

The Guidance

Jack Verson

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To all those who are rich
because they enjoy what
they have

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Avalon

Avalon

Avalon is an unusual land existing in an unusual part of an unusual planet, Domhan. Unusual is a relative term, one that can only be meaningful if there are other parts of other planets in the universe to which one can draw a comparison. But there are no other planets in this universe, so no comparison can be made. Nothing exists that is not Domhan. And there is no place to live for the people of Domhan that is not Avalon. Avalon is all they know. It is home. Home to the people of Avalon, to those who have learned how to live there with what they were given, and to those still learning.

That's not to say that there aren't other parts of Domhan and that all parts are the same. There are and they aren't. But the people who live on the land they call Avalon have never been to any other part of Domhan. Avalon is theirs. That they can see other parts of Domhan makes no difference. They are happy where they are. They know Avalon's secrets. It gives them food, family, friends, and a society that provides all the comforts required to live a happy and contented life.

Why leave? That's a question often discussed among the people of the village, especially the young. The rest of the planet that the people call Domhan, or at least one other part of Domhan, can be seen just over the crevice. A crevice about four times as wide as the distance a stone can be thrown by the strongest of those on Avalon. It looks like one could easily leave if one wanted to leave. Why not? There are many pros and cons to that age-old question. A question that has resulted in many a discussion, keeping people awake many a night long after many sunsets throughout the years.

What actually is on the other side of the crevice? If you want to find out, you start by asking just this question. It's the opening salvo for those on the "pro" side of the "venturing beyond Avalon" debate. Those who start this discussion are typically the young. The natural curiosity of the youth, the wanderlust of the unknown. A desire to go just for the sake of going. A desire to travel just for the sake of traveling. One cannot encounter new wonders in a land where everything is known. One must find the piñata before earning the prize. There are no piñatas in Avalon. They may exist beyond the crevice. Maybe. Maybe not. What if there aren't piñatas in other parts of Domhan? Well, as the

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argument goes, no one will be any worse off if we go there and find nothing. But what if there are, what then? What are we missing?

Many have tried to leave Avalon over the years and over the centuries. Many have tried and many have died. A few have returned, having made the decision to turn back shortly after the start of their attempt. None have succeeded in crossing the crevice. The problem is not the steep slopes almost impossible to scale down without falling. Most can get that far safely. Not all, but most. And the problem is not the steep slopes that need to be scaled up on the far side. At least no one considers that to be a problem because no one has made it across the valley floor to be able to attempt the ascent. The problem is the animals who live in the crevice. A Serengeti, a small condensed Serengeti where all animals are predators. Omnivores, yes, but their preference is meat. Predators that prey on other predators and can only feel partially safe within their own pride, within their own ambush, within the own leap, or within their own herd of whatever kind of animal they happen to be. Safety in numbers. Stray outside and one does not last long. Some do stray. Some are forced out. The weakest of a species is sacrificed to provide food for the other species. It's the law of the land.

No one lasts long trying to cross the crevice floor of Domhan. No animal, no person. Perhaps that is the way the people of Avalon treat the weakest of their species. They allow them to attempt to leave Avalon.

The animals who live in the valley at the bottom of the crevice do not exist on Avalon. They cannot ascend the cliffs to the high land, just as people cannot descend to the low land, descend and survive.

One may think that this is a good argument for those on the “con” side of the “leave Avalon” discussion. Yes, it's a good argument. No one denies that. But it's not used. Not even the elders of Avalon mention it. There's a better reason, an obvious reason. The obvious needs no logical support, no justification, no elucidation. The reason the elders use can be found in the first chapter of the *Book of the Blest*, the book given them by the powers of Avalon, by God or by the gods or spirits. Given to them by whatever forces formed, control, and watch over Avalon.

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“We give you this land for your protection. We give you this land for your home. Care for it as if it were your own body, for it is what you have as yours in all of Domhan. Live, multiply, prosper and in this way honor Avalon. All who honor Avalon will be blessed and will be protected.”

Why do the elders read this passage to convince others not to attempt to cross the crevice? What do they think it means? It's obvious, right? Live on Avalon and you will prosper. Leave and you won't. The first thought is said. The second is implied. Both are believed.

The Harvest Tribe

The *Book of the Blest* was known to the Harvest Tribe for as long as can be remembered. Most consider this to be from the time that Avalon was first formed. Before Avalon, so the story goes, all Domhan was populated by beasts, by those who now live on the crevice floor. People did not exist before Avalon. They could not.

This popular story continues by saying that a desire grew within the will of the universe to create a people who could build a civilization, who could develop intelligence, and integrity, and an ability to reason. The will had grown tired of maintaining watch over Domhan. They were tired of being the only ones capable of such a task. They wanted help. They issued a proclamation to create a people to enjoy Domhan, to progress, to help Domhan grow, and to eventually protect Domhan. People could be taught to do all this. It might take a long time, many years, centuries or eons, but it could be done. The path to success was not obvious even to the supernatural. A path was not guaranteed to be successful, but a path was possible. So, they tried.

Such a goal would succeed only if people were allowed to flourish, prosper, and grow. People could not survive much less prosper in the Domhan that existed originally. A special land was needed. Avalon was created. Avalon was designed as a home and a haven for what was hoped to be the most important of Domhan's creatures.

All this is implied by writings in the *Book of the Blest* and followed by the people of the Harvest Tribe. On Avalon, people are protected from Domhan. They can survive if they learn how to survive. Survival requires that they follow the rules that the *Book* states. The first rule is to stay in Avalon to learn. There are other rules, simple rules, but not many.

What other help does the *Book* provide? The most important describes the process of growing food. The main sustenance of the Harvest Tribe comes through food grown from the soil. Grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts. Chapter two teaches the Harvest Tribe how to plant in the spring. It instructs them how to tend to their plantings over the hot summer months and into the early autumn. It trains them how to harvest the grains, the vegetables, the entire bounty earned from their hard work throughout the year. And finally, it

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educates them on how to preserve what they have grown throughout the colder months until the next harvest is ready.

Also clothing. Some plants produce a cotton-like seed. Others grow flax. Flax and cotton plants were provided to the people of the Harvest Tribe so they could make clothes. This part of Avalon near the crevice can get cold in the winter months. Perhaps out of necessity, the Tribe taught themselves how to make what they needed to wear. Perhaps instructions were included in the *Book*. There is some disagreement on this. The elders insist that all knowledge comes from the *Book*, so instructions for making clothes must be there. Look through copies available to the people and one will find such instructions. Copies of the *Book* in the town museum are different. Some of them are missing these instructions. It is said that those books, the ones without directions for the manufacture of clothing, are simply incomplete. That is the claim but also the rumor. The town elders control access to museum artifacts. The original copy of the *Book* is considered sacred and too frail to be examined by people who are not elders.

There is some wildlife in Avalon. Tame life, not predators. Wildlife can supplement a diet. But a harvest, a bountiful harvest, is required to comfortably last the winter when animals are hard to find.

Another important section of the *Book* describes traditions, ceremonies, and celebrations. The main celebration occurs once a year in the fall and is called the Feast of the Harvest. Its purpose is to remind people of the benefits that result when everyone remembers and adheres to the planting and harvesting rules. It ensures that those rules are passed down to future generations. The feast is described in detail in chapter three. It requires the Tribe to give thanks for all that was provided during the year, whether it was a good harvest year or one with results not so plentiful. Not every harvest can be successful, but all harvests can and do provide something for the winter months for which the people need to be thankful.

The Feast of the Harvest, the third day after the sixth full moon following the spring planting, is a day of rest, a day of prayer, as well as a day of giving thanks. Thanks are not only offered to the divine spirits that watch over Domhan, but also and more importantly to one's neighbors. All must join

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together during the year to be successful. Everyone is thanked. Even those whose help might not have been used this year because it was not needed. Thanks are not only given for help performed this year, but for help possibly provided last year, or the year before, or maybe for help that will be provided in future years. Those are all considered. It is traditions like this that hold the Harvest Tribe together. A good harvest is reason for all to be thankful.

It's almost time for that ceremony to begin, to be led by Lothar, the high elder of Sennen. Sennen is the name given by the Harvest Tribe to the place where the ceremony is held, the part of Avalon that acts as its capital. Not that a capital is important in an area with only one town and one people, but it is a useful designation nonetheless. Sennen is used for ceremonies, for trading, and as a place where help can be found when help is needed. Some Harvest Tribe elders are always available in Sennen. Saying one is traveling to Sennen has some meaning and some importance.

Minna also occupies a level of importance among the people of the Harvest Tribe. While Lothar is the high elder, his title offers him only ceremonial rank much like the king of England. Minna is the prime minister, the one who makes all the decisions and the one who holds the real position of power in the Tribe. Power is perhaps a misleading term. There's no need for power within such a homogeneous population as the Harvest Tribe. Rarely is there a need for dispute resolution. When there is, Minna is up to the task of being a fair arbitrator. She assumes whatever power is required to resolve issues in all areas except those dealing with religion and pageantry. Those are assumed by Lothar. Today is Lothar's day.

On this day the area known as Sennen is bustling with activity and people. The entire population of the Harvest Tribe numbers 954 people, 812 of them being able to help in the fields. The remaining are either too old, too young, or unable for some other reason.

The harvest celebration is not only the major event of the year, but it's the only one of any significance. It's the only celebration mentioned in the *Book of the Blest*. A successful harvest means food for the winter and survival of the Tribe. Survival of everyone in the Tribe. A less successful harvest requires some sacrifice. Minor concessions for a slightly bad harvest. Harder decisions for a

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very bad one. The *Book* gives some guidance for making these decisions. Minor deficiencies may be handled by rationing. To remedy a severely bad harvest, the *Book* discusses life in the Tribe. People are told to be fruitful, but also told that the land, Avalon, has a limit as to how many it can support. The *Book* discusses the crevice animals who are also creatures of Durham, how those crevice animals control their population to survive, and how the Tribe can learn from them how to survive severely poor harvest years. The people are told that all this is described in chapter four. No one likes to rely on the teachings of that chapter.

It has been many years since the last truly bad harvest. People try to forget that time, especially Minna who needed then to provide necessary guidance so the Harvest Tribe could survive until the next planting and harvest.

Back to the actual festival. Besides Lothar, other elders involved in the harvest celebration organization are Rolan and Bria. They are helped by their daughter Aisling and her friend, her special friend, Conner. All work closely with Lothar and all are well versed in the festival proceedings. It is a solemn affair, but at the same time a fun and colorful event. People are required to be aware of the importance of the harvest and also to enjoy a successful one.

“Are we all ready?” asks Lothar of the others gathered to start the ceremonial part of the festival.

“As ready as ever,” responds Minna, an automated response that has almost become part of the official ceremony. Lothar asks that every year just before he addresses the people.

“You got it! Let’s go” join in Rolan and Bria.

“Before we start, I wanted to fill everyone in on a small change on which the ritual committee has decided,” continues Lothar. “One small change. A simple phrase. This year, instead of giving thanks to the spirits that formed Avalon, we are going to give thanks to God, to one God.”

Rolan and Bria look at Lothar, not sure if his comment is serious. The ceremony, the requirements, the determination of thanks, those are all

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described in the *Book of the Blest*. It has been that way. It has always been that way. People cannot make changes to the scripture. It is not within the people's power, even the elders, even the high elder. But Lothar appears to be serious. Bria has a simple question, one that does not express her full concern, "How can this change be made? Doesn't it go against the writings in the *Book*?"

Lothar responds to this question as if it was fully anticipated, which it was. "The people on the ritual committee have come to a conclusion that the ceremony as celebrated in the past has been wrong. It has always been wrong. They agree that the *Book* always uses the word 'we' when referring to God. But it has been said that many people in power use this word when referring just to themselves. And who is more likely to use such a word, who is more powerful, who is more important than God. Clearly it is to God that we must give thanks. The use of the word 'we', the ritual committee states, must be a test God placed in the *Book*. God is challenging us to discover who was behind creating Avalon for the Harvest Tribe. We have now met this obvious challenge and from here forth will acknowledge the one God."

Bria is flustered. "That's a big change. Are you sure the people are ready to make any change to the ancient rituals of the festival? Maybe some more discussions are warranted. Rituals should not be changed so suddenly with no notice." That's all Bria can say.

Rolan nods his head in agreement. Aisling and Conner also agree but not because they like the current ceremony or dislike it. It's a ceremony. They're young and the direction that Lothar is taking is not the way they would go. They feel that it's wrong but also that it matters little. Whatever the actual words are is not important. There are more important parts of the festival that will pique their interests tonight.

Subject closed. The ceremony starts with a report. A small report. A required formality so everyone can know, officially, where the Tribe stands for the upcoming winter. They are told that the harvest this year was bountiful. The celebration will be joyous. Everyone should be happy.

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The short harvest report is followed by one from the gatherers. Not all that is harvested in a year is grown by the Harvest Tribe. There are also plants that grow in the wild, some far away from Sennen. There is an important grove a long way from Sennen. If one were to leave at sunrise, this grove would not be reached until the sun had climbed half way up the sky. That's as far as one can travel away from Sennen. So says the *Book*. It's lucky that the Harvest Tribe happened to find this grove. It was found long ago before anyone alive today was born. A grove of hemp plants. And the harvest, the gathering from those trees was also plentiful this year. The Harvest Tribe has not learned many skills, not learned how to build tools or how to use nature except as needed for a successful planting and a successful harvest. But they did learn one useful skill, the use of hemp. They can use hemp to make string and rope, strong rope, ropes of every thickness. It is a skill taught to apprentices interested in a trade. One of the few trades acceptable to the Harvest Tribe that does not require actual work in the fields. Rope allows the Harvest Tribe to strengthen buildings and to capture the small wildlife around their part of Avalon. This is how meals are supplemented on special occasions.

Aisling listens to this report carefully. She smiles at Conner. Aisling's parents are the largest rope builders within the Tribe. She and Conner have both decided to become apprentices. They have been paying close attention and listening to all Aisling's parents say. It's their future if they learn the trade well as they hope they will.

Formalities over, Lothar starts the religious part of the festival by giving thanks for the gifts bestowed on the Harvest Tribe during a successful year. A sheaf of wheat, a stalk of oats, one of corn, and one of barley are all tied together and burnt in an offering as a way of remembering what has been provided. Lothar recites a prayer of thanks, the prayer of thanks as described in the *Book*. A prayer so familiar that everyone can recite it by heart. Or so everyone expects. This year the prayer has been changed slightly. Religious liturgy rarely changes. Sometimes a word there, or a phrase, or a sequence to the order of a service. The change this year is more noticeable. As explained to Rolan and Bria, the word God has been inserted as the recipient of the Tribe's thanks. One God. There is no mention of God in the *Book of the Blest*. The ceremony description only requires thanks be given to the powers that created Avalon. There is murmur by some people as the modified prayer is recited by Lothar.

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Most don't even notice. Many simply automatically recite what they think has been said. Others just don't listen. But some do and those some will talk about it later. The prayer has been changed. Perhaps it doesn't really matter. The people are giving thanks. That's the important point.

The service continues with instructions to offer thanks to neighbors for the help they provided during the year that just ended, or may provide next year. Thanks are warranted. Avalon is not large. Everyone knows everyone in the Tribe. All people are neighbors. This part of the service takes a long time as people mingle in the crowd so they can eventually thank everyone. If any activity during the year melds the Tribe into a single people with a single goal for survival, it's this part of the Feast of the Harvest.

As time goes on, people settle into groups consisting mainly of their closer neighbors. That's nature. Everyone is a neighbor but some are more neighborly than others. As they settle down to relax, to join in deeper conversations and, of course, to get ready to enjoy the feast, the younger children know what is about to happen. It's the last formality before the meal. The children's attention is focused unwaveringly toward several fires scattered around the altar area. Small bundles of several ears of corn are placed on the top of several clay pots. The pots are carefully positioned in the fires. The kernels pop, the children catch them as they fly through the air, and the feast begins.

This year's feast is rich with breads, many different types made from the many different grains harvested. Fruits, vegetables, and nuts are everywhere. And meats. This is a special meal, the largest feast of the year and it warrants a special addition. Ropes made from hemp gathered during the year led to many successful trappings that provided this part of the meal.

The land was fertile this year. A good harvest the direct result of strict adherence to teachings in the Book of the Blest. The *Book* provides the rules. The Tribe survives. It survives each year as a Tribe but not all individuals do. There are 954 members at this year's Feast of the Harvest. There were 980 at the start of the year. 26 are no more. That is the cycle of life. It's to be expected. 980 was too large a number anyway. Not by much. It was still a population that could be supported. The *Book* says that this number should not exceed 975. That's a better population. Enough for the Tribe to be able to

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support and not so many as to cause problems during lean years. To reach 975, the hope is for 21 births to occur before the next feast. Births should occur in the summer to allow the newborns to establish themselves in the world before their first winter.

We now get to the final part of the feast. The fertility of the land was celebrated. Now fertility of the people. Only those who submit a petition during the year and whose petition is accepted are allowed to procreate. The punishment is severe for births that occur without this permission. The Tribe can support a few extra but not many. And the number of extra births that can be supported is arbitrarily determined by the year's harvest. Sometimes during lean years an extra birth must be offset. The parents must decide how that offset is to occur. By the mother, the father, or the new arrival. One of those must be sacrificed to the crevice floor. The rule may be harsh but it is a way that has been followed for as long as can be remembered. As a result, the Tribe still exists.

On to this year's set of petitions. This is the part of the ceremony that is of the most interest to Aisling and Conner. They are among those couples who petitioned. The announcement of which ones have been approved is made and theirs is one. The Tribe's tradition provides for this announcement only at the Feast of the Harvest. A baby needs to be conceived after the feast and before the winter solstice so it will arrive during the summer. This meal has ended for Aisling and Conner. Their real celebration is about to begin.

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This year's *Feast of the Harvest* has ended and has been observed, not only by the Harvest Tribe but by the forces that watch over Donham, the spirits that created Avalon, the gods, perhaps the God. It has been observed by the metaphysical nature of the universe that contains Donham. It matters not in what form the people choose to imagine this in their minds. Whatever form they choose, it will not be accurate. It is a form, a concept, a construct that cannot exist in a person's mind. There are no analogies in the physical world. Let everyone form their own thoughts.

The only description that might come close is that the controlling forces are part of a supernatural guidance that observes all that happens in all universes, not only the one containing Donham. The Guidance. The Guidance is a benevolent power that attempts to gently nudge all people everywhere and everywhen in a direction toward success, toward peace, toward contentment, and mostly toward advancement.

The Guidance is looking for help. There is so much it needs to protect that even for an unknowable and indescribable protector whose presence flows everywhere, even for such as that the task may grow too large. The Harvest Tribe is one seed out of many that has been planted with the hope of growth. Growth to reach a stage where they can understand and provide help to the Guidance. Change is growth. There has been change in this year's feast so there has been growth. Some growth advances toward the desired goal, some away from that goal. The changes today have been observed and have been assimilated into the Guidance. For now, that is enough.

The Hunter Tribe

Avalon is not a large land, but it is larger than the Harvest Tribe believes. A statement in the *Book of the Blest* commands that one should not stray a distance away from Sennen that cannot be reached by a quarter day's travel, the time it takes the sun to climb from where it first appears in the morning sky until it reaches a point half way to the zenith. People in the Harvest Tribe never violate this commandment. They likely think it is for their own protection. No one in the Tribe knows what dangers may be encountered by traveling a greater and forbidden distance. People feel safe adhering to this simple rule. One can always return before sunset. They stay within the circle of familiarity they call home.

The real reason for this commandment is the Hunter Tribe. That Tribe lives inland, away from the crevice. It is a four day walk from Sennen, the Harvest Tribe capital, to Talland, the capital for the Hunter Tribe. But people of both tribes are forbidden to travel such a distance so neither knows that the other exists. This is as planned by the Guidance. There may be a time in the future when the two tribes meet, but that time has not come yet. Both tribes need to grow before such a meeting.

The *Book of the Blest* was given to the Hunter Tribe in the same way as it was given to the Harvest Tribe. No one remembers a time before the *Book* was known. Many parts of the *Book* given to the Hunter Tribe are the same as in the *Book* given to the Harvest Tribe, but not all. Two books with the same name but different.

The Harvest Tribe lives near the crevice with a climate that has more moisture in the air than where the Hunter Tribe lives. The rich soil near the crevice allows a wide variety of foods to grow, enough to support life. Life there can be sustained solely from gifts grown from the soil.

The climate for the Hunter Tribe is more arid. Some plants grow. Enough to provide some nourishment but not enough to support life without another food source. Not for a full tribe of 975 individuals. Only some of what grows there is digestible by people. But what does grow can support an abundance of other animal life. Other life forms can consume more types of vegetation than people can.

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Chapter two of the *Book of the Blest*, Hunter Tribe version, mentions these other life forms, the animals. Only mentions that they exist. The Guidance thought that was enough. When the Hunter Tribe was new, when it had just been formed, there were few people. There was enough food that could be foraged from the naturally occurring vegetation to support the Tribe.

The Tribe could not grow. The people read the *Book*, wondered why animals were mentioned, wondered at their significance, and learned. The animals were fast, faster than people could run. But they were also tame. There was no need for an animal to run from a person. Until the people learned, that is. One was caught, killed, cooked, and consumed. The Hunter Tribe learned why animals were mentioned.

The animals learned also and grew scared of the Tribe. They no longer came close and allowed themselves to be captured. The Tribe could grow in population only because an animal was occasionally captured and the extra nourishment was enough. It was enough to support a small increase in population. The Tribe grew, but slightly.

Then people in the Tribe started to wander, to explore Avalon within their constrained boundaries. Those who wandered to the south encountered a land that rose. There were small hills and mountains formed by land pushing up from below, part of the process that built Avalon. Farther away in the distance as one started the slight ascent, the mountains rose to unscalable heights. The Hunter Tribe could not climb those mountains for two reasons. The first was that they lacked the skill to do so. The second more important reason was the limitation placed on how far they could travel in one day before returning home. The higher elevations clearly could not be conquered in that period of time. But here in the lower elevations in the south were rocks, hard rocks, interesting rocks that could not be found in Talland. It was still a new, young world when members of the Hunter Tribe found these rocks. Curiosity was strong in the young. The explorers brought some of the more interesting rocks back with them. Exactly what is it that makes a rock interesting? A question with a subjective answer. There were several explorers in the group. Each found a different type of rock interesting. Each selected

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some they personally thought were interesting and returned with those to Talland.

Others explorers wandered to the east away from the home of the Harvest Tribe. There they found groves of trees. Not hemp plants like the Harvest Tribe found and not trees like those found around Talland. They found hardwood trees, ash, pine, and oak. They had no tools to take from the trees what the trees wanted to keep, but there were logs, fresh recently fallen logs. Those were interesting like the stones. Curiosity was a strong drive instilled in the Hunter Tribe. There was a desire to bring those logs back to Talland. Some of the logs were heavy and hard to carry. Curiosity won. A feeling that the logs were important won over thoughts that the trip back could be hard.

Back home the Tribe gathered around their new discoveries and pondered. The woods and the stones were not like anything they had seen before. But were they worth anything? Some thought the shiny stones might be gifts from the creators. As such they had worth. Immediate worth. An object has value only when someone is willing to trade for it. The Hunter Tribe had no money, but those who wanted the shiniest of the stones offered what was most valuable, what most resembled money. They offered pieces of meat. That was enough to encourage others to travel and collect more rocks and stones. Soon many had been brought to Talland. So many that their worth diminished. Anyone who wanted a shiny stone had one and meat was too valuable to purchase more. As fast as the stone trade started, that's how fast it ended. As a result, there was now a supply of stones in Talland where there were none before.

What about the logs from the hardwood trees? Those did not appeal to people as the stones did. A piece of wood was not shiny. It was without form and what form it did have was duplicated by logs found in town. The trees here and their logs were not as dense and those brought back by the explorers, but they were here in abundance.

As said, curiosity was a deep-rooted part of many members of the Tribe. So was inventiveness and intuition. Why had explorers wandered to find the stones and the woods. Did that happen by accident? Many believe accidents such as these did not happen without a reason. So, why did they? The elders

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looked in the *Book* for guidance. Where else could they look? They found nothing. Only the chapter that mentions other animals. But no explanation, no insight into the worth of the new discoveries.

Others more pragmatic sat down and experimented. They found some stones with sharp edges and noticed those could be used to cut the new woods. To cut shapes, to make forms. Before long one of the larger logs was formed into a table. A sturdy table, much sturdier than any made roughly from the local woods. The name of the person in the Tribe who made the first useful piece of furniture from the newly found woods was a young boy named Carver. He wound up starting the craft of furniture building which thereafter bore his name. Another trade was born. Another item of value was made. This one with more acceptance and more practical use than shiny stones.

That was not the end. There was more that could be learned from what was returned by the explorers. Remember the *Book*. Remember the mention of animals. Remember the commandment to honor Avalon, and by doing so the Tribe would live, multiply, prosper, and grow.

Another intuitive inventor, a woman named Diana, started playing with the stones and the wood. She found one stone, a very sharp one, and used it to chip away at a second stone making it sharper than the first. She took the wood and with her new sharp stone, carved a long, thin, narrow board. She was amazed at how small in diameter she could make such a board out of the hardwood. Long, straight, narrow, and still it held together.

Diana was strong, not as strong as many but stronger than most. One day she left the village a few steps so no one else would be near her, and she threw one of her narrow boards. She aimed at a tree and threw it hard. It missed the tree but she was close. She tried again and managed this time to hit the tree.

What now? Ingenuity sprang into her mind. She cut a slit in one end of her board, wedged her sharpest stone into the slit, and threw it again. This time it hit the tree and stayed. It stayed in the tree for a short time before it fell to the ground. She knew what she had. Avalon's first spear. A way to hunt. A way for the Tribe to get more meat and to grow. Animals could be felled from afar. It did not seem fair but it was what it was. The Tribe must have been provided

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with these stones, with these woods, and with this ability to use their new belongings because the *Book* wanted them to do so. Chapter two of the *Book* now became clear.

The Hunter Tribe made weapons and hunted animals for food. The Tribe grew and prospered.

Many seasons passed since the Hunter Tribe first invented spears. They learned how to use their new abilities. They imposed careful control on the process of taking animals for food. Only for nourishment.

The Tribe is now 970 individuals, close to the limit described in the *Book*. They have learned how many animals need to be taken in a year to maintain that number. Less are taken in the summer when the young of each animal appear. More in the autumn so the food can last the winter. The winter for the Hunter Tribe is mild but not without some extreme days. They have learned how to dry meats to make them last longer. Not forever, but longer. They can store enough to get the Tribe through the cold season.

They know that the animals must also prosper. The Hunter Tribe is aware of the numbers of each type of animal. They are respectful. They thank the powers every time they are required to take an animal for food, but they take one anyway. Among all of Avalon's creations the Tribe must survive.

More seasons pass and the Hunter Tribe continues to learn. They have learned to build confinements, walls around large fields, areas of growth for grasses and grains and plants of many kinds. They have learned to keep animals inside these enclosures. The animals can wander around and can feed, but cannot escape. The Tribe has also learned which animals can provide nourishment without being harmed. Eggs and milk are added supplements to their diets. The more they take of this, the less they are required to gather nourishment from animal flesh.

People of the Hunter Tribe are now ranchers as well as hunters. It is added security to their future.

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Many want the Tribe to grow beyond the maximum allowed number of 975 as prescribed by the *Book*. Many do not want this growth. The elders who adhere and live by the words of the *Book of the Blest* are still the most powerful in the Tribe. The number does not increase.

More time and more seasons pass as the elders observe how their Tribe is surviving. They are pleased with the prosperity.

The Hunter Tribe has a yearly feast. Theirs is called The Feast of Autumn. It's also used to give thanks for a successful year. It could be any time of the year but the *Book of the Blest* for the Hunter Tribe follows, when possible, the *Book of the Blest* for the Harvest Tribe. That festival must be in the Autumn for the Harvest Tribe so it is also for the Hunter Tribe.

Conversations start planning for the festival this season. The high elder, a woman by the name of Vanya, comments how well life has progressed in the time since the spear has been invented. And how much better still since the fields have been enclosed.

Edyn, another elder, agrees. "It has been twenty-three winters since the spear, and fifteen since the first field. Life is good. Life is secure and comfortable. It is almost hard to remember the problems we used to have and the concerns as each winter approached. It's very pleasant to have happy thoughts fill up a conversation, especially when one is planning a festival to give thanks. To be thankful warms the heart. Especially to be able to be thankful for yourself, for your friends, for your children."

A murmur arises among the elders as the conversation continues. The murmur is a low, quiet discussion within a group here and a smaller group there. "Who should we thank?" is asked. Normally a simple question and a simple answer. "Thanks should be given to the powers that created Avalon and the people of the Tribe who have worked for the success we have. They should receive our thanks. They have always received our thanks. The *Book of the Blest* is clear."

The *Book* is always open to interpretation. When the second chapter says so little except to mention the animals that live in Avalon along with the Tribe,

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there is a lot for an imaginative mind to interpret. Normally the elders are not a group open to interpretation much less imagination. Interpretation can mean change. Change is a more common quality in the young, not in the elders. But the elders have power and power generates an imagination of its own.

“What about giving thanks to the animals?” suggests Torin. An innocent suggestion.

Vanya rebukes this idea almost immediately. “While the animals have provided much to our success, the *Book* only allows us to give thanks to the powers and to the Tribe. There is no consideration for thanking the animals.”

“Possibly,” admits Edyn, “but possibly it is allowed. Remember chapter two. It only mentions the animals. It does not explain them, only mentions them. I believe this is a test that the powers placed in the *Book*. The animals may be those powers. The animals may be the embodiment of the forces who created Avalon. Consider that we get nourishment from them, from their bodies, from their eggs, from their milk. Perhaps it’s because that’s how the spirits that created Avalon move into us and gives us strength. Before spears were invented, we were a weak Tribe. The people were barely able to exist. Now we thrive. Why? Because through the animals, the spirit of Avalon moves into us. We should give thanks to the animals. It is the same as giving thanks to the powers. It is a test we have been given and one we can now pass.”

Pause, contemplation, study, thought, acceptance. All agree. What Edyn said is right. Why has it taken so long to see the obvious? The ceremony will be changed this year.

Justin and Brenda sit around a campfire a few-minute walk outside of Talland. It is a pleasant night. Most nights around Talland are pleasant. There are a lot of microclimates in Avalon. So, while not really very far from Sennen, the weather in Talland is much milder. There is snow in the winter, some snow but not much. Most days are warm enough to relax. This could be one of those if it wasn’t for the fact that relaxing time is over. The Feast of Autumn will start soon. Justin helps Brenda get up. They extinguish the fire and start a slow stroll into Talland.

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A short time later as the sun makes its final approach toward the horizon, they reach the feast grounds. Edyn is in charge of the secular part of the feast. The feast starts as he gives his report. This part is routine. The Hunter Tribe has reached a level of civilization and of organization where everything runs smoothly. Reports on food supplies are all positive as expected. So obvious is this part of the report that people aren't really listening. They are waiting for the meal. Except the children, who are waiting for gifts to be handed out before the meal starts.

The secular part of the feast moves to the religious part. Vanya thanks Edyn for the good report. People are still not paying attention as Vanya next gives thanks to all the creatures of Avalon for seeing the Tribe through another healthy year and by providing needed nourishment and guidance. No one takes note of what was said.

The rest of the feast program proceeds according to tradition. It's time to thank one's neighbors just as the Harvest Tribe does. This part also takes a long time but eventually ends. Finally, the children walk up to accept their gifts. The Hunter Tribe has no corn. Instead, large baskets of the shiniest stones gathered throughout the year are placed around the central campfire. Each child gets to pick the one they like the best. Each child selects from the ones remaining when it's their turn. The youngest goes first. The feast begins as soon as the final stone is selected.

It is fine feast. There are some grains, some fruit, and eggs, but mostly wild boar, turkey, beef, and meats from animals not found outside of Avalon. The elders thank the powers they now believe are present in each of the foods they consume. Thanks are given to those at every bite.

The feast ends. The year started with 970 members of the tribe. This year 45 are no longer alive. Although feeling as safe and secure as ever, more people die each year in the Hunter Tribe than in the Harvest Tribe. There will be no controls on births for the upcoming year. The Tribe can absorb 50 more individuals and the number of birth petitions received during the year numbered less than 50.

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The power watches over Donham, over Avalon, over the entire universe, and over all universes. It is the power that is the Guidance, the power that flows everywhere and exists everywhere. Everywhere includes this year's *Feast of Autumn*. It has observed that feast.

The Guidance cannot alter what the Tribe does now or how the Tribe progresses. Whatever direction the Guidance could exert can only be done when the process for the creation of life commences. That process takes energy and is exhausting even for the Guidance. It was started millions of years ago. Millions of years for the people of the Hunter Tribe and for the people of the Harvest Tribe. Perhaps not so long for the Guidance, for time does not exist for it, for them, for whatever the Guidance is. After the process of life starts, after it is placed in motion, the direction cannot be changed. It can be observed but not changed.

Here again the Guidance observes. The Hunter Tribe is another part of the seed that was planted with the hope of growth. They have the Hunter Tribe and the Harvest Tribe. Two parts, one hope.

Change has been observed. Expected and noted. The Hunter Tribe has changed. Whether that change moves them closer toward the goal of the Guidance's hope or farther away has yet to be determined. The change today has been assimilated. The Harvest Tribe came up with an understanding of what or who embodies the Guidance. Now, also has the Hunter Tribe. Neither understanding is correct. Neither understanding is incorrect. These understandings will have to be considered by the tribes and by the Guidance when the time comes for consideration.

The Pharmacist Tribe

Walk four days southeast from the Harvest Tribe, if one is willing to walk that far, and you will find the Hunter Tribe. But the Hunter and Harvest tribes are not the only ones in Avalon. Walk four days mostly east from Sennen and a bit north and you will find the most unusual tribe of people in Avalon, the Pharmacist Tribe. If one could draw a line from the capital of the Pharmacist Tribe, Byrn, to that of the Hunter Tribe, Talland, on to the Harvest Tribe capital, Sennen, and finally back to Byrn, the three lines would form an equilateral triangle, more or less. Since the distance from any one of the capitals to any other is a four-day walk, none of the three tribes of Avalon knows of the existence of any other. For now.

The Pharmacist Tribe lives in a part of Avalon more barren even than where the Harvest Tribe lives. Some edible vegetation can be foraged, enough to support a small population but nothing more. There are animals. A few. Not as abundant as for the Hunter Tribe. The Pharmacist Tribe manages to capture a small animal now and then and has learned how to process the game for consumption. Meat, when available, supplements their diet. The time when meat is available is rare. Most of the nourishment for the Pharmacist Tribe comes from the sparse vegetation.

More nourishment is needed. Wildlife is the only possible source. There are two problems they must overcome to obtain that nourishment. The first is to figure out how to find wildlife. The second is to figure out how to capture them once they are found. If not for those two obstacles, there would be no problem.

The elders know they need to somehow increase the food supply before the Tribe can grow. Their version of *Book of the Blest* has a chapter two like the others. Their second chapter discusses the animals, the soil, the plants, and the rocks. What does this mean? A good question. It is even more vague than instructions for the Hunters. In the Pharmacists case, they are not sure if they should look to the land for more edible vegetation or try to capture more wildlife. At least the Hunter Tribe had some clear direction since only animals were mentioned.

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The Pharmacists have another problem deciding where to look for more nourishment. The other tribes have a council of elders who can use their experience to help solve problems. The current problem here is the issue of food supply. Experience is used to remember events of the past and figure out what worked and what failed. In order to draw on experience, a tribe needs people that have been around and can remember details about what was attempted in the past. Ideas that can be tried or not. Ones that can be expanded upon. This is a job of the elders. It is why a tribe has an elder council.

The Pharmacist Tribe has no elders. Or more precisely, their elders are not elderly. The Tribe is small. Food is sparse. Only enough to support about two dozen individuals. And what food they can find is lacking in nutrients, in sustenance, in something. The oldest individual in the Tribe has lived barely thirty winters. The average age of an elder is twenty winters. For the Pharmacist Tribe, it is up to the young to help the tribe flourish and grow. There are no true elders.

Eventually a new generation is born among the Pharmacist Tribe with drive, intuition, and the ability to reason. Survival of the fittest in a land full of dangers and predatory animals favors the physically strong. Strength is required to fight off other animals competing for your food supply and those that might consider making you part of that supply.

Not so here. There are no predatory animals. There is no advantage to the physically strong. The mentally strong, that's different. Over the years, the smartest of the Pharmacist Tribe learn what areas of Avalon might be more likely to produce edible plants. They learn what areas might be home to wildlife and they learn how to sometimes, not often, but sometimes, capture an animal. They learn this because of their curiosity, their desire to roam, to search, to discover, and their ability to know something is significant when they see it.

That's the situation of the Tribe this spring. It has been many springs since the Tribe was first formed. Many springs of little growth. The Pharmacist Tribe is probably lucky to still be a tribe. This spring there is a new generation of elders who get together, compare notes, and talk.

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“What type of land do we live on?” they ask. “We do not seem to be able to thrive and grow on the land where we are now. We need to look around. What might we find if we go to the north, or to the east, or south, or west? Think! What is there about each of those other areas that could be special and better than what we have here?”

“They’re all different,” comments Marie, who at 23 winters, is the newest member of the elders. She says this not as an answer, but as a way to move the conversation forward.

“True,” adds Emil to continue the thought, “but all areas do have plants, no more and no less than ours. The best hope is that the other areas might have different plants than ours, so one of them could be better than what we have. Or possibly many of them in many places.”

“But the plants everywhere are all so small,” says Robert, joining in, “and many are so far away. It’s a day’s walk out and back. A day to walk there, wherever there is, to look for a plant, to decide on one that might help, and to bring back a sample. That’s a lot of work when we have no idea which plant might be an important one. Also, we don’t know if the answer we are looking for can be found in a plant. Since we aren’t really sure what the question is, how can we know if we found an answer?”

Marie responds to this comment. “We know the question. It’s how do we find food to be able to keep surviving. We have to assume there is a solution somewhere in the plant life. For no other reason than that it’s mentioned in the *Book of the Blest*. Even if it wasn’t, what other choice do we have other than to consider new plant life?”

Emil, always with a positive attitude, adds, “Yes, we could make a trip just to look for new plants. That would be a good reason by itself. We need to find something, as much effort as it may turn out to be. It would be easier to justify a trip if there was another reason. And there is. There are more differences in other parts of Avalon than plants. There are soil and objects in the soil like rocks. They are as varied as the plants. Up in the mountains, the soil is yellow and has a very unpleasant smell unlike any smell down here. Farther south, in

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the low lands, there is a black rock that rubs off on your hand when it's touched. There are rocks everywhere of different types, rocks that almost crumble to the touch, and powdery substances. Our main purpose can be to look for new edible plants. At the same time, we may find something else that's helpful. Who knows what may happen if we concentrate on our journey, if we pay attention to what is on Avalon. There are probably many questions we could answer with what we might find. Answers to questions that are not known today. There are many reasons to go."

That's true, they all think. They must look if there is a possibility to find something to help the Tribe. Look hard. Everyone realizes that knowing what is out there is only a start. What is out there must be brought closer so it can be examined. The members get excited as they consider this. A youthful exuberance among the elders springs forth as each remembers an interesting item that they saw on one of their own trips out of Byrn. A plant with an unusual leaf at one place, a fragile black rock at another, unusual fruit from a bush, more rocks, and the list goes on.

Letting this time of quiet contemplation go on long enough, Marie asks everyone to think of one plant or object they saw, one they consider to be the most interesting, and to describe their item and where it was sighted. That's done. The descriptions are discussed, compared, and the group determines which are the eight most promising. A list is made. Marie looks at the list and selects one plant and one other object sighted at places close to each other, where the two locations can both be reached there and back in a day. She does the same with another two, a third two, and a final two. There are now four general locations. A different group of two Tribe members, eight people in all, are sent out to gather their two items and return.

She instructs the group as follows: "Your first priority is to bring back the plant on your list. Each plant was selected because it has promise to be edible. It's best if the plant is bearing seeds or fruit. Bring back an entire plant or two. Preferably two. They will be replanted near Byrn so that whatever they bear, we might be able to grow more in the future. After this, look for the other item on your list. The rock or soil. Collect as much as you can carry. Note if there is anything unusual growing or happening near the item you collect. This may

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help us determine its usefulness if it has any. Bring everything back to Byrn before the day ends.”

With that the group returns to their homes to rest for the big day that will start the next morning. Will it be worthwhile? No idea, but at least it's more than has been done by prior elders.

Early the next morning they depart in groups of two as agreed. Emil and Dot are the first pair to leave and soon find their way down a narrow stream in a direction away from the nearby hills. They note some low bushes growing near the water. They might be edible but they're not yet at either of the places where the actual items of their search are located, so they keep to the plan and continue onwards. A short time later Emil finds a set of stones on their list. Yes, they are supposed to collect the plants first but they're here already. A cluster of four or five small, white, stones are collected. They are the texture of a fine sand. Not very heavy so he and Dot take them all.

Now it's off to where Dot remembers seeing the new plants. A little backtrack up the creek and a turn right up a small hill to a peak. Dot takes her time to look around until she sees a familiar growth that jogs her memory. A few steps in the direction back toward Bryn and she spots what she was looking for. A plant with roots that look like legs of people in the Tribe. Or hands. One plant has several roots that, viewed together, look like a real person. Hands, legs, a body, and leaves at the top like hair that reminds Emil of one of the Tribe members. He won't mention this to that member when they get back. They carefully dig up three samples and prepare them to be carried back.

Success for the first pair.

The second journeyers, Marie and Robert, head up the mountain as far as one is allowed to go in a day. They find their plants but leave them alone for now. They will dig them up on their return. The plants will be in better shape the less time spent out of the soil. They continue upwards and don't have to go far. They find their rock: soft, crumbly, and black. A black that rubs off on one's hands. It's not possible to touch this rock and remain clean. It can be found in abundance at this sight. Too bad it's such a long walk from Byrn. They take what they can carry.

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On their way back down, they easily find their plant again. It's one with long thin green leaves and a thick brown root. Many roots, actually. Multiple roots have grown together from multiple plants. The roots smell fresh and at the same time pungent. A combination that should be worth studying.

Success again.

And success for the other two groups. They all meet back home and decide what to do next. The obvious "next on the list" activity with the plants is to find a place to plant them. Three plants look like they have small leaves or roots that could be useful in some way or another. The fourth has a large brown root and might be edible. The problem is how to find out if it is edible and not harmful. For now, all that should be done is to hope their new vegetation prospers in their new locale.

What to do with the stones and non-plant gatherings is a different story. The elders will need to brainstorm how to investigate them. That can also wait until the morning. Today they plant the plants, store the rocks, grab what is available for an evening meal, and call it a day. This was a big day. Eight of the tribe members had left on a long journey and returned. That's one-third of the population of the Tribe. No one expected any problems but it could have been disastrous if they hadn't returned. They did. All is good.

Time passes and the newly acquired plants thrive in the soil around Byrn. New plants grow from parts of each healthy existing plant. By the time summer is ending, there are enough plants of each type to be able to start figuring out what the Tribe has here. They know what they have. They have two plants with promising roots and two with interesting leaves. That much is obvious. But what good are they?

First thing to decide is if any of them are dangerous to eat. No volunteers and there shouldn't be any. People as a resource are too valuable and scarce to take a chance. There are still many animals around who might innately know if a food is dangerous or not. The elders decide to place a selection from each plant far out of the village and watch to see if any animal eats them. It could be a long wait since animals are rare. They agree to do that in the morning.

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The next morning arrives. Four locations are found, one for each plant. Samples are placed at each site with one Tribe member staying a short distance away as an observer. Later that day the four observers return. In all cases, some animal came to feed on what was left for them. Three of the observers reported that and nothing else. The fourth had a better result. An animal also showed up and fell asleep after eating its offering. That animal had been given the root that looked like a person. The observer picked up the sleeping animal and brought it back. It wasn't dead but it was asleep. And soon it was dinner.

Time moved on. The Tribe was growing and getting healthier. The plant that apparently acted as a sleeping drug for many animals was a boon. The root could be placed in the woods near Byrn and left. A Tribe member returning later to the site would often find an animal of some type asleep not very far away. The tribe's food supply grew significantly.

There was more than that. As the seasons passed, experiments were made with the other vegetation harvested, both vegetation brought back on that first day as well as other vegetation gathered in later trips. Marie, now head elder, was the first to try one of the brown roots. Tasty. And others followed. Most who regularly ate this root appeared to be healthier than those who didn't. They felt better and much more important, they were living longer. The average age of a Tribe member increased by two winters. The Tribe now had 33 members. Not all because of new births. There would normally have been several births over the years. That, offset by the lower death rate, and the Tribe was becoming more secure.

More seasons pass. Several plants are found that produce new edible varieties of vegetables, legumes, and starches. All kinds of nourishment not available before the days of Marie. The Tribe regularly sends members to explore and return with new findings that improve life even more.

A new trade is formed from all this exploration. The skill to know if a plant or other item gathered is useful or not and how to proceed if it is. It requires apprentices but it's not a trade that can be taught to anyone. Maybe it can be taught to some extent, but true experts require intuition, an ability to look at a

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plant, or a rock, or any substance at all and come up with an idea of how it can be used. People with this skill are the true apprentices and soon become the true tradespeople. Intuition can't be taught. Perhaps intuition is not a complete description of this required capability, but it's certainly a significant part of it.

After experimentation and testing by the new tradespeople, uses are found for many of the rocks, stones, and minerals. It takes much time to formulate ideas on how to use each one and to test those ideas. It eventually happens. An example is with a white stone that forms in cubes. Sometimes large cubes, sometimes small ones. Whatever size they are, each can easily be broken into smaller and smaller cubes until the smallest are like a fine dust. It is discovered that those small white stones can be packed around meat and the meat will last longer. Meat prepared in this way can be kept for almost an entire winter and summer. It greatly adds to the Tribe's stability.

Then there is the hard black rock, one of the first found. It can burn. Imagine a rock that can burn. It's not like anything the Tribe has seen before. It burns and radiates heat much better than logs. A more compact source of heat. It's used to cook and to keep warm during cold nights.

Time progresses. The Tribe keeps busy with their discoveries, with their research. Each new use that's found is cause for celebration. The Tribe had been accustomed to only one celebration every season as stated in the *Book of the Blest*. The Tribe is so involved in their new work that they forget about the *Book*. They forget about the requirement to have a feast of thanks in the autumn. They forget that the *Book* provided the initial direction that allowed them to wander around their home, explore the land, the mountains, the soil, and to discover what Avalon could provide them. They forget the population limit the *Book* imposed to protect the Tribe. Possibly that's no longer needed. The Tribe that was the weakest, the smallest, the most limited by natural resources, is no longer that Tribe. It has grown to over 1,100 members.

It's not that they forget the yearly autumn feast, it's just that they began to have a feast whenever there's a reason to have one. It's not always in the autumn. It can be any time of the year. A feast is used as a means to present new discoveries when they are made.

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One such feast is being held now, announced as a special feast, one that will be fun. A time is set to hold this feast just after the sun has fallen below the horizon. A time that everyone would normally have been asleep. No one is. All are interested in what is about to be shown. It starts. The Tribe watches in silence as attention is drawn to a spot in the middle of the feast. A spot that contains dust or so it seems. A row of dust here and a pile there. When the time comes the piles are lit one at a time. The dust ignites, burns, and as it does, emits a light show, a sort of collection of sparklers. This pile is green and the row next to it burns in a shade of red. All piles are different colors and all are making crackling noises. The Tribe has just experienced the world's first display of sparklers. Just for fun. Not all new discoveries have to be serious.

The Pharmacist Tribe has progressed to a comfortable and secure stage.

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No time has elapsed since first tribe had their Feast of the Harvest. No time has elapsed since the second tribe had their Feast of Autumn. No time has elapsed from those feasts until this one, the feast with no name. Time does not exist for the Guidance.

When the Guidance created basic life so many millions of years ago, they instilled the seeds of life with a direction and a goal. They tried as well as they could. They tried to guide the flow of the world's life forces to form three tribes. It worked. Three tribes evolved from the basic life they formed in those first few days. It was only a few days ago to the Guidance. It was millions of years on Avalon.

Each tribe was formed in a different part of the planet with different gifts and different challenges. They were each given a book to help recognize the gifts they were given that could be used to help meet the challenges they were also given. The Guidance hoped that the three tribes would solve their problems, would develop, advance, and grow. Paths of growth that were in some ways the same for all the tribes and in other ways different. The challenges were given to help grow their differences. The *Book of the Blest* was given to help grow their similarities.

Now, so millions of years down the path, they are different. That part was a success. Are they the same? The Guidance observes the feast of the Pharmacist Tribe. How is that the same as the other feasts? Does it reflect enough similarity to achieve their next goal? Or does it strengthen the differences that much more? A good question that will have to be considered by the Guidance when the time comes for consideration.

Simmering

The tribes are formed. Life goes on. There is advancement and change.

Harvest Tribe

The Harvest Tribe has moved beyond the borders of Sennen. They learned how to cultivate fields, no longer relying solely on small patches of land maintained by individuals. The Harvest Tribe still works as a tribe. What is grown by the Tribe is still shared by all. Now there are large fields scattered throughout the countryside near Sennen. More food can be grown than is needed in a year.

The Tribe has learned how to work with nature. They no longer need to travel almost a day to find and harvest from the hemp forest. They learned to take seeds from the far-away grove, to clear land near Sennen, to plant and care for those seeds, and to grow a grove. There is a large supply of hemp near Sennen. They taught themselves how to use hemp to make not only rope, but clothing, and shoes, and how to fabricate it for warmth and insulation from the weather.

The Tribe built structures to store the excess grain. They learned how to preserve grains over the long winter and how to store grains so they do not spoil over the hot summer. Grain is stored in structures insulated from the extreme hot and cold temperatures by products produced from harvesting hemp. The buildings they make are reinforced and tied together. Their new knowledge gives them security and happiness. But more important, it gives them contentment.

All this has taken a long time. Aisling's and Conner's son, conceived after the *Feast of the Harvest* so many years ago has grown up to have children of his own. So has their daughter. It has been many years. Aisling and Conner are no more, having lived long and happy lives. Their children and grandchildren have also lived their lives. Many people have come and gone. The Harvest Tribe has changed.

One change stands alone as being more significant than the others. There are now many towns. More than just Sennen. More towns are needed to tend all the new fields. The elders decided many years ago that the limitation of 975

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members for the Tribe, as prescribed by the *Book*, was meant to apply to each settlement, to each town individually. There are now six towns, six separate settlement areas. Each maintains their own fields and have built their own food storage buildings. In total, the population of The Harvest Tribe now slightly exceeds five thousand people over the six settlements, just as God decreed in the *Book* according to the current interpretation of that *Book* by the elders.

People in the six settlement areas still gather in Sennen once a year for the *Feast of the Harvest*. It's still held in accordance with the original traditions. God requires the yearly celebration and the Tribe honors that which God requires. Long gone are the days when thanks were given to the spirits that made Avalon, to the forces that created the people and the animals, to the divine nature that provide food grown from the land. Thanks are now offered to God, and of course, the people in the Tribe still offer thanks to each other. They thank their neighbors like they did when the Tribe was young. Everyone in the Tribe is still a neighbor, even if it might be slightly less all-encompassing than it was so many years ago. The Tribe still knows it is one Tribe. If one settlement has a problem, the other settlements help. They all work together.

The crevice is still very close to Sennen. Some among the young still yearn to conquer the crevice, still wonder what is on the other side. Some still spend their days, when not working in the fields, conjuring their conquering plans. Sometimes a group is convinced they found a strategy that will work. A few are so certain that they attempt to escape. Those that do are never heard from again.

Hunter Tribe

The Hunter Tribe has been busy and has also learned and grown. People in the spear-making trade now attach feathers to the back of the spears to guide them. They fly straighter when feathers are attached in just the right way. They also make many other tools besides spears. Most of those are fabricated from stones originally found outside of Talland and still gathered from the same places. Items made with these stones and local woods includes axes, hammers, and large cutting tools.

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In the years since we last saw the Hunter Tribe, a new trade has grown up as the result of experimentation with bones from the larger animals. Many are always available after each large meal. Those they soon learned could be used to make smaller sharp tools such as fine knives, and scrapers, and even fish hooks. Many in the Hunter Tribe are now expert anglers, piscators.

There is even some time for fun by experimenting with the shiny stones also found years ago. Those shine in the sun, but each one shines a little differently than the one next to it. Some stones that reflect the light sparkle. Others are translucent, allowing people to almost see all the way through them to what is beyond. Not quite, but almost. In some cases an image far away is captured inside the stone. An optical illusion that can be interpreted in many ways. And it is. Imagination plays tricks. The Hunter People worship the animals as a force channeling the gods of Avalon. When they look at an animal through a semi-translucent stone, an image of the animal is sometimes captured inside. This reinforces their belief. The Hunter Tribe becomes more certain than ever that they are in the midst of something greater than the people of the Tribe themselves.

Those inventions, discoveries, and realizations started a long time ago. Other changes occurred to the Hunter Tribe over the years. They originally used only small fields to raise livestock and chickens. Now their abilities allow them to enclose more and larger areas. They build finer mesh materials so they are able to keep more egg-producing birds under their control. Large areas to roam with nests to return to in order to lay their eggs. They learn advanced techniques in drying and curing meats so they also increase their food security over the long cold times and the hot times.

Their gods, their animal spirits, insist on comfortable conditions for the livestock. It is acceptable that an animal provide nourishment to the Tribe, but they should live comfortable lives until that time. The Hunter Tribe is told to spread their settlement beyond the constraints of Talland. It's not sure who told them to do so, but it's common belief that they were told. The more land there is, the more land can be used for farms for the animals to graze and enjoy. The elders of the Hunter Tribe learn from their animal gods that the limit of 975 people can apply to each settlement, not a limitation on the Tribe as a

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whole. The elders determined this the same way that the elders of the Harvest Tribe made their determination. They willed it and it was so.

Many years pass and many settlements arise. Each has a farm. The land required to provide comfort for all those animals is more than the land required for the fields of the Harvest Tribe. This is because less vegetation grows in the climate of the Hunter Tribe than for the Harvest Tribe, and much more is needed to provide adequate grazing. Land cannot always be found close to Talland. The Hunter Tribe grows in numbers and in area.

All members of the Hunter Tribe meet once each year for the *Feast of Autumn*, as the *Book of the Blest* commanded. Each Hunter Tribe family brings themselves, their children, and their favorite animal with them to the feast. Why their favorite animal? The *Book* says that the people shall dine each year along with the creatures of Avalon. No one has actually read that portion of the *Book*, but the elders assure everyone that it is a real requirement.

At the feast the gods are thanked by giving thanks to each of the animals in attendance. Then the people thank all others for a good year. Everyone is a neighbor among the people in the Hunter Tribe. The tribe is so spread out that at every feast, many met neighbors and good friends they had never met before. Even so, it is one tribe that can rely on any of them for help if needed.

Pharmacist Tribe

The Harvest Tribe and the Hunter Tribe naturally advance over time. It's part of human nature for each generation to look for ways to improve themselves. Those two tribes learned success early. They managed to sustain the population that the *Book of the Blest* prescribed and they managed to reach that level in the early days. Their work allowed life to become more comfortable, a level of comfort that slowly increased with every generation. Those two tribes were never at a stage where they considered they might fail, that they might cease to exist entirely. The people in each tribe wanted a better life, but only wanted, not needed.

The Pharmacist Tribe was different. They existed for many generations with only two dozen members. With a group of members barely out of childhood acting as elders. Their need to improve life was driven by the need for basic

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survival. One failure, one step in the wrong direction, and the Pharmacists would be no more. This was the drive that propelled their major attempt at exploration, to find a way to live and to grow. It worked. Underneath that initiative, that success, was the force that molded a special nature into all the people of their Tribe. What was survival of the fittest within the Pharmacist? It was a drive to explore, a drive to discover, a drive to invent, and the mental endorphins that resulted from the thrill of success.

The Pharmacist Tribe developed in an entirely different direction than the others. They started slowly. Their size was only a few when the other tribes had many. But with the few they did have, the Pharmacists worked, discovered, experimented, invented. Soon they learned much about the plant life of Avalon. Not only did they learn which were nutritious but also which could be used to lessen pain and which could be used to cure diseases. Cure diseases both in people of the Tribe and in animals.

They experimented with the plants they grew for food, with the growing process. Mixing what was left from the prior year's growth into the soil or adding parts of soils found nearby. They experimented to see what combination would produce better crops. Some of the crops were food they ate. Some were fed to the animals. What they added had vitamins and minerals that helped the growing process. They did not know about vitamins or minerals, but they did observe. If one combination resulted in healthier animals, then it was better whatever it contained.

This naturally led to more advanced and controlled science. They experimented with four fields growing the same grain. One was planted as it has always been. The other three each received an additive, a different one in each. Then they observed which field's production was the best. That there were differences was no surprise. What was a surprise was that the best results came from spreading animal droppings around. It reliably produced larger and healthier grains, vegetables, and fruit. Why? One idea was that the life that was in the animals travelled through their manure into the ground and up through the plants. They did not know this for sure. It was only a thought. They did not need to know why. The result was a better harvest. Nothing else was needed to be known.

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With this success brought time to spend on entertainment, enjoyment just for the sake of being happy. A happy people are a healthy people. Mental health is part of physical health. They experimented in areas that did not deal with the food supply. They finally found a use for that smelly yellow rock found on their initial outing so many years ago. For some reason they decided to mix the powder of that rock with power from the black rock that burned. Why did they do that? Well, mixing colors could be fun. That's reason enough. Eventually they threw in some white powdery rock. Why? Because they could is the only answer anyone came up with. No one really knows. And guess what, it burned and burned very hot. That's something, right?

It caused their minds to think some more and to fiddle with their compound. A bit more yellow, a bit less black, a lot more of the white. Two and two were put together, then another two, one here and one there, and results. A special celebration was called to show off what they found. Another feast, a celebratory feast, a demonstration feast, or a bragging feast. Possibly all. Whatever the real reason, one night they had a feast. Food, friends, and finally darkness. Everyone happy. The sun set and a group wandered off to the edge of the clearing used to prepare the food. Everyone was told to look up in the sky. A streak of light left the cooking area. It rose up until it seemed like it was right over the largest gathering of the Tribe and for the first time ever on Avalon, the Pharmacist Tribe witnessed a fireworks show.

The Pharmacist Tribe were thinkers. They experimented, invented, and soon the Tribe was secure. They learned what was needed to maintain a food supply and to treat diseases for healthy members. They grew in numbers like the Harvest and Hunter tribes. They started later but they soon caught up. The Pharmacists were no longer in danger of extinction.

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Many years passed since life was placed on Avalon. A long time for basic single-celled life to develop and evolve. It took many more years until the three tribes formed and for those tribes to gain a foothold on Avalon.

They all gained this foothold, emerging in their own ways. There were common reasons that helped their development. They all had the *Book of the Blest*. There were differences in each tribe's books. Differences are good. The Guidance did not want a single tribe to develop. But they wanted some similarities. Three such tribes can eventually merge into one people that can reach a level to be able to help the Guidance in their work.

These peoples, these tribes, this experiment that was started by the Guidance is still moving toward a final goal in some faraway future. How has the experiment gone so far? There are some emotions, feelings, threads within the fabric of the tribes' souls that have strayed from the original plan of the Guidance, but not so far as to have strayed beyond hope. The goal is still possible.

Advancement is simple as individual tribes. Children are conceived by a man and a woman. It's easy to create a will to procreate. Improvements in humanity over generations result from a randomness in the process of creating a child. Each is not the same as either of their parents. Each new individual has many of the same qualities as their parents. But not all. Some are better, some worse. Those that are better outnumber those that are worse, usually. Each generation is slightly better than the one before because of this intermixing. While it produces new, better, slightly improved people, there are limits.

In order to reach the next step, the next advancement wanted by the Guidance, development must proceed from three sources, not just two. This is why the Guidance planned for three tribes. That is why they allowed, hoped, planned for each tribe to take a different path in their development. Their intermixing will move life closer to the final goal.

It is now time for the three tribes to meet so that the next phase of the trial can start. They will be given a test to see if they can work together. The test will be

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a problem on which their entire existence depends. Solving such a problem will bind the three tribes into something new. It will require the drive, ability, intuition, intelligence, and strength that each has developed. Success will result in the final people that the Guidance hopes to evolve into the final product they need. The time for the tribes to meet has arrived.

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Meeting

The Tribes

There are critical times in the experiment that is Avalon when a nexus occurs that provides an opportunity for the people to advance to the next level. An event of this magnitude can only occur when willed by the Guidance. It has been willed. A test unlike any others the tribes have encountered. The foundation has been laid.

All that's needed now is a little push. How can this be done? The Guidance needs the tribes to do something but they can no longer control the tribes. Directly that is. Indirectly they can ask the planet to help. They can control Domhan and they can control Avalon. They can cause unrest. Ages ago Avalon was formed by causing the ground to shift. The ground was forced to rise and to form mountains from what was then just an ocean. Avalon rose from that action. A long thin land. Barely wider or longer than a six-day walk.

That action also formed high mountains in the East. Rising taller than a person can climb. Insurmountable. The ocean exists just over the eastern mountains, unseen by anyone in any of the tribes. Mountains also exist to the north and south. All the mountains constrain the tribes to stay within their borders. A necessary part of the upcoming test. To the west is the crevice. The crevice filled with thousands of predators of every kind. Predators that grow hungrier every day for fresh meat. Vegetation in the crevice only partially satisfies their hunger. Only the Harvest Tribe now knows about these predators. Soon the other tribes will. The only way to escape Avalon is to conquer the crevice.

The Guidance calls back the forces of Domhan that were called upon those many years ago to form Avalon. Lava and magma flowing deep under the sea that rose up to become the land now home to three tribes and which has been friendly, until now. That was then. Today magma deep within the mountains that form the eastern wall of Avalon, as well as the southern and northern walls, start to rumble. Slowly but unstoppably, they rise up and begin to fill the high calderas formed in centuries long past. It doesn't take many days until these calderas are full. They overflow. Lava flows down the mountains, reaching first the towns of the Pharmacist Tribe and soon the towns of the Hunter Tribe. The advancement of lava isn't fast like a gush of water

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overflowing a river bank, but not slow either. Each day sees lava advance by the width of a dwelling.

The lava flow is first noticed by the surveyors of the Pharmacist Tribe who often leave their homes to check areas surrounding the settlements. They observe that the advancing lava causes everything in its path to burn. Everything is destroyed by fire. They rush back to their tribe. Meetings are held. Plans of action and escape are considered. The realization comes that only one of the many plans is possible. They must move west until they get to a point where the land no longer slopes downward. To where it is flat so the lava stops flowing. Or where the ground slopes in some other direction to cause the lava to flow away from them. They will have to travel until a place is found that can somehow stop the advancement. The realization that one of these possibilities must be found makes one other fact certain. The Tribe can no longer stay where it is and where it has been its entire existence.

This same conclusion is reached both by the Hunter Tribe and by the Pharmacist Tribe. No one in either tribe knows where such a place is. No one has ever walked far enough to encounter a place like the one they now need. There is no place within a quarter-days' walk and a farther journey has always been forbidden by the *Book of the Blest*. A requirement that could easily be honored since there was never a reason not to do so. Now there is.

Each tribe gathers their people, their animals, their most valuable possessions, and leave. The Pharmacist Tribe starts walking west away from the eastern hills where the lava was seen. From there, they pivot slightly south into a valley. The Hunter Tribe walks to the west away from its source of lava, and then turns north toward the low lands.

Both tribes hope to find a barrier that will contain the lava. And they do find a barrier of sorts. There is a small stream at the very bottom of the sloping hills as the land flattens. Not so deep that it proves a problem to cross, but deep enough and with a current that might be able to carry the lava downstream when it arrives. The Pharmacist Tribe crosses the river with ease. As does the Hunter Tribe.

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While these two tribes are making their journeys, the Harvest Tribe is also aware of a rumbling in the East. They can see fires in the distance. The mountains are aglow with red. They see a red river flowing down from the peaks. It's not something the Harvest Tribe has ever seen before. Concern rises within the Tribe. What can this mean? Is God angry? Is there something the Tribe has done that they weren't supposed to do, or perhaps something they forgot to do? The elders meet. Ideas are put forward. Theories are discussed about a cause and a solution. A solution for what? No one has any idea. The only action that makes sense is to get closer to try to see if anything can be discovered. Not that anyone has any idea of what that can be, but no other action makes sense.

The Tribe elders and some of the younger adults, along with food and supplies, set out from Sennen to the east. They soon come to the east border river, the border that marks the normal limit of travels by the Harvest people. This river marks a quarter day's journey from Sennen.

They reach the river to find out what can be discovered. They do find something that no one in the council of the elders had imagined. There is a tribe of another people, an unknown people, walking toward them from the north. That is the Pharmacist Tribe. And from the south, the Hunter Tribe is approaching. Both tribes have people who look like them, like the people of the Harvest Tribe, but who are not. No one among the Harvest Tribe recognizes any of the people in either of the other tribes. The same thoughts that are in the minds of members of the other two tribes. All look around in wonder. Here on the side of the river away from the lava flow, the three tribes stop, stare, and try to understand the unbelievable sight in front of them.

Time is frozen. Movement is frozen. The impossible has just happened. Except that it obviously is possible. There are other people on Avalon. Each member of each tribe thinks to themselves, "how can we communicate with people whose origins we do not know?" This is a concern. The concern is enhanced with wonder if the other people know what's happening. As time becomes unfrozen, it becomes time to ask just this question.

Callum, the high elder of the Harvest Tribe, is the first to attempt to communicate with the newly discovered peoples. Callum doubts the people

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will understand his language, the words he is about to say, but there is no other place to start. “Welcome to our home” is his opening greeting, the first sounds to emanate from any member of any tribe.

As far as first attempts go, it appears to be one of the more successful ones. The people of the Hunter Tribe relax. Their stance changes almost immediately. It softens. A second ago it was tense. Nuala, apparently taking on the role of spokesperson for the Hunter Tribe replies with two simple words spoken in a welcoming, if not somewhat surprised, tone. “Thank You.”

One barrier breached. Those two tribes have the same language. Eyes turn to the Pharmacist Tribe. Everyone at this meeting knows that whatever will be said next, that it will be comforting words. They can read expressions on the faces of the last tribe yet to speak. Kayleigh, their leader, says “We are all glad to meet you and to be here.”

The ice has been broken. Whatever that means. The members of the Harvest Tribe cancel their planned trip to the mountains in the far east. They assume that whatever answers they were looking for are known by the new tribes they just met and will be told to them. This is the expectation. Even though they have yet to know what questions to ask, they expect to have answers.

The Harvest Tribe observes that the other tribes brought supplies, food, tools, and artifacts. They appear to be civilized and peaceful. All three tribes know that they can live together. So many new people. It soon becomes apparent that each tribe will need its own land. There is much land on this side of the eastern river. The Harvest Tribe cannot support all the new arrivals for very long. But they can help them get settled. The tribes are given land: Pharmacists to the north and Hunters to the south. The Harvest Tribe occupies land in the center.

Meetings among the tribes are held to discuss why they have suddenly shown up near Sennen. Both showing up at the same time is as interesting a fact as either of them showing up at all. That discussion leads to the Harvest Tribe’s question about the glow in the mountains and they soon learn how serious that glow is. Or how serious it might be. The other tribes are not so sure anymore, having successfully forded the Eastern River, the name given to the

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river by the Harvest Tribe. That river was forded and may offer them the protection they travelled to find. The proof will be when the lava flow reaches the river. For now, at least enough time has been found to settle in a new location and to talk about the problem among themselves and with their new friends.

The Pharmacist Tribe establishes themselves to the north of Sennen in an area they dub New Byrn. They soon start exploring their new area for plants, stones, and minerals. They try to find the natural resources that were around their old capital, Bryn, the resources they learned how to use. Some are found but not all. New resources are found instead. Resources they had never encountered before. Here, in New Bryn, their work can continue.

The Hunter Tribe settles to the South of Sennen in New Talland. They build fences and small buildings for their livestock, plant what they can, and settle down to wait for whatever the future will bring.

Many days pass before the tribes get used to their new sites. The seasons advance. The height of the noontime sun moves lower on the horizon, a sign that winter is near. To the Harvest Tribe, it's also a sign that the time for the *Feast of the Harvest* is approaching. Not imminently, but the number of sleeps between now and then is getting small. A meeting with the tribes, all three tribes, is needed for feast preparations and before it can commence as God has commanded.

A council of the tribes is called. There are many urgent matters requiring attention. The feast is not the only one.

The Council

The long-awaited meeting finally convenes with five people from the elder councils of each of the three tribes. The first official inter-tribe council. The first item on the agenda is progression of the glow in the eastern hills.

The facts are simple. Both the Pharmacist and Hunter tribes have seen the magma rise up in the calderas, have seen the lava flow down the slopes of the mountains, have observed how the lava destroys and sets fire to everything in its path, and have hoped that, in their sojourn west, they would come across a

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barrier that could and would stop the lava progression. The river? They both crossed the Eastern River that they hope proves to be that barrier.

Attendees from the Harvest Tribe listen with interest. They did not know the extent and seriousness of the red glow in the east before this meeting. They know now. They are concerned because they know more than the other tribes. They try to pass on this knowledge to the other tribes, which they claim is both good news and bad news.

They explain about the crevice. If the river does not stop the lava progression, then the crevice to the west definitely will. It's so deep that it can contain the entire lava flow, however large that flow may prove to be. The Harvest Tribe also describes many lands they believe to be to the west of the crevice, out of reach of the lava. Those lands are likely habitable. That is the good news.

Then the Harvest Tribe explains the bad news. It is not possible to cross the crevice. Years of trying in every time of year have failed. No one who attempted to cross has ever reached the bottom of the crevice and returned. The Harvest Tribe describe the animals that live in the crevice. They explain why the attempts failed. They detail the thought that went into many of them. They explain the tools, the plans, the schemes of each. Some very ingeniously conceived. None worked.

The tribes pay attention to this presentation. Some make comments or ask questions. Each council member listens carefully and thoughtfully to all that the others have to offer. Information is gathered but no plans are made. The hope is still that the river will stop the lava advance. Observers will scout each day to check its progress toward the river. Hope remains until it is lost.

What if the lava is not stopped at the river? In that case, the time for action will be short. The distance from the river to the crevice is not far, not nearly as far as the distance the Pharmacists and Hunters had to travel to get here. All three tribes know they should use this time to prepare what to do if some further action is needed. The plan for now is for each tribe to consider possible actions by themselves, to the best of their individual and slightly different abilities. When one tribe feels the need, any tribe, it can reconvene a meeting of the council to discuss whatever progress has been made.

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A good place to leave things for now. The tribes have met and have become friends. They feel that they can work together to solve a problem. They hope that there won't be a problem since the hope is that the river will stop the lava. But if they must, they will be able to solve whatever needs to be solved.

Discussions about the lava flow are so intense that it is the only subject talked about. The Harvest Tribe elders forget about plans for the *Feast of the Harvest*. That part of the agenda has been preempted. It will be brought up at the next meeting. This meeting ends for the four groups that attended. Three of those four were the tribes. The fourth was the Guidance. Of the four, only one knows what problem will eventually arise and how it can be solved. That one is not one that can help. Its ability to help ended when life was created so many millions of years ago.

Assimilation

Life goes on. Time advances. The people of each tribe stay in their areas each night. They sleep near Sennen, or near New Byrn, or New Talland, with their friends and families nearby. While the nights are spent with their tribes, many spend the days wandering to get to know people in the other tribes. They learn about their history, their innovations, their traditions, what they consider important. No one has anything to hide and many are excited to discuss and share. Talk about what is similar, what is not, what is obvious, and what is not so obvious.

Sharing starts with food and continues to plants and animals. Here are mostly similarities. The plants that one tribe found has, for the most part, been found by the others. Similarities yes, but differences nonetheless. The Pharmacists have developed uses for many of the plants that the other tribes haven't. One plant may seem like just a flavorful herb to the Hunter Tribe. The Pharmacist Tribe had learned that properties of the same herb, when prepared correctly, can help someone sleep. The Hunter Tribe noticed one plant makes people feel happy and treated it as a divine gift to be used in spiritual celebrations. The Pharmacists encountered the same plant and experimented, learned what properties produced the happy feeling and how it worked. They used the same plant to ease pain. The Hunter Tribe's use also relieved pain, but their celebrations involved excessive quantities that often resulted in non-desirable side effects.

Then there are adaptations of the natural world. The Harvest Tribe knows how to make rope from hemp, which exists only in this part of Avalon. They share that skill with the other tribes. The Hunter Tribe's acquired knowledge allows them to be efficient in building ranches for many animals and houses for the fowl. They learned useful techniques in many related areas such as how to improve egg production. Their dependency on wildlife, more than the other tribes, led them to develop efficient weapons such as spears that proved germane to their existence.

Next the Pharmacist Tribe. Curative drugs were already mentioned. Their farming and ranching skills are not as advanced as that of the other tribes. Besides their ability to launch fireworks into the night sky, which may be fun but not be useful in an emergency, there appears to be nothing else that this

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tribe can contribute. Nothing obvious except the ability to watch and learn, which may prove to be the most important.

All three tribes contribute volunteers to track the progress of the lava flow. Scouts are sent daily to check on its advance, which continues slowly westward toward the location of the three tribes. Slowly but not standing still. Soon it will reach the river.

And then one day it does. It reaches the river. It is a time when people of all tribes are present and silent, watching when the head of the lava flow enters the water. There it sizzles and cools. More lava enters and encounters the same fate. As the lava cools, it floats a short way downstream and settles to the bottom of the river bed. The river is acting like the members of all three tribes hoped it would. The lava advance is halted.

The tribes feel safe at least for the time being. They relax. They intermingle. They get to know each other more as the anxiety of daily existence lessens. They realize that they aren't entirely different people. The river where the lava continues to meet its fate becomes a popular meeting place for all. Danger over there is so close and within sight. Over here on this side, all is good with the world, with Avalon, with Domhan. It's why the river is a happy place for all the tribes. Protection. Danger averted. Some only come to the river from time to time while others show up every night.

Among the nightly visitors are Cara and Owen. Cara is from the Hunter Tribe. Owen is a Harvest Tribe member. Those two tribes are different, with different ideas, different cultures, different beliefs, different ways of seeing the world. Cara and Owen are young. They each understand their own heritage but are open to other thoughts. They listen to what each other has to say since the teachings of their own tribes have not yet hardened into dogmas in their minds. Cara and Owen talk about their histories, about their parents, about how their tribes reacted when they first learned about the lava flow. They talk about school, a structure that has developed in all tribes over the years.

They both talk about the *Book of the Blest*. As they talk, it becomes obvious that they both have had a book since the beginning of the memory of their Tribes. It also becomes obvious that the books are not the same, aside from

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the name and some of the words. Owen explains the concept of one God and how the elders of the Tribe from a long time ago came to the conclusion that there is only one God. A conclusion based on an inference but an obvious inference.

Cara listens respectfully and then explains their book and their belief that the spirits that watch over Avalon are embedded in the animal life of the planet. Owen listens with interest and some level of curiosity.

These are differences between Owen and Cara but they decide that they are not of a great significance. Their explanations of the supreme nature of Avalon are what they were taught, what they grew up with, what they were told to believe. It does not define who they are. Whatever or whoever watches over Avalon, Owen is Owen and Cara is Cara.

As the days go on, Cara and Owen spend many nights talking. They spend time walking along the river, enjoying being together, and thanking God or the spirits that they met each other. They eventually talk about marriage, another concept that seems to have evolved over time. Somewhat differently in the two tribes as anything of this nature would be. But not that different. The end result is the same.

It is a surprise to many but not to the friends who know Cara and Owen the best, when they announce to the elders of their tribes their intent to marry. Each other! Marry a person from a different tribe! The tribes accept their wishes and agree that a ceremony should happen soon.

The Guidance watch and are pleased.

But the wedding will have to wait, preempted for the time being by another important event. Besides the Hunter and the Harvest, members of the Pharmacist Tribe also spend time at the river. As is their nature. They observe more than those in the other tribes. A few days after the lava first appeared, they noticed the river starting to flow faster. They observed it flowing a bit faster ever since then. Why is that? It soon becomes obvious. Water flows faster when the end of a hose is pinched because there is less space for it to flow through. Water in the river will also move faster if there is less space

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available for it to flow. Same volume of water over less space means it must move faster. The river has less space because the bottom of the river bed is rising. The bottom is filling with cooled lava, now solid stone. The river bed will soon be so high that the water might be blocked, unable to flow, or diverted. It will no longer stop the lava flow. The river is winning the war against the lava for now, but it won't be long before roles are reversed and the lava starts winning. When that happens, lava will enter Sennen, New Byrn, and New Talland. The tribes will be forced to leave. The only escape route leads over the crevice.

Plan Of Action

The time when a plan is needed is now but there is no plan. No ideas occur to anyone except for the people in one tribe, the tribe that observes. The Pharmacists had guessed that a time would come when they would be forced to move on. They spent many days learning what each other tribe could possibly contribute to a solution. They have an idea of how to traverse the crevice. It requires cooperation from all tribes but it can be done.

The Pharmacist Tribe calls a meeting to suggest a course of action. They admit that there is no way to cross the crevice on the ground. They believe the Harvest Tribe when they claim the beasts are too numerous. Even using spears of the Hunter Tribe, there are more animals to conquer than there are people to cross. A few animals could be killed but that would only delay the inevitable. Some might make it across the crevice floor. Most would not.

The other possibility is to cross over the crevice; to build a bridge. How? How can this be done? What material do they have that is strong enough to support a bridge and the weight of people crossing on it?

The obvious material is the strongest hemp rope of the Harvest Tribe. That will work. If enough strands of rope can be stretched from this side of the crevice to the other. If someone could carry one piece of rope across the crevice and attach it to the other side, that rope could be used to pull more to the far side until enough is attached to allow the tribes to cross.

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How to get that first rope across. It can't be thrown. Even if it that was possible, it couldn't be secured to the other side without some person from one of the tribes already there.

But, the Pharmacist Tribe say, it can be thrown. A rope can be attached to the largest spear that the Hunter Tribe can make. The Hunter Tribe acknowledges that they have spears of the size described, big enough to drag a large rope behind. But no one in our tribe is strong enough to throw a spear that far, and members of our tribe are the strongest in the group.

A valid point that the Pharmacist Tribe has already considered. Here they present the final piece of the puzzle. It has already been suggested how skills from the Harvest and Hunter tribes can be used. A contribution from the Pharmacist Tribe is the next logical step. They have a solution: fireworks.

Members of the other tribes turn to stare as this idea is presented. No one can comprehend how a fireworks show can help. At first. Then it dawns on one member of the Harvest Tribe and one of the Hunter Tribe. Eventually everyone is on board.

A Pharmacist's spokesperson explains.

“We have learned how to launch fireworks high into the sky using an exploding compound we developed. We can use this same compound to launch a spear with a rope attached. We can launch it high and far enough to clear the crevice. When it lands, it may just fall and lay on the ground. If so, we have accomplished nothing. We can try again and keep trying until one is launched with a trajectory that allows it to land straight down into the ground with enough force from the heavy spear to stick. It should stick well enough to support the weight of someone willing to hold onto the rope and cross the crevice. Once we get someone of the other side, that person can secure the rope to a tree and secure more ropes as we launch them over the crevice. As more are secured, more people can cross.”

The Guidance

A grumble arises from those in the meeting. Nods of approval. It's a plan. One that may or may not work but one that has a chance. Since there is no other plan, it's agreed. It'll be a lot of work and a lot of intense emotion as the spears are launched. The tribes start to disperse to each prepare their own part of the escape plan. But first all agree that there should be an evening of celebration. And what could be better than to finally have the wedding of Cara and Owen.

The Guidance watch and are pleased.

Escape

It's a good idea to let enjoyment enter one's life, especially just before pressure, before the challenge of a lifetime, a test that was never anticipated, a test with a pass/fail result where failure is not an option. Before that event descends on the people in all the tribes, there will be a reprieve, an evening of happiness allowing everyone to relax.

Cara and Owen. The first inter-tribe marriage. How will this even proceed? There are traditions to follow. Beliefs! Strong beliefs among those of the Harvest Tribe and strong beliefs among those of the Hunter Tribe. Traditional ceremonies with different traditions. Even the Pharmacists. They have traditions. Theirs are not as deeply ingrained in their persona as those of the other tribes. While they may have their beliefs, what they believe is not important today. No one in the Pharmacist Tribe is getting married. The head elder of the Hunter Tribe, Anders, and the head elder of the Harvest Tribe, Revna, meet to discuss details on how the ceremony will work.

To Cara and Owen, this is a necessary evil. Something that must be considered. But whatever decision Andres and Revna come to, however the marriage is performed, the ceremony itself is almost inconsequential as long as they are married when the day is over. They both know there are differences. They have been talking about those for many days. They each understand their own beliefs as well as those of the other. To them, the differences are interesting and that is all.

The elders, as it turns out, are not as well versed in what the other tribe believes.

The Guidance

Over the years, the Harvest Tribe has developed rituals around their belief in one God based on their interpretation of the *Book of the Blest*. Revna, as Harvest Tribe elder, has a responsibility to ensure that God views Owen's marriage to Cara as a blessed union. That can only be accomplished through respect during the ceremony. Respect in thanking God that Cara and Owen were allowed to meet each other, that they grow to respect each other, and that they agree to continue their life together as God wants them. There is only one God and that God would be upset if thanks were given to anyone else. Upset if anyone else was acknowledged to have equal footing in the ceremony. All this is contained in the *Book of the Blest* as given to the Harvest Tribe so long ago, and as modified by insights God gave to the Harvest Tribe over the years.

Anders seems somewhat concerned, surprised and concerned over what he has just learned. He recalls the words in the *Book of the Blest*. The words that the spirits of Avalon provided to the Hunter Tribe before the memory of anyone in the Tribe, almost before time itself. Their *Book of the Blest* describes in great detail how the spirit of the world is embodied, not in a single God, but in the life force of all the animals that live on Avalon. A blessing, a marriage, a ceremony that does not acknowledge this clear truth would certainly not end well for Cara, nor for Owen. Anders could not allow a marriage to occur that was doomed before it even started.

That Owen and Cara are not concerned seems to be ignored. Anders and Revna are. They're older and know better. It's unfortunate that the young take so long to realize the basic truths of life. That's why there are elders to protect the Tribe, especially the young and naïve of the Tribe. If there's one reason the *Book of the Blest* describes the elders and their responsibilities and powers, it's for just this reason. It's described in all the books that are in use today. Three books, three tribes. It wasn't in the original version of any of them.

Anders and Revna talk. There's an impasse in how the ceremony will be conducted. A simple impasse? One easy to resolve? It might appear that way, but when one's beliefs are so deep-rooted as are the beliefs of each Tribe, then it becomes not simple, but difficult, perhaps impossible.

The Guidance

They do come to an agreement of sorts. After long hours of argument, they agree to present the problem to each tribe's councils of elders and let them decide how the marriage ceremony should proceed. The path forward is too important to be resolved only by the two high elders of each tribe. Council involvement is needed.

The council meetings begin. It soon becomes apparent that each Tribe was unaware of the blasphemous beliefs of the other. So much so that each of them now finds it difficult to talk to the other. Luckily there's the neutral Pharmacist Tribe. They're called upon to be mediators. It's a strange topic for them to mediate since they had wandered away from the belief of a supreme force a long time ago. They try. They assume the job of communication, carrying messages back and forth from one council to another.

Impasse continues. Word spreads. Meetings of the Hunter Tribe and of the Harvest Tribe grow in attendance. Everyone in both tribes is interested in the discussions, especially those that had been elders in the past. Everyone has an opinion, a belief, a feeling for how the ceremony should proceed. All the older members do, that is. Those are the ones with power established from respect earned by age. The younger people are mostly quiet.

The Guidance watches.

The meetings go on all evening. People grow weary and sleepy. The meetings continue that day and into the next. In all this time, Owen and Cara are not married.

Eventually a member of the Pharmacist Tribe who has acted as a mediator intervenes. But not to help resolve the marriage ceremony dispute. He announces that the river is full of lava. The volume of the lava has suddenly and rapidly increased. It is heading toward their villages, toward each of the three settlements. The marriage can wait. There is little time, perhaps not even enough, but in whatever time there is, they need to try to cross the crevice.

The Guidance

The members of the Harvest Tribe stop talking about the marriage. They listen to the report of lava breaching the river. And then the high elder, Revna, makes a decision on how to proceed. The announcement is almost inevitable.

“This,” she said, “is God’s way to tell us that we cannot work with the heathens, the unbelievers of the other tribes. God would rather that we perish than allow people like this to survive. We can no longer work with any other tribe to cross the crevice. What we can do by ourselves, we can try. But only by ourselves.”

Consensus followed, almost unanimous consensus.

Those were the words of the Harvest Tribe. At the other location, the other meeting of elders, the meeting run by Anders for the Hunter Tribe, that meeting was also told the news of the lava. There Anders made his own announcement. It was almost exactly the same as the one made by Revna.

The Guidance

The Guidance continues to watch. They are not pleased. They are not surprised either. This was not the first attempt they had undertaken to evolve a people to help. It was not the first attempt that encountered problems. The Guidance knows that advancement by people to another level is necessary to reach the goal the Guidance wants. That advancement is not going to occur on Avalon. A failure after millions of years in the life of the Tribes is only a failure after a few days of existence for the Guidance. Regardless of time, a failure is still a failure.

They wonder where they went wrong. No, that’s not right. Wonder is a misnomer. The Guidance immediately assimilates all that happened since the tribes were first founded and all that passed since they were given the *Book of The Blest*. One version for each tribe. The *Book* had been provided to let the tribes know there was purpose to their existence. It was meant to give them comfort that they could rely on to help mold their direction on Avalon. The hope was that this direction and implied purpose would help form a unifying force when the three tribes finally met.

The Guidance

That was the intent but not one the Guidance could control. They had control over the tribes only until the time they were formed. After that the tribes progressed on their own.

That the tribes moved along different paths was OK. It was expected. The *Book* had been tailored to the needs of each tribe, slightly adjusted to survival on the portion of Avalon they were given.

It was obvious to each tribe that the *Book of the Blest* came from somewhere outside the tribe. There were many interpretations they could have considered on where that was. Interpretations needed to be made by the people since the Guidance did not describe who they really were and what abilities they had.

Even if the Guidance wanted to describe themselves, they couldn't. It is indescribable and unknowable to the people on Avalon. The concepts, much less the words, do not exist. It also is not important that it be known. The tribes were allowed to answer the question of the *Book's* origin as they saw fit. Or to not answer. That was also OK. The Guidance had instilled in the tribes enough passion to let them accept what the *Book* asked them to do. But only that amount, they hoped. Only a small level of curiosity.

The passion they were given was too much. The *Book* they were originally given provided instructions on how to build a life and how to survive the challenges of Avalon. It was an instruction book. Like a book for building a piece of furniture. Those books describe construction but not directions on how to use the furniture once it's built. A cabinet can be used to hold clothes, books, or tools. Instructions tell you how to build a cabinet, not what it should be used for once built.

The tribes went too far. They added to the books they were given. One *Book* talked about animals. That tribe added words that the animals were sacred and should be worshipped. Another *Book* said nothing. That tribe thought they were being helped by something unknown. True, but their minds formulated ideas about who or what that unknown force was. They added words that invented God.

The Guidance

The people of each tribe long forgot that their own elders had modified the *Book* to match their presumptions. They followed the modifications as if they had been in the original.

Even this was OK, except that each tribe came to strongly believe that their own interpretations were correct. They did not admit that other interpretations could also contain some degree of truth. They could not allow for the possibility that theirs could have some fallacies or inconsistencies, could be partially true and partially untrue. This was a miscalculation of the Guidance. The slight degree of passion instilled in the tribes was too much. How much is enough? How much is too much? An Avalon rendition of the dilemma of the three bears.

Clouds form in the part of existence where the Guidance exists. Clouds? No other term describes it better. Clouds of many colors, if “colors” is even accurate. In the middle is an ominous circular cloud that takes on the color of deep violet. The cloud forms to look like a button of sorts. Again, button is probably not a completely correct description, but there are no words that can describe what is forming. And if one can conceive that the cloud described in this way is pressed, then that might also be somewhat accurate.

Avalon is an unusual land existing in an unusual part of an unusual planet, Domhan. Unusual is a relative term, one that can only be used if there are other parts of other planets in the universe to which one can draw a comparison. But there are no planets in this universe since the universe no longer exists. Neither does Avalon, nor Domhan. It never did.

Lemuria

The Guidance

Patience is a virtue required to achieve the highest goal. It is a virtue of the Guidance. There is a goal that may require many attempts, each taking millions of years to reach fruition. Or millions of years to even see if fruition is possible. Avalon was one such attempt, one of their failed attempts.

Patience is not their only virtue. There is also observation and there is learning. Even the Guidance can learn. They needed to grow and learn to reach the place they are in now. Their hope is to create life that can also grow and learn and join them in their benevolent oversight of all that exists. Whatever life they create cannot take the exact same path of growth that the Guidance did, but the end result can be the same. Almost the same.

The Guidance needs to try again and knows it can only mildly control the path that the life it creates will take. Control ends at the time of creation. It's like skipping a stone on water. A good throw and a stone skips many times before its trip across the water ends. A bad throw and it sinks immediately. The reward for a good throw to the stone skipper is the enjoyment of seeing success. Regardless of the result, control over the stone's path ends when the stone is released. Until then the creator, the stone skipper, has complete control. Afterwards, none.

The Guidance wants to account for all possibilities before starting down the path of a new life. But it can't. Even for the stone skipper, a breeze may blow, a wave may rise, wind and water unknown to whoever throws the stone may impact its path. Many unknowns can influence a stone's progress.

The Guidance can only deliberate an action in order to consider possibilities for success. Not to guarantee it. What can the Guidance use from the events that occurred on Avalon that might help them in this deliberation process? One observation is that the people had developed different beliefs about the nature of ever-present gods, of benevolent spirits, of omnificent beings that might have created Avalon. The Guidance did not consider that beliefs as strong as the ones that developed could have arisen. It mattered not to the Guidance what the people believed since they did not have the ability to form a concept that came close to describing what actually was.

The Guidance

There is no omnificent being after a stone is launched. None that can be perceived. It's a concept that even troubles the Guidance themselves, an impossible concept, ineffable, unable to be contemplated, impossible to correlate to reality. How can such a concept as this form in people's thoughts and form so strongly as to cause their destruction? What difference can a concept be that, by its very nature, cannot represent the truth? What can cause this to be the cornerstone of a people's existence?

The Guidance admits that such development was within their plan. The concept of a supreme controlling force has benefits. They were the ones who provided the *Book of the Blest* to the people of Avalon. There was meaning in this gift, logic, intent. It was to provide a push in the right direction. A direction to help the people develop morals, ethics, kindness, and support for one another. That concept was good. It did help the people develop, become thoughtful, kind, and considerate.

But the concept strayed from its original course. The foundations were sound. The feelings and compassion that resulted were as intended. Somewhere along the path of development, the form became more important than the teachings. The operation was a success. The patient died.

Like their plan on Avalon, the Guidance needs to try again to create people that will develop in at least three different forms. Three different paths to eventually join together to share what each learned. The ability to develop a separate path for each of three people is easy. That much has been perfected by the Guidance. Perhaps easy is not the right word, but life can be initiated with a high degree of confidence in its success for this part of the plan.

To lay the groundwork where the three will eventually and successfully join together is much more difficult. Like a three-body problem.

The Guidance considers all that it has learned before Avalon and all that Avalon has taught them. They are ready try again.

Lemuria

Lemuria is not a land like Avalon. More precisely, it's not a land like Avalon would have been if Avalon had ever existed. Lemuria is long, longer than it is wide. Its width can be traversed by walking for thirty days. To walk the length requires well over one hundred days. This is the time it would take to walk Lemuria if the land were flat, which it isn't. When one accounts for mountains and other natural obstacles, walking either its width or length is an unobtainable goal.

Except for those natural boundaries, there are no constraints to travel on Lemuria. People can roam wherever they are able to and wherever they want. There are no artificial boundaries imposed by the *Book of the Blest*. There is no *Book of the Blest*. That aid, that concept, is not part of the incarnation known as Lemuria. There are also no constraints imposed by dangerous animals. Go where you want to go.

Lemuria is a land on the planet Atlantis. There are other lands on Atlantis. There are other planets in the solar system that includes Atlantis. There are also other solar systems in the galaxy, other galaxies in the universe, and other universes. Those do exist but the people on Lemuria are only aware of Lemuria itself. There is no reason for their awareness to extend farther.

The long stretch of land called Lemuria has all the geomorphic formations one would expect of a large continent on most planets. There are oceans to the east and west, mountain ranges in the center, with high and wide realms of grasslands located everywhere else. Lemuria is designed to support many different peoples and cultures. A peaceful place where one can live and thrive without danger. Where people can spend their times learning about Lemuria, teaching themselves about the planet so they can prepare themselves to confront any danger that might arise. There are no dangers, but if they were, they could confront them.

The Pampas

Of all the places to live on Lemuria, the pampas region is the most desirable. A place where rain occurs often and where vegetation is bountiful. There is an abundance of lakes. Water is plentiful. Not a care in the world for all forms of life. If one could choose a place on the planet to live, this would be it.

Life formed in many parts of Lemuria millions and millions of years ago. In the pampas' region, the essence of life started in the lakes. Tiny cells were placed there by the Guidance on day one. The cells thrived. They grew, combined, enlarged, evolved, and eventually there were fish. More time passed. The fish evolved and left the lakes for dry land. There were animals. First frogs and reptiles, and eventually larger animals of all kinds. While this process progressed, uncountable millions of years passed on Lemuria. Only five days to the Guidance, but five days is unimaginably long in a place where time does not exist.

The progression of life continued. Another day, as defined by the Guidance, and people appeared. The stone that the Guidance skipped over the lake of Lemuria finished its trip. It settled. Only a few more millions of years remain to see what can be seen.

As with any cycle of creation, only a handful of people initially reach the level where they can start to become the dominate life form on a planet. This time, it is not so much a tribe that has formed as simply a group of people working toward one goal, to survive another day. If any drive can join people in a common goal, it's the drive to continue to be. That drive exists on Lemuria, albeit not a hard one to achieve. The people of the pampas have it easy. There are plenty of vegetation, fruits, vegetables, and nuts to provide sustenance. There are also animals, but no dangerous ones. Bonds form between these people, the dominant life on Lemuria. Because there are no major obstacles to survival, the glue that forms this bond is not strong.

The people of the pampas are not given direction like the people of Avalon were. There is no book, but more important there is something lacking internally in these people and in all the people of Lemuria. They are deficient in the spirit that drives ingenuity, inventiveness, and imagination. And in passion. There is some, but it is dampened. This was the last control the

The Guidance

Guidance imposed before launching Lemuria's iteration of life. They hoped these people would develop in the areas that were needed and not in those that could lead to destruction. A damping in their persona was the compromise made to adhere to this hope. When people find it difficult to develop original thoughts, they are less likely to insist that their thoughts are correct. They are more likely to consider the thoughts of others. Maybe this is a valid tradeoff. A large sacrifice for a large gain. It's like balancing a rock on the tip of a pin. A feat so precise as to be almost impossible. But only almost.

It's not that inventiveness and imagination don't exist at all. They do. For example, it is several generations before one of the people notice lightning strike the ground and dead tree branches nearby catch fire. That is observed once, then again, and many times over the years. Finally, the inventiveness that does exist allows someone to realize that fire can be started without lightning. Rubbing sticks together until they are hot might do the trick, hot enough to ignite some dead leaves or small branches. It takes a long time but fire is eventually discovered on Lemuria. Time does not matter. What are a few years out of hundreds of millions. Only the end result matters.

The people of the pampas notice animals immediately. How can one not notice other creatures wandering among you? Many years later, they accidentally hit one with a rock and kill it. By this time, they are in the age of tools. They use their tools to process what they just killed, warm it over a fire, and partake of their first non-vegetarian meal. This new found ability allows the population of the pampas to grow with the extra nourishment it provides.

The pampas are long, wide, and fertile. They're full of both plants and animals and able to support a large population. People roam the lands. They settle far from where the original people were placed and from where they evolved. The numbers of people grow over thousands of years. But there are no cities. There are no tribes. There are families, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. These families live in one place for a year or two and then move. There is no reason to move since nowhere is short of food, but they move nonetheless. Each time some family members join the majority of the family members that move. Some like where they are and stay. Some go their own ways. A scattered nomadic existence, a peaceful one, and one that allows an intermingling of all who live on the pampas.

The Guidance

The tribes of Avalon had a strong incentive to advance toward an integrated society. Advancement was needed to survive the various obstacles present there. That is not the case on Lemuria. That which drove advancement on Avalon is not as strong here. Development toward an organized civilization occurs slowly. There is no push generated by a need to survive. Nothing emanates from the cohesive will of a tribe. There are no tribes.

Here civilization arises almost by accident. This world of nomadic existence facilitates discovery and supports trade. Not all plants grow in all areas of the pampas. Not all minerals and resources exist everywhere. People wander. People in one family scatter as some move one way and some another. When they settle in a new place, they often find some plant or object they had not encountered before. The unusual is intriguing and accrues worth. An object is worth what one is willing to give for it. Something different often obtains worth just because it is different. People acquire what is new and rare from one place and carry it with them to another. When it's an object that has never been seen by anyone in the new location, the item's worth increases.

In this way trade evolves. By carrying a plant, stone, or mineral with them when they move, people of the pampas act like expert chefs, mixing ingredients from all over the pampas' region. Possibilities are unknowingly created where none existed before. In many cases, carrying a plant or mineral from one area to another area where it does not exist is inconsequential. The two items that would never have come together if not for the people of the pampas do come together. So what?

That is not always the case. There are individuals among the people of the pampas with curiosity about the world, and with inquisitiveness at a level far above the norm. Many people on other worlds in other universes exhibit this quality that is an innate part of an intelligent species. This is the quality that was dampened by the will used to start life on Lemuria. It was not removed entirely. It still exists. It's a trait only in those with a significant propensity for the unusual. While inventiveness does not occur as often as it would elsewhere, it still does occur.

The Guidance

As time progresses several of these people filled with curiosity meet. Perhaps they are of the same family and the trait is hereditary. That's not important. But the fact is that they meet, share the same desire to learn, investigate what they see, and discover some of the mysteries of Lemuria. That is important.

It starts with the discovery and invention of a simple trade, lapidary. Many stones on Lemuria appear plain to the untrained eye. They look like ordinary stones until a group of individuals learn how to cut and polish those stones. They discover which ones shine the brightest. They learn how to mount polished stones as pendants, as rings, as bracelets. What they make is art. It has a beauty created from their abilities and it cannot be found anywhere else on the pampas. People are willing to purchase these items. They have worth.

A trade is started, the jewelry trade. The people who start this trade decide to stay where they are, to no longer lead a nomadic existence. They are able to stay since others on the pampas want to acquire jewelry for their families. Still others find rocks and gemstones and are interested in selling them. There is one place on Lemuria where stones can be sold and jewelry can be purchased. This is why the people who started the trade do not move, so others can find them. Many people come to see them, so many that other trades start and the first city on Lemuria is formed, Lazuli.

Lazuli is soon the center of activity on the pampas. What started only as a center for jewelry soon grows to become a center of trade for many items: plants, meats, wood, and transportation. Lazuli attracts the upper echelon of ingenuity on Lemuria. Inventors. People invent and build tools such as levers and pulleys. A transportation industry starts manufacturing carts and wagons. Lazuli grows as industries grow. Then other towns spring up on the pampas. Lazuli remains the largest and attracts the best of the people of the pampas.

Two of the best known of these people are a man named Felipe and a woman named Sofia. They are observers, always intrigued when they see something new. And always convinced that whatever they see has special properties. That is their job, their calling in this world, to discover what those properties are and what they can do. Felipe and Sofia become known in Lazuli for their interest in unusual plants and their ability to find uses for them. When someone becomes known in Lazuli, they soon become known in Lemuria.

The Guidance

That brings us to today when a stranger walks into their shop looking for Felipe and Sofia. Most people enter shops in Lazuli to trade, to buy something or to sell something they have. Lorenzo is no exception. His land, about a three day walk from Lazuli, supports a grove of trees. These trees produce pods. Inside the pods are seeds in abundance. Seeds with an unusual and pleasant taste. Would Felipe and Sofia have any interest in purchasing these seeds? Lorenzo says he could provide them in reasonable quantities.

Sofia has never met a challenge she didn't like. She and Felipe are excellent experimenters and can find a use for almost anything. They purchase what Lorenzo has carried with him and tell him to come back in four moons to find out if they are interested in more.

Lorenzo accepts their offer, gives them what he has, and leaves. Sofia tastes one of the beans and talks to Lorenzo about how it and the others can be used. Lorenzo experiments and before long the pampas have their first taste of chocolate.

Later they are approached by another individual and invent coffee. Felipe, Sofia, and even Lorenzo became famous and at the same time rich. Rich by Lemurian standards which means comfortable. More importantly, they became famous as people who can take a new plant and come up with a use for it. The rumors are that they can decide what a plant is good for just by looking at it. That isn't true, but the mystique grows up about them anyway.

Lorenzo walks in one day with his new load of cocoa beans from his family's land. "What's wrong?" offers Sofia almost immediately upon seeing the worried expression in Lorenzo's eyes and, undeniably, over his entire face.

"I may have problem with deliveries in the future," starts Lorenzo, "but that's not what's troubling me. It's the reason I might have delivery problems that's bothering. Two people in my family have become sick, very sick. One died. The other can't get out of bed. And there are others who don't appear to be well. They're still working, but I'm afraid that it may be serious. I can't remember a problem like this happening

The Guidance

anywhere on the pampas. Sure, people die, mostly when they are older. And sometimes people die too young, but it has never happened to so many people at the same time. Or what could soon be many people.”

Felipe hears the conversation between Sofia and Lorenzo and offers him a cup of coffee while they sit down to talk about what’s happening. Lorenzo tells them a little more.

“First, my cousin, Paula, started making strange sounds when she was talking and breathing. Her breathing sounds really bothered me, like her throat was too narrow. A few days later, her brother, Mauro, started sounding the same way. Both soon became too weak to work. They laid down for many days while we tried to take care of them. One morning when we went into her home, we found Paula had died. And Mauro is sounding worse every day. He’s still alive, or so he was when I left, but I’m worried. Also, before I left, I thought I heard the same problem in others. Maybe it was in my mind because I was so concerned about Mauro, but maybe not. Maybe others are having problems too.”

Felipe listens to the description of events presented by Lorenzo. Something in the back of his mind comes to light, a sense of familiarity, of déjà vu. He has heard this before. Many people come into their shop every day and Felipe listens to their conversations. He doesn’t participate in all of them, but words fill the air. Felipe remembers more than he thinks he remembers and this description from Lorenzo causes him to recall memories of other conversations. He has heard it before. There is a problem in the pampas.

Felipe explains to Lorenzo what he remembers. He tells Lorenzo that his family might not be the only ones to have this problem. He will try to do what he can and find out what the others have done. There must certainly be an explanation and some action that can be taken so that more people do not succumb to the illness. Maybe he and Sofia can help. They have heard of plants or herbs, some of which have power to cure many problems, to

The Guidance

alleviate pain, to help one sleep. Perhaps some plant somewhere will help with the problem Lorenzo is reporting. If there is, then Sofia and he can find it.

All this is said to try to make Lorenzo feel better. It doesn't work. He only hears that others have the same problem, which makes the problem worse in his mind. He doesn't hear Felipe's hope and his offer to find a solution. That offer is either lost to Lorenzo or he hears it and does not believe it will ever happen.

Lorenzo leaves to go back to his family and help in whatever way he can. The disease that attacks the lungs continues to spread around the pampas. It's the first uncontrolled epidemic on Lemuria.

The Sea

The pampas, while a comfortable place to live, is not the only area of life on Lemuria. The western reaches of the pampas end in most places at high cliffs overlooking the vast ocean to the west. While the eastern reaches of the pampas contain similar cliffs, most rivers flow east to west, making views in the west more spectacular. Many people travel to these cliffs to not only view the ocean far below, but to also enjoy majestic spray as waterfalls collide over jagged rocks on their way down to the sea.

Most rivers end in such a precipitous drop. In a few places the rivers are not so daring. Many years have passed since Atlantis and Lemuria were formed. The years have allowed some rivers to conquer portions of the cliffs, to cut through the soft rocks that are found in rare parts of Lemuria. The waters in these rivers still flow to the sea, but start their descent far away from their final destination. The path is not as steep. One can walk along these river banks from the high pampas' lands to the ocean. If one wants to, which some might want to do if anyone could come up with a reason to do so. None can or more accurately, none do. There's no reason. Walking down would just require one to walk back up. And why? Nothing is down there that cannot be seen over the cliffs. The want, the need, the excitement to see something new, the desire to go just for the sake of going. These are not qualities common to the people of the pampas.

People travel to see the beauty of the ocean but nothing stirs their interest to go farther. None are tempted by the simple fact that it's possible to continue. No one notices the unusual nature of a river here or there cutting through rocks when other rivers nearby do not. A curious observer might think it's almost like the rivers are providing a path on purpose, or that someone or something is tempting them to continue down to the shore. It could be tempting. No one is tempted.

Too bad. There is something that can be seen after taking the long journey down to the sea. It can't be seen from any vantage point up on the pampas, but it's there. Walk down to the western beach, turn south, continue quite a distance until the coastline bends to a place hidden from the sight of the highlands. There just past the bend is a narrow but long plain, stretching as far as the eye can see to the south and even farther.

The Guidance

Living on this plain are another people that have evolved on Lemuria. Evolved near the sea. An evolutionary path that started at the same time as the seed of life that became the people of the pampas started. The same people. The same dominant life form. Perhaps a little different in how their development was impacted by where they were placed, but the same people with the same drives, desires, and limitations as those on the pampas.

The sea people have been on Lemuria as long as the people of the pampas. The two almost developed in the same way. There were differences imposed by their geography. The sea people have land, but not land to the extent of the pampas. The lowlands are lush and provide nourishment required for development, but those plains are not as far ranging as the pampas. The sea people development did not include an initial nomadic phase and their population, limited by available land, did not grow as large. These differences had a mostly superficial impact on their development.

There are other differences and those are more significant. Any people need protein to live a healthy life and animal life is very scarce on the lowland plains. Other sources of protein are plentiful. The sea is brimming with life. An abundance of fish. The problem is that none of these fish typically swim up to the shore where people can catch them. There are no ships or boats. Wood is almost non-existent in the fields to which the sea people have easy access. There is occasional driftwood. The sea people learn how to use that to make fires, but there's not enough to build a boat or anything reliable enough to take to sea.

Nowhere else is there where a source of wood can be found to make boats. Yes, there is wood high up on the pampas. People can climb paths from the sea to these higher lands, but that would require effort and a desire to do so. No one will go that distance without knowing what is there, and no one knows what is there since no one will go.

It's the early days of the sea people. The people see the fish but never think about what they can provide. So not very many people even attempt to enter the water. The waves by the shore are still fun and there are children of all ages. Children play in the waves often, especially on the hotter days. They

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jump and throw objects back and forth in games of catch, Lemurian style. Those objects are mostly smaller pieces of driftwood, which float so they can easily be retrieved. One day, one of the older children dives after a toss and grabs it as it dips slightly below the surface. Only when he resurfaces, he is not holding onto a piece a driftwood but rather a fair-sized fish. What fun! He holds onto the fish and rushes ashore to show his friends and family. What happens next is the first seafood meal among the sea people. Quite tasty.

A new sport starts soon after that, fishing without hooks or rods or equipment of any sort. Some people become fairly proficient at swimming out and grabbing a slippery fish. Proficient in this case means that one is captured every few days. Not a lot, but more than there used to be.

There is extra nourishment of this new type. The population increases a little bit and lives slightly longer. Protein from the sea, while not healthy for the fish, is beneficial to the sea people.

Here evolution of the sea people takes a turn from evolution of the pampas people. Perhaps another example of survival of the fittest. Adaptation to the environment, maybe. Perhaps the results of an initial nudge from the Guidance. That's also possible but they won't tell.

People who can swim farther from the shore, people who can last longer in the water, and people who can dive deeper to chase a fish swimming beneath them, those people become more valuable to the society of the sea people. Adaptation. Changes occur, slightly with each new generation. Their skin changes. Not everywhere and not everyone, but in spots for some. Not scales. People do not grow scales like those of the fish but they do seem to grow a fine mesh skin behind the ears in the upper neck area and sometimes in the chest. These mesh areas close on land. In the sea, the mesh opens and can process oxygen from the sea water. Gills? Not gills, but they work the same way.

On a quick glance the mesh appears like the rest of the skin. Except for the color. Areas of the skin where the mesh is, or where it hides, are darker. Noticeably darker than the rest of the skin. It makes sense. The mesh area is probably thinner and lets the darker colors under the skin blend with the

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lighter skin color one normally sees. It is not a big difference. It is a small difference for a while. Then everyone gets used to it and the difference disappears from sight.

Soon all sea people are born with this ability to breath in the water. It becomes the dominant hereditary gene. Some have the ability to stay in the water for hours. Others not so long, but still much longer than those who were born without the skin mesh. Nature's adaptation presents the sea people with what they need. The people are still creatures of the land. They cannot live in the water but they can survive as long as they stay awake. Sleeping in the ocean is not possible since their evolution is still land based.

From here, the development of the sea people starts to follow that of the pampas. The ability to survive long periods of time in the sea and the skills of strong swimmers allow many sea people to travel long distances away from their home. There are islands, previously unknown and unreachable. They were unreachable because boats were needed to reach them from the shore and boats did not exist. They still do not exist. The sea people can now travel far in the sea and these islands that once were out of reach are not anymore. The people of the pampas started life as nomads. It was part of their makeup. It was who they were. And the sea people were formed from the same mold. Their long-suppressed trait has surfaced. They can now wander aimlessly around their domain where they couldn't before. They do because it's who they are.

The sea people settle many islands near the shore. Those islands are now accessible. And they travel farther north and south along the shore as they find new places to settle.

One island just barely offshore from where the sea people originally developed soon becomes a place where the inquisitive gather. Like Lazuli. Trade starts. Not with stones, polished stones, or chocolate, but a similar trade. The sea people discover different shells and corals on the different islands. These are traded almost like money. There also turns out to be unique seafood found only one of the islands. Another island might have another unique offering. Crustacea, crabs, mussels, breeds of oysters. The center of

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trade that attracts the curious is an island named Atlantis, after the planet. It becomes the second city on Lemuria and the first for the sea people.

The sea people have one advantage over that of the pampas. They started slower and were confined to a smaller area until their seagoing skills evolved. Some of the early sea people were curious. Even people without much inquisitive drive can get bored when they don't have places to go or other things to do. Some of those people were interested in what they could find on Lemuria and started experimenting with the stranger plants. They started before Felipe and Sofia. They developed knowledge of which plants could be used to relieve pain, which could cause drowsiness, and which could help in other ways. Some of this knowledge was lost over time, either because people were not interested or because they generally had no need for remedies. But some of it was passed down over the generations.

After a few years, a girl was born with the given name of Darya. Darya was one of the sea people who was gifted with an abundance of curiosity. Not only did she want to know everything about the world she was born into, she wanted everyone else to know also. Very unusual for Lemuria but perhaps not that unusual for the people who found themselves on the island of Atlantis. Darya started a guild on Atlantis, attended by the most inquisitive of the sea people. The guild was formed to investigate Lemuria. Investigate what? That was what Darya decided. Whatever she wanted to investigate was investigated. She was in charge.

One morning as members of the guild start showing up, Darya had an idea.

“I’ve heard about people from a long time ago,” she starts “who thought that certain plants on Lemuria, special plants, had powers or abilities. Abilities to make people feel better. To help when they were sick or hurting. I wonder if this story is true, if such people ever existed. I wonder if they found anything. If so, I wonder why nothing ever came of it. There are no known cures for any ailment. It would be nice if there were, if we could make those available to our people. This is what we should be working on, investigating, trying to find if there is any truth to this rumor.”

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And it happens. The guild members always listen to Darya. She's a person that exudes a confidence no one ever questions. The investigation starts. Members of the guild ask everyone on the island if they had ever heard this rumor and if they can recollect any details. Some have faint memories, many of those being memories from conversations with friends who still live on the main part of Lemuria. They ask others that travel back to the mainland. Yes, the rumors do seem to be strongest in the part of Lemuria where the sea people first lived. Some people there even claim to have details on particular plants.

The guild lets it be known that they're interested in obtaining those plants and would trade, make significant trades, to obtain samples. A fine conch shell is offered for a sizeable quantity of any of them. For those who live near the origins of the sea people, these plants are easily obtainable. And the price offered is much more than they are worth. The guild on Atlantis has no problem acquiring what they need to start their research into benefits the plants can provide.

The research is well timed. Soon after it starts, the first person is reported with green skin, an infection of the mesh the sea people use for their adaptation to the sea. One person dies, then another. The disease is not always fatal, but people who contact it can no longer enter the sea. They become land bound again. If the disease spreads any farther, the way of life of the sea people could be destroyed forever.

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The Guidance has been watching the people of the pampas as they developed and how they are addressing their first serious problem. They have been watching how the people of the sea have developed at the same time and how they are handling the problem presented them.

For now, all is going according to plan, as well as a plan started millions of years ago can continue to stay on course. The Guidance hopes this plan will work better than their prior plans have. There is so much that needs to go right for a plan to come together. There is much that can go wrong.

So far, the Guidance is pleased. Soon it will be time for the sea people and the people of the pampas to meet and for both to meet the mountain people.

The Mountains

The pampas and the sea are not the only places on Lemuria that can support life. They are not the only places on Lemuria where life was placed, where life started to evolve and to adapt. There are also the mountains found in the center of the pampas' region. Wide pampas grasslands on both sides give way to a tall mountain range in the center.

Back to the sea people for a moment. The pampas themselves are at a significant elevation above sea level. Too high to want to make the trip up from the sea to the pampas. Too difficult to want to make the trip from the pampas down to the sea. No reason to make the long trip by following a steep path along the banks of a fast-moving river. Not for the people who evolved on Lemuria. There is no reason to make this trip. No reason yet.

Then there are the mountains. There is a path, or many paths one could follow to climb from the pampas up to the highland plateau. These paths are slightly more gradual than the paths down to the sea, but they are longer. A long walk, probably more than a day. And for what? To reach the clouds? No other purpose and it's quite an effort to walk that high. There's no reason to go up there. Everyone knows and everyone agrees.

There is a reason. The high plateaus were given the same seed that started life on the pampas and at the sea. A third petri dish of life placed by the Guidance to form the third component of people needed to come together for advancement. How did these people evolve and what can they offer?

The people of the pampas had an easy route to follow to get to where they are today. There were no real obstacles to their development. The sea people? They had some issues, but mostly just issues in advancement. They stayed where they were, perfectly happy but unable to follow the nomadic existence that was inbred into their persona, their destiny. While there were never really any significance issues in their day-to-day life, they had an obstacle to overcome even if they didn't know they had it. The obstacle was eventually met, conquered, and the people evolved to be symbiotic with the sea. Then they were able to wander and explore the part of Atlantis given to them as their domain. All turned out OK. It just took some time.

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Life for the mountain people is different. Their life starts with more significant obstacles. They are placed high in the mountains on plateaus so far above the surface of the planet that the air is thin. It's hard to breathe. They manage, they survive, but they tire easily. They tire just working the fields to grow what they can. They tire tending to the animals. They do what they need to do. They rest a lot. They live the life they must.

There are other obstacles besides the thin air. The mountain climate is cooler. There is more wind and more rain and snow, all which make daily life difficult. There is less vegetation. The lands of the mountain people are close to the tree line. They often need to walk down the slopes to where growth is more abundant. It's hard for them to live at the elevation they were given, but that's only flat area in the mountains. It's the high plains that they must call home.

There are pluses to a mountain existence. Vegetation may be sparse but animal life isn't. There are herds of goats everywhere. Goats like this elevation. And animals that look like llamas. The mountain people learn how to use tools, learn this earlier than their cousins who developed elsewhere on Lemuria. They use fallen branches of trees that are available in many shapes. They use stones. Parts of rocks that rise high over the pampas of Lemuria to form the mountains. Hard stones of almost any size can be found everywhere. The mountain people learn to make tools and weapons. It's a lot of work to make these tools. It's a lot of work to hunt with the tools they make. Hard, but a necessity. The mountain people survive.

Their life does help them in one area, to develop a society, a closeknit society. When people tire easily, they rest. They sit down in groups and talk. Much of the day is spent interacting with others. They eventually form a government, at least a governing council based in their one town, Aosta. The council starts with really nothing to decide but is there, ready to leap into action when something actionable jumps up to demand action. The council meets every day when the day's work is done. It's really just a bunch of people resting and talking like they used to do before there was a council. But now there's a council and when they get together, it's a meeting. Before the council, people would talk about random topics. Now the random topics are official topics. Otherwise, nothing has changed.

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Most people who attend these meetings do so because they are too tired from their day's work to do anything else. Work depletes a body's store of oxygen and tires the muscles. There are other forms of being tired. Just sitting can also be tiresome. It can tire the mind. A mind that wants to learn.

One of these people whose mind yearns for more exercise is an imaginative member of the mountain people, a woman named Mila. She does a lot of talking at the council gatherings. Mila describes with interest the diversity of what can be found near Aosta, what can be found off the paths on which the people wander, and also what can be seen at other elevations. The plant life in particular. It would be fun to see if some of these plants could be useful. Perhaps a new food. Perhaps a new feed for the animals or something to help with the sheep when they get sick. Or with people for that matter. She advances an idea that these plants should be investigated and studied. Who knows what might be found. "Nothing will be unless we look," she claims.

When she first brings up this idea, she looks around the gathering for a response. She gets several nods from other members. Some nods that seem to say "yep, sounds good." Probably several nods from people dosing off. Maybe even a nod of approval. But her comments go no farther. No discussion. "Oh, well," thinks Mila, "that's enough for one day."

The next day arrives and she brings the subject up again. And also on the third day. On the fourth day, she gets support from another council member, a man named Brayan. Mila knows Brayan. Every one of the mountain people in Aosta know everyone else. She never paid too much attention to Brayan. He's one of the quieter people, but not right now. He makes a proposal stating that he and Mila should be assigned to investigate the plant life to find what they can. They will agree to work long hours each day. In exchange, he and Mila will be excused from their other chores of tending to the animals or gathering food. He looks to Mila for her approval to this plan. Mila considers that Brayan might be suggesting this just to get out of some more demanding work. Playing the audience, so to speak. Whatever the reason for his response, it gets Mila what she wants so she shows her approval with a subtle nod.

The unusual thing is that Brayan's offer is different than a casual comment. For the first time in a council meeting, a proposal is put forth. At least the first

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proposal of any significance that the council has been asked to consider. No one knows what to do for a few moments. Things soon settle down. A murmur flows through the assembled people. Eventually someone says OK and all quickly agree. Why not? Politics in action. For the first time. Fairly exciting. This is as exciting as things get among the mountain people.

The simple proposal to investigate the environment of the higher elevations provides more benefit than originally envisioned. It provides an activity, something of interest to occupy people's minds during the day. The mind is challenged a little more than it was before. Many more than just Mila and Brayan become involved. It starts a trade. Maybe a science, an industry of sorts, or the hope of an industry. Whatever it is, the people of Aosta get with the program and help Mila and Brayan. It appears that many have noticed varieties of plants on their walks. Those people gather what they consider to be the most interesting and bring them to be studied. As promised, long hours are put into the effort as each one is examined.

Some plants do prove to be tasty and offer a new source of nutrition. Some that might not taste as good to the people seem to be enjoyable to the animals. Investigating each plant takes a long time. Mila turns out to be intuitive and can somehow sense if a plant might be poisonous or at least dangerous. Something in the smell or feel of the leaves. This part of the analysis takes the most time until she is comfortable that a plant can be trusted and tasted. Many plants are tested. The process continues for a long time. A year passes, then two, and a third.

And so it goes that, one day, Mila starts working on a plant with a bright green plump leaf. Mila senses something different about this plant. A type of magic? No. No one believes magic is real, but there is some part of this particular plant that is different than any other. What is it? Maybe something to do with the thickness of the leaf, the space that it seems to occupy, like the leaf has been pumped full of nutrients or a small treasure. A gift to the people just waiting to be discovered. There have been a few plants like this over the years. But only a few. Some of them have proven to be quite useful in many cases. One thick leaf had water inside, no doubt being saved for its own use in times of drought. This leaf was identified and used by many people over the years

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when they ran out of water on their own travels. A few leaves could provide enough water to let a lost hiker make it to the next enclave.

Mila hopes this new plant will also provide something useful inside. She cuts into it hopefully and finds nothing. How disappointing. A soft fleshy interior. Nothing different than the outside, just more of it. But she has seen plants like this before that were tasty and, feeling adventuresome, takes a bite. And there you have it! It has a taste that reminds her of, of nothing. No taste at all. Almost like eating air. At least it doesn't seem to hurt her.

She finishes her work for the day and leaves to enjoy her evening meal and sleep. When she wakes the next day, she jumps out of bed and for some reason remembers her plant and seems excited to examine it again. She has breakfast and rushes into the lab. Her coworker Brayan is already there, being an early riser. They greet each other and Mila shows Brayan the plant. Then gives him a description of what happened with it yesterday, which was nothing, but asks him to look at it again with her. Why does she do this? What is interesting about this specific plant other than her earlier intuition? Well, Mila feels better today and wonders if that has something to do with the plant.

Brayan agrees to investigate. He also cuts a piece and takes a taste. What else can he do? Mila seems unharmed by ingesting some the day before. He agrees there is nothing distinctive about this particular plant, other than its bland taste. He tries one more leaf and then suddenly pauses.

“Did you hear that?” inquires Brayan?

“What do you mean?” answers Mila. “I heard nothing except for your chewing.”

“No, listen,” says Brayan. “Listen when I cut the leaf. Listen very closely. There may be a noise, a very soft noise. So soft that I'm not sure it's real. Quiet now.” He ends his remarks as he prepares to make another slice into the leaf.

When he does, there is a small hiss. So small it might only be the sound of the knife piercing the surface of the leaf. But it can also be more. They cut a few more slices from the leaf and then get another leaf from a different plant. They

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slice that leaf a few times and there is definitely a difference. The new leaf is emitting two noises. One caused by the slicing action and another coming from something within the texture of the leaf.

Brayan asks Mila, “Any idea what that sound is?”

“No,” admits Mila. “I have no idea. How about you?”

Both Brayan and Mila are stumped but both believe this is important and keep working on it for the next few days. Each day they show up to examine the new leaf and stay until they are tired at the end of the day. Each day they stay later than the prior day until they realize what has happened. They seem to be deriving energy and stamina from the leaves. Finally, Mila’s imagination takes hold and she realizes what’s happening. She tells Brayan as she makes another cut into the new plant. They listen. And yes, they agree the sound they hear is a small, faint, tiny whoosh of air. The plant is storing air for its use later, much like the other plant that learned to store water. By eating this plant, this tasteless plant, both Mila and Brayan are increasing their vigor by increased their oxygen intake. They have made a major discovery. It is what’s needed to be able to work harder in the higher elevations. A plant that can provide a source of oxygen to ingest into a person’s system, to enhance what is available from the air. It’s not a solution that helps as much as living at a lower elevation would, but it helps a lot.

The new plant is cultivated wherever land allows. The mountain people become stronger and more productive.

The seasons go on. More years advance. New generations of mountain people are able to fulfill their destiny. They are able to wander the highlands. Go over higher passes to find lands to the north and south. They become successful and secure, like their cousins elsewhere on Lemuria. They spread far to the north and to the south in the central mountain range and settle new lands with diverse fauna and flora. Microclimates in the high land produce more significant differences than elsewhere on Lemuria. In each new settlement, people are assigned, or volunteer, to carry on the science originally developed by Mila and Brayan. Discoveries are made. Many significant but none as significant as the original oxygen plant.

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Even with the new energy levels of the mountain people, council meetings still occur. They still occur daily mostly just as friendly chats, but with the ability to consider new ideas and to try to solve problems. By now there are many councils. There are many towns and each council has a head, a president, a mayor, or a CMO. The title is not important but there is someone in charge. This person's main responsibility is to communicate any significant finding to the other councils. Not that there is a central government. There isn't, but any finding should be shared among all the people. Anaya is the head of the current council meeting.

"Has anyone noticed," Pranav questions, "how young Jagan seems to be able to do so much? He can work for many hours before taking a break."

Anaya, to whom Pranav asked this question as well as many others sitting nearby who overhear, perk up when this question is asked. Like the same thoughts were on all their minds. Jagan does seem to have a level of energy unusual for the mountain people.

Anaya responds. "I have been noticing that he's doing a lot more to help around here than the others are. Originally, I just thought it was because of his age, his youth. Or maybe because he wants to help so much. I've always liked Jagan. Perhaps his energy is unusual. Is anyone making him work so hard?"

"Someone might be but I doubt it," adds Jagan's mother. "If anyone were, it would be us and we're happy with the work he's doing. We have no reason to ask him to do more, although it would be nice to have a few more like him."

Pranav listens and then says: "Perhaps we should have him looked at by Vaidya. I heard that some of the younger people have found a plant that gives them energy. Probably like the one the rest of us are using. We've learned too much of that plant can be dangerous. Maybe that's what's happening or maybe not. To be safe, he should at least be looked at."

Jagan's parents are both there and accept that this might be the right thing to do. They arrange for Jagan to see Vaidya later today. Vaidya is not a doctor. There are no real doctors among the mountain people, but there are many

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people who have an understanding of human physiology and might be able to sense something that is not normal. Vaidya is the best at this. She's the person consulted when there is something serious to consider.

Jagan goes to see Vaidya later that day. He sits down and they talk to each other. No medical tools or instruments have been developed but a lot can be learned from talking and observing. The first thing Vaidya notices is that Jagan appears more alert than typical for mountain people this late in the day. People are normally tired after completing whatever chores they are required to do. The second difference with Jagan is that his skin looks healthier. It is a brighter color than typical. Not enough to be significantly noticeable, but enough to be noticed by someone like Vaidya. The third quirk, the one that Vaidya considers might really mean something, is Jagan's breathing. Like his skin, it's not different enough for most people to notice. Vaidya notices.

She puts the palm of her hand on Jagan's chest to test his breath, to feel how he breathes in and out. There's definitely something unusual. She sees the chest walls in front of the two lungs go in and out as Jagan breathes. But also, something in the center between the two lungs. There is movement there also. Not as much as for his lungs, but movement. And when she puts her palm on his chest, she can feel it, a third lung. A lung smaller than the original and outer two but Jagan is taking in more air than others. That explains why he has so much more energy.

Like the gill-like skin of the sea people, Jagan has evolved. He has adapted to live at the mountain altitudes. Maybe it's the influence over the years of the plant rich in oxygen that the mountain people have been consuming. It's also possibly something that the Guidance inserted into the evolutionary progress of the people on Lemuria. Whatever it is, it has happened.

And also like the sea people, development of a third lung becomes a dominant trait for new generations. Before long all mountain people have a third lung, can work longer and harder, and can live better lives than their ancestors.

Life continues to improve for the mountain people, but this time for everyone, not only for some. Towns are built. A capital called Dharan serves as a

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meeting point and a center for technology and industry for the mountain people. People travel there from all up and down the mountain settlements. All people have a third lung. Their chests have increased in size, slightly but noticeably to accommodate the extra lung.

More years pass. Industries and trades develop. The descendants of Mila and the descendants of Brayan still work as botanists, as chemists, as investigators examining all that Lemuria has to offer in this mountain habitat. Life remains good for most. For almost everyone until, like elsewhere on Lemuria, a sickness develops. This time an infection spreads throughout the lungs of those afflicted, a minor infection but in a critical part of the anatomy for the mountain people.

What might be minor to people living at other elevations becomes a serious threat to the mountain people. One of the young chemists is a man named Abdon whose thinks he may have found a cure. He has noticed an improvement in breathing for those who drink a new tonic he prepared, a tonic from a mixture of the original oxygen storing plant and another new plant. As promising as it may be, the second plant was one presented him recently by a traveler from a different town. Not from Dharan, when Abdon lives, but from a town at a much lower elevation. A town at the edge of the dominion of the mountain people. Abdon is not sure where that person lives, where he came from, but the plant he needs can only be found there and he needs to find it soon.

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The guidance observes, originally only the people of the pampas and the sea people, but now also the mountain people. Each of them has developed along the lines the Guidance planned.

The people of the pampas were given the easiest path. They had few obstacles in developing a comfortable life. The pampas provided what was needed, allowing for an easy development toward the life they wanted. The pampas people developed a society sooner than the other people of Lemuria. Like the Harvest Tribe from Avalon, they used what was given them and used it well.

The sea people also developed. They had some obstacles to overcome but they learned and evolved. It was a more difficult path than presented to the people of the pampas. In the end, they also managed to carve out a civilization and a comfortable life.

The mountain people had it the hardest. The most obstacles to overcome. The most difficult path. They too succeeded.

In all cases, aid had been provided to each of the peoples of Lemuria. Aid that helped them overcome roadblocks to their development. Aid in the form of bountiful lands or predetermined evolutionary forces. Aid provided by the Guidance. The people of Avalon were given subtle aid through hints in the *Book of the Blest*. Aid given the people on Lemuria was not as subtle. The people of Lemuria did not have to earn their aid. They just needed to wait for it to happen.

Again, we have three peoples, or rather three iterations of the same people. Each mostly the same but with some differences caused by the path they were required to follow to get to this point in time. Differences that can be used to continue development when the people meet. Each people can contribute what they learned, what has been ingrained into their spirits. The three peoples can merge and a new single people emerge to form what the Guidance wants.

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Now is the time for them to meet this challenge, to each contribute their own skills to a new integrated society. Three peoples to form one. And then to evolve along the line that will develop a force that can help the Guidance in their oversight of everywhere and everywhen.

The Merging of Lemuria

Search

The mountain people hold a council meeting. A council of councils in the town of Dharan, their defacto capital. Abdon does not call the meeting. He does not have a position of authority in any of the many councils of the mountain people. Anna does. She is acting as the current leader in Dharan. But Abdon is the one who raised flags. The first flag was announcing that there was a problem, a disease, an epidemic spreading throughout the towns of the mountain people. An epidemic that for now is only mildly infecting some of those people. But it's an infection of the most critical part of the anatomy, the lung. Even though the infection is mild, even a mild lung infection is significant.

The second flag raised by Abdon is that a cure is possible. He thinks he has a cure devised using two native plants. One of those plants is available in abundance here in the mountains. The source of the second is unknown, except that it grows somewhere in one of the lower elevations. A traveler left some samples with Abdon a while ago, stating vaguely where he was from. Abdon had experimented with a mixture from that plant and it helped him produce a cure for the disease. He has a couple of those plants left, but not enough to manufacture the medicine for all who might need it. The traveler departed many days ago. Abdon tried to remember more about their conversations, but "down" is the only word that he could recall.

Those who live in Dharan know that the mountain people have roamed far and wide since the days long ago. The days before their third lung developed. Even the days before the oxygen-rich plant was discovered. Such a long time has passed and there are no records of where all the current settlements are. Everyone knows of Dharan. The people in Dharan do not know of everyone else.

What the council does know is that this plant needs to be found, so they contact the best artists in the town. Who else? Pictures are drawn of the missing plant. Five volunteer groups are formed. Each group takes one set of drawings and plans to head in different directions. All down but at different angles. Abdon leads one of these groups. Anna leads another. They agree to search for sixty days and return with whatever information they can gather.

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Less than sixty if the plant is found but no more than sixty even if it isn't. The groups prepare. Ten people in each. They have their final sleep in Dharan, say goodbye at first dawn, and head down to lower elevations.

The sea people. Remember them? They seem to also be plagued by a disease critical to their life style at about the same time as the mountain people. The sea people's disease is not an infection of the lungs, but rather a skin infection. It's an infection critical to their lifestyle since it effects the part of the skin that helps them breath underwater. The part that absorbs air directly from the ocean water. It's similar enough to the problems of the mountain people that it might be the same affliction. Darya tries to find a cure. She starts her research studying benefits of the plant life found in the sea, on the islands in the sea, and along the shore.

Among all the sea people, Darya is the one with the most intuition, drive, and native intelligence. She has the knowledge and ability to be able to select the right plants and herbs. She knows how to combine them and how to test their effectiveness. And also important on this day, she has luck.

She looks through the various seaweed and sea plants already in her lab, the ones she has been able to use to create other helpful medicines. She works for many days mixing what she thinks might produce a cure. Nothing. She cannot think of any plant, drug, food, or anything, nothing known to the sea people that might help.

None of this is the luck. She can contribute only knowledge, ability, and training. Luck comes from entry into the picture of Miguel. He's sitting on the beach today, enjoying the sun and the waves, when he notices a noise from high up on the cliffs. A breeze. Perhaps a strong breeze or even a storm in the distance. Whatever it is, somewhere up above leaves of all sorts are blown off trees or other plants and are propelled over the water. So many that the sky seems to turn a shade of green. Temporarily, only for a few seconds, but definitely green for some amount of time. The leaves fall, flutter back and forth on their descent and some land on the beach near where Miguel is relaxing. Some look like leaves from no plants Miguel has seen for his entire life. Knowing Darya's interest in plant life, he gathers what he can and takes them

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to her. Although in the middle of her experimentation, Darya takes the leaves from Miguel, thanks him, and returns to her work.

Darya has a fourth skill, intuition. She holds the plants Miguel just delivered and her intuition piques the idea of synchronicity. Perhaps the events that resulted in these plants being handed to her right now are not coincidental. Plants do from time to time drop from the highlands to the sea. But not often. Why now? Why at the exact time that Darya needs help. Why has she been given ingredients never seen before? Enough time for questions. She needs to see if anything Miguel brought can be a potential cure.

And voila! One of the plants fizzes when mixed with a potent seaweed. She rubs some on a part of her skin that has been infected. It feels different. A good type of difference. She waits a while. More than a little time but not as long as a lot and looks at her skin. The part where she applied her new solution has improved. It has improved in looks and Darya can feel that it has improved in function. She knows her skin is now able to again process air from sea water.

Like the mountain people, the government of the sea people on the island of Atlantis is presented with a problem and a cure. The cure needs plants that grow high above the domain of the sea people. Perhaps on the cliffs themselves. Perhaps on the land that is presumed to exist above the top of the cliffs. No one knows where to go to find these plants, except up. And no one can explain how to know that they have what they want when they find it. No one knows what "it" is.

Artists are again called. Pictures of the leaves are drawn. Five groups of ten people each are selected to climb where no sea person has ever been, to find something they have never seen but which they need. The five groups prepare themselves to leave the next morning and to look everywhere until they find what they are being sent to find, or until sixty days have elapsed. Darya is in one of the groups. Miguel is in another.

The situation is the same on the pampas. Almost the same. They are also inflicted with a serious disease. In this case there is one major difference. There is only hope for a cure. Felipe knows that some plants have curative

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effects when taken, but he has not experimented with any of them. For two reasons. First, he has not yet met anyone he knows has contracted the disease, whatever it is. He knows there are many such people out there but he has not met one of those. Second, he does not know of any plants he could try to use to cure it. He has only heard that such plants exist but doesn't know for sure that they do.

He and Sofia call the local powers in Lazuli together for a meeting. Lazuli speaks for all of Lemuria, so they think. For now, it can be assumed that Lazuli at least speaks for all the people of the pampas. The situation here is graver than for the other two people. The groups that can be sent out to try to find a cure have no plants to look for, no pictures drawn by the local artists of Lazuli. They only have hope that what they need actually exists.

The case is made that groups of people must be sent out to find an answer to the afflictions. Felipe and Sofia spend the day instilling hope in the people that the components to overcome this problem are out there somewhere, that a cure can be made if that components can be found, and that the time is now for a search to start. Felipe explains the stories he remembers hearing from many people who visited Lazuli. Sofia explains what type of plant they may be searching for. There is no way to describe this for sure, but she does try to transfer as much knowledge as she has for others to be able to make a decision.

Sofia joins one of the groups. Felipe joins another. They rest for the night and five groups of ten people start looking the next morning.

Using what little control the Guidance may still retain after millions of years since the first skip of the Lemuria creation stone, all three groups depart on the same day.

Meeting

The descent from the high plains of the mountains is long and slow, but easy. Each of the mountain people's groups takes a slightly different path. They encounter many settlements along the way. The number of settlements surprises even Abdon. People knew it has been many years, perhaps a thousand, since their people first wandered away from the general area of

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Dharan and settled other areas of the mountain, higher up as well as these lower communities. Abdon and the others knew that there could be many enclaves of mountain people. Even so, they are all still surprised.

As each gathering of people are encountered, they are shown pictures of the plants that are the subject of their search. No luck in any of the places reached by Abdon. He suspects the others are experiencing the same fortunes. Even so, “no luck” might not be a fair assessment of their fortunes. The plants are not found. No one has seen them, but in each village, there are memories. Someone in each place remembers having seen a plant like the one they are shown. But always lower. Always farther down the mountain. Each time they are told this, each group continue their descent with renewed hope.

Encountering so many villages slows the trip down the mountain. That and the fact that the length of each of the paths is long. It's many days later when the first of the groups of mountain people reach the bottom of the mountain range that they have always called home. They are on the pampas, the eastern edge of the western pampa region. The walk was long. The mountain people are full of energy. They have never enjoyed such thick air so full of oxygen. The opposite effect on people climbing to higher elevations. The mountain people feel exuberated, feel like they can go on forever in their search. They would feel that way if there wasn't such a serious concern. They need to find something that they believe is here but that no one has seen. A mythical creature is the same as a mythical plant. They feel they are looking for the Loch Ness Gingko of the Abominable Chamomile.

The search continues. Abdon looks to the south and notices another group of people walking toward him. Likely another one of the search parties who took a different path and are now wandering in his direction. He thinks. There's something strange about this group. They look like people, but not exactly. There is something different about them that Abdon cannot quite gauge from this distance. Not important. Their task is to find a plant and this is another opportunity to do so.

At about the same time Sofia notices another group of searchers in the distance north walking toward her group. Apparently that group is not

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following plans. Sofia's group is the only one that was given this part of Lemuria to explore. This other group in front of her should be somewhere else. Then she thinks. If another group did head in her direction, how did they manage to pass them and get that far north? She had made good time since they left Lazuli. The other group does look larger than Sofia's group and healthier. Even so, they could not have covered that much more ground in the short time since they started. Looks like it's time for a discussion.

They meet. The mountain people and Abdon. The pampas people and Sofia. They get close a short time after the initial sighting, stop before the actual meeting point and stare at each other. Each group should be familiar to the other, they think. At first glance the mountain and pampas people look like people they have seen before. But soon, no, not like any people they know.

The mountain people with their third lungs have an upper chest larger than any of the pampas people. Like walking along a path and encountering a bobcat when one has only seen housecats. Or perhaps like someone who lives with white-tailed deer coming across a moose for the first time.

Likewise, the mountain people realize they are not meeting another one of their search groups. The pampas people are shorter and wider. They have more bulk for their height than the mountain people do. The people of the pampas have had an easier life. A simpler evolution. They eat more and enjoy more nourishment and richer foods than available high up the slopes. The mountain people are more active. They wander up and down the hills each day. Their legs have grown larger out of necessity and out of use.

The initial shock ends. Both peoples are on missions, important missions. Curiosity about these new pseudo-people they just encountered takes secondary importance to their task. These people might have the answer they need, so Sofia breaks the tension in the air with a simple, friendly greeting.

"Hi. My name is Sofia," she offers.

The mountain people seem to relax a little on hearing Sofia's friendly voice. Not relax entirely. They are still aware that they have encountered something

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unknown and unexpected. But her voice carries no intonations of danger, so Abdon responds, “And mine is Abdon.”

A cautious shuffle can be observed in the pampas people. They think they understand the response made by the large male who seems to be speaking for the group but none are really sure. The accent is strange and Abdon, if that is what was really said, is not a name any of them have heard before. Then again there was also no hint of aggression in his tone, so that much is good.

Sofia suggests they sit down and each tell the other the story of how they happened to meet. Everyone present knows there is a story to be told. Looks go through each of the groups of people. Everyone understands the offer. Eventually nods of approval everywhere and the first interracial meeting on Lemuria starts.

The meeting ends a long time later. It is apparent to all, if not somewhat surprising, that at least two sentient and similar peoples exist on the planet. Neither is sure that they and the other have the same roots. As similar as they do appear to be to each other, there are obvious differences. There is the fact that they both appear to have similar problems, that they both need similar solutions, and that they both might be able to help one another. Sofia, for her part, does know about the plant that the mountain people are seeking. She has some back at her offices in Lazuli. That makes the next course of action simple. The twenty of them, ten from the pampas and ten from the mountains, head to Lazuli.

As all this is happening, the sea people are struggling with their climb from the ocean up the steep path following the fast-moving river as it falls down to the shore. Everyone in the five groups knows why no one has ever made this trip before. If they didn't know before, they do now. Since there is only one known path up, this initial part of their exploratory trip is taken by all fifty searchers. They reach the summit, having not seen any vegetation resembling what they were looking for, and split up. Two go south, one along the cliffs as the other angles slightly away from them. Two go north with similar deviations. The fifth one proceeds straight inland. It is the fifth group that includes Darya.

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Two days' walk inland and Darya sees a group of searchers walking toward her. Unlike the mountain people, Darya immediately senses something unusual even before those people are in site. All five groups of sea people made the same climb. Once the plateau was reached, all groups headed in different directions. The group coming toward them cannot be one of those. It must be another group of people in a reality where no other group can exist. That something unusual is happening is an understatement.

And like the mountain people, Darya also sees a difference in the people. It's the subtle color of the skin around the neck. It's lighter than that of the sea people. She remembers stories of a long time ago, before people were born with the sea-breathable mesh, that people's skins were lighter. These people, whoever they are and wherever they come from, don't have the same type of neck adaptation as Darya's people. They aren't from the sea. Where can they be from and how could they develop on Lemuria?

They soon meet. The group of ten sea people headed by Darya and the group of ten pampas people headed by Felipe. They stop and greet each other in the same way that Sofia and the mountain people greeted each other. They sit down and talk. Again, in the same manner. A cautious and controlled talk as both peoples are suspicious of each other. Another people so different should not exist. They do. That much is obvious. How and why is not so obvious.

The reason they were both walking in this area and the cause of their meeting is revealed. Felipe sees the drawings that the sea people have brought with them. Yes, he's familiar with the plant it represents. Both groups understand that a disease has not only infected them but the other people as well. They seem to believe it might be the same disease. They both come to the conclusion that a cure is possible by mixing two ingredients. The final point that is accepted by both parties is that each of them has access to one of those ingredients. That this is cause for a meeting is the understatement of the day. Two more groups of people, ten from the sea and ten from the pampas, head off to Lazuli.

Agreement

All the searchers reach Lazuli on the same day. The group with the mountain people arrives in the late morning. With strange looks from everyone they

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pass, they eventually arrive at the council meeting hall. The visitors are provided with a place to rest and the locals explain they will arrange a meeting for later that day or possibly the first thing tomorrow. As soon as possible is the explanation. That taken care of, Sofia goes to make it happen.

The group with the sea people arrives in the early afternoon. To say that there is surprise all around is probably the second biggest understatement of the day, but not by much. Two groups with two strange but different people, apparently all wandering around with the same purpose is a lot for anyone to handle. Since there are so many people requiring so much organization, it's agreed that the meeting will start in the morning. Which turns out to be the right decision as four other groups of mountain people and four other groups of sea people arrive a short time later. Everyone is here.

Even though it's still well before dinner, there is nothing to be done as good hosts other than invite everyone for a meal. It's not often that one hundred unexpected guests drop in and not often that a meal this size can be put together so fast. But they did arrive and dinner is prepared. One of the more interesting meals to have ever happened in Lazuli, anywhere on the pampas, or anywhere on Lemuria. Understatements seems to be the theme of the day.

The dinner starts and proceeds. How does it proceed? "OK" is the best that can be said. The mountain people are polite, thank those who offer them food, and then sit by themselves. They either want nothing to do with the others for now, or are still overwhelmed by what has happened. They can wait until the morning to get to know everyone better.

The sea people act the same way, enjoying the dinner by themselves, or would be if "enjoy" was a word that could be applied to what they see in front of them. The sea people are used to a diet of sea plants and seafood. None of this is in great abundance on the pampas. In fact, it's not available at all. They nibble at their meal silently and eventually go back to their supplies for something real to eat.

The pampas people sit and enjoy the meal since it is what they are used to eating. The dinner activities are spent just staring at the others and thinking.

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What they are thinking about is unknown, but they all appear to be deep in thoughts of some kind.

The next day the meeting takes place in one of the larger outside gathering areas. A cordial meeting but also a cautious, if not somewhat distrustful, meeting. Each people have not yet earned a level of trust with any of the others. A level of credibility, yes, since each is presenting a story with which the others can identify. But trust? Not yet. How can one develop trust with others you aren't even sure are people. A wary meeting.

There are fifty of each of the three peoples of Lemuria present, but a meeting with all one hundred-fifty is too large. Each side selects two representatives for the necessary discussions. Sofia and Filipe, Darya and Miguel, Abdon and Anna are these six. The meeting progresses rapidly. Surprising fast since the subject matter is serious and requires concentrated contemplation over what can be done. On the other hand, not surprising since a solution to the problem was contemplated before the meeting even started. Darya and Miguel know they have a solution that will work for their infection. It requires a particular type of seaweed from their environs and a plant apparently available on the pampas. A plant that Sofia and Filipe brought to the meeting looks like the plant in the pictures drawn by the sea people's artists.

Abdon and Anna also believe they have a cure. Part of it is the same as that of the sea people. Part is different. The part that is different is the plant Abdon already has. A different plant than the one used by the sea people but one believed to be just as effective. The part that is the same involves the plant in their drawing. It looks amazingly like the drawing brought by Darya. It's also the plant Felipe has in front of him. Certainly, a startling coincidence and probably more than that. There's no doubt that it's a good starting point and the basis for an agreement.

It's the people of the pampas that seem to be at a disadvantage. They only have the hope of a cure, nothing that they can present as an actual cure. One of the cures of the other people could work for them. They don't know yet. But the pampas people also have an advantage. They have the key ingredient both other peoples want and need. A plant that is the cornerstone of the hopes of the others. A plant so important as to cause those others to travel to the

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unknown land of the pampas. That's good as far as it goes, but it is the second component that the Sofia and Filipe are unsure about. One from the sea people, when added to the plant the pampas people have, appears to work for them. The mountain people have a different second ingredient. Would either of those work for the pampas people?

One way to find out. The obvious agreement is made. Each people will be given a few plants to take back with them, to the sea or the mountains. In exchange, each people will return with samples of what they make to cure their people. The people of the pampas will experiment with both to see if either combination works for them.

An easy agreement is met with some trepidation. Anxiety based on the unknown. How can a solution for one of them work for the other. The three peoples are clearly not the same. There are differences and those differences are likely to be the cause of problems. What problems? No one knows for sure except that there must be some. Just look around. It's obvious.

The only possible agreement is reached. All get up to go tell the others what has happened. No one shakes hands. Perhaps that is not part of the social development on Lemuria. No difference.

Three plants are given to the mountain people. Another three to the sea people. Both leave immediately promising to return as soon as possible to fulfill their side of the agreement. Cordial goodbyes are said and everyone leaves to start the long trip back to each of their homes.

Success

The sea people are the first to reach their goal. They have the shortest walk and the downhill return journey is easier than the walk up was. They take their three plants and place them in the ground near the ocean, but not so near as to be impacted by the salt water. Darya uses a few seeds from one of the plants to make an ointment. She applies it to a few people in Atlantis. A few of the more important people according to her estimation. She would give it to everyone but does not have enough ointment available yet and not enough of the plants to make more. The people who do get the ointment seem to

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recover. Their skin condition improves. All is good for them, and soon all will be good for everyone.

In the couple of days that Darya has taken to prepare and mix the ointment, two other processes have been undertaken. The first is handed to Miguel who goes out to gather the special seaweed to take to the pampas in exchange for more of the plant the pampas people have. The seaweed gathering process is easy and soon finished. He then searches for a group of people willing to make the climb back up. That proves to be harder. No one wants to expend the energy to make the climb and none are too eager to see the strange pampas people again. He finds a small group willing to do what is necessary, but only because it is necessary. There is no desire to make a return journey otherwise.

The second process is one that seems to have a greater impact. Miguel checks on the plot of land where the new plants have been placed. They are doing well. Actually, more than well. They are growing like weeds and spreading far. New growth is everywhere. One wonders if this will impact the desire for people to make their committed climb back up the slopes. Perhaps the sea people have what they need already and will not have to obtain additional plants from up above. There appears to be enough of the new plant growing here. They did agree to help the pampas people by providing medicinal seaweed. That obligation did not dissipate.

A day after the sea people reached their home, the mountain people reach theirs. A longer walk and a walk up, not down. Their process follows the same path as the sea people. Abdon manages to prepare a small amount of the tonic he hopes will cure his people. He does and it works. Anna, as head of the mountain people in Dharan, arranges a group to provide the pampas people what they want in exchange for more of the plant the mountain people need.

Then, also like the sea people, the plants brought from the pampas thrive in the high mountain air. A plant that acts like a weed seems to act like one anywhere it is. The mountain people soon have all that they need and have it before anyone starts their return to the pampas to provide what they have agreed to provide.

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Now what? The mountain people have a meeting. They go over the facts. They had a disease that infected many people. They found a cure. What about the promise they made to the people of the pampas, the promise to supply them with the other half of the cure?

One of the mountain people stands up to talk. One who was on the first search party to the pampas, who met those who lived on the pampas and who remembers the agreement made to provide them with a component of the cure. "We need to keep our end of the bargain," she opines.

This causes a mumbling in the meeting. Finally, Abdon stands up to address the group. "I was there and we did make that agreement. But it was made under duress. We needed what was available on the pampas and the only way to get that was through an agreement. Now we have plenty of the new plant, but we are not sure how much of our plant we have available to trade. We need to protect our people first. The people who live here. We are not even sure what it is that lives on the pampas. Certainly not one of us. We might have made an agreement, but we cannot and should not fulfill that if it means risking any of us. And no one wants to make a long trip back down the slopes. For what? To save those who are not us? That's not a good reason."

The mountain people decide not to follow through on the agreed exchange. The meeting ends.

At the other end of Lemuria, top to bottom, the sea people are ready to return to the pampas and deliver their ingredient. Before they do, they have a meeting to select the people to return and to instruct them what they should say once they arrive. That's not all that is discussed at the meeting. Other points are made similar to those of the mountain people. The meeting of the sea people ends with the same conclusion. No one will be making the climb.

On the pampas ten days pass, then twenty, and thirty. Nothing is forthcoming from the mountains or from the sea. The disease among the people of the pampas is spreading. Another meeting. More discussions. Some thought they could not trust the strange beings they met, the ones who looked somewhat the same as them but were obviously not. Some say they knew they could not be trusted. One thing that is known is that the pampas people need a second

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ingredient and they are going to get it somehow. Tools are gathered. Tools that can act as weapons. Groups are assembled. Large groups. At least five hundred individuals in each. Some of those groups head down to the sea. Others head up. One way or another, they will be successful in securing a cure for the people of the pampas.

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The Guidance has been watching. They consider the events that have occurred: the meeting and what has happened since. Not as they had hoped. The three peoples are not exactly friends. How can one integrated people be formed from three antagonistic peoples? That is the problem.

Perhaps the problem was caused by the Guidance themselves. The people of Lemuria appear to have no compassion for others. They care only about themselves. The Guidance removed a level of passion from these people on purpose. The removed the passion that caused problems on Avalon, a passion triggered to extremes by meanings presumed to be in the *Book of the Blest*. Passion was needed on that planet to generate a drive to overcome the problem of the crevice.

The problem presented on Lemuria was not difficult enough to require that level of drive, so the corresponding level of passion was not provided. What else was missing? Passion is the human component that causes the spirit to expand outwards. A passion to travel, a passion to investigate, a passion to explore. Any passion requires exposure to and input from the outside world. Any passion drives a desire to obtain outside knowledge. Could the component of passion that the Guidance implanted in this iteration of life have been too low? Without passion, can there be interest in anything other than oneself? Without passion, can there be compassion? Compassion for others? Compassion seems to be missing.

While the Guidance looks down on Lemuria, clouds begin to form in the part of existence where the Guidance exists. Clouds like those that formed in the final moments of Avalon. But no action is planned yet. The Guidance is still willing to be patient. It is willing to give Lemuria another second before taking any irreversible action. How long is a Guidance-second to the people on Lemuria? An intriguing question. How long is a second in a place where time does not exist? Unknown. Undeterminable. It can be any length to the people on Lemuria. A second can be just that, a second, or it can be a thousand years. Time passes at a constant pace on Lemuria. Time stands still to the Guidance until they decide that it shouldn't.

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There are those among the sea people who still believe their potent ingredient should be delivered to the pampas people. The Guidance listens to discussion involving those people. They should hurry to convince the others. The people of the pampas are almost half way down the slope to the sea.

There are those among the mountain people who believe the same. Not many. Only a few. The people of the pampas are almost half way up the hill to the first enclave of mountain people.

The meeting of the sea people ends. All meetings. There was more than one. Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed for the mountain people. But there is change for the people of the pampas. Their anger grows at every step. Finally, the Guidance notices that a boundary is crossed. The boundary where reconciliation is no longer possible. Then, like the tick of a celestial clock, a second passes. The people of the pampas stop their ascent. Their last step is taken. Lemuria is no more. It never was.

Chéile

The Guidance

The Guidance has had two attempts to evolve a people to help in their celestial supervision of everything. That they have had two failures is not quite an accurate statement. We have just presented two failures. There have been many more and there has been one success. A success that occurred quite by accident with no supervision by any outside force. That success resulted in the Guidance. When one success has occurred purely by chance, it would seem easy that another success could occur since now there is a force that can provide direction. Easy, right? Things are not always as they appear to be.

The chance of success is as hard as guessing the number of grains of sand on a beach. First, it's almost impossible to do. And second, there's no way to know when a right guess is made. If someone knows the answer, they can always give a hint after a wrong guess to provide direction to the right one. As simple as saying higher or lower. But that's not how the Guidance is working. They have no help at all?

It may seem that way, but it's not entirely true. Maybe the Guidance does have help. The people on Avalon were too driven by their beliefs. The people on Lemuria were just the opposite. Those are hints like higher and lower. The Guidance has to provide less than they did on Avalon and more than on Lemuria. It's subtle when one has to consider less or more of what? It can be done. Can the Guidance do it? Is learning even possible within the existence that is the Guidance? If the Guidance can't learn, then who or what can?

We hope they do. Whether they can or not, one thing is certain. There is no success unless you try. Bring on Chéile.

Chéile

Chéile is a land on a planet with the same name because the planet of Chéile has only one land, only one continent. The land extends almost the entire length of the planet from near the north pole to near the south pole. An ocean covers the entire west coast and wraps around to the east. One ocean on a planet with one land mass. Water occupies about three quarters of the planet. Land occupies the other quarter. Launch a ship off any eastern port, travel east for as long as one can, and that ship will eventually reach the western shore. Geography is simple on Chéile.

Travel from the equator north or south presents all of a world's possible climates. Hot and desert-like near the equator, cold and icy near the poles, with various degrees of pleasantness in between.

Creation occurs. Another stone skipped by the Guidance. Years pass. Tens, thousands, millions. Life emerges like it always does and eventually a people emerge. Not too unlike other times, but now there is a new environment. There are new forces, new presents for people to enjoy and new obstacles to overcome. All the results of assimilation of what the Guidance has learned.

Differences exist from the other worlds and realities that the Guidance has created. There have to be differences. If everything were the same then results would be the same, and past results do not bear repeating. There are similarities too. Some similarities are also needed or at least one. There needs to be three peoples, three different sets of experiences that can eventually be merged into one.

The Temperate Zone

Peter awakes after a long sleep in a small village he calls Home with the people he calls friends. It's too early in the development cycle of Chéile for there to be enough people to call a whole town. But it's bigger than a hamlet so village sounds about right. As just said the village has a name and that name is Home.

The area around Home is in one of the more comfortable latitudes of Chéile. A place where the Guidance always locates one of its new people. Home is not safe like the comfortable lands where manifestations of new life were placed on other planets in the past. There are plenty of nutritious vegetations in this part of Chéile and herds of tame animals like deer and bison, or the closest to actual deer and bison that one can find on Chéile. On a normal planet with normal evolutionary cycles, herds of this type of game attract predators. Chéile is a normal planet. There are also prides of predatory animals roaming the areas around Home. The people in the village are always on guard to help the predators differentiate valid prey from people. They have learned how to do just that with reasonable success. Success as long as village members adhere to rules that have been learned through observation and through trial-and-error. Trial-and-error is not the preferred method for learning how to survive. The "error" part is too severe.

What observations have been made? The simplest one is observing herds of larger animals protecting their young. Those animals stick together in the center of their herd. A few of them stand watch around the outskirts. When a predator approaches, these lookout animals cluster together and surround the herd, mainly the area of the young. It can be quite daunting when fifty or more all group together. Maybe not too much for a predator to overcome, but enough so it might be injured in the process of attacking. Since there are usually other less intimidating places to attack, a predator normally takes the easy route and goes elsewhere. The people observe how this works. They learn. They imitate. Each night the village is guarded by groups of at least twenty people. One group guards the village and stays awake for their shift until it's time for another group's turn.

This method works. It takes a lot of planning and effort and agreement of who gets what time slot. There's not a lot of complaining since it's better than

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being eaten. It's Peter's job to organize the guard schedule. It makes him one of the least popular people in the village to those who get the worst shifts. It makes him very popular to those who don't.

As can be expected, this arrangement helps keep the village relatively safe for those who stay in the village. Those who wander out take primitive weapons that provide some protection. The entire process of protecting the village population takes its toll but the village survives and even grows a little.

Discoveries and inventions occur as the years progress. The main one is fire. The people of the village learn how to make a fire to cook their food. For safety, meals are normally held in the middle of Home over a warm fire. Most of the year it's built just for cooking. During the colder times of the year, people keep it going long after dinner when its warmth is greatly appreciated.

Even when it's cold, even when there's a warm attractive fire in the center, the village still needs to be guarded. The twenty people who take a guard shift do so in pairs. Twenty people per shift in ten pairs of two scattered around the perimeter of Home. Each pair keeps vigilant watch over their region. The entire village is not that big, so any of the pairs can yell out for help from the others if help is needed. A shift is long and there are times when the night is cool. More than cool, it can get cold.

A shift near the northeast portion of Home is guarded by Peter and Arlene on one such cold night. As the shift starts, Peter approaches Arlene with a bunch of twigs and a pile of some small logs obviously taken from the store of logs around the dinner fire.

Gathering logs to maintain the dinner fire takes a lot of energy from the people of the village. As the years go on, they need to travel farther and farther to be able to find wood of the right type and size. A major effort with some danger. This makes wood a valuable resource not to be used without due consideration. Rank has its privileges and Peter is able to bring some to their lookout location.

"What are you doing?" asks Arlene as Peter drops the twigs and logs on the ground in front of her. She's pretty sure she knows the answer to this question

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but still asks it because she's surprised at what she expects will happen. What Peter has brought is too valuable to use to provide warmth for just two people.

Peter responds, "It's cold out here tonight. Colder than I can ever remember. The others want us to be their protectors, right? Well, we can do a better job if we can concentrate on our protection activities rather than thinking about how to keep warm."

If there is ever a response that says nothing and answers a question completely at the same time, this is it. Arlene watches as Peter produces a burning stick stolen from the main village fire. Maybe borrowed, but with the same effect. Soon a fire is burning just outside the village perimeter and right next to Arlene's lookout station. Peter's lookout station also.

As obvious as it may seem to be important to keep warm, it's also curious that this is the first time a fire has even been made for only two people, even ones on protection duty. No one else has ever before violated the unwritten rule not to use logs for this purpose. Not that being unwritten is significant. Writing has not yet been invented.

The two of them sit down to relax and enjoy the warmth of the fire. Soon not too far away, Arlene notices two lions possibly on the hunt. This is just the reason they are working tonight. Arlene's observation will protect the village. They have seen lions approach this way many times before. Arlene points them out to Peter, who calls to the neighboring pair of nightly protectors for assistance. The other pair comes over and notices a fire burning where a fire shouldn't be. They say nothing since they are also enjoying the heat. Four armed people stand near each other at the edge of the village and wait. They expect the lions to challenge them and for them to be able to convince the lions to leave. They wait some more. The lions pace back and forth but come no closer. This goes on for a long time until the potential attackers eventually leave. A first? Not really. But it's rare that an animal like that leaves without trying something. Everyone returns to their posts. Nothing more happens for Arlene and Peter that evening. There's some significant activity on the other side of the village. It's handled okay by the other pairs. Arlene and Peter have a quiet night.

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The next morning the two of them talk at breakfast about the calm and warm night. The other pair who joined them pass nearby and give them a knowing grin. A grin that says they remember the fire and aren't planning to tell anyone. They hope for a repeat tonight and don't see any reasons for others to know just yet. Even so, there are no secrets in a village this small. Everyone knows that Peter permanently borrowed some valuable logs last night.

That's something to talk about and it is, but it's not the main subject of most conversations. There's a different mumbling throughout the breakfast group. This is a village of people who observe and who learn from their observations. They know that there's much to be learned by just watching. No need to jump to conclusions without evidence, but the side of the village near where Arlene and Peter had their fire was quiet. It was the quietest part of the perimeter. Other areas were normal. There were a normal number of threats from predators, maybe even a little more than normal.

What was different about Arlene's area? There was one difference created by Peter. A new factor. New information not present before. Fire. Possibly animals of the night do not like fire. No conclusion yet, but all agree an experiment is warranted. Tonight, each station will be given logs and allowed to start a fire. More than allowed. They will be required to do so. Can animals be kept away simply by the use of fire?

That night they try. There are many volunteers to be part of this experiment. Not because they are interested in the results. Everyone is. They volunteer because they can spend the night warm.

So it goes. Success! The animals did not approach any area where fires were built. There was still some activity between the fire locations, but the number of instances was greatly reduced.

Fire is an effective deterrent against predators. The village learns how to protect Home better than before. Home grows more secure and the population increases. The village is now a town.

The Cold Zone

It should come as no surprise that Peter and his town are not the only people on Chéile. Far to the north is where the Guidance placed its second evolution of people. There is a great distance between the people in the temperate zone and those in the north. Too far to walk in only a few days or in a few tens of days. There are no natural boundaries on Chéile to block one people from wandering and encountering another. No boundary except distance. The Guidance will encourage, actually force people to make this journey when the time comes for them to do so. That time will be after each people have learned their lessons. Lessons required before a merging of the groups can occur with a chance for an outcome that the Guidance wants.

Those in the cold areas have a harder time establishing a foothold in the part of Chéile granted them by the Guidance. They have comradery, they have family, they have the comfort of friends in a small gathering in a place they named Heem. That much keeps them going in the beginning. They also have challenges that come with a cold climate. It's not so cold as to cause insurmountable obstacles to survival, but cold enough to warrant some thought and require development of some process to learn how to survive.

These people learn how to make fire. They learn it early in their development. They were confined to small rooms where only a few could exist before they discovered fire. It wasn't so much a problem during the summer when temperatures could get warm enough to spend time roaming outside. During the day at least. During the night, returning to the protection of the village, the camp, was always a good idea. Stray so far that a return the same day was not possible and perhaps a return would never happen. It was that cold.

The people of the north experience less time in the sun than those in the temperate climates. The sun is always lower in the horizon and the intensity of the rays is never strong. The sun provides nutrients required for a healthy life. Their lack is a problem for those living in the north. That problem is partially solved by heredity. The concept of survival of the fittest. These people develop lighter skin when compared to Peter and his group. To go along with that, their hair is lighter. Shades of blonde are the predominant hair color for both men and women. Lighter skin and lighter hair block less rays from the sun and

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allows more of the solar derived nutrients to be absorbed. A minor but necessary improvement.

The northern habitats are all close to the sea. People need protein to survive. More than can be gathered from plants since only some plants contain any protein at all. Nuts do, but those are not very common in the northern climates of Chéile.

The people look to the land, the sea, and the many rivers that empty into the sea. There are fish in the waters and animals on land. It's easier to capture animals on land. The people are able to satisfy their needs by catching some of the smaller animals that roam the woods near their home. Some. Very few are actually caught since they run much faster than people.

The northern people have many of the same qualities as those in the temperate zones. They have the capacity for patience. They have an ability to observe and a passion to learn. They do just that. What do they see? They notice what animals eat. People have a hard time finding food in the cold zone. Animals do too. The animals find food and the people observe what the animals eat. How can they use this information to help?

They soon realize what should have been obvious all along. Some people make a small box out of wood. This takes a long time as tools are not available yet. Small fallen sticks of the right size are gathered. Vines from sturdy plants are used to make string. The string is used to tie the sticks together in a box. The box is propped up by another stick tied to a long vine. Delicious delicacies known to be desirable to the animals are placed under the box, as learned from their observations. Time to wait until an animal appears and partakes of the food offering. A pull on the vine. The box falls and dinner is prepared. A dinner where the animal is the object and not the subject.

Observing patiently, learning, applying what they observe. Not jumping to conclusions. Logically figuring out how to survive. Innovation. That is how the people work. What they just accomplished is a breakthrough. More meat is available. The northern people use the extra nourishment to grow. A few more people survive the next generation than did the prior one. Others live longer.

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One of the new generation of people is more ingenious than the others. Keryn. A larger population means that more food is needed than what can be provided by a few small land animals. People look to the waters, to the sea and rivers. Fish look a lot like the land animals. Differences obviously. Similarities too. The similarities mean that the fish need to be captured. There are many more fish in the sea than there are animals on the land. Many more nearby. How can the fish be caught?

People are patient as they were before. They observe. They notice that schools of fish swim together. Looks simple to just find a school of fish, reach in the water and grab one, or two, or three. Some try. It doesn't work. The fish are aware of their surroundings and swim away as soon as hands disturb the water's surface. Besides, they are too slippery to hold even when one can be temporarily grabbed.

Most people give up trying to catch fish. Not Keryn. She takes more time to observe and learn. She remembers the traps used to capture the land animals. She thinks about the vines used as string to tie the sticks into boxes. She forms images in her mind of how they are tied together. Her mind moves these thoughts to the water. As a final piece to a puzzle, she adds an image of throwing rocks into the water as a young girl. They obviously sank. Everyone knows rocks sink when thrown into the water. Who doesn't know that. Only Keryn now realizes why this is important.

She and her friends gather vines of all sorts. Large thick vines. Small thin vines. They tie the vines together under the direction of Keryn. It's tedious and exacting work to do just as directed. Much time is spent in this activity. Larger vines are placed close together and connected using the smaller vines as string. Twenty days are needed to gather and join enough vines of the right size.

Eventually they finish. A large net has been made. Stones are tied to each corner to make the net sink when placed into the water. Long vines connected to the corners will allow the net to be brought back up, rapidly, if pulled by strong villagers. Keryn knows where fish swim, where they congregate, where their schools hold classes. Keryn and her net building group go to this point. There are no fish there now. That's good. The net is lowered below where they

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will be soon. Time to wait. The fish arrive. The net is raised. Some fish escape. Many do not. Enough remain caught to call this a success. A new source of protein is available. More protein in one net than can be caught in several days from traps on land.

Heem grows larger with the new source of food. The extra nourishment produces healthier people. Less time is needed to secure food. More is available for innovation. Tools are designed and built. This allows the larger trees to be harvested for housing. Heem becomes a town. Industry develops.

The people of the cold north are now a people whose lives depend more on fish. The next logical step is to learn to build boats and ships. Ships that can go out into sea and harvest larger fish. Boats that can sail up and down the coast and locate new food sources. Fish as well as other foods. Fish are found that do not live in the far north of Heem. Groves of new edible vegetation are found somewhere in the southern direction.

The years advance as travel ventures farther away from the cold climates of Heem. Not too far. Soon Heem is the center of activity and industry for several villages and towns up and down the coast. Life is good.

The Tropic Zone

To get the obvious out of the way, the third people on Chéile live in the tropics. The tropics are wherever the sun is directly overhead at least one day of the year. More importantly, it's that part on Chéile where all of the land is desert. Perhaps that's a bit too harsh of a statement. It's the part where most of the land is desert, but not all. Some parts of the tropics are livable and even somewhat accommodating to life. Others manifest themselves in very unforgiving conditions. And there are those in between.

The Guidance decrees that life should exist here, so it obviously has to begin somewhere. The place picked for the tropic people is one of those in between places. This forces them to acquire knowledge required to live a life in a place where living has to be learned, but not so hard that they cannot learn or cannot survive.

The tropic people develop in an area of the desert with water, little water, but water nonetheless. Enough to support a small group of people. They develop in an area with some edible vegetation. Not much, but enough. The ability to obtain more than just these basics is a skill that will have to be learned.

The Guidance does provide one feature to help them survive. Genetic adaptation, mutation, beneficial randomness. The sun in the tropic climates is harsh. Very much the opposite of the sun the people in the cold climate experience. Here living can be dangerous from over exposure to the sun's rays.

The people adapt thanks to the Guidance. They grow pigments in their skin to protect against direct sunlight. Their skin grows dark and their hair also. Most people in the tropics have black hair and dark skin. There's no need to absorb extra nutrients from sunlight. They get plenty of that forced into them just by being outside for the time they need to be. Protection becomes a dominant trait by the natural selection process of evolution. Those who don't receive this trait don't survive long enough to reproduce.

The tropic people number very few. It's all that the world they know can support. They survive only because they manage to find an oasis. A small area in the desert with a few trees, three or four small fields of plants, and a pool of water. Enough food and water to support about two dozen individuals. That's

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the size of the tropic people in the beginning of their existence. And for many years thereafter. Enough to survive, but not to grow.

There are not a lot of oases in the deserts of Chéile. More than one and less than many. An oasis seems to form from nowhere, exist a short time, and then dissolve back into the desert. Each oasis may last a year. Maybe two or three. Long enough for the tropic people to establish a temporary place to live. During that time, the people live on the plants they harvest from the oasis's small fields. Plants are often unique to a given oasis and grow nowhere else.

The first thing the people learn on their arrival in a new oasis is to sense the plants. They learn by touch and texture which plants will provide the best source of foods they need. They sense that fast as each new oasis is entered and settled. They cultivate those plants and take care of them by using some of the water the oasis has to offer. Water is always the most precious substance in an oasis and even in the entire world. The plants are needed to provide nourishment, which makes them important enough to compete for water.

Animals also live in the oasis. Sometimes new animals are seen wandering in the desert and stroll into an oasis. There are no dangerous animals in this part of Chéile. There are not many animals at all, but there are some. The people learn to supplement their diets by processing an animal every now and then, typically one of those unlucky wandering ones. Finding one occurs only rarely. Because it is so rare, any that do find themselves captured by the desert people are saved for special occasions like the birth of a new member. It makes the celebration special. Special for the people, not for the animal. Sustenance at other times is entirely based on the vegetation an oasis has to offer.

Conservation is one of the main lessons the tropic people learn. An animal that is taken to provide food also provides much more. Bones are used to make tools. Hair and skin are used for clothing and for shoes. Stomachs, intestines, and other internal organs are used to carry water when the people need to wander the desert to find a new oasis.

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Movement is inevitable. The water in any oasis slowly dries up. It disappears as the oasis dissolves back into the sand. The people learn to see signs when this starts to happen. They know well in advance when there will soon no longer be enough water available to survive. Then they put as much water as possible into the bladders they fabricated and leave the oasis for, hopefully, a new oasis and a new fertile location.

A new oasis in the desert is rare. The people learn the skill required to locate one. They learn by watching the skies continuously. There are signs they look for. Sometimes clouds form in one direction. Clouds carry moisture and either drop that moisture in the form of rain, or acquire it from ground water. Either way, a direction with frequent clouds is a direction that provides the best chance of finding a new livable location.

Not only clouds. There are birds. There are not many birds in the desert. If someone is lucky enough to see any, they most certainly are flying near an area with water. Birds need water just as much as people do.

Besides clouds and birds, there is a third tell: other animals. Camels. The most common animals in this part of Chéile are camels, Chéilean camels. They can travel for a long time without water, but they too need to drink now and then. They seem to know where there's water. Following a caravan of camels also likely leads to success.

The gurus of the tropics, the pundits of the desert, are those people who spend their free time watching the skies for clouds and birds, and watching the land for camels and other animals. When it's time to move, these people direct travel. They always succeed thanks to their observing and planning. That they always succeed is obvious without even mentioning it. Fail only once and there will no longer be a people of the tropics to write about.

Why does an oasis dry up after surviving for so much time, even many years? And more importantly, how does a new oasis form. They don't just magically pop out of the ground, nothing one day and a full oasis the next. As the people travel from one oasis to the next, they notice that the desert is not all sand. It is barren but not completely so. Every few hours of walking and the people encounter a plant. A sole plant in the middle of the desert. No one thinks too

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much about this plant. They have a destination and not much time to get there since the amount of water that the people can carry is limited. They need to hurry to reach their goal. Time is especially of the essence since no one knows exactly where their goal is. They trust that those who are directing them have made the correct decision which way to go. They trust that they are well on their way there, even though no one knows exactly where “there” is.

A new oasis is found. How long has it been here and how much longer will it last? Again no one knows, but they are here and here they will stay as long as they can. That remains the way of life of the tropic people until some of them finally take the time to ponder. What does one ponder in a new place? For most, thoughts are directed at plants in the oasis and which should be selected for cultivation. Only a few people find the time to think other thoughts, like about those random plants encountered in the middle of the desert.

One day Dinah finds herself sitting in front of the main pool of water in the center of her new oasis and pondering just this subject. She asks to no one in particular, “Do you remember the plants we saw just before we arrived here?” It’s almost a rhetorical question. A reply is possible so she waits for a response, not really expecting one.

“Of course,” Hadad’s words surprisingly fill the air. “Everyone noticed them. It may be unusual to see a plant in the middle of the desert, but it’s not that uncommon. Why do you ask?”

“Just thinking,” is Dinah’s continuation on the topic. “Intriguing response, Hadad. What does it mean to see something that is unusual but not uncommon?”

Hadad’s comment was only an automated and haphazard string of words, escaping his mouth without much thought or meaning. Now, being challenged to explain what he said, he stalls by asking, “Is your question a joke of some kind?”

“No, not really,” Dinah replies. “I had the same thought. You just verbalized it for both of us. When we encounter something that we have seen before, seen

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often, that encounter just floats in and out of our minds as if we never saw it. It's no longer uncommon, so no longer stirs curiosity when we see it another time. Or even interest. It should stir some interest, shouldn't it? It's still unusual? Everything needs an explanation. These plants are anomalies. Anomalies should not exist. Once we have an explanation for something, it's no longer an anomaly. We don't consider something we understand to be an anomaly. How is it that something we see so often that it is no longer uncommon still does not have an explanation?"

It's Hadad's turn, "Not everything in this world can be understood. Some things just are. We live with many. Why are some plants edible and others not. Why do some animals wander into our oasis and others don't. Not all questions can be answered, Dinah."

"Yes, I agree with you," says Dinah as the dialog continues. "But here, plants where they should not be, that seems to be important. Important to our people. And answerable. The question as to why they are where they are is answerable. Much more likely so than any of the other questions you just used as examples. And this is one question I have an idea of how to answer."

With that final volley from Dinah, the rest of the people around the water stop their background chatter and turn their eyes toward her. No one was listening closely to what she had been saying before. Not closely, but everyone was listening at some level. Apparently, since they all are now interested in the conversation. Why, indeed are there small plants in the middle of the desert? Subconsciously at least, it has been on everyone's mind for a long time. A question without an answer until now. Possibly an answer. They look toward Dinah and see her chatting quietly with Hadad.

The chatting ends. The two of them have decided to investigate Dinah's idea. First thing in the morning before the day gets too hot, they will walk an hour from the oasis to a spot where they remember seeing a plant in the desert. A lone plant with nothing else around.

The next day starts for the two of them. They leave before sunrise. It's important to travel as far as one can before the sun's zenith makes the day too hot. They leave the oasis and arrive at the spot they remember. There in the

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middle of nowhere is a small plant. Only a weed. Not edible, but a plant. Alive. That's the key. Alive! And there is one reason it can be, a reason the two of them realize is obvious. The only question is the extent. How much water is there near right beneath this plant? The two of them brought what primitive tools were available. They dig. Like digging at the beach. Digging in sand at the beach is different than digging in the sand at any other point in the desert. The sand is wet on the beach. Hopefully this sand is wet. Hopefully there is some water here and they will find it. And finally, hopefully there will be enough and it will be drinkable.

Hadad and Dinah dig and reach what they expect to reach. The sand is slightly damp. So far, so good. They spend more time digging. Probably longer than they should, but not as long as they want. They dig about a meter into the sand. They reach dirt, or clay. Some hard non-sandy substance. The dampness is no longer being quickly absorbed by the sand. Water slowly trickles into the middle of their dug-out hole, their pool. The pool gets deeper. They take a water container, an extra one they brought with them, and manage to skim some from the top of the pool. Their work is done. They take their newly acquired treasure with them back to the oasis. The topic of conversation tonight will be much more interesting than normal. Not an uncommon conversation, but definitely an unusual one.

What have our desert people discovered that can actually change their lives? They found proof of an underground source of water. An aquifer in the desert. Places where the aquifer rise near the surface of the desert support plant life. One or two plants only, but more than none. Places where the aquifer breaks through the surface of the desert form oases.

The plants are important for two reasons. First, when the people travel between oasis locations, they will be able to find water if their original supply is running low. They can find some by stopping at a place where a plant is seen and dig.

That is a major finding but the second reason is more important. The plants mean a location of an aquifer. They use that knowledge to map the path of the aquifer and to find areas of the desert more likely to support an oasis. They find new oasis locations faster than before. This is a new important tool that

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the desert pundits can use to determine the direction to move when a move is required.

Years pass. Years of applying the knowledge gained by the efforts of Dinah and Hadad. At each move, the people find oases that are more fertile, that contain more plants, where a larger number and wider variety of animals come to drink. More years pass and the desert people continue to wander. The main direction is north. The farther north they go, the more water exists as they approach the edge of the desert bordered by the southern edge of the temperate zone.

A day occurs when one of them notices an unusual color on the horizon. Green. The world of Chéile is not green. It is brown. Shades of brown. What is this green? They soon find out. The tropic people have been following their instincts for so long, instincts enhanced by what they have learned, that they have wandered out of the desert. They have entered the temperate climate. Still many days travel away from any other people on Chéile, but it looks like their days of desperate survival have ended. They are in another world on the same planet.

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The Guidance notices what's happening. It's not according to plan. The people in the hot arid regions have learned some of what they need to learn. They gained part, but only part, of the knowledge that can be obtained from the deserts of Chéile. They were well on their way to learning it all based on meeting challenges the Guidance planned for them. The tropic people no longer live with those challenges now that they have somehow managed to find their way to greener pastures. There's more they should have learned that cannot be learned where they are now. Will what they learned be enough? It could be, but there is some uneasiness among the Guidance. Somewhere in that place where the Guidance exists, a storm is brewing. The sky feels like this storm is just over the horizon. It's not here yet. The clouds have not yet formed. The Guidance is still watching.

The Cold and the Hot

The people of the tropics are thrilled. Giddy might be a better description. Yesterday they needed to be careful where they roamed. They needed to drink water only when they could no longer stand the thirst. When on the move, the only water they had was what was carried with them or what they were lucky enough to find on the way.

Today there is more water than could be imagined yesterday. A river is right in front of them. It's only the older people that even know that the word river exists and what it means. More of a scholastic understanding than knowledge derived from experience. When the river was first seen, it took some time to even remember that word. Now there is a river right in front of them. Yes, giddy is the right description.

And trees, and vegetation of all sorts, and animals that had never been seen before. Animals that need water to survive, that need more water than available in the desert. Of course they see new animals.

It's a good day for the people of the tropics.

The people of the cold north are also discovering new information about Chéile. The ship builders of Heem have been operating for many years by the time the people of the tropics emerge from the desert. Most ships they build now go to sea. When they return, they have a supply a fish large enough to satisfy the needs not only of Heem, but of many towns. Heem is no longer a village. It is a large town and the center of many. More ships are needed to harvest more fish as more towns grow up along the coast.

While most of the ships return, some do not. Ship building is not an innate skill of the people in the cold zone. It's not an exact science, it's an acquired skill and the people learn. Parts of ships that do not make it back to shore are sometimes recovered and studied. The people are patient and observant. They learn from their mistakes. The knowledge they gain is used to build larger ships. Larger, sturdier, and able to go farther. The size of the ships allows for more goods to be stored in their holds so they can stay at sea for longer periods of time. They travel a long distance and stay away for weeks and months. They discover new places as well as new types of fish.

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While all this is good, it can get better. And it does when Blair and Elspet are allowed to make their first trip together on a sailing vessel. By this time, ships are large enough to carry more than just people and equipment required to fish. They are outfitted for more than one purpose.

Curiosity is part of the nature of the northern people. It is part of the nature of all people brought into existence with the help of the Guidance. Curiosity leads to exploration which leads to discoveries. When discoveries are made, information learned is taught to others. That often leads to innovation and improvement in the lives of all.

Why are Blair and Elspet going on this ship if they are not planning to fish? It's because they have convinced the people in Heem and in all of the cold zone to allow them to open a university. There are many skills that can be taught. Skills like ship building and farming and raising livestock. Also cooking, house building, and the trade of making fishing tools and nets.

Then there are subjects like navigation. Mapping of the shorelines for those leaving Heem. Mapping locations of other settlements and how to get there from here. Courses for all of this can be formulated if Blair and Elspet are allowed to go to sea on one long trip. They can map the shorelines and the settlement locations and, for the curious, who knows what else they will be able to do and teach with the knowledge they'll gain?

The university has not started yet. Blair and Elspet are given an OK to do so. They first need to gather what information they can about Chéile for their new courses. This is why they hitch a ride on a fishing vessel. One of the newest and biggest ships that has ever been built. One that plans to be gone for sixty nights. The purpose of the ship, other than to carry Blair and Elspet, is to fish and deliver what is caught to many of the villages far away from Heem. Then return to Heem with a good supply of fish for the people here.

Blair's task on this same trip is to map the skies and the shore. Elspet's is to study the villages they encounter. To see if any of them has something new to contribute. On their return, Blair and Elspet will put all their information in a

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book, or many books, to form the basis for many subjects that will be taught at their university.

So, it happens. The trip begins shortly before the spring equinox. Travel earlier this far north is hard if not impossible. The sea is either impassible due to existing ice, or dangerous because of floating remnants of ice.

Blair pays great attention to the shoreline as they sail away from Heem and close attention to the stars. By this time, everyone knows the star patterns that remain stationary over the north polar regions. These patterns are seen a little bit lower in the sky as the ship makes its progression to the south. Blair constantly maps where they are every night. He correlates their locations to each stop they make in the outlying villages.

Elspet is just as diligent. She records every feature she can about the people she meets at each port. She writes down facts about the villages and products that are available. A true travel agent's guide to Chéile, at least northern Chéile. She meets many people that she learns to call friends and is always sad when it's time to depart for the next destination.

The sixty days they're away go by fast. The work they tasked themselves to do makes the time pass. They accomplish what they set out to accomplish. When they finally land back in Heem, it hardly seems like they had left at all. That feeling remains until it's time to take everything back to their house. It's a lot of everything and requires many trips. Only one is needed to carry their clothes. Another trip is used just to transport all the notes they took. And ten more to carry the presents Elspet's friends had given her. A once in a lifetime trip is over. Time for the work of organizing what they learned and starting a university.

What is in these notes? They show many interesting details that describe both similarities and differences between Heem and the various villages they visited.

Similarities. Most of the habits and traditions found in one village are found in all villages. Some are imposed from necessities of living in a cold climate. They all have warm fireplaces. They all have warm coats and other clothing.

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They all eat a diet that relies heavily on fish; not so much on vegetables. Most manage to get exercise from their work. Others seem to enjoy a walk in the afternoon sun. One can't spend all day sitting around a fire in a house, as nice as that might actually sound.

Differences are not so much actual differences as degrees of similarity. Elspet noticed that activities, traditions, and diets, while basically the same, do have some variation. The diet in some villages has more vegetables than others. In some places people get their exercise from walking. Where walking is common, it typically occurs later in the day than in villages where the people are less likely to walk.

Clothing is the same everywhere, but, again, only almost the same. Elspet looks at the gifts she had been given. Many of those are items of clothing. Shirts and jackets received from people in some villages are significantly lighter than the same items received from other places. Part of her notes includes a list of each gift she received and where it came from. The heaviness of the clothing is consistent by town. That is, in the few instances she received gifts from two people in the same town, they were generally the same type of clothing, heavy or light. Is this a peculiarity of each village? Do some villages just randomly prefer heavier clothing and others lighter, or is there another reason? And what about the diet and exercise? Can that mean anything other than random differences.

Elspet thinks about this for some time and finally decides to ask Blair for his thoughts. Blair listens to Elspet's comments and comes up with an idea that might help. As he locates each village on his map, he asks Elspet to describe what she can about it. The type of clothing, the diet, exercise tendencies, anything that she can remember.

As Elspet answers that question for more and more villages, the two of them notice a correlation. The farther south a village is, the more vegetables in the diet, the more likely people are to exercise by walking in the evening, and the lighter their clothing. All indicative of warmer weather. They consider this. Yes, they remember warmer weather the farther south they traveled. They both thought that was because summer was coming and the weather was getting warmer everywhere.

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Maybe there's another reason. Seasonal weather changes might not explain all the differences they observed. Habits like walking in the evening, diets that include more vegetables, a clothing trade that regularly makes warmer clothes. All that is probably an adaptation to the typical weather of each village, not changes that occur just because of the time of year.

Elspet and Blair can't know for sure. They decide they need to gather some more information. They ask each ship that leaves Heem to record the temperatures of each town where they stop and the date. It's the only way to actually know if temperatures are warmer in the south. They need to gather temperature readings taken on the same day from different villages

They are! Temperatures are warmer in the south. This fact becomes part of the classes that Blair and Elspet teach in their university. It's taught by them and for many generations after them. Guess what comes out of their teachings? People prefer to be warm. Not a big surprise. Even people born in the north, in their home where their ancestors were placed long ago by the Guidance. Some of them realize that they can move and be warm. There's not a mass migration to the south, but the effect of what does happen is the same. A few people in each generation settle in a village south of the one in which they were born. Others move even farther. They board a fishing ship, get off at a southern port, and don't get back on. If there's no village there, they start one.

A few generations later, maybe ten, maybe twenty, and Heem, what was once the capital and largest town in the cold zone, becomes a ghost town. The population of the north have moved south. The people of the north polar region are now the people of the north temperate zone. Still far away from any other people, but not as far as they were at one time.

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The Guidance observes the people they placed in the cold zone of Chéile. Agan, plans have not progressed as originally hoped. The people started on the right course. They followed the playbook. All was going well. Goals were being met. Much like the desert people who were following the plan until they strayed and discovered the ease of living in the temperate zone. The plan laid out for those in the north was looking good until they also strayed.

Two glitches. Two hitches in the giddy-ups. How is this possible? The Guidance thought all was in control. They thought they had learned from their past mistakes. Perhaps they have. Perhaps there is more to learn. Maybe all is still OK. But maybe not.

This much is obvious. The Guidance is not all-knowing. As much as they do know, it's always possible to learn more. Maybe they know that. Maybe this experiment will still turn out well. While that's certainly possible, there's an increasing uneasiness in the Guidance, an uneasiness that causes clouds to come a little closer to forming in the area of existence where the Guidance resides. Now those clouds start to assume a shape similar to the shape they had just before the end of Avalon and just before the end of Lemuria. That formation begins to appear again.

But it only starts. The Guidance has not yet given up on Chéile. They still want to observe. Even if the experiment fails, there is knowledge to be gained from observing. Information that can be useful the next time, or the time after that. The Guidance knows it can learn so it is in no hurry to do anything drastic. They will give Chéile another second, or maybe two, before making a final decision. And we all know how long a second of Guidance time is, right?

No, I guess we don't.

The Guidance

Meeting

The seasons advance. Chéile continues to revolve around its sun. Years pass. Many years.

The people whose seed of life was placed in the cold of the far north grow quite content living in the temperate climates. They use skills they learned from ship building to make other products. Such as ships on land, which they call wagons. And homes. All people now live in comfortable homes. They also manufacture smaller objects like spears, other weapons, and tools. Each year the assortment of items they learn to craft grows. It makes for a more comfortable existence and a more mobile lifestyle. There are more people. More homes are needed. People are always on the move and almost always move farther south where the weather is warmer. A little bit warmer every time.

With the South

Besides the north, there is the south where those who started their existence in the hot desert region are also happy. They can finally live each day without worry. Without worry about the life-threatening factors they were facing, such as lack of water and little food. This is partially offset by some new threats: dangerous carnivores, the same types that used to threaten the temperate people. And like the temperate people, the tropic people meet and overcome this new threat, this new challenge.

With less to worry about, they have time to hone their skills. What skills are those? Remember Dinah? She spent time studying the ground, the sandy ground in the desert and the plants that appeared where plants shouldn't be. She discovered underground aquifers and taught others how to find them.

Why was Dinah able to develop this ability in the first place? It was because she was able to understand the planet Chéile. Understanding the planet, the inanimate part of the world, is the skill that the Guidance hoped the tropic people would learn and would refine and enhance. That goal was met. Were there other goals that might have been learned had they stayed in the desert longer? That is an unanswerable question for now.

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They have learned this one skill. A skill they are now developing. They learn how to observe the world, how to discover what is in the world, how to determine what those discoveries can be used for, and how to evaluate the worth of each. Not just water. They observe the rocks, the soil, the minerals. They experiment and discover uses for what they see and test. They learn to melt gold. They teach themselves to make bronze. They learn how to work with iron, using it to make weapons to help them secure their food supply. They make bowls, plates, urns, forks, spoons, and knives. They also use their skills to make art. At first, art is just a new design for a plate or a vessel of some sort. Then there is art of art's sake. Art that represents the beauty of the planet and all of nature.

The people of the tropics thrive, both physically and intellectually. With each new generation, their migration continues the logical northward path toward cooler and more comfortable latitudes. They are still the people of the tropics but they no longer live there.

And what about those who were given the temperate zone as their original home? Remember them? What have they learned and how have they grown? Their expertise was the ability to understand and control the wild animals of Chéile. This started when they realized that fire stopped the most vicious animals from attacking. But it also had an effect on those less vicious. It made all the animals cautious. At whatever level they were before fire, they became calmer afterwards.

The people who noticed a change in animals confronted with fire thought they had somehow learned how to communicate with life. Quite an accomplishment, especially since it was accidental. If they can do that by chance, they should be able to put their minds to it and find other ways to commune with life. They try.

They experiment and observe actions that impact behavior. Some are positive, some not so much. Expanding on the positive actions, they are able to calm many breeds of animals. The first attempt is to domesticate wild canines. This is successful as they are able to train some to help protect the people of Home. The first guard dogs. Next, they train them to watch over, protect, and

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control livestock. The first sheep dogs even though there are no sheep on Chéile.

Success breeds more success. The people test their skills on other animals. It works there also. They're able to calm some species of birds. Sooner or later, they are able to understand, to communicate with, and to calm all the animals on Chéile.

From animals to plants is a natural progression. They learn various techniques that help a plant grow healthy. They experiment to determine which techniques work on which plants. Everything does not work all the time. They learn hybrid techniques, which they employ to make heartier plants, or plants that provide more nutrition when consumed, or both. They become the farmers, ranchers, biologists, and botanists of Chéile.

All that is living on the planet is understood by these people. They are no longer threatened by the animals who were a danger so many years ago. Not only are those animals no longer a threat, they are now friends. The people still let the predators catch prey but the people are no longer considered prey. This is their skill. Understanding and communing with all life on Chéile.

With a new comfort and confidence, the people of the temperate zone are prosperous. Their numbers grow. They spread to many towns both north and south of Home.

The scene is set for the inevitable to happen. The decision is made to build a new town, to be called Lukeville, at the southern edge of the world known to the temperate people. Just beyond their known world, not too far to the south, over a nearby hill, another town already exists. It exists in a place where no town can possibly be.

That town, Sonoyta, belongs to the tropic people. The residents of Sonoyta are enjoying an early morning breakfast. The calm of the morning is broken when Cedro hears an unusual noise, gets up from his meal, and decides to climb on top of the northern ridge to see what is making that noise. He does. To say he is surprised does not give full credit to his actual feelings. All the people in the town know, as does Cedro, that there is nobody north of Sonoyta. At least they

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think they know. Obviously, they're wrong. Not only is there someone north of here, there are many people to the north and they are busy building.

Cedro walks back to relay what he just saw to the rest of the town. All agree this needs to be investigated. Elana and Cedro start walking from Sonoyta to what is the beginning of the new town of Lukeville, although they do not yet know it by that name. A short time later they enter Lukeville. Quietly. How much noise can two people make walking on hard packed soil? They aren't trying to be stealth but they do get very close to one of the workers before anyone becomes aware of their presence. Paul is the first to notice. Then Emma. The looks on their faces parallel the look that was on Cedro's face when he first noticed people to the north of his town.

That there are looks of surprise is obvious. Surprise and confusion. All reasonable expressions to reflect feelings about what is happening. Those are the feelings that do surface. There are more feelings that are significant about this encounter. Significant because they don't appear. Fear, prejudice, anxiety. Those feelings aren't anywhere. There are no negative feelings about new people walking into town, only curiosity about who they are and where they came from.

The people of Chéile, those from the temperate zones and those from the tropics, seem to have not developed a sense of xenophobia or the feelings that might arise out of meeting another people. The two peoples have differences. Outwardly there is the obvious difference in the color of their skins. The bigger difference is the unknown of where the others came from.

Nothing in the training of Chéile has taught them differences should matter. That may be true. There was no training on Lemuria that differences should matter, but there it did. Why there and not here? Is this what the Guidance learned between their two creations? The Guidance created the people of Chéile with a desire to learn. More than that, with a passion to learn. No actions, no conclusions, until all the facts are observed. And no presumption of danger. They offer none and they detect none. Since there is no danger, it makes sense to wait, to observe, and to learn. Conclusions jumped to without any facts to base those conclusions on tend to be wrong. Action can occur later. Now there is no reason not to wait and see what the future brings.

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The learning starts with a simple “hi” from Cedro. Perhaps that is somewhat of an understatement, perhaps “hi, what are you doing here” is warranted, but a simple “hi” is a friendlier start. Besides, how can Cedro be certain these strange people even understand his speech.

Emma smiles and responds with “Hi, my name is Emma,” as a simple expansion on the original greeting. It may be quite a surprise that everyone speaks the same language. No surprise to the Guidance who have maintained some level of control over the years.

The ice is broken. Emma and Paul identify themselves to Cedro and Elana as the people in charge of a new town they are building. Cedro and Elana identify themselves as people from a nearby town that is already built.

The four of them have something in common so they agree they should talk some more. When? No time like the present. They spend a long time explaining their history to each other. Not everything can be explained in a few hours but a lot can. The talks uncover similarities and differences. That is as it must be. The important take away is what it uncovers that they have in common.

By the time this first round of discussions gets to a reasonable breaking point, the sun is sinking low in the sky. It’s not a long walk back to Sonoyta where there are many more people than the construction workers in the planned town of Lukeville. Sonoyta is a better gathering point for everyone and it seems like that is the right thing to do. Gather, that is. Cedro and Elana extend an invitation to Sonoyta for the first inter-people meal. A fine feast of tropic cuisine for a new group of friends. That is how well the brief talks have gone so far. No one sees any reason not to call each other friends.

Both peoples of Chéile are cautious. They know to take time to observe and learn, and they have. In a short amount of time, they have learned that they have just found new friends and that there is no better way to start a friendship than to enjoy a meal together. There is much more that will be learned in the coming days, much that will benefit both, no doubt. But not now. Not it is time to relax and to eat.

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Everyone is soon enjoying a pleasant night in Sonoyta. The dinner includes less vegetation than the temperate people are used to having since less is available this far south. There is enough to make a small salad. Dinner vegetables are based on a local cactus. The main course is a delicacy of the tropic people. A special recipe of a local desert snake. The temperate people are well versed in manners and graciously and courteously enjoy the main course. At least they do outwardly.

Conversations continue the next morning. One main question asked by the tropic people is what the temperate people are doing here, obviously far away from their main stomping grounds. Cedro and Elana observed a large collection of materials of some sort when they found Paul and Emma and their group. They doubted it was just junk, as much as it may have looked like that. They ask what it is and the response is that it is building material for the new town. Cedro and Elana look at themselves to ponder what this means. This is a nice part of Chéile, but there is already a town here. They wonder how two towns so close together would work.

Paul and Emma's minds are still on dinner last night. The cactus and snake courses were edible, but not like home. Sort of like serving fish for the first time to a steak and potatoes person. Edible, yes. Different, also yes. They know that many more vegetables and fruits can be grown in this part of Chéile. That is knowledge learned by the temperate people over the years, so the claim that this can be done is based in certainty.

Then they think about building a town, Lukeville. The place they selected will work but the place where Cedro and Elana have their town is slightly better. The main part of the local stream flows through Sonoyta. Building a town here would solve a lot of problems in securing a water supply this far south. Water to drink and for irrigation.

In their daydreaming about dinner, water, a new town, and meeting a new people, Paul and Emma have not even noticed that Cedro and Elana had left the meeting. They only notice this when they look up and see them returning. The implication is that they left, but when and why?

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With Cedro's and Elana's return, attention goes back to the meetings and discussions about events of the last day. Subjects come up that are on everyone's minds, at least the minds of the four people in this meeting. As discussions continue, it soon becomes apparent that all are on the same page. Cedro thought the conversation would progress as it did, which is why he and Elana had left the meeting earlier. They left to talk to the other senior members of the town. It's good that they did because they are now able to make the obvious suggestion.

The temperate people can live in Sonoyta. There is no reason to try to support two towns. The tropic people already have an infrastructure, water, stores, and supplies. The temperate people can build their houses here and help the combined town with the skills they know, like farming and ranching.

The two peoples are different. There is talk of this. The talk is not one of concern. The obvious differences are only the knowledge that each people can provide different skills based on what they have learned over the years. The tropic people learned skills useful for survival in their part of Chéile. The temperate people learned skills useful for their part. The place of Sonoyta is a place where the skills of both can be used. These are the differences that are discussed. How to take advantage of them to make a better life for all.

The Guidance sees what is happening. They are pleased. This is a meeting the Guidance had hoped would happen, but the time for that was not now. It was to occur a hundred years in the future. That was the plan of the Guidance. Now the Guidance considers they may have been wrong. The meeting they are witnessing is positive. It has potential. It is a meeting they planned for and hoped would happen. The Guidance will continue to observe as they decide to give Chéile another second.

With the North

Back up north in the colder climates. What's happening there? The people who started their existence in the cold zone of Chéile, who eventually moved just south of that, have expanded their industries yet another level. They now have large ships that can carry many people. Ships that capture the wind to help them move. Faster than people with oars and able to go farther. Large

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and fast enough to travel from the western shore of Chéile and around the world to the eastern shore. They could do that if they wanted to, which they don't. It's nice to be able to, though. One trip they can take with these large ships is south. South along the coastline. A long exploratory trip to see what they can see. The bear who went over the mountain in another reality is going south in this one. It's the same reason they employ to make a decision to go south. To see what can be seen.

People are selected. A plan is made. They plan to leave just as the weather is getting warm and to return before winter sets in. Besides this timeline, there is no goal other than to gather information for any of the many universities that are now supported by these people.

The large ship is finally equipped with enough food and supplies for a long trip. Dael is selected as the captain and Dale as the navigator. They are brother and sister from a large family. Strange to have two children with such similar names. Their parents were jokesters who thought the naming idea would be fun.

Dale graduated at the top of his navigation class. Dael has been captain of many ships in her twenty years spent at sea. A good combination for this adventure. The two of them and the rest of the crew are sure to be able to handle anything the sea throws at them. They have been briefed by all the expertise that the north can offer and have been instructed how to handle all possibilities they might encounter. They know how they will react to anything they might find, except what, as is about to turn out, they will find.

It's now twenty-three days out on their long trip. They are sailing as close to the shore as is safe, but far away enough to allow clear sailing. On their way south so far, they have made three stops at places that looked like they might make for good settlements. Those were the thoughts as they landed and remained their thoughts until the landing party encountered new animal life, threatening animal life. They noted that in their logs, returned to their landing boats, rowed back to the ship, and continued southward.

On the fateful twenty-third day late at night, their lookout sights fire slightly inland from the shore. Calling Dael and Dale to the side of the ship, they look

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closer. It is fire. It isn't an uncontrolled forest fire. And it isn't just one fire. They see several. Several small fires. Fires that remain stationary. Not fires that spread to other plants. Obviously controlled fires. Obviously lit by people. That much is confirmed when, looking through their spyglasses, they manage to see some of those people around the fires. And, yes, they have spyglasses. Years of being seafaring people has led to some useful inventions.

Dale spends some time looking over his maps. Not only are there no known settlements this far south, there are no maps that include the area of Chéile they are currently sailing past. No one has ever been this far south before. At least no one they have a record of. Dale, Dael, and the lookout spend some time in amazement talking about what they see and wondering. Perhaps they spend a little too long time wondering. The captain and the navigator and the lookout should not all be preoccupied with events that take all of them away from their jobs. All three at the same time.

Remember that this is described as a fateful day? Time for the "fate" portion to come into play. The ship veers close to the shore and runs aground. Hard. Too hard to jar loose. On top of this, it's now high tide. There's no hope to float the ship over whatever they hit when the tide comes in. It's already in.

It would be dangerous for so many people to remain on the ship, so the decision is made for the crew to set up camp on shore until a plan can be devised on how to free the ship. They start preparations. The first few crew members set off to shore. Dael is in this group. Dale remains on board the ship.

It's a quiet night in Home. What wind there is peacefully weaves its way through the trees, making hardly a sound. Off in the distance, the repetitious pattern of waves lapping the shore is the white noise of Home that lulls many to sleep. Tonight, like many, many nights in the past, Aubin and Jade are drifting off to sleep in their house near the shore. They find peace in the sounds of the waves like others in Home. For the two of them, it's a peace ingrained into their beings. They almost know how a wave is going to break just by the sound it starts to make when it reaches the shore, or right before it rolls over a rock just off shore. Like a song one has heard many times, they can complete the notes of the stanza of each wave.

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That's true for most nights. Not this night. Tonight, the waves are different. They are upset. Their song is flat. There is something new on the shore. Their shore. The shore that's part of Home, the part of Home that Aubin and Jade cherish. Whatever is happening on their shore must be investigated. Even this time of day. Dawn has just arrived and they are still tired. Even so, they get up from their state of slumber and walk down to the shore.

When they arrive, they stop, stare at what they see, and stare at each other. People. People they have never seen before. People with strange hair. Light colored hair. And skin. Light skin to go with their hair. Obviously not their people and no one in Home has ever heard of any other people. What should they do? There's no sense of danger. Danger is not an emotion associated with other people. There's a sense of curiosity. Obviously. They do what they have to do and shout a greeting.

Dael hears the greeting and her initial reaction is one of shock. Not a shock of terror. More a shock of mild surprise when you think something might happen and then it actually does. Dael was prepared for this possibility. She didn't tell anyone what they had seen just before being grounded. It had been a fire, a controlled fire, and there was only one way she knew that a controlled fire could be created. She is still surprised when the fire-creating people appear. Much of that surprise is because the people in front of her are clearly not her people. She now knows there is another people on Chéile. Again, not really a surprise. When is a surprise not a surprise? This qualifies as a good answer to that question. What else could explain what they saw from the ship.

There appears to be no danger. The people approaching are not threatening. That makes this a time to learn, a time to examine what is in front of them. Then the time to decide what to do will come.

"Hello," Dael responds after a few seconds to gather her thoughts. This is probably the biggest indicator of surprise, that it takes several seconds to formulate a good response and all that comes out of her mouth is "hello." "Hello," as it turns out, is just the right introductory salvo in the first meeting of these two people. "Where are we?" also turns out to be a good follow-on question.

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Aubin and Jade, now completely relaxed and completely curious, walk down to the beach, help the new arrivals unload their supplies, and sit down to talk to everyone. They mostly talk to Dael. Little is said before the boat holding Dale and some of the other senior crew arrives.

Soon there is a larger conversation, a friendly conversation. Friendly and serious at the same time. Aubin comments how unusual the blonde hair is and how cute it looks on some of the women, especially the younger women. A stare from Jade puts a quick stop to that topic of conversation, moves the talk back to what just happened and then to what might happen from here on out.

It's not too long before an agreement is reached. Agreements are good places to start when meeting the unknown. The people from the north will be staying here for some time. No choice. When one looks out to sea, it's obvious time will be needed to free their ship. Today they can set up camp on the shore. Tonight they will take the short walk into Home for dinner. More can be settled tomorrow.

The people from the north secure their ship as well as they can. The remaining crew row to shore and prepare for their evening meal. The first meal as guests of a people they never knew existed until this morning. None of their preparations, none of their instructions, none of their planning equipped them for this dinner. But they are ready. They have been prepared for this event by who they have evolved to be, by their basic nature, and by their interactions meeting people in the many villages they encountered on the journey south. All that has prepared them for this dinner. And, perhaps some credit should be given to what the Guidance themselves learned before they skipped the stone that formed the planet and the people of Chéile.

One can hope that they are prepared. Hope is an important factor because more surprises are in store this day. We still have the meeting at the south end of the temperate zone, with the people who originated in the tropics. Remember Cedro, Elana, Paul, and Emma. It has been many days since the four of them and the rest of the members of the Lukeville construction crew met and enjoyed dinner with the tropic people of Sonoyta. It went well, that

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dinner, and many meals thereafter. Friendships were formed. Decisions were made.

One major decision was already discussed. Why build a town, Lukeville, when there was already a town, Sonoyta. Two towns are not needed. The two peoples got along so well that they joined forces to expand one town, Sonoyta. While building the town, they worked together to make it a better place for all. The tropic people taught the temperate people how to find water. The temperate people helped identify and tame the local animal population. They taught the tropic people which ones could be used to produce food, such as eggs, and which ones could be processed. The tropic people had some idea about the local animals, but the extra information helped. All learned how to live in the land that they now both occupied.

Benefits from cooperation, even on this small a scale, were obvious. It was also obvious that more could be done. Paul and Emma thought it a good idea for a contingent of tropic people to travel to Home to discuss how the benefits they had realized so far could be expanded. All assumed they could, so the trip and the meeting were easy agreements. Cedro, Elana, and ten others started the trip up north to meet the residents of Home. They arrive the afternoon of the dinner. Make that Dinner with a capital 'D'. Dinner planned for two of the peoples of Chéile was about to become a dinner for three. Three peoples.

The Guidance adds yet another second onto the Chéile doomsday clock.

Cooperation

Paul, Emma, and a contingent of tropic people show up at Home just as dinner is starting. They expect to be making a grand entrance and for everyone in the town to be surprised, if not shocked, by their news. Surprised for three reasons. First, they are not expected back so soon. It takes more time than they have been gone to lay the foundation for a new town. Second, the accompaniment of people who did not leave with them. Third, the many significances of the new people.

Looks like, today, turnabout is fair play. There is a lot of surprise all around. It is actually a good way to start the first tri-people dinner. The two surprises seem to cancel each other out and the evening dissolves into laughter, enjoyment, fun, and good food. It ends many hours later, but it seems like it ends as soon as it begins. Time flies when you're having fun. The day finally ends as places to sleep are found for the new arrivals from the south. Tomorrow will consist of meetings, discussions, stories, and histories. It will be a time for learning.

As expected, tomorrow eventually arrives. Also as promised, meetings start. Questions, answers, debriefings. There is too much for one day. It extends in another. The first day was formal, or as formal as meetings get on Chéile. Formal here just means that everyone one is gathered in one place. Everyone gets to hear all the questions that are asked. Everyone gets to hear all the answers to those questions. It's a transfer of information, a transfer of facts, a formality, albeit a necessary formality.

The second day is not as formal. People wander through Home. There's no agenda. Nothing that needs talking about. But meetings take place, and these meetings are just as important as the all-encompassing one on the first day. No, that's not true. These meetings are more significant and more important.

Some meetings include people from the north, from the tropics, and from the temperate climate. Others contain people from only two places. Many meetings, the largest consisting of four attendees. They talk. That's obvious. What else does one do in a meeting? They ask questions. They get answers. They think about the questions, the answers, and that makes them consider more questions. The groups are fluid. Every so often, some get up from one

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group, wander to another, and continue from where they left off. There are no rules, so people are relaxed. When people are relaxed, it's easy for them to talk. Subject matters grow from what was talked about in the first meeting each person attended to everything else. There are no boundaries. It's a time to learn.

The people in the temperate climate learn what it's like to live in the desert. It's hard for them to imagine overcoming all the problems that needed to be overcome. The people from the north explain the art of shipbuilding and the art of making sails. New concepts to those of the other climates. Both the northern and southern people learn about all the wildlife and plants that grow in the temperate part of Chéile.

Certain skills and experiences seem to gather interest from peoples of the other climates, regardless of where the skill was first developed. Not everyone is interested in everything said, but some are very interested in specific topics. Any subject brought up generates some curiosity from others. Informal discussion groups are formed. Familiarity seems natural in these groups. Friendships are formed as offers are made to satisfy one's passion to learn. By the time the third day is over, everyone seems to know all the names of their new friends and of all their families. Most important, each person is on the path to learning what the others know and what they themselves do not.

Those from the temperate latitudes know how to communicate with life on Chéile. The temperate zone is abundant with life. The people evolved knowing what was around them. They learned. Communication became second nature. They can understand the animals. They can understand the plants almost as well. Ingrained with a will to learn and surrounded by life, they learned life. They have a symbiotic understanding and relationship with all life on the planet.

Those from the tropics know how to communicate with the Chéile. Not with life on Chéile, but with the planet itself. They first used this skill to trace underground aquifers. They can now locate rocks, stones, minerals, soils of whatever type they need. They aren't always sure what they need, but they can always find something that will satisfy a need. Rocks with a texture needed to make hard spheres or beautiful objects. Stones soft enough to help clean

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surfaces. Minerals that can be mixed to make drugs. They can also understand plants, if those plants can act as cures for some diseases. This may seem like a skill of the temperate people, but it's different. The temperate people can understand what is required to nurture a plant. The desert people can decide if a plant has healing potential.

What are the skills of the people from the north? They are builders. They have no special connection with animals, plants, or Chéile, but they are ingenious in what they can make from what they are given. Ships and spyglasses are not known outside of the north. Not that this is all they can do. It's most of what they can do now. When the new people they just met tell them more about Chéile, when they learn more about the planet, then their skills will grow. There's no doubt they'll have ideas of what to do with this knowledge. Ideas that those elsewhere in this new world wouldn't come up with.

The people of the tropics, the people of the north, and the people of the temperate zone all realize what possibilities they now have. Their thoughts are directed inward at what they offer. They each know their own worth. At the same time, their thoughts are drawn outward. They each can see worth in the people they just met. They have not fully learned yet what this might mean, but they are open to learning what can be accomplished by all working together. Capitalizing on the differences and strengths of each is the obvious path forward. "Strengths" is a strong word that becomes stronger when enhanced with "differences." A path with many benefits and no downside.

The first example of what might happen occurs the next day. Everyone is already treating each other as lifelong friends. Dael, the captain of the stranded ship, and Cedro from the south take a walk along the shore to look at Dael's ship. The time has come to consider plans to loosen the ship from the mound of soil on which it's stranded. Cedro is amazed at how large a ship they managed to build. To say it was the largest one he has even seen would mean a lot more if it wasn't also the first. Cedro looks around and then decides to stroll a short way out into the water, to feel what he can sense close to the ship. It's a good decision. Cedro, like most of the tropic people, has an affinity with Chéile, the land, the air, the water and, in this case, the land under the water directly under the ship. He can sense a cavern, an open chamber at a depth of about ten hands beneath where the ship is stranded. The chamber is

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deep. If the soil around the walls of this chamber were broken, soil from the top would collapse, fill the open space, and the ship would be able to float free. It's a lot of work to dive down and dig through the soil. A lot of work that would not have been done except that, now, the reward for doing so is known.

People from the south, people from the north, and people from the temperate zone all agree to take turns diving under the water, loosening a bit of soil, and discarding it away from the ship. Just before high tide, Dael and two of her staff board the ship. Twenty-four people take turns diving and digging. After about an hour, a small rumbling is heard. The rest of the soil keeping the ship stranded falls into the opening. The ship is free. Dael manages to steer the ship away from land, drop anchor, and return to shore.

A simple task as it turns out, but not as simple as it seems. If the tropic people had not shown up when they did, no one else in the area would have been able to figure out a solution to free the stranded ship. How many other problems can be solved in this way? How many ways can these three people of Chéile join together for the benefit of all? How many new inventions not even conceived can be made? A question that can't be answered yet, but a question that will be answered. The path forward has started.

It is agreed that a group will be formed, perhaps a think tank of sorts, perhaps a university. The people from the north are the only ones so far that have an actual university. That concept was part of the discussions over the past few days. The people from the north will help to start a university in Home. Home is the most central location in Chéile, the easiest access for everyone. All agree to go back to their people and send a contingent of thinkers to Home, and to do so as soon as possible.

A few days later, Dael, Dale, and the crew lift anchor to return to their people. The rest of the trip along the southern shore is no longer important. They found what they had set out to find. More than that. They found what they had never expected to find. The people on this trip back north are not the same as those who arrived from the north only a few days ago. It seems like a lifetime. What was experienced in these last few days is more than most experience in a lifetime. It was only a few days.

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There are six people who sailed from the north to Home and who decide to stay. They found something worth staying for. In their place, four temperate zone people asked for permission to join to trip north. A request that is easily granted. Along with a request from two of the tropic people.

And the same is true for the trip back to the border of the desert. The day after the ship departs for the north, the tropic people start their walk back to Sonoyta. Not only the tropic people, but some from each of the other peoples. Those replace those who decide to stay in Home and those who are now on the ship north.

Is this what the Guidance had been planning all along? It appears that all is good with the world. The worlds. Chéile and the world of the Guidance. World might not be a good word to describe where the Guidance exists, but it fits the description today very well. In the world of the Guidance, the sky is now clear. Not a cloud is in sight.

The University of Home

It is not many days later that people start arriving in Home from the north and from the south. A university is formed with schools of biology, geology, and engineering. More departments will be formed as the years go on, but the three just mentioned are the first.

The biology school is headed by people who live in Home. Introductory classes are very basic. Chéile Life 101 teaches names, identifying marks, and uses of all life known in this region. Names of plants and animals and how to identify each one is the easy coursework. Remembering facts about the worth of each plant is more difficult. So many plants, so many uses! A plant can be used for food, for medicine, or just for beauty. And that's just the first class.

Plants in the first class. Second year teaches how to communicate with animals. Communication not with words, but understanding. How can people understand what an animal is contemplating and how can a person make an animal understand him or her? Not an easy class, but a successful student can answer these questions by the time the class is over.

Then we get to the upper division and even more advanced classes. What could that be? How about understanding plants and getting them to understand you? If it can be done with animals, it should be able to be done with plants. You believe that? It's true. The first year this class is taught, only those born in the temperate zone can pass. Over time, anyone enrolled in the university can. Almost anyone. By that time there are so many students descendent from more than one of Chéile's original three peoples that it's hard to determine the ancestry for any of them.

Another discipline at the university is taught in the school of geography. As one might expect, this starts under the leadership of the tropic people. Like the school of biology, there are introductory classes that teach the basics: names of rocks, stones, minerals, jewels, types of soil, and so on. This forms the foundation of necessary knowledge in the geology department, along with the obvious association of uses. Second year students are taught much about each of the inanimate parts of Chéile and how they can be used. Some can help grow plants, others form the basis for soothing salves, while others can be appreciated just for their beauty. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and

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the tropic people behold much more than the others. This can be taught to a lesser extent, and only to some.

There are advanced classes that teach communication to Chéile, much the same as communication to plants and animals. Students are taught how to feel what use a newly discovered part of Chéile might render. The people have not yet discovered all there is. The advanced student must be prepared to analyze uses for newly discovered objects. This analysis is sometimes done in the laboratory and sometimes done in the inners of the mind. Like biology, the people who were originally able to master the advanced classes were all from the south. Also, like biology, it's not that way anymore.

The engineering department is unique. The other two departments have an intuitive component. Strengths in the engineering school draw more upon a natural ability of understanding. Is that an intuitive component? Perhaps. It's a component that seems to be strongest in the people who come from the north, the original heads of the engineering school. Perhaps there's some level of intuition, but it's also a skill common in select people from other regions.

Courses in the engineering department have no component that might be considered out of the ordinary, at least in the lower-level classes. By the time a student gets to an upper division course, the teachers assume there is nothing to teach. They expect anyone reaching that level to innately know what to do. Most classes end with a statement that the rest is obvious and left as an exercise for the student. Lazy teachers or the intuitive nature of the people from the north? One of these is true. Maybe both.

Over time, the University of Home becomes the main source of new ideas and new inventions on Chéile. Other universities arise in other locations, but the most prestigious is the one at Home.

While it's a nice idea to teach, there needs to be growth outside of the classroom. The university may teach facts and skills, but must also, somehow, teach the student how to imagine what might come next. Successful students at the university must be able to accomplish something that could not otherwise have been accomplished without their training.

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The university at Home meets this goal. Significant innovations happen almost inevitably because of what is occurring on Chéile. In the early days, accomplishments arise solely because of how people interact. Discussions. Someone makes a statement that is obvious to them. Someone else listens. What was said was not obvious to the second person, but it jars another thought loose. The two thoughts jell into a concept, an idea, a plan, and a product. Just because of a conversation between people of two different heritages, experiences, knowledge, and abilities.

For example, one time a student started talking about a plant they found far up in the hills of central Chéile. Not a common plant, but one that the student found intriguing and brought back to Home. It's discovered to have properties that make some people feel better. Especially people who are afflicted with a disease that's starting to spread and become concerning. That the plant can cure a disease is the immediate benefit. But the plant only grows in the mountains, and is hard to harvest and keep alive on the trip back.

That discovery started with the temperate people, at least with the ability that the temperate people originally developed. Communication with plants was their skill. It was why the plant was brought to the university in the first place.

Then a tropic person sensed what the plant was worth. Pharmaceutical skills are the domain of the desert people. The active ingredient was recognized because the student had sensed the same ingredient, not in plants, but embedded in soil deep underground in his home town. Never actually seen it, but sensed it being there. Tropic people can sense the inanimate parts of Chéile.

Now its location is known, but the location is deep underground. Still hard to access. Bring in the engineering expertise from the north and the ability to create a hole, a tunnel, and access needed to build a mine. A few months later and an abundant source of an ingredient needed to cure a serious disease is acquired.

This major accomplishment contributed to a significant increase in the lifespan on Chéile. Was it an accomplishment that could have been credited

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to any one of the people who now attend the university, or credited to cooperation and learning among them all? The answer is obvious.

There are simpler and more basic cases. The demand for housing increases with the increase in population. Trees need to be harvested. Students in the biology department determine where to best harvest those and how many so as to minimize impact in the ecosystem. A few trees are cut here and a few more there, but not too many from any single location.

The geology department helps by locating other building materials to lessen the demand on wood. It also allows for sturdier and larger buildings to be made. Of course, the construction effort is handled by graduates of the engineering school. Homes are built. A simple task. Simple when everyone is working toward the same goal.

Time passes. Advancements become more significant. Skills taught by the tropic people are used to locate minerals that can react with the sun and realize its potential. Solar panels are built to generate power. With more innovation, power is stored in batteries. This source of power is added to hydroelectric energy, another recent discovery. Electricity is readily available. Products are built that use and rely on electricity. Life improves.

Plants and chemicals are found that produce more drugs and health products. The people learn to separate water into oxygen and hydrogen. Oxygen is used in hospitals. Hydrogen is used for transportation. Cars and trains move people rapidly throughout Chéile.

More years pass. Hundreds of years. In this time, the powers of the peoples increase. Each new descendant has by now inherited some of the abilities from each of the original three peoples on Chéile. There are no longer three. There is only one. The merging of three peoples into one has occurred. Did it occur as the Guidance had hoped?

One passion that has survived through the years is the passion to learn, a passion that has served Chéile well. The new people, now the only people on Chéile, still strive to learn, to invent, to gather information before acting.

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One of these people is named Imani. One day she relaxes in the park outside of the offices of the graduate school in Home. The graduate school is not like the lower division schools. It has no specialty. It is a true “think tank”. It has the best of the best on Chéile. It teaches those who are accepted to think, to observe, to learn, to use their abilities in novel ways. Beyond that, there is no instruction. Novel is defined by each student as they each determine is best for them. There is encouragement but not direction.

Not many people get admitted to the graduate school. Imani has been admitted with good cause. She is interested in exploring the reality of the universe around Chéile. Not Chéile itself. Others are busy with the planet. It's been done. For Imani, her mind goes outward.

Today her intuition tells her to relax on the lawn. It's not hard to give in to this idea, so she does. The sun is bright today. The sky is clear and it's the middle of summer. It's too bright to look anywhere in the sun's direction, but not too bright to close one's eyes and imagine what is happening inside the sun. The original tropic people of Chéile had the ability to sense the inanimate parts of the planet. The tropic people moved north and met those from the temperate zone. Those people could sense the animate parts of the planet. The people of the north had the ability to build, to make something out of what the others taught them. Now, many years later, Imani is the product of all those people, a descendant with all the abilities that life on Chéile is capable of providing.

Imani is the master of everything she has experienced. It has led her to the graduate school for independent research. It has led her to the lawn on the property of that school.

What was it that Imani mastered. Not just the ability to sense Chéile. Many can do that. For Imani, it's child's play. As easy as breathing out and breathing in. Imani yearns to try something harder. She closes her eyes and lets her mind drift to the sun. She does not realize she can even do that. She tries and now knows that she can. She connects using abilities inherited from years of evolution from the best of all her ancestors over the centuries.

As she senses the sun, she becomes part of it, part of its process. It's this process that flows through her mind. She senses the elements that exist on

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the surface of the sun and those that exist deep in its core. She senses what might be considered the animate part of the sun as those elements move, interact, form other elements, and form the photons that escape. She senses how this interaction works, how an all-powerful engineer would build a machine like the sun. Intense thoughts. They take a toll on her mind as she starts to drift off to sleep.

But only starts to drift. She never falls asleep. Her thoughts merge into one and she wakes with a start, with an understanding, with amazement at what she has learned. Learned through her discipline of thought, through patience, through observation, and through understanding. Or perhaps learned purely from her passion to learn. From the path that her ancestors started when the three original peoples of Chéile met and formed a university in Home. She now knows how the sun works. She can teach that to people here. She can build the first fusion generator on Chéile. The unlimited power of the universe is harnessed.

Many more years pass. Imani is a memory, but a memory so significant that she remains in everyone's mind. No one has forgotten Imani even after hundreds of years. The University of Home celebrates its one thousandth anniversary of being founded. It marks this date with the greatest achievement of the people of Chéile. The greatest achievement of a people that have had a great many significant achievements. But this, this is undeniably the greatest by far.

A ship powered by fusion and driven by thought. The ship's engine is the results of two hundred years of study, design, and planning since the days of Imani. A mechanism is engineered to drive that ship. Everything in, out, or anywhere attached to the ship is controlled completely by thoughts from members of the ship's crew. The ship will take those on Chéile who will be selected from a list of almost unlimited applicants. Those on the ship will leave the planet, leave the solar system, and enter the universe for parts unknown on the greatest learning experience imaginable.

The launch occurs and those who have been selected leave the planet on their way. How and to where?

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“How” has been described. The ship is powered by the thoughts of all those on board, possible because the people on Chéile have learned how to learn. They all have a common goal to find out what the universe has prepared to teach them. Each individual contributes what they can toward this goal. Not everyone is equal. Each have their own strengths. The strengths of one do not conflict with strengths of others. There is also a hierarchy on board the ship. There are four senior citizens of Chéile trained to make decisions if a decision ever needs to be made. Two sisters, Rebecca and Hagar. Two brothers, Ismael and Isaac. The four of them work as one, as do all the people from Chéile. There is strength in this, a strength taught and learned by the path of development that occurred on Chéile. There will not turn out to be need for a hierarchy.

The trip progresses. Almost immediately, the perception that is the people of Chéile grows. It becomes aware of its surroundings. There is not much surrounding a ship in deep space, so the awareness is hardly noticed. But it is there. Space debris, as rare as it is, exists. But never near the ship. That is somehow protected. Not by a feature built into the ship when it was designed. This protection is new, a protection emanating from the cognizance that is the minds of the travelers. The start of a new ability.

The other question is “where”, to where are these people headed? A question that would be answered if an answer was known. They may return to Chéile one day. They may not. The only sure thing is that they will encounter unknowns. Could there be unknowns like the day the three peoples of Chéile met each other? Probably more than that.

Time progresses. The people started their travels long ago. During this time, their perception grew. Perception leads to awareness and a realization of where the ship should be headed. A destination? No. A direction? Yes. That much the joint consciousness has decided. It is not a decision that could have been made by any one individual or by all individuals acting by themselves. The ship still contains individuals. But the thoughts of the ship are now formed by them all. The total is greater than the sum of the parts.

A change in course is made. Not in any spatial dimension. That remains unchanged. Nor in speed. No change in speed or direction. Velocity remains

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constant. But the course now is not the same as the course before. Time and space seem to stand still as the ship proceeds. Where is this new direction? Perhaps they are going to meet the Guidance. Perhaps they are going to become the Guidance. Wherever they are going, they will learn how to get there. They will go and they will learn the only way they can, together.

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The Guidance watches the Chéile ship lift off and leave the planet. They watch the ship as it progresses. They are pleased that their attempt to produce a people to help keep watch over the universes seems to have finally worked. Besides being pleased, could the Guidance also be proud of themselves? After all, it was their decision to create people with a passion for learning that led to success. They could possibly be proud, but they aren't. Pleased is OK. Proud is a stretch since what needed to be done should have been done before.

The Guidance had tried many times and each of the prior attempts had failed. Each failure was examined. A new plan arose from the culmination of what was learned from each of those failures. And also from what had worked. Each attempt had some good and some bad. It's just that the required goal was so hard to obtain that a combination of good and bad could not work. Each new attempt was slightly different than the ones before. But even the Guidance could not be sure that a tweak made to a prior failure was just the right tweak, or that it was too much, or too little. Each attempt was an educated guess. An educated guess is still a guess.

It turns out that passion was the key ingredient to success. The Guidance knew that the level of passion was critical. And the direction. What went wrong with the other attempts that finally led to the success of Chéile?

How about Avalon? Before starting Avalon, the Guidance knew passion was needed for a people to develop. The people on Avalon were given passion. A seed was planted in the writings of the *Book of the Blest*. That seed grew. Passion was not the issue. The problem was the direction of that passion.

The purpose of the *Book* was to let people in the tribes of Avalon know that they were being watched and cared for. That should have directed them to strive to find out who was watching them and why. They needed to understand the clues they were given and realize they were only clues. This should have directed their passion to learning more of what the Guidance wanted them to learn.

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That's not how life progressed on Avalon. The words were too subtle. They provided too much direction. The people on Avalon studied the *Book of the Blest* and came to conclusions. When a people imagine that they are being watched and cared for, they form thoughts in their minds that describe who is doing the watching. They infer concepts of power, imagine abilities of the caretakers, and formulate their appearance. These thoughts were formed on Avalon without learning because the words in the Book were too strong in one aspect. In another, they left too much to the imagination. The Guidance gave them no information to describe who the Guidance was. It mattered not that they couldn't even if they wanted to.

That the conclusions of the people of Avalon were incorrect, or at least incomplete, was obvious when each tribe came to a different conclusion. Each tribe was convinced that their belief was the correct one. Tribe elders spent their energies attempting to prove the truth of their obvious conclusion. Perhaps there is something inconsistent when people need to spend their lives proving that the obvious is indeed obvious. But it had to be. It was the way that the passion given them by the Guidance evolved. It was a stagnant passion. All energy was targeted to reinforcing what they already thought they knew, even though what they thought they knew was never mentioned in the *Book*. They forced themselves to relearn the same lesson over and over again. There was no time to learn anything new.

The end of Avalon resulted from random, unpredictable, and impossible to resolve thoughts. Once the Guidance realized that Avalon could not recover, they made sure it didn't.

What had gone wrong on Lemuria? The Guidance made Lemuria without the components that caused Avalon to fail. They removed the hint of direction that was in the *Book of the Blest*. They did not replace that with anything else. That also removed the passion. The people of Lemuria were, for the most part, not driven by any passion. They only cared to exist. They cared about not much more than the next day. When the time came to help themselves, which they could only do by helping others, they could not gather the compassion to overcome that hurdle. Helping themselves was good. Helping others was a foreign concept. There is no compassion without passion. Lemuria failed almost before it started.

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What had the Guidance changed before they formed Chéile? Passion needed to be reintroduced. That was obvious. This time the passion had to be directed. What did it have to be directed toward and how could that be accomplished? Two questions, the answers to which were the keys. The passion that needed to be developed by life on Chéile was a passion to learn. The people could not be told anything. Knowledge told to a people at creation is knowledge from the supernatural. It carries a weight disproportionate to its value. No words so that no beliefs could be implied from those words. The people on Chéile needed the passion to learn by themselves.

How can a passion for learning be implanted in a people? Each of them needs an obstacle. One that is not too difficult but one that has to be overcome. A serious obstacle and a solution the people can learn by themselves. A combination to allow life to become significantly better when the solution is discovered. A sense of relief so large that the passion to learn even more naturally evolves. A few more problems. A few more solutions achieved from patience, observing, and learning. Then passion to learn becomes permanently ingrained.

The people of the temperate zone were surrounded by dangers from animals that shared their planet. The people in the north needed to find a source of food. Those in the tropics needed food and water, and constantly needed to locate new sources for both.

Those were the obstacles placed in each part of Chéile. Solutions were also placed. The people were formed with a desire and an ability to learn. Part of that ability was the passion. Part was the realization that one needed to pause and observe before action. Part was the patience to plan a course of action, to test, and to validate. It was all a part of the learning process. That was the success of Chéile.

Gaia

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The Guidance is not finished with its work. The people of Chéile have departed their planet and may soon be intercepted by the Guidance. No people anywhere have ever made it this far. The Guidance is hopeful for success but not certain. There is still time for success and there is still time for failure. For now, there are other universes and planets that the Guidance has formed and are watching. There's one in particular that was started before Avalon, before Lemuria, and before Chéile. The people on this planet have not advanced as fast as people on the others did, but they are advancing. They deserve attention of the Guidance.

The planet is called Gaia and is one of several planets revolving around the same sun. Gaia is the only one of those planets where life was placed, so it is the only one being watched. Gaia is the name the Guidance gave to the planet. They placed this suggestion into the minds of the people they created. For some reason, that is not the name those people use to call their planet. Why? The Guidance does not know and it makes no difference.

Recent attention of the Guidance was directed almost entirely toward Chéile. With just cause. They have not paid much attention to Gaia in a long time. They do now. The time for examination has arrived. What differences and similarities are there between Gaia and Avalon, Lemuria, and Chéile?

To start, the three people were placed on Gaia at places so that their eventual meeting would be harder and would take longer. They were not placed close together like on Avalon. Farther apart than that. Even farther apart than on Lemuria and Chéile. They were placed on different continents. The Guidance knew much time would be needed to develop a means to travel from one continent to another. Hopefully time that would allow each people to advance in their development. Advancement that would be more conducive to assimilation once they met. This was the hope when the stone of Gaia was skipped.

Besides the direction that they hoped would occur, the Guidance realized other directions were possible. The longer time could also result in each people being hardened to their ways. The Guidance was ever hopeful that the first way would prevail.

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The people on Gaia were given a *Book of the Blest*. Not exactly the same as on Avalon and not with the same name, but the concept was the same.

The people on Gaia were created with differences. Peoples on all planets created by the Guidance needed to be different.

The Guidance looks at Gaia to see how they have progressed since they last looked. They consider how the *Book of the Blest* has helped or hindered advancement. They ask themselves if the people are stuck in the midst of the stagnant passion that doomed Avalon or if they are they progressing. Have the minor differences in the books been accepted by all people, or are there still two or three conflicting beliefs by the three original groups?

The Guidance looks and sees that there are not three different beliefs as they feared. As far as the Guidance can determine, there are now 85 clearly conflicting beliefs. How could that be? It is not a problem with this many as long as people who believe one way are considerate and accepting of those who don't. The Guidance looks. They are not pleased. The people of Gaia appear to have developed as the people of Avalon did. Acceptance is not the predominant emotion.

The three peoples on Gaia were created basically the same. Physically. There were superficial differences, but not as different as on Lemuria. The Guidance looks to see if each people have developed compassion for the others? Are they all working together?

As far as the Guidance can determine, the three peoples have not yet merged into one. Quite the opposite. They have segmented. The people on Gaia now exist as if the differences are almost innumerable. There are at least 50 different groups, according to the peoples' own opinions. Again, this is OK as long as the people have developed compassion for those unlike them. The Guidance looks. All they can see reminds them of Lemuria.

Perhaps the Guidance should have paid more attention to the development of life on Gaia. But to their comfort, at least Chéile appears to have progressed as hoped. As far as their opinion of Gaia, all that can be said is that clouds

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begin to form in the part of existence where the Guidance resides. An ominous cloud, one the color of deep violet, forms in the center.