

FIFTEEN

It had been several months since the sale to the Mandoteii had been completed. Hostilities had begun between the Panterran and the large green insects. It was still too early in the conflict to determine which of the two races had the advantage. Up until now, the reason for the conflict had escaped general knowledge. Most members of the galactic community attributed the war to bad blood between the two antagonists. The charge levelled by the Mantodeii, namely, that they possessed good title to the property was passed off as a subterfuge. The Panterran, on the other hand, claimed that they possessed good title and argued that they took possession of the planet before the Mantodeii. Public opinion was still against the Panterran for blowing a Mantodeiiian starship out of the sky without bothering to ask questions first.

Paul Phillips was in dreadful shape. He lived in fear that one of the warring factions would discover the duplicate deed and trace it back to him. However, he was not merely concerned with this one battle. Since the passing-off of the first duplicate deed to the Mantodeii, Paul had sold several other false deeds. He had visions of being confronted with his crimes by all the aggrieved parties. He was therefore not too cheerful when Owhindamon dropped in unexpectedly.

"Hello Paul. You look terrible, what's the matter?"

"What do you mean, what's the matter? I'm scared shitless that one of the people I passed bad deeds to, will find out and come after me."

"Oh. Sounds like a legitimate fear. Remember when I told you about learning to use the voice. Well, we have'nt had any lessons for a long while, now. I think this would be as good a time as any other to begin a new lesson."

"I don't want any lessons. What the hell can I learn from mind reading, anyway?"

"Tell you what, just sit back and relax. That's better. Now just take it easy and keep your mind open to me."

"Hello Paul," came a voice from inside his head. Paul was surprised because the voice was not Owhindamon's. When he opened his eyes he was further surprised to find out that he was not in his dining room, but in a totally strange room, and that the voice belonged to a young woman.

"Who are you?" asked Paul.

"My name is Elissa, and I am a friend of Owhindamon's."

"Where are we?"

"We are not really 'anywhere' that you can label as a definite place. You see, I am a life which Owhindamon has recovered from the void."

"What are you talking about? I see and hear you. I can see this room, feel the rug we are standing upon, smell your perfume. How can this not be real?"

"All of this is, in a sense, real. But what you see, feel, hear and smell gains validity through me. These are manifestations of my life; but of my past life. I have no future life, except through Owhindamon. As I said, he has recovered my life and taken it into his consciousness. Within his consciousness, I am alive. He can experience my feelings of love, hatred, jealousy, envy; but he experiences them through the filter of my perception. We are joined, yet separate. I can also commune with the other lives Owhindamon has recovered, and with Owhindamon directly."

"Are you trying to tell me that we -I should say you - are alive in Owhindamon's consciousness only?"

"That is correct. But I am not alone. There are many more who owe their lives to Owhindamon. But, let us get back to the task at hand. Owhindamon asked me to tell you my tale. He thought that my story would help you in your time of trouble. Well, I suppose I should just start at the beginning, so if you'll pardon the lack of formal preface, here we go. As I said, my name is Elissa. I was born in the Rigellian system, on the fourth planet orbiting the sun. On my home world, we lived a quiet, uneventful existence. Long before I was born, the world had become united under a common government, ruled by an hereditary monarch. My father was regent of that land and I was his youngest child.

"We lived in tranquility, and our days passed languidly from one to the next. My father was a wise ruler and beloved by his people. He was at an age where he would soon pass the scepter on to his son, my brother, Edwald.

I had taken a husband and had extended our family line by the addition of a little prince and princess who were the joy of my father's heart. My husband was an industrious and capable member of the government and soon was beloved of my father and brother. In short, both I and every member of my family were content, as were each and every citizen of the realm.

"Our race was one of the oldest in that quadrant of the galaxy. We had discovered space-travel centuries and centuries before the time I was born. We had no need for additional arable land, nor did we lack sufficient natural resources. We therefore engaged in relatively

little space travel. As a result of our parochialism we had little contact with other members of the galactic community. In fact, we came to be known as recluses and were always considered to be outsiders to the rest of the galactic members.

"As is the case in all nations, and in all periods of history, some people are never satisfied. They long to do that which is proscribed; and find excitement in doing that which is forbidden. Our race was no exception. We had explorers and wanderers. Well, over a long enough period of time, news of our world made its way throughout the galaxy. The original tales dealt with our relatively easy life, and the contented nature of our people. But like anything else, a story repeated often enough becomes more and more embellished. Soon, word spread that the people of my world were all rich beyond belief.

"The first starships came into the sky at dawn on our day of thanksgiving. Within minutes, thousands of my people lay dying throughout the capital city. The attack was planned with deadly precision. At the same instant, starships winked into being over every major city and parcelled-out death to our people. Just as quickly as they appeared, so too did they disappear. We knew not who our invaders were, but we were determined to know before they struck again.

My father gathered his leaders together to take counsel. While each one of those present had lost some friend or family member, their thoughts went foremost to the people they governed. The cost in lives had been horrible, and damage to homes and fields had been beyond reckoning - or so it seemed. But my father's stalwart companion - the prime minister - pointed out to the gathering that the invaders had used laser weapons and had spared us the horror of nuclears.

The council developed a plan to monitor all hyper space disturbances up to a parsec away. In addition, real space shunts were to be tracked with great precision so that patterns in travel might be detected. Finally, after some research had been done by the scientists, it was determined that the invading force had come from several different directions, and not from one central location. This fact more than any other, alerted the council to the magnitude of the problem they were facing. The planning and expense involved in co-ordinating an invasion of this size from more than one location was mind-boggling.

Phaser stations were set up on our two moons, and several satellites which were kept in geosynchronous orbit were also equipped with weapons. All major population centers were equipped with laser stations and several strategic locations were equipped with weapons systems as well. Time passed slowly in those first weeks after the initial invasion, as everyone waited for the inevitable second battle to ensue.

Nearly one month to the day of the first invasion, the second battle began. Our advance warning system detected disturbances in hyper space over a very broad area of our quadrant. Some of the engineers were

diadem on his forehead. Most of those present attributed his attire to the last showing of a proud regent before surrender. Imagine their surprise when he stood and flung aside his cloak to reveal full battle gear. I shall never forget his words as he stood before that hushed multitude: "I have called you here not to propose terms of capitulation, as many of you have surmised, but to lead you into battle against this pernicious foe. Too long have I remained in the war-room when I should have led my armies in battle. Together with my sons Edwald and Eomer, we will on the morrow lead a three pronged attack on the enemy. We shall not return until the invader or ourselves perish. I shall appoint my prime minister, Fenwick, as governor of the capital in my stead and shall leave an army at his disposal. I hope that our deeds will be deemed sufficient to future generations," here he stopped and gazed at myself, my son, and daughter. "Rarely have our people been tested as they are now. We must accept the test and prove our mettle. Prepare now, for tomorrow we do battle."

A cheer went up in the throne room when he finished, and I saw his friends, men whom I had known my entire life, crying as they shouted his name over and over. The word quickly went out that we would not surrender, but would fight, with the King himself leading the battle. Almost immediately, the city erupted in a wild frenzy as people began cheering and bells started clamoring.

It was the proudest day of my life, but it was also the day that I learned the terrible price of monarchy. It was the first time that I realized the King really was the servant of his people and that he would forfeit his life, if necessary, to ensure their freedom.

On the following morning I bid farewell to my husband, brother and father. Each was in the vanguard of an immense army, and as they advanced in their separate directions, I waved my farewells to each in turn.

The news from the fronts was encouraging, as the three armies advanced against the enemy. Wherever they went, the invaders were repulsed. Indeed, it seemed as if the daily troop increases the invaders received were merely sent to face their death. Slowly, we began to recoup the territory we had lost. Within several weeks, we had pushed the enemy far into the remote areas of the planet. It began to look as though our armies would return home after a few more weeks.

People were once again smiling, and plans were being made to welcome home loved ones. Just then, enemy re-enforcements arrived. Instead of traveling in ships, these came in a sort of blue smoke. They were not in appearance like the original invaders but instead, looked like large cats. They were matchless fighters and totally fearless. Their numbers were not large, but they were each like 100 of the original enemy. They soon had the invaders regrouped, and were leading effective counter-attacks on all three fronts. The battle picked up intensity, and momentum shifted from one side to the next. It appeared that we were once again at a stalemate. Fenwick was not so sure that the sides were evenly matched, however. We could not be certain of

skeptical of the validity of the data, due to the magnitude of the disturbances. Warnings were issued to the probable entry locations, and the planet was in readiness for the second leg of the invasion. Just as was predicted, the fighters burst into the sky with lasers flaring. This time, they met with returned fire. For nearly one hour ships entered the atmosphere, fired off several rounds of laser fire, and were blasted out of existence. Just when the pace of the battle seemed to lag, another development was reported from the remote locations. A different type of ship began to enter the atmosphere, fly low, and jettison pods containing soldiers onto the planet's surface.

Our preparations stood us in good stead, however. Within a short period of time our ground fighters were engaged in armed combat with the invaders. The battle raged for weeks, with new invaders replacing their fallen comrades. Their numbers never seemed to diminish, but ours were gradually succumbing to the continued fighting. Each day new fighters entered our airspace, and were blasted away. Each day new ground crews landed and slowly made their way toward the planet's population centers. Our ground forces were drawn back in an attempt to protect the cities. Try as we might, we were forced to fight a defensive war and at the dawn of each new day we gave up further ground to the encroaching armies of the enemy.

Our people began to be discouraged, and with each new day the general populace clamored for further action from my father, the King. His counselors were of no use to him now. Only the King was responsible to the people, and he knew as did they all, that some action was required of him. He urged the soldiers to be steadfast, and tried to give courage to his generals. He issued battle plans far into the night, and after the last of the aides had gone to bed, went to the hospitals to visit the wounded. My brother and husband assisted him when possible, but he insisted that they get rest for the exertions of the coming day.

The battle dragged on day after day, week after week, and still the invaders came. Slowly, the will to fight came to be lost. People began talking about an honorable surrender with what terms we could negotiate, before the entire populace was devastated. My father's exertions redoubled, but the strain was beginning to take its toll upon him. He aged almost before our eyes, and we feared he would negotiate for terms.

He called a meeting of his advisers nearly four months after this phase of the invasion began. Most of those summoned expected to hear terms of surrender discussed. I must confess that I was one of those who were so inclined. I could not fault my father in this, for he had exerted himself mightily these past several months. Indeed, most people were amazed at his fortitude and determination during the war.

My father, although born to the nobility, was really a very simple man. Rarely did he display the tokens of his office. When the assembly gathered, many were taken aback by his formal dress. He sat on his throne and was adorned in his ceremonial robes, scepter in hand and

where the cat creatures were coming from, and when they would arrive. He feared some new treachery from these creatures and doubled the sentries within the capital.

The creatures did not attack the the capital, however. Instead, they massed their numbers and chose one of the armies to attack. My brother Edmund was their first choice. The cat creatures rallied their charges, and armed with portable lasers, attacked Edmund from three sides. His armies fought valiantly, but constantly retreated. The cat creatures eventually performed a flanking manuever, and Edmund was surrounded. His army continued fighting for four days after being surrounded. Finally, the news was brought to the capital that his army was defeated and that no prisoners were taken.

The joy that filled the city only weeks before was now replaced with as profound a sorrow. Throughout the city a sense of desolation and foreboding gripped the populace. All hope seemed to have fled with the news of the fall of Edmund's army. Fenwick tried to restore the spirits of the people, but to no avail. I must confess that I was little help to Fenwick, for I stayed in my chambers, disconsolate about the loss of my brother and dreading that my losses would not end with only his death.

The day after the death of my brother came the word that the enemy armies were again on the march. Their location was relatively simple: they would either march against my husband or against my father. As it turned out, they chose to march against my husband. Again, their tactic was to surround him on three sides, and try to outflank him on the fourth. My husband was not totally unprepared for their measures, however. He had manuevered himself into a valley surrounded on three sides by mountains. The enemy armies could come over the hills on two sides and against him from the front, but his back was protected by an impassable wall of rock. In this way, he was able to keep the enemy from surrounding him and completely annihilating his army. His tactic, while preventing an easy victory by the enemy, was vulnerable in another way. His men were short on rations, and it would be a matter of days before they ran out of food.

The enemy played a game of cat and mouse. They would attack, then retreat; attack then retreat, never exposing too much of its position to the strength of my husband's army. I think my husband must have hoped for help from my father. Perhaps he did not know my brother was already dead, and looked for help from him as well. He could not have known that my father was also pinned down by the enemy, although they did not throw as much of their strength at my father as they did my husband. In any event, help from my father was not forthcoming. Finally, after nearly a week of playing games with the enemy, my husband's armies burst forth from their trap and attacked their captors. They fought bravely for nearly two days, but ultimately the sheer numbers of the enemy overcame them.

At last, there was only one hope remaining for my people. The armies of the enemy had been severely depleted from the battles they fought

against my brother and husband, yet they still outnumbered my father's armies by nearly three to one. This time they did not try the same tactic they had against the other two armies. Instead, they split into two distinct groups and went at my father's army in two long columns. There was danger in this tactic if my father could break through the enemy ranks and then meet them with a column of his own. In fact, this was exactly what he accomplished, so that at the end of the first day of fighting, the enemy was badly beaten and had retreated several kilometers away from their positions earlier in the day.

On the second day, the enemy formed a phalanx and came at my father with laser cannon blazing in the forefront, with the infantry following behind. Inexorably, the phalanx made its way against my father's troops. Farther and farther back my father retreated, spreading his army around the enemy as he went. Finally, as my father's troops came up against the edge of a forest, he gave a signal and his troops came crashing against the enemy. The invaders then realised that they had fallen into a trap. My father's troops attacked relentlessly and soon had the invading army on the run. By the time the daylight departed, we had won a great victory and crushed the enemies troops.

That night, the town was jubilant. Everyone was in a festive mood, and the guards on duty may have had too much wine to drink. But Fenwick was glad of the victory, and was himself careworn. No one was aware of the blue smoke and the creatures that stepped out from it. That night, the enemy invaded the city. Fenwick was killed, as were the sentries. I and my children were captured and held hostage by the invaders.

On the next day, my father was issued an ultimatum: surrender or be responsible for the death of his daughter and grandchildren.

The enemy had played their hand adroitly; my father had no choice but to surrender. He and the remainder of his army were allowed safe passage into the city. Upon their arrival, my father asked to see myself and the children before surrendering the planet. We were marched outside, under heavy guard, so that our safety could be determined. Having seen that we were in fact safe, my father surrendered to the invaders. Holograms were made of the event so that the citizens of the galactic community could witness the surrender of the planet. I daresay that the narrative described my people as the aggressor, and the cat people as champions of the original invaders.

7H- After the holograms were made, all our soldiers were herded into the center of the marketplace with my father at their lead. I shall never forget what happened next, as long as I live. With our people defenceless in the center of the square, the cat people took aim with their laser cannon and cut down every man. The leader of the cat people approached me with a smirk on his face. He offered me the choice of dying now, or of being sold into slavery. I spit in his face as he spoke to me, and screamed that I would rather die a thousand deaths than see him another day. He merely laughed and declared that I and my children would be sold into slavery. We were

to communicate with me.

At about mid-morning, one of the guards came to the cage and removed one of the shaggy creatures from the cage. When the creature crossed to our side of the cage to make his exit, he stopped in front of me

and reached his hand out to touch my face. I did not recoil from him as he touched my cheek and straightened-out my hair. It seemed as if he were showing the kind of concern a mother might show for one of her children, so gentle was his touch. I had no doubt, from that moment on, that these creatures were indeed sentient.

They led the creature to a chair not far from the cage, and in full view of every occupant in the cage. They tied him, rather harshly, to the chair and began to question him in a tongue unknown to me. After awhile the guards began to grow restless when their questions went unanswered. Still, my new friend would not respond to their inquiries. They then lost patience and began to strike him with their fists. When this treatment produced no better results, they used their claws on him. It was obvious that the creature was in great pain: it was equally obvious that he would not answer their questions. Finally, they began to cudgel him with a club, with each guard taking a turn at striking him.

I could not bear to witness this depravity; I called out for the guards and demanded that they leave him alone. For their part, they merely laughed at me and continued to torture my friend. It was then that I noticed the other creatures in the cage. Each one was as silent as he who was being beaten, yet each one wore a look of deepest pain upon his countenance. As their friend winced, so winced they. As he sought to deflect a blow, so did they seek to avoid some new punishment. My earlier thoughts of their sentience began to fade: it now appeared to me that they were merely mimics with no powers of reason.

I could not tell how long the creature could endure such pain. Finally, he expired with a sigh. At that very instant one of the other creatures in the cell sat bolt upright and a film came over his eyes. In a few moments he was back to normal, although it appeared that his co-ordination was slightly out of joint. The children and I sat in our corner of the cage and wept, not so much from a sense of loss but from a knowledge of the suffering the creature had endured. Just then, I thought I heard a voice somewhere; and turned my attention toward whence it came. But the voice had grown silent, and I could not make out what it said.

That evening, as I lay down with the children for the night, I was startled when someone called me by name. "Elissa," said the voice, "do not be troubled by Ashweredon's death."

I nearly jumped out of my skin with fear, when I heard my name called out. I looked round the cage frantically to see who had called me,

That night, after dinner, as the children and I grouped together for warmth, one of the animals gave us a cover. I was quite taken aback by this action: I did not expect the creature to respond with kindness, nor could I determine from whence the blanket came. Nevertheless, I appreciated the gesture and tried by my smile and nod

lead to the animal's kennels where we would wait in preparation for our journey into slavery.

I suppose I must have been in shock for the next several days, for I remember little of what happened until we boarded an alien spaceship. I cannot even remember what type of ship it was. I lay in a stupor tending to the children as best I could, and seeing that they ate their meals and cleaned themselves. I cannot remember how much time passed on that ship, or to what destination we were headed. Finally, we arrived at a planet and disembarked from the ship. The atmosphere was breathable, but it was frightfully hot. We were escorted to a holding pen and were locked inside. I was alarmed to find out that we were not alone, for inside the cage were creatures unlike anything I had seen before. The children and I were terrified, which amused our captors a great deal.

The other creatures sharing our cage did not bother us, and after a while the children and I became accustomed to their presence. We did not see our captors for the remainder of the day. As night approached, we were given food and drink and straw was thrown in the cage, apparently for bedding.

As the sun set, the air temperature became quite cold and the children and I huddled together in an attempt to keep warm. The children finally finally fell asleep, but I was unable to get any real sleep. I spent most of that night on guard duty: alert to any movement by our captors or the creatures with whom we shared a prison.

A second day passed much like our first on this planet. Again, we did not see our captors at all during the day. Our fellow captives kept to themselves, but I began to develop the notion that perhaps they were not merely insensate animals, as I had first imagined. They appeared to have developed a fairly elaborate sign language, and they made a series of grunts which could have passed for speech, I suppose. Also, they appeared to co-operate on a series of tasks which they carried out in the cage. I am also fairly certain that they were evaluating my behavior at various times during the day, but this was more a feeling than a determinable fact.

of thanks to convey my feelings. The creature ambled to the other side of the cage and sat, immoveable. I slept that night, somewhat more puzzled than the night before by our cellmates.

As I slept that night, I had a feeling that someone was talking to me in my sleep. I could not remember any words or phrases distinctly upon awakening, but I could not shake the feeling that someone was trying

to communicate with me.

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but all I could see were the creatures huddled together on their side of the cage. "Who are you," I whispered as I continued my visual search of the area.

"I am a friend; do not be alarmed. You cannot see me talking, for I am communicating with you directly by means of my mind. Don't be alarmed; calm yourself. As I said earlier, do not be troubled by Ashweredon's death."

I was incredulous. I could not accept the fact that someone could talk to me through my mind. I was beginning to doubt my sanity, when I heard the voice again. "Please believe me; I am sitting across from you at this instant. To prove the validity of what I say, I will get up, stretch, walk to your side of the cage and then sit down. Watch now."

To my surprise, one of the creatures at the opposite end of the cage stood up, stretched, walked to my side of the cage, and then sat down. The look on my face must have been one of utter amazement, for when he sat down, he burst out laughing. At that, all the other creatures in the cage laughed in unison. It must have been contagious, for I began laughing as well. I laughed so hard, tears rolled down my cheeks. The laughter felt good though, for it had been weeks since I had anything to laugh about.

"I trust you believe me now? came the query. Good. Let me introduce myself; I am called Owhindamon. These are my friends Ahiradow, Hrashinda, Whoosheera, and Owhindar. We are captives of the Panterran, or the cat people, as you call them. This is our home planet, Owhinda. The Panterran invaded us some fifteen months ago to establish a game preserve. We are spies for our people. We were captured to secure information for the war effort. The Panterran do not know of our telepathic powers, so we learn valuable information while in captivity. There are risks involved in collecting information as you recently witnessed. We are all volunteers, however, and knew of the risks when we accepted our assignments."

"He is at peace in the bosom of the people. He did not die as you know the meaning of that term. He is right now in our midst. My friend, Hrashinda, saved him from the void just as he expired. As a matter of fact, Ashweredon would like to speak to you now."

This latest idea was too far-fetched for me to believe. I had seen the one they called Ashweredon die before my eyes. I had heard him breathe his last sigh; watched as the pain and care ebbed from his countenance. Yet, just as Owhindamon had said, a voice began talking to me.

"Hello, Elissa. Don't be troubled on my account. As Owhindamon told you, I am not dead, at least not in the way your people commonly use

What happened next occurred with such rapidity that I can barely sort out the sequence of events or the details. I remember thinking that I was about to die, and feeling the pain of the laser ripping through my flesh. I also saw Owhindamon and the others come behind the guard. Owhindamon realized that I had been hurt, and was focusing on both the guard and myself. He appeared to be trying to make a decision between turning his attention upon the guard or upon me. The others had already overpowered the guard, so that Owhindamon turned his attention to me.

The pain became almost unendurable, and my mind began to fog over. My breathing was becoming more rapid and shallow. I fell to the floor in a puddle of liquid. I realized that the liquid was my own blood, and was seized with insurmountable fear. I was now certain that I would die and a great longing for life came over me. My strength continued to diminish, and I could barely keep my eyes open. I heard Owhindamon; he was speaking slowly but very clearly.

"Elissa, Elissa, Elissa. Do not fail yet, I must get prepared. Hang on - do not fail: ELISSA."

I began to drift and could no longer concentrate on my pain, the blood oozing from my wounds, or Owhindamon's voice.

"ELISSA! ELISSA! Please hang on, I am almost ready."

I then felt a sudden surge of pain which rocked me to consciousness. My eyes focused on Owhindamon as he prodded my side with a stick. The pain was excruciating, but to my amazement, he prodded me again. If I had the strength left, I would have screamed at him to stop - I thought he was my friend but he treated me like this when the pain came I wanted to end it but he kept the pain coming in unendurable waves he would not leave me alone he kept the pain coming LEAVE ME ALONE GODDAMN IT LEAVE ME ALONE YOU SON OF A BITCH LEAVE ME ALONE TO DIE LEAVE ME ALONE LEAVE ME ALONE LEAVE ME ALONE ALONE ALONE.

He called me then, and I heard his voice and grabbed onto it as the last foothold to my life. Then it happened.

For a brief second I was out of my body. I floated incorporeal in the air, utterly free and without pain. As I floated I felt as if I had a thousand, no a million, eyes. I could see my body supine on the ground. I could see Owhindamon with a smile on his face staring right at me while I floated in the air; he was wiping tears from his face as he held a stick in his other hand. I could see the others as they held their prisoner. I could see the children wailing as they looked at my dead body. I could see through the walls of the building to the battle going on in the courtyard. I could see beyond the courtyard to the fields adjoining ours, I could see the battle raging all across the planet. I could see the combatants dying, fighting, performing heroic deeds. I could see into the forests where Owhindamon's people

the word. Just before I expired, Hrashinda plucked my consciousness out from the void and incorporated my being into himself. More importantly, he also provided a home to those elements of consciousness which I had stored during my lifetime. I can tell you were troubled by the pain which I experienced at the end. It was only of brief duration, and could be withstood. I am fine now, and am past the grasp of either pain or suffering. Go always with peace in the bosom of the People."

"Don't be troubled any longer, Elissa," came a voice which sounded like Owhindamon's. "Know that you have friends here, and that your confinement will not be endured in solitude. Rest now, and dream good dreams. You will feel better at the break of day."

The day began hot and muggy. In the camp, the guards were unusually restless and paced nervously outside our cage. Sounds of a battle, not too far off, began shortly after daybreak. Owhindamon's voice came to me after the first sounds of battle erupted.

"Our people have begun a counter-assault. The battle will lead to this camp in a short while. Make sure that you and the children lie low and do not move when the assault begins. Get under the sleeping mats and blankets for further protection. I will call to you when the time is right for fleeing from this cage. Above all else, listen for my call, for our time for escape will be limited. Now, get under the mats and wait for me.

The children and I waited under the mats for what seemed like an eternity. Outside, the sounds of battle grew closer and at one point in time, it seemed like the battle raged directly outside our cage. The smell of burning wood filled the air, and the sweat and fear of the combatants was wafted on the breeze. In time, the sounds of battle moved away. Still, the children and I waited for Owhindamon's summons. Finally, the voice in my head went off.

"Elissa, come out from the mat, and walk slowly to the cage entrance."

The children and I removed the mats and crawled to the entrance of the cage. I could see no one inside or outside of the cage. Since I had no further instructions, the children and I waited next to the entrance of our prison. Owhindamon then told us to run to the building across from the cage, and hide inside until he got there. We immediately ran the short distance to the building across from the cage and went inside. It appeared as if no one else was in the building, so we went toward the back of the building and sat in a dark corner.

In a short while, we heard footsteps which I naturally assumed to belong to Owhindamon. I jumped up to meet my friend at the doorway, when too late, I discovered that it was a Panterran guard. He turned his laser upon me and fired.

lived. I could see the old people caring for the youngsters or telling them stories. I could see the mothers suckling their young; I could see the children playing their games in the trees. I could see beyond the planet to the stars themselves; could turn my attention to any one of the planets; could see the people living on them if I so chose. I could see and touch and go to anyplace in the universe that I chose. Finally, I wanted to come back to Owhindamon and the children and my dead self.

When I returned everything was as it had been before, save one thing. Try as I might, I could find no trace of Owhindamon. I began to grow alarmed when I could not see him. His voice came to me then more clear and melodious than before.

"Elissa, raise your hand and look down."

I did as he instructed, but could not understand what I saw. Instead of the arm and hand I expected to see, I saw a hand that looked very much like Owhindamon's. The thumb too far removed from the other fingers; the fur on the backside of the hand that shaggy, bright orange-red; the fingernails too long and unkempt. I did not understand what was happening.

"Go to the puddle of water outside this building, and look at your reflection."

I walked out the door and over to the puddle of water to which Owhindamon directed me. I edged up to the water, and cautiously bent over to catch a glimpse of my reflection. Looking me in the face was Owhindamon, not the form I had come to associate with 'me.'

I thought to myself that some joke was being played upon me, that my senses had somehow been tricked. I turned and walked back into the building. The 'me' that I had come to know was lying dead on the floor. I walked over to the body and felt for a pulse. There was none. I placed my head against the chest. I was greeted by no swell of the breast to indicate breath; no heart beat in its steady rythmn within that lifeless body.

"I am dead or insane - or both, I thought to myself.

"You are neither," came the reply from Owhindamon. "You are within me in the same way that Ashweredon is in Hrashinda. Your consciousness is alive and will continue to be alive, but you now share a body with me and many others as well."

How can this be, I thought to myself. How can I share a body but have my own conscociusness. I shall go insane for sure! I will never have any privacy trapped as I am with a mindreader in the same body.

"Don't make problems where none exist. You will have privacy, as do each of us within my body. All people need privacy, and there are times when each of us wishes to be left alone. My people have been telepathic for thousands of years. Over that long stretch of time, we have developed rules and methods of maintaining privacy. I cannot enter a person's mind unless they allow me - only in instances of extreme emergency do we enter a consciousness without permission. In your case, I deemed it necessary to enter your mind because of your need for companionship and also to be credible when I issued instructions for the battle today. We were surprised by your appearance the other day. We have planned this invasion for several months, and if we did not warn you successfully the invasion might not go as planned. I am truly sorry that your body has died, but I think you will grow to like it with my friends and I.

"Then I am truly with you, now" I asked to Owhindamon.

"Yes, you are with the People for now and forever."

I think you know the rest of Owindamon's story, Paul. He escaped from his planet along with a few of his friends. After the Owhinda had mounted that attack against the Panterran, their world was devastated by nuclears. The Panterran do not take knidly to losing battles.

As for myself, I have made friends with the many people sharing Owhindamon's consciousness. I have given my counsel to Owhindamon when he asks for it, and sometimes I give it unbidden. I am one of the only women in our little community as it were, and I try to keep the area tidy and neat. You see, if I may use a parable to explain our shared consciousness, there are many spaces for people to occupy. I have given myself the function of keeping the spaces neat and separate. I suppose that my job is just an extension of my personality in my previous life. It's really funny how little has changed since I have been with Owhindamon, especially when I was worried that I would not have my own existence.

My children are grown now, and I see them occasionally. They both know that Owhindamon had rescued me. I have asked Owhindamon if we might take them in when their time to die approaches. He has never really answered me, but I have found out over the years that space is not given to everyone. Only those who are necessary for the future of the People are granted this gift. Those who cannot contribute to the People's progress die just as you or I normally would. One thing that has always bothered me is that I cannot see why I was chosen. When I ask Owhindamon, he does not say but indicates that I will know someday. Anyway, the children are grown now. My son helps Owhindamon and his people in their fight against the Panterran. My daughter has become an official in the Federation. Both of them, in their own ways, are trying to right the wrongs done by the Panterran and their kind within the Galactic community. I am very proud of both of them."

"I don't know what to say, Elissa. When I stop and think about your

problems, mine seem sort of insignificant. I admire you greatly for what you've been through and how you've borne up under your difficulties. I just hope that I can do as well as you have. It sometimes seems like I am completely alone and that I am totally unaware of what to do or how to do anything. Thank you for being here when I needed you."

Elissa touched her hand to Paul's cheek, and then kissed him on the lips. "I will be here when you need me, just tell Owhindamon and he will show you the way to me. He's getting pretty restless by the way, I'll bet he wants to go to Borneo. He's got a girlfriend there, you know. I shouldn't tell you this, but sometimes it gets a little hard to maintain complete privacy, if you know what I mean. We can keep him waiting for a while longer, if you like."

Paul awoke to find Owhindamon smiling his gap-toothed smile. "What did you think of Elissa, my friend?"

"She is a remarkable woman. If I didn't know better, I'd think I was in love."

"I know what you mean my friend. Sometimes it is very difficult to adhere to strict privacy, is it not?"