

TWELVE

The day began in much the same way as many others of late. Wake up at five or six AM, fix a quick breakfast, examine several galactic surveys, compare selling prices, meet with prospective buyers, haggle over selling terms, contact Nick with selling prices and requests for deeds. At the end of the day, retire at one or two in the morning and prepare for the next day. The process repeated itself day after day, week after week and still it seemed that there was an endless amount of work to be accomplished; an endless amount of worlds to be sold. Paul was almost relieved when a message from Nick Sawyer appeared on his screen.

"Will be at your house within 15 minutes with deeds - Nick."

"Well, its the first time I'll be happy to see Mr. Saran Wrap himself," thought Paul.

"Hello Paul, how are you?" said Nick as he emerged from the blue fog.

"Tired, but I'll live. How've you been, Nick."

"I'm flattered by your demonstration of concern."

"Forget it, I was just being polite. I really don't care if you melt, Sawyer."

"I can't melt, I'm not made of plastic you know."

"Could've fooled me, Sawyer. You look like a cheap grade of vinyl."

"Well, my skin is more resinous than yours, but I am organic."

"How comforting. Well, I'm sure you didn't come all this way just to trade pleasantries with me. What's up?"

"I've brought the deeds with me. There's quite a few of them; it appears as if you've been pretty busy. Fleshrender sends his regards, he informed me that you handled yourself in a professional manner."

"That's real nice of him to say so. Imagine that, here I am talking to a plastic man and being complimented by an overgrown alley cat. And they say the age of romance is dead. Nick, on a more serious note,



I'm going to be an old man before I sell off the entire galaxy. I've been working 20 hours a day, and I've sold what amounts to only a handful of properties. Do you have any ideas on how we can speed-up the process? While you're at it, you had better think of a way of transporting these deeds to me in bulk, you won't be able to hand-deliver each deed."

"Let me address each of these problems separately. First, as to the problem of selling the properties, you must remember that your sales up till now have been mostly for resort/recreational properties. These are the choice locations in the galaxy and are sold on a one-at-a-time basis. When you begin selling the commodity-type properties you will be selling them in bulk. Don't worry about the sheer volume of numbers, you are making remarkably good progress.

"As to the second point about transferral of deeds, I must confess that I have'nt given it much thought. Perhaps we could transport them to you without my having to personally deliver each deed. I'll think about it and get back to you."

"OK, that sounds fair enough on both counts. Did you remember to bring the deed for the Earth?"

"Of course I did, its here with the rest of the deeds."

"Here are the deeds, and here's the earth deed. Your commissions exceed the value of the Earth already. Paul, maybe you should take some time off. The dollar volume of sales you've made is more than 20% better than we anticipated. I can arrange a trip to any place in the galaxy for you; you really could use the time to unwind. When you get back, you'll feel much better."

"Thanks Nick, but I think I'll continue working. To tell you the truth, I'd much rather get this sale over with and then I'll relax.

"OK, suit yourself. Well, I've got to be going. I have some reports to file, and a few locations to inspect. I'll se you in a few weeks. Good bye, Paul."

"Bye, Nick. See you around."

Paul sat down to examine some printouts as Nick vaporized in a blue cloud. For the first time since he had met Nick Sawyer, Paul had the feeling that perhaps Nick had some redeeming qualities after all. This business of selling the galaxy could be very complicated. If only there were clear-cut issues involved. If only there were good guys and bad guys. The trouble was that people like Nick Sawyer kept popping-up. It was easy to hate Sawyer; but just when he thought life



was becoming less complicated, Paul realized that Sawyer possessed a modicum of human decency.

Paul was also bothered by the plans he made with Owhindamon. They decided to evaluate each sale of a planet on a case-by-case basis. Where the sale would not harm the planet, or could possibly improve the chances of intelligent life developing or being nurtured on the planet, no duplicate deed would be drawn up. Where a planet could be harmed or life threatened, a duplicate deed would be made and alternate owners found. The amount of time necessary to analyse each sale was staggering. And yet, the time element did not bother Paul appreciably. What really worried him was the uncertainty of the process. How could he and Owhindamon determine the fate of a planet; so much rested on the judgement of two men. It was a staggering responsibility and began to take its toll on Paul. Finally, he was concerned that on the planets where multiple ownership could be claimed, armed conflict would arise. He found it very difficult to accept that warfare would improve the chances of a planet's nurturing intelligent life. Ultimately, Paul had to rely on good intentions and he could not help but think of the adage about "the road to hell being lined with good intentions."

"Yes, my friend, faith is a difficult concept to deal with. We are taught throughout our entire lifetimes to rely on our powers of reason. We are reminded daily that our lives are governed by our senses. And the process of faith cannot be governed by the senses or made more accessible through our powers of reason. But, if I had told you two years ago that you could converse with me without speech and across an entire galaxy, would you have believed me? Learn to trust what your heart tells you to be right. You cannot always have absolute proof in this life. Open your heart, do what you know to be right, strive to do your best; more than that cannot be asked of you. I shall not fault you if you follow these precepts."

"I am so afraid of making the wrong choices, Owhindamon. There are so many lives hanging in the balance; I don't think I am up to the task before me. You seem so confident, so sure of what you are doing. I have no idea of whether what I am doing is right or wrong."

"Do you think I am sure all the time? You give me too much credit. I am not the omniscient one; I am much the same as you."

"You aren't though. You make a decision, and implement it; I vacillate out of fear. One minute I am sure, the next I am plagued by doubts."

"We are different in this regard, Paul. I have looked at pain, death and suffering for so long that I know that these things are the worst that can befall a people. Where I can tip the balance even so little that I minimize these things, then I consider a victory to be achieved. It is a small victory perhaps, but it is one worth fighting



"Well, until I met you, we had no one to help us carry out our plans. None of the People could have implemented this plan - we are all supposed to be dead. But, on a more personal level, I needed a friend at this juncture of my life. I also needed someone who could keep alive our heritage and culture, who could share our sorrows and joys. You see Paul, after we have passed, our lives must be remembered; our works be given the validity that only our friends can impart. You are therefore a gift from providence to me in my time of need. I have had my faith restored by you, and as a result I am readied for my final test."

"Hey, Owhindamon, you're starting to worry me with that kind of talk."

"Don't be alarmed, my friend, its nothing serious."

"Tomorrow I pick up the document copier, will you be stopping by?"

"Yes, I'll be there. In the meantime I've got business to attend to."

"How is nighttime in Borneo?"

"Quite pleasant, thank-you. I'll see you tomorrow, Paul."

"Good night, Owhindamon, and thank-you."

"Good night my friend, and sleep in the bosom of the People."



for. You look for absolute victory, and I know that such a thing is unattainable. We live in an imperfect world my friend, and while we may strive to eradicate suffering; we know that we never can. It is the measure of a man's life to realize that he cannot achieve an end to suffering, but to strive as if each action he performs will in fact eliminate it once and for all."

"I can't do that, Owhindamon. I can't live by that code. You know me too well; I cannot have my hope shattered constantly. I can't fight and know that I will never win. I can't send an entire planet to war and hope that somehow some amount of good will come out of the struggle."

"But tell me, Paul, can you see millions of intelligent creatures sent to their death for no good reason? Do you believe that one group can take possession of another's homeland?"

"Of course not. You know how I feel about these things; we've talked about them often enough."

"Well, the solution we have developed might not be the perfect answer; but it is the best we can think of. It might cost lives and involve many years of struggle, but it is better than the alternative. If you believe in it, put aside your doubts and misgivings and pursue your work."

"It is a bitter pill you ask me to swallow."

"It is the same pill every man must take sooner or later. Some accept it willingly and acquire wisdom thereby; others fight and rail against fate - but in the end each must accept it. Choose Paul, for choose you must; it is the common lot of humanity and that which ultimately binds us together."

"I wish this task could be given to someone else; I don't want to take this poison. I must accept though; I hope I gain the wisdom you speak of for I am sorely in need of it."

"Providence has a way of watching out for us, Paul. I am sure that the assistance you require will be given you when needed. I came into your life unexpectedly, unlooked-for. What you don't realize is, that the same applied to me when I met you."

"How could you possibly need me?"