

After Earth

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===== 1. Plotting a Course =====

“Where do we go from here?” Golan Trevize wondered aloud.

He, Janov Pelorat and Bliss were back aboard the Far Star, and currently gathered in the pilot-room. Their search for Earth, the legendary human homeworld, had brought them to an underground base on the radioactive Earth’s oversized moon. They had been treated hospitably by the base’s leader; an ancient robot named Daneel Olivaw. Daneel had chosen to burden himself (so Trevize thought of it) with the Solarian child Fallom Bander. Now that their quest was over, they had to decide on their next move.

“I shall be sorry to go,” said Pelorat. “I found our host’s conversation quite stimulating, and his records of the origins of humanity are unique and comprehensive. I could happily remain here the rest of my life. As long,” he added with a smile at Bliss, “as you were by my side, my dear.”

Bliss returned Pelorat’s smile, and discreetly held his hand. Discreetly, for she knew that Trevize was willing to suffer only so much of their displays of affection. “I know you could, Pel. But I have been away from Gaia/us for too long as it is. As much as I enjoyed staying here, and as much as I will miss Fallom, I long to return there.”

Trevize was not overly eager to return to Gaia himself, but Bliss’s desire to return there was (for the moment) in accord with his own desire to leave Daneel’s haven. He was sure that Bliss had noticed his joy at being back on board the Far Star and preparing for departure. No doubt she knew the cause as well, for he had made no secret of his unease where Fallom was concerned.

Trevize said, “As it happens, our options are severely limited. We learned on Comporellon that Mayor Branno has spread a description of us to every world in the Foundation. If we go to any Foundation world, we will lose possession of the Far Star. I’ve grown rather fond

of the ship, and I would just as soon not have it taken from me. On the other hand, if we go to any world outside the Foundation, we are just as likely to lose the ship, and less likely to retain our freedom. That being the case, I can only think of three possible destinations.”

“One being Gaia, of course,” said Bliss.

“One being Gaia,” Trevize confirmed. “As far as I know, it’s the only world in the Galaxy that does not covet this ship, either on its own behalf or on behalf of Mayor Branno. The second choice is Terminus. It’s been six months since I left, and any animus Mayor Branno bore me will have faded, especially if I return with the ship. I still have my position in the Council, and since I was instrumental in Branno’s triumph at Sayshell, my political future is assured. The third choice is Comporellon.”

“And the waiting arms of Mitza Lizalor,” said Bliss with amusement.

Trevize scowled briefly. He had never appreciated Bliss’s constant disparagement of his romantic interludes. He said, “I did promise her that I would return with the ship once my mission was complete.”

Bliss said with mock astonishment, “And you mean to live up to that promise? I was under the impression that men said all sorts of things they didn’t mean to get their way with women.”

Pelorat was frowning uncertainly. (He was always uncertain when he frowned, Trevize noticed. He did it so rarely; he tended to be out of practice.) “Now Bliss, that’s hardly fair. I’ve known Golan for some time, and known of him for longer than that, and I’ve always found him to be an honest man. Too honest, perhaps, given his choice of a career in politics. I have no doubt that he meant what he said to Minister Lizalor, and that he still does.”

“My apologies, Trevize,” said Bliss. “I’m afraid I have a tendency toward irreverence where men are concerned.”

“So I’ve noticed,” said Trevize. “I’ve also noticed that it seems to be directed exclusively toward me and never toward Janov.” He sighed and added, “Very well, apology accepted. I’d be happier, though, if I thought you’d be less irreverent in the future.”

“As soon as you return me to Gaia, you won’t have to suffer my irreverence any further.”

“That’s the best reason I’ve heard yet for returning there,” said Trevize. “Gaia it is, then.” So saying, he placed his hands on the ship’s computer console. The engines powered up, and the ship began moving towards the airlock leading back to the moon’s surface.

==== 2. The Lost World =====

The Far Star emerged from Daneel’s sublunar base and began its ascent away from the surface of the Moon. Pelorat, sitting in the pilot-room with Trevize and Bliss, gazed longingly at the Earth showing in the viewscreen. The sunlit side didn’t look quite like any other world he had seen. With no plants and animals to keep the atmosphere in balance, the oxygen was being chemically bonded with the ground (so Daneel had explained). By now, there was scarcely any free oxygen left. The same was happening more slowly to the atmospheric nitrogen. Eventually, Earth would have only a thin trace of atmosphere, just like the Spacer world of Melpomenia.

“Why so sad, Pel?”

Pelorat sighed. “Because, my dear, in a sense my goal in life has proved a failure.”

Bliss was puzzled. “But your goal in life was to locate the original homeworld of humanity, and you’ve succeeded. There it is.”

“I didn’t just want to locate it. I wished to study it. I wished to walk upon its surface and search for clues of what life was like there back in the days before interstellar travel was discovered.”

Trevize said, "Surely Daneel was able to give you all the information you needed about that. You just got done saying that his records of the origins of humanity were unique and comprehensive, and that you could happily remain here the rest of your life."

"True, they are unique and comprehensive, as far as they go. Unfortunately, for my purposes, they don't go far enough. As old as Daneel is, he still can't tell me everything I want to know about Earth.

"You must understand that Daneel himself is far from well-informed about the details of Earth's history. He was, so he tells me, built by Spacers from Aurora, that world we visited with the feral dogs. As long ago as that was, it was still over a thousand years after the discovery of interstellar travel. Also, the Spacers were contemptuous of Earth, and deliberately eliminated most of their information about their world of origin. Daneel himself was built in a Spacer enclave on Earth that had as little contact with the rest of the planet as possible, and he was brought to Aurora within months. He only made two brief trips to Earth before it became radioactive, and he had little time to learn details of its ancient history."

Pelorat sighed again. "All my life, I've dreamed of locating the Earth, and beginning the work of unearthing and preserving its past. Now that I've finally found it, I know that will never happen. With Earth as radioactive as it is, archeological fieldwork is impossible. Apart from the bare outlines preserved by Daneel, and the stories I got from Monomee on Alpha, nothing from Earth's past has survived to the present. It's all gone, and there is no way to retrieve it."

The pilot-room was uncharacteristically silent after Pelorat finished. Finally, Bliss stood, and led Pelorat by the hand back to their room. There was nothing else she or Trevize could do.

==== 3. Pillow Talk ====

"Still depressed about Earth?" Bliss inquired.

Pelorat smiled beside her. “My dear, after all the effort you’ve just expended, I couldn’t be depressed about anything. I suppose I shall become reconciled in time. And now that I’ve found you, of course, I have a new goal in life.”

“And that is?”

“Trying not to die of exhaustion.”

Bliss returned Pelorat’s smile and kissed him, and the two were silent again for a time. Then Pelorat said, “I wonder where Trevize will ultimately go, after he drops us off at Gaia?”

“He seemed eager to return to the arms of Mitza Lizalor on Comporellon,” said Bliss tartly.

“My dear, I must tell you that I’ve always found your attitude concerning Golan’s personal life to be rather disquieting.”

“I know it made you uncomfortable, but I assumed it was simply your dislike of seeing friction between two of your friends.”

Pelorat shook his head. “There is that, but it goes deeper. I can’t help feeling that there’s a touch of jealousy on your part.”

Pelorat had the satisfaction (and he had to admit, it was satisfaction) of seeing Bliss rendered speechless. He couldn’t sense emotions as she could, but he could guess that surprise and indignation were warring within her mind. Finally she answered, “That’s ridiculous!”

“Oh no, my dear, it’s far from being ridiculous. You’ve shown all the venom of a woman scorned.”

“But I’m not even attracted to Trev! Why should I be jealous when he chooses to fall into the arms of some —” Bliss had the presence of mind not to finish the thought. It didn’t matter. Pelorat was looking at her like she had just confirmed his analysis, and she had the sinking feeling that she had.

“Now, I know you and Golan have a tendency to think of me as an innocent in matters of the heart,” said Pelorat, “but I assure you that a man who has been married and divorced as often as I have can’t help but gain a certain practical knowledge of the subject.”

“But I have no reason to be jealous of Trev,” Bliss said — quite reasonably, she thought. “I’m not even attracted to him,” she repeated.

“That doesn’t matter,” said Pelorat. “What matters is that he is not attracted to you.”

“I fail to see what difference that makes.”

“Do you?” Pelorat asked skeptically. “A woman as attractive as you is bound to gain the attention of any man she meets. I imagine you’ve come to expect it. Golan, however, was completely indifferent to your charms. I saw it, and I’m sure you felt it. Now it seems to me that ever since then, you’ve been going out of your way to find fault with Golan’s taste in women as a way of proving to yourself that his indifference was his fault and not yours.”

“Do you really think I could be so petty, Pel?”

Pelorat shrugged. “I’ve noticed that being part of Gaia hasn’t made you into a flawless superbeing. You seem to have your share of minor quirks, just like any other human.” He chuckled. “That’s why I find Golan’s assertion that you might be a robot so amusing. A robot wouldn’t be so emotionally irrational.”

Seeing Bliss frown, Pelorat said, “I wouldn’t make too much of it, my dear. It won’t be too long before we return to Gaia, and then you won’t have to worry about Golan’s poor taste in women any more.”

Bliss shook her head. “If I really am being so petty, it can only be because I’ve been away from Gaia for too long. It’s always easier to see your own flaws when you can see yourself from others’ perspectives.” She sighed. “I’ll have to apologize to Trev. Now that I

think back, I can see I have been overcritical.” She shook her head again. “If this is how Isolates interact with each other, it’s a wonder you can put up with each other.”

“There there, my dear, don’t worry about it. We’ve had more practice at it than you have.”

==== 4. Homecoming ====

Blissenobiarella didn’t feel the Jump, but she felt the effect. In a fraction of time too short to measure, the *Far Star* had moved three thousand parsecs in space, and her link with the rest of Gaia had changed from a tiny, tenuous thing to a mental avalanche. The shock of it woke her from a sound sleep, and her own awakening woke Pel. She felt his mind shift from remsleep (a term whose origin was lost in the mists of time) to full consciousness.

Pel looked over at her, and she felt his curiosity. “We’re here,” she explained.

Pel’s curiosity changed to understanding. He had deduced from her words (as she knew he would) that they had jumped into Gaia’s planetary system, and were now within a hundred million miles of the unified planetary consciousness that was Gaia.

Within minutes of the Jump, the two were dressed, and had made their way to the ship’s pilot-room. There they found Trev sitting at his computer console. In the screen above it, there was a view of stars, with one particularly bright star centered in the screen.

“The stars,” Blissenobiarella murmured.

She could feel Trev’s amusement as he said, “You’ve seen the stars before, surely.”

She suspected he knew very well what she meant, but she explained anyway. “It’s just been so long since I’ve seen these stars.”

Trev nodded. "It's a common reaction. For most of the people in the Galaxy, the pattern of stars they see when they look up at their world's night sky is part of the familiar environment that they're used to. No matter how many other starfields they see in their lifetime, that one particular pattern is always what they think of as the stars. To someone from Terminus, for instance, the Diamonds and the Mist are the stars." A smile on Trev's face matched the amusement he radiated. "It's comforting to know that even though you're a part of Gaia, you're still human enough to feel homesick."

Hour by hour, the sun of Gaia grew brighter on the screen, until it was almost too bright to look at. After that, its intensity remained constant, and only its size changed. Finally, a blue star drifted onto the edge of the screen, and that star grew quickly into a blue and white circle. Then the circle grew into a world, and Trev brought the Far Star down to land on it.

When the airlock opened, and she could smell the air of Gaia, she knew in a way that was beyond conscious knowledge that she was home. As Trev stepped out to join her, she said, "No exclamation of 'Back home to the crap'?"

"Gaia may be the only world in the Galaxy where returning from offworld is not a crappy experience," said Trev. "I think that may be the real reason I chose Galaxia." Trev was being facetious, of course. He wouldn't choose to transform the entire Galaxy into a larger version of Gaia just because of the way Gaia smelled. On the other hand, even Trev himself couldn't articulate just exactly why he did choose Galaxia. Perhaps, in the end, it really was the smell that finally decided him.

Trev had landed the Far Star on the same spot it had occupied during his first visit, and Dom was waiting to greet them all when they left the ship. Once again, familiarity brought with it a sense of satisfaction. Blissenobiarella wasn't entirely happy to learn that, as Trev had observed, she was still human enough to feel homesick. After all, she had been in mental contact with Dom, along with the rest of Gaia, throughout her voyages on the Far Star. Something as

relatively crude as visual perception shouldn't have so overwhelming an emotional impact upon her, and yet it did. In the final analysis, it was humbling to learn just how much she had in common with the Isolates of other worlds.

Normally, she would communicate with Dom on a largely nonverbal, emotional level. However, out of deference to Pel and Trev, she and Dom conducted their conversation verbally. "You seem different," she said to Dom.

"I am different," he said, "and you are the reason."

"How so?"

"As you can imagine, we've all been following your exploits among the other worlds, and we've all found it terribly interesting. You've become a celebrity."

"A what?"

"It's an Isolate word. A celebrity is someone who is celebrated, someone whose existence has become known to a large percentage of the population. Here on Gaia, of course, everyone is more or less aware of the existence of everyone else. On the Isolate worlds, however, an individual remains unknown unless his or her actions are communicated, for whatever reason, to the general population.

"Your own adventures on the other worlds have made everyone on Gaia particularly aware of your existence, to an unusual extent. As a result, I find myself thrust into the role of intermediary. For the moment, I represent not merely myself, but also an appreciable fraction of the human population of Gaia. We all wanted to be here to welcome you back home. Welcome back!"

Momentarily overwhelmed, all Blissenobiarella could say was, "It's good to be back."

Dom continued, "It is also the general feeling on Gaia that the experiences you've accumulated offworld entitle you to add another three syllables to your name. We're a bit ashamed to admit to a certain curiosity concerning which syllables you'll eventually choose, so we would appreciate it if you could let us know as soon as you've decided on them."

She smiled, for to her the choice of the new addition to her name had become blindingly obvious as soon as Dom had mentioned it. She said, "You won't have to wait long, because I've already chosen them. My full name will now be Blissenobiarellapelorat."

===== 5. The Gift =====

The Far Star sat beneath the sun of Gaia. Standing beside it were Golan Trevize, Janov Pelorat and Bliss. This time, however, Pelorat and Bliss would not be joining Trevize as he set off once again into space.

"Are you sure you wish to do this?" Bliss inquired one final time. "You can stay on Gaia. You're one of the most honored people on the planet."

"Because I chose to make your world the model for the future of the Galaxy," Trevize noted sardonically.

"That's true," Bliss admitted. "We're flattered that you find us worthy. We don't even mind," she added wryly, "that your reason for choosing Galaxia was fear of a hypothetical alien menace."

Trevize shook his head. "I have commitments to honor elsewhere." He could tell that Bliss was forcing herself not to mention his Comporellian paramour, Mitza Lizalor. Trevize had noticed with some curiosity (and a good deal of relief) that Bliss was no longer commenting on his social life. Of all the things he disliked about her, that had been the most prominent.

Pelorat stepped forward. Taking Trevize's hand in his own, he said, "I've only known you for half a year, but somehow it seems like a lifetime. Probably because I've experienced more in my time with you than in all the decades before. I've come to rely on your determination and self-assurance, for I've always been aware of a conspicuous lack of those things in my own makeup."

Trevize smiled. "You don't need my determination and self-assurance any more, for you've developed a good deal of your own. And whatever you lack, I'm certain that Bliss will more than make up for."

With a wry smile of his own, Pelorat said, "I don't doubt that you're right. Good luck, my dear friend. I shall remember you always."

"And I you, Janov. If I had had someone like you to teach me history in school, I might have become an academic rather than a politician."

"But then you wouldn't have been available to us," Bliss pointed out. "We wouldn't have had your decision, and where would we be then?"

"Don't be so sure," Trevize cautioned her. "I'm certain that Daneel would have found some way to exile me from Terminus at the proper time, even if I had taken up dentistry."

"Do you really think it was Daneel's manipulations that led Mayor Branno to exile you?" Pelorat wondered. "After all, from what you tell me it was your own outspokenness on the subject of the Second Foundation that led her to act. If you had kept your beliefs to yourself, might the whole train of events never have happened?"

Trevize sighed. "That's the trouble with mentalics. When you're dealing with them, you can never be sure whether the motives you act on are your own or theirs. Was my speech spontaneous, or was one of Daneel's mentalic robots present on Terminus, waiting for the correct moment to loosen my tongue?"

Pelorat said, "It seems pointless to second-guess yourself."

“True. I must say, though, that I now have a much better understanding of why men like Arkady Darrell’s father were so obsessed with eliminating the Second Foundation. The temptation to endlessly examine one’s motives for outside tampering could easily drive a man mad.”

Bliss now stepped forward, and followed Pelorat’s example by taking Trevize’s hand in hers. She said, “I know it’s customary in some Isolate cultures to present a gift to someone who is departing for an extended period.”

“It’s called a going-away present,” Trevize said.

“Since no Gaian is ever truly apart from the rest of our planet, the custom is unknown here. Nevertheless, since it is one of your customs, we thought it would be appropriate to present you with a gift, as a token of our gratitude.”

So saying, Bliss leaned forward and kissed Trevize on the mouth.

Trevize stood still for a moment, clearly mystified. Finally he said, “That’s your idea of a gift?”

“Were you expecting a chronometer?”

Shaking his head, Trevize turned and entered the airlock of the Far Star. Pelorat and Bliss stepped back, and a minute later the ship lifted off the ground. When it had finally disappeared into the sky, Pelorat turned to Bliss and said, “I must say, I agree with Golan. It seems an odd choice for a gift. Why a kiss?”

Then Bliss told him, and astonishment filled Pelorat’s face. “What an extraordinary thing. Was this your idea?”

“Dom came up with the larger plan, but the kiss was my idea.”

All Pelorat could do was stare up into the sky and repeat, “What an extraordinary thing.”

==== 6. Renunciation ====

Golan Trevize found himself alone for the first time in six months. It was, he had come to recognize, a never-ending cycle. One went from sharing one's life with other people, to being alone, to sharing again. It had first happened when he was twenty-two, after leaving the Navy. He had gone from being a member of a unit to being a man alone. Then he had met Zillia, and for three years he had been part of a couple. Then came the breakup, and he was alone again. Since then there had been other women, Ensa and Cordia and Danna, periods of union separated by periods of solitude. His last solo period had ended with his confrontation with Mayor Branno and his exile from Terminus with Janov. Now Janov had been left behind on Gaia, and Trevize was alone for the first time in the Far Star.

But not for long, he knew. He would only remain alone for as long as it took the ship to reach Comporellon. Then he would be reunited with Mitza Lizalor, and the familiar pattern of a life shared with someone else would begin again.

Once again, Trevize looked upon Comporellon, with its larger-than-normal polar ice caps and its redder-than-normal sunlight. As before, he signaled to the world's immigration authority requesting permission to land, and as before he was directed to one of the twelve orbiting entry stations. The name of the station, Padrel, tugged at his memory, and he looked up the Far Star's log to check on a suspicion. The ship's log confirmed that they had docked at Padrel Station during their previous visit. Trevize was unsurprised to find A. Kendray (he had never learned the man's first name) waiting to meet him.

This time, Kendray was accompanied by another man, who seemed to exist solely to provide contrast with Kendray himself. Where Kendray was short, heavy and dark, his companion was tall, thin and fair.

Kendray was, if possible, even more avuncular than at their first meeting. He said, "Ah, my dear Golan Trevize, what a pleasure it is

to meet you again. Since our last meeting, fortune has smiled upon me, and I now have the honor of being Station Administrator here at Padrel Station. My colleague here is Assistant Administrator Binlo Gatis.”

“Can I assume,” said Trevize, “that your change in situation was a consequence of our earlier meeting?”

“You can indeed. Minister Lizalor herself congratulated me on my clear thinking in regard to the matter of your worldless companion. The initiative I demonstrated in not allowing the strict letter of the law to interfere with your mission to our world was recognized and appropriately rewarded. And speaking of your companions, where are Doctor Pelorat and Miss Bliss?”

Trevize explained, “Doctor Pelorat and Miss Bliss chose not to accompany me to Comporellon this trip.”

Kendray’s smile grew even brighter. “I must say, I’m not sorry to hear it. Even though nothing unfortunate came of it, the presence of Miss Bliss on your ship was an uncomfortable one for all of us.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“At any rate,” Kendray continued, “you’ll be happy to hear that Minister Lizalor has directed us to waive the usual formalities, and allow you to proceed directly down to the Capital.”

Trevize found himself wondering whether Mitza Lizalor was more enthusiastic about having him back, or at having the Far Star back. He decided he would be better off not knowing.

It took less than an hour for the ship to travel from Padrel Station down to Comporellon City. Once again, he set down at a spaceport located on the city’s western outskirts. Emerging from his ship, he found a Comporellian vehicle waiting for him. Trevize noted absently that the vehicle was completely black, with the insignia of the Comporellian Ministry of Transportation visible on the back door. His

attention, though, immediately focused on the figure standing next to the vehicle. It was a tall woman in black with short hair of a startling red color and wide eyes of an equally startling green. She gave him a brief, formal nod that let him know that they were in a public setting and should maintain themselves with fitting decorum.

“Minister Lizalor”, Trevize said formally, with an appropriately respectful nod.

“Mr. Trevize,” Lizalor replied. “Allow me to welcome you back to Comporellon. If you would care to accompany me, I can escort you to the Ministry of Transportation.”

“I’d be honored,” said Trevize.

Little had changed on Comporellon in the two months since he had last been here. It was still just as cold, and snow still covered much of the planet’s capital city. However, Trevize’s attention was distracted by a detail of his short conversation with Lizalor.

“Minister,” he said, “I’m willing to let the matter pass, in light of our friendship, but I’m curious. Why didn’t you use my title when you greeted me at the spaceport?”

Lizalor’s eyes widened in surprise. “You mean you don’t know? Haven’t you been following events on Terminus?”

Trevize began to experience a sinking feeling. He could halfway guess what Lizalor was about to tell him. “No, I’ve been rather out of touch with Galactic politics lately. What has happened on Terminus?”

“The elections for the Council of Terminus were held last month. In your absence, another man was elected to fill your seat. You are no longer a member of the Council.”

Trevize uttered the vilest oath he could think of. “Branno!”

Lizalor nodded. "I assume she was unhappy about your not returning the ship to the Foundation."

"Of course," Trevize fumed. "So she found somebody in my district to run against me. I can only imagine what sort of campaign she cooked up against me. Nothing obvious, of course, not from Branno the Bronze. Just a few unsubstantiated rumors, wondering why I was off touring the Galaxy instead of staying in Terminus City doing the work I was elected to do!"

He turned to look Lizalor directly in the eyes. "Minister, if I ever needed anything to show me that my future lies here on Comporellon and not back on Terminus, this was it. I hereby renounce my Foundation citizenship and request citizenship in the Commonwealth of Comporellon!"

===== 7. More Pillow Talk =====

Trevize had assumed that they were going to the Ministry of Transportation building, and as the vehicle threaded the streets of Comporellon City, he knew he had guessed correctly. It was less than half an hour before they pulled up outside. During the ride, Trevize and Lizalor had engaged in pointless small talk, from which fact Trevize assumed they were (or at least could be) under surveillance. He followed Lizalor out of the vehicle and down the steps leading to the main entrance of the Ministry building. They passed through the vast lobby he remembered, then threaded their way through corridors until finally reaching an elevator. As soon as the doors closed upon them, Trevize found himself buried under an avalanche of amorous Minister.

They remained locked in embrace until the elevator reached Lizalor's apartment. When the doors opened, Lizalor dragged Trevize into her living room and began to undress him. They continued into the apartment, shedding clothing as they went. Whether through chance or design, they both ran out by the time they reached Lizalor's bedroom.

Much later, she looked up at him and smiled. "I feared you would never come back. I thought you would go on searching forever, or that you would find," here she paused for a time, then finished, "your goal, and be cursed to oblivion. Did you give up your search?"

"Yes," Trevize answered simply. He gave up searching because he found what he was looking for, but he didn't intend to tell her that. For one thing, she would undoubtedly decide that he had indeed been cursed for finding Earth, and that by coming back to Comporellon he had spread the curse to the planet in general and her in particular. For another, during their stay at Daneel's base on Earth's moon, the ancient robot had created mental blocks in Janov and himself to prevent their revealing his existence. Trevize doubted that he could tell Lizalor what he had found even if he wanted to.

"And now that you are here to stay," she continued, "you can direct our efforts to replicate the Foundation's gravitic drive. Needless to say," she chuckled, "you will report directly to me."

Trevize was taken aback. He had expected to be involved in Lizalor's project to reverse-engineer a gravitic drive from the Far Star, but he hadn't anticipated being asked to head up the effort.

Perhaps sensing his hesitation, she asked, "Unless you don't think you can handle the responsibility."

"I simply wasn't expecting the offer," Trevize assured her. "I've directed engineering projects before. In fact, before I went into politics, I was Director of Research at the Darell Shipyards on Terminus."

It seemed to him that Lizalor looked at him with a new respect. "I had no idea you were so accomplished." Then a look of embarrassment crossed her face, as she realized how her comment might be interpreted. "I didn't mean to imply..."

"That I was just a good-looking non-entity who managed to weasel his way onto the Council of Terminus?"

Trevize was able to watch as a blush spread all the way up Mitza Lizalor's unclothed body. He asked gently, "Is that the way it's done on Comporellon?"

"In theory, no. In practice, it is all too common."

"That's not the way it's done on Terminus. We have the example of the Indburs before us to let us know what happens when we let our government become an empty sideshow while real power is exercised behind the scenes. Nobody can hope to win a popular following on Terminus without demonstrating their competence at some creative endeavor. In my case, I served as an officer in the Foundation Navy, then went on to win a graduate degree in hyperatomics at the University of Terminus. I worked at two engineering firms before joining Darell Shipyards' Hyperdrive Division, and spent three years there before being appointed Director of Research. When the Relocation Crisis came to a head last year, I decided that it was my duty to the Foundation to oppose the Centralists. The Councilman for my district was a Centralist, so I ran against him and won. I was part of the delegation Mayor Branno sent to the Normannic Sector to persuade the Siwennans to side with us in the House of Worlds. It was their votes that turned the tide against the Centralists in the House of Worlds, and it was the defeat of Gorib Hannis's allies in the House of Worlds that enabled Mayor Branno to hold the line against Hannis's Relocation Bill in the Council of Terminus."

"And now," said Mitza Lizalor, "you have chosen to side with us against the Foundation."

"I have chosen," Trevize gently corrected her, "to side with you, Mitza, because there is no other woman in the Galaxy who can compare with you."

Then Mitza laid her head on Trevize's shoulder and began to weep.

==== 8. Assignment ====

When Golan Trevize emerged from the elevator into the public areas of the Ministry of Transportation with Mitza Lizalor, he discovered that her staff had been busy since his arrival. He had been assigned an office near hers, and they were met there by a Comporellian man who introduced himself as Trevize's new assistant.

"Kuel Denrun," he said, taking Golan's hand. "I've been heading up the Gravitics Project here at MinTrans. I must say, your previous visit here caused quite a stir in the Project. To be honest, your departure caused even more of a stir. We were all hoping we'd get a look at your ship, and then before you could say 'hyperspatial anomaly' you were gone again. I understand you're planning to settle here on Comporellon."

Denrun's breathless manner of speech made Trevize feel as though he had just stepped into the middle of a cyclone. "That's true," he answered. "In fact, I've already applied for citizenship here on Comporellon."

"Not surprised," Denrun nodded. "When the Foundation finds out you've jacked one of their new ships you're going to need all the friends you can get."

"And just how," said Lizalor icily, "is the Foundation going to find out?"

It seemed to Trevize that Denrun was either very confident of his own value to the project or indifferent to the Minister's imposing disapproval. "Oh, they will, no question about that. Not a chance of sitting on a secret this big for long." Trevize decided it was confidence when Denrun proceeded to look Lizalor directly in the eyes and add, "So what we have to do is, instead of pretending that the secret is going to keep forever, we have to assume that it's going to leak out, and sooner rather than later, and plan accordingly."

He continued staring into the Minister's eyes until finally she nodded and said, "I agree. Prudence dictates that we prepare for such an eventuality. I'll have the Policy Group draft a contingency plan."

“Glad to hear it,” said Denrun. “In the meantime, I’ve got a whole roomfull of techs who are just itching to get a look in that ship of yours, Mr. Trevize.”

“Then let’s not keep them waiting,” said Trevize.

“Not quite yet, I’m afraid,” the Minister interrupted. “I think that if you intend to become a citizen of Comporellon, Mr. Trevize, you will have to start dressing like one.” So saying, she led the two men to one side of Trevize’s new office. A contact was pressed, and a section of wall slid aside to reveal a closet. Within was a Comporellian uniform similar to Lizalor’s. Like hers, it was dark gray with white piping. Where the Minister’s uniform had a white collar and lapels and two diagonal white stripes that crossed the front of her jacket, the uniform in the closet had dark gray lapels edged with white, and two thin white stripes that dropped straight down the front in parallel.

“I don’t suppose,” Trevize said doubtfully, “you’d be willing to let me wear my sash along with it?”

“Certainly not that one,” said Lizalor, indicating the cherry red strip of material that blazed across Trevize’s dark brown jacket.

“How about white?”

“Out of the question.”

“Perhaps,” Denrun offered diffidently, “a gray one with white edges?”

The other two looked at Denrun, then looked at each other. “Very well,” both said with equal reluctance.

“I’ll have one made up for you by the time you get back from your ship,” Lizalor added.

A few minutes later, newly attired in his dark gray MinTrans uniform, Trevize left his office in the company of Kuel Denrun. They took an elevator up the five levels to the building’s vast lobby, where they

were met by the members of Denrun's engineering team. Denrun rattled off a dozen names, but Trevize's earlier experiences in politics and management stood him in good stead, and he was able to keep all the names straight. It struck him as odd at first that all the members of Denrun's team were men, but Comporellon wasn't the first world Trevize had been to that restricted women to certain professions, and he knew he'd grow accustomed to it in time. If he were a woman, though, he'd probably think twice about relocating here permanently. It gave him a new insight into the force of will that had allowed Mitza to win her way to a major government post. A lot of people on Comporellon must have underestimated her, and later paid the price. He resolved again that he would never underestimate her himself.

===== 9. The Far Star =====

Golan Trevize and the other members of the Comporellian engineering team followed Kuel Denrun as he led them up a moving stairway to the Ministry of Transportation's roof garage. After a brief exchange with a black-uniformed guard, Denrun led them to a large conveyance. The others filed into the back, while Trevize joined Denrun at the front. Denrun conferred with a traffic controller, and a large hinged door opened out into the cold Comporellian afternoon. Denrun flew them out into the daylight, then set the controls on automatic and let the vehicle's computer fly them to the spaceport.

Once at the spaceport, Denrun resumed control of the vehicle and landed them thirty meters from the Far Star. He looked at her through the front windows and said, "She's a beauty."

"She is indeed," said Trevize. The ship had seen him through thick and thin for the last six months. It had become more of a home to him, he realized, than any of the apartments and houses he had lived in since leaving the Navy. Lately, it had even come to feel as though the ship and he were growing together, becoming parts of a single organism. For a moment, he wondered if being on Gaia had somehow changed the ship, made it part of the Gaian collective consciousness. But Bliss had assured him that it would have

required a stay of years, even decades, before an inert Isolated object like the Far Star could be absorbed into the Gaian consciousness. Even Janov Pelorat would never truly become a part of Gaia, even if he spent the rest of his life there, which seemed likely to actually happen. Trevize finally decided that any symbiosis between the ship and himself was all on his part, the same sort of bond that had developed between people and the machines they worked with since before the dawn of recorded history. He felt a momentary impulse to ask Janov about it before he remembered that Janov was unavailable. "I'll miss you, my friend," he thought silently to the historian.

"How does she handle?" said Denrun, interrupting Trevize's reverie.

"Like a dream," said Trevize. "She enters hyperspace so smoothly you don't even notice the Jumps. The ship's computer can calculate Jumps so quickly you could travel from here to Terminus by way of Trantor in less than an hour."

Denrun gave a low whistle. Gesturing with his hand, he said, "Lead the way."

Trevize felt a twinge of conscience as he led the Comporellian engineering team into the airlock of the Far Star. Despite the way Mayor Branno had deprived him of his Council seat, he still thought of himself as a Founder, and the Far Star was Foundation property. Wasn't he really just stealing something that wasn't his, acting in petty spite to avenge a perceived wrong at the hands of Branno the Bronze? When you got right down to it, wasn't what he was doing nothing less than an act of treason?

Like all schoolchildren on Terminus, Trevize had grown up hearing about Han Pritcher, who had betrayed the Foundation in its hour of need and joined its enemy the Mule. Of course, later on when he learned the facts of the case, he had come to the conclusion that Pritcher had been cast in the role of villain unfairly. After all, it wasn't as if he had acted freely; when the Mule Converted somebody, that person's free will disappeared. Nevertheless, "Han Pritcher" was a

synonym for “traitor” on Terminus, and probably would remain so for the rest of time. Unless, of course, treason gained a new exemplar named Golan Trevize.

He shook his head. The Far Star was his property. Branno had forfeited the Foundation’s right to the ship when she tried to take it from him in the middle of his mission. Besides, giving the ship to Mitza Lizalor and Comporellon felt right. Trevize didn’t think he would ever grow accustomed to the Gaians’ belief in his intuition, and he hoped he never came to rely upon it too heavily, but he knew that the Comporellians ought to have the ship’s gravitic drive. They would, he realized with a chill, need it in the not too distant future. He didn’t know how he knew, for his intuition was beyond his conscious control, but he knew. If the Comporellians didn’t have the gravitic drive, something disastrous would befall them.

His conscience clear, and determined to help his newfound countrymen, Trevize opened the far airlock door and ushered in Denrun’s team.

==== 10. Data Search ====

Closing his eyes, Golan Trevize communed with the computer that controlled the Far Star. In his mind, he sent the command: data search!

A computer-generated vision came to him of the lobby of the Lewis Pirenne Memorial Library on the campus of the University of Terminus. Around him were rows of carrels holding the more conventional computer terminals found at Pirenne Library. One such terminal was directly in front of him, with the standard queries concerning subject, title, author and keywords. Trevize found it amusing that the Far Star’s computer had chosen to create the illusion of a lesser computer. Still, it made a certain amount of sense. Pirenne Library held the most comprehensive database in the Galaxy, and Trevize had grown familiar with its data retrieval system during his days at the University. He thought: subject — engineering schematics for FNS Far Star.

Trevize found his viewpoint within the library floating away from the computer carrel. He drifted up past three rows of balconies, each holding endless rows of book-tapes. Passing over the railing of the fourth balcony, he floated down past the stacked shelves before finally coming to a stop. He was looking at shelf upon shelf of book-tapes, each dealing with some aspect of the design specifications of the Far Star. A brief search brought him to a shelf full of book-tapes on the gravitic drive. He focused on a book-tape titled Applied Gravitics With Respect to Hyperdrive Engineering, and a faint blue glow surrounded it. He sent the command: copy to portable storage!

The book-tape, still surrounded by its blue nimbus, flew off the shelf. Trevize was able to follow it as it flew out of the Pirenne Library and across Terminus City to Hober Mallow Naval Base. There, it sought out one particular hanger and entered through an open door. The familiar shape of the Far Star sat within, and the book-tape flew in through the airlock to the pilot-room, finally coming to rest within the book-tape slot of the navigation console. The screen above the pilot's chair lit with the message: transfer complete.

Trevize opened his eyes and looked up at the screen. The words "transfer complete" were still there. He reached down to the book-tape slot and withdrew the slim white rectangle within. Handing it to Kuel Denrun, he said, "Applied Gravitics With Respect to Hyperdrive Engineering."

Denrun wrote down the title on the book-tape and passed it on to a member of his team, who slipped it into a carrying case. The man passed another blank book-tape to Denrun, who slid it into the ship's navigation console. Trevize closed his eyes again and found himself back in the library, looking at the shelf full of gravitic drive engineering specs. He shifted his focus to another book.

An hour later, the last of the copied book-tapes had been placed within the carrying case, and Trevize stood up from the ship's computer. The Far Star was still bustling with activity as the other members of Denrun's team scanned and recorded and analyzed the engineering marvels revealed within various access panels.

Denrun nodded with satisfaction at his men. He said, "By the time the boys are done today, we'll be able to project an exact holographic replica of the Far Star at the lab, accurate down to the last atom."

"And then comes the hard part," said Trevize.

Denrun grinned. "And then comes the hard part. Trying to replicate all the engineering that it took to build her. These book-tapes will help, but there's no substitute for trying to do the work yourself."

"Given everything you're learning here today," said Trevize, "how long do you think it will take to start building your own gravitic ships? That's the first thing Minister Lizalor's going to want to know."

"Don't I know it," said Denrun with a sigh. "Fortunately for the peace of mind of everyone involved, I'll be able to give you and her a pretty accurate forecast. If all goes well (and that's always the trick, isn't it?) we should have our own home-brewed version of the Far Star ready to fly within six months. After that, I figure we can crank them out at the rate of about one a month for the foreseeable future."

Golan Trevize let out a breath that he hadn't been aware he was holding in. Once more, his intuition was letting him know things he couldn't possibly know. Trevize still had no idea why it was so important for the Comporellians to have their own fleet of gravitic ships, but he knew that it was, and now he knew that there was hope that whatever they had available would be enough to meet whatever situation was coming up.

Provided, as Denrun had pointed out, that all went well.

==== 11. Administration =====

The annunciator on Golan Trevize's desk buzzed, and the button next to Transportation Minister Mitza Lizalor's name lit up. Trevize punched the light and said, "Trevize here."

Lizalor's distorted voice spoke. "Come to my office, please, Director Trevize."

"On my way," Trevize answered, and switched off the annunciator.

In the weeks he had spent here, Trevize had noticed how rigid and formal the Comporellians were in comparison to Foundationers. He was a top advisor to Lizalor, and the director of her most important project. As in any bureaucracy, his importance was reflected by his proximity to power. Thus, his office was next door to Lizalor's in the Ministry building, and an inner door connected the two. On Terminus, an official in Lizalor's position would have simply stuck her head in the door of an official in Trevize's position and asked him to join her.

Of course, in this case the Comporellians' natural formality was strengthened by the fact that he and Minister Lizalor were having an affair. Their public relationship had to be kept scrupulously correct in order to prevent anyone learning of their private relationship. Again, on Terminus they would simply have gone public with their personal relationship, and nobody would think twice about it (although the more sensational periodicals might decide to highlight the relationship in order to increase their circulation). Comporellon, though, was a much more puritanical world than Terminus. Sexual relations outside of officially sanctioned marriages was deeply frowned upon here, and the discovery of their illicit relationship would have serious repercussions for Lizalor and himself.

Yet another reason for the pervasive formality was the fact that the Comporellian security forces monitored public conversations. Like most of the worlds in the Galaxy since the fall of the Empire, Comporellon was ruled by an elite organization with a restricted membership. On Comporellon, that organization was called the Emergency Policy Formulation Group, and it dated back to the time three and a half centuries earlier when the Empire had withdrawn from the Sirius Sector.

The Policy Group devoted itself to allocating the use of resources, maintaining contact with other successor-states of the Empire, and

of course keeping itself in power. In the last century or so, the rise of the Foundation had ended the economic dislocations and endemic warfare that had accompanied the fall of the Empire, so these days the Policy Group tended to focus on the third objective.

To a Founder like Trevize, Comporellon's authoritarian government was uncomfortably similar to the Indbur era. The Indburs had used ruthless methods to maintain themselves in power, which had given them a bad name in the Foundation. They had also allowed the Foundation to be conquered by the Mule, which had given them an even worse name. Since then, the Foundation had become the Galaxy's most zealous proponents of democratic government, and even strong Mayors like Harla Branno were forced to be extremely circumspect about how they exercised their powers. (According to Trevize's historian friend Janov Pelorat, one of the central debates in Foundation history was whether the democracy movement sprang more from the Indburs' cruelty or from their failure to stop the Mule.)

Thus, when Trevize received his summons from Minister Lizalor, he responded by rising from his desk, walking over to the door, and entering Lizalor's office. In keeping with Comporellian standards of formality, he walked over to the front of Lizalor's desk, nodded to her, and waited for her to speak.

"Director Trevize," she greeted him.

"Minister Lizalor," he responded.

"Director, I have been summoned to the First Minister's office. I wish you to accompany me."

"Of course, Minister."

Lizalor rose from her own desk, and Trevize fell in behind her as she left her office. She led the way from the warren of offices that surrounded her own to her private elevator, which swiftly brought them to the vehicle park atop the Ministry building. He joined her in

the back seat of her ministerial aircar, and they were soon flying across to the Comporellian capital building.

Most of the worlds Trevize had seen used the old Imperial administrative centers as their capitals, either out of tradition, inertia, or lack of funds to build replacements. On Comporellon, the Empire had been unpopular (understandably for a world which thought of itself as the oldest settled world in the Galaxy), and when the Governor and his staff had departed in GE 12,244, the Imperial Palace had been sacked, burned, and razed to the ground. The site was now a flat expanse of land called Independence Park, and the buildings that housed the Comporellian government were arrayed on a broad road called the Circle, which circumscribed the Park. The First Minister of Comporellon worked in a building called simply Administration, which was virtually identical to the various ministerial buildings. The Ministry of Transportation was about a third of the way around the Circle from Administration.

Minister Lizalor's aircar landed on the roof of Administration, and the Minister and Trevize were met by a group of men in the black uniforms of the Comporellian Security Service. The Captain of the Security squad saluted Minister Lizalor, and his men fell in around her and Trevize. Together, the group took a series of moving stairs downward through the labyrinth of Administration to the First Minister's office. In keeping with the requisite lack of ostentation within the Comporellian government, the door to the First Minister's office was a plain gray, with unobtrusive white letters that read: Dinnis Erkar, First Minister. The only clue to the importance of the person within was the presence of two black-uniformed guards flanking the door. Trevize glanced at Lizalor. Although her face was perfectly still and calm, Trevize could tell from the way she stared at Erkar's name that she was imagining her own there in its place.

The Captain of the security squad stood to attention and stated to one of the door wardens, "Minister Lizalor and Director Trevize to see the First Minister."

The door warden said, "Pass," and led them inside. They passed through an outer office with no less than six deskbound functionaries steadfastly ignoring their presence, and were escorted through another door to the office of First Minister Erkar himself.

There were three men waiting for them within the office, and Trevize recognized all three at once. One was Erkar himself, whom Trevize had met twice in his official capacity as Director of the Gravitics Project. The second was Antin Peskonik, the Foundation's Ambassador to the Comporellian Commonwealth. He was an ex-Councilman whom Trevize had seen in occasional trimensional broadcasts, but never met personally. The third was a man Trevize had met exactly once, shortly before his exile from Terminus.

He was Liono Kodell, Mayor Branno's Director of Security.

==== 12. Confrontations ====

"Golan Trevize," said Liono Kodell, "You are hereby charged with the theft of the starship Far Star, and with failing to comply with the orders of Harla Branno, the Mayor of Terminus and Executive Officer of the Foundation Federation. Will you come quietly?"

Mitza Lizalor stepped forward to face Kodell. "Director Trevize has renounced his Foundation citizenship, and is now a citizen of the Commonwealth of Comporellon. As such, he is no longer under your jurisdiction. You may address any complaints you may have with Director Trevize to the Comporellian Foreign Ministry. Any such complaints will be taken under advisement by the Comporellian government and appropriate measures will be taken."

"In other words," said Kodell, "you propose to do nothing, and allow this thief and subversive — and, it now appears, traitor — to elude punishment for his crimes."

"The Commonwealth of Comporellon does not regard Director Trevize as either a thief, a subversive, or a traitor," said Lizalor. "We regard him as a loyal, patriotic citizen and a valuable asset to the

Comporellian people. Hence, we will, as we say, take any complaints you may have regarding him under advisement, and deal with them in such manner as we find appropriate.”

Minister Lizalor’s tone and expression were carefully neutral, but Trevize could tell that she was enjoying herself enormously. Kodell was very likely the second most powerful individual in the Galaxy, and Lizalor had the satisfaction of meeting him face to face and telling him that she intended to keep his intended quarry out of his hands.

Trevize had a sudden picture in his mind of Lizalor standing face to face with Harla Branno, and telling her the same thing. That, he knew, was what she really wanted, to cross swords with the most powerful individual in the Galaxy and emerge triumphant. Trevize had to admit to himself that he would enjoy watching such a confrontation.

The other two men in the room remained silent during the dialogue between Lizalor and Kodell. Dinnis Erkar, the First Minister of Comporellon, seemed content to allow his underling Lizalor to present his government’s arguments. Thus, if she made some sort of misstep in her dealings with Kodell, Erkar could maintain that she was acting outside the bounds of her authority, and the blame would rest entirely upon her shoulders. Antin Peskonik, the Foundation’s ambassador to Comporellon, was present as a diplomatic courtesy. All dealings between the governments of Comporellon and the Foundation supposedly took place under his auspices, so protocol demanded that he be present at any meeting between officials of the two governments. However, he knew that Kodell was everything and he was nothing, and so he remained silent.

Kodell liked to project an image of grandfatherly kindness, as a way of offsetting the very real and rather intimidating power of his position as Director of Security for the Foundation. Trevize, though, had never had any illusions concerning the reality of Kodell’s act. One did not get Kodell’s sort of job by being genial; one got it by doing whatever had to be done in whatever way it had to be done. Kodell

now proceeded to confirm Trevize in his belief by dropping his kindly old grandpapa demeanor.

Kodell's face hardened. The reassuring crinkles disappeared from around his mouth and eyes, and his eyebrows lowered and drew together. Even his snowy mustache seemed to grow intimidating. Trevize was suddenly reminded of old images he had seen of the first Mayor Indbur, who had seized control of the Foundation's government, rounded up and condemned his political enemies, and nearly crushed the life out of the Association of Independent Traders. This, Trevize knew, was the real Liono Kodell.

Glaring at Lizalor, Kodell said, "You may think yourself safe from the power of the Foundation because Mayor Branno sees fit to exercise forbearance in her dealings with other nations. You may think that the Foundation has become a vast, pitiful giant, unable or unwilling to use that power for fear of alienating public opinion across the Galaxy. However, let me assure you that you could not be more mistaken. There comes a time when the appearance of weakness is more to be feared than the appearance of strength, and when that time comes, the Foundation will act, and then those who think to taunt the giant in safety will learn the folly of their ways."

Trevize knew few men who could have withstood Kodell's tirade without wilting. He felt nothing but pride when he saw that Mitza Lizalor remained unbowed. She met Kodell glare for glare, and when he was finished, she answered him. "If that time should come, then we of Comporellon will face our fate without flinching. In the meantime, if you have nothing more to contribute to this discussion, then I suggest you leave."

"Not quite yet, Madame Minister," said Kodell. "I may leave this world without the traitor Trevize, but I have no intention of leaving without the Far Star. That ship is and always has been the property of the Foundation, and you will not be allowed to keep it."

"It is the position of the government of Comporellon," Lizalor replied, "that the Far Star is legally ours under Galactic salvage laws. The

ship was left unattended on our world by its pilot, so we have claimed it for our own.”

Kodell’s normally fair complexion darkened with anger. “If you try to keep that ship, Madame Minister, you will find that you have moved the time for action on our part from the indefinite future to the immediate future. You have forty-eight hours in which to surrender control of the Far Star, at the end of which time a state of war will exist between our two nations. And I assure you that the Foundation will not hesitate to prosecute that war to the full extent of its ability.”

Mitza Lizalor allowed the silence following Kodell’s ultimatum to stretch out. First Minister Erkar remained impassive. Ambassador Peskonik, on the other hand, was becoming visibly nervous. If war did break out between Comporellon and the Foundation, it would mean an ignominious end to his public career.

Finally, Lizalor spoke. “While the Comporellians are a proud people, and not normally given to compromise, we recognize that there is a certain amount of ambiguity inherent in questions concerning the precise legal status of the Far Star. That being the case, and in the interest of promoting the cause of interstellar peace and preserving the friendly relations which have heretofore characterized our dealings with the Foundation, we of the Comporellian Commonwealth are willing to forego our claim to the Far Star. Please accept the return of your wayward vessel with the compliments of the Comporellian government.”

Korell continued to glare at Lizalor for a time before finally giving her a curt nod and stalking out of the First Minister’s office. Ambassador Peskonik hurried after him.

At last, First Minister Erkar broke his silence. “Just as you predicted, Minister,” he said to Lizalor. “He was willing to let us keep Trevize as long as we were willing to return the ship.”

Although Lizalor’s expression remained as icily correct as it had been throughout the meeting with Kodell, Trevize knew that inside

she was awash with pride and exaltation. She had faced down Harla Branno's henchman and come away with her major prize intact. When this day was over, he knew that their celebration together would be long and physically exhausting.

But there was something not quite right with the mood in the room, and Trevize had no difficulty discerning the source of the imperfection. It was Erkar. He didn't share Lizalor's satisfaction with the meeting's outcome. There was some other matter claiming his attention, and when one of the inner doors of the First Minister's office opened, Trevize knew what that other matter was.

The inner door had opened to reveal Goron Bek, the Minister of Defense. Erkar continued, "I thought it would be best to allow Minister Bek to observe the results of your meeting with the Foundation officials."

Minister Lizalor's exultation had vanished in an instant, replaced with uneasiness at the sight of Bek. "Minister Bek," she greeted him warily. "I am curious to know what interest you might have in my discussion with Director Kodell."

Bek explained, "I found it quite significant that Mayor Branno should send such an important member of her administration simply in order to deal with a single ship and a single man. The First Minister," he gestured toward Erkar, "was kind enough to fill me in on the details of ex-Councilman Trevize's arrival and his involvement with the Gravitics Project.

"The First Minister agrees with me," Bek continued, "that, given the potential military applications of the Gravitic Drive, the Ministry of Defense would be a more appropriate agency to administer the Gravitics Project than the Ministry of Transportation. Hence, I have come here in order to escort Director Trevize to his new offices at the Ministry of Defense." From the doorway behind Bek, two men emerged wearing the dark gray uniforms of the Comporellian Defense Force, and holding blaster rifles.

===== 13. Prisoners =====

“So they got you too, did they?” said Kuel Denrun to Golan Trevize.

“They got me too,” Trevize confirmed. He had just been “escorted” by two soldiers from First Minister Erkar’s office to this room deep within the bowels of the Ministry of Defense. It was the sort of bureaucratic turf war that Trevize had heard was all too common on Comporellon these days: Goron Bek, the Minister of Defense, had just stolen the Gravitics Project from Transportation Minister Mitza Lizalor.

Besides Trevize and Denrun, the room held half a dozen other members of the Gravitics team. “How many of the others do they have?” Trevize inquired.

“The lot,” said Denrun. “You were the last.”

Trevize sighed and sat at the table beside Denrun. “How long have you been here?”

“About an hour,” said Denrun. “Right after you two left for the meeting with Erkar, a bunch of soldier boys came tramping down to the Project area, all kitted out with body armor and blaster rifles. They said go, and you don’t argue with soldier boys, so we went. They brought us here.” He indicated the room they were in. “Got a whole complex laid out. We were still sorting ourselves out when they came back with all the files and simulations from the Project. So far as I’ve been able to tell, they got everything. And now, they’ve got every one.”

“It sounds to me,” said Trevize, “like they’ve been planning this for some time. At least a couple of weeks, maybe since I came back to Comporellon.”

“Could be,” Denrun agreed. “Very methodical man, Goron Bek. He’d have made a wonderful General, if he’d ever been in a war.”

“He may get his chance yet,” said Trevize, without knowing quite what he meant. It was his intuition dropping another hint of what the future held. To forestall any questions from Denrun, he asked, “What do you think of Minister Lizalor’s chances of getting us back?”

“If it was anyone else,” said Denrun, “I’d say none. What Bek gets, Bek keeps. But you never know with Lizalor. Everyone said she was daft to let you leave, the first time you came here. But she just said, ‘He’ll be back.’ And two months later, back you came, renounced your Foundation citizenship, and handed us Gravitics on a plate.” He shook his head. “Blessed if I know how she does it, but she does. If anyone on Comporellon can get us out of here, she can.

“In the meantime,” Denrun added, “we’ve still got a job to do. And Bek is even less tolerant of failure than Lizalor, if you can imagine such a thing.”

“All right,” said Trevize. “In that case, you’d better show me around, and we’ll see about getting the Project back up and running.”

Denrun nodded his approval, saying, “That’s the spirit, never say die.” The two men rose from the table, and Denrun led Trevize back into the Gravitics Project’s new abode.

Goron Bek had indeed been methodical. The Gravitics complex here in the Defense Ministry seemed to be an exact duplicate of the one in the Transportation Ministry, down to every last memo board and chair. All they had to do was transfer the files and simulations into the new computers, and carry on with the work. The only difference Trevize noticed was that the locks on the doors were all on the outside. Nobody was leaving unless somebody on the outside wanted them to leave.

For most of the members of the Gravitics team, the fascination of the work soon drowned out any worries they might have had about their change of circumstances. Every member of the Gravitics team knew that he was working on the most important project on Comporellon, and it created a kind of ongoing exuberance that Trevize

remembered well from his days at the Darell Shipyards. In fact, Trevize considered it one of his chief duties as Director of the Gravitics Project to keep the members of his team from skipping meals and rest periods. No doubt it had inspired some of the in-group humor, and provided him with a nickname among the members of the team. Back at Darell, his nickname had been “Nanny”, and Trevize had to admit its accuracy. People engaged in a cutting-edge research project seemed to be incapable of taking care of themselves, so they needed someone else to do it for them. Here on Comporellon, that someone was he.

His other chief duty was protecting the Gravitics Project from Goron Bek. Just as he had at the Ministry of Transportation, here at Defense Trevize reported directly to the head of the Ministry. Trevize found his relationship with Bek to be just about as different from his relationship with Mitza Lizalor as it could possibly be. As Denrun had once observed, “Lizalor believes in using the carrot and the stick. Bek believes in using the stick and the bigger stick.”

Every morning, Trevize was let out of the research complex/prison compound and escorted to Bek’s office. There, he would brief Bek on the progress made by the Gravitics Project since the previous morning. Every few days, Bek would suggest to Trevize that the best way to inspire greater effort from the Gravitics team would be to single out one of the members and accuse him of trying to deliberately sabotage the project, then have him executed.

So far, Trevize had been able to hold off on Bek’s suggestion by pointing out, truthfully, that all the members of the Gravitics team were performing vital work, and that removing one would actually slow the pace of progress.

“Isn’t there anyone there whose work is less vital than the others?” Bek would want to know.

Trevize had found that the best way to forestall the Minister was to start going into technical detail on the work each man was doing. Bek would then wave him to silence and say, “Never mind.”

A new wrinkle appeared one morning when, after Trevize pointed out that all the members of the team were performing vital work, Bek responded by saying, "Well, it doesn't really matter whether the man we choose is actually doing poor work. In fact, it will actually increase the effect on the others if they aren't quite sure why we chose the one we did. They'll all be inspired to work harder."

"But not hard enough to make up for the man's loss."

Once again, Bek had a new response. "It will be your job to make sure they do work hard enough to make up for the man's loss. After all, if they find the loss of one of their own inspiring, imagine how much they'd be motivated if they learned of your loss."

==== 14. Procedures ====

Golan Trevize woke up with a sentence drifting through his mind. Before he opened his eyes he could see it glowing against the insides of his eyelids.

Get it in writing.

It could have been a remnant of a forgotten dream, or a message from his allegedly infallible intuition, or just the aftereffects of the previous evening's meal. When Trevize opened his eyes, the sentence vanished from his sight.

It remained in his mind, though. As Trevize rose from the cot in his office, showered, dressed, and prepared for the morning's meeting with Goron Bek, he was constantly turning the message over in his mind. By the time he had been allowed out of the Gravitics Project research lab and escorted to Bek's office, he had worked out a course of action.

As always, the two members of Trevize's military escort had entered Bek's inner office with him and taken up posts on either side of the door. Trevize walked up to the huge desk on the far side of the office and stood silently while Bek studied the screen of his computer.

To give himself something to do while he waited, Trevize counted the seconds until Bek looked up and took notice of him. He had created a database back at the research lab where he plotted each day's wait. Most days, Bek kept him waiting between thirty and fifty seconds. Yesterday, the day of his ultimatum, the Defense Minister had kept him waiting only twelve seconds. Today, Trevize had reached seven in his count when Bek looked up and spoke to him.

"Director," Bek greeted him.

"Minister," Trevize responded.

It was like a macabre parody of his meetings with Mitza Lizalor. The exact same words, spoken in the exact same way.

"I hope you've had time to consider the suggestion I made at our last meeting," said Bek.

"I've been giving it a lot of thought," Trevize admitted.

"Good, good. And have you reached any conclusions?"

"I have," said Trevize. "I've come to the conclusion that the procedures you've outlined need to be taken seriously."

"Well, that's a start. How seriously do you intend to take my suggestion?"

"Seriously enough to think that it needs to be put on an official footing."

There was a pause before Bek said, "What exactly do you mean by an official footing?"

"I mean that, if your suggestion is to become official policy with regard to the Gravitics Project, it ought to be spelled out. There ought to be a set of official guidelines documenting the proposed procedures. And what's more," Trevize said, his eyes locked onto Bek's own, "I feel that, absent such a set of official guidelines, it

would be ... premature ... of me to attempt to implement the proposed procedures.”

There was another pause, much longer than the first one. At last, Bek said, “And if I were to suggest that, in the interest of keeping the Gravitics Project on schedule, it would be permissible to forego the creation of such a set of official guidelines?”

“Then I would feel it my duty to refuse to implement the suggested procedures, Minister. Under any circumstances.”

A third pause, the longest of all. Then Bek said, “After giving the matter due consideration, I find myself coming to appreciate the merits of your suggestion. Very well. I’ll see to it that a set of official guidelines is established with regard to the proposed procedures. Afterwards, I’ll expect those procedures to be followed to the letter, and in a timely fashion.”

“They will be,” said Trevize.

“Excellent. Thank you for your assistance in this matter, Director. That will be all for now.”

“Yes, Minister.”

As Trevize was escorted from the Defense Minister’s office back to the Gravitics lab, he felt as exhausted as if he had just finished a twenty-mile run. However, he also had the unmistakable impression that he had just taken a key step in solving the problem of Bek’s usurpation of the Gravitics Project. For the first time since Bek had walked into First Minister Erkar’s office, Trevize felt the future opening up before him.

==== 15. Paperwork ====

Needless to say, the directive from Bek was marked Top Secret. That was all right with Golan Trevize. It didn’t matter how widely Bek’s directive circulated. The mere fact that it existed meant that a

paper trail was being created, one which led directly to Defense Minister Goron Bek.

The title was deceptively innocuous: Ministerial Directive DM-322-303-1, Updated Security Procedure for Gravitics Project. The language was equally innocuous: the bland, passive-voiced hypercomplexity of bureaucratic communications the Galaxy over. None of that mattered, because the inertness of the style couldn't disguise the explosiveness of the substance.

For Ministerial Directive DM-322-303-1 was nothing less than a direct order from Bek to Trevize to single out one of the members of the Gravitics Project for expulsion and execution on charges of sabotage. It was, at least potentially, a dagger pointed at Bek's heart, for if it became known that Bek was ordering the murder of a member of the most important research project on Comporellon, Bek's career (at the very least) would be in ruins.

Of course, Trevize hadn't the slightest idea how DM-322-303-1 might manage to make its way into the hands of Bek's enemies. As far as he knew, the only two copies of the document were located within the closely guarded memory of Bek's computer and the even more closely guarded memory of Trevize's own computer. Trevize wasn't worried about that. His task had been to get Bek to create the fatal document in the first place. Someone else was going to have to figure out a way to give Bek's order wider circulation.

What did worry Trevize was the fact that, having received the order from Bek, he was now obligated to carry it out. If he refused to follow its instructions, he himself was guilty of insubordination, sabotage, and possibly even treason. Nor did Trevize delude himself into thinking that his refusal to obey DM-322-303-1 would result in a trial which would bring the directive to the attention of a wider audience. After he had gained Comporellian citizenship, Mitza Lizalor had taken it upon herself to acquaint Trevize with the obligations and privileges thereby entailed. As Trevize might have guessed, there were many more obligations involved than privileges.

The edicts of the First Minister had the force of law, and one of those edicts allowed for the secret trial and punishment of anyone found in disobedience of orders issued by any member of the Presidium (as the heads of the various government ministries were collectively known). If Trevize disobeyed DM-322-303-1 and were arrested, the only people present at his trial would be Bek, First Minister Erkar, and himself. Erkar would ask him if he had disobeyed Bek, Trevize would admit that he had, and Erkar would order Trevize's immediate execution. That was all.

Nor did Trevize believe that his knowledge made him irreplaceable. Mitza Lizalor undoubtedly thought so, but Goron Bek just as undoubtedly did not. The only irreplaceable man in Bek's world was Bek. The Defense Minister would not hesitate for a moment to have Trevize executed.

Which meant that Trevize was faced with the choice of abetting either an innocent man's murder or his own suicide. It seemed to him that his only viable course of action was to act on Bek's order as slowly as was safely possible and hope that he was freed from Bek's control before it became necessary for him to actually sacrifice one of his men.

Fortunately, the wording of Bek's directive allowed him some leeway. Since the ostensible purpose of the directive was to discover a saboteur among the members of the Gravitics Project, Trevize would be able to spend a certain amount of time actually looking for evidence of sabotage. He knew he couldn't drag out his investigation indefinitely, but while he could, he would.

Was it possible that his investigation might uncover a genuine saboteur? Trevize didn't think so. He knew that the Gravitics Project was moving ahead as quickly as possible, and he believed that his own intuition would have alerted him already to the presence of a real saboteur. He would be playing for time, and nothing more.

With a sigh, Trevize began composing a report to Bek outlining the proposed course of his investigation.

===== 16. Selection =====

Goron Bek was being blunt, for him. “Director Trevize, your progress in implementing directive DM-322-303-1 has been unsatisfactory.”

In an ordinary conversation, Golan Trevize would have offered either an apology, an excuse, or an explanation. However, he knew that Bek was interested in none of these, so he remained silent and waited for the Defense Minister to continue.

“Unless you wish to face charges of obstructionism, I expect you to comply with the directive, most especially with regard to paragraph four subsection C. I expect you to have a suitable candidate available for implementation of the remedial phase of the directive in time for our next meeting.”

“Yes, Minister.”

“That will be all for now, Director.”

“Yes, Minister.”

Walking back to the Project compound, Trevize’s mind was heavy. Translated into plain Galactic, Bek had just ordered Trevize to identify one of the members of his research team as a traitor and saboteur, in his next report to Bek. The consequences would be swift and deadly: arrest, a mock trial, and a quick execution. Whoever Trevize named would likely be dead within hours of his next meeting with Bek.

After reaching the Project compound, Trevize went straight to his office, sat behind his desk, and stared at the top. Sometime within the next twenty-four Comporellian hours, he would have to condemn an innocent man to death; either one of his subordinates, or himself.

All right, he said to his alleged intuition, you’re supposed to be infallible. Tell me what to do next.

There was no answer.

Trevize broke with his regular routine tour of inspection around the Project compound, choosing instead to remain within his office. Denrun and the others, perhaps sensing his mood, did not interrupt him. The Comporellian hours, shorter than the Standard hours to reflect Comporellon's shorter day, passed by Trevize with terrifying speed. He tried to read status reports, tried to write status reports, tried to sleep, tried to eat. It was impossible to do anything while his last fatal Investigation Report to Minister Bek remained unwritten.

Finally, in the small hours of the morning, Trevize opened the file on his investigation, and sat looking at the blank screen that would eventually become somebody's death sentence. His fingers began tapping at the computer's keyboard, and the bland, verbose opening sentences of the report appeared on the screen. Trevize was barely aware of any conscious thought as the sentences became paragraphs, the paragraphs pages, and the pages a finished document. With all the terrible finality of a murderer pressing the contact of a blaster, Trevize pressed the key that would enter the report in his file, and send a copy to the identical file in Goron Bek's computer.

Only then did it seem to Trevize that perhaps his intuition had been guiding his fingers after all. The realization came to him that he did not, after all, have it within him to order another man's death. He had chosen to return to Comporellon, he had accepted leadership of the Gravitics Project, and now the responsibility for the outcome rested on him alone. If that meant choosing his own death, then so be it.

Golan Trevize smiled for the first time in weeks as he read the name he had defiantly named in his report: Goron Bek.

His computer chirped at him, and a message appeared on the screen to remind him that it was time for his daily meeting with the Minister of Defense. Still smiling, Trevize rose from his desk, left his office, and went out to the compound's exit to meet his escort.

As the door to the outside slid open, however, the face that met him was not the face of Captain Weklin, his usual escort. Instead, Trevize found himself looking at a man in the black uniform of the Ministry of Security. Furthermore, the man was familiar, though it took a moment for Trevize to place him. The last time Trevize had seen this man had been during his first visit to Comporellon with Janov and Bliss.

“You’re the taxi driver!” Trevize exclaimed.

The black-uniformed man nodded at Trevize, clearly pleased at being remembered. He said, “You are correct, sir. Lt. Hennis Mindollo of the Comporellian Security Force. I did indeed have the pleasure of escorting you and your companions to the Ministry of Transportation during your initial visit to our world.”

“Against our will, as you’ll doubtless recall.”

Lt. Mindollo nodded again. “These things are sometimes necessary in my line of work. I think you’ll agree that matters did eventually resolve themselves to your satisfaction.”

Was that a veiled reference to Trevize’s first tryst with Mitza Lizalor? Not that that mattered right now. Trevize asked, “Are you here to escort me to Minister Bek’s office?”

Oddly enough, Lt. Mindollo seemed to be having trouble keeping his expression neutral. Trevize had the strange impression that the security man was trying to keep from grinning at him. Mindollo replied, “I’m here to escort you to the office that was Bek’s.”

“Was?”

“Yes, was. Goron Bek is no longer Minister of Defense. He has been arrested on charges of attempting to sabotage the Gravitics Project.”

Stunned, it took Trevize several seconds to formulate a response. He finally said, “Who has been chosen to replace him?”

Lt. Mindollo said, "You have ... Minister Trevize."

===== 17. Promotions =====

It was fortunate for Golan Trevize that there was nobody standing in his way as he walked the corridors of the Ministry of Defense, for if there had been, he would have bumped into them. His attention was completely focused on his escort, Lt. Hennis Mindollo of the Comporellian Security Force.

"Would you mind very much repeating that, Lt. Mindollo?"

The security officer clearly did not mind at all. "I said that you have been chosen to replace Goron Bek as Minister of Defense."

"How in the Galaxy did that happen?"

"In the usual fashion," said Mindollo. "After the position was made vacant by Bek's arrest, the First Minister appointed someone else to fill it. In this case, you."

"Why would First Minister Erkar make me his Defense Minister?"

"First Minister Erkar didn't."

By now, Trevize's mind had begun working well enough for him to figure out what Lt. Mindollo was getting at. He said, "Because Dinnis Erkar isn't First Minister anymore."

Mindollo nodded. "Citizen Erkar has chosen to retire permanently to his vacation home on the Southern Peninsula. His successor is waiting to meet you in your new office."

And then the two men were standing in front of the door to that office. The white-on-gray words had already been changed from "Goron Bek, Min-Def" to "Golan Trevize, Min-Def". Lt. Mindollo touched the lettering, which glowed briefly, and then the door slid open.

The cavernous office within was the same, but the figure standing beside the desk was not Goron Bek. Instead, as Trevize had somehow been half expecting, it was Mitza Lizalor.

Mindollo saluted Lizalor and said, "First Minister, I present Minister Trevize."

Lizalor nodded to Mindollo and said, "I thank you, Lieutenant. Please remain with us for a moment."

"Yes, ma'am," Mindollo responded crisply as he stood at attention.

"Golan Trevize," Lizalor continued, "on behalf of the Emergency Policy Formulation Group and the citizens of the Commonwealth of Comporellon, I hereby nominate you for the position of Minister of Defense. Do you swear to fulfill the duties and obligations incumbent upon the office of Minister of Defense, to uphold the laws of the Commonwealth of Comporellon, and to defend the Commonwealth against all foes, foreign and domestic?"

"I do," said Trevize.

"Then Golan Trevize, I hereby appoint you to the position of Minister of Defense for the Commonwealth of Comporellon." Stepping forward, Lizalor took Trevize by the shoulders and bestowed a formal kiss upon each cheek. Trevize was half tempted to kneel down like a character from an Imperial drama. Instead, he returned Lizalor's formal kisses and took a step back. Lt. Mindollo saluted Trevize, then turned sharply on his heel and left the room.

As soon as the door had shut behind them, Trevize found himself buried under Mitza Lizalor's fierce embrace, and the kisses she bestowed upon him were considerably more than a formality. Trevize returned her embrace with equal feeling, and the two remained that way for a long time.

Finally, Mitza pulled back enough to look him in the face, and said, "You, Golan my love, are the most irrepressible madman I have ever

met in my life! Sending Bek a report accusing him of sabotaging the Gravitics Project!”

“I take it you’ve read it, then,” said Trevize.

Lizalor shook her head, but Trevize knew she was confirming his guess. “The sheer brazen effrontery of it! Magnificent! Impossible! You mad fool!” She threw her arms around him again, and it was all that Trevize could do to keep her from crushing the life out of him. “Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?”

When Trevize had recovered his breath, he said, “I knew that if I didn’t accuse one of my team, Bek would have me arrested and executed. I also knew that I didn’t have it in me to sacrifice one of my men to save myself. At that point, I knew I was doomed, so I decided I might as well go out in a blaze of glory. Also, it would probably be my only chance to let Bek know what I really thought of him, and I couldn’t pass that up!

“Just out of curiosity,” he added, “how did you come to read it?”

Lizalor was silent for a time, then she said, “After Erkar let Bek steal you from me, I knew I could expect no help from the First Minister. At that point, there was only one man in the Presidium who would be able to help me.”

“The Minister of State Security,” said Trevize.

“The same,” said Lizalor. “Security and Defense have always been rivals within the Presidium, and with Bek in control of the Gravitics Project, it was clear that Defense was in the ascendant. I went to Minister Banasek and offered an alliance. If he gained me access to the contents of Bek’s computer, I would provide him with evidence that would allow him to discredit Bek and Erkar both. He agreed, and I set about finding him his evidence.”

Trevize said, “And the evidence you showed him was directive DM-322-308-1.”

“Correct.” Lizalor shook her head again in disbelief. “I will never understand how you were able to persuade him to issue such an incriminating document. And if anything else were needed, your final report denouncing Bek was it. Minister Banasek told me that your final report alone would have convinced him of the need to eliminate Bek. He was dubious at first about my plan to set you in Bek’s place, but your report convinced him of that as well. He spoke eloquently in praise of your courage.”

“And he also knows about our affair,” said Trevize.

That brought Lizalor up short. “What makes you say that?”

“It stands to reason. Why would he allow you to become First Minister, and me to become head of a rival Ministry, unless he had some sort of hold over both of us? And the most obvious hold would be knowledge and evidence of an illicit affair between the two of us. All he has to do is reveal our wrongdoing to the populace at large, and the two of us will find ourselves out of power just as surely as Erkar and Bek are now.”

The look on Mitza Lizalor’s face made Trevize wish his intuition wasn’t so infallible.

==== 18. A Sign from the Past ====

Ironically, now that Trevize was Minister of Defense, it made sense to keep the Gravitics Project where it was. Kuel Denrun was once again appointed Project Director, and the locks and guards were removed from the Project compound. Trevize wondered how many of the men on the Project would notice.

The Gravitics Project was now only one of the matters facing Trevize, though still the most important one. He had assumed responsibility for a vast government bureaucracy charged with the defense of the 37 worlds that made up the Commonwealth of Comporellon. He would be allocating resources, awarding contracts, and overseeing the implementation of strategic policies. True,

Comporellon hadn't fought a war in nearly a century. With the rise of the Foundation, the chaos that had shaken the Sirius Sector since the fall of the Empire had gradually vanished, leaving the Comporellian military with little to do but maintain itself in a state of readiness and plan for various increasingly unlikely contingencies.

Fortunately, the Min-Def (as the Comporellians called it) largely ran itself, in the manner of established bureaucracies everywhere. Most of Trevize's work at first consisted of learning what each of the various subministries and subdepartments was involved in. There just weren't enough hours in the day to stay on top of it all, and Trevize joked to Lizalor that he was now more of a prisoner than he had been under Bek.

And at the back of Trevize's mind was the nagging sense of an approaching crisis. Ever since he had returned to Comporellon and begun work on the Gravitics Project, Trevize had had the feeling that he was racing the clock to prevent some sort of catastrophe. He didn't know what that catastrophe might be or when it might occur, only that Comporellon's drive to recreate the Foundation's gravitic drive technology was the key to dealing with it.

Another consequence of his new position was that Trevize no longer saw Lizalor every day. She was even busier dealing with her new duties as First Minister than he was dealing with the Ministry of Defense. What was more, there was the knowledge (or at any rate, strong suspicion) that Security Minister Banasek knew of their illicit liaison. Logically, they shouldn't have let the knowledge affect their relationship; after all, he could already ruin both their careers with what he knew. Adding a few more trysts to his files wouldn't make the situation any worse. Nevertheless, they knew they were being watched, and it made them more reticent with each other.

So it was that after calling it a day at the Min-Def, Trevize found himself at loose ends. He didn't socialize with his subordinates at the Gravitics Project, and he couldn't appear in public with Lizalor, and he didn't really know anybody else on Comporellon. He took the

tubeway from the Defense Ministry to a large shopping district he had heard of a few kilometers away.

Once again Trevize felt as though he was walking in a historical book-film through the subterranean world of lost Trantor. Half a dozen levels rose above him, each one crowded with shops selling various goods and services, all covered over by a clear dome displaying a cloudy sky. Here at last the Comporellian preference for shades of gray had been set aside, and colors rioted everywhere he looked, with the drably-dressed Comporellians providing a kind of sober contrast. Trevize walked slowly along the concourse, stopping from time to time to look at kittens playing in the window of a pet store, displays of toys, art supplies, games, clothing, food from worlds across the Galaxy.

From the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of a symbol out of history, and he had to stop and search to make sure that he hadn't imagined it. Tucked in between a Rhodian restaurant and an appliance outlet, there was a maroon-colored storefront with no merchandise on display. Instead, above the door, there was a sign showing an open hand outlined against a rayed sun. There was a sign like that in the heart of Terminus City, carved into the permacrete of a four hundred year old building that had once served as the holiest shrine in the Galactic Periphery: the Temple School of the Church of Science.

This was the religion that Salvor Hardin had allowed to grow up in the Four Kingdoms, and which he used as an instrument of control against the ambitious monarchs of those distant days. It didn't merit any mention in the history books after Hober Mallow had ended its role as the Foundation's state religion, but Trevize knew in a vague sort of way that it had continued to spread across the Galaxy.

It was a tiny touch of home in the center of a vast, unfamiliar world, and Trevize found himself drawn to it. A red-robed priest emerged from the doorway, and he noticed Trevize gazing up at the sign. "Would you like to come inside, my son?" he said in a voice with the same Comporellian accent as Lizalor's.

Trevize was going to refuse, but a combination of curiosity and homesickness made him change his mind. "Thank you, Father," he said at last. "I'd like that very much."

==== 19. The Church of Science ====

Like most natives of the planet Terminus, Golan Trevize had never been inside a Scientific temple. Although Salvor Hardin and his immediate successors had used the religion as a method of controlling the barbarians of the surrounding Four Kingdoms, they themselves had not believed in it.

The religion had originally arisen in Anacreon and the other kingdoms in the century and a quarter between the Zeonian Revolt and the end of Imperial rule in the Periphery. The Zeonian Revolt had been destructive enough, but the aftermath had been worse. The planetary universities that had acted as recruiting grounds for the Zeonians had been closed down by Imperial decree, and all higher education in the Periphery had ceased. Technical training had become practically nonexistent, and over the years buildings, bridges, power plants and the rest of the technological infrastructure had fallen into disrepair and, eventually, disuse. As the nuclear power plants went offline one by one, central heating systems were replaced by fireplaces. Forests were cut down and turned into firewood, and coal and oil were dug from the ground. All forms of mass media had vanished, to be replaced by rumor, legend, and myth. Half-remembered scraps of Imperial culture had been mixed together with tales of growing hardship and lawlessness, and the resulting stories mutated as they were passed down orally from one generation to the next. In the end, a folk religion grew up among the increasingly barbarized inhabitants of the Periphery, telling of the Fall from the Galactic Paradise.

The final ingredient to the mix was added by the Foundation. Technicians and engineers from Terminus had come to the worlds of the Four Kingdoms to repair and refurbish the disused hospitals, roads and power grids, and they brought with them the tale of Hari Seldon and his Psychohistory Project. Seldon was quickly absorbed

into the folk religion, becoming the Prophet of the Galactic Spirit, and the technicians found themselves being treated as holy men. Back on Terminus, Salvor Hardin learned of the new development, and chose to encourage it. The technicians were organized into a priesthood controlled by Hardin, and the religion was co-opted by the Foundation as a means of controlling the people of the Four Kingdoms.

Hober Mallow eventually dismantled Hardin's system of technician-priests and state-sponsored temples, but by then the religion had acquired a momentum of its own. Although it was no longer supported by the Foundation, Salvor Hardin's Religion of Science continued to spread from world to world, supplying spiritual solace and an ethical framework for trillions of people throughout the Galaxy.

The Temple School in Terminus City was still there, and still served as a theological seminary for the Church of Science. As a historical landmark, the Temple School was open to the lay public, and hourly tours were conducted through its halls and lobbies. Trevize himself had taken the tour during a grade school field trip, as did all the schoolchildren of Terminus at one time or another. Twenty years later, all that remained in his memory was a vague impression of walls decorated with artwork depicting scenes from the Book of the Spirit. Hari Seldon was shown, not seated in a wheelchair, but standing atop one of the ancient domes of Trantor, a staff in one hand, the other reaching forth as he was graced with a revelation from the Galactic Spirit.

A duplicate of that mural was reproduced in the main vestibule of the Temple on Comporellon. There was Seldon, his hair and priestly robe rippling in the wind, dark clouds scudding across the sky behind him, while the light of the Galactic Spirit filled his noble face. Trevize suddenly remembered the story of Seldon's adventure outside the Trantorian world-city, shortly after settling on the Imperial capital, when he became trapped in a snowstorm. Presumably the

Anacreonian peasants had picked up that story from the Foundation technicians and made it one of the central myths of their folk religion.

Aware that the Comporellian priest remained by his side, Trevize turned to him and said, "It looks just like the one in the Temple School in Terminus City."

If the priest was surprised to learn that his guest had been to the Church's central shrine, he didn't show it. He simply said, "There is one like it in every temple in the Galaxy. It serves to remind us that the Galactic Spirit acts through the agency of humanity. From the Holy Prophet himself to the smallest child, all are vessels of the Spirit."

Not being a believer in the Church of Science, Trevize had no wish to become engaged in a discussion of theology. Instead, he asked the priest, "How long has the Church been here on Comporellon, Father ...?"

Again, the priest showed no emotion at the change of subject. He simply said, "You may call me Father Dorno. It has not been long, as such things go. A mere matter of a generation or two. The first missionaries did not reach the Sirius Sector until two centuries ago, during the Time of Darkness." Trevize had never heard of the Time of Darkness, but it wasn't hard to guess that the priest was referring to the period when the Foundation was under the rule of the Mule. "The men who ruled Comporellon in those days were unbelievers who would not permit the Church entry onto this world. The Galactic Spirit bids us to abide by the Laws of Men as we do the Will of the Spirit, and so we forebore to trespass here. It was a mere forty-seven standard years ago that the Presidium chose to reverse its policy and allow the Church to bring the word of the Holy Prophet to these people."

Now Trevize was curious. "What made the Presidium do that? A sudden revelation of enlightenment? Or pressure from the Foundation?"

Father Dorno smiled. "Not the first, I regret to say, and not the second either. The government of the Holy Foundation has taken no notice of the Church since its disestablishment under Primate Mallow, and does nothing to either encourage or discourage its spread. The men of the Presidium acted out of self-interest, as is so commonly the case in this life. It had not escaped their notice that elsewhere in the Sirius Sector, where the arrival of the Church was met with less resistance, that the worlds that allowed us access tended to have higher standards of living."

Surprised, Trevize asked, "Why should that be?"

"For the same reason Primate Hardin first established the Church. Our missionaries come from the most advanced worlds in the Galaxy, from those worlds that have been longest in the embrace of the Holy Foundation. Along with the Word of the Holy Prophet, they bring new devices, new techniques, new medicines. Not intentionally, as did the missionaries of old in the days of the Established Church. Nevertheless, they bring with them the things they are familiar with, and these things are often unknown to the people among whom they walk."

This was something Trevize hadn't expected to hear. In the familiar history he had been taught as a child, it was the Traders who spread the Foundation's reach after the Church of Science had lost its power to control the people of the barbarian fringes. Had Hari Seldon known that the Church would continue to spread outward, bringing the culture of the Foundation in its wake? He must have; it would have been right there in his equations. Was the Second Foundation monitoring the Church? Trevize found himself wishing he could ask Stor Gendibal, the Second Founder whose mind he had briefly touched.

It occurred to Trevize that there seemed to be a blind spot concerning the Church among the people of Terminus. The history books always seemed to convey embarrassment when discussing the century-long era of the Established Church. The historians tended to hurry past it, and one could sense their relief that they

could stop talking about the pious, faithful missionaries and start discussing the devious, mercenary Traders. As for the citizens of Terminus, there was that one field trip to the Temple School as schoolchildren, then the whole episode seemed to drop out of their consciousness.

Trevize blinked, realizing he was allowing his thoughts to sidetrack him. He was supposed to be getting a quick history of the Church of Science on Comporellon. "So," Trevize guessed, "the Presidium were becoming fearful that Comporellon was falling behind its neighbors technologically."

Father Dorno nodded. "It is often the case that a world finds itself welcoming the Church for the most unspiritual of reasons. And as Primate Hardin was wont to say, if you've got them by the purse strings, their hearts and minds will follow. So it was that the First Minister of that time allowed the Reverend Father Rendic Poros to establish the First Temple here in the Capital."

Trevize looked around him. "This temple?"

"No," said Father Dorno. "We stand in the third temple to be established on this world. The First Temple is half a mile from here, in the Karien District."

Trevize was still hazy on the various districts that made up the Capital, but he recalled that Karien was an industrial site where some of the poorest inhabitants of the city made their homes. He asked, "Was the site chosen for the First Temple by the Reverend Father or by the First Minister?"

Father Dorno smiled faintly, no doubt following the trend of Trevize's thought. "The choice was the Reverend Father's, although I'm given to understand that the First Minister was pleased by the choice as well. The Reverend Father Poros was following a well-established tradition of the Church, for we have found that it is usually the least-regarded members of a society that are most in need of spiritual solace. At any rate, there are now thirty-four temples here on

Comporellon, and an additional twelve scattered across the other worlds of the Commonwealth.”

An odd thought struck Trevize, prompted by Father Dorno’s use of the phrase ‘least-regarded members’. “Tell me, Father, do you have any temples in the region of the Central Mountain Range?”

Now Father Dorno’s smile grew more pronounced. “You are quick to see to the heart of things, my son. As it happens, no less than fifteen of our temples have been established in the Central Mountain Range. The folk of the mountains have been particularly receptive to the Word of the Holy Prophet.”

Having spent so much time in Mitza Lizalor’s company, Trevize had become quite conversant with the beliefs of the mountain folk. His curiosity engaged, he asked, “Have you had much trouble reconciling the Galactic Spirit with He Who Punishes?”

“The Galactic Spirit embraces all things. He Who Punishes is but one of the Spirit’s many facets. With time, the mountain folk are coming to recognize this.”

“The older ones, though, still cling to their original beliefs,” Trevize guessed.

“Some of them,” Father Dorno admitted. “It is of no consequence. In their way, they follow the path laid out for them by the Holy Prophet, as do we all.”

Trevize found himself wondering how Father Dorno would react if he were told that the people of the Galaxy, in fact, were no longer following the path laid out for them by the Holy Prophet, but were instead following another path laid out for them by the Holy Prophet’s robotic mentor.

No doubt, the Father would simply remark that Daneel, too, was a vessel of the Galactic Spirit, his robotic origins notwithstanding. The

Church might even decide that Daneel also qualified as a Holy Prophet.

They might, Trevize realized with a chill, decide that he did, too. To get his mind off his possible elevation, Trevize asked, "How has the government responded to the spread of the Church?"

"With a certain amount of hostility, you may be sure," said Father Dorno. "Even though we no longer have any connection with the government of the Holy Foundation, the Presidium sees us as part of the Holy Foundation's campaign to absorb Comporellon. As, in a sense, we are, for has not the Prophet Seldon set all worlds on the path of inclusion in the Holy Foundation?"

"True enough," Trevize admitted.

"In the last ten years," Father Dorno continued, "at the promptings of First Minister Erkar, the Presidium has begun promoting Comporellon's own folk beliefs. They run approving stories in the government-run media, invite folklorists to government-sponsored events ... "

"And give positions in the government," Trevize added, "to prominent Believers such as Mitza Lizalor."

"Just so," said Father Dorno.

"What do you expect will happen now that Lizalor has ascended to the First Minister's office?"

"It is difficult to predict," said Father Dorno. "Comporellon is not the first world to react to our presence in such a fashion. Sometimes, the effort to promote traditional beliefs fails, or is abandoned. There have been worlds, though, where the government sought to foment violence against the Church. You understand, such worlds tended to be particularly barbaric, worlds where the natives were already engaged in violent confrontations over spiritual matters. Yet, there have been worlds just as civilized as Comporellon where Church

members have been subjected to mass arrests, incarcerations, even mass executions, at the behest of a fearful government.”

Trevize found himself staring at the priest in horror. “And what will you do if such things happen here on Comporellon?”

Father Dorno had seemed a genial enough man, but Trevize could see a glimmer of steel in his eyes as he said, “Then we will follow the path laid out for us by the Holy Prophet, wherever it may take us. If Comporellon’s road to the Holy Foundation must be marked out with the blood of martyrs, then that is as the Galactic Spirit wills it.”

===== 20. Proposal =====

On a world like Comporellon, of course, a member of the Presidium couldn’t simply walk into a Scientific Temple and expect the fact to remain unknown. On the afternoon of the day after Trevize’s visit, First Minister Lizalor requested his presence in the Administration building. He was able to guess at the reason (me and my intuition, he taunted himself), so the stern look Lizalor gave him was not totally unexpected.

Gesturing at a report on her desk, Lizalor said, “Minister, word has reached me from the Ministry of State Security that you were observed entering a Foundation temple yesterday evening.”

“Minister Banasek’s men are operating with their usual flawless efficiency,” Trevize responded drily. “I did indeed visit a Temple of Science, to give the facility its correct name. It was the one at the Arcadia shopping district, though I have no doubt that your report has already told you where it is, and also exactly how long I spent there, to the Galactic Standard second.”

“You display an unseemly jocularly for a man who is in imminent danger of being arrested for treason,” said a frowning Lizalor.

“I was informed by a priest at the Temple (a Father Dorno, in case your report doesn’t mention his name) that there were 46 Scientific

Temples in the Commonwealth. Is everyone who frequents a temple in imminent danger of being arrested for treason?”

Her voice growing perceptively colder, Lizalor said, “None of those other Comporellian citizens is a member of the Presidium. We who serve in the upper echelons of the government are held to a higher standard of loyalty than the average citizen.”

Trevize nodded. “So you’re saying that the act of walking into a house of worship is grounds for treason here on Comporellon.”

“Do not bandy words with me, Minister,” said Lizalor, growing visibly angry. “You are consorting with agents of a foreign government, and that is grounds for treason here on Comporellon.”

“The First Minister’s grasp of Galactic history seems to be faulty,” said Trevize. “The Church of Science hasn’t been associated with the Foundation’s government in over three hundred years. These days, they’re simply another religion.”

“A foreign religion,” Lizalor spat, “sprung from the Foundation.”

“Naturally,” Trevize said, “as First Minister, it is well within your powers to declare the Church of Science an illegal organization, and to have its members and associates arrested. Will you be doing so?”

If anything, his question seemed to make Lizalor even angrier. “It is not a question of what is within my power, as you know very well. It is within my power to declare war on the Foundation, but we both know that doing so would be the height of folly. It would be almost as foolish to declare the Church of Science,” she snarled the name, “illegal. The Presidium has allowed this dangerous cult to grow too influential. To move against it would be to invite an uprising against the government by its adherents, and to make Comporellon appear every bit as barbaric as the Foundation claims we are. So, to answer your question, no, I will not be arresting every member of the Church. But I will arrest you unless you explain exactly what you were doing there!”

“I was homesick,” Trevize said simply.

That seemed to bring Lizalor up short. Her anger evaporated, leaving only puzzlement. “Homesick?”

“Yes, First Minister, homesick,” Trevize said quietly. “I have been away from Terminus for nearly a year now. I am foresworn there. I can never go back.”

“Do you regret becoming a Comporellian?” Lizalor asked, equally quietly.

“No. Moving here was the right thing to do, and I do not regret it. Nevertheless, Terminus is my homeworld. I miss being there, and I can never go back. When I saw the temple at the Arcadia shopping district, it was like looking at a small piece of Terminus, and I couldn’t resist the impulse to step inside and feel an echo of home, however faint. If you want to have me arrested for that, First Minister, then go ahead.”

Lizalor rose from her desk, came around, and embraced him. “I am sorry, my love,” she whispered to him. “You have always been so strong, it never occurred to me that you might suffer so. Can you forgive me?”

Trevize kissed her. “There is nothing to forgive, my love. It was a foolish thing for me to do.” It felt wonderful to have Mitza Lizalor in his arms again. He found himself wishing there was some way for the two of them to be open about their love.

And just like that, as though his mind had been waiting for him to frame the question in the proper way, he saw the answer. Releasing Lizalor, he sank down onto one knee before her, took her hand in his, and said, “Mitza Lizalor, will you marry me?”

==== 21. Response ====

Mitza Lizalor, First Minister of the Commonwealth of Comporellon, was not a woman who often found herself at a loss for words. However, the sight of Golan Trevize on one knee before her and proposing marriage did the trick. She stared at him as if he had just declared himself Emperor of the Galaxy.

After a moment's silence, he added, "This is the part where you either tell me yes or no."

Lizalor said neither. Instead, she said, "Are you insane? I can't marry you."

"Why not?" her Minister of Defense asked, apparently in all sincerity. "You're a single woman. I'm a single man. Under the laws of Comporellon that satisfies all the legal requirements."

"I'm the First Minister," she pointed out, as if to a child. "You are one of my subordinates."

"First Ministers have married before," Trevize insisted. "Admittedly, never to another member of the Presidium, but then, the Presidium is only a few centuries old, and this is probably the first time the circumstances have allowed one member to marry another."

The shock of the unexpected was receding from Lizalor's mind, allowing her to begin thinking again. Was the idea of marrying Trevize an unreasonable one? As he pointed out, there were four instances in modern Comporellian history of First Ministers marrying, though never, as he also pointed out, to another government Minister. Jorn Marek had come closest, marrying the daughter of his Underminister of Weights and Measures, and no public censure had resulted.

In fact, upon further reflection, there was much to be said for the match. Trevize had become a popular figure on Comporellon since his dramatic defection from the Foundation. It had flattered the vanity of the Comporellian-in-the-street to have a Councilman from the high-and-mighty Foundation announce that he preferred to live in the

Commonwealth. The politician within her knew all too well that she was rather less popular with the public, due largely to the fact of her being a woman in a traditionally male profession. The people might well look more kindly upon her if she were part of a husband-and-wife team with the more popular Trevize.

There was also the fact of her illicit affair with Trevize, and the likelihood that Minister of State Security Banasek was aware of the affair. As a practical matter, marrying Trevize would free the two of them from the danger that Banasek might choose to make their relationship public.

And finally, there was the undeniable fact that she found Trevize to be the most fascinating and desirable man she had ever met. Even now, it was all she could do to keep from tearing off his clothes and satisfying her lust for him. And he had made it clear, in every way a man could, that he found her equally desirable. Since his return to Comporellon, in fact, it seemed to her that she was gaining the ability to actually feel the love he felt for her. Which was ridiculous, and probably just a symptom of her own growing love, but there it was.

So Mitza Lizalor, First Minister of the Commonwealth of Comporellon, raised Golan Trevize to his feet, gave him a long, long kiss, and said, "Yes, my love. I will marry you."