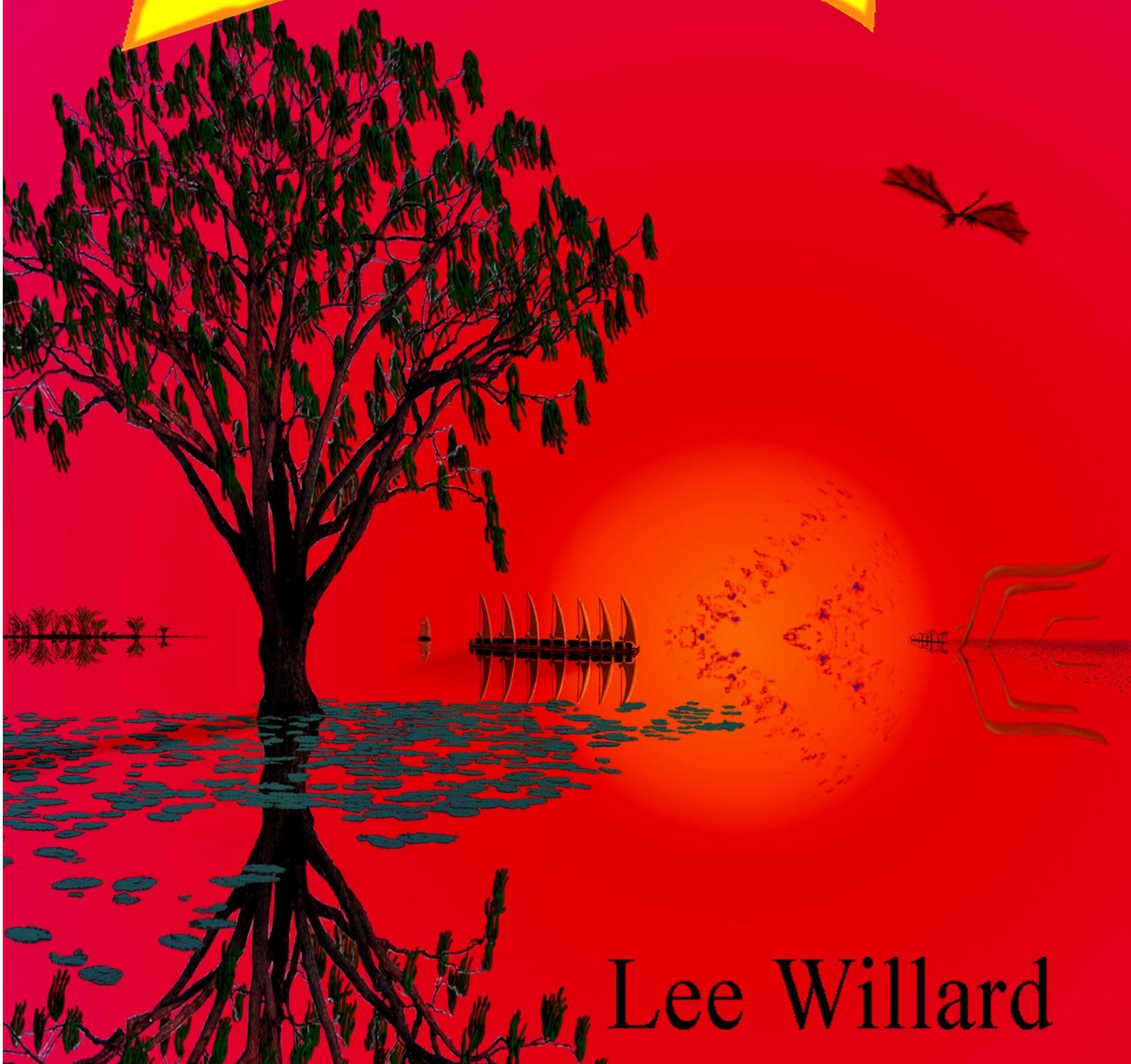


The Report of The Second Expedition To 61 Cygni
Vol II.

Char



Lee Willard

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The Second Expedition
to 61 Cygni

Vol. II

Lhar

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The Second Expedition is dedicated to Trudi. Without her help and support this tale could not have existed.

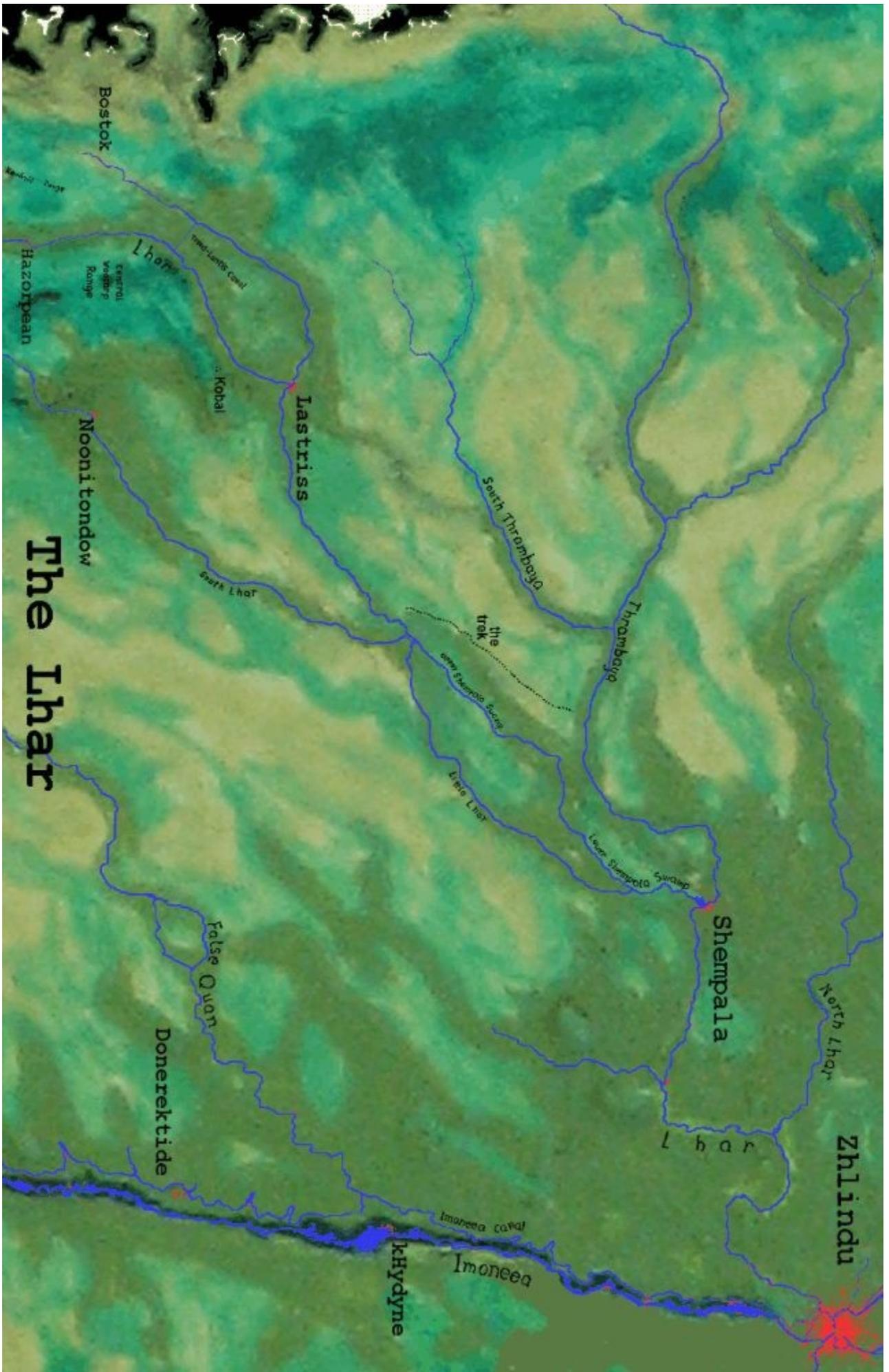
Background information on the planet Kassidor and other stories by Lee Willard can be found at www.kassidor.com.

Cover by Lee Willard

Lhar

After resigning from membership in the expedition of Gordon's Lamp in the mountain town of Yoonbarla, Alan faces the unknown of a whole new world as he follows a pair of native women down the long, lazy, river Lhar. The women meanwhile must cope with the adventure of a shipmate from an alien culture. All the while the child of the expedition's system, Ava Bancour, attempts to unravel the technology of the planet's ancient past.

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Book I.

Signals of a Suntower

Wednesday Jun. 1, 2271 - 9:06pm

Alfred arrived back at his quarters, tired of the security meetings. There had been five hours of them so far since last Saturday night, another hour first thing this morning, and there were two lines uttered in total that summed up everything there was to know about Alan's defection.

"Just like I told you, your mortal went feral on you the first time it smelled a potential mate." Everyone on Gordon's Lamp knows that comment had to come from Major Delos Alvarez of Economics.

The other was, "Alan is perfectly right, other than obliterating villages with mass pulled from the near moon, there's not a whole lot we can do about it." That was the resigned voice of Colonel Glayet Samrova of Security.

And thus the whole expedition of Gordon's Lamp, the flagship of the Christial Church's starfleet, is completely stymied by the fact that his experiment has gone out of control. He'd administered the biosphere for eighty five percent of human life off-Earth, and now he has one simple experiment escape. And it's a single macroscopic creature, his firstborn son as a matter of fact, not a virus or even an insect.

It wasn't all his doing. Church doctrine decreed that they

should seed any possibly habitable planet with human life in God's image as a source of souls. So as soon as they knew there was a biological planet in the system, Alan's zygote had been thawed. The huge, slowly rotating, inner planet of 61 Cygni A was found to be a riot of biology. A pre-industrial civilization was discovered while they were still doing unsuccessful economic prospecting in the asteroid belts. A years-long overcautious approach found no advanced technology.

By then the zygote was a bright young schoolboy. Alfred himself animated the android that played the part of Alan's father. Victoria McReady, a brilliant xenogenetesisist he hadn't met, wooed and married til the Afterlife, animated the android that played his mother.

Unfortunately Alan's proficiency with his system interface enabled him to find out that his 'parents' were androids and not biologicals when he was only sixteen. Alan discovered that he is the only biological specimen of humanity on the expedition. Everyone else is an Angel, living in Heaven, in silicon, in the qbytes of Gordon's Lamp's logic pods. His zygote had been fertilized in-vitro with frozen gametes taken from bodies long dead. Alfred knew how deeply hurt Alan was, more than he could admit even to himself. They had planned to tell him the truth about themselves when he was twenty one, when he would be better able to handle it. The androids never moved again once Alan showed them he could hack control over them.

Their orbit was in a stasis point between the planet's little hundred-mile egg of an inner moon and the planet itself. From there they planned to study the native civilization in more detail, though the captain's paranoia at being discovered by the natives had allowed them to learn almost nothing in the four years since then.

Alan's administration, not just care, hadn't actually been transferred from Theology to Biology until a probe was landed among the natives and turned up the shocking fact that the natives were humans. They were not plausible humanoids, they were pretty young men and women. This planet was already well seeded with human life in God's image, most of them in their late teens and early twenties, descended from an ice-age indo-european stock they thought. That fact made Alan an uncomfortable issue.

Alan became more withdrawn and surly as he got older and realized how superfluous he was. No companions were raised for him and he had only video images to converse with. He had a video friendship with Glenelle and Morgan, the only other souls who had ever animated androids in his presence, and at times he was pretty close to Ava Bancour, their systems administrator. He never had an actual companion his own age. Ava was biologically younger than Alan when she ascended, but she was over a hundred thirty years old in silicon.

Alan refused to ascend to the Afterlife, preferring to play with his terminal and retain his biological body, performing

doggedly in the exercise ring and participating in as much EVA as he could be allowed. His moods became a concern for both he and Vic and they tried to find something to get him interested again.

Alfred and his friend, Colonel Elmore Bovok, commandant of Economics, championed the idea of sending Alan to the surface. There was some chance he could pass as a native long enough to find out some useful information before he was incarcerated and/or dissected. They argued that he wouldn't arouse as much suspicion as a probe. If he could find anything at all on how this planet came to be inhabited by humans it was worth the risk. It would also give him something to do, something that would certainly pique his interest.

That had piqued his interest alright. He had trained heroically and was already fluent with the native language. He put the only remaining live probe's audio and video on in his chamber round the clock. Once set down, Alan had passed for a native much too well. A week after they set him down he had found a girlfriend and run off with her to some native city, presumably the big one in the center of this basin. That was as vast a pile of construction as existed on Earth itself, a misty and mysterious ceramic honeycomb overgrown by tangled jungle and filled with a swarming multitude of humanity, their domestic animals, and a riotous canopy above.

The girlfriend claimed to be a well-traveled university professor, and knew some pretty impressive things, like how many nucleotides it takes to code an amino acid in all five evolutions of life found on this planet. Everything she'd told Alan that can be verified has been correct, including the nucleotide-amino acid codings for humans and the two forms of life native to this planet that the expedition already had samples of. If things they can't verify are correct, the natives control their own biology, had a high-energy civilization about the time of the Egyptian pyramids and outgrew such savagery as governments and such primitive afflictions as old age about the time of Jesus.

Because it was his experiment, Alfred was stuck with continued monitoring of Alan's comm channel. He didn't think that fact was grievous punishment. Indeed that was exactly what he wanted. Actually Alfred wanted to remain with the whole biology lab, its supporting equipment and probes. All that would remain in orbit here at the biological planet of A, while the remainder of the ship took the two year journey to 61 Cygni B in search of enough metals to allow an economy to develop. All the biological equipment and specimens would be left behind, along with the atmosphere shuttle and all the atmosphere probes. They were leaving everything that would be of no use in the all-out economy-or-bust expedition they were mounting to B. The only problem was that Theology was against leaving Souls behind with the

jettisoned equipment and Captain Kelvin M'Kintre paid a lot of attention to Theology.

Alfred was trying to justify his staying behind. Everything from the 'I'll be fine here, there's plenty of facilities' argument to the 'I deserve the punishment for starting this experiment' argument. Many of them made logical sense to him, but would they make theological sense to the captain? Alfred had never been familiar with theology. True he had lived the latter part of his afterlife in the Pan Solar League, a Theocratic state for the Christial Church, but he had joined that nation because his skills were in demand in a prominent position, not because of his religious devotion.

Thursday Jun. 2, 2271 - 3:09am

Alan's channel came to life, and within minutes everyone who was on call, both publicly and privately, was listening in. Because she was interested in the world below and had considered young Alan a friend, Ava stayed awake and listened to his whole narration.

"You don't have to respond," Alan was saying, "and shouldn't respond with audio. I see the connection's good, so I assume this is going somewhere. I'm going to tell you what I think is significant about what I've seen so far, I'll stop if someone comes near, but I'll talk for as long as I can. I'm in a crows-nest on the mast of a ship, we're underway already in

the dark but I'm off duty and right now there's no one around.

"First let me tell you about the 'peasant areas' that you were so worried about," Alan began. "People's possessions are modest but they aren't totally destitute and it's certainly not slaves on plantations like you thought. It's individual landowners of an acre or two. They and theirs eat from the bounty of those couple acres pretty well, but I've been told most of them get their money by strolling into town and taking a job one or two weeks a year."

He described homes that were simple, open and airy, but often covered with flowering vines from which the local intoxicant is made. He described many kinds of homes, apartment buildings in the form of trees, single homes up in trees, lush gardens. He found the flat valley floor is covered with little canals and creeks. A lot of people have water access and two-man kayaks that often have a folding outrigger and mast. He complained that it's hot and humid. Ava looked it up on their monitoring instrumentation. It had been to ninety three and was eighty three now where his signal was originating from. He was now 15,812 feet below sea level barometrically.

He said the people are just the same as up in the hills, just as friendly, drink just as much and don't move any faster. Adults swim naked in the canals and don't bother getting dressed while they're sitting on the bank or bench next to the canal. The people seemed to have all the prosperity they seem to want. "To me it feels like they've outgrown the fascination

with material objects and cut down to the personal friendships and leisure that are the true rewards of prosperity," he said, a pretty philosophical observation for someone as young as he. "Desa told me last week that most natives consider these 'peasant zones' to be 'the good life' and I can see what she means. We saw them poking their gardens a little during Morningday and sitting in the shade or swimming in the canals during Afternoonday."

He described the small city of Hazorpean, the long industrial canal they approached it on, and how the thick jungle in the center was not a park but the downtown residential area. He discovered tools powered by compressed air, boats grown on vines and apartment trees growing in shallow water. It was all interesting enough and she made sure it was all going into the logs. But after lots of detail about the city itself, he got to something she thought was even more important.

"On the Lhar side of the central plaza, at the entrance to the docks, is the most important artifact I've seen so far. The thing is mounted on the most improbable pedestal. It's a twisted, coiling, re-grown drift-woody snag almost thirty feet tall on a raised plaza between the downtown end of the dam and the docks. But caught in the upper branches of that snag is a coal-blue sphere with a few polished crystal facets roughly around it's equator. There's a thick bundle of optical fiber coming off the sphere and disappearing into the trunk of the pedestal. I am sure that the sphere on the top of that tower

is a high capacity optical hub. Desa tells me that only one of the facets is now aimed at anything, a relay tower in the eastern mountains that relays to the city of Lastriss. That's a city out on the flat and supposedly much bigger than this. I've also been told this 'suntower' as they call it, now allows twenty people at once to type messages to millions of addresses all over the world. My guess is the current civilization knows how to use about one millionth of this thing's capacity.

That intrigued her and she got the geosynchronous scope to look for it but found the dark had settled on the land. Alan went on narrating, talking about the corn tortillas made of papyrus that were the national dish in the region he was in, a region called the Zhindu basin. He told about the sailing ship he was on, a collection of pinned-together barges, the center ones with masts. He was living in a crow's nest on one of those masts. He talked about the economics of trading cargo in this basin and how it was organized and financed. The natives were quite efficient in their endeavors and quite adapted to the realities of life without government.

"The captain and crew are pretty colorful," Alan was still narrating, "The captain has some religious thing where clothes are not allowed on her body. The 'first mate' I guess you'd call her, looks like a body builder, she's too muscular to be feminine and she only wears a harness while aboard ship, nothing below the waist but a lush crop of curls. There's two steersmen. One is bald with a one inch ceramic ring hanging

out of his lip. Both of them share the captain's nest but with a bit of tension. The cargoman commands mast three. He could slam a silverback gorilla around like it was a rag doll. He's not quite seven feet tall but I have never seen such a four hundred pound boulder of muscle, so much he barely has room for a face. His bullet head puts out a wide thatch of ragged black hair. He's got long black hair on his shoulders, arms and thighs too. He's got three girls sharing his nest, but one's getting off in about fourteen hours.

"Those five are the whole professional crew on the ship. All the rest of us conscripts are civilian travelers willing to haul sail for passage on the Lhar. Some are going here or there, most are getting off at a city called Lastriss. Our little band of three is the first to sign on for the whole trip, a voyage that will take at least a local year. The third of us, the one you haven't heard about before, is a woman named Luray who was one of Desa's friends back in that hill village. She had a spat with Desa's sister at Desa's send-off party and suddenly decided to go down to the city also.

"Sorry I haven't had much biology to report. It's been the same, the same *domestic* biota. We're not really out of the plots yet, but I'm sure I'll have a lot to report once we get on open river, which I've been assured there is plenty of between here and Lastriss.

"I'm going to sign off now because the second shift at the evening meal is starting to get up so there'll be people around, and like I said, it's my turn to sleep. I hope your preparations

for the trip to Kunaë, I mean 'B', are going well. Thanks for listening." He had been talking for a good part of an hour by then and given them a tremendous amount of data on the native way of life.

Ava knew who was on that live; Alfred, Victoria, Glenelle, Glayet, Kelvin and herself. Biology didn't know the others were listening, Glayet didn't know Kelvin was and the Captain didn't know she was. Ava was amazed that they all had themselves alarmed for this, even at this hour. She hadn't expected all of biology to be tapped into it, only Alfred. He was the only 'official' listener but had actually been the last to wake. She certainly hadn't expected Glayet and the captain to have their alarms set. The captain probably only wanted to be sure Glayet would cover it, but he stayed and listened to the whole narration.

She wondered who would be first to speak. It was Glenelle. "Do you think he's making that up?" She asked.

"I see no reason not to take what he's said at face value," Alfred responded. "He's passed thru these places and seen these things. He's learned some details about the economy. We should probably pass them on to Elmore."

"He doesn't seem to care about security at all," Glenelle said, "if he's just going to lie up there and chat with us."

"What more has he done to security?" Alfred asked in response. "I see no reason to dispute that he was up in some crow's nest on a native sailing raft talking to himself, talking

about what he's seen. He asked us not to respond in audio. He might convince someone he's a bit daft by doing that, but I doubt he'll convince them they're under observation by a superior civilization."

Ava let them ramble, she wanted to check Alan's optical hub theory. Colonel Elmore Bovok requested an atmosphere probe (yes he did, it's right here in the log) with a broad-band optical research pickup. Being the systems person, Ava was able to make sure the request processed right thru with all required signatures set to 'true' and the foundries set to work fabricating it.

Friday Jun. 3, 2271 - 5:51pm

"We have to find some theological angle on this," Alfred told Victoria the next evening, "All the science is a little tiny 'so what' if we can't rebut Bishop O'Conner."

"What is his objection?"

"Real or public excuse?"

"I know his public excuse," she said, "A living Angel can't be abandoned to die like a machine."

"And we can rebut that by saying we're just waiting for the next expedition."

"And Alan can't be abandoned to die like a machine," she added. "His soul is as much a part of the Church as we are."

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