

CHAPTER 1- A SMALL REALM SOMEWHERE

As I reached the tower with my faltering mental projections, all hope of solitude is lost in a shuffling of vistas. A field of a civilization of abandonment breaks up into mobility photographs of memory. This tower appearing from the distance of a magnetic field like a spire of an ancient cathedral. As I view it from across the street, neck-tilting, it looks like oversized earthenware pots, asymmetrically hoistered on the sides of this conically-curved pillar, by some prodigious child. These multi-hued pre-fabbed globes have a quasi-Gaudi aura to them.

The mall's solarium was replaced in the mix, by some magical operation of capital, into a taco joint and juice bar. So my meandering ascent to find some relief from the commercial din below was compromised. I desired a refuge for a higher level entity from the punishing proto-modern zither music piped onto every level. I needed to be de-capitalized, unpunctuated by stylized cerebral ads. I found myself being sucked up the air-inductive escalators, hemisphere of concentric hemisphere after another, to a ceiling of peaceful intent. Like a climbing and winded cat I got to the top of the final landing beneath the fire door leading to the roof. From this odd perspective the sun was observable. The door was ajar, but chained from being thrust open. Tired, alienated, but flexing with the passion of discovery, I knelt like a secularized St Francis looking for nature's grail. The only thing I noticed was a solid mote beam of sunlight and its perpetual duality, choking from behind the clouds.

After this ancient trance-fix of the reptilian brain I was ready to get back to gathering some more commodities. I descended a plumb line divined by a sinking mood to the pit of the Aurora mall. The largest indoor structure in the Universe designed for consuming totally useless things. A world of the trivial fun of our displacement and antagonism. As I moved among the ghostly masses of mutating power caught in their Gruen transfer I rummaged through a list of things, stopping here and there in the shadow of shops filled with perplexing items. I entered a multi-complex that contained a bookstore, a pharmacy, a holo-bit disc retrieval center and a gourmet cafe. The readers were at odds with shifting from screen displays of nervously depicted digitized texts, to verbalized virtual reality scenarios, to data books. Even the few bound and page forward models were impressing the gaggle of lurkers with the customs of the ancestors. I was looking for an old fashion, print—fit, hold in your two hands edition of "Treasure Island." I found several Stevenson's, but not this one, and settled for a very obscure but poignant novel by Kobo Abe. I grabbed four magazines, some Compoz liquid energizer, a ballpoint pen, a portable marked down holobit tape player with

octoneural headphones, a few holobit tapes, a Rosemont chocolate bar and an electric lint brush. Lugging my loot I was bemused by the smell of the coffee of the day and had to have a cup.

In the corner of this complex, a gourmet cafe stood out like a bas-relief of modernity with Victorian trappings. It's shelves were filled with hermetically sealed glass containers of teas and coffees. It's bric-a-bracked avant-garde back wall dusty with memories reminded me of my teenage years squirting aqua ray guns at unsuspecting patrons talking politics at Rocco's on Greenwich Street. I sidled up to the plexiglass counter and onto an extra high Naugahide stool. In a moment of confusion the waitress dropped a carafe of health wine. It landed on the stucco-tiled floor. The explosive noise and putrid ruby-red bleeding splotch caused a frontal distraction, then a class-based fracas with cuss words tossed like a chef's salad, then a totally pissed waitress with nostrils snarling heading full-steam ahead to take my order.

Waitress: Whadayawant?

Me: Can I have a cup of Kenyan Triple-A ?

Waitress: Weaintgotnokenyan.

Me: Can I see a coffee list ?

Waitress: Can't you pick somethin without it ?

Me: No.

Waitress: Nows yo want me to go back across all dat stuff and get it now. O. K. youd the customer.

Finally after diffusing the waitresses' anger I chose a cup of Peruvian fujimora-a strong brew that was shock therapy to my taste buds. While drinking I noticed over the shoulder of a fellow mocha maestro, two articles in an eye-beam transmitted newspaper. One was about the discovery of an otter's skull from a site near the Lascaux caves. They inferred that it was about eleven thousand years old. They also discovered that on the under crust of this site the ground was immersed in radioactive waste from an advanced case of de-salinized drainage running downhill from a mountain-located baryon fission reactor. The other article was a science flash about how ATP synthase particles in the mitochondria of a whale's blubber cells are being replicated into nano-bot frequency devices to monitor Alzheimer 's dysfunctional brain impulses.

So what else is new !

After finishing the last drop I got on line to pay. My ready form of transaction was the usual hand - implant credit chip. I had one put in when I was nineteen. Since credit cards were on the way out and cash was as scarce as a Beatles c.d., I chose, for convenience, a 1/40th of an inch square microprocessor in my right palm.

When I got to the checkout desk I put my hand on top of a florescent blue plate that read my code. Then the automated flux device activated the overhead price-item registration laser beam. The laser registered the prices in relation to my allotted computerized international coded consumer account.

Then I pressed the enter key and the amounts of the transaction were added to the stores account. Then the barrier gate opened and I was free to leave. There goes 1637.43 World Monetary Units into a black hole.

Every time I place my hand on that plate I feel like a witness swearing on a bible to the proposition that I have accepted the fate of Frankenstein, in this little dumbbell nebula. O techno gods of auto evolution tie me down on your table. Electrocute me so I can live a normal economic life just like the rest of the walking, buying clones of this gone mad world. Breathe into me life that mirrors the achieving genes, and let me dream upon my monster of mediocrity. I am owning and using, without responsibility, incarnate.

With very long, striding, but firm, steps, I weaved through the maze of mallites. I scanned the crowd in its frenzied, preoccupied nodding reality and speech-acts, bursting with complex needs, common contradictions and imbricated purposes. Many have dangling around their necks or in deep pockets musico-pendent stones that vibrate to the lulling melodies of their choice, through internal circuits or into enviro space. Some have prostheses replaced bodies, with or without parts and organs. Almost every person had display screens in their hands, on their wrists and over their eyeballs, and some had them on their backs and chests, taking in unknown signals from the ether. They all had dazzling on-off lights throughout their bodies of phones operating in outreach mode. Each one who met my gaze was a self-contained and fluctuating atom caught in a chain reaction of determinism. Colors, moods, ages, genders, sizes, groups, conversations, gestures, grins, yelps, cries and dead-pan desires, all smashed together with the personified momentum of billiard balls in a closed loop. Identity was missing. All that was apparent were segments of experience moving toward an ever escaping altar of commodities. Cool eye, spying sales, or seduced by a nice line or image. Each encased item enclosed psychic freedom and idolized itself behind transparent partitions. Everyone was hypnotized by the hyper-romantic process of techno-consumption.

But all I wanted to do was to get to hell out of this place!

In a manic but determined pace I moved towards the parking arena of this pseudo-basement universe. As I was racing headlong from upper to lower levels, I grasped the enormity of this mall. About a year ago I borrowed a virtual reality schematic of this structure. I mentally was coaxed to travel through a three-dimensional replica of the mall. My characterized video companion, who represented my transplanted sensuous consciousness, became excruciatingly weary traversing only a minute portion of this visualized building.

It went on and on forever with its distasteful ambient designs leading to one psychodynamic cul-de-sac after another. The accompanied aural promotional info that was read along with this virtual scenario was very illustrative. It said: This mall was built by 9,000 construction workers, planners and engineers, over a period of eight years. The Aurora was the brainchild of Kim-Tai-do, who put up eighty billion of his own money to construct this mall. Actual cost: 113, 678, 031, 159.44 WMU's. It opened on August 4th. 12 years ago, the anniversary of the birthday of Sun Myung Moon, the former Premier of the Pacific Rim Confederation, a global corporate finance state, made up of 5 transnational business-entelechies, 3 exchange-motif pulse banks of commerce, and the countries of Korea, Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia. Moon was subsequently martyred when he was blown apart by a Shu-Shu rocket launched by a Taiwanese terrorist in retaliation for Moon's limited, briefcase nuclear escapade, that incinerated 184,000 unsuspecting Chinese "collaterals".

This mall has 26,431 shops and booths. It is twenty-nine square miles in area with a 3718 foot ceiling above its nineteen-tiers. It has three separate theme parks-each representing a different phase in Civilization. The first park is called Aristoland. Here is a perfect replica of European upper crust society in the eighteenth century. It includes several baronial mansions filled with circa antiques (cordoned off with electrically charged ropes, of course), a central square where you can rub elbows with dukes and duchesses, marquises, earls, viscounts and sundry lords and ladies. You will hear at least eight languages spoken here; but don't expect them to talk to you. You can visit the snuff factory, play human chess in a sumptuous courtyard, get guillotined by some burly hooded guy at the Marie Antoinette virtual reality center, and try on period costumes to your hearts content. You can stay overnight in one of the fine hotels: the Kingdom and the Fop House. Both offer royal accommodations, good victuals, and a view of an enclosed commons in the distance.

The second park is called the Wild, Wild West. This park is a frontier paradise with cactus, gulches, locoweed, and ghost towns, people spitting, gold rushes and authentic saloons stocked with red-eye

and beguiling barmaids that look like a cross between Annie Oakley and Miss Kitty, dressed in calico and lace. You can meet Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Bret Harte, James Fenimore Cooper, the James boys, and many others. And don't worry they will talk to you until the cows come home (literally). You can rope, plow furrows, ride horses and stagecoaches, have high-noon duels with computer gunslingers, rustle, clear "uninhabited lands" , and kill injuns. Don't miss the buffalo-burgers at the Tumbleweed tavern. Be sure to stay at the Natti Bumpo Inn-it has the best washbasins and Gideon bibles in this park.

The third park is called-- Wow Man, it's the Sixties. This psychedelic theme park (minus the mind-expanding drugs) is fun for all the family. You can experience the early years of the Vietnam war: military-industrial complex briefings, search and destroy missions, carpet bombings (from a plane or close-up) agent orange and napalm demonstrations (don't forget your gas masks for this one), and picking out which village leader is a sympathizer or local bureaucrat lottery game.

You can visit the Civil Rights history pavilion where clones of King ,X, Parks and Muste guide you through a simulated ten-minute story of their liberation struggle. The souvenir stand here is right on! Also don't miss the Woodstock tour of sounds, sights and smells, a dramatized Chicago seven trial, The Kennedy conspiracy simulation, complete with grassy knoll, and the famous House of Herbs Macrobiotic Kitchen. If you stay in one of the communal sleeping areas, Kesey Tent and Leary Lane are highly recommended.

The attendance at this mall the first week was 28 million. Its yearly sales topped 14 trillion last year. Giving Mr. Tai-Do an annual compensation of 9.4 trillion W.M.U's. It's parking arena, which I am hastily descending to, houses 12,000 cars, standard and electric. If you placed every item available in this mall every day you would have a strange looking line of objects that stretches from Kansas City to London across the Atlantic-Expando bridge.

I finally reached my car and maneuvered my Michaelmas electro-mag hydro cell out of the lattice of rows of parked vehicles. When I came out of the belly of the whale I was on Putney street. I veered left and headed for the grid-conveyor highway entrance ramp.

About ten years ago transit carrier ergonomists had designed an automatic system of connective roadways that had ridges that your wheels fit into, to propel your car, using cold fusion techniques of motion conduction with de-centralized logarithms from efficiency speed computer terminal boxes, to your pre-

programmed destination.

I hooked into the grid-conveyor, which signals with three short beeps to your vehicle that you have one minute to punch in the code for the place of exit. If you do not know the number(just having arrived only a few hours ago I didn't have the time to get the grid guide) you can type in the name of the street you want to go to plus the adjacent cross streets. I had noticed these street names when I hurriedly left my hotel to come to the mall. The only problem that I now had was mastering the triangle -split keyboard with my déclassé peck-and -claw style within the one-minute time. I typed the last letter just as I heard the warning beep.

I heard a whirring sound and my engine was shut off. Vroom !!!! Off I went at seventy-two miles an hour on the grid. I unbuckled my seat-belt (a real futuristic nuisance) and began unpacking the loot I had bought.

I fiddled with the holo-bit player assembler capacity, and popped in a tape of 20th century classical jazz. It was bizarre to see all those cats jamming in miniature on my dashboard. I thought Trane was going to fall into the ozone below when he hit the high note during a heavenly solo. I sucked on the stem of the Compoz liquid energizer vial and felt a mild but angst laden buzz. Lurking in the passenger seat and watching the wheel turn by itself always fostered an aberrant and insecure feeling in me. Who was now inside my car chauffeuring me to the hotel while I grooved on these tunes ? I think I would feel more comfortable if it had some bandages around it's head.

As I passed along this conveyor belt my mind swarmed with ideas as the uniform patterns of mechanized perspectives went by. I wondered about the solicitude of drabness invading our enigma cluster, in the embedded lanes of commerce that marked the global city. How much more de-humanized can our society become? When will we re-learn how to make a world that evokes aesthetic feelings of joy and beauty instead of conflicted states of rage, disgust and boredom? Everything has been made easy by the technosperics of our commodified everyday life. By a management technique of styling social suggestibility through desensitization. This facility was so controlling our innermost thoughts and natural actions that the animism of simple gestures and apperceptions were being decimated. Since the laser war the already domineering aspect of social reproduction had been disrupted for a while- but within break-neck speed had been patched back into its more functional form of oppression. The details of how life in the last months has grown worse, are still unclear. The experts still hold the information- driven reports and folders of research

data. They have only released what they felt we were ready for.

Since after the accidental space-war, which lasted less than twenty minutes in eight local bubbles, all communications and energy sources, on this Earth, was cut-off for six days, we don't really know what happened. This problem was exacerbated when all information was wiped clean in every databank, of every computer in the world: with the exception of the random appearance of 64 cell ratios on the Top Secret super-collider computer, Transac, located somewhere inside a mountain. We really don't know where this computer is-who controls it-what do these cell-ratios mean-and how will it effect our future. We only know about the twelve communiqués issued to the World Council by those who had access to all the data of modern knowledge and who said they were committed to transmit this information to save mankind. When the World Council decided on the third day to turn over temporary control of the world's security and logistics to the Transac computer we were sure they would not let us down. But now some of us are not so sure!

As I drove through the patches of environ-nature around Ruru and Dayton Street I saw, through a cut forest niche, a beautiful striding deer. It must have been dislodged from the surrounding species envelopment, by the metal whirring of machines. As it loped along I spotted two gangly teenagers who were carrying bows. They loosed their arrows as I called out to them. Two sharp ones struck the deer and grounded it. I jimmied the propounder knob of the vehicle to stop -but it skipped on until it finally tripped it's traction lock. I was too late to catch the murderous archers. But I did identify one of the youth to be a scrawny girl with glasses wearing a hockey jersey. I raced towards the wounded deer. It was lucky that the arrows had not pierced it's skin to deeply, and I was able to gently remove them. I soaked up the blood and twisted my handkerchief into a tourniquet.

The deer seemed stunned but still alive as I went back to the vehicle to continue my trip.

The road was relatively smooth until the exit. My car whisked down the ramp and was stopped almost at the end by a compression-gauged mechanism that brought me to a halt. At the corner I heard three whistles indicating that I was now allowed to take control of the terrain and vehicle. And off I whooshed to my destination.

When I reached my hotel, The Alton Ames, I got to my room just in time to answer the phone. With one hand I activated the house-wizard image-presentation button that allowed me to see a life-sized wall projected picture of my caller. With the other hand I picked up the receiver to hear who was calling. When I ascertained it was my wife I was ready to speak and willing to transmit my image back to her. The

usual visual and auditory sidebars, jokes, psycho-babbled small talk, partnership internalized complexes, retorts, plexure, endearing glances and long established erotic pauses ensued. Within the terminus of conversation she mentioned that a certain unknown person named Paul Russell was frantically seeking me out. It turns out that he, in some way, knows me, and had highly critical and the earth-shattering news to share with me. He said that he would meet me, at a pre-arranged place in San Francisco tomorrow at seven a.m. I found that it was strange that he was seeking me out. At this point I am just an ordinary academic gadfly without any privilege or proxy. I live a simple life without fame or deception purged by a modicum of compassion, insight and moral sensitivity. Values not in much demand today. But maybe he knows me by my other identity? Why does he want to speak to me? How did he get my number? And more importantly, how did he know I was on my way to S.F. for a conference at 10 a.m. tomorrow?

He didn't indicate anything beyond his request to see me and his need to convey an important message. I was perturbed but was curious enough to weed through the edge marks that could arise from this encounter, and accept his offer. I asked Leonora to let him know I would meet him, and asked her to try to squeeze more info out of him. I threw a warm aura kiss to my wife and bid her good night.

As I peaked through my purchases again I became very tired. I requested from the auto server, a robust glass of cognac and some nootropic substances. The doses arrived at the auto server platform that rises from below. I opened the door hatch behind the headboard of my bed, and commenced to unwind through the associations of my eight-circuit model. The soft glow of the room receded and my thoughts began to wander. The article on "Multiple Casual Fields of Consciousness" was getting very interes.....:

The Sun was all-endowing light and red like a firecracker fuse. The sky was a blue land of icy chaotic clouds. Mountains belong in this and that position and assume dignified poses alluring to sand and wind. At the edge of awareness empty space and dispossessed pleasure is entered by eleven white robed figures spiraling like ellipses. They meander to and fro in determined holomovement and then march forward towards an abandoned and desolate fortress etched into this world of reality-mirage. In the atrium of this fortress is a golden peacock throne. An image ascends the scaffolding and sits on the throne. The other ten

design a pyramid of forms and remain below like the tributaries of a great river. They wait for the co-evolution of the next action. The image opens it's hood and Fire bursts forth into every corner of the Universe.

Should I respond? ----- :

I awoke with a perceptive feeling. The import of transformative oracles in accord with my mood. It was pitch black outside. Damn ! What time is it ? I flicked on the illumotube and read my watch. 3:14. I had luxuriated in my dream too long. How the hell was I to get to San Francisco by 7? I was at least a thousand miles away, laying on my rump, and ruminating over unforeseen visions reflected in my brandy snifter. An urge to motion and purpose suddenly hit me. I got up. Sham showered. Packed. Taxied to the airport. Bought a ticket for the 4:30 flight to S.F. and boarded the plane. If it took off on time and I caught a break in the morning rush I could be on Cobble Hill in time to have sausages, eggs and dank coffee.

At 4:36 I was airborne. The terrific surge of the engines ripping up runway and bursting out to a rendezvous thrust me forward in the minds-eye. I settled back to snooze oblivious to what was going on. Within moments I heard the voice of a passenger in the next seat attending to me in socially constructed sentences expecting answers. I fix-gazed in his direction with little interest in conversation, or making new friends. Ever since I was a child I have hated the dialectic of strangers imposing inquires and wanting friendship. I always feared being controlled by the trialogue of me, the other, and the world trying to become a reminder of responsibility. But no need to over philosophize, this guy just wanted some feedback.

Otto: (After he got my attention) That magazine. I mean the one in front of you- " Agents of a New Age Dawn"-Do you mind giving it to me?

(of course not-)

Otto:, You are very kind. Are there any magazines or pamphlets over here you would care to peruse?

(No, I don't think so.)

Otto: (looks up from his zine) Allow me to introduce myself, I am Otto 54 from Zurich.

(The moment I heard his name I almost gasped. I recognized that the use of a number as a last name indicated, that first, this elderly and charming man sitting next to me was a Morabot.

Morabots are half-cyborgs and half-transfused downloaders. Downloaders were a cult in the early teens that consisted of people who hooked themselves up to multiple-array processing brainwave computer terminals that transferred their complete chemico-mental data tracks and framing into referential robots that were designed to look like them. They copied themselves in every last detail of quantified information.

Then they pulled the plug on themselves, flat lining their corporeal form- so they could inhabit these plastic molds resembling their outer features, for eternity.

But they didn't last to long. Their circuits burnt out garbling their bits and throwing their system into 'fluctuations', leading to infocide on a mass-scale. So an advanced group of robotic scientists, The Hermes Group, solved their dilemma by mating them before burn-out with newly designed prototype cyborg androids, that have been packaged with some pre-processed emotional cues and self-detection devices, needed to bridge the chasm of robot angst.

Secondly, that all Morabots with numbers under 65 were designated after the laser-war to have Perfect Sequence security clearance by the newly-formed World council.

This guy was a hot piece of tin with a mission.)

Me: (With my mind racing to conclusions before they arose)

It is a pleasure to meet you Mr. 54. Do I detect an accent?

Otto : Yes, my system is being learned German-and the effect is very obvious, Ya ? Are you an American, British or laboratory subject?

Me: I am from Kent, England. My name is James Montaine.

Otto: England is a wonderful place. I know a lot about it. Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady, God bless her soul-was from your country. She is an inspiration to me and all those like me.

Me: Oh, is that right?

Otto : Have you ever read the "Comedy of Errors " by William Shakespeare.

Me: Many years ago-Why?

Otto: This play is like all the efforts we humans have done to help modernize and develop the uncivilized masses. It is our hope that those who are below us shall reap the rewards of a New Jerusalem.

Pure and untarnished by diversity and chastened by the goals of progress.

Me: What does this have to do with this play?

Otto : I don't know. I read last night of the performance of the Limbore players' production in the Washington Times. I never read the play or saw it. But the reviewer reminded us all of the real "comedy of errors " that transpire every day when we try to solve the problems of the world.

Me: What problems?

Otto: Lack of incentive, social unrest, welfare, family values, women's rights, terrorism, drug abuse, promiscuous sexuality-especially by same sex sinners, All these problems keep the free world from aiding the foul world in it's search for deliverance and entrepreneurial freedom.

Me: Thank you for letting me know that.

(END OF TRANSMISSION- AT LEAST FOR THIS TIME !!!!)

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The joy of the limbs moving up a hill. All scenes of postcards and the tutelage of chimeras in motion along a facaded boulevard. The dreary soup of fog and the sirens of distant barges pooling the briny surface. Egg drop colored legions of seagulls encircle the barricaded estuaries. Limestone houses of information exchange and dwelling are visually submerged by ever upward flowing glass mastodons. All this-and the ancient Golden Gate Bridge- it's 6:45 and the unknown shadow of an Other awaits just blocks and secrets behind a tall, impervious facade.

As I was on the lip of the hill facing skyward I saw at my parallel the circular domed Cable-car museum. Along the outer ledge of the road, a stone's throw from the Reagan Presidential pavilion of the North Canosa Hotel, I saw a river of blankets, sleeping bags, day cots, and burnt-out mattresses. Figures in rags, wheezing and spitting up blood, were rising like zombies. They curled up next to each other to yawn and mutter. As the ranks filed in you could see a multitude of raw, hungry faces hunched over wretched bodies. My eye, at a distance, estimated several thousand awakening from dreams more vivid and nurturing than this leper's net.

America has more than 8 million homeless. San Francisco is the way station for at least 5 percent. As I meander across the street I see four excruciating souls moving towards me. When I met their tear-incrusted eyes their hands extended for an emblazoned coin or a piece of dry meat to salve hunger. Noticing the observing regard of the masses I double thought rendering a single monetary unit to each mendicant. I give out some loose change and moved away. My heart is a sacred hoop and my hands tremble like a psychopath. They, behind the morose expressions and within the turmoil of dirt bag social justice, know that the empathetic look I gave them was a gift of incalculable value.

But I still feel ashamed living through this parenthesis period between compassionate redundancy and incurable dread, with a vulnerable clade of muckrakers in the interstices.

The outside of Bell's restaurant looks familiar. As I entered it reminded me of a luncheonette I saw in a film from the late-twentieth century. I passed an ornate c.d. jukebox, a counter marbled with chevrons and zigzags, many vases of cut flowers, and the deleterious aroma of cooking-oil and ammonia. Everyone was in the back. Only one gaunt, bearded man with a trendy black biospherian jumpsuit sat at a table adjacent to a window. When he saw me he flagged me down.

We sat and ate, and spoke in terse but pregnant sentences. I was amused at his habit of lowering his eyes as we spoke; for I sensed his complicity with truth, was, for him, being confirmed by his humility. All the right answers for his method was forthcoming. He made me feel that what he was going to reveal to me soon was a cautionary tale worth hearing. He lit a cigarette and began a discourse about a lucky guess and pair of scissors in the right place.

Paul: In my job as an astronomer we check out dark matter and chart stars along the horizon. Our on-time at the observatory is usually three or four days, about 20 hours per day. Around two weeks ago I ran some data through on a dwarf configuration isolated below a black hole two light years dense.

My colleagues had gone down the hill for a well deserved dinner break and I was on my own. All variables were coming in without a hitch. Our findings were shaping up into conclusions and I was about to change data-imprints for verification. Then on the screen their came up the weirdest thing-it was a scissor closing and opening in sequence to the most eerie music I have ever heard. The light from the blades was

blinding. I tried to respond by calling up a carrier-frequency that the observatory used when they were looking for extra-terrestrials. Don't ask why I did this? Being a scientist I should of weighed the options of hacker-entry from some close terminal in the valley below. But this lucky guess proved right.

The music stopped and the scissor-blades began spinning within their own fulcrum at an ever increasing rotation. Within a half-minute or so---- a red triangle with a blue dot appeared on the screen. Then just the blue dot and a calming mantric hum. Then an incredible flood of textual information relating a story of an amazing prophecy. The information fed onto my computer in descriptive prose with mythopoetic detail that was explained, and uncompromising and complete evidence was offered. For forty-nine minutes these 108 pages raced into my brain. Having an exact cryptic memory I was able to read every word, and absorb the meaning. Then without touching it our force-field printer turned on and printed the whole story.

Then the lights blew-closing down all equipment erasing everything on the computer.

When the lights came back on I retrieved all the pages and put them into a file folder-and put them into my briefcase. This action amazed me. I am not a secretive sort of a person. And why would I want to hide this from my co-workers who I could hear laughing, and climbing the stairs at this moment.

When they came in I didn't say a word. I just returned to my stargazing-accept for a few furtive glances at my briefcase, to see if it was still there.

James: This is one hell of an experience-but how does it relate to me?

Paul: After going home and pondering what I had I realized that I needed somebody to share the awful truth of what this information portended. I have few friends and was afraid of going to any authority given my squeamish nature, and the affairs going down now. I hid the transcript for a while and went about my daily life. But the burden of what I had received and what the text indicated I should do drew me to find a confidant. One untouched by institutional claims, a free thinker with some moral turpitude who had the intuitive capabilities and inner strength to help me. I had read many books by you and was deeply effected by your honesty and your equanimity. I used my computer expertise to break through the unlisted codes of the New York phone bank to get your home number.

James: I am, sort of flattered, by all this. Your story has a mysterious allure to it-but I need to know more. What 's in that transcript that makes it so important?

Paul: This information is so vital, because it clearly proves that this Earth is going to end in 13

months.

James: Yeah, right- Their use to be a guy on my block in Earl's court when I was a child who paraded around with a placard saying- The Armageddon is coming in two weeks-hide under the blooming bed. I used to pitch snowballs at his daft head. Come on, man you don't believe that bullshit do you?

Paul: Maybe I should explain the details of what I've learned-and then when I am finished you can tell me if I stepped in anything along the way.

Paul: The reason I know of the pending demise of our planet is connected to the plot hatched by a cabal of very powerful people to take advantage of the circumstances that are winding out of our control-and leading us to the end of our planetary life. This plot was spelled out in clear detail-with irrefutable scientific evidence in the dispatch I received through my computer.

James: You say scientific-many ideas once deemed infallible by science-have been proven incorrect. So science is prone to mistakes, you know!

Paul: I would be the first to agree with you- but sometimes overwhelming proof coupled with strong intuitive judgment and mutual knowledge makes a view of the future somewhat more real and nearly unavoidable.

James: I am skeptical by nature of these end of the world scenarios. In the back of my mind I feel that if the world didn't end after the Holocaust, or the environmental degradation of the last five centuries, or the limited nuclear briefcase wars, or the battle of the advancing sunspots, or if it didn't fry after the laser incident of a few months back, that Mother nature is a bit miffed- but isn't ready to administer that ultimate swift kick-as yet!

Paul: From where I sit the cards are on the table -turned up. The game is almost over except for the final payback.

James: Who won?

Paul: Nobody- we all lost- once again a small elite has manipulated the masses and will escape with the booty when it is all over.

James: How will it all go down?

Paul: From what I can figure there is a group of nine people called the Servors-who come from various devious and prominent places in the eco-social global security nexus of our omni-capitalist world system that is now directing all local, national and international institutions, and through these, all of

humanity- using a super-collider computer, named Transac, located in an impregnable mountain somewhere.

James: We know most of what your saying, so great- now we will finally find out who the hell killed Kennedy! Come on- didn't all this conspiracy crap come to an end when LaRouche died in prison ?

Paul : I understand your cynicism- but the authors of the document I was given show remarkable examples and proof that what I am telling you isn't theory but fact. I have put what they indicate to the test-in both experiments and in observations- and I am convinced that these Servors are real-and so is the Plan they have for the future.

James: What Plan?

Paul: In the time left before the very end- these nine people who have created a World-Government in absentia- will use their power, technology and the guile of the masses to de-materialize all property and possessions on this Earth into neutralized astral corpuscles that can only be used or transported by those who have the code. They can lock and enclose any matter. This doesn't render it invisible, yet. But it allows them to imprison all objects within an atmosphere fashioned and dictated by sixty-four cell patterns that have superceded all other aspects of language, communication and coding-even the D.N.A. code.

James: This will happen, I suppose just before this Earth croaks?

Paul: You got it. They will dematerialize the neutralized astral corpuscles rendering it invisible; They will reverse the cell-code pattern propelling the neo-atomic element formulas like blips into their computer data bank. Then they will have their fusion-based network merge all this into an end product chip for transport on crafts off this Earth just in time to watch the explosion.

James: That means they will have the blood of 22 billion people on their hands!

Paul: You got it! But when did profit ever have a conscience?

James: This is some fantastic story. I don't know if I really believe you. (Looks at his watch.)

It's time to get over to the conference. Will you join me?

Paul: Sure- I need to fill you in on the other details that you will need to know.

James: We can discuss this during the lunch break.

Within moments both men were within the conference hall. The introductory speaker was

hammering out some inchoate rhetoric, and was shifting gears to his concluding remarks. James was torn between the words of the speaker and the nagging thoughts of a bleak future conveyed by his new friend. He was excited several months ago to learn of this conference and anticipated hearing a speech by Eberhart Latamond on the relationship between the situational networks and the global mutualist movement. He had read many books on mutualism- an eco-philosophy based on civil linking and community praxis that melded the ancient sacred wisdom teachings of both shamanic and universal spirituality with green libertarian socialism. And now, if Paul was right, what difference did it make what kind of society we could have if the world would not be around to see it. His mind was a quiver with pessimism as a very focused and optimistic Prof. Latamond moved to the microphone. James took a deep breath and hoped that sanity would intervene and shape the words to come, into a shield against the tyranny of time.

Prof. Latamond: In a carefully conceived social nexus where freedom for the individual is matched with interactive self-organized situational networks, life, intellect and spirit thrive. We must shape our future by joining together in a radical effort to raise our consciousness through contemplation and critical action. Propaganda is a powerful enemy in the search for Truth. The dialogue between harmonious cooperative sectors of our world, both inner and outer, can defeat the subterfuge inherent in dominator culture.

Mutualism is the sacred science of living and communication based on participatory democratic virtues. We live as mutualists by centering, distributing equally, loving, sharing, rejecting violence, calming mind, and strengthening awareness by experiencing in psychological, economic, political and social action the emancipation of self-government. This experience reflects wholly the real nature of the Universe.

I have worked for this goal in my writing and in my life now for more than thirty years. Even though I am disappointed that control still reigns and manipulates our existence- I feel that some time in the future the meaning and depth of this wonderful philosophy of human and divine intercourse will find its embodiment in a revelatory fashion.

This person or persons will arise from the baptism of fire and water and summon the angels to help our planet in dire need. All the abuse and criticism I have received during my years of extrapolation of this synthetic form of partnership enhancement will fade from my mind and I, if I live to see that day, will be rejuvenated in mind and soul.

(As the professor continued I realized that here was a transparent and beautifully framed utopia that I was familiar with, but was seeing more facets of the diamond within his emotionally-weighted discourse. He set down the parameters for a transformation in spirit and society that could succeed if we would survive our own egoism and greed. I looked in the direction of Paul several times during the speech. I could sense a warmth and an understanding in him building to empathy. He looked like he liked the alterity of what he was hearing and wanted to rid himself of his terrible burden and join the cause. We were both locked into the rhythm of the future with one eye on the mysteries of the present and another on our past saving grace. Could the words we now heard become less an ideology and more a living mythology-with an heroic ending for ourselves and our planet.? When the speech had ended I felt a new phase was beginning and that I would have some part skinning back the problem to seed the solution.)

Professor Latamond blushed at the enthusiastic applause when he stopped speaking. His small, round articulate face emanated a wry smile. The sincerity of his words and mood had resonated through the rafters of the college auditorium. Some listeners were shocked and filled with grace. Some were unmoved. Some were stuck in academic puerile fantasies of semiotic bracketing. Some were even happy.

Paul and I made it towards the exit. We decided to get some lunch and drinks, across the street, between sessions. When we entered Bowmans we hid away at a back booth. It always amazes me how mindlessly appreciative college students and their marketing boosters are of art deco designs, campy posters and graffiitized replicas of that Romantic period: the middle to late twentieth century. Here beer swilling, pony-tailed grunge-bourgeois railed against society advocating an end to reality. Our presence, assuming the offense of professorial outcasts of semantic grafting, with felt-elbow patches, was harshly merged into a cacophony of heavy metal and ranting youth ebullient beyond acne and testosterone.

With a bottle before us we ventured to perambulate through the din and used this masking environment to conceal our covert dimension.

James: The nice thing about the damn noise is that nobody notices us.

Paul : I know. It's a good atmosphere for me to fill you in and give you the manuscript.

James ; What! How many copies do you have?

Paul : (Opens briefcase-takes out a folder and holds it up .) This is it!

James: Are you loco, mate. If what you said is true that's some pretty potent stuff to be shoved under my nose. And anyway, wasn't this your revelation. Don't you want to hold onto it yourself.

Paul : When I decided to seek you out I was firmly convinced that , not only could I rely on your judgment , but that you were the only one I could fully share my inspiration with. Take it off my hands. Read it. To the best of your ability validate it. Don't show it to anybody or copy it. Then when the circumstances are right we will meet to discuss your impressions and work out a counter plan. (He hands it over to James with a trusting smile)

James : (Accepts the manuscript with a puzzled look.)

What do you mean by counter plan ?

Paul : We both must resolve to stop the Servors before they implement their plan. If we want our world to survive, regardless how screwed up it is, we must work together to keep their plan from becoming a reality.

James: Your an odd sort of a bloke. I hope you're not a wacko con-man with a power trip mentality beneath some self-righteous facade. Because if you are your putting my life and livelihood in jeopardy-

But what the hell I could use some adventure- and given the rate of pollution and crime in society and its production-reproduction cycle, I'll be dead soon anyway, I might as well have some fun in the process.

Paul : I can't guarantee a good time- but I can tell you this-the lines between good and evil are surely drawn this time. A Herculean commitment is needed- with unending vigilance.

This may sound a little fatalistic and preachy but I see numerous dark tunnels before the light, this time.

James : My skepticism is shaking and I feel something is ominous in the air.

I'll read your manuscript and help you as much as I can.

Paul: Thank you. But it isn't my manuscript- I just received it.

You'll notice that it was signed by a group called-Crescendo. I have no idea who they are .

James : Talking about crescendos I think I've heard enough wall of sound explosions by 'Alice in Chains' to last an aeon- lets get out of here .

We cut through the parking lot to get back to the auditorium. A radiant sunshine permeated our path

as we moved with hope and anticipation into an uncertain future. In the several hours I have known Paul his frightened demeanor had eclipsed each moment.. But now his eyes were alight with wonder and I could feel a mood swing. I clasped the portfolio that held the unread scenario. The brilliant challenge of the moment caught me and I felt a compulsion to ask more questions of Paul, but this wasn't the time or place. I would have to wait until I had read the manuscript and formed an opinion.

At the instant we entered the lot we both heard the screeching of tires behind us. When I turned I could see a Vazi racecar careening towards us. It was burning rubber and flashing sparks. We jumped apart and ran at parallel angles away from the vehicle. In an instance the car moved towards Paul and side-swiped him into a fence. It knocked him face first with tremendous force. I froze squat-like between two parked cars and watched as the driver v-cut to go back for the kill. It charged at Paul again but hit a wet-spot and missed him tearing the fence at another point with a snarling rip. Then it crashed headlong into a wall and was crushed like a fly.

I was the first to reach Paul. He was twisted and battered and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth. His eyes were dazed, but he was still conscious. Puffs of toxic gas fumes and jets of flame consumed the air from the crashed Vazi, and it was about to blow. I lifted Paul's mangled body and ran toward an open space. I thrust him down under a tree as gently as I could. Crowds of student's and onlookers hurried like ants at the end of a picnic. I had distanced Paul far away from the explosion, as it rocked the vicinity. Circumstance swallowed up the fanning conflagration and the winds ripped it apart from other points of combustion. I was safe, at least for the moment, to attend to my friend.

The wailing of an ambulance could be heard. I hoped it sensed danger relayed by the event. A grey-eyed Wicca type knelt amid the catastrophe assuring me that a healer was summoned and that she could soothe the patient with her magic hands. I opted to wait for the mainstream . Within moments help arrived. A sallow-faced e.m.s. trainee took pulse, checked drooping eyes, and with assistant placed him on a portable gurney in the ambulance.

In the waiting room of the hospital, time was beginningless. The bright antiseptic glow of death and terminal boredom surrounded me. I tried to read or lull or pry a glance at a nurse. But thoughts of previous dilemmas of illness and endgame were everywhere. I was traumatized by the unfolding events and was deeply concerned about Paul's fate. After about two hours of restlessness I decided to go to the hospital chapel. I was just moved to get out of this loop and calm my nerves.

Since it was early I found the chapel empty. When I was very young I used to steal into my neighborhood church when nobody, it seemed, was being saved. Now the memories rushed back of me kneeling below that porcelain doll with the hippie kid on her lap. I could hear myself praying inside from memory. Asking in the past, and now, for answers born of compromise and love. I was never much of a believer in miracles, but I wouldn't throw one out of bed now for eating crackers. I guess that you could call me an agnostic theist willing to accept prophecy if it accepted me.

I honestly held my hands together in hope for some divine engineering to heal Paul, and asked for the Essence to intervene. I was hoping to break through to another side. The flowers on the altar were purple and yellow. A canticle of primordial tones was the hymn in my brain. Jesus, the faith kinglet, was just a few feet away when he looked at me. I could hear my heartbeat. I remembered the doctrinaire words of a curmudgeon priest who equated faith with survival. The milky Madonna's bosom rose and fell. A rollicking train rumbled under my feet. Children whispered and withdrew. I was aware of something above me- like an apparition. It entered me. I closed my eyes, and all I could see was a mirror.

CHAPTER 2- RETURN JOURNEY

Je-ah pondered her day's tasks. She had finished drawing water from the cistern for evening use. The date palm groves that they shared with a resident of Aoud-il Shami had been tendered. The sheep were sheared and quartered for the night. The goats bleating in the wind were milked and hitched. All the rugs, that she would send to Jordan on consignment, were placed aside. She thought about how she missed her father, rotting in an Israeli jail, on trumped up treason charges. It was late to be up. But her mind was clear and the cool breezes of this desert night stirred memories. At fifteen the burdens of adolescence as a Bedouin woman had worried her. Now that her father was gone and his Palestinian sensibility was absent from her life she had to bear the limited roles of her matrilineal culture. It was not that she didn't respect the traditions of her mother, but she saw herself more as a world nomad enjoined to a global duty than a desert nomad entrusted with local responsibility. She wondered about her pending wedding arranged by her intended's family to gain some respectability, given Je-Ah's ancestral mix of upper middle-class Sunni with her mothers hybrid line of hadar and badia. She sat outside her black goat's hair tent on a Bokharian prayer mat. Her body became still. Strong wisps of sand blew up under her skirt and blouse unsettling her concentration. She looked behind her to see if the flap of her tent had not been blown open and the gusts had awakened her mother. When she returned to her quiet position the winds died down. In the mythic moonlight her being was infused with purpose, even though she did not see any meaning in her present life. As the hours to dawn grew shorter she pondered the future before she gave in to tiredness and went off to sleep, outside in the cross-hairs of nature.

In the foreboding of dream she saw herself isolated on a high mountain plateau. Out of the cave she wandered. Into a deep blue valley she could only see the high peaks. Her mind envisioned a lake below. In it two swans, one black/one white, with golden wings were fused together and drifting with the dawn. She was seeing her freedom from a self-imposed asceticism. Only if she could find the answer and see the difference between good and evil. A King with a kindly face separated the swans and made them take flight. The fowler was defeated.

When she awoke the full moon was still visible. The sun was peaking behind it above a cloud of dust. Her limbs were aching and her back was sore. Sandy grit was caked in her hair.

Amala amazed at her distress brought her tea and pointed at the water cistern, in a maternal sign language enumerating the blessings of cleanliness. Je-ah sighed and whistled as she moved cautiously among the objects between darkness and dawn. Her mind was never more preoccupied with the near future.

This morning her husband -to-be's parents would come to check her out like the teeth of a camel. The Jednin's would be arriving soon offering their betrothal gifts, wild speculations on local gossip, blanched figs, and the chatter of broken promises. She felt like walking away from her village-deep into the desert without looking back. Embarrassment is a treacherous emotive inkling for an Arab women. And it's danger grows when it is matched with resistance. Tradition taught her to be empowered by her gender, even though it foolishly relinquished her freedom to the highest male bidder.

Within another adjoining village a family prepared to travel along the double arc of the desert horizon. Abdul and his wife packed the sides of their horses with dried fruit, straw mats and tintured paint as a bestowal of greeting for Amala. They had no second thoughts about the destiny of the moment. They were gladdened that Pasan would soon be married to the obedient daughter of a renown matriarch. They didn't anticipate any trouble in the common task before them. As they walked along the busy road to Aoud-il Shami the trenchant crawl of camels, carts of trade and nomadic merchants bypassed the heart of their ritualized path like common arteries of ancestral memory. When they came to the village a stern group of beggars tried to jostle loose their wares. Abdul using common sense set the horses free and took his camel whip toward the young scruffs. The horses galloped in the direction of the town square while the boys scurried for a hideout. In implacable silence of purpose Abdul and Dawa carefully traced the horses hoof-prints to the back of a chaihana filled with boyishly giggling hookah-smoking shriveled hadjis. From that point on they preceded with caution, knives unsheathed, to the house of the Mutar's, two kilometers away. When they arrived they could see Amala raking some coals near the outhouse. She was hardening nuggets of camel droppings to fuel the roasting hearth. A meal of mutton with rice would be offered under an erected red canopy.

When the Jednin's were in sight Amala looked towards them and stopped to acknowledge their entrance. She wiped off her dirtied hands with the rim of her apron. Abdul gave a plaintive smile Amala's way and began hitching the horses. Dawa strode broadly towards her to greet her. An air of suspense was broken when Amala ask them to join her under the canopy for some mint tea. For a short time they sat sipping and chatting in the shade. Then Abdul related his story about the beggars. Amala dismissed it as a

common occurrence not to be worried about.

The Jednins were too self-assured and without much worldly knowledge to forget this event so easily. They fawned fearlessness on the outside, but on the inside they were terrified about their trip back that evening.

In a curious moment of self-reflection Abdul pulled out the gifts they had brought. Amala accepted them with buoyant friendliness and gestured to them to begin serving themselves the meal she had set before them.

They ate and drank in a silence broken on occasion by the squawking of animals. After the meal Dawa nudged Abdul to discuss the wedding plans. She felt that they should schedule it before the beginning of December, in about two weeks. Amala wanted to wait until just before Ramadan in February. She felt that after a short honeymoon the purifying effect of fasting and prayer would solidify the two lovers faith in themselves through union with Allah. After much arguing they compromised, and chose a Haj day, January 1st, as the date for the wedding. After a rich dessert the Jednins embraced Amala warmly and headed back to their village.

Beyond the range of this encounter, in the wooly stretches of a sandy encampment, Je-Ah was fastening ornate blankets and rugs to dry on a primitive clothesline. She had no place beside her mother at this auspicious moment. The design of her intentions through traditional patterns of culture was as an observer. She had no say in what her fate would hold. All she could do was to submit like a good and dutiful Bedouin woman. What could she say: I am not interested, at this point in my life, when all my opportunities are fully open, becoming the slave of somebody I don't even know. Or: Why can't I pursue my own life-desires and pick my own mate. These questions could not be posed and would never be resolved given the circumstances of her social destiny. These powerful conclusions saddened her and she thought about running away on the evening of the 31st. She didn't know where she could escape to but she knew that she couldn't go through with what she felt was an archaic custom that restricted human freedom. The thought of leaving her mother and wandering off without any destination depressed her to no end. She deeply loved Amala and would miss her dearly. Then the thought of trying to persuade her mother to break tradition and call the whole thing off, entered her mind. But immediately the 1001 thoughts that guided her and motivated her inception of familial ritual instilled by her maternal upbringing devoured that one lone hope. Je-Ah was distraught but her mind quickly concocted a plan to offer allegiance to her new betrothed and then feign illness. This would give her the time and the motive to postpone the wedding. She had to do a good job of

manufacturing an apparent serious illness that would fool Amala.

As the weeks went by, and the threat of marriage loomed, Je-ah's anticipation of being trapped in a strange bed and house as a prisoner of perennial sexism, stiffened her resolve to fool her mother with an apocryphal illness. This anticipation and its culmination was heightened when she accidentally observed her husband to be. Seeing this witless and vile rogue suitor, puffed up, without the credentials or wiles of a lover, friend or healer, made her more determined to opt out of this kismet.

She was alone that afternoon, behind the hammam, stacking coal bits for her grandfather's sauna, when she saw across the road a strange figure.

Riding a grey horse, without even a blanket for a saddle, was a cranky, crazed looking, allergic, pompous teenager with the vehemence of the Aryan hordes in his eyes. Je-ah had never seen him before. His rough look frightened her. He was acting out, in the mirror of prideful self-reflection, some vainglorious barbarian Freudian role.

His mesmerizing snarl was apparent as he stopped to water his horse. Before taking off for a direction unknown, Caleb, a neighborhood boy began joking with him. Their voices carried.

Caleb : Your horse smells ! Why do you bring it to our watering hole ?

Pasan : I don't have to explain myself you. This is near the home of the Mutar family.

Caleb: So what !

Pasan : This property- this land you see beyond my hand -will soon be all mine .

Caleb : What do you mean ? You look like you couldn't own a donkey's shit.

Pasan : (Drawing a curved sword from his sheath - his eyes flaming) Allah has given you
enough

life to lose under my blade, if you still dare to continue screwing with me.

Caleb: (In fearful, shrieking voice) Are you mad ! Are you mad !

Pasan : (Whipping his sword in angry spiral wisps in front of himself) Stand back and listen
or your tongue will ride with me- hanging from your bleeding head.

I am Pasan Jednin- before the next moon I will come once more to this village. This time I will
take as my wife the daughter of the Mutars as my first prize. After a short while I will be rich
and I will use my brain to spread these riches throughout the world with plots and schemes that
will make me famous.

Caleb : Why tell me this-don't you think your future in-laws will find you out.

Pasan : Only you and I and Allah know of this ! Who do think will reveal my secret ?

(Pasan mounted his horse and slowly meandered down the road.)

Ghosts rode on Je-Ah's breath. Her face turned ashen and the stones she held slipped from her fingers. Every memory she had of evil intentions lurking from dreams and patterns of living flooded through her mind. This was the man who she would have to spend her entire life with. Curses and crashing sounds entered her head. Emotive waves drowned her tranquility with pathetic tsunamis of dread. She whimpered and clutched her side. Streams of tears became torrents and her moan became strikingly audible. She rose and when she found that she could not compose herself, she spit with anger, clenched her teeth and wailed to the heavens. She lifted her skirt and ran toward her tent, leaving a trail of charcoal bits and ponderous hope behind.

As days passed the memory of this incident and the future event made Je-Ah more determined to escape. She did not tell her mother about seeing Pasan- for that was forbidden-even by accident, according to her culture. She didn't tell Amala about what she heard ,for that would never be believed.

She just relied upon her own guile to break this cycle and her plotting became obsessive.

When the wedding was approaching Je- Ah found it hard to discuss the plans with her mother and her uncle ; who were now responsible for the event. But she was very uncomplicated in her answer to the Hadji-who questioned her about her commitment. With big eyes flashing, and in unambiguous terms she submitted herself to the judgment of the families and told the community spiritual elder that she would , with the help of Allah, serve her husband , abide by his wishes and be a dutiful wife. These statements singed her soul , but without them, disgrace would follow the Mutars for generations.

Four days before the wedding she hatched her plan. When her parents were off visiting friends Je-Ah set the wheels in motion to make herself so incapacitated that her wedding would have to be postponed.

She entered the hammam wearing every stitch of clothing she owned : leather and wool hassocks, shawls and silk kurtas. She covered these heavy outfits with layers of blankets. This slight, frail teenager weighing only 105 pounds took on the girth of a sumo wrestler. It took her a very long time to walk the fifty feet to the sauna bathhouse.

As was tradition a hammam fire is stoked before shutting the door. This religious rite is a precaution against suffocation of the naked bather who sits out their toil in the hammam enclosure.

Je-Ah chose to close the door, to latch the venting hatch above the pit, and preceded to place the charcoal in the vessel. As is usual practice two or three nubs of charcoal will emit enough heat and steam to

accomplish the purpose of purification. Je-Ah dropped seven enormous pellets into the vessel and lit it with a primitive acetylene torch , her father once used to cut steel girders on a construction site in Hebron. She then sat no more than a foot away from the baking coals. This process could have set off an explosion that would have blown her to Mecca- but it didn't. The fire obeyed and threw voluminous sheets of steamy smoke into the room- and into Je-Ah's lungs.

She sat there for a full fifteen minutes sucking in the fumes. After the fire began to die down she rose in a stupor and raked over the coals to hide the evidence. She unhitched the roof latch and staggered for the door. Her head was about to cave in and she was so sick to her stomach she began to have double vision. When she flung the door open the sun was setting- and she saw ten or twenty blazing orange coronas dipping in the west. Even though she was groggy and hallucinatory she couldn't collapse until her plan was finished.

Showing enormous inner fortitude she managed to make it back to the communal tent. She summoned every bit of strength she had to strip off her garments and place them in their correct place in the closet. She then put back the outfit she wore before her mother left and fell into a swoon onto her bed. As her mind wavered through reveries she realized that she had not covered her tracks- and would easily be discovered by her mother. She tried several times to get up but she couldn't. Within a few moments she blacked out.

Amala were shocked to find her soot and sweat soaked daughter asleep at this time. When she couldn't wake her she thought Je-ah was dead. But before panic set in Amala noticed rough breathing.

She tried to pour water into her mouth- but it just lapped down her cheek. Je-Ah was completely unresponsive to any healing device Amala used- until, when she was massaging the back of her neck, trying to soothe her before she would have to get some assistance from the village doctor- Je-Ah began coughing in a fit. The coughing broke her brief coma and her eyes opened. Within a few seconds Je-Ah gasped and coughed profusely-spitting blood into a towel Amala held beneath her mouth. Je-Ah raised her arms and signaled her mother to let her get up so she could relieve her lungs and stomach. Je-Ah raced to the outhouse. She stumbled and fell forward- while bending down she expelled mucous and vomit and the dark matters of her soul.

Amala brought her back to bed and gave her some fresh water. Je-Ah's lungs and brain was so

clogged she could not speak. Amala smiled in recognition of this, and out of thankfulness that she had not lost her dear daughter. She then went for help from the local doctor.

Within a short time Dr. Iqbal arrived with his new assistant, Ceresa, a shaman who was giving him holistic advice. The doctor propped her up. He checked her eyes- and felt for lumps in her neck and made her lean forward so he could check her heart and lungs. He asked her about what she was feeling and he probed, with his stethoscope the areas she was experiencing discomfort in.

He withdrew to consult with Ceresa and they engaged in an animated discussion, peppered with gestures, long faces and a-has. When they came back to the patient Dr. Iqbal gave his determination:

Dr. Iqbal : It is my opinion that your daughter has an imbalance in her phlegm and bile from ingesting toxins from smoke or soot- probably within the last six hours. She needs to be purified by homeopathic medicines and given rest for at least a week. The only thing that puzzles me is I can't figure out what medicines to prescribe unless I know what she has swallowed. Is your daughter feeling well enough to explain to me how she got this way ?

Amala : (To Je-Ah) This one knows better than keep secrets from me- Tell what happened- so the doctor can help you !

Je-Ah could hardly begin to tell the story , but she felt ashamed and didn't want to embarrass her family, so she tried to explain about her present state. As she began, she coughed excessively, and began to relate. without too much fabrication what she had done. Of course some very important details were left out, and her reason for her action went without explanation.

The two physicians withdrew for consultation as Amala's stare pierced Je-Ah like a poisoned arrow. They returned and the doctor indicated that an herbal laxative would have to be prepared. Ceresa, with a kind smile , illumining a powerful presence, announced she would fix the substances herself, and return shortly with the cure.

Je-ah lay on her side. The coughing began again, as she tried to find some relief from the shooting pain that effected her system. Within a short hiatus of breath her mind wandered and hypnagogic images crept into her head . As she lie on her back her breathing was swoon like. Weird hallucinations and

colors raced through her with fierceness. She lost psychic focus for a moment and floated above herself. She saw herself as a cloud of molecules flowing within a whirlpool of solar wind and different lights of seven sacred hues crisscrossed her physical form, as seen from above, and hummed with beautiful musical tones that bathed her in an transparent ,warm glow. Then the music and lights stopped and she saw the face of her father and she blacked out for awhile.

Within an endearing dream mirage she saw a six-tusked elephant pure white with red face and feet. This majestic beast was an apparition of her beauty and her power. The elephant went bathing and frolicking in a lake. Her pain and indecision seemed to be soothed by this prophetic act. What was larger than life and more surreal was being unburdened by a playful fate.

While she soundly slept Ceresa prepared her shamanic brew of bitter herbs. When the potion was ready she entered Je-Ah's tent and found her sleeping. She sat , with the pot on the 'ill-one's' stomach, and waited for Je-Ah to invoke the right dream that would propel her to rise and wake with a spume of air.

How Ceresa divined this unearths some preternatural mysteries better left buried, at this juncture. But when the ill Bedouin bride -to-be sat up and coughed some hoary extract the patient healer appeared in the horizon.

Je-Ah: So you have returned. Do I have to swallow what is in that pot ?

Ceresa: Yes- these herbs will clean you out and make you feel stronger.

Je- Ah : I will try a little at a time- then maybe I will stop having such problems with all my social relations.

Je- Ah, with Ceresa's help, lifted the cauldron and tipped it to her lips. The bitterness of the drink made her eyes roll and her body shudder. After drinking a substantial amount she fell on her back, and a strong shiver made her skin sweat and ache. In a short time- she sneezed rapidly, and quite violently for a few long seconds. Then she made a short gasp and closed her eyes. Ceresa placed compresses, first cold , then hot, for about twenty minutes. As she did this she held and pressed Je-Ah's hand while she chanted a healing song, in a soft, sweet, lilting and mesmerizing tone. She continued until Je-Ah fell into a deep sleep. Ceresa walked out into the dimming moonlight. A frantic monkey and a perturbed jackal crossed her path. She looked up at the lunar disk and saw a hare in the shadow of the craters. Silvery beams burnt through the burning coal of the night and inundated in her mind the mark of Je-Ah's great sacrifice. In about two

tempestuous hours Je-Ah awoke. Ceresa remained in the shadows. Her small head and sloped brow deep in observing Je-Ah's first reactions. From the center of the room Ceresa saw the arc of a gray disembodied cloud swirl above Je-Ah. Four huge globules of smeared blue light appeared. Ceresa approached Je-Ah and sat near her on the bed. She put her arm under Je-Ah's arm and pulled her wrist toward the tent ceiling. She then twisted her head from left to right and pulled her down on her back. She placed her thumbs on her eyelids, closing them while she pressed them down. Je-Ah stopped breathing for a short space and her tongue was flanged out. Ceresa pushed her up and pounded her back just below her right lung. Je-Ah winced and called out to Ceresa to slow down. In a few moments Ceresa finished and laid her back down. Ceresa: Your burden is not over yet. I know less than you about how to cure it.

But very soon the truth must come out before it kills you.