



isions of Paradise

#: Stepping into Tomorrow

Contents

Out of the Depths.....page 2

Starflame.....page 4

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Out of the Depths

You can blame Shelby Vick for this new installment of **VoP**. All right, maybe it is not Shelby's fault totally, but he has to accept at least part of the blame for it.

I have been a devoted fan of science fiction for 45 years now. I was weaned on **Galaxy** and its stablemates **Worlds of IF** and **Worlds of Tomorrow**. My favorite sf has always been set in the distant future in cultures totally different from that of contemporary Earth containing exotic aliens and equally-exotic landscapes. Sense of wonder was an important factor in my preferred science fiction. Early favorite stories of mine included Alfred Bester's **The Stars My Destination**, Roger Zelazny's **Lord of Light**, Samuel R. Delany's **Nova**, and Robert Silverberg's **Nightwings**.

Then in the 1980s science fiction basically turned its back on the far future. One reason was cyberpunk which emphasized near-future realities close to our contemporary society. Another was the growth of fantasy which dwells either in the past (both real and imagined) or the urban fantasies popularized by Charles de Lint. A third factor was alternate history which is also set in the historical past.

Sure there was some science fiction set in the far future and on exotic worlds, such as Sherri Tepper's **Grass** and Dan Simmons' **Hyperion** series, but there was a lot less of it than previously.

That situation began to change in the 1990s when the British *New Space Opera* movement began. For some reason I was slow to recognize it, although writers such as Iain Banks and Stephen Baxter were writing highly-acclaimed far-future novels. What finally made me realize this new wave existed was reading some of Alastair Reynolds' short fiction in various Best-of-the-Year anthologies, stories such as "Great Wall of Mars" and "Galactic North." Then last year I read his wonderful story "Zima Blue" in **Postscripts** and my eyes suddenly opened to the vast potential in this entire *New Space Opera* movement. When I read Reynolds' entire *Galactic North* trilogy **Revelation Space**, **Redemption Ark** and **Absolution Gap** last summer, and loved nearly every page of it, I was totally hooked.

However, space opera, no matter how much wider and more acceptable its meaning has become in recent decades, still conjures up a somewhat limited view of far-future sf. Consider the following blurb from my editorial in **VoP** #106:

"On space opera: space opera happens in space. If it's not in space, it's not space opera. Also, no, planetary romances are not space opera. They come out of a different tradition - as Charles completely correctly pointed out to me to day. A planetary romance comes from the lost civilisation tradition, while space opera grows out of both the western and the naval action adventure. The new space opera - a group to which Westerfeld's novel clearly belongs - is "new" because it's darker, it doesn't necessarily involve the triumph of man or humanity, it has nifty new technology, and it has actual characterisation." –

Jonathan Strahan from his blog <http://www.jonathanstrahan.com.au/wp/>

My comment to the blurb was: where are the “new planetary romances?”

I enjoy space operas (the modern definition of adventures set in space rather than the older definition of inferior sf versions of horse operas) so long as they are not dominated with interstellar wars. Generally I prefer planetary romances though since because they tend to involve the development of alien races and societies and the examination of exotic cultures. But while space opera has undergone a renaissance lately, where indeed are the new planetary romances? C.J. Cherryh is still writing them in her *Foreigner* series. Miller & Lee’s *Liaden* series qualifies in this area, as does Ursula K Le Guin’s recent such as **The Telling** and the collection **Four Ways to Forgiveness**. I have not read any Julie Czerneda or Karen Traviss, but descriptions of their novels tend to indicate they are planetary romances.

I want to do my part to encourage a *New Planetary Romance* movement, as Banks and Baxter did with space opera. Discussing it and critiquing it can only do so much though. I took some inspiration from Chris Roberson who has sought a revival of the type of pulp adventures he enjoyed as a youth. Pulp adventures obviously include some space opera and planetary romances, but they tend to be simpler, more exuberant, less thought-provoking than I usually enjoy. What inspired me was how Roberson began writing his own pulp adventure novels and even founded a science fiction anthology **Adventure** devoted to pulp adventures.

Finally, enter Shelby Vick with his online zine **Planetary Stories**. It contains pulp adventures similar to Chris Roberson’s **Adventure** anthology. Initially I offered to write a story for **Planetary Stories**, but almost as soon as I began the story I realized I was not writing a pulp adventure. I was writing a planetary romance, primarily a mystery of the “what is actually happening on this world?” type. It ended up being a very short story, barely 4,000 words, and it did not fit in a zine devoted to pulp adventures. I considered submitting it to some of online magazines looking for such short fiction, but I have never been very good about submitting my short fiction to editors. I submitted two stories to magazines in the past year, and neither editor has gotten back to me yet. One has been holding a story since April; the other since mid-August.

So instead I decided that the only way to let planetary romances stand out on their own was by creating a 5th segment of **Visions of Paradise** to go along with the personalzine *The Passing Scene*, the reviewzine *Wondrous Stories*, the lettercol *Halcyon Days* and the FAPA emcee zine *Ride the Lightning*. So I offer you this zine whose title will vary slightly each issue among phrases involving *Tomorrow*. Because that this zine is devoted to the future in all its wondrousness. Mostly, but not exclusively, planetary romances, but always stories about the future. Each issue will be short, containing one story if possible, two at most.

For the foreseeable future, I will write the fiction contained herein. Submissions are welcome, but since I have no publishing timeline, I will only accept stories I really enjoy. No deliberate fan fiction, please. I want stories which, if not totally professional in quality, at least achieve semi-professional quality.

And they must concern the future!

I do not know how frequently *Tomorrow* will appear. Partly it will depend on what reaction it receives from my readers. If reaction is totally negative, this might be a one-shot zine. Better reactions will spur more issues.

There will be no payment for any stories I publish here. I am trying to encourage people to read and clamor for more planetary romances, not launch a self-supporting publishing venture.

The story "Starflame" is the first of a continuing series of adventures about three peacekeepers working for a loose confederation of planets known as the Conglomerate. It is intentionally short, although I cannot promise the same for future installments. My typical work of fiction tends to run from 10,000 to 15,000 words. If you enjoy "Starflame," please let me know so I can publish another issue of *Tomorrow*.

Enjoy.

Starflame

by Robert Sabella

*

Anila was the first person off the shuttle. She was greeted by two dozen colonists who gathered around the landing grid. Standing in front of the group was the apparent leader.

Anila wore a peacekeeper's jumper, dark brown with beige ornamentation on her wrists, shoulders and waist. The uniform blended with her dark brown skin and black hair. All the colony's men wore black pants and shirt with a large straw hat, while the woman wore bonnets and ground-length dresses. Anila was not surprised since Penn's World had been settled by Quaker revivalists.

The colony leader extended his hand to Anila. "I am so pleased you came here," he said. His smile was a broad one, but Anila realized it was more a smile of relief than a smile of pleasure. "My name is Ephron."

"I'm Anila."

"I thought peacekeepers traveled in teams of three."

Anila nodded. "My partners are closing down the shuttle. We don't take any chances when we leave it."

Ephron looked slightly offended. “We would never impose on your privacy, or that of your personal possessions,” he said, a chill in his voice. “We are the most peace-loving religion in the entire Conglomerate.”

Anita deliberately let a trace of offense creep into her voice as she said, “I’m a Buddhist. We’re pretty peace-loving ourselves.”

Ephron’s eyes widened. “But aren’t peacekeepers a military force?”

“We are precisely what our name implies, an organization created by the Conglomerate to keep peace throughout the spiral arm. Our weapons are strictly defensive weapons which will never be used to cause harm to another being.”

“Aren’t there Mercies in your force?” somebody called from the group surrounding Ephron and Anila.

Anila laughed. “Mercies died out thousands of years ago, if they ever existed at all. Many historians believe they were as much legend as the so-called technological age which preceded the *crazy years*.”

There was some nervous laughter, but a few people studied Anila critically, not sure if she were telling them the truth. She shrugged. Let them believe whatever they wished; her task was keeping the peace, not debunking superstitions.

Suddenly an audible gasp ran through the crowd as their attention shifted to the shuttle. Anila’s two partners were descending the shuttle’s ramp. First was a foot-high grey cat with white trim under her neck and above all four paws. Behind it walked what looked like a male human, but as he reached the ground certain differences became visible. His legs were jointed backwards and he had two opposable thumbs on each hand. He was totally hairless, although the colonists could not see that through his jumper.

“These are my partners,” Anila said. “Jov—“ motioning first to the cat “—and Hadar.”

The crowd’s reaction to the two aliens was completely different. The colonists eased away from the not-quite human Hadar, but the youngsters were fascinated by the cat. A few tried to run to it, but their parents held them firmly at their side.

Anila smiled. “You can let the children go to Jov,” she said. “She enjoys being petted by youngsters.”

Hearing that, two children immediately pulled free of their mother’s grip, while another began pleading with his father. Meanwhile the cat sat patiently awaiting their prodding and poking.

“She really doesn’t mind?” Ephron said, looking dubious.

Anila shook her head. “Jov is the crowd-pleaser in our group. She’ll let people get away with

things that would definitely annoy Hadar or me.”

Eventually Ephron led the three peacekeepers to a private meeting inside a nearby building. It was traditional for peacekeepers to first be shown their quarters and allowed to rest from their trip, but this was not the first time a colony’s need was so urgent they dispensed with the niceties and got right to business.

The meeting room was well-stocked with food and drinks. Both Anila and Hadar filled plates with stewed vegetables and huge chunks of bread with preserves. Hadar looked for meat, but Anila whispered to him that Quaker revivalists had given up the practice of eating meat. They carried their plates to the table and were getting bowls of punch when Ephron approached Anila.

“Shouldn’t somebody feed the cat?”

Anila laughed. “Jov has opposable thumbs on her front paws. She is as capable of caring for herself as I am, although perhaps not so well as Hadar who has the advantage of double the number of thumbs.”

Ephron glanced at Hadar dubiously, his eyes widening at the peacekeeper’s broad smile which exposed sharp teeth obviously intended for tearing prey.

“Don’t worry,” he said in a deceptively high-pitched voice, “My ancestors gave up eating raw meat millennia ago.”

Ephron’s expression exposed his discomfort as he followed Anila away from the others. In a low voice he asked her, “How do you get along with your partners?”

“No differently than I get along with any two humans.”

“It wouldn’t be easier having human partners who don’t have such differences from you?”

Anila laughed loudly, attracting the attention of other nearby colonists. “The Conglomerate is much more diverse than your little colony is. Anybody who fears differences is better off staying isolated on their self-contained little world than traveling through the spiral arm.”

With that she took her plate to the table and sat beside Hadar who was frowning at his plate of stewed vegetables. He shrugged and dipped a chunk of bread into it.

The peacekeepers ate, while the colony leaders fidgeted, anxious to get started on business. Some of them stared at Hadar tearing the bread with his sharp teeth, while others watched in amazement as Jov ate with a fork and spoon.

The three peacekeepers were barely halfway finished with their food when Ephron said, “Can we discuss our problem now?”

Anila’s mouth was filled with food, so she merely nodded without speaking.

“One of our children is missing,” Ephron said.

Hadar swallowed. “Missing?”

“She did not come to the main hall for dinner a week ago. All our dinners are communal meals by custom. We sent out a search team, but they found no sign of her. We searched for three days without success.”

“Could she have run away?” Anila said.

“My daughter Sarah would never run away!” a woman cried out, her voice filled with pain. All three peacekeepers looked away politely, and nobody spoke while the man sitting next to her calmed the woman.

“It would be impossible for her to run away without our knowing it,” Ephron said.

“Why is that?”

“We have a protective fence around the entire settlement. Nothing can get past it without setting off the settlement’s alarms.”

“Could somebody have shut the power momentarily while she slipped through?” Anila asked.

Several colonists, including Ephron, looked stunned. “Why would anybody do that?”

Anila shrugged. “I don’t know the dynamics of the colony, nor what type of atmosphere you have created for your children here. Sometimes a colony based on precepts which are perfectly acceptable to adults can be hellish for the colony children.”

Immediately the colonists began talking amongst themselves, and from the tones of their voices it was obvious they were displeased. Finally Ephron said in a low, restrained voice, “Your implication is offensive to the entire colony.”

“I am not concerned with placating your egos,” Anila said. “Do you want us to find Sarah or not?”

“Of course we do, but there is no need to insult the entire colony—“

”Stifle your pride,” Anila said. “I grew up on a Buddhist world where all my friends fled as soon as we were old enough because we were absolutely stifled in the overly-strict Buddhist regimen of the colony. Their practices suits the adults’ own conservative beliefs very well, but they accepted those practices voluntarily. We children were not given the same option as the adults.”

Several emotions flicked across Ephron’s face, and she saw his mouth move back and forth as if he were trying to speak. Finally he said, “So what do you want to do?”

“First we will try to find Sarah ourselves, but if we do not succeed we will question every child in the colony. Because, according to what you told me, she could not possibly have gotten past the invisible fence without help, right?”

Ephron clenched his mouth. “Yes.”

Anila leaned over and spoke quietly with Jov and Hadar briefly. When Hadar nodded and Jov purred her agreement, she returned her attention to the colony leaders.

“Take us to the colony border. We need to see what’s out there.”

*

The fence surrounding the colony was two miles long. The three peacekeepers walked its length with the colony leaders, attracting other interested colonists along the way. When Anila tossed a rock above the fence, it set off a loud siren which could be clearly heard through the entire colony. As they walked, she and Hadar asked questions about what they saw beyond the fence. Mostly it was open fields with forests visible in the distance. In one direction loomed a distant mountain.

The peacekeepers stopped when they saw movement far off in one of the fields.

“What is that?” Anila said.

They all pressed close to the fence, careful not to touch it, peering into the distance. Hadar took out a small pair of glasses which he hung over his ears, then twiddled two controls on the sidebars.

“It looks faintly apelike,” he said, “covered with white fur. I think it’s eating vegetation.”

“We call them apes,” Ephron said. “All we have ever seen them do is eat vegetation. They seem very peaceful.”

“Some peaceful-seeming animals can be very dangerous when they encounter humans,” Anila said.

“We have considered that,” Ephron said. There was a low moan in the crowd behind them.

“Have you seen any other native life?”

“Smaller animals, some of them meat-eaters but too small to be any real threat to the colony.”

“How small?” Hadar said.

Ephron motioned toward Jov. “The biggest are about twice the size of the cat.”

Anila pursed her lips. “That’s big enough to threaten a human child on her own. Do you have any of Sarah’s possessions that Jov can use to track her?”

Ephron nodded, and one of the colonists reached into a bag he had been carrying. He took out a small white garment which he handed to Anila.

“We figured you would need something which was in close contact with her body.”

Anila grinned and held out the pair of underpants to Jov. “Are you ready to sniff these?” she said, suppressing laughter. Jov let out a loud growl and reared back on her hind legs, extending her front paws. Her claws stuck out threateningly.

“Do you people think I’m some kind of pervert?” she said in a gravelly voice, shocking the colonists both with the fact that she could speak and her obvious anger. “I’m not smelling anybody’s underwear! Get me something she touched, like a book.”

For an instant nobody moved, so Anila tossed the underpants back at Ephron. He fumbled trying to catch them, then picked them off the ground and tossed them to the man who returned them to the bag.

“Y-you heard the cat!” Ephron said. “Get Sarah’s bible, and hurry!”

As the man practically stumbled running to the nearest building, Anila gave in to her amusement and laughed aloud.

*

The three peacekeepers ignored the urging of the colonists to begin searching immediately. Instead they spent the night sleeping in a small hut. Anila was a restless sleeper, awaking a half-dozen times, always envious at how Hadar slept so soundly he might have been comatose. Jov moved around in her sleep, her tail twitching almost constantly, but she seemed content. Eventually Anila gave up her efforts to sleep, instead sat cross-legged and meditated. That relaxed her almost as much as sleeping did anyway.

In the morning the colonists gave them another meal, with stewed fruit replacing the vegetables and the bread considerably sweeter.

“The diet in this place is sufficient reason for somebody to run away,” Hadar whispered to Anila and Jov. They both agreed with him. Anila could accept a lot of religious quirks, but why would a religion ruin one of its members’ most important pleasures by serving uniformly unappetizing meals?

Less than an hour after dawn the peacekeepers were ready with their backpacks to begin the search for the girl.

“What is her name again?” Anila asked.

“Sarah.”

“That’s so we don’t return the wrong girl to you,” she said, enjoying the look of consternation on the colonists’ faces. They were certainly a particularly joyless group of people. She was beginning to understand why Sarah felt the need to flee.

They approached the settlement’s invisible fence and waited for the signal that it had been turned off. Ephron watched somebody standing in front of a warehouse-like building until he waved his arm in the air.

“You can go now,” he said.

Immediately Hadar picked up a rock and tossed it in the direction of the fence. When it passed through harmlessly, he walked towards it, followed by Anila and Jov.

*

Jov’s weapon was the ability to track, so Anila and Hadar followed her as they passed through the field into the woods. They soon stumbled upon a group of white apes who were as startled to see the peacekeepers as they were seeing the apes. Up close they looked less like Earth apes. Their feet resembled flippers and their arms had no joint in the middle. But those arms were incredibly strong as they grasped small trees and easily pulled them out of the ground to get at the vegetation high over the apes’ heads. Their faces were decidedly un-Terran, more like canine snouts than apelike. Up close the white fur resembled the quills of porcupines rather than real fur.

The apes were obviously intimidated by the peacekeepers, immediately turning and fleeing from them. They did not even stop when they were a safe distance away, but kept running until they were totally out of sight.

“I guess the colonists were right that they are peaceful,” Hadar said.

“Don’t confuse fear with peacefulness,” Jov growled. “Terran cats are easily frightened, but they are still predators by nature. It might be our size that frightens the apes more than their disposition.”

“*Our* size?” Anila snickered.

Jov growled. “All right, *your* sizes.”

After tracking for several hours, the peacekeepers stopped for lunch. Both Hadar and Jov opened cans containing meat. Jov’s were chunks of meat in gravy, while Hadar’s was a loaf of bread stuffed with meat. Anila was a vegetarian whose stuffed bread was filled with beans and spices.

“This is a hell of a lot tastier than stewed anything!” she said as the spices filled her head. “I’m surprised they don’t flavor their meals with alcoholic drinks.”

“They certainly do,” Hadar said.

“How do you know that?”

“I sneaked a peak in the back room of the meeting hut. It contained a still.”

Anila and Jov both laughed.

After eating and resting they continued their search.

“How’s the trail?” Anila asked Jov.

“Faint after a whole week, but I’m having no problem following it.”

“Do you have any idea how far away Sarah is?”

“Not yet. From the faintness of the trail though she did not pass this way recently. She could be halfway across the planet by now.”

Hadar sighed. “Too bad we could not track her in the shuttle.”

“You know I cannot track inside an enclosed vehicle.”

“Well, I wish the damned scientists would start working on that. It would certainly ease much of the harshness of this job.”

“Aren’t you the one who loves native flora and fauna?” Anila said.

“I do, but I’m not particularly fond of hiking for days on end. I could experience native life just as well by flying toward a location and sitting there observing for a few hours.”

They continued hiking through the dwindling day, stopping for another meal in the evening, then continuing until it grew too dark to see. They selected a relatively open area to set up the tent which Hadar carried in his pack. Anila carried the portable fence which she set up around them. While it was certainly not as powerful as that used by the colony, anybody passing through it would set off a signal loud enough to waken the three peacekeepers.

Unlike the previous night, Anila was so tired she fell asleep quickly and did not waken for a long time. When she did waken it was abruptly to a flurry of scuffling noises in the tent.

“Hadar? Is that you?”

“No, there’s something in the tent with us!”

Suddenly Jov flicked on a light which brightened the entire tent. All three peacekeepers gasped at sight of a huge creature standing in their midst, moaning as it looked anxiously at the light. It was one of the apes. When its gaze settled on Anila it moved towards her, its short arms held outward as if it intended to grasp her.

“Watch out for those arms!” Jov screamed.

Anila jumped to her feet and held her own arms out in front of her. Her weapon was the ability to confuse a being’s sensory input, and she unleashed it against the ape. Immediately it stopped walking and looked around the tent confusedly, its eyes wide and unfocussed. The problem with Anila’s weapon was that its effects spilled over, so the peacekeepers were momentarily disoriented as well.

The ape stumbled around the tent, waving its stubby arms, as the peacekeepers cringed away from its quill-like fur. Hadar particularly was jumping around the tent, shaking his head trying to see the ape. His weapon was the ability to make beings comatose, but first he had to touch them. If he could not see the ape, he could easily impale himself on its quills.

“Hurry!” Anila cried as the ape swung its arms over her head. Quickly she ducked and scampered to the other side of the tent.

Suddenly Hadar fell to the ground and rolled across the tent floor, stopping when he felt something.

“That’s me,” Jov cried. Hadar rolled away from him until he felt something else, by which time his vision had cleared enough to see the feet of the ape. Then Hadar gripped one of the feet in both arms and concentrated. Immediately the ape’s legs weakened and it fell to the ground. Hadar rolled away from its bulk in time to avoid being crushed.

*

Some careful probing quickly told them the ape’s quills were too sharp to move the ape easily, so instead the peacekeepers moved their tent and fence a short distance away. They set a rotation of watch-guards for the rest of the night, but none of them could sleep anyway. Instead they all sat and watched as the ape awoke, stared at them momentarily, then lumbered away into the woods.

“So why didn’t any of us hear the fence’s siren?” Hadar said.

“You sleep too soundly to hear *anything!*” Jov said.

“I accept that,” he said, “but it’s part of my nature, so it is not a personal fault. However, you sleep very lightly, and Anila hardly sleeps at all. Why didn’t one of you two hear it?”

Jov looked at Anila with raised ears. "I don't know," she said.

"Neither do I," said Anila.

They say thinking briefly until Hadar said, "That eliminates the possibility that somebody turned off the fence for Sarah."

They both looked at him, seeking some flaw in what he said, but unable to find any.

"So what do we do now?" Jov said.

"I guess we keep posting a guard outside the tent," Anila said.

"That's easy for you two to say," Hadar groaned, "But I need more sleep than both of you."

Anila laughed. "That's no problem. We'll extend our nights so everybody gets sufficient sleep. So what if we spend a few extra days on this planet?"

Hadar waved his hands. "Forget I said that! Maybe we should cut out nights altogether and find that girl as soon as possible so we can go to someplace more civilized."

"Not to mention easing her parents' worries."

"Yeah, that too," he said.

*

Anila and Hadar lay in their sleeping bags, eyes closed but very much awake as they waited for something to happen. Anila meditated, concentrating on nothing but her primordial sound. Gradually she drifted into the meditative state which always relaxed her no matter how stressful her situation might be.

An abrupt noise broke her state. She opened her eyes and saw a white ape standing in the middle of the tent, looking around as if it was searching for something. She stood up quickly and faced it. As soon as the ape saw her, its expression changed and it lumbered in her direction.

"Jov!" Anila cried.

Immediately the cat scampered into the tent, stopping at sight of the ape.

"I swear I was awake the whole time," she said. "Nothing could have possibly gotten past that fence without my knowing it."

"Watch out!" Hadar said as the ape neared Anila. He hunched down and began to duck-walk across the floor.

“Don’t interfere!” Anila insisted. “I don’t think he intends to harm me.”

Hadar looked confused as he looked from Anila to the ape. His brow furrowed in concentration.

“But what about the quills?” he said.

“Please trust me,” Anila said. “There are no quills on his arms or stomach.”

She stepped past Hadar into the path of the ape. Both Hadar and Jov watched nervously as the ape neared Anila, then tilted his head a few times as if studying her. Suddenly it placed both arms around Anila and hugged her tightly to him.

“He just wants to be friends,” Anila said, smiling, as the others watched she and the ape abruptly vanish from the tent.

*

Anila awoke with a severe headache. She kept her eyes closed and performed a brief mantra to ease it. When she opened her eyes, she was sitting in a small grove surrounded by towering trees.

“Hello,” a voice said softly.

Anila turned around abruptly and saw a human girl standing in front of a cave entrance not far away.

“By any chance, are you Sarah?”

“You found me!” The girl covered her face with her hands and began sobbing. When Anila stood up, the girl hugged her desperately. “I didn’t think anybody would ever find me.”

When the girl was calm, they sat and talked. Sarah had been abducted by an ape in the same manner Anila had been. Now Anila realized the apes were teleports, which explained both how it escaped with Sarah and how it got into the tent twice. Sarah explained that the ape cared for her as if she was its child, even trying to breastfeed her until Sarah refused so forcibly the ape quit trying. At times the ape made Sarah walk with it to a nearby river where she helped Sarah drink and wash. On those trips they always encountered other apes with their own children.

“The young apes look exactly like human children,” Sarah said. “No hair, very thin. I think my ape lost its baby somehow and was replacing it with what it thought was an orphan child since I was not with another ape when it found me.”

“Maybe it thought it was adopting me too,” Anila said. “Where is the ape now?”

“It generally leaves me alone during the day while it seeks food.”

“So why haven’t you tried to find your way home?”

Sarah frowned. “Where are we? What’s my direction home? How far is it? I tried fleeing the first day I was alone, but after nearly getting lost in the woods surrounding this grove I realized I’m a lot safer here being fed by my mother ape until somebody found me.”

“Well, we don’t have to worry about that now,” Anila said, pulling a small cube out of her pocket. “My team can find us via this device. Depending on how far away they are, we’ll just sit here and wait for them.”

“Are you hungry?” Sarah said abruptly.

Anila frowned. “A bit, I guess. Why?”

Sarah motioned towards the distant trees. “Mom is bringing us breakfast.”

Anila laughed as she watched the ape approaching carrying an armful of fruit. She actually felt sorry for the ape who was going to lose her children for the second time.

*