

JANUSPUVAKO

“How do you pronounce that again?” asked Yozef, smiling as he remembered asking the question several times during the last few days.

“Yahnuspuhvahko,” Maera and Anarynd said simultaneously, having answered his question the same way too many times.

Caedelli did not have the “J” sound, which is why he ended up “Yozef,” instead of “Josef” or “Jozef.” He remembered a similar effect with the commander of the original Fuomi expedition to Caedellium. Jaako Rintala became Yaako Rintala, to the name owner’s obvious annoyance, though the Fuomi’s first name was seldom used until the last months before he returned to Fuomon.

“That’s ‘Jahnuspoohvahko,’” he enunciated, fully pronouncing the “J.”

You know, now that I think about it, nobody here realizes my name was Joe or Joseph. Not that he saw a reason to enlighten them.

“That’s what we said,” replied Maera. Both women tried again, unsuccessfully, to voice the unfamiliar sound.

Hmmmm, he thought. I wonder if Caedelli can hear the difference?

“Did Eina say why we have to wear these cloaks?” asked Anarynd.

“They’re part of the ritual,” answered Maera, adjusting the full-length white covering.

“Something to do with everyone being equal during the ceremony. She said she would huddle with us and explain the details.”

Yozef was still struggling with the hood or the flap. He wasn’t exactly sure what to call it.

“Here, let me help,” said Maera, exasperated at his fumbling. “Leave the head coverings lying on your back. Eina says we don’t have to cover our heads until the ceremony begins.”

Minutes later, they were on a carriage headed down the cleft toward Orosz City, then beyond to arrive at the ceremony site near the Fuomon Embassy. The last light of the day allowed them to see wood stacked and meant for a bonfire. Forming a circle around the wood about twenty-five yards away were tables set for eating. People mingled between the tables and the wood. Yozef estimated eighty to a hundred men and women, mainly Fuomi. Dozens of lit lanterns provided abundant light, but the cloaks help hide people’s identities. The other guests were already there: Hetman Tomis Orosz and his wife; Hetman Klyngo Adris, who happened to be in Orosz City; and theophist Rhaedri Brison. Yozef recognized Reimo Kivalian’s and Klyngo’s voices before he located them.

“We’ll get started in a few minutes,” said the voice belonging to Kivalian as he came up to them. “The Fuomi will arrange in a circle around the wood. Counting you, there will be exactly one hundred people taking part. It’s the tradition there be no more than that. I heard once the reason is supposed to be that the ceremony has more impact if there aren’t too many people. I don’t know how someone settled on one hundred.”

“It’s preferable to hold the ceremony outside, but inside is allowed if the weather or some other reason makes it necessary. Of course, then the details are adjusted. Can’t be having a bonfire inside a wooden building.”

“Reimo, you said Fuomi would form the circle,” said Maera. “What about us?”

“In theory, only Fuomi form the circle, but there are variations in belief. Eina will tell you more. You will stand behind the circle. The ceremony will be in Fuomi, so Eina and I will

quietly explain what's happening to not disturb the others. Eina will stand with you, Yozef, and Brison. She thinks you three will have the most questions. I will be with the rest of you. Most Fuomi on Caedellium are men, but the few women are dispersed so they don't cluster. Eina may know the history of that custom."

Maera turned to Anarynd. "Is that all right with you, Ana—being separate from Yozef and me?"

"Of course, silly. I probably wouldn't understand the questions you and Rhaedri ask, anyway." She smiled. "And I've a better chance to hear more informal and disrespectful comments from Reimo than Eina."

"Here comes Eina," said Yozef.

"How can you tell?" asked Anarynd.

"She has a hitch in her stride from the right leg taking shorter steps than the left."

The others turned to watch Eina walk the last thirty feet to where they stood.

"If you say so," said Maera, "but I don't see a hitch."

"Greetings, everyone," said Eina, smiling broadly. "I'm *so* pleased you're all here. I've been fortunate to witness Caedelli customs, and I thought it fair and possibly interesting if you experienced one of our most important days of the year. It's called 'Januspuvako' and has religious, historical, and mythological elements. The ceremony you'll witness has the same name and is one of the most complete versions practiced in Fuomon. Many places use shorter and different versions or even no ceremony at all, but that's the exception. There's no version that's required for *all* of Fuomon, but for formal occasions or special times like today, this version has many of the common details.

"You should notice that it's not a strictly religious ceremony, though God plays a major role. The ceremony has evolved over the centuries, and the version you will see is intended to be experienced by any Fuomi, although variations are performed in different regions, sects, and even families. The Januspuvako provides a fundamental ceremony that all Fuomi can experience without infringing *too* much on alternative details. As you can imagine, in military units and any grouping of people from different backgrounds, harmony is required, and Fuomon forbids forcing one dominant set of beliefs."

She grinned. "Don't feel awkward if you're skeptical how this works out exactly. For many Fuomi, the Januspuvako is not seriously thought of as purely religious but more a cultural tradition helping bind us together. As you might expect, there are always those who consider any deviation from their particular beliefs to be blasphemy, but they generally keep that opinion to themselves.

"Reimo and I will explain what's happening, but we'll keep our voices down. That's one reason we've divided you into two groups."

"If I may, Ambassador," said Brison, "could you outline the basis of Fuomi religion? I realize it's impossible to capture all the details, but some essence I can compare with here on Caedellium."

"Of course. And it's *Eina—Rhaedri*." She smiled. "One facet of the ceremony is that there are no distinctions among Fuomi on this day. If the Grand Protector were here and the rest of the participants were common laborers, everyone would refer to each other by first names." Her smile broadened. "It's not unexpected that some high-ranking people are uneasy with that custom, but it's so engrained that none dare suggest changes. It's a topic of endless stories and jokes.

“As for a very brief summary of how Fuomi view God, I’ll say it’s more proactive than here on Caedellium where you don’t believe God manifests himself in the everyday world.”

Yeah, thought Yozef. Sort of a monotheism-light was my impression when I first got here. God gives strength and guidance, but you’re pretty much on your own in daily life.

“Of course, not every Fuomi has the same level of belief. For some, religion is central to their lives. For others, like myself, it’s part of our culture, but I consider the details more from a historical perspective, rather than religious.”

Further words were lost under a deep bass sound that washed over them. Yozef’s eardrums throbbed, and he refrained from clamping hands over his ears only because the sound cut off abruptly. After a startled silence, Eina spoke again.

“That was a keiko horn to signal the ceremony is about to begin. We’re lucky to have a horn here on Caedellium. It belongs to one of our ship captains and has been in his family for centuries. Tradition holds that the keiko was something like a large version of a krykor—maybe four or five times the weight and with two horns that curved forward. We think the last keiko was killed over two thousand years ago, so the horns are rare.”

I wonder if the keiko was an Anyar animal or one of those transplanted from Earth? thought Yozef. If from Earth, then they might even be Miocene animals, if my suspicion that animals like the merstor and the balmoth are too similar to result from parallel evolution.

No one noticed him shake his head at the thought of an animal extinct on Earth and saved by being taken to Anyar, only to be lost again, but this time due to humans.

“Everyone’s getting into position,” said Eina as people finished shielding lanterns.

There was enough starlight to see cloaked figures completing the circle around the woodpile. Eina and Reimo led them to form an arc of two clusters a few yards behind the Fuomi. Eina stood flanked by Maera and Rhaedri, Yozef on the other side of Maera.

The keiko horn sounded again.

“Cover up,” said Eina, pulling the flap of cloth over her head. The others followed suit. A woman carrying a torch walked to the wood. She had barely touched the fire to the wood before blue flames leaped eight feet into the air. They subsided to a yellow blaze three to four feet high.

“The wood was soaked in alcohol. It works well and is available here on Caedellium,” whispered Eina. “In Fuomon, we either don’t ignite the fire this quickly or we use a type of tree resin. The fire represents God, the sun, creations, or combinations, depending on the sect. To be honest, I’m not sure for tonight’s ceremony. I’m not that familiar with all the variations.”

A man’s voice spoke a short phrase, loud but clear. The Fuomi responded by what to Yozef sounded like low humming, rather than words. Yozef heard Eina doing the same. A few seconds later, the humming stopped as the man began some kind of recital. Every so often, he paused and the circle responded with a single word.

An “amen”? thought Yozef. Hallelujah? He remembered from students at Berkeley and TV shows that some Christians, Muslims, and Hindus were among the Earth religions that had response words or short phrases, but the details weren’t in his enhanced memory.

“The man speaking is the captain who owns the keiko horn,” Eina said softly. “He’s quite devout and belongs to a conservative sect. I’m told the ceremony version you’ll witness is typical of that sect.”

Yozef could not see Eina’s face, but he sensed amusement.

“His family is also quite wealthy. Supposedly, the original source of the coin was enterprises not politely spoken of in the higher circles of Fuomi society. However, the advantage to us here is that the captain has both the keiko horn and an ersorpka tapestry that depicts legends of human

creation and events in Fuomi history. If you wish, you can look at it before or after we eat the traditional meal.

“I’ll summarize the major parts,” whispered Eina as the captain continued speaking.

“The planet Anyar was created by God from pure thought. The wonders of Anyar needed life, so God created plants and animals from rock, soil, wind, and water. Seeing that no animal was dominant, God created humans to rule the animals. Here’s the next place where this sect diverges from many others. Their litany states that a major reason God created humans was to worship him. The majority of Fuomi now reject that reason as too human a motive, inappropriate for God. The topic is best left untouched in many parts of Fuomon.”

Yozef thought the captain’s voice seemed to turn into a drone, as though he were reciting a well-learned speech. Except for being so much longer, it reminded him of a California cashier giving a monotone “Have a good day” for the hundredth time without sincerity. The difference here was that if Eina was correct about the captain, he might be saying the words with the conviction that there were no doubters present.

The captain talked and Eina translated. His voice continued with the droning quality, and Yozef’s attention quickly faded, as had happened in church services and dry lectures on Earth. He avoided falling asleep only because they were standing.

The keiko horn brought him back to full awareness. The circle broke up as people uncovered lanterns and found chairs at the tables.

How long did that go on? thought Yozef.

“I reserved the tables behind us. We can uncover now,” said Reimo, flicking back the head cover.

They sat in the same order as when witnessing the ceremony. A mixture of Fuomi and Caedelli created a trail of servers to and from cooking pits and fires a hundred yards away. Pitchers of water spiked with a faint bitter taste like lemon arrived first. Anarynd wrinkled her nose at the first sip.

“It’s supposed to remind us of the bitterness of the first years after coming to Fuomon, depending on the specific belief,” said Reimo. “Fortunately, the source used in Fuomon doesn’t grow on Caedellium, so this isn’t anywhere near as bad.”

Next came loaves of a flat bread and bowls of what to Yozef looked like stringy spinach cooked to mush a few days previously.

Eina grinned at Yozef’s reaction when he pulled a bowl toward him and smelled the contents.

“Yes, it’s not the most palatable food. Like Reimo said about the water. In this case, the legend is that when our ancestors first came to Fuomon they almost starved before finding they could eat a type of small plant—but only if it was cooked to this consistency. In Fuomon, it’s called the musoni plant. It grows almost everywhere on Anyar. Here on Caedellium, I’ve heard it called both shilcell and shitgrass. I’m afraid the latter is a little too understandable. It’s highly nutritious, but no one would eat it unless close to starvation.

“Again, the flatbread is also part of the reference to the first peoples coming to Fuomon, depending on belief. It’s coarse ground and made without leavening, salt, or herbs. No one is expected to fill up on this first course. Just take a small portion and, frankly, just get it down.”

Reimo laughed. “In my family, there was enough beer to kill the taste, but in most versions of the ceremony, unfortunately including this one, no alcohol is served. The bread’s pretty bad, too, but if you eat some between the shilcell, it helps kill the taste of both.”

Yozef had a similar youthful experience when his parents insisted he eat brussels sprouts when they were served. His solution was to mash them, put a lump in his mouth, swallow as fast as possible, and gulp a chaser of water. He resurrected the tactic here on a different planet and downed three lumps of whatever it was called, interspersed by generous mouthfuls of the bread and water.

Stifled groans, incipient gags, and a few curses emanated from the guest group. Worry about offending the Fuomi abated upon the Caedelli's hearing similar responses from other tables.

Yozef leaned toward Maera. "I could use a large goblet of Mittack wine right now."

She giggled back. "I think something like the hard liquor being made might be necessary to deaden the taste coating my tongue."

"I heard that," said Kivalian. "Like I said, sometimes beer and other spirits are available before the ceremony. Even more common is afterward, when the festivities can turn raucous with people saluting the new year."

Relief came when the servers reappeared and took away the bread and the shilcell. The lingering aroma was quickly replaced by the savory scent of platters of roast krykor. They smelled fantastic, but Yozef knew it was from the herbs and not the meat. He had eaten krykor before.

"Don't worry," said Eina. "I know Caedelli don't think much of krykor meat, but the Fuomi have creative ways to prepare it that bring out flavors you didn't realize were there. In fact, I'm told the krykors here on Caedellium taste perhaps better than any other on Anyar. A few captains are planning to take some home when they return to Fuomon."

Yozef eyed the platters of steaming meat and the accompanying bowls of vegetables. He was dubious but surprised to find Eina was correct. It was delicious, as were the following courses of beef, a fish-like Anyar sea creature, hot bread lathered in butter, and trays of sweets he sampled, despite an overly full stomach. His opinion was evidently shared. The participants mood was subdued to start Januspuvako but shifted with the krykor course. By the time the sweets were served, the talking and laughter were just short of boisterous. He did not know what followed the food, but there was something he wanted to examine.

When first arriving that evening, they had passed an awning sheltering a wooden frame that supported the tapestry Eina had mentioned. Yozef had been listening to Eina and Anarynd at the time and got only a brief glance before a press of people behind moved them along. Now that most people seemed to have finished eating, he caught Eina's attention across their table.

"I'd like to take a closer look at the tapestry, if that's allowed," said Yozef.

"Of course," said Eina. "Anyone else interested can come along. I'll try to explain the tapestry's elements—at least, what I know."

Maera and Rhaedri accompanied them. Anarynd was laughing so hard at Kivalian's stories that they didn't bother to invite her.

A cluster of three men and a woman was examining the tapestry but smiled and made way for Eina and guests. It was Yozef's first good look. He estimated it was four feet tall and six feet wide with a gold-colored border about an inch wide. The colors of the scenes were bright, more so than he'd seen on Caedellium. He made a note to ask about dyes. Maybe eastern Anyar had a bigger selection than he'd seen on the island.

However, his strongest impression was the fine detail. From his first glance and seeing the tapestry from a distance, he'd had no impression of what was depicted. Now, up close, the detail was striking.

Wow, he thought. *This had to have been hand-done by a master craftsperson. I doubt a loom in this world could have made this. And how long would it have taken? Years?*

“This is a high-quality ersorpka,” Eina explained, “but it shows only part of the scenes that are on some larger ones. One in Kahmo, our capital, is thirty feet long. It’s supposed to have taken twenty people ten years to make. At the top of this ersorpka, you see a sun, which depicts the essence of God. There are still rural places in Fuomon where people consider the sun to actually *be* God.” She pointed with a finger, and Yozef noticed she took care not to touch the surface. “The rays coming from the sun represent the creation of humans. You’ll notice there are two clusters of people. In one cluster, you might think the people are disintegrating because some have only parts of bodies. However, in one major legend, humans are created from nothing, and what you see are humans coming into being, piece by piece.

“In the other cluster, people are emerging from the ground. These different depictions are a major feature of the ersorpka tapestries. Our earliest written records go back about 3,200 years, give or take 50 years. The captain will tell you it’s exactly 3,245 years, but honestly, that’s no better an exact estimate than many others. These tapestries are thought to be based on original designs on animal hides, none of which have survived. It’s widely believed that somewhere around 3,200 years ago, there were major conflicts between people holding to the two different creation stories. Somehow, the two sides settled on not requiring one story to dominate, an amazing accomplishment if you know more of Anyar’s subsequent written history. My husband, Paavo, is a history scholar and thinks the accord has lasted so long in Fuomon because it’s taken as an indication of Fuomi superiority. Otherwise, we would have succumbed to religious wars, as happened in many other places until the last couple hundred years.”

“On Caedellium, we’ve taken a different approach,” said Rhaedri.

“Yes, I know,” said Eina. “I’m sure Paavo would be fascinated to learn how the Caedelli came to not have a creation story.”

“It’s considered too far beyond human understanding,” said Rhaedri, who then grinned wryly. “That doesn’t mean we don’t have religious details to argue over.”

“What are all these other scenes?” asked Maera.

“Over here on the left, you see a scene of people getting on a ship and, right next to it, people getting off what appears to be the same ship. The legend about this scene is that during some unknown amount of time since the creation, people had moved from one place to another. Again, there are different interpretations. One of the most common is that humans had displeased God and were taken from their homes in a ship and moved somewhere else on Anyar.

“This particular ersorpka tapestry is not among the oldest. Those are over a thousand years old and were copied from tapestries that go back another thousand years or more. About 2,200 years ago, there was a war against a nomadic tribe that came out of central Melosia, the Urglors. It was a time of a decades-long drought that brought starvation and disease throughout most of Melosia, especially the east—the records are sketchy for western Anyar. In the east, the nomadic tribes moved south to search for water and grass. At that time, Fuomon had no strong border defenses, and the Urglors rampaged throughout Fuomon for many years.

“There was so much destruction that in many parts of Fuomon, the surviving records are few and partial. What’s certain is that a Fuomi army attacked a major Urglor force at night, coinciding with a total eclipse of the moon Haedan. Depending on whose interpretation you believe, either God signaled his intervention to save Fuomon, or the Urglors were so superstitious they lost the will to fight. Either way, the battle is considered a landmark event, and the war turned in Fuomi favor.”

She pointed to several scenes. “Here’s *that* battle. As you move down the tapestry, there are many more scenes of religious, historical, or legendary significance.”

Eina continued her description. Yozef only half listened. His focus was still on the earlier scenes. He waited to ask a question until she reached the bottom of the tapestry.

“Here with the ships, is the background on both sides supposed to be where they came from and where they went? There’s structures on the right . . . if that’s where they came from . . . but only crude shelters on the left where they went.”

“Yes,” said Eina. “That’s one reason for the legend of God punishing humans by taking away their possessions. If you look closer, you’ll also see animals on both sides. Some of them are familiar and some are not, the latter particularly on the right where they came from.”

Yozef hadn’t noticed but now leaned closer, once again impressed by the fine details. His eyes roamed over animal forms he recognized and those he didn’t. Suddenly, he stopped, his breath caught, and his mouth partly opened. On the right, partially hidden by other forms, was apparently one of the bigger animals. It had small ears alongside its head, two horn-like protrusions from near its mouth, and a curved structure between the horns.

“Holy shit,” he whispered inadvertently in English. Maera’s head snapped around, and Yozef caught himself before he slipped even more.

“Just a strange-looking creature,” he said and shrugged.

Maera raised an eyebrow and turned to check on Anarynd, letting Yozef return to the tapestry and the image that caught his attention.

THAT has got to be an elephant, he thought, his pulse still racing. He looked closer at the other animals. The small sizes and overlapping figures provided limited resolution. If he looked hard enough at the animals on the right, he was cautious about possibly identifying a rhinoceros, a camel, and a great ape of some kind. On the left were so many overlapping forms, it was difficult to tell how many. Among them were plausibly the merstor from the Munjor flag, the giant balmoth of Caedellium, and several forms he did not recognize, including what looked like a crocodile on long legs. He thought again about how the merstor and the balmoth on Anyar were so similar to the entelodonts and the paraceratheriums of Earth’s Miocene that they had to be transplants or amazing examples of parallel evolution.

Yozef looked again at the collage of animal forms on the right. He squinted his eyes—a reflex from his Earth eyesight not being as sharp as on Anyar.

Hold on, he thought. *Is that an elephant or a mammoth?* The tusks were long. An Indian elephant had short tusks. These appeared longer than those of African elephants, and they curled inward. The ears were small, even smaller than on an Indian elephant, and nowhere near the size of the large, fan-like ears of African elephants.

That’s a mammoth or something awfully close, he thought. *Does that date when humans were transplanted to Anyar?*

He reached into his memory, back to the childhood phase when he was crazy about dinosaurs and extinct mammals. Most mammoths were believed to have vanished about ten thousand years ago, but a remnant population survived until four thousand years ago on Wrangel Island, a forlorn and frozen land off northern Siberia. If what the tapestry depicted was related to the transplantation, it indicated humans came to Anyar four thousand or more years ago.

Now his eyes searched for similarities to other extinct Earth mammals. Many shapes were too small, even with the fine weave, or too obscured by other forms for him make reliable comparisons to what he knew. He was about to turn back to the rest of the tapestry when a final form caught his eye.

Well, he thought, that could be a giant ground sloth. They went extinct in North and South America about 10,000 years ago, shortly after humans arrived. However, they hung on in Cuba until humans got there 4,000 years later. If humans were transplanted from Earth when humans and ground sloths were alive, does that narrow the transplantation window to somewhere between 4,000 and 10,000 years ago?

He shook his head. *Just more clues?*

“I think Anarynd is starting to wonder why we’re looking at this so long,” said Maera.

Yozef glanced over to see Anarynd staring at them with a raised eyebrow.

“Go ahead, Maera,” he said. “I want to examine this a bit longer. Eina, would that be all right? I won’t touch it.”

Eina shrugged. “Best *not* touch it, or you’ll create a major diplomatic incident. The captain may be a minor member of his family, but they’re enormously wealthy and influential.”

They left him alone. No one came to take their place. He did not notice people’s reticence to interfere with the Caedelli paramount’s examination. Scene by scene, he went over Eina’s descriptions. Something was nagging at him. Something he could not quite bring into focus. Minutes passed. He was oblivious to more and more people staring and commenting on the paramount’s fascination.

The horn and the tapestry’s owner came over to Eina at her table, his face wrinkled in a frown.

“What’s with the Paramount?”

“It’s just his way,” said Maera. “Something will get his attention, and he seems to go off somewhere else while his mind is working on it.”

“Don’t worry, Captain,” said Eina. “The Paramount won’t touch the tapestry for any reason. He is extremely impressed with the artistry and craftsmanship and would do nothing to cause offense.”

The captain was only moderately appeased.

Meanwhile, Yozef continued his examination, alternately stepping back for global views, then forward to study the surface, inch by inch. He was on the verge of giving up his attempt to discover the cause of the itch when he froze. In the depiction of people boarding a ship, off to one side was a small oval object with no apparent connection to the rest of the scene. It could obviously be a mere decoration, something to fill an otherwise blank, small piece of tapestry. He didn’t believe it.

He moved to the left of the two ships, where humans seemed to be disembarking. Again, to one side, with no apparent reason for it to be there, was an oval shape, this one seeming to blur at the bottom as if that part could not be seen.

He grunted—deep, as if punched in the gut or as if responding to pieces of data coming together in ways he suspected but hardly believed. Time passed as he moved on, inch by inch, scene by scene. He found more of the small ovals, always with the long axis vertical, sometimes with the lower part obscured. Then there were no more. The last ovals he could find were with scenes of deliverance from the Urglors about halfway down the tapestry.

When he finally sighed and stepped back, he had to arch his back, which resisted from his leaning forward for so long. He looked around. All the people were finished eating. The Caedelli group sat and talked with Eina and Reimo. As for the rest of the people—ninety-one as he did the math—half were talking among themselves, while the other half stared at him with a wondering or annoyed expression.

Eina looked quickly over to Yozef and rose to join the ship captain and another man who were talking. Maera caught Yozef's eye and nodded toward his chair at their table, then put a hand on Anarynd's shoulder next to her and said something.

When Yozef sat, Maera said, "I was about to come shake you from wherever you were. There's a final part of the evening ceremony, so everything stopped while we waited for you."

"Oh. Sorry. I got absorbed with the tapestry. The . . . uh . . . artistry and detail are amazing. Very impressive."

"Right," she said and made a comment to Anarynd. Neither of them looked convinced.

He wished for a generous portion of some sort of liquor and to have it burn on the way down. Maybe that would help settle his mind, which still whirled from the implications of the tapestry.

The keiko horn sounded for the third time that evening. Eina returned and sat.

"This is the closing part of the ceremony. As with other parts, there are variations, but this usually involves a declaration of Synpahahvon, the Six Precepts. The man standing with the captain is named Samtoola. He's what translates as something similar to a Narthani priest or a Caedelli theophist, though not quite the same."

She looked at Rhaedri. "I'm sure you and he would have some interesting discussions. I can introduce you to him later, if you wish."

"Definitely!" said Rhaedri, excited. "I talked a little with Reimo, but I gather he's not what you would call a serious believer."

Kivalian grunted but did not respond.

"I think Reimo is not so much a nonbeliever as that he doesn't follow any of the major Fuomi religious sects."

Kivalian's second grunt was softer.

"All right then," said Eina. "It's about to begin. Notice the bonfire has long burned out to coals, and all the lanterns are being covered again. See the three men and three women with covered lanterns, standing to the right of the captain? Samtoola will lead the next part about the Six Precepts. As he speaks, those six lanterns will be uncovered. In some ceremony variations, it's candles, especially in homes."

The keiko horn sounded again, this time noticeably softer than before. The room quieted, and Samtoola stood on a two-foot-tall box and raised both arms. As he spoke, Eina and Reimo translated.

"Do you believe in the Six Precepts?"

A firm "I do" sounded out from almost a hundred throats. The non-Fuomi were silent, and Yozef watched a section of men and women facing his direction. There was sufficient light from coals and stars for Yozef to see enough body language and mouth motion to gauge that most Fuomi people were believers, but a couple looked as if they may have only mouthed the words. Yozef interpreted the expression of one man as disdainful.

"Do you truly believe in the Six Precepts?" intoned Samtoola, louder this time, as if not quite believing the first response.

"I do!" rang louder this time.

Eina motioned for Yozef, Maera, and Rhaedri to lean toward her, and she whispered, "He's now going to declare each precept, and the people will respond with statements supporting the precept."

"Then heed the Six Precepts."

One of the six lanterns was uncovered.

“God is one.”

“We believe in the one God, creator of the universe, source of goodness and wisdom.”

A second lantern added its light.

“Be thankful.”

“Life and bounty are by the grace of God, not to be squandered or thought deserved.”

“Family is without limits.”

“We are responsible for every person who wishes us well.”

“Truth is a rock.”

“To lie is to mock God and forfeit esteem.”

“Avoid excess.”

“Harmony, humility, and health come from prudence, discipline, and moderation.”

The sixth and final lantern’s light was added.

“Loyalty to Fuomon.”

“The homeland is our sanctuary, future, security, and is honored above all realms.”

“Do you truly believe in the Six Precepts?” Samtoola called out.

The “I do” was the most fervent yet.

“Then let us consider the precept of Truth.”

Eina whispered again.

“This is where the leader of the ceremony gives a sermon on one of the precepts. Depending on the individual, it can concentrate on everyday life or be more philosophical. Over the centuries, the sermons from the most widely respected priests/theophists have been incorporated into a range of sect tenets and philosophical schools.”

Yozef estimated Samtoola spoke for half an hour, concentrating on why truth was essential in military and diplomatic groups.

Appropriate for the audience, he thought. I’d be curious to hear sermons on the other precepts and to listeners with different backgrounds.

Samtoola said something in Fuomi, and people began forming clusters of five or six.

“This is the final part of Januspuvako,” said Eina. “It originated from those who believe the version where humans came to Fuomon after displeasing God and being taken from their homes. We all are fallible. The ceremony closes with forming small groups and confessing something we need to improve on. The number in each group is at the discretion of the leader of the ceremony—which in this case is Samtoola. He decreed no more than ten people or less than five. You see some jostling around as people settle into groups of that size range.”

“And what are we supposed to do . . . confess some sin?” asked Maera, looking a little dubious.

Eina laughed. “Don’t worry. It’s mainly ceremonial. Most people ‘confess’ something trivial and state they will attempt to improve in the coming year.”

Sort of a New Year’s resolution, thought Yozef. At least, it’s better than making a long list of resolutions where few, if any, will last beyond January. Actually, this whole ceremony is something like an efficiency expert’s solution to combining Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, 4th of July, Yom Kippur, and New Year’s.

When the milling subsided, Samtoola said something, and people turned from him to their group.

“That’s it,” said Eina. “I’ll start.

Rhaedri cleared his throat. “Uh . . . actually . . . Eina, this puts me in an awkward position. I’m afraid as a theophist I can’t confess a sin and commit to change or atonement unless I

consider it needful. I hope I don't offend, but if I understand what you say, then some of your people often do this part of the ceremony only as a formality."

"Well . . . it's not required for guests," said Eina, "so we can just watch the others."

Yozef thought the Orosz couple looked relieved and Klyngo Adris, confused.

"As it happens, I do have something to confess and profess to change," said Rhaedri, "but I don't want to put the rest of you in the awkward position of feeling pressure to do the same."

"Since we are guests, does the required number in a cluster still hold, or could we do it in our smaller groups, yours and Reimo's?" asked Yozef.

Eina put a fingertip under her nose as she considered.

"I don't know that guests are required to follow the leader in this. So, in the absence of knowledge, I say we can do it in the two groups. I doubt anyone, including Samtoola, will notice."

Yozef turned to Maera. "Is that all right with you?"

"Does that mean you have something you regret?" she asked. She did not say it, but she was curious what her husband would say. "As you would say, 'I'm okay.'"

Eina grinned. "Oh, dear. This means I'll have to come up with something other than committing to eating fewer of those little Caedelli sweetcakes I've grown too fond of. Rhaedri, you can start, if you wish."

The elderly theophist appeared as calm as ever, leading Yozef to wonder what terrible thing the most revered theophist on Caedellium had done.

"I'm hardly unaware of the persistent rumors that I will be declared a Septarsh. There's nothing I can do about people talking, and the tradition has the advantage that such a declaration can only happen after the person has passed on from this existence. I would hate to live with people regarding me with even more veneration than they do now. Only *I* know all my failings, starting from my first memories to the present moment.

"Therein lies the problem. On the one hand, I honestly believe I am not suited for elevation to Septarsh. Yet . . . I'm afraid there is a part of me that is not so certain and for whom it perhaps is even appealing. A sixday ago . . . or maybe two sixdays ago, I wandered through the Orosz City main plaza on market day. There were the usual throngs—people buying, selling, or just mingling with the crowds."

He smiled. "Particularly the women. It's no secret or disrespect meant to acknowledge that women enjoy just 'looking,' with no intent to purchase. As I passed a clothing stall, three women were examining dresses and talking. One of them asked the others if they thought Yozef Kolsko would be declared a Septarsh before Rhaedri Brison. I am dismayed to say a rush of annoyance washed over me before I realized I had thoughts I believed I had long ago moved past.

"My commitment in the following year is to every day read sections of *The Word* that deal with humility."

Rhaedri stopped and looked at the others. No one said anything. No one knew if they were *supposed* to say anything.

Eina stepped in. "Traditionally, there is no discussion. Each person makes their statement, and the next person continues. I'll go next. It's something that has nagged me, and I've not told anyone. I'll take this opportunity to hopefully expunge it. When I left to come on the expedition to Caedellium, I knew it meant leaving my family for perhaps years—we couldn't know how many. Our two daughters are married and have their own families, but Paavo, my husband, and I have two young sons.

“Being asked to be adviser to Jaako Rintala on the expedition was a major career opportunity. Paavo understood that and was supportive of my decision to come. However, at the time and still today, though less so, part of me wishes he had offered to come with me, even though I know it was both impractical and inappropriate for our sons. The expedition would have to traverse the Great Ocean to hide from the Narthani our intent to find out what was happening on Caedellium. The dangers and unknowns were too great to risk their lives only because I didn’t want to be separated from them.”

Her wry smile was sad. “And then, according to custom, how am I to change? I’m afraid I fall back on what’s allowed—and that’s to at least acknowledge the fault, even if no remedy is apparent.”

Maera reached out and patted Eina’s hand without speaking.

“I’ll go next,” she said. Her face blanched, and the hand she withdrew from Eina now slightly trembled. “I love and respect Yozef more than I ever imagined I would with a husband. I expected to marry for the good of Clan Keelan, and I thank God every day for Yozef.” She paused and glanced at their other small cluster. Tomis Orosz was speaking words they could not hear. Anarynd listened closely, her head tilted to one side.

“I also love Anarynd, perhaps more than I do my sisters. I don’t know if that’s right, but that’s the way it is. I was heartbroken when she was taken by the Narthani, and I didn’t know her fate or if she was even alive. Then she came to us, and I was overjoyed. Then the time came when I began to think she would eventually leave us for her own life. In a sense, it seemed more than I could bear. That’s not true, of course, but the feeling was there.

“It happened one evening when I saw Anarynd rocking baby Aeneas. She was crying. I imagined that she was wondering whether she would ever have the joy of marriage and family that I felt. It came to me that I could keep Anarynd close if she were part of our family. I proposed the idea to both her and Yozef. Both of them were hesitant for different reasons, I assume. But I persisted—gently, I hope—and Anarynd joined our family. I believe it was the right thing to do and that all three of us are happy. I believe I would do the same thing if given the opportunity to do different. But I also know that when I witness Yozef and Anarynd together, too often a part of me wishes it were only Yozef and myself. Jealousy. A sin according to *The Word*.

“What can I do differently? I’m glad Eina says this ceremony recognizes there may not always be solutions. All I can say is that I love Yozef and Anarynd more than life.”

Maera’s eyes were moist, and Yozef saw Anarynd, in her group, look concerned when she glanced their way. He shook his head slightly at her and put a hand on Maera’s in her lap.

“It doesn’t take a Paramount to figure out it’s my turn,” he said, attempting to gently divert attention from Maera. “First, nothing I’ve heard sounds like a major sin, but more like normal thoughts that go through our heads. I can’t say I’m well aware of the philosophies and theologies of Caedellium and Fuomon, but in Amerika we would say that we are only human. A thousand thoughts go through our minds every day. We should feel no obligation to ensure that *every* thought be admirable. That’s expecting too much, and I believe that greater minds than mine in Amerika would say that to have such expectations is one of the highest forms of pride—a significant sin, in and of itself.

“Having said that, I find that my statement should require my own exculpation, which I don’t know that I can achieve,” he said drolly. “I don’t know if I can call it a sin or not, but it conflicts with what I think *should* be. I have secrets. I doubt this is news to any of you three. You are all far too intelligent not to suspect otherwise. I regret the secrets will remain but especially

with Maera. We talked about this when we first thought of being married. I explained then, and I believe now, that not all secrets are bad. It was my judgment then, and is still now, that some things are best not known. The day may come when circumstances change. If that happens, it will be Maera whom I turn to first.”

He looked to Eina. “I hope I’m not violating the custom *too* much when I have no intention of changing what I regret.”

She shook her head, her eyes thoughtful. “Because you are guests to the ceremony, I doubt it matters. But if it helps, I’ll give you my exoneration.” She paused to look around. “And with that, I see most of the other groups have finished. There is no formal closing, so the ceremony is over, and I thank you all again for coming.”

They thanked Eina for the invitation and, in the next thirty minutes, Rhaedri was introduced to Samtoola, the two men walked away in deep discussion, and Yozef exchanged greetings with Fuomi he recognized now that the cloaks were shed.

The carriage ride back to the manor passed unobserved by Yozef. Maera and Anarynd talked of the evening without his participation—as soon as they realized he was off into one of his introspective periods.

Yozef was not sure what he had learned in the previous hours. Were their clues to how humans came to Anyar, and were the Flagorn eggs involved? He would have hours of wondering without coming to conclusions.