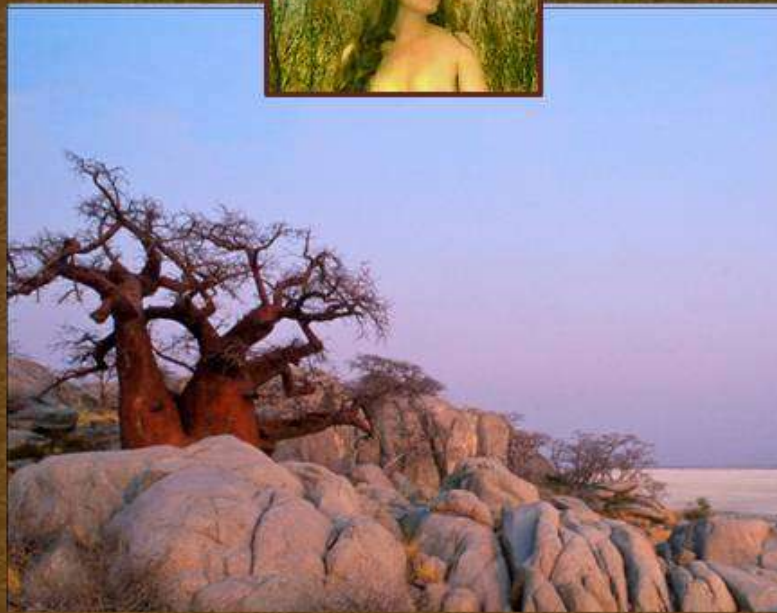


THE LIFETREE TRILOGY  
BOOK ONE



THE  
SKYCLAD SAGES

AN EPIC NOVEL THAT MERGES A PINCH OF FANTASY  
WITH A STRONG DOSE OF REALISTIC NATURALISM

B. P. YOKE

# **The Life Tree** **Trilogy**

*Book One*

## **The Sky Clad Sages**

The new-old worldview that seeks to resolve the fundamental conundrums that are endangering our civilization. Presented in a novel that is both sensual and intellectually challenging.

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*For J, L, & C,  
and for M & J.*

About the Cover:

Main photo – The edge of Ule/deni Mesa in the middle of the dry season.

Inset – Carressa (1958) looking pale shortly after emerging from hibernation among the Tayron

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## The Characters:

### (Prelude) 1. Artemis the Star Savage

Artemis was alone. She had been living in complete solitude, deep in the tropical forest, naked, and with virtually no possessions for many days. Yet Artemis was happy. You could say she was even ecstatically happy.

She was perched halfway up in an acacia koa tree in the Kohala wilderness on the Big Island of Hawaii's northwestern horn. Now when most people think of Hawaii they tend to think of beach property, condominiums, and high rise hotels, but in the twenty first century's opening decade a deserted Eden still existed in Kohala, with rugged gorges covered by native trees, and with beautiful snails, giant centipedes, tall grass, and lush flora.

Artemis had learned of Kohala a couple of years earlier, and she had returned there to know and savor the 'hidden gifts of the void,' as she called it. She was twenty, and a largely unarticulated craving had drawn her to this relatively wild place. She reveled there, in a space in which human culture and cognitive thought often fell away, leaving her right brain, her temporal lobe, the 'mystical' part of her mind filled; a shining vessel of raw animal sensation.

It was night, and she had come part way down from her nest bivouac in the acacia's crown. As she climbed in the dark, Artemis concentrated on her footing and handholds, and familiar cautions flitted through her head: "Just remember what's happening here, girl. You're *far* from any foot trail, and it is miles of rugged cut up terrain to the nearest road. If you fall you'll probably die, and you'll die slowly at that."

Thus occupied she carefully climbed down to a branch twenty feet above the waterfall. It remains 'Her' waterfall even now; it empties into a deep ravine, which then winds seaward, and eventually it becomes a green gorge many hundreds of feet deep. The gorge, which on maps is called the Punalulu, ends at a cut in the great ocean cliffs of Kohala. The cut then

reaches halfway down to the sea, and there the stream creates a final waterfall, plunging through the opening to the rocks and surf below.

From her position she could look through the trees, down the ravine, and feel the distant boom of the surf over the sound of the falls, and at night she could see the soft sparkle of the ocean under the waxing moon. This sea view also held memories of recent days when she had glimpsed the green and black shadow of a sea turtle cresting the swells just beyond the surf, and in the remote distance she'd also observed the occasional white splash of foam from a breaching humpback.

Artemis crouched on her acacia limb, cheerfully sky clad, without the slightest touch or blemish of human culture, and on this particular night she was feeling deeply cleansed, wholly innocent, and with this freedom and vulnerability all she had to do was empty her head.

-- Whereupon with a rush she was filled with almost painfully beautiful sensations, all of them connecting her brain solidly to the world. But although her perceptions of the moist jungle air, the tree, the sounds of water and rustling leaves, and the starlight, were of an *ecstatic* intensity, they tended to occupy her consciousness in waves; her sensations were followed by short troughs of cognitive activity, and the word thoughts were slightly troubled:

Artemis felt she didn't understand her current joy anymore then she understood why she had been so depressed her freshman year of high school back in Colorado Springs, nor did she understand her melancholy when finishing high school on Kauai, or her endless despondency in collage at Honolulu. And as her cognition and memories oscillated with the sensual feelings of the moment Artemis's thoughts rambled; she was curious and bright enough to want to know:

“Am I shallow? ...

Does my life have so little meaning that I must existentially fall prey to banal events or simple sensations?”

She had thought that moving to Kauai at age fifteen was surely, overall, a bad thing. The islands were certainly beautiful, but so was Colorado, and the painful fact was she had gone from a few girl friends back home to none

in Hawaii. Yet she was a *cheerleader* in Colorado Springs. And, that seemed so, *like, ridiculously* superficial, now. At least she wasn't one of the super 'hot' cheerleaders, like Jill or Kim. Collage had been such a welcome wakeup.

But that was nothing. Camping *here*, living really, for so long, alone, nude, in the wild . . . It was profoundly grounding. Whew!, that was putting it mildly!

But she wondered, what was it that had caused this religious (or spiritual) revelation? -Or at least she guessed she could call it a revelation. Was it the nudity, the solitude, or was it this wildness?

She supposed early humanity, tribal humans, experienced this. Didn't they? Was this experience, where she was finding such unnamable joy, was it just normal to them? Was there something *superficial* about her feelings?

Or was it just her hormones? There had been some changes in her moods, but only mild changes. Really; she'd been feeling this way right through her period weeks ago until now.

Artemis guessed that she honestly didn't know *what* was happening. . .

She focused on the distant surf for a few moments and limited her thoughts again while she timed her breathing with the crash of the waves.

"So really, anyway, what does it mean to be superficial? Does it just mean being focused on, appearance? I haven't thought much about my appearance since I've been in the forest. --Yet I do love to play with my dark copper hair." She smiled a bit at her vanity; it had been a little oily since she don't have any soap, but she certainly felt clean generally. . . --what with all the mud baths she'd had, and climbing in and out of jungle pools every day. Again, her thoughts wandered to the slight movements of her hair on her neck and shoulders. . .

She rolled her eyes in the dark. She knew that her hazel eyes were a blessing. Artemis loved studying people's eyes, and she was self conscious. Even when alone she was aware of what her eyes must look like as they rolled and flashed when she observed the minute and vast landscapes of the forest. She loved being sensually aware of herself; It actually felt profound, significant; the awareness of her vibrant feeling body as just a part of the vital world. Sure her hips seemed a little big, yet being naked, she loved the

feeling of swiveling them when she walked, and she could run! The unencumbered freedom of it!

“I know I’m not ‘perfect’ whatever that means, but in the wild I feel lovely just by being alive and healthy, and out here feeling beautiful as a part of the *greater beauty* is all that matters to me. And for now, or even for as long as I live, how can that revelation fade?”

Then her mind jumped briefly to boys; surely boys, men, weren’t the problem, or were they? She had only vaguely been lonely for Stephan or maybe Joshua. . . .

“But who cares?” Her thoughts clicked forward.

There were of course other, larger, issues that on occasion intruded on her meandering consciousness from the world outside. The predicament of the human world. Civilization. It all now seemed perversely profane from her current perspective, or anybody’s perspective for that matter --the culture of her birth. . .

And then there was the troubling issue of the religion of her childhood. That was perhaps the main thing. Looking at all of it, she thought the ‘problem’ obviously seemed to be her current confused relationship to ‘God.’ The thoughts rolled by, “Am I *really* an atheist?” It had been the dogmatism. She still felt cold anger rising whenever she thought of those old parochial unreasonable dogmas.

“God!?” she whispered. She looked up at the leaves and to the tropical stars that were burning through the moonlight.

For over two hundred thousand years humans have tended to look to the heavens when thinking about the transcendent, or perhaps about an omnipotent god, but Artemis was a special case. For her the sky had always melded religion and science. A couple of months ago she had completed an internship at the nearby world class observatory on Hawaii’s tallest mountain, Mona Kea. Since she was only a sophomore at university it had been quite a privilege to have earned that internship.

Her affair with the sky had started when she was eight years old. Artemis had received a book about astronomy for Christmas, and it had been a seminal experience for her. The information in that book had seemed so *sacred*. Those deep space intergalactic photographs were so real

and reproducible; she found she loved the book's gift of knowledge, enabling her to now hold the 'known' universe in her head. By the time she was a teenager maybe once a day she would experiment with methods of getting her consciousness around the size and age of the cosmos. She would run the astronomical numbers over and over through her mind, trying various ways to grasp them.

She often returned to what essentially became her personal mantra: "The known universe extends over thirteen billion light years in every direction.

It contains over a hundred billion galaxies.

Each galaxy averages over a hundred billion stars."

Yet now she wondered, what were these tropical stars but remote and cosmic sparks in the void?

She let the Mantra go through her, and she let it return her to the immediate world of sensation: the photons from light years distant stars entering her pupils, the sounds of the jungle radiating heat, oxygen, and moisture into the nighttime firmament.

She was squatting on the Acacia tree branch. Her legs a play of curves. Her brown toes curled round the rough bark. Then she arched her back to reach the branch above her head with one arm. The rising moon piercing through fronds and leaves caught her thus, dappling her in silver and gray and turning the dark waves of hair on her back into black shadows with the faintest tints of copper. Artemis looked at the moon. Her period would start in two days. Within a year after staring menses she had found, and since confirmed, that her period followed the moon perfectly. It had always started four days before the full moon and ended the day the moon reached full. She felt this rather unique fact, that her body stayed perfectly aligned with the lunar cycle, was a kind of gift, from something mysterious. The void? But it was a blessing because she reveled in her ability to always have a peaking libido when the moon was full.

As she gripped the tree with her right hand she reached down with her left hand and with her fingers parted her labia and with a long sigh, peed. An arc of opal and pearls fell and blended with the milky spray below. Still squatting, Artemis again lightly rested her butt on the branch. Then she imagined herself as the primal primate. And the tree felt so alive touching



her skin. She loved, or was in love, with all of it. She didn't think anyone she knew would understand this as anything but sexual. And it was sexual, but God it was so much more!

Then inexplicably for a second the troubling memories returned again; "There had been *so much misery* and ugly emptiness for *years*." She chose to let that random thought slide past and gently pulled herself back again to the now, in Kohala, and thus as it had every evening since she arrived, her thoughts inevitably turned to: "tonight I'm blessed....but surely this shouldn't be so rare."

She clutched at the tree. "I guess most of humanity, they can't love you as I love you, you old gorgeous, . . .you old acacia tree. . . that you are, . . . Tree of the Ark, of the Covenant . . ." She remembered Sunday school class and mused briefly about the relative significance, or insignificance, of acacia trees. She stretched a little and looked down at the falls then spontaneously spoke out loud, "Water! Tonight again I'm blessed, and I bless you with my water, pollution be dammed!, though words are failing me." She laughed softly at her own awkwardness, at the absurd easiness of this gift, of endless sensual joy, and at the wanton beauty of the night.

The sound of her laughter merged with that of the falls. But the forest didn't accept it silently. A native Hawaiian bird called the scarlet iwi which was roosting in a tree nearby was startled. It gave out a reckless falling cry that the girl felt as the sound moved out over the canopy and into the space beyond the moon and those primordial tropical stars.

Artemis assumed the reason for the Iwi's cry was her own laughter, but still in the habit of caution she lifted her other hand to the limb over her head and perched there straining into the darkness with fully dilated pupils, her ears, nose, and skin fully alert. --Self consciously an animal, pure sensual awareness, taking a thrill of pleasure at her own vulnerability.

She glanced up yet again at the stellar symphony, offset by the cratered moon shimmering through the leaves. There was no light pollution in the middle of the Pacific a hundred miles from Honolulu. She forgot about the iwi, there was nothing to be afraid of, and she returned to her rambling reverie with the night. "Cognitive thought, word thought; without it I wouldn't be able to survive, but sometimes it's time to clear my mind, sense,

live. Find the oneness in my right brain.” And once again, she did, but this time for much longer.

The jungle air massaged her arms, feet, ribs, vulva. The moonlight, and leaf shadows dappled her lips, toes, hair, her elbows, and hips. A mosquito landed on her open armpit, moved between the hairs, and began to bite. She reached down and calmly pinched its life away. Then she let her arm glide back and felt the slight movements in the tropical air as a caress. All the nerves on her skin were vibrating, and in her eyes there were leaves and waterfalls, and stars that pulsed with current.

Her chest slowly expanded and contracted as she perched there silent, emptied, for what may have been hours;

Then presently she began to tip off the acacia limb.

With a jerk she clutched the branches of the Ark tree, realized how tired she was, stretched, and made her way back up to the crown and her nest.

Her nest was only big enough to sleep in curled up. The core of the structure was made of vines that Artemis had brought up the tree many days ago with a great quantity of itchy sweaty effort. She had managed to wind the vines round the crown of branches that the Acacia tree broke into at its top. Artemis had roofed the nest over with elephant ear leaves which she'd gotten from a bush in the neighboring Wiamanu valley.

When Artemis needed to stretch she could hang her legs over the side of her shelter, but when she was in the nest on her side with her knees against her chest she was so snug under the structure's roof of thatched leaves that a hard rain couldn't find its way in. Even Hawaii gets cold enough at night when it rains that a naked person can become very uncomfortable, so as a final touch she had also filled the nest with dry leaves and grass for blanket material.

Sometimes she was irritated by ants, but the real problem was the centipedes. They were big and their bites could cause infections; so every other day she tried to clean out her nest and replace the old bedding leaves with fresh ones.

On this night, as she started to climb in, she was as always careful of the dizzying fall into the shadows below, and she also realized that she was very hungry. She decided that tomorrow she would hunt jungle rats.

Later, curled up in her nest, Artemis was rocked by a soft breeze, and when she started her ‘dream meditation’ sleep began to descend quickly. She had been fifteen in Colorado when she’d developed what she called the ‘waterfall reality-dream meditation’. Artemis had started doing it when she was standing outside her house as a teenage girl; she’d look slowly up and down and in the four directions, and she would imagine stretching her eyesight through the cosmos to the trillions of earthlike planets that must exist, planets in their star’s ‘warm zone,’ planets with liquid water. On those myriad planets she could open her mind to all the waterfalls that had been, are, and will be: beyond the earth, trillions upon trillions of cascades, waterfalls, and cataracts. --All that falling water, throwing the sparkle of alien stars. --Ionizing air with unconscious grace, throughout the universe. She felt that, though humanity may have fallen for now, she could always hold in her awareness the gift of creation, secure that its generous beauty was untouchable by any human profanity. Her mind flitted out into the universe, and the falls of the cosmos melded with the one below her as she fell asleep.

## The characters:

### 2. The Crone

The petite old crone's skin fit the forest. It was twined and crinkled as the bark of an ancient desert juniper. She was walking among the trees, searching the rainforest methodically, looking from the boles among the undergrowth to the branches and leaves above that pressed against the hard blue of the mid-ocean sky.

Though her mission was urgent she was content, the same as any healthy animal. It was the gift of awareness --that the jungle was still beautiful.

"I must find it, then I can get some rest; because surely then it would be enough. . .

Anyway, I still love that absurd tribe. I suppose it's because they do have such a store of wisdom, even though they're the ones who lost it.

I showed them the ancient way, yet still *they* lost the bogada."

"They' were the now famous Tayrona Indians, far away in South America. They were in Northern Colombia protecting their sacred mountain, believing it would keep humanity's relationship with the cosmos in balance. It had been decades since she had been among them on their peculiar mountain that rose above the Caribbean coast.

She considered that tribe, whose Indians were her adopted family, and she was bemused to discover that her old anger could flare up briefly. It was confounding that the anger could still surface, flushed up out of her amygdala. As she walked she guided the anger into her cerebrum and examined it, smiling. Incredible that it was still there. Perhaps it would always be.

"Now those old patterns can't be helped. . .  
But by the Elder kauris this place has changed."

Most of the honey creepers were gone. There had been quite a variety of them, many kinds of colorful birds, with all manner of calls, but all with

curved beaks. She knew there was a connection there, between the nectar-drinking birds and the insectivore bats. They had known it since Io's time. But what was the connection? How did it work? It was a disconcertingly sad and tragic part of the puzzle if only because now without the birds the kukui and acacia trees were much quieter.

Virtually all of the forest's trunks were smaller too, and the surrounding canyons were a little bigger, and more barren. Erosion was eating into the plateaus and pulling the topsoil down.

The crone wore a few small tattered fantail feathers braided in her thick hair, which was so long she wore it like a cloak. She swiveled her sunken hips a little as she walked and felt strands of hair trailing behind her like jelly fish tentacles, or like cobwebs that might blow out of an attic window.

And what was this 'bogada' for which the crone searched? You could say it was an herb. But it was more than an herb: she knew that without bogada she would lose her mother, the mother of us all, whose breasts looked so impossibly young and beautiful, yet were so ancient. And soon they would lose their sweet milk, the primal food, which for an eon has held the very nectar of maternal human wisdom.

She could scarcely think of what would happen after such a loss, for then all hope of sustaining the gifts of civilization, of this new science and art, which she loved, would surely founder. Wouldn't it? Humanity itself could then be lost in the clutch of cruel and brutal dogmas, and she believed that deranged minds would take dominion, and in the collapse much more that is beautiful on earth, human and nonhuman, would be destroyed forever.

It seemed bogada had always been hard to acquire, and easy to lose. She remembered that, but even at her age she hardly knew how to begin to find something so sacred and elusive.

Sacred: it seemed like a musty word in the modern world, but it was still the best word she could think of.

She remembered, the path that leads to the . . . Sacred; it's created and maintained only by those who are sanctified, or partially so. And here on the island this was *her* story. She had left the bogada here, but there had been so many changes.

She had heard that at least the iwi was still here, such a small bird, but she should keep to the old positive vision: Simply plan for the future, remember the past, and right now. . .

She knew, all she needed to do, in this present, was breath. Washed in all this sensation the crone could just clear her brain, of the clutter of words, and she'd be humming with sensation. If bogada was still here she felt confident she could pick it out.

The old woman walked on in quiet grace, as a soft breeze would move; she brushed and lifted the leaves and boughs that blocked her path.

## The characters:

### 3. Makao

He had always thought he could get along with anybody. So he couldn't quite believe this was happening. Makao was three quarters native Hawaiian, and prided himself as being the most 'chill' member of his group of friends. But now David Hackel had come unhinged and was screaming anti environmental clichés at him:

"It's you people who're destroying this country! You want to destroy Hawaii. You greens hate mankind so you-all sure as hell don't care if I can make a living. You've banned DDT, and that's caused the death of millions of children from malaria. You want to stop nuclear power when it's the only real solution we have to the energy situation. You're trying to stop genetic engineering of food which is now leading to the starvation of billions. So don't talk to me all high and mighty. You're just a bunch of pussies and whiners who want power, but are getting in the way!"

"Yo Dave don't talk that way man, I know you're not like that. You're stereotyping....I just don't, don't want you to be messing with the . . . tranquility of this valley."

"It's my valley too! MY Freedom!, and don't condescend to me ya lolo punk. Now get outta the way, an go count your fuckkin snails."

Makao felt all he had done was tell Dave to turn off the dirt bike while they were talking. He knew there was a lot of anger on both sides of the 'development' of Hawaii issue, but now he kind of felt that Dave was being an asshole, surely, if ever there was one.

Makao *did* like the snails. He knew that most Americans, and certainly the majority of the rest of the world's populace, weren't aware that the state of Hawaii had more extinctions than all of the rest of the United States put together.

Makao was keenly aware of Hawaii's predicament. He had grown up on the north coast of the Big Island near Hilo, and in his twenty years on the planet he'd watched ever swelling traffic on the island's roads and seen massive numbers of hotels, condos, and houses built. His parents had railed

throughout his early childhood about all the indigenous species that were being pushed to the brink, or past it. The boy's half Hawaiian half haoli father had been particularly incensed at what he saw as the desecration of the island's sacred beauty.

Makao Akamu was prone to ambivalence: Though he loved his gentle Hawaiian mother and felt he had learned honor from his father, he had mainly been overwhelmed by the extinction issue. It was just another facet of the crazy modern world, and he wanted to ignore it.

In his heart Makao was actually more of a humanist, but it was complicated. He had some deep issues with the human race; when he was twelve both his parents had died.

The resulting impact on his psyche left him with the general feeling that human relationships couldn't be totally trusted, and the boy's experience had created kind of a void, where normally there had been a natural desire to deeply relate to people he now would only go into the shallows.

His aunt had taken him on, and in his new home he approached environmental/human issues partially with a guilty sense of duty to his parents. He was consciously conflicted, feeling that he was drawn more to human culture and to humans than to wilderness. But there was still a vague but unrelenting pull towards solitude.

He often told people that his main interests were music and partying. He was a good drunk: he was normally soft spoken, but when drinking he became a bit loud, though still gentle, and even when he was completely soused he was often funny. He loved weed, though you could rarely tell when he had been smoking, as it hardly affected his intellect at all.

Makao had practiced the banjo, and the ukulele, since he was five, and in the last few years he had taken to the violin. He loved to fuse Hawaiian music with bluegrass and various forms of folk. He had some interest in the metal and rap of his peers, but though deeply melancholy he just wasn't that angry. 'Primitive' music such as the African drums, pan pipes, and Indian flute were great, but so was classical; Mozart and the romantic composers Grieg and Bizet currently held his heart.

So it was mostly duty, or perhaps honor, which had caused him to major in biology and now in his junior year Makao had chosen a summer



internship with the state wildlife department. And here he was back on the big island hiking into the Waipio valley on his way to the Kohala forest to count the endangered indigenous tree snails.

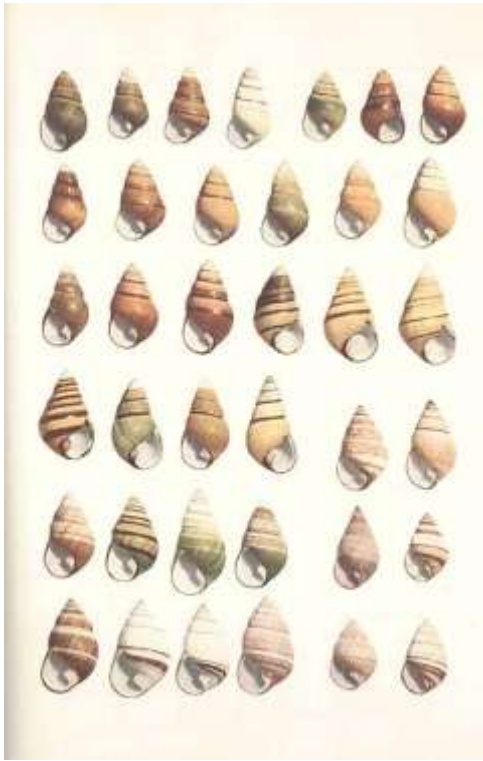
Then he had run into Dave.- They had grown up and gone to the same school and university, but they hadn't been friends since elementary school. Currently Dave was a helicopter pilot in the tourist trade. So they had very little in common, except that now they were both headed to Kohala.

To reach Kohala Makao first had to cross the dramatic Waipio valley. It cuts into the North West corner of Hawaii's Big Island, creating a gap in the sea wall, and the valley gouges deeply into the island's interior just where the high sea cliff ramparts of the Kohala peninsula meet the main land mass. With its relatively large flat floor, the valley of the Waipio has one of the few rivers in the Hawaiian Islands. The river is formed by waterfalls that drop from the cliffs that ring the valley's sides, but after its steep birth the river meanders through the almost flat basin, sleepily gliding between rock walls three thousand feet high, until it reaches the ocean. The only road down into the Waipio is a four wheel drive road which slants steeply down the eastern cliff wall. To reach the Kohala forest by land Makao needed to cross the valley near its front where it makes a mile wide arching sand beach, and then he had to hike the steep path that angles up the western side's cliff wall. This foot path creates one of the only entrances into the Kohala forest preserve.

Although there were some modern houses with their attendant yuppies in the valley, there were also Hawaiian locals in the Waipio. The locals were sufficiently cut off from the rest of the world by the cliffs that they managed to live and raise taro in patties somewhat like their ancestors had. Makao had been walking around these taro patches across the valley and to the foot path when Dave had come along revving his dirt bike like a chain saw. It seemed like the noise was necessary to compensate for some sort of male insufficiency, and then there were the words. . . But now Makao put Dave's stinging comments aside for a while as he returned to thoughts of the week in the forest that lay ahead.

He felt he would be very lonely, and he was even a little afraid. He couldn't say of what, but he was a young man, and not being much of a nature buff he hadn't ever thought to camp out alone before. To be far out

into the forest, alone at night, was something he was now looking forward to with excitement, but no great happiness. What would he do alone for so long? He had brought little for entertainment, just notebooks, field guides, and his banjo.



*The Indigenous Hawaiian snails. Many of which are extinct.*

. Makao supposed he did love the snails, those that remained. They were such harmless animals, and they had been on the island for far longer than people. When the Polynesians had arrived a thousand years ago they had created their own share of snail decimation with the release of rats and pigs. Then the Europeans had done the rest with hundreds of other introduced species and massive development. Additionally in the nineteenth century it became fashionable among the Europeans to collect all the many different varieties of snails, with their lovely multi colored spiral shells. And collecting remained very popular for both the English and the Americans, until virtually all the snails were gone. Now in the early twenty-first century there were only a few species that lived in small remote pockets of the Kohala, and Makao's job was to see how they were faring. Normally this was a job for a team of students. But there had been no other volunteers, and Makao's eccentric supervisor, Professor Lonia, had spent a lot of

solitary time in the bush and saw nothing wrong with his students doing likewise.

Makao reached the trail that cut up the valley's western cliff. He took off his shirt and stuck it next to his banjo in his pack. Then he looked at the steeply sloping trail.

"I'm crazy," he thought, "to take my damn banjo up this hill!" It was just going to get ruined in the rain anyway, and how was he going to keep it tuned? . . . Well, it was old, and tired, and it was likely to be the main thing that would keep him sane.

The sun was out now, and it beat on him, bathing him in sweat soon after he began to trudge up the trail. To distract himself from his physical difficulties he kept an eye out for snails in the bushes that grew along the side of the cliff. Soon his thoughts also turned to Dave's behavior, again, and while he walked, searching absently for snails to his left side, he occasionally glanced right and down at the massive waves breaking on the beach which dropped away as he climbed.

"So," he mused, "he's a 'conservative,' into 'freedom,' and I guess I'm a 'liberal,' into 'equality.'" The argument rankled him. All the arguments that Americans made for one political side or the other; - they just seemed to be about the details. But if you looked at the words themselves surely being conservative wasn't good or bad, and neither was being liberal, the words actually just meant being against, or for, change, and surely that which was good or bad would be the specific change you were talking about. How curious, then, that those words had come to symbolize the great divide in society. If the debate was really about *freedom* versus *equality* surely neither of those two concepts was completely good or bad. After all, you could certainly have either too much or too little of each; so it was all just a question of degree. But if that was the case at what point should one side be so certain that the other was wrong as to get angry and indignant? It generally seemed rather subjective. Like, why did conservatives act out so often with violence, big military, and wars on crime; Clint Eastwood, Chuck Norris, and John Wayne as model heroes, bustin people up? They seemed so comfortable solving their problems with guns. And why did liberals

often act out with sex, pornography, and Monica Lewinsky, Madonna, Lady Gaga, or pacifism when confronted with a Hitler? That didn't seem objective to Makao. Of course historically there had been many conservatives who had acted out sexually and many liberals who had been violent, but at least in recent times the generalization seemed to hold, more or less. It seemed like it was about personal dispositions. He felt that people should go deeper than the old arguments. . .

It was hard work in the sun to reach the top of the cliff. The path leveled out as he came up onto the Kohala plateau, and Makao stopped to rest and turned to scan the panorama below him. The river which wound through the verdant valley was dark with tannin. He gazed out at the numerous waterfalls, the arc of the black gravel beach, lined with palms, and the waves that up here could be seen coming in perfect rows many miles long, parallel to the island. The breakers were hitting the beach with a colossal whump, followed by the roar of the rolling gravel as the wave retreated. Makeo turned to his immediate surroundings; there was a very distinct change where the path turned a corner as it came up to the top of the cliff. He looked at the thick brush that now crowded around him: there were some bushy ohia'ai trees and a heavy undergrowth of rubiaceous bushes wound about with honeysuckle and passion fruit vines. The path went on and disappeared among the massive kukui trees of the forest proper that covered the plateau. Almost subconsciously he scanned under the bushes looking for snails when his eye was caught by a patch of yellowish white. He scrambled under a rubiaceous bush to reach it, and found that jungle rats had dug up and bitten into the edge of a light yellow plastic grocery bag.

He uncovered it, opened it, and found a sodden blue jeans skirt, a green bikini bra, green silk bikini panties, a cell phone with dead batteries, small leather sandals, a water bottle, and a small purse with three hundred twenty six dollars, two credit cards, a University of Hawaii photo ID, and a drivers license belonging to one Artemis Sherri Gindling.

This was an amazing coincidence for Makao, because he had seen this girl before at the student union cafeteria back in Honolulu. He remembered

her vividly, though she hadn't noticed him. He had almost gone up and talked to her because of her eyes. Their intensity had caught his attention. He hadn't actually seen them glitter, but it felt like they sparkled. They seemed, she seemed, more alive than the average person. It was as if her presence had ionized the air around him.

He looked at the grocery bag.

This wet stuff had been there for several days, at least. Should he go down and get the police? Maybe he really should've brought his cell phone. Of course he didn't think it would work in the forest, and that was probably right anyhow.

He wondered again, and not for the last time, why had he forced this snail count on himself; why had he done this, no cell phone, couldn't even text, and just his banjo for company?

At best it seemed an ill omen. Had someone abducted her, stripped her, buried her clothes? Why hadn't they taken the money? Had she gotten naked, headed into the bush, and fallen off a cliff? That didn't feel right. His memories of her came back stronger. She had been simply dressed and self-possessed. She didn't wear jewelry, no obvious tattoos. He remembered, though, that she kept a feather in her hair.

He made up his mind. He was worried about her, but alerting the authorities seemed premature. He straightened his shoulders and settled his backpack preparing to go. "Geey-um. Let's get on with this."

Then he heard a machine coming his way, quickly getting louder. It hove into view over the far side of the Waipio: helicopter. Moments later Dave Haack roared over him with another load of tourists.

Makao grumbled about the "banal irony" of his situation and headed into the forest.

## 4. Taro & Jungle Rats

The tree's crown was swaying gently when Artemis sat up in her nest. The sun was already above the horizon. It was bright and clear, with wind from the ocean, and the forest was filled with moving dappled green light. Over the sound of the leaves and the falling water Artemis could feel the surf crashing in the distance, but somehow the ocean seemed a lot farther away in the morning than it did at night.

Today she needed to be a huntress. She stretched, removed the nesting material, the grass and leaves that were clinging to the skin on her side, back, bottom, and hair, and she carefully scrambled over the edge of the nest.

Climbing down and then straddling a wide fork in the trunk just below the nest, she reached up and removed three small arrows. She had made the arrows a couple of years earlier, and had fletched them with endangered nene feathers that she'd retrieved from a bush on Maui's Haleakala volcano when she had visited that unworldly mountain as a child with her parents. She slung across her chest a small homemade bow of bamboo strung with yucca fiber. The bow often kept her very occupied. In the six months previous to coming to the forest she had practiced shooting it for seemingly countless hours. She also had a hair net of string she had made with her own hair. The net actually was just a wide woven band that sat on the top front of her head, and it had braided strings on each side that came down and tied under the hair that fell down her back. The strings tied to a small tightly woven bag that rode on her spine just below her neck under the bulk of her hair. She couldn't see it when she walked, and she could barely feel it. Affixed to the net's string that went by her ear was her lone decoration, the blue feather of a steller's jay to remind her of the mountains of Colorado.

She stuck the arrows in the bag so that the fletching stuck up through the mane trailing behind her head. Artemis also stuck her knife in the bag. She had made the knife when she was sixteen. She suspected there wasn't another cheerleader anywhere with such a possession. It had a thin obsidian blade almost seven inches long, and it a beachwood handle with a carving of

a spiral galaxy on it. The bow, arrows, hairnet-bag, knife, a wooden comb, a small sponge for her periods, and a small magnifying glass for starting fires were the only possessions that she had brought into Kohala.

She occasionally thought of the little stash of civilized possessions that she had left where the edge of the Waipio valley met the forest, though she rarely missed them. She repressed feelings of fear, of her naked and solitary vulnerability, and she replaced the fear with pleasure and pride in her stealth and anger at the brutality and judgment of the 'civilized' world of humanity; that they, not the wilderness, should be the cause of her fear.

If she was feeling safe and content with the wild mango, macadamia nuts, and taro that she could forage from the forest, then she generally preferred the completely nude animal freedom she experienced when she left the hair net bag and the bow in her nest.

Yet today she was famished for some protein, she was worried she was getting a bit skinny, and it being just before her period she thought she was feeling a bit too tired. So she silently made her way down the acacia koa.



*Artemis' Acacia Koa Tree*

Artemis had been planning to come to Kohala for some time. . . She had recently completed her sophomore year at the University of Hawaii. So she'd thought she knew what she was getting into. When she arrived in the jungle she already understood from her biology course why Kohala was a marvelous place for a human to live like a wild animal:

She knew that people had only inhabited the Hawaiian Islands since around one thousand A.D., and before humans, with the exception of bats, the native forest had no mammals at all. Consequently plant life hadn't developed the spines and thorns typically found in most terrestrial biomes.

Artemis had also learned that, until the first people arrived, indigenous birds were the largest animals, and although humans then introduced a variety a mammals, which became feral, there were still no large carnivores to contend with.

Plus, all Hawaiians know that the windward island canyons and valleys are filled with refreshing waterfalls, that the mosquitoes are generally manageable, and the traditional climate on the islands is famously mild, the temperature rarely varying more than ten degrees from a median of 78 degrees Fahrenheit, and computer generated climate projections also had shown Artemis that, beyond changes in sea level, Hawaii was one of the least susceptible places on earth to global climate change.

Finally she had lovingly studied the Kohala biome, and found that given enough acreage per person a properly educated individual living off the land could gather all of their food via the *invasive* plants and animals. She realized she could impact the altered struggling ecosystem in a way that was more than benign, it was benevolent. . .

When one is naked, crouching, flitting from bush to vine wound trunk, to reeds, grass, broadleaf plants, and bamboo, each step brings a world of sensation. Her bare feet, toes, arches, and heels could feel the rough rotting wood and bark of the dead trunk, which then crunched and collapsed under her weight. She used the excuse of the collapse as a pretext to leap into a thicket of tall reeds and grass by the stream; her feet sank partly into cool mud and partly onto reeds, tubers, and roots that were flattened by her passage. With a rush through the green cellulose, an open stoma chlorophyll sensation swept over her skin. Then the grass and reeds flowed past her, against her calves and up her legs and hips, and it moved between her legs, focused upward by her movement as she straddled some of the reed grasses while more vegetation was flowing over her ribs and back while she pushed the plants apart in front -- her arms a wedge to protect her nipples, and her eyes glanced up at the grass thicket as it parted just out of arms reach over her head. Artemis looked through the lines of the reeds to the elegant fractal pattern, of the vault of the jungle canopy, cutting up the sky.



Another agile hop, breasts bouncing, and she landed on the sun-heated stones at the edge of a stream. Stone felt clean on the feet after the slime and bracken of the forest. She scanned the stream bank, checking her taro.

Taro was her root crop, hardy but not dangerously invasive. It was her staple. She had planted some in secret in the minor valleys two years earlier on her second trip to Kohala. Her first trip had been a tourist trip of discovery that she had made with her parents, but her second had been a backpacking trip she had organized with her church youth group from Kauai. Artemis had gone out at night while the others slept in their tents, and staggered the plants carefully among the native foliage. It would have been hard for the casual observer to even see the taro, harder still to tell how much of it there was. It looked like a living agricultural remnant of the old Hawaiian civilization, swallowed by the jungle. Indeed there were a few spots in the valley bottoms of Kohala that had some remaining stone work that was pre European. So actually there were already small patches of ancient taro sprinkled in most of the larger Kohala valleys.

Her passage through the jungle continued swift and hot: coming down into a neighboring valley, with a healthy release of speed; going upstream, rock hopping, feeling a breeze, then bush whacking in the thicket with sweat on the small of the back, the back of neck, sweat on her arches and armpits, her butt crack slippery, then she trotted round the bend to a waterfall swim, followed by cliff climbing to an upper marsh and taro patch.

As Artemis worked her way up yet another cliff she was holding on to the waxy leaves and limbs of some small noni tree saplings when she startled a truly endangered bird, a palila. She had never seen one before, but she knew it from photographs. It had an elegant orange head, white breast, and gray wings. She paused for some time, and felt a surge of joy at receiving the gift of this sighting of a forgotten animal, followed by guilt at having disturbed the bird, and that followed by anger at having to feel guilty. This precipitated the first fully cognitive thoughts of her day. Artemis was majoring in both astronomy and biology in college at Honolulu, and she was deeply aware of the fragility of her little Eden. She knew that some people may have felt that she was committing a sacrilege living off the land in one of the last small sanctuaries that many of these indigenous Hawaiian species

had. Her own judgment was that she was performing some sort of unique experiment which had a kind of deep intrinsic value. She understood that perhaps she was just being narcissistic, yet she really wasn't sure. She had generally been successful by just feeding herself using the tiny patches of taro and by culling the meat and fruit of introduced species, and her time here had been such a discovery, like finding her birthright.

On this morning for the first time in three days she decided to hike through the jungle down into the remote Wiamanu valley, and from there to the coastal trail coming in from the Wiapio. Soon she was hiking on it, furtively, and as chance would have it in short order she saw some other humans, but they didn't see her. It was a couple of backpackers, probably in their thirties, walking along the trail at the top of the eastern side of the valley near the coastal cliffs at the jungle's edge. She heard them and saw them long before they had a chance of sighting her. It was easy to hide in some foliage a way up off the valley path before they came then moved out of range. She wasn't afraid, and she felt some pleasure in her vulnerability as they went by unaware, but she was a little lonely. Still, it reminded her, as always, to be vigilant in her secrecy.

A naked woman alone in the woods of America, as in most of the world, was a target. She knew this of course, and there were people here who were more dangerous than backpacking tourists. She knew there were still three areas in the thousands of acres of Kohala where old Vietnam vets were holed up in remote camps of their own. Artemis carefully avoided those places. She had heard from the locals that the vets were crazy, unpredictable old men who guarded their privacy and hidden marijuana crops with booby traps and guns. But worse than the vets, by far, were the helicopters. The helicopters were a large part of why she avoided the coastal trail.

Imagine being a Muslim and watching an infidel shitting on the Koran, or being an evangelical Christian and watching a movie making a joke of Jesus masturbating through the nail hole in his hand, and you have an idea of how Artemis felt about the helicopters. They were a major part of the Hawaiian tourist trade, filled with people too indolent to hike, hauled by greedy local men, and they flew over this remote tiny slice, a last bit, of pure heaven in Hawaii. She had come here to find solitude, and it seemed they

had created a large superhighway of noisy thwapping high technology through the sky of Eden.

Artemis generally liked people, hardly ever made real enemies, almost never had a violent thought, but if she'd had a bazooka she surely would have blown the helicopters out of the sky. They came by regularly, all day long, but they stayed by the wonderful Kohala sea cliffs, traveling up and down the coast. It was day traffic, but they occasionally came near the Acacia tree where Artemis made her nest. So she found that if she left her nest early in the morning and headed inland into the deep forest during the day, and returned later in the evening, she could avoid them.

Still, they turned her vision of the primordial on its head, and she had to always be mindful that they might see her through the trees before she heard them. Also there was the difficulty she regularly encountered when she had to work her way down loose and shifting soil and stone on the often bare and exposed cliffs. She was very vulnerable then and often could only move slowly. Numerous cliffs lined the long valleys that slashed through the Kohala highlands on their way to the sea. Hearing the helicopters was another major difficulty she encountered when she was near the best part of the jungle, the rushing noisy creeks and waterfalls. They could obscure the sound of a helicopter until it was right overhead.

She had gone near the trail because there was a patch of wild taro, not her own. She had just wanted to check on it, but on her way back to her wilder region of the forest she had to skirt near the coast and was almost completely visible on a unforested exposed stretch of a ravine when a helicopter appeared suddenly coming along the coast. She ducted under a bush, cursing the intrusion, and she waited, squatting, till the sky was clear.

Again, Hawaii has no native mammals except bats and seals, but rats have been on the islands since the Polynesians arrived a thousand years ago. Rats live in the jungle, and they now occupy the same niche, and then some, that squirrels do in North America, and rats are common enough in Kohala. So even though they were primarily nocturnal animals Artemis saw about a dozen every day. There were feral pigs and goats as well, and these introduced mammals had caused enormous damage to all manner of species

from birds to snails to saplings and ferns in the fragile island forest, but the goats and pigs were currently much less common, and she had no objection to dining on jungle rats. After all, she reasoned, they are still eaten in China, among other places, and these rats weren't vermin living on garbage but clean wilderness foragers.

Nevertheless, on this day she hadn't seen any mammals at all except the backpackers, and she decided, with a bit of hungry irritation, that the two taro roots that she had dug up from her secret marsh and a couple of passion fruits and wild mangoes might have to be her only food.

At midday she came to a muddy little marsh in a clearing in the deepest part of the highland jungle, and there she rolled on the ground, covering herself with the delightful mud. This was to keep the sun and mosquitoes off and to keep cool as the temperature climbed into the upper eighties. Brown and slippery, she stalked in long, fairly aimless circles through the forest, searching for rats; she marveled again at the stone silence that a human can achieve when barefoot, and from the complete absence of the crisp grinding sound of cloth on cloth that most of humanity is rarely aware of. But she saw no rats.

In the late afternoon Artemis retrieved her produce, and the mud was no longer cool and wet, but pleasantly flaky. She went back to her own ravine, the Punalulu, and headed down the stream that eventually made the falls under her tree. The young woman felt a bit irritable, but she was excited about the prospect of baking her taro in the coals of the fire she was planning, and afterward the luxury of swimming in the hidden tropical pool at the base of her falls. So she wasn't very focused on the moment when she heard the familiar rustling of a rat moving in the underbrush. It took her a couple of seconds before she had her bow drawn with an arrow notched. She looked toward the sound, straining to see through the undergrowth.

Then she saw it: a fat grey rodent moving through some grass down to the right of the stream. Focusing on her breath and posture she aimed, and let her arrow fly, but she was dumbfounded to see two arrows strike the animal -- hers and another coming in from down to the right of the stream. A flash of hot fear went down the girl's back, and she threw herself under a

bush, and looked back over the stream in the direction that the other arrow must have come from. Among the leaves of a passion fruit bush there was another mud covered nude woman, staring back at Artemis.

## 5. Carressa

The woman didn't seem at all surprised; she looked amused. She glanced down at the twitching rodent.

"Let's share this rat." She said, with a mild accent that might have been Spanish.

The woman stepped from behind the bush, and Artemis saw that she was tiny, only a little over half as high as Artemis. From the even proportions of the strange woman's features the girl sensed that she had once probably been very pretty, but she was old, clearly very old, but how old was hard to tell. Her skin didn't have the parboiled look that most elderly people have who have worn clothes all their life. It was deeply crinkled, but it had personality; there was an organic kind of roughness and there were scars, particularly on her legs and hips. It was skin that had experienced the world. The woman's breasts were practically flat, her belly sagged, she had virtually no pubic hair, and the skin on her legs flapped a little as she walked towards Artemis. One might have expected such an old person, lacking clothing and with a thin patina of mud, to be striped of her dignity, yet the main feeling that Artemis experienced was of an almost transcendent sense of dignity and grace. All in a moment this vision created a new awareness of human beauty for the younger woman; she had never seriously considered it before. Artemis knew why too; the old woman looked as if she belonged here, in the jungle, as much as the birds or the vines.

The mysterious woman had brown skin. The hair on her head was still strangely rich on such an old body; it was slightly curly thick long shining black hair, with a peppering of grey. On the left side of her head there was a tiny braid that held several small grey, yellow, and white feathers. The large mass of the old woman's hair hung down behind her almost to the back of her knees. She had a slightly flattened nose and vaguely almond shaped eyes, but they were green, brilliant, emerald green.

“A mud-covered naked girl hunting rats with a bow. There must be some story behind this.” The old woman laughed gently.

Artemis had been alone in the jungle for a long time. She suddenly felt very shy, like a child, before this apparition, this earth woman.

“My name is Carressa,” the woman said.

There was a pause as Artemis struggled to renew communications with another person. “I’m Artemis. You must have seen me aiming, to have shot at the same time I did. . .

How long have you been watching me, and are you camping here, in Kohala, or what?”

Carressa replied, “I’ve been camping, for the last two nights. I was just resting here, enjoying the creek and thinking when I heard and saw you, and the rat. When I saw you take aim I thought I’d help you. I have some experience hunting small game.”

There was another pause.

Carressa said, “Are you alone?”

“No, well yes. You?”

“Yes. How long have you been camping here, Artemis?”

“Twenty-two days, I think.”

“Alone?”

“As you see me,” said Artemis, suddenly proud, “I’ve been living out here with nothing but this knife, bow, the two arrows, and a magnifying glass.

I feel so connected and so free at the same time that it’s absolutely... It’s like I’m in love or something. I don’t know if I ever want to go back!” Artemis started grinning broadly and shook a bit as if she couldn’t contain herself or was about to start dancing.

“Oy!” little Carressa exclaimed. She stared at Artemis for a long moment. “You are well named. Are you a protector of the fruit of the tree, the Baobab?”

“The what?”

“Never mind. I think this may well be a (how do you say it?) an *auspicious* meeting. But, what brought you to doing this? You’re young. Do people know you are here?”

“I’m old enough. I’ve been doing an internship with the observatory on Mona Kea, and I am here on break. I have friends who know I’m here. My parents think I’m with my friends.”

“And that feather, what bird is it from?”

“A steller’s jay.”

“Hmmm, they are a spunky bird. Aren’t they?”

“Yes, and intelligent.”

Artemis saw that Carressa also was wearing a couple of feathers in her hair, and Carressa noticed her looking. Both women smiled.

“Would you like to prepare this together?” Carressa gestured at the rat, “Or perhaps we should catch a couple more. . .”

“OK.”

The old woman paused over the animal, bowed her head, and did a kind of curious expansive arcing gesture with her arms. Then she removed her arrow from the rat with a deft twist, and started to climb away from the creek. Artemis took the carcass and her own arrow, wisely disdaining to put the rat in her under-hair net that was resting between her shoulder blades, and where she was currently carrying the taro roots. She held the rat by the tail, and fell in behind the old woman who was working her way down the ravine.

Artemis was feeling a mix of relief, comfort, and deflation to be following this strange woman. It had been a rather eventful day. She watched the streaks and snakes of silver grey in the mane of Carressa’s black hair as the old woman walked in front of her. The hair created a rhythmic shadow that would almost engulf Carressa’s form as she wove through the trees. Only the old woman’s feet remained consistently visible below the hair.

Without words the two women began to move slowly, stalking rats; they walked carefully, in the total silence of no clothing or shoes. There were no rats.

Shortly Carressa came to an ancient-looking gnarled kukui tree whose bole forked a couple of feet off the ground. She climbed carefully up onto it then lowered herself, her withered body crouching in, and tightly straddling, the fork. The hair made a curtain around her, falling below her feet.



“What are you doing?” Whispered Artemis

“Quiet Child.”

The old woman seemed to settle, and every available inch of her skin seemed to press against the tree. Something untoward was happening, and Artemis felt the downy hair on the small of her back stand up. Carissa’s eyes seemed to take on a sort of feral pre-simian focus.

“There is a rat over there.” The old woman spoke softly, pointing her finger. “They are such careless animals here in Hawaii.”

Artemis searched where Carressa was pointing with her eyes and saw nothing. The strange feeling faded, but at a signal from the old woman she crept silently toward the indicated spot. After thirty paces Artemis finally saw a rat crouching motionless under some leaves. She felt proud that her arrow not only hit the animal but killed it almost instantly.

“Two are fine by me. Let’s cook these,” said Carressa quietly as she held the tree.

The girl went and grabbed the second rat while Carressa moved out of the fork. Then they both headed down the ravine to Artemis’s nest tree camp.

Artemis dove off the cliff at her waterfall. Perhaps it was the cool sweet air created by the water, but she had found that there were hardly ever any mosquitoes around her campfire site she near the base of her acacia koa. Washing off her mud protection and the sweat from the day’s hunting was a joyful daily ritual. After so many days of solitude, Artemis, who was normally jealous of her secrecy, found it a joy to show off the perfection of her hidden Eden to the older woman. Carressa did not jump off the cliff but moved with surprising agility down through steep thick ferns and vines beside the falls to the plunge pool, and glided into the slightly chilly water.

“I keep some coals buried near my tree nest.”

Artemis showed Carressa. When not in use the young woman kept her fire ring camouflaged by covering it with three rather large flat stones. These were now removed, and under some loose earth there was a fire pit, almost two feet deep. Artemis had built it a couple of days after she had arrived.

She had cunningly left slight cracks between the stones to keep a faint smolder going when the fire was not in use. The magnifying glass could start fires, but only when there was sun, yet she really liked fire during the rain. This evening the weather was still fair, but a raw rat just wasn't right.

They cleaned the rats and toasted them on spits. Actually it was a feast. The hunters ended up with a rat and a taro root each.

The two women sat cross legged between the fire and an overhanging cliff face near the falls with the acacia tree off to the side. Artemis had chosen this spot for her fire because when it rained, as it often does in Kohala, the cliff afforded some comfort.

As she ate Carressa spoke, "I am a member of an order of women in a tribe. The tribesmen and tribeswomen did solo vision quests, walkabouts, often every year. You would fit right in, and our order needs you."

"What tribe? Why would you need me? And you don't know me. We don't know each other at all."

"I think you're unusual enough that I probably know what I need to know, but as for what tribe, and why we need you, that's quite a story. Perhaps we should build the fire up a bit, I'm pretty sure this spot is hidden enough..."

Carressa stood up threw several large limbs on the fire. She pointed her fingers to the stars and performed a long sinuous catlike stretch. Then she crawled down to the creek, washed her face, and placing her hands on the ground she put her lips to the stream and drank.

Presently she returned and sat cross-legged by the fire, and looked up at the girl. "So how did you come to be named Artemis?"

"My parents say they just liked the sound of it. I don't know. I know it seems ironic or something, but I have always liked the thrill and 'awareness' I experience when I'm alone in the woods. I discovered how nudity enhances it right after I went through puberty back in Colorado. Maybe a name helps create the person. . ."

"Well Artemis what do you think of 'civilization'? You say that you have lived here now for some time as a wild animal, naked. Does this modern world have a chance?"

Artemis giggled for a second, then looked at the fire, considering the tired litany. She thought about it silently, not wanting to give the old ideas the power of speech, “Let’s see, we have come so very close to nuclear war. Then there’s the cold war, the world wars, genocide, radical Islam -- I cannot believe something so twisted and perverse might take over the so called modern world, there’s consumerism, ‘fundamentalism’, Stalin and Mao’s communism and other perverted ‘social’ experiments of the twentieth century; there’s capitalism, and the insanity of fossil fuel.

Then there are people, actually whole societies, clinging to absurd and irrational old dogmas, people acting like sheep, people who are lost and filled with angst or an indifferent bland nihilism.

And of course we have overpopulation and destructive technologies run amuck with a threat of much worse to come.

There is mass extinction.

Also, there’s this sacred forest with its tourists and locals crowding the edges, its introduced marauding species, and its endangered and extinct species, and the stupid helicopters. I could go on forever,” then she muttered, “with a blah, and a blah, and a blah blah blah! What a God-awful mess! Shit!”

She was startled silent again by her own sudden vehemence; the soft sound of the distant surf and the white sound of the waterfall made themselves heard, and with that sound the joy came flooding back; she couldn’t, she just couldn’t be so negative. “For all the horror,” she said, “there is the beauty of civilization: We did go to the moon. We made the Hubble telescope. We landed on Titan, a moon of Saturn for heaven’s sake!

We discovered the logic of Taoism.

We have Mozart, Didgeridoos, Einstein and the beautiful equations humans have found in modern physics. There’s Annie Dillard, Pasteur, Parliamentary Democracy, *Doctor Zhivago*, Gandhi, *The Brothers Karamazov*, The David, The Burgers of Calais, Beethoven, Indian cooking, fine lace, Guatemalan fabric, and of course there is this sacred forest. It’s lost many species, has helicopters, and many invasives, but we have kept it, so far.”

Artemis looked at Carressa and said, “I think there is a chance.”

Carressa sighed,

“You know humans may be the most conscious species on this planet, but it’s ironic to have such an awareness, and then to be so befuddled by the prospect of the world civilization crashing; because it will crash, most everyone sees it, unless we grow up a bit and create some major changes.

The threat of nuclear war is what really made moderns aware of the possibility. But now, beyond issues about grand social and economic systems like capitalism versus socialism, you have the green house effect, overpopulation, the energy crisis, the potential of out of control artificial intelligence, the destruction of biodiversity, etcetera, and etcetera. And as everyone knows it also feels even more unmanageable because this techno world humans have created has been changing faster and faster.

Then your dominant ‘first’ world has been shown to have a fairly bankrupt value system: the world wars, over-consumption, the almost realized threat of Global thermonuclear war, the general collapse of the befuddled western philosophical world view, and then the human invasion into the supposedly educated west from the overpopulating ‘developing’ countries with their more vital but relatively woefully ignorant conflicting ‘fundamentalist’ Islamic, Christian, or Hindu dogmas. Now it’s default individualism and hedonism with no civilization wide sense of meaning as a foundation to build consensus on.”

Artemis nodded as Carressa went through her own litany of the familiar issues of a deranged civilization. She felt it herself, and felt it as a threat to this little spec of wilderness that she had fallen in love with, but she had doubts, maybe she, and now obviously Carressa, who seemed to be in agreement with her, had been missing something; maybe the two of them were crazy to be so concerned about modern humanity’s prospects. After all, living alone, possessionless, and naked in the jungle was certainly proof that she was, if not crazy, then at least very far from the norm.

“The precariousness of civilization is a problem,” Carressa went on, “maybe *the* problem. But I who come from the tribe of tribes named Bogada, the mother of tribes, believe that the joy you have found here is a critical part of the solution.”

Carressa caught Artemis's eye, and spoke louder. "Artemis, I think the first step to a better vision for a future that we can feel confident about is to be fully aware of the situation. So I would like to tell you a rather long story. The tale may take days. Do you mind?"

Artemis smiled broadly and easily, then sprawled on the ground across the fire from Carressa, propping her head on her hand and up on her elbow. "I don't know about days, but for now I'm all ears."

"Good, fine, I will tell you the story, but first are you familiar with the idea of the Medicine Wheel of the Plains Indians?"

"Yes, a little, it was supposed to be a magic or spiritual ritual wheel laid out in stone on the ground, and it was aligned with the four directions, I think. But I don't know how it was used."

"You have it right, but there is much more. The Plains Indian medicine wheel is said to represent the universe, a kind of metaphor, but at the same time it can represent the spiritual path of the individual; in secular terms, it can provide a compass for the psychological growth of an individual.

To sum it up, the Indians said we are always moving around the medicine wheel, as the sun 'moves' through the sky. In the northern hemisphere that would be clockwise; so they start in the east with sunrise, or illumination, which is commonly represented by the Eagle. Then there is the south, and the word for that is innocence, represented by the Mouse. Then to the west with the sunset is introspection, the Bear, and on to the north is wisdom, or the Buffalo, and thus back to the east.

It is a very ancient idea. Some of the earliest humans in Paleolithic Africa used something like it for many millennia before the Plains Indian culture, as you will learn in the story, but they called it the great flower, or the great vulva. Our Bogada tribe's common name for it is the Rose Mandala. At the top, or the clitoris, was god, or the transcendent unnamable, the ecstasy and beauty of creation, from God down to the right flowed meaning, purpose, 'objective' values. When you reach the bottom, the anus, you have the self, the ego, finding balance through humble purpose as a part of the larger whole. Then climbing up the left is the introspective subjective journey, finding the sacred on the way to unity and

god, and in the center is the (w)hole of creation!, and round and round we go until . . .

Death, birth, orgasm. . . In the end, the very end, I suppose it's a mystery. . . “

“That's kind of cool, but it's also pretty weird, Carressa. It also makes me want to ask a big question:

I've always had ideas about how to 'save the world', and your ideas may be well and fine, but they're your ideas. Most people have their own ideas about the way human life ought to be, what they think a better civilization would be like. The problem is that other people's ideas can be so different that they're often diametrically opposed to yours. There are seven billion of us, billions of whom are very different from you, what can you do about that?”

“We humans only change when our understanding changes, and when we truly care about what we understand. The change we need to see is profound, meaning of life, 'spiritual,' or 'religious,' change. It is human nature that deep change across a culture can generally only occur in young adults. Small children are under the influence of their parents, and older adults neural pathways are literally entrenched so it is very hard for them to change their worldviews, but from the age of around fifteen to twenty-five many people are open to a profound shift of consciousness. We of the Bogada have long been too passive. We must move swiftly to proselytize the young, your age group.”

“Proselytize? Yuck! I was exposed to a lot of repressive and unreasonable evangelism as a child. I'm sick of it.”

“Actually, Artemis, what you personally have experienced out here in the jungle is more powerful in understanding the way, than anything I'm about to tell you. I don't mean the way to live 'primitively' either; I think you know that. Clean, primordial, untypical, life giving joy. We must quickly find a way that every modern human can do what you have done. Though the problems are legion, there is very little wilderness left. What you've done is risky. You could fall, or starve, or suffer from exposure. And of course you invite voyeurism, at the least. Most people on the earth today would misunderstand what you are doing, sexually, and human

sexuality is incredibly powerful. The people of the Bogada have long done the naked walkabout, but we ourselves walk a razor's edge sexually by doing so, so does our culture. Yet we have endured.

Perhaps I am not responding to your point about proselytizing. Several hundred years ago in Europe the philosopher Thomas Hobbes was very concerned about how European religious denominations were all fighting and killing one another over doctrinal differences. He felt that people should be able to agree on the basics of how we should live and govern ourselves in this mortal life, despite differences of faith. He wrote a treatise that had a great influence on the modern ideas about the importance the separation of church and state, of the secular from the holy. The tradition he was responsible for, of separation, is fine, but it shouldn't become a religious doctrine in its own right. Humans have profound differences of opinion, and unless it comes down to issues of extreme self-defense, we of the Bogada would never advocate violence to resolve differences. We would educate and advocate for experiences, for rituals, that would change awareness.

Additionally the right side of the Mandala is objective, and can be discussed as such; that is if you agree with the premise that the best foundation from which to begin a discussion of ethics is that we should love this reality, this physical universe that we inhabit, above all else save possibly the transcendent mystery that encompasses it. After all, the universe contains everything, past, present, and future, that we could love, including, of course, ourselves. If it can be discussed objectively it's more philosophy, or about science, then religious dogma. Though I don't deny that's only half of the Mandala.

See Medicine Wheel and Rose Mandala on pages 186-189.

Carressa reflected on her own words for a moment. . .

So I say 'proselytize' because that's what it must be; education is crucial, but we must advocate for the experience, and finally we must advocate tirelessly for a profound change in human civilization. Such advocacy is by definition proselytizing.

The Plains Indian medicine wheel is a great, dogma neutral, framework with which to understand our relationship to reality. It's something we all travel around. The Rose Mandala is the same in that we can all travel on it, and it's also all encompassing, but it describes, a very ancient path to wisdom, that can begin at the dawn of the universe, move to the dawn of life, on to the dawn of man, and it is a path that has no conflict with your modern science. It can evolve with science, it brings the theist and the atheist into one room, nether are likely to disagree with it once they experience it, or even merely understand it.

From your eyes Artemis I know you have experienced perhaps the most important part of it. If I tell you my story I think you will understand it, or at least you will understand it far better than you do now.”



## (Book 1 – The Sky Clad Sages) 6. //Tlili

Carressa began her tale softly, “This story starts with a woman, you could say she is *The* woman, and you remind me of her Artemis. I’ve seen a lot, but your smile is so easy in the world. Its an enigma to me, and maybe that is the resemblance.

Anyway, the woman’s name is //Tlili, and she was born in east Africa one hundred forty two thousand years ago.”

Carressa prefaced the name with a peculiar double tongue click: //.

She continued, “At that time The People, Homo sapiens that is, had only recently developed what we would think of as true speech, and this early human speech had a number of ‘click’ sounds. Anthropologists are currently saying that true speech came much later, only fifty thousand years ago, but I have a different story to tell.”

Artemis decided to be flippant, “Well to my way of thinking a hundred forty thousand years isn’t that long anyway. A beam of light would only just be able to make it across the Galaxy. For light to get to the very nearest of the hundred billion other galaxies it would take thirty times as long.”

Carressa let this semi non sequitur pass, “None the less, it’s a very long time for a human life or a human culture. It is a good ways back into the Paleolithic era, around fifty six hundred generations ago.

Did you know Artemis that all of modern human history can be said to have taken place during an ice age that has lasted several million years?

It is important to understand ourselves within the context of climate; within this general period of coolness in the earth’s history there have been many cycles where the polar ice caps have moved towards the equator to cover much of the earth. //Tlili had been born at the tail end of one of these cycles. That mini ice age within the ice age had been a short, relatively mild, cycle, and as usual, in Africa its main effect had been a period of increased desertification. In earlier cycles these stresses had created the savannas in which modern humanity was born. When //Tlili was born it was still an arid time, but it had been getting greener for generations.

In the modern world scientists are now saying that climate and geography are the main drivers of evolution. Statistically they may be right. Yet in this time when life should have been getting easier Homo sapiens was not thriving. There were other variables, some rather subtle, that were driving our population down to less than a couple hundred individuals.-

Now perhaps you have heard of this ancient woman, this //Tlili. A lot has been written about her, but I can tell you the true story.” as Carressa said this she looked at Artemis with a slight gleam in her eye, “//Tlili is the Mitochondrial Eve, and among other things I think we can say she invented the Rose Mandala or 'Medicine Wheel' for personal or even cultural growth.”

“She invented your 'Rose Mandala' eh?” Artemis didn't know what to make of this assertion. She said, “Well I've heard of the mitochondrial eve, but there are a couple of things I don't understand about her, and I certainly don't understand how someone way back in the Paleolithic could have invented a 'mandala'.”

I said it wasn't called a Rose Mandala back then, and I'm sure I can clear most of your questions up.” replied Carressa, “Perhaps I should start by explaining what the Mitochondrial Eve is . . .

‘Pretty much all multicellular life forms are made of eukaryotic cells which have a central organelle, called the cell nucleuse, which contains their genetic material. This material is in chains of DNA wound into chromosomes. In animals, the sperm and egg each contain a half set of chromosomes which combine into a full set when the sperm enters the egg. But one of the other organelles in eukaryotic cells, is the mitochondria, which is unique in that it has its own DNA. The mitochondria are the cell's power plants. They take energy from food, glucose, to create ATP molecules which power the cells metabolic systems.’”

Artemis jumped in, “I know about all that. At first there were only simple relatively tiny single celled organisms, like bacteria. But all multicellular organisms evolved from a much larger type of cell, Eukaryotic cells, and the mitochondria has its own DNA because when eukaryotic cells first evolved the mitochondria was probably a separate bacteria like

organism that formed a symbiotic relationship within the host eukaryotic cell.

They are also the Mitachlorians from Star Wars!”

“That’s right, except for the Star Wars part. I’ve never seen the movie, but the mitochondria is real,” replied Carressa. “Anyway, the mitochondrial DNA is much simpler than the organism’s nuclear DNA. And the sperm doesn’t contribute any mitochondria. So we get our entire mitochondrial DNA from our mother via her egg.

Following the simpler mitochondrial genetic markers backward matrilineally geneticists’ currently estimate that we all must have gotten our mitochondria, and surely some other traits, from one woman who lived one hundred forty thousand years ago. They know the human population must have been very small back then because only her female descendents survived and passed on human womanhood from which we are all sprung. They don’t of course know how //Tlili prevailed or why the population was so small.

Humanity was in a bottleneck, and as such it was a time of firsts, lasts, and superlatives; a time where in a small population the action of an individual could have tremendous affect on the future of the human race.”

“Was there an apple?”

“Sort of. There was certainly a tree, or at least a type of tree.”

## 7. The Baobab



*Eve's first Memories ~ The Baobab*

Carressa looked steadily at Artemis. She began again, but now in a melodious voice,

“Let’s start with //Tlili’s first memory. . .

It was of a baobab tree:

It was a vast fat tree in a grove where //Tlili’s clan was resting for shade in the heat of the day. This was during the early part of a dry season. Her clan had been unlucky foraging, and they were exhausted. //Tlili must have been only two or three years old. She was lying on her mom’s lap and nursing her mother’s withered breast.

Baobabs lose their leaves in the dry season, and //Tlili was watching the few remaining leaves left from the rain as they stirred slightly in the breeze. The leaves were silhouetted within a tangle of rooty branches against the cobalt sky. Now, if you don’t know, baobab’s are mostly trunk, and this ancient tree’s bark with its wrinkles, burls, and blemishes was as ugly and fascinating as elephant’s skin.

The clan members lay about listlessly, barely able to swat the ever-present flies and mosquitoes, but the sweetness of her mother's milk and the presence of the massive tree, a lord of the little grove on the nearly desolate plain, left the child limp with contentment. . . .

Years later //Tlili tried to clarify what she felt during that earliest simple memory when she said, "That tree tied the sky to the earth --

--It went beyond just being a good spirit. The struggle that even as a small child I felt, of the People, of humans, was insignificant against that tree's majesty in the world. It showed me there is a joy so big it's beyond me, beyond us.'"

Carressa sat in silence looking at the fire. The old woman let herself be caught, again, by the ancient hypnotic dance of campfire flames moving and flickering among embers. Then she looked up across the fire at Artemis, a modern girl with her young eyes, green and shining, and her pert American voice, yet the naked girl was so obviously aware of that larger wild joy. A billion years of evolution had gone by on this earth, and fire was throwing orange light on yet another young breast waiting for its turn to fill with milk. It was a wellspring of hope for Carressa, tired old soul. She murmured, "And I find it comforting that early humanity had the Baobabs watching over them. Those trees can live thousands of years. They are like sentinels of eternity."

Carressa continued, "//Tlili has related many other early childhood memories; such as her first taste of tsamma melon, or the rhythm and drumming of sticks during the dances that followed a successful hunt.

//Tlili especially remembered the fragrance of cardamom and baobab flowers after the rains, and she remembered the fruit bats, silhouetted against the stars, creaking and barking as they flew from branch to tree top branch to gorge on fruit.

Not that there weren't bad memories: There was the ancient disquieting laughter of hyenas, and the fierce eyes of the hunters when they

came home hungry. Or the row of many of her friends and cousins lying dead in the wet grass after a time of sickness and fever.

I don't know if life was worse then or now. But, there were no nuclear bombs then, no stupidly conceived civilizations. Angst was fairly nonexistent. And we certainly belonged on the earth. But there were dangerously too few humans, it was hard to make it out of childhood, and most of the people didn't live much past forty, because primitive life and sickness could of course be --*horrible*.

//Tlili would be the first to be honest about it. As she once said, "What is beautiful about the brute ferocity of the lion as she kills and eats you, or the Hyena that will eat those too infirm to flee, a bite at a time; eating them slowly, long before it kills them? Or the foulness and horrible pain when a parent pulls a worm as long as one's leg out of their child's foot. Or what is beautiful about the squirming mass of white worms that came out of young Lialia's bowels during her last night alive while she sat in her squirming filth, shitting and puking at the same time?"

Yet Artemis, how can modern humans honestly judge the good life? Truly. One in ten of you Americans, mostly women, are so bloody depressed that you need antidepressant medication just to get by. Yet, when at the edge of survival //Tlili, the mother of our race, easily found the baobab, and salvation. And she found it when she was but a tiny child. I think we cannot judge the good life very easily, but we can extinction, and the extinction of our own race we tend to take personally. In the danger she faced //Tlili had some things in common with us, in that the race had continued more or less successfully for many thousands of years before her, and many thousands of years after her, but during her time, like ours, it was different; the fate of humanity hung in the balance, as it seems to now. How did she cope, and how did she personally come through the tunnel, as it were? Don't misunderstand me Artemis; I don't think we are facing the extinction of our species as she was, but we are facing the rather probable cataclysmic death of billions of us, and we are facing the extinctions that we are causing, of millions of our fellow earthly species.

*So to continue:*

Like most of us //Tlili's earliest formative memories were mostly random, and they hold no story. //Tlili's story only really starts with the shaman woman, Naia.-

Gathering food and herbs with Naia was the centre of //Tlili's childhood. As //Tlili grew Naia (who always seemed to have been old) slowly withered and became shabby with years; she was the tribes oldest member, and she was gentle, and sweet as a dried fig. In the later eras of //Tlili's life she could always remember Naia vividly: The old woman's one bright eye, and the other eye that was blue with cataract, - the wrinkled belly and buttocks, the flat dusty breasts, the gnarled feet as tough and strange as ostrich feet, and her beautiful creased hands with velvety soft fingertips.

Naia was the clan's human window to the spirit world. Spirits were a fairly well developed concept among //Tlili's people. Beliefs about the supernatural in other hunter gatherer cultures were and are different, but humans seem to have had belief and interest in the supernatural starting from at least the dawn of homo sapiens, though in widely varying degrees.

For Naia's part, although she was generally kind, when there was great suffering she tended to become quiet and remote, and then it was often a mystery what she was thinking. Which reminds me, she was the only one of the people who Nllkua, the clan's Big Man and //Tlili's father, differed to. I will tell you about him in a moment.

The first important full memory of //Tlili's was when she was still a small child, maybe seven years old. There was a day when the clan had moved camp to a lightly forested hill country next to the savanna, and //Tlili and Naia were out with a large antelope skin bag gathering mongongo nuts, a staple of the clan. Back in the mid Paleolithic humans were always as naked as we are. At that time humans were only in east Africa, and they had not yet often taken to clothes at all, but long ago, much earlier, they had found uses for animal skins.



*mongongo nuts*

So they were out, under the sun, and //Tlili danced around gathering handfuls of nuts that had fallen to the ground. She'd found that rolling the smooth lumpy wood in her hand created a pleasantly ticklish feeling on her palm, and a soft crunchy click as she rubbed them together.

“Naia mam the bag is almost full. When it is full shall we go back?”

“No //tlili bird, the others are still gathering. We have time, and I want to examine the brush in this ravine.”

“What are you looking for Naia mamy //na?” The girl's voice, between and with the clicks, had a rolling sing song lilt.

Typically the women gathered food, and the men hunted. The women were spread out within earshot, and the two strongest women, one of which one was //Tlili's mother, had spears.

“I don't know till I see it.” whispered the old woman.

They finished filling the bag, and leaving it next to the trunk of a mongongo tree they walked to where the land fell off steeply into a ravine that was thick with bushes and scrub trees. Naia backed carefully down into the side of the ravine while holding onto handfuls of brush to avoid slipping. The girl followed attentively; she was careful to avoid patches of jin claw bushes with their barbed thorns.

*Unlike Hawaii, Artemis, which evolved without foraging land mammals Africa's plants, particularly in the savanna, have every sharp, pronged, or poisonous defense that you can imagine.*

At any rate the mid afternoon passed as the girl struggled to follow Naia through the close bushes of the ravine. The air was still, and under the



afternoon sun they both became slick with sweat, scratched, and itchy. Naia looked intently about, then she smiled,  
“There! That’s a clump of natal flame bushes, and they’re still in flower.”

//Tlili looked at the limp waxy leaves and the drooping red bird tongued flowers of a natal bush, “What are they for?”

“They aren’t for anything I don’t suppose, but there is a grub that I am looking for that likes them.

Ayyee, what louse has done this? Fools!” Naia hissed, “to get the grub they have killed the bush. Erectus probably did it.”

Looking closer //Tlili saw that something or someone had girdled several of the bushes; most of the bark was removed around the bases.

“And here is one, though; a wetchla.” Naia said. Smiling wanly she picked at the raw inner trunk and held up a small distinctly purple grub for //Tlili to look at.

//Tlili was astonished, “Purple wetchla!? It cures the yellow fever?”

“Yes”

“I thought purple wetchla was made of vocan//ka bark”

“No. That’s what I’ve told the clan, but it’s dried grub paste, and this is the first wetchla grub I have seen in a *long* time. When I was a girl and old Tsi//lo was medicine woman we found these bushes and the grub regularly, but for more seasons then I would care to count they have been so rare that where I now find them I keep it a secret. I think another clan has found this clump of natal bushes, and recently.”

“Then how have you had so much paste. You have been able to cure so many of the yellow fever.”

“Actually many have died,” said Naia.

“k!tki and cousin Klluka this rainy season. It’s true,” said the girl sadly, “but not Nllkua, my father.”

“He is strong as a water buffalo, and whether I like it or not I have the healer’s touch. Some are healed whatever of the spirit herbs I use, if it’s not poisonous. But I know this lowly little grub is infused with a hot spirit, like an ember, and it always cures the fever. If I had real wetchla three moons back K!tki and Klluka would not have died.”

//Tlili looked at the little purple grub. It was powerful indeed to stop the Fevers. Klluka had been a lively boy, and she had loved the girl K!tka. K!tka had loved to laugh, and she and //Tlili had held each other to keep warm on cold nights. //Tlili looked intently at the medicine woman, “I want to be a great shaman like you Naia. I want to learn all the medicines, all the secrets.”

“You may have the healer’s touch child, but the main thing is to be fully awake. Even in your dreams.”

“So she had a herb that cured malaria?” said Artemis

“Yes, and it was a very virulent strain of malaria, older and more widespread among primates than the new strain that developed at the dawn of agrigarian times.”

”Naia shouldn’t have kept it a secret. She should have educated the people so they wouldn’t over harvest it.”

“In a more sociable time that might have worked within a clan, but it certainly wouldn’t work with warring clans of different humanoid species,”

“Of course.”

“You should know that not only were there other Homo sapiens clans, although in //Tlili’s time there were only a few left, but there were two other separate species of humanity as well: Homo erectus, and to the north Homo neanderthals. It’s important to be aware that Erectus was around on earth for a million and a half years, and even now we Homo Sapiens have only been around for less than two hundred thousand years. If you compare us with Erectus and chimpanzees we may be smarter than Erectus, but they were certainly smarter and more technologically savvy than chimps are. However we now know that we aren’t that much smarter or different than chimps. We also know that we share 99% of our DNA with chimpanzees, and when taught sign language chimps can communicate with us almost as well as we communicate with each other. Since we obviously are far more closely related to Erectus than we are to chimps the difference between us and Erectus must not be that great at all. Erectus, after all, populated much

of the earth. We will still need another thirteen hundred thousand years to know if we are smart enough to outlast that ‘primitive’ hominoid species.” Artemis sighed, Carressa’s preaching was an old litany, but the girl agreed with it. There was comfort in that. . .

“Carressa, If civilization is to last that much longer things are going to have to be pretty different.”

Carressa nodded. “That’s the long view. In this last hundred years your modern culture may have lost the ability, even the desire, to take a long view. By today’s capricious approach to the future even the foresight of you American’s own founding fathers seems outlandish. You have to go back a little ways, to the building of the pyramids, or the earlier Brahmin priests, to find pillars of civilization that thought in really large spans of time; and the Pharaoh with his slaves, and the Brahmins at the top of their cast systems, were repressive.

Anyway, the struggle to keep humanity going in //Tlili’s time was also in no large part social. //Tlili belonged to N!lkua’s clan, as I said, and as a small child her main awareness of N!lkua was that if she stayed out of his way she was safe.

The people hunted and gathered in extended family groups, or clans, and for as long as anyone could remember, clans had a Big Man. Human clans at that time generally consisted largely of women and children who were dominated by a small cabal of strong men ruled over by a single big man, the alpha male. Excess adult males were killed or chased away where they lived alone or in small bachelor groups.

No one in all the clans had ever seen anyone like N!lkua. He was old and intelligent, probably in his mid thirties, and he was equipped with a ferociously muscled rugged beauty. Unlike the dark eyes of everyone else in the clan he had strange yellow eyes. So when he looked at you it was as if you were trapped under the gaze of a panther. Not only that, he was a master at tracking and stalking, and although his aim was average he could throw his heavy spear further than any of the other men.

N!lkua had become the head man in what was perhaps the usual way: When //Tlili’s mother was a young girl //Tlili’s grandfather and the clan’s

cabal of five adult men had gone hunting. //Tlili's grandfather had been the big man of the clan at that time, and two days later when the hunters returned there were just four men. One of whom was a newcomer, N!lkua. //Tlili's grandfather and his two brothers were missing, and they were never seen again.

Each of the four returning hunters was dragging almost a quarter of a giraffe, and carrying several hares, and N!lkua also carried a large tortoise. The men had brought back such a huge amount of meat that the clan's grief at the loss of the old chief was somewhat assuaged. The three remaining hunters were unrelated to the old chief. So they were ambivalent and subdued about whatever it was that had happened on the hunt.

//Tlili's grandmother was somewhat filled with grief, but, life being as it was, she stoically accepted the imposing young usurper, that is until one night a few months later. That night not far from the camp N!lkua dug a pit with a sharp flat piece of greenstone. Then he pulled the two younger sons of the old chief and their nephew from sleep and threw them into the pit, terrified and still breathing.

N!lkua then quickly pushed the heaped earth and stones over the boys, and buried them, and such was his strength and fierceness that //Tlili's grandmother and great aunt's horrified resistance to the death of their sons was easily rebuffed with a few blows. . . “

Artemis interrupted again, “Do we have to have this story? Is it going to be like the book of Joshua in the Old Testament, filled with pointless primitive violence and a fatuous claim that there is a relevant moral to modern times? I really want you to tell me a story of the Mitochondrial Eve. I think that's a cool idea, but I came out here to get away from human madness, and the horrible raping torturing murderous crap like what you are talking about. I am having *enough* trouble dealing with the helicopters that fly over here, and I don't see how an ancient brutal story would solve the complex problem, that you asked me about, of saving civilization. I'm sorry Carressa, but can we talk about something else?”

“Patience child! This is a *very* long story. Besides, a few minutes ago you said that a hundred and forty thousand years wasn't that long ago. I'm

sorry about the violence, but though it has decreased sharply with a global fossil fuel based economy and particularly with the advent of nuclear bombs, ha!, it is obviously still very much a part of life, and it actually is important for you to understand. Ineptitude with regard to climate, disease, and famine has generally been the main difficulty when one considers the key historical threats to human survival, that is with the exception of the ancient eruption of the Toba super volcano in Sumatra, but human violence has occasionally been a major factor as well, and of course since the invention of nuclear warfare, biological war, chemical warfare, and so forth, it still is.

Besides, even if you wanted to Artemis, the world won't let you live here in Kohala forever.

And it's also important to know how humanity changed and evolved, with //Tlili and after. //Tlili is our mother.”

Artemis took a long breath raised her eyebrows and tilted her head sideways. “Well then, what did this //Tlili look like? What did the people look like?”

Carressa said, “//Tlili was simply ... Well she was simply adorable and as beautiful as a kingfisher or a jeweled sunbird. She had tan skin, almond eyes, full lips, and the grace of a cheetah. Later, as she matured, she became as voluptuous during flush times as one would hope for Eve to be. She also was blessed with a perfectly curved Bushman style hind end, which can be very useful to store fat in during a famine. Maybe I should also mention that //Tlili was the name that her mother had given her, and in the ancient tongue it actually means Kingfisher. -Which is a small brightly colored bird that existed long before kings, and it dives most elegantly, straight down out of trees, to grab minnows in its long beak. She had received the name as an infant because of her slightly hyper agile grace.

Humanity, at that time could be described as a blend of all the ‘races’ that you currently see. They looked closest to the African San, or Bushmen, who call themselves the Ju/Wasi, and who today's geneticists will tell you we are all descended from. But in //Tlili's childhood the ‘People’ were harsh and socially not much at all like the peaceful San, not in behavior, culture, or religion -Although their diet was kind of similar, and their language slowly gave rise to the early Ju/Wasi language. Still, //Tlili's people at the start

vastly predated the Ju/Wasi culture, and the language of //Tlili's time was much simpler than the Ju/Wasi's which nowadays is considered humanity's most 'primitive' or earliest language. But not having fully evolved language skills does not mean that subtle communication was not possible. It was. Much of the communication was based on tone, inflection, and body language; but they were almost as fully conscious as we are. They were capable of subtle thought; so for convenience in this story I will speak as if they had full verbal acuity.

As for what the people were like generally you may mean Homo sapiens. Now I know it's virtually impossible to be objective about this, but when I try to compare us, humans, non-anthropocentrically, to other animals I have to say that at that time, and now, humanity is, physically, a lovely piece of work. I think our svelte hairless bodies are generally simply beautiful to behold. Being upright and efficiently bipedal we can see and walk better and farther than most animals, and we have more, and more varied sex, great sex. Few other female animals seem to have orgasms, at least like we do. . . Which by the way directly and indirectly promotes our intense social bonding, and sex also helps with the incredible amount of cohesion parents need for the many years it takes to raise a human offspring.

We can also make beautiful and diverse vocal sounds, and with them express all manner of the glory of creation. So physically at least, we are blessed.”

Carressa pulled her massive hair around herself, like a blanket over her old body.

“But, back to the story. . .

By the time //Tlili was seven it was already evident to the people that the girl was particularly gifted in two areas:

First she had an eye for finding difficult bush food and medicine. Children generally stayed around camp until they were about nine years old, but //Tlili was allowed to go on long walks during her seventh year because

she had an almost prescient sense of the life of the land. She could find bitter melon, track bees to honey, find water roots, and climb trees for fruit and eggs with an alacrity that was more than charming. By the time she was nine she would have been able to forage well enough to feed the clan by herself, but of course she was too small to carry more than a child's load.

//Tlili was fascinated most of all by bush medicine, and following old Naia on a forage was a joy. So many things in the world held a kind of secret value, not immediately obvious, and there were hundreds of these items that were a part of Naia's medicinal repertoire. The girl loved to hear Naia speak the name and use, or gift, of every plant, tree, fungus, bird, reptile, mammal, insect, or rock. Even clouds and stars were named and had a reputed medicinal purpose. To //Tlili Naia's knowledge was a marvel. Even in old age the shaman woman not only could repeat vast lists of the clan's lore about the world, but there was a fund that she had gained by herself, and Naia was still studying, thinking, and learning.

Animal, vegetable, and mineral;

Naia once said to //Tlili, "Love the medicine talisman. I keep what medicines that can be dried and stored rolled in skins in this big old leopard skin bag. It was given to me by old Tsi//lo, my teacher"

The clan didn't possess much, and the medicine bag was probably the largest possession that was moved from camp to camp. It held the power of a talisman, and Naia hauled it, letting no one else near it. She slowly allowed //Tlili a limited access, and it became obvious to everyone that //Tlili was her apprentice. It is strange to think that 'the bag,' with its contents, was probably the highest form of technology the earth had yet seen. In the shaman's hands it was a pharmaceutical cornucopia that, though it misfired a fair portion of the time, was able to cure myriad ailments due to a lore of trial and error that had been gained over many generations. Naia was mindful of the future and worked hard to pass its secrets on to //Tlili.

//Tlili's second gift was something rather new in the world at that time. She had a passion for music. In //Tlili's time music was new enough that there wasn't even a word for it in the ancient language. Sound, rhythm, and memory may have been genetically imbued in //Tlili in a new way. This is reasonable because //Tlili lived around the time of the birth of true

human language, and language and music have coevolved. A huge portion of our consciousness is occupied with language, which of course we learn via sound. The human consciousness also has evolved an innate profound logical faculty that we use to comprehend the world. That is why humans can discover complex mathematical equations that describe natural phenomena. So there is a deep nearly universal pleasure in modern humanity in the use of organized sound as a way of expressing subtle and not so subtle beliefs and ideas about the world; be it modern heavy metal, Mozart, the chanting of Tibetan monks, or the didgeridoo of ancient aboriginal culture.

//Tlili loved to string the various clicks, vowels, and consonants of her language together in a nonsensical babble that for sheer loquaciousness went far beyond the chattering of other children. This was a mysterious gift, and fortunately for //Tlili it was strangely pleasing to the adults. She was a musical child prodigy lost in time, and felt compelled to carefully examine every new sound that she discovered; she spent much of her spare time making beats and rhythms with sticks, stones, bones, and hollow logs.

As she grew //Tlili's passion for music increased. She had always loved the ritual of story telling around the fire at night, and some months after Naia found the Purple Wetchla the hunters returned after a difficult but successful hunt. The six hunters had been gone five days, and had managed to kill and retrieve an oryx and a springbok.

That night around a bonfire there were hunter's tales that the women were permitted to observe but not take part in. During the story a couple of N!lkua's young sons and the other hunters kept a simple beat. In a primal-quasi-musical act so old as to be pre-human they used sticks to beat on a hollow log which they had hauled to the fire.

It was N!lkua who pantomimed the stalk, the throw of the spear, and the tracking of the springbok that was wounded. And while N!lkua pantomimed, Nixa, his chief crony and hunting partner, half chanted the hunt while adding more clicks to the words to match the beat. It was an endlessly replayed variation of an already ancient hunting story:

“With eyes like leopards,



with our empty stomachs growling,  
we stalked,  
prowling through the grass.  
N!lkua the merciless speared the springbok.  
We, fierce as lions, were running after the meat.  
Then we killed without pity.  
We rejoiced and laughed when the springbok fell.  
The hunt went on.

Now only the fast will survive.  
Those four legged won't escape.  
Not even the smallest.  
We hunt in the open Savanna.  
Here only the fast ones live.  
Only the strongest survive.”

The sticks clicked as N!lkua, Naxa, and another hunter danced an alternating two and three step stamp showing how they evaded hyenas, and how they guarded the kill from wild dogs. The naked men grimaced, shouted, and brandished their spears to demonstrate the brief loud encounter they had with another hominoid clan, members of Erectus.

//Tlili was entranced as never before by the drumming. She hummed and clicked discreetly at the fire circle's edge while softly slapping her thighs and keeping the time. Then she noticed that N!lkua was looking at her.

N!lkua was her father. But she had never felt a bond with him. He was often violent and intimidating to virtually everyone in the tribe, except for his fellow hunters, his cronies. These he favored with food and mates and thereby kept himself in charge and the tribe subdued. He had always ignored her as his harmless little daughter, and she like the rest of the clan generally passively accepted him as a fact of life. -Although when she really thought of him, in her heart there was a dark cloud. The ritual of storytelling and drumming generally created a kind of commonality in the group that transcended the repressiveness of N!lkua's cruelty, but for now N!lkua's power was in the ascendancy, and it had made the dynamics of her

clan more competitive, by far, than our bonabo cousins, more brutal than *Homo erectus*, more brutal than the chimps. Indeed, her clan society was crueler than the social order of most wolf packs. Genetically and socially the power of big men in *Homo sapiens* culture had been rising for generations, and as a consequence mores against rape, murder, or incest were trivialized, rituals profaned.

Now all of humanity consisted of just a few clans, one tiny culture, stuck in the bottle's neck. *Homo sapiens* was truly an endangered species, but its most overtly strong member was satiated with corrupting power. Nllkua's penis was hard, the erection visible to all, and under his fierce and luridly eager yellow eyed gaze //Tlili felt a tight pressure growing in her stomach. She could hardly breathe. She looked at the ground, and became very still.

After a while she furtively looked back up and found that he was no longer watching her. He had stamp danced, penis swinging, to the opposite side of the fire. So she backed away from the fire circle into the security of the night, taking her chances with the hyenas in preference to the false safety of the light and the malevolent man.

She sat for some time in the darkness. Then, looking up at the stars and moon she felt some sense of peace return and began to breathe easier. From the quite remote heavens she harvested *defiance*. Luckily //Tlili seemed to have been born with an easy awareness of the indifferent beauty of the larger world. For her it was a tonic to the heart against savagery.

The hunters were still keeping time about the fire, beating their sticks, but she would do her own dance. Off in the shadows young //Tlili stood up, mouthed the chant, snapped her fingers softly and stamped, her feet silently hitting the clay, stone, and grass as she wove and swayed in the night.

During the moons that followed she continued thus: She gathered food and medicinal material with Naia and the other women. Learned the shaman's world, avoided Nllkua's gaze, and found her own solitary dance outside the light of many of the clan's social fires.

The primordial hunter gatherer life of humanity, of the clan, could be difficult, but generally work then was more varied, pleasurable, and less time

consuming then work is now. Sometimes there was hunger, and occasionally famine, yet more often than not in //Tlili's childhood there was abundant food. Childbirth was difficult, but under Naia's care more babies and mothers lived than died. However the people did not prosper.

It was disease, mostly, that was killing humanity off. And Old Yellow Fever was the worst disease. After that day in the ravine with //Tlili Naia continued to search but never managed to find another Purple Wetchla grub. In her mind Naia still kept the ancient knowledge, passed down through the line of shamans, of every micro biome for hundreds of square miles around where Natal Flame bushes and Wetchla had been found. As the clan migrated about their world she showed the secret locations to //Tlili, but the Natal Flame bushes were decimated, and although a few bushes survived the grub was gone.

N!lkua the Big Man didn't help the clan prosper either. He perversely relished seeing to it that the male and some female babies that were deemed too ugly or weak, or obviously not his, were killed. N!lkua knew the value of his fellow hunters, and with them he shared some of the less desirable women. But it was he who decided when a child lived, and this was accepted. N!lkua may have been cunning in enabling the satiation of his own pleasure, but the problem was that the clan's survival, and even his own children's lives, were just a vehicle for his appetites and nothing more. Perhaps if he had been able to compare his clan to other successful ones his competitive spirit would have rallied, and his people would have prospered. But the reality which was unknown to him or even Naia was that his clan was virtually the last, practically alone. So, too many babies died under his decree, and the number of people shrank further.

## 8. Bogada

When //Tlili was about ten years old it was during the middle of the rainy season that the fever struck again. There weren't that many mosquitoes, but the particular malaria strain at that time was virulent, and it was new to humanity, and of course no one knew mosquitoes were the vector. The fever took four more lives, three girls and one of the hunters. And it almost took //Tlili when she too became ill. Fortunately for her she was secretly favored by Naia who gave her some of the very last true purple wetchla powder. When it was administered orally during the onset of the fever the wetchla worked like an antibiotic and a vaccine; it killed the disease, and it guarded the girl against recurrent fevers and future infection. It was typical in primordial times for even a small human child to have witnessed death as a part of life, but this bout of the fever created another distinguishing difference in //Tlili, she would go through introverted periods of extreme thoughtfulness, in this she was somewhat similar to Naia except that //Tlili would become almost catatonic.

The wet season was nearing its end before //Tlili fully recovered, and one day there was a lull in the storms and the sun came out. The rainy season is, and was, a time of great fecundity, with lush grass for grazing, and wildebeest and silvetherium calves, lion and saber-toothed cubs, and hyena pups were born. Many species of birds were nesting, and a chorus of flowers was blooming. There were Iridescent and golden-winged sunbirds flitting and streaking about calling challenges with their curious whortalling cries.

The old woman and the girl were out again, but they weren't harvesting medicinals. To //Tlili the day felt magical. The color and shape, and the taste and the smell, of the land seemed intoxicating. The sound of the birds, insects, and breeze were a caress to the soul, and the feel of the air, sun, soil, and plant life on her feet, butt, belly, and head were a source of shivering pleasure.

*You know Artemis how sometimes we can be inexplicably sad and other times inexplicably happy? For //Tlili it was a day like that. -she was feeling happy beyond reason.*

They were with a boy in his eleventh year named /Naxa. He was the son of a woman who all the hunters had shared though he looked somewhat like N!lkua, yet he was close to the age where he would be driven away to the bachelors camp. As I have said, the bachelor's camp was where boys who weren't killed were sent. It was a small group of men that would sometimes follow the clan, knowing they didn't have the strength to overthrow the hierarchy

On this day Naia wanted to gather the eggs of the Blue Pigeon. The birds nested in colonies in the crowns of Baobabs and of Acacia Tortilis or Umbrella Thorn trees. Naia carried a long knobby stave that she would hold against a tree so //Tlili and /Naxa could scramble up to reach the lowest branches of the shorter trees. The girl and boy would then climb to the tree's top, and fill their antelope skin bags with eggs while the pigeons wheeled mournfully around the tree scolding them. The latest tree they had found was a medium sized Baobab that had several nests. //Tlili loved doing this; the trees felt like a haven, an anchor in the savanna. In their crowns she felt secure from the perils of life in the open plain, and on this day the tree was in bloom, and it was humming with bees and other pollinators.

“//Tlili!”

/Naxa had three eggs held carefully in one hand, and he was clinging to a fork of the main tree trunk with his other arm while peering into a hole somewhat larger than his head. “There are bats in here. Come and look.”

The girl worked her way across the tree to look in the hole.

“There are a bunch of them, and there's babies.” /Naxa said, “Let's eat them. We can put them in our bags.”

//Tlili looked into the gloom of the hole. “But they're small. They would be hard to catch, and they're covered with bugs, with mites.” she said.

“Not that one.” Naxa pointed.

It was bigger than the other bats, obviously a mother. Clinging to the bat was a fat baby, or pup, and where the other bats were listless with small red sores and crawling with mites, the big bat and baby were brimming with health, and they clambered around on top of the others. /Naxa started to reach for the mother.

“Stop!” //Tlili grabbed his arm.

“Why?” said /Naxa

“See, it’s got a fungus on it.”

They peered into the dimly lit hole. The bats, though clearly alarmed by the intrusion, squeaked and climbed around, yet they showed no inclination to fly out. The People ate fruit bats, but these bats were small, insectivores.

“You’re always fussing about dumb stuff //Tlili. Who cares? This bat’s fat!”

//Tlili frowned, “It’s tiny /Naxa, with a baby!” then she called down to Naia, “Naia! Should we eat a bat if it has a greenish yellow fungus around its legs?”

“I don’t know about that. You had best not. Many types of fungus can make people sick. You kids come back down before you crack those eggs.”

/Naxa scowled at //Tlili. The girl shut out all the vibrant sensations of the world and stared hard at the hole. Then she really saw it: Orange green scales of fungus were on the base of the mother bat’s legs and visible under some of its fur. Several faint yellowish green tendrils of what looked like fungal mycelium were visible moving about the squirming bats like blowing cobwebs, plus there were fine mycelium strands on the rotten inner wood that trailed around in the inside of the hole to the living inner bark at the hole’s edge.

When they returned to the ground the three gatherers had as many eggs as they could safely carry, and as they quietly headed back to camp the sky turned grey with clouds.

This clan knew fire, and it had learned long ago about how to cook eggs on heated rocks. In the rainy season they had moved into a group of hills that rose above the savanna because in the hills they could camp under an overhanging cliff that hominoids had used for eons. It was called Nallo's chin because the camp was under a massive rock that resembled the profile of a man's face. It bulged out from a larger uplifted cliff wall or anticline that went for some miles through the hills. Who Nallo was no one could remember, but the giant rock face held no special power except perhaps to make the people feel secure who slept in the cave like recess under its chin.

That evening as it started to rain //Tlili, her mother, her mother's cousin /Shouhe, and Naia were gathering firewood in anticipation of fried eggs around a warm fire. -Of course the people would suck an egg raw, but they also knew what would happen to an egg when it was cracked open upon a rock heated by fire.

"He's a dung worm." whispered //Tlili's mother to Naia.

Though the main force in //Tlili's childhood was Naia. //Tlili's mother was also important. Her name was Luititi. She was the granddaughter of the old big man, and was a gentle skinny woman with a sad smile who loved to hug and groom her daughter. N!lkua had always found Luititi very attractive. So he had seen to it that she was well fed, but she stayed very thin.

He would often say something like, "You are my gazelle, and with such a smooth pelt," as he grabbed her.

He wasn't particularly violent to her, but he was rough. It was clear that she had to submit to him, which she did, but to her it felt like rape for, tradition or no, in her heart she loathed him in his indifference to all that did not serve or succumb to his appetites. Since that first hunter's dance when he stared at her //Tlili had felt the loathing as well, and it grew as his awareness of her had grown for incest had become quite common in this tiny fading nucleuse of humanity as it often does when a small group is isolated for generations, or when there are only a few members of a species. After all, who could Adam and Eve's children have sex with? But //Tlili knew in her bones that she wanted no part of him.

She spoke up, "I hate him too Mother." And at this mother and child looked to Naia for guidance.

Naia said, “I think hatred displeases the spirits that give us life. In my experience hate wears down the body and the soul. N!lkua gives you meat, and he protects the tribe, after his fashion.”

/Shouhe agreed, “He protects us. It is the way of the people.”

//Tlili admired Naia’s tranquility, but to the girl something was wrong about Naia’s statement and very wrong about /Shouhe’s mindless acceptance of malevolence. She personally didn’t feel protected at all by N!lkua. The fact that their clan, and the neighboring clans as well, were slowly shrinking over the years had been such a long range condition that it barely registered on the consciousness of any of them. //Tlili alone would soon be conscious enough for such a feat of vision, but for now she was too young. She changed the subject; to what, after her brilliantly sensual morning, had haunted her for the rest of the day, “Naia do you know of a fungus that’s bright green and orange?”

“No child, I know nothing of such a fungus.”

“It was the bat fungus. I want to show it to you. The orange was very bright, and the bat whose legs it was on was so healthy.”

In //Tlili’s mind the tiny crumpled strands of orange on green fungus on the bat’s legs had been so bright that the animal’s legs had almost vibrated with color. It was so orange it had seemed to sing to her.

“Certainly //Tlili.” replied Naia, “I think it will be raining hard soon, but maybe tomorrow the rains should let up a little, and if you can get in the trees in this wet than we can get more eggs, and also, if you can take some from the bats you can show me this fungus. Now help with the firewood.” She continued to listen to Luititi grumbling quietly about the thorn that N!lkua was in their lives.

In actuality it rained hard and there was a cold wind for three more days. The clan stayed under Nallo’s chin and subsisted on some dried antelope and a few stashed Tsama melons.

On the fourth day the temperature rose considerably, and the rain slackened so the people went out to forage. Naia, //Tlili, and Naxa enjoyed being out again as the rain became warm and gentle. Since they had already robbed the pigeon nests from the Baobab with the bats they decided to avoid that tree for a while, and climbed some neighboring Acacias. The



children scrambled carefully among the wet tree limbs. When trees are wet it is harder for small hands to maintain a grip on larger limbs, and //Tlili and Naxa had to hug the trunks close. Soon their bodies became slimed with tree detritus. Eventually they managed to creep into the twigs of the canopy, and once again they gathered the eggs beneath the melancholy calls of the mother pigeons. Since their dexterity was hampered by the weather several eggs broke, but after awhile they again reached a limit on the eggs they could carry.

When they returned to the bat Baobab there was a slight breeze. Naxa sat down, and leaned against the leeward side of the tree to escape the drizzle. He was tired and had no desire to see the inedible bats again, so //Tlili scrambled up the tree by herself.

Soon the filthy little mitochondrial eve, mother of the modern human race, peered into the hole, but the bats were gone.

As her eyes became accustomed to the dark hole she picked out a couple of greenish strands of mycelium. - Mycelium is to fungus as roots are to plants; except that mycelium doesn't taper but starts as fine often nearly invisible filaments that can become vast in the cubic feet of host soil, wood, or whatever host the fungus inhabits, and the mycelium of certain species can remain dormant for decades before it fruits into a mushroom.

This mycelium's bright green had faded from several days ago to a dull grayish forest green. The green made her wonder briefly if it was a fungus or a plant, but it simply didn't look like a plant; it had no leaves and no proper roots. She couldn't see any of the orange scaly part of the fungus she had seen on the bat. //Tlili reached an egg slimed hand in the hole and pawed about in the rotten wood and guano. She was about to give up when she turned up one tiny brilliant orange chip of the scaly fungus. She had no bag and no place to put it, so she wedged it into her tangled natted hair.

When //Tlili got down she showed the fungus to Naia. The shaman woman studied the little chip,

"Child this is too small. I can't make sense of it. Though I suppose we could start the taste process."

Naia broke the tiny chip of fungus in half. She put what was now just a grain in her mouth for a second or two then she spat it out. Thus she utilized the primordial method of testing an unknown flora for its culinary,

medicinal, or toxic qualities. First you taste a small quantity and spit it out. After waiting a day to see what happens, you taste another tiny quantity and swallow it, wait again, then a larger quantity. In this way humanity has generally been able to find out how useful a thing is while minimizing casualties. Naia had done this many times in her life, with some worthy discoveries, and she lived to a wrinkled old age with only a few cases of intestinal distress.

“That tingled, like the feet of a live grasshopper on my tongue; it’s most curious” She said. “If we find more we will want to study it. Now let’s go home.”

/Tlili considered tossing the remaining grain on the ground. It was so tiny, she thought that if she tried to keep the piece she would probably lose it anyway, but since she had invested so much energy in it she wedged it back into her hair.

As they walked home she thought again about the orange vibrant fungus as it had been on the bat’s leg, and the strands of mycelium connected to the tree, and its wisping strands moving about the bats as they had squirmed around in the hole.

“Naia mamy nan? I know. It connected the bat and the Baobab. Let’s name this fungus Connection.” *In the ancient tongue the word for connection was bogada.*

“Bogada? That would be a curious, perhaps inconvenient, name. It is an important thing, naming something that lives. Why bogada? I know mold and fungus are similar, and after floods there are forest floors where I have seen mold growing on many things at once. I can think of no mold or fungus with a name like bogada. It seems wrong.”

“But this was growing on things that were alive: A tree and a bat, which are so different.”

“I don’t think we understand it well enough yet to know just what it was doing.”

“Please? I like the name bogada.”

“Well, for now I suppose it will do.”

It was evening, and their shadows walked in front of them as they went up the final hill on their way back to camp. //Tlili was enjoying the rain softened grass beneath her feet while the trio stepped carefully, and therefore quietly, to avoid breaking their eggs. They were walking through some scrub blackwood trees when Naxa, who was in front, crested the hill. Before them lay the anticline, and straight ahead Nallo's rocky head guarded the cave beneath his chin. Suddenly /Naxa dropped to the ground. As Naia and //Tlili approached him he motioned urgently for them to be silent and get down as well. Naxa pointed through the trees to a pit like indentation on the cliff face a stone's throw to the left of Nallo's chin. At first //Tlili saw nothing, then eventually she saw some stealthy movement among the stones and boulders of the indentation and then all along base of the cliff. A group of strange men armed with spears and coated in grey clay were barely visible as they moved towards the cave beneath the chin.

//Tlili never knew what possessed /Naxa, the boy with such dubious prospects, but after crouching for a few moments more he leaped up with a stick in one hand and a stone in the other, and ran, screaming, at the strangers. He managed to run about twenty paces before a man in the rocks hurled a spear at him. The agile boy jumped to dodge it only to land in the path of another spear, thrown from a different attacker. It skewered the nine year old /Naxa through the chest. He shook for only a moment then slumped to the ground.

//Tlili crouched watching in horror as /Naxa died. The girl had never witnessed a murder, and she stayed rooted to the ground among the blackwoods. But in giving his life /Naxa had alerted the clan. Moments later yellow eyed N!lkua in full battle fury rushed from the cave with his hunters behind him, and in the short mêlée that followed they smote the strangers with spear, stone, and fist.

There were twelve attackers, and the clan killed them all.

It was an amazing victory, for at this point N!lkua and his hunters numbered only seven men, and now none of them were even hurt.

//Tlili's people saw that these clay covered men were from a human clan. There were no other human clans nearby, but Naia recognized some of their faces. She also saw that they looked very scrawny, even

malnourished, and that probably explained the ease and completeness of N!lkua's victory

She walked out of the trees and spoke to N!lkua, pointing to a body, "This is Kalwi's son, I am sure of it. She is kin of mine from the Dil/koa whose territory is at least a moon's walk to the south. We have never fought with them. They were our allies, of old we are the same people. Why are they here?"

N!lkua was nonchalant, "Why does any animal fight? They were here for my women, and this cave."

Soon the entire clan of twenty four people was assembled around the battle scene staring at the dead and talking excitedly.

/Naxa's body was ignored until his mother came out of the cave. She went to her son and held his bloody filthy body while crying silently. //Tlili stood by her, and set her hand on the woman's back. The girl's innate sense of justice was outraged. The hunters knew Naxa had warned the clan yet his sacrifice and tragedy went unrecognized.

The others returned to the cave for the night feeling very cheerful about the victory, and leaving the bodies of the enemy outside to be food for the hyenas and jackals.

## 9. Kwanza

The old shaman woman stayed behind. Naia wanted to examine the dead. She was curious to know what had driven these people to come so far only to be killed. She had little time. It was dusk, the clouds had broken up, and the evening star was already out. There among the dead she saw that one of the Dil/koa was but a skinny boy, perhaps eleven years old. He looked starved, yet his wounds were relatively mild. How had he died? She looked at him closely and saw what at first had been imperceptible. He was quite bloody with wounds in the head, chest, and leg, but ever so faintly she saw that his chest was slowly rising and falling. She quickly drew closer, and studied the boy's face. The nose, the lips, and the eyebrows seemed familiar.

Naia had never conceived a child. As the medicine woman her magic kept people in enough awe that aggression was never directed at her. She was sweet or remote to women, and to men gently aloof, but as long as she could remember, on a visceral level she had always judged men and their violence to be simply inferior. No doubt this was due to some childhood trauma, and she was not at all vocal about it, but to her men seemed fundamentally to rely on brute force rather than intelligence, and hardly ever compassion, so on her deepest level she didn't respect them. In her younger voluptuous days she consciously cultivated seemingly unclean habits that young men found grotesque enough that they generally left her alone. There had, much earlier, been a man once, a boy really, when she was a young girl. He had been the son of the old shaman, Tsi//lo, and he had gone out on a day hunt with another boy. Her clan had been roaming in the south savanna back then. When the boys didn't return in the evening the old big man, //Tlili's maternal grandfather, and his hunters went out to search for them, but they soon gave up hope, and the boys never returned.

She stood lost in thought, looking at the unconscious Dil/koa boy. Perhaps it was the heroism and sacrifice of /Naxa. Maybe it was the boy's

face, but now all she could see was innocence, and something within her softened, then resolve began to grow within her. She was a healer, and she would keep this boy alive. She called for //Tlili.

The cooking fire in the cave had been built into a bonfire. The clan sat around it pressed tightly together while pulling hot rocks out of the fire and cracking eggs on them. They talked excitedly about the day as they scrapped the resultant fried egg off the rocks with their fingers and after eating it they put the dirty rocks back in the fire or hurled them out the front of the cave. There was some talk of cannibalism, all that fresh meat just sitting out there, but it was faint hearted. The people had no major taboos against cannibalism, but no tradition of it either. Meat and other food was fairly easy at that time and place for the meager human population to come by. And the faint revulsion or disgust born of ancient diseases that cannibalism held for them was sufficient to make it distasteful. So tonight the discussion of it was mostly in jest.

Only //Tlili and /Naxa's mother were avoiding the party. They both squatted on their respective skin mats. //Tlili was crouched in a ball, her head down, with a boulder between her and the fire. In her short life she had seen many people die of disease, but until now she had never seen a human kill another. Of course she knew about it from the proud warrior tales of the hunters, or the rumors of dark deeds that the women ascribed to N!lkua, but witnessing it was another thing. Years later she was able to articulate her simple feelings of that evening. She felt the pressure of the tribe, and she wanted to fit in, but something wasn't right about her, or about her clan's attitude. To her it seemed natural and correct for a person to feel that humans are a very precious thing in the world, and to be cavalier about the death of any human was simply a terrible wrong, and further, by adding unnecessarily to the already brimming cup of suffering in their world //Tlili thought it was just crazy. All that death seemed stupid. She was fairly lost in mourning, and it took awhile to realize that Naia was calling her from outside of the cave.

//Tlili approached the scene of the battle by walking along the bottom of the cliff. There was no moon and few stars, but she could see faint

silhouettes and shadows in the lingering twilight. She heard hyenas laughing in the distance, and when her foot touched a cold body her stomach sank within her, she was not at all happy to be there. The clan said the spirits of the dead lingered around bodies for a full turn of the moon.

It was Naia's job to placate the dead.

“Naia?!”

“I'm over here child.”

“What are you doing out here Naia mam?” The girl's melodious voice shook.

“This Dil/koa boy is still alive.”

//Tlili could begin to make out Naia sitting among the bodies cradling a smaller skinny form, its head on her lap.

Naia spoke tightly, “I need you to help me haul him into the cave.”

//Tlili felt the pit in her stomach get a little deeper. N!lkua would not allow this. And it went against the clan. Girls from other clans were welcome, even stolen, but not a boy. Still, to //Tlili it felt right, her love for Naia was like a flame, and she steeled herself against her fear.

Some minutes later they had dragged the boy, who was still unconscious but was now groaning, into the firelight. In a moment N!lkua had grasped their intent, and leaped up from the fire. He came at them with a snarl, “What are you doing old woman?”

There was silence in the cave as Naia answered softly, “The dead say we must take this boy.”

N!lkua was fierce, “They were trying to kill us. We owe them nothing, and I do not fear these dead.” He loomed over Naia and //Tlili as if he would kill the boy and them as well.

With a flick of her hand Naia pulled the pointed breastbone of a bat out of her hair and pointed it at N!lkua. She squinted her good eye, and aimed a gaze at him with her white eye opened bulgingly wide, “Don't make me curse you N!lkua. These men were our kin. They were here for food, and their spirits are angry. They request that we care for this child. Anyway, this boy's way too small and weak to hurt you.”

“They were here to kill us! It's obvious, and I fear no boy!”

“That’s not what the dead say, and if the boy is not a threat then there’s no problem.” She turned away, put the bone back in her hair, and started rummaging through the leopard bag for poultice herbs.

N!lkua continued to scowl at them, but //Tlili wouldn’t meet his eye. After a moment he said, “He’ll be carrion soon anyway.” He stalked back to the fire.

It was silent in the cave save for the crackling of the fire, and the peaceful activity of Naia. //Tlili had the distinct feeling that no one save her and Naia wanted the Dil/koa boy to live. She looked at /Naxa’s mother who returned a furious glare. No one else looked at her at all except her own mother who was watching her with a mixture of confusion and anger. //Tlili turned to the boy.

In the fire light she saw that N!lkua was probably right.

His whole body looked pale and yellow. He was a thin skinny boy, laying now on his back with a large gash on his lower leg that was still dripping blood. His little penis was covered with dried blood and what looked like feces. He had a sizable dark purplish bruise on his lower right chest. He appeared to be starving. She could see all of his ribs, and his belly stuck out. He was breathing in shallow gasps. Finally, he also had a big bloody bruise on the side of his head.

Naia made the poultice from ground buchu leaves, ground African ginger root, and water she poured from an ostrich egg jug. She cleaned the boy then rubbed the poultice into pieces of hide and placed the wet herb smeared hide on the wounds. As she was binding up the wound on his leg he groaned and opened his eyes.

His awareness grew slowly, but the first thing he saw was //Tlili, and they looked at each other for a long moment. “//Tlili hand me the piece of kudu hide”, said Naia. //Tlili moved to obey, but she kept her gaze on the boy. His eyes were bleary and full of pain but within that they held nothing but gentle gratefulness, and //Tlili felt confirmed in her decision to help. Then he saw the egg jug, and when she saw him staring at it she gave him a drink. As he drank he continued to watch her. When he finished the blariness in his eyes had somewhat given way to a slight sparkle; he signaled



her to come closer, “Hey, there, cheeky bird, you think you got a fish now?” he whispered.

//Tlili looked at Naia, “Did you hear him Naia Mam? Why would a mutilated and starved little boy speak so?”

Weeks passed, and //Tlili was the busiest she had ever been. Naia tended the boy constantly, and since, with the exception of game, food in the clan was only marginally shared //Tlili had to forage a share not only for herself but for Naia, the boy, and some for the rest of the clan as a good will gesture, but most of the clan remained hostile about their medicine woman’s decision.

The boy mended slowly, and though he spoke with an accent they learned his name was Kwanza, and //Tlili and Naia were slowly able to gather why the Dil/koa had come from so far.

Kwanza guilelessly told the shaman and her apprentice that the Dil/koa were indeed trying to attack Nllkua’s clan and to take it over by killing Nllkua and his cronies. This was because far away in the Dil/koa clan the alpha male had let his circle of hunting cronies become so small that the Dil/koa women had suddenly banded together and driven the men out. An embarrassing situation. Like the women of the People, the Dil/koa women were angry about the infanticide that the clan’s alpha male and cronies had committed. Such events had happened before in Homo sapiens culture, but there had always been enough wandering camps of men that a group of indignant women was an irresistible target. But the world was wide open now, and what was more the Dil/koa clan women were probably no longer mating. Kwanza said they had spoken of making a kind of group chastity pact.

Kwanza also made it very clear that he was an orphan with no blood allies and an unwilling participant in the surprise attack he had been enlisted to take part in. He had only just barely managed to make himself useful enough as a gatherer that the Dil/koa men had let him straggle along after them. On one level the boy’s personal indifference to a battle for women seemed likely enough to Naia and //Tlili since he hadn’t even gone through puberty. Yet he was a boy, all the boys //Tlili had known would certainly have gone to battle in a similar situation if asked. It made basic sense. The

men she knew would all rape or kill if it meant a chance to mate when the possibility was otherwise foreclosed. Even if they couldn't participate older prepubescent boys would at least be sympathetic to such male activity. So she watched Kwanza curiously.

Naia explained to the young Kwanza, "Your story to N!lkua must be that the Dil/koa men came in peace on a hunting trip."

"Whew, that would be a very long hunting trip. We came from far away. We walked for two moons, I think."

Kwanza had many stories to tell about his life. He chattered away, and //Tlili loved to listen because he had an unquenchable sense of humor. Tragedy had cut this boy, but not to the core, mirth seemed to keep bubbling up. One day as //Tlili was applying a poultice to the yellowing bruise on his chest Kwanza flinched with pain and grabbed her hands. He struggled convulsively for some moments. It obviously hurt, but in a flash his grimaces turned to laughter, and he was winking and joking. The moment stuck with her as disturbing, but admirable.

Under Naia's and //Tlili's nursing Kwanza's wounds began to heal. He was gaining weight, and before long began to limp about, but then the gash on his leg started to go septic, and though Naia did all she could it steadily got worse. . .

One and a half moons after the battle Kwanza was on his back again. His wound was wet with pus and his leg red and hot. A day later the sepsis had spread until his whole body had the fever, and then the next day the wound began to turn green and stink.

During the day that followed old Naia became very silent. She held the boy's hand and chanted softly and lovingly yet he faded and lapsed again into unconsciousness.

//Tlili was desperate. She had seen many of her kin die, but this Kwanza had been on the precipice of death, then he had come so far, and all along he had shown such a strangely easy joy in life.

She sat by him, across from Naia, and held his other hand, seeking the life force that would hold up this destruction.

It was exhausting but uplifting to merge her energy with Naia's and to give it to Kwanza. Though the old woman did nothing overt to acknowledge

//Tlili's aid, Tlili felt a deep new companionship, they were sharing and empowering their mutual shamen's force on the edge of life. It felt as if they were pouring light into the boy, and as she emptied her mind into willing life and health into Kwanza an idea, long forgotten, came to her. She must try the bogada chip.

She had almost forgotten it. It had stayed in her hair for a day after the battle, and on the next morning as she was waking up she saw it had fallen onto the old antelope pelt she used for a sleeping mat. Then she had taken the chip and put it in a pretty snail shell that she kept in a rock crack by her sleeping area. The bogada had seemed to her a childish trifle next to the deep wisdom of Naia's medicinal trove.

Now she found it, and rubbed it until it dissolved into a tiny smear of paste between her thumb and forefinger. She placed it on the wound. Then she resigned herself, putting her mind in the neutral place between doubt and belief that this fungus that had seemed to give health to a bat --that it could help this boy.

During this activity the old shaman hadn't stirred at all. It was evening now, and Naia's eyes were closed as she sat on the cave floor holding the boy's hand. //Tlili the young girl couldn't sit still for long, but soon she decided to join Naia again, and this time she just held Kwanza's other hand as a friend. Holding him thus she felt such peace that shortly she began to sleep.

The next morning //Tlili and Naia woke at the same moment. Kwanza was sitting up. He was still holding their hands, but his fever was gone, and he was looking at his leg. Its color was normal, and over the wound there had formed a clean dry scab that was crisscrossed with bright green tendrils of mycelium. The fungus had clearly taken 'root' in the wound, but within an hour the tendrils had faded to a dull green that dried and shriveled until there was no trace of the bogada on the hard and perfect scab. . . .”

Carressa's story trailed off, and she sat silent for a while, staring at the fire. Artemis got up and threw a couple more sticks on the coals. She wasn't sure where this story was heading, but she was increasingly sure that this Carressa with her ancient naked body and no possessions save a rugged homemade bow was a stranger animal than herself. What was such an old woman doing out here in the middle of the Hawaiian jungle with no possessions, not even a campsite, just stories?

Artemis wanted to know. She began politely. "The wind is bringing in some clouds, and the stars are disappearing. I guess nothing is as certain as rain in a rain forest."

"Yes."

"So this Eve, this //Tlili, she seems to have been fully human, modern even, at the dawn of the human race, and she lived in a difficult and violent time where a war between the sexes almost ended humanity, and she found a great antiseptic. She named the antiseptic Bogada, which means connection, and which you said earlier is also the name of your 'tribe', and this all presumably has something to do with saving civilization. I'm sure there is an important moral or something that you are driving at, but I fail to see it, so far. But what I think I may really want to know Carressa is what brings you out here."

"Patience! I say again. I will tell you in the course of this story why I am here. There will come a time soon in the story, in her life, where I would say that //Tlili had completed a significant circle around the Rose Mandala, significant for civilization; I will mention it then. For now you should know that it's all connected. Ha!"

## 10. Iboga

Carressa got up and crept through the darkness to the stream where she bent like an old ungulate till her lips touched the water to drink. She came back, her crinkled flesh shivering slightly, and sat next to the fire where she started to begin again, but she was interrupted by Artemis:

“Before you start Carressa, I’m sorry, but I have taken some anthropology, and these people seem awfully smart, that is they seem modern, and I don’t just mean //Tlili. I think I remember reading recently that humans only fully developed our modern brain capacity or intelligence, and our language skills, in response to survival stresses starting from that big volcanic eruption around seventy thousand years ago, and they say we probably kept evolving till, well *now* actually. Yet you are saying //Tlili lived a hundred forty thousand years ago.”

“The arrival of modern human intelligence is not that simple. The changes have been subtle. As I said earlier we Homo sapiens really aren’t that different from Homo erectus, who existed starting over a million years ago. They had fire, and they were highly social. It is in the nature of the struggle of the ego to find balance that judges the ‘other’ to be of less value than itself, and the further removed the other is from the ego the less value. Hence one’s own family is often of less value than one’s self, neighbors of even less value, and other cultures of less value still, particularly as they become further removed in space, time, and genetics, or species taxonomy. This tendency is the main reason we tend to assume that earlier humans were significantly less conscious, but they weren’t. As I’ve said, chimps and dolphins are similar enough to us in consciousness that you could make a strong argument that killing them is murder.

Now, shall I continue?”

“Yes I suppose, please do.”

Three years passed, and because the prepubescent boy Kwanza was still weak and skinny old Naia was able to keep an uneasy peace with N!lkua, but the end of the truce was coming because Kwanza was beginning to grow. It seemed he would be a fairly tall man, but he would always be thin. Full puberty wasn't far off.

During this time there were perhaps a dozen pregnancies, but the clan did not grow. //Tlili's older cousin died along with her baby due to hemorrhaging while giving birth. Another newborn died of diarrhea, three more died of the fever. Fully four more babies died by the decree of N!lkua because three were boys of uncertain fathers and one was a girl with a large birthmark. Four newborns lived, but one of the older girls, a boy, and one of the hunters wives died of the yellow fever, and typhus. Another girl was eaten by lions, a rare but not unheard of event. This rate of attrition was not particularly unusual for a group of mammals, and the People with their parochial Paleolithic mindset took it more or less in stride, though they *were* fully human and certainly felt profound emotional pain.

//Tlili's medicinal skills increased. Although many died many more were healed by her and Naia, and she attained a measure of respect among the people, but though she searched in many hollow trees and discovered a couple of insectivorous bat families she found no more Bogada.

As the season's passed //Tlili came to feel certain that she had made a true friend in the gentle talkative Kwanza. He spent most of his time with the women because he was too skinny to be taken on the hunt, nor was he welcome among the men. He had already developed a rather fatalistic attitude about ever finding a proper place in the world; luckily he didn't seem to care. When he was with Naia and //Tlili he was a fine enough gatherer, although he certainly didn't have //Tlili's aptitude. He and //Tlili could both hunt small game, and this was one of Kwanza's chief pleasures. Although Kwanza was no good at throwing a man sized spear he did like to take risks. He loved climbing as much as //Tlili. He liked climbing to the very top of acacia trees, and would leap from one tree top bough to another. He found pleasure in testing himself against animals. He loved to stalk them, particularly the dangerous ones. He had stalked rhino, hippos, and

oryx; approaching within a few feet, and he stalked very close to a giant long horned buffalo and the giraffe like sivetherium; both species of which are now extinct. He had a bit of a passion for snakes; in three years he had found and picked up several small puff adders, and a number of smaller black mambas.

Because Naia and //Tlili had saved his life and protected him from N!lkua Kwanza felt indebted to his two spirit women as he liked to call them. He was always finding special gifts of food or treasure for them. One day he ran up to //Tlili, panting hard and laughing even harder, “Look! Look! I found this meat with a lovely skin for you. He held a still living Death adder by the head. //Tlili knew that even seasoned hunters died attempting such stunts. “Ayyyee!” //Tlili screamed in frustration. “You risk your life for such a gift when Naia and I have worked so hard to keep you safe!” At first Kwanza looked as if he were about to cry, but then he simply laughed again, and sensing no malice the girl had to forgive him.

When //Tlili menstruated for the first time it was early in the dry season. The clan was camped out in the savanna next to another small hammock of baobab trees that were not far from a water hole, or kopjes. Now generally kopjes is a name for igneous rock extrusions or clusters of huge granite boulders that stick up out of the east African plains, but this was *The Kopjes* because it surrounded a permanent water hole, a kind of artesian spring in the rocks. Although it could be accessed from the plain by circuitous paths through the boulders, it was not popular with prey animals because poor visibility among the rocks and limited escape routes made prey susceptible to ambush from predators.

When Naia became aware of //Tlili’s bleeding she said, “There is no iboga root left in my bag. In two days I think you will have finished your period, and we will hike toward the setting sun to find some more iboga for your coming of age.”

The hallucinogen iboga was the central ceremonial plant of the People. *It is still used, even now Artemis, in the 21st century for religious ceremonies in West Africa, primarily in the small country of Cameroon, but it's incredible antiquity in human culture is not known to hardly anyone but the Bogada tribe.*

As now in Cameroon so also one hundred forty thousand years ago; children who were coming of age connected to their medicine totem or spirit with the help of iboga. The root was, and is, also used by hunters, who before any serious hunt drink a mild tea made out of the plant's ground root bark. For hunters the purpose of the drink was to strengthen the awareness of the unseen world. In a coming of age ceremony a much larger dose was used. For girls in //Tlili's clan this ceremony was presided over by Naia, for the boys it was Nixa, but either way it was an event for the whole clan, and it was perhaps the most important ritual in the People's lives. . .

In //Tlili's youth the plant grew in the forests that bordered the western edge of the arid portion of the east African savanna. Naia chose Nixa the hunter and sometime shaman to accompany her on the journey west across the semi desert to get the Iboga root. With them went Kwanza and //Tlili.

The tradition of coming of age rituals is so ancient that it predates Homo sapiens. The ancient Homo erectus created many clan cultures that had waxed and waned in multi millennia long cycles where chanting, and scarring or piercing were rituals used to initiate new adult members.

By N!lkua's time it was already an ancient tradition within Homo Sapiens clans to use Iboga as the lubricant to psychological introspection in coming of age rituals. It wouldn't have occurred to one of the People, even as destructive a person as N!lkua, to stand in the way of such a vital process, and of course he needed the root for hunting. He was happy to allow Nixa, his chief crony, to accompany Naia's party to ensure the journey's success. Nixa would protect Naia and //Tlili, and Kwanza knew he would gain more safety and education by making the journey then by staying in camp where only respect for Naia had kept him from harm.

The day after //Tlili stopped bleeding they drank at the waterhole then filled ostrich eggs (as humans had not yet developed the use of water skins



or bladders). They set out across the arid savanna carefully carrying the eggs by hand. After the first day the eggs were empty, then they had to rely on finding water root -- which even //Tlili was hard pressed to find. So some level of thirst was ever present.

As they walked //Tlili felt like talking. “Naia do other clans of the People use iboga?”

“Yes child I believe they all do.”

“But, what I want to know,” said Kwanza, “Is how many clans are there, and where do they live? When I was little Old Tsa used to say that there was a huge tribe up North towards the sun, but when we got here there was only you, the /Santo.”

Naia knit Her brow, “When I was a girl I knew of at least four other clans that I can think of, beyond the Dil/koa and the People, or the /Santo to you Kwanza, and I seem to remember encountering two of the other clans during marches from rainy camp to dry camp, but it was very long ago; before the fevers got so bad. I think Nixa’s grandmother from his mother was of the Ch!du clan. She was an adventurous girl. She should perhaps have become a Shaman. But she was killed by hyenas.”

They all looked at Nixa who was walking somewhat in front of them. //Tlili called, “Nixa. What of your Grandma? What was she like?”

Nixa didn’t seem to hear her.

//Tlili wondered about it. Beyond the People what other humans were left in the world? She couldn’t say. There was purportedly the clan of Dil/koa women, and //Tlili knew there were a few males, some wandering singly, and the clan’s own bachelor camp had a few men that the women only saw intermittently at a distance. There may have been other groups of humans, but whatever became of them in the wide world //Tlili was never to fully know.

“Well anyway //Tlli,” Kwanza prattled, “If you could be an actual //Tlili bird, what would you do?”

“I would fly to the place where there is water that goes on forever. Naia says that it is about a moon’s walk toward where the sun rises.”

“I would come with you, and I would be a stork.” Kwanza smiled showing his very white teeth, trying, maybe, to look stork-like.

“Well I would perhaps rather be a sunbird than a //tlili,” said the girl, “That’s all. They are small as well, but they’re like crystal rocks with wings.”

“You could rest on my back. But //tlili birds fish, they’re more interesting.”

“I have watched them both carefully, and //tlilis eat fish, yes quite beautifully, but Sunbirds simply drink from lovely flowers. ... Kwanza, did you ever wonder why there are so many Erectus, but so few of us?”

“Kwun//lex, my uncle, who was killed by your Big Man, once told me that the Humans are few because we are the lords of the world; just as there are less lions than antelope. We are few.”

“How are we the lords?”

“Because,” he said, “because we talk!”

Kwanza started to click and chatter a mess of nonsense:

“/ ! /// !! //Tlili she swings freely through the branches day and night. She gathers herbs, she gathers nuts, she sings and chatters but won’t fight. You see she talks, and as she walks, she acts so very smart and bright, But maybe it’s nothing cause she sulks and creeps away from fire rites.”

“You are ridicules, but maybe somehow what you say is correct. The Erectus don’t talk as we do, or they don’t seem to, but they are still many, and the hunters say the Erectus hunt elephants, and they don’t fear anything.

Naxa, what is it like to fight the Erectus?” //Tlili shouted to the hunter who was a good thirty paces in front of them.

He turned and slowed down. For some reason the question seemed to bother him. “They fight like hyenas. They are sneaky and unpredictable, and normally they just run away, but don’t count on it!”

Eventually the savanna gave way to forest. It was a gradual process as solitary acacia and balanite trees became more common and closely spaced, giving way to thickets, and finally woodlands. They began to drop into a valley where the plant life turned lush and close.

“See here! It’s a small iboga bush,” said Naia. They all stopped while she made the serpentine movement indicating reverence with her hands.

“It’s not large enough to collect the roots, but on the far side of the river at this valley’s bottom, up among the rocks, there are many of the sacred plant.”

//Tlili and Kwanza looked at the plant with its curious yellow orange fruit, hanging like eyeless fish, floating like spirits among the stems and leaves.



*iboga*

“The fruit is too powerful for our use, inedible; we want the roots, but not here.”

Naia led them away.

When they reached the valley bottom //Tlili saw that the ‘river’ was just a wide and sluggish creek meandering through the undergrowth. They crossed it without incident, but on the far side they found and started to follow a trail, taking it to the left as it followed the creek downstream.

Naxa was leading as usual. He was normally a reserved and taciturn man. So he didn’t speak or even signal them, but it was obvious to the others when his movements became agitated and furtively stealthy that this trail made him very uneasy. They all began to look around wondering what it was that he sensed. They came round a bend to a clearing, and they had but a moment to take in a fire ring. Then they all heard it, a kind of guttural hooting coming from further down the path on the far side of the clearing.

There was no time to re-cross the stream. Instead they dashed to the right, across the clearing, and up into a grove of balanite trees and wild date

palms with an undergrowth of mostly bush willows, which only partially concealed them. Following Naxa's lead they quietly used as much detritus from the forest floor as they could to cover themselves, and only just in time, as a large troop of perhaps twenty Homo erectus entered the clearing below.

The People had met Homo erectus often enough that //Tlili had seen them several times at a considerable distance across the savanna. But the two subspecies intentionally avoided one another, and //Tlili had never seen them so close.

The males were tall and robust, at least as big as the men of her clan, with the possible exception of N!lkua. But the women were slightly smaller. They had large boney ridges above their eyes, but though their heads were arguably larger than the People's, the main difference was that they seemed to have barely any forehead at all.

Yes Erectus looked different, but they were obviously similar to the People. Yet for //Tlili there was an even bigger difference than their appearance; it was almost immediately obvious to her that they didn't seem to possess any verbal language. There were no clicks, no variation in vocal sounds beyond basic grunts, growls, moans, and sighs. They were expressive though, she could see through the trees that they used their faces and hands as they communicated far more than the people did.

It was to be a long day; one of the Erectus men had brought a large wad of mongongo leaves that turned out to contain a mass of clay which in turn contained a pile of embers. These they used to build a fire upon which they began to cook some sort of root. Even though she was scared //Tlili was excited because she had never seen that particular root before.

The situation became most precarious as the Erectus began to forage around the clearing for firewood. Several times they came frightfully close to her and Kwanza. One child walked obliviously right through //Tlili's group and could have almost tripped over Naia. They all saw there was no hope of making an undetected escape.

It was terrifying to //Tlili to sit there imagining being captured, not able to move. She couldn't itch, or adjust her position; she was only barely even able to breathe. //Tlili had heard many times that if Erectus caught one of the People they would eat them.

Surely that was true, but among themselves Erectus actually seemed a little more comfortable with one another than the People did. For one thing the women seemed louder, less subdued, and there was more sex. //Tlili was astonished.

*Artemis you might not have considered it, but there is a fairly direct correlation between the degree that a culture emphasizes monogamy and the degree that sex is considered a private act.*

Living in a small polygamous Paleolithic clan //Tlili was used to seeing fairly overt sexual behavior, but Erectus took it to a new level. She was stuck there for the better part of a day, and during that time among the twenty two Homo erectus, of whom fourteen were adults, she saw genitals connect between males and females, males and males, and females and females, maybe thirty times.

There was still a big dominate male, but he wasn't as abusive, and he didn't subdue either the females or the males as much.

The other thing //Tlili observed was that the average Homo erectus looked less healthy then one of the People. They were all unusually filthy or covered with sores. Two of the children certainly seemed to have the fever, yet she saw no medicine bag. How was it that there seemed to be more Homo erectus if they were so unhealthy? Could these strange creatures really have been responsible for the loss of purple wetchla? She wondered, was this group representative of Homo erectus as a whole people?

Eventually it grew dark and one by one the Erectus drifted off into sleep beside their fire. For //Tlili fear began to give way to boredom. Later she found herself quietly shaken from sleep by Naia. Soon after Naxa led them right through the sleeping forms and on down the path.

The next morning they found the iboga grove. After they all genuflected in accordance with Naia's lead they quickly dug up a large supply of roots. The return trip was a thirsty one, but it was otherwise uneventful. .

*-and here Carressa paused; and Artemis watched as the old woman's voice trailing off as if into a memory. . .*

## 11. Iron Bird

As Dave Hackel flew towards Kohala for the first time that day he was musing silently:

“I think that any man down there who would run around naked is either no better than an animal or he’s perverted, or both. And a woman who would do that... well she’s just a whore.”

Dave knew he should keep such politically incorrect thoughts largely to himself. He opened up with such opinions to only a couple of his closest friends.

He had seen something crouched in the bushes during the yesterday’s last trip, but it was just a glimpse. It looked like a human’s backside, tanned but still fairly white. Haoli probably. He had seen the back, and part of somebody’s butt, for just a moment. He wasn’t certain, but it had seemed to be a woman’s butt. He hadn’t mentioned it to his customers as he named the various waterfalls and pointed out the remnant ruins of the old Hawaiians as they flew over the Wiapio and on to the cliffs at the sea edge of the Kohala forest.

“It’s so beautiful down there” said one of the tourists, a thin older woman with unnatural looking red hair.

Her husband spoke up, “How do people get in or out? I’ve seen almost no trails. That country looks rough.”

“I go there,” said Dave. “I hunt the wild boar, else wise they’d tear the place up.” He added this last part, which was true, in response to an alarmed look from the wife.

“Actually I’m planning on a pack trip as far in as the Punalui valley this weekend.”

“Why don’t you fly?”

“There’s pretty much no place to land, and as I’m hunting, it might scare away the prey.”

Prey is the word, he thought. He had seen them in there a few other times, stupid hippies mostly. Somehow it galled him. Man or woman,

running around naked, way back in there, and if they were naked you bet they weren't armed. He would never go into a wilderness without a gun. . .

He banked the helicopter and headed straight toward the cliffs, right up to where a large waterfall fell hundreds of feet directly into the sea. Dave deftly brought the craft close enough to the falls that the wind from the rotors blew the spray about. They bobbed around in the cross-drafts next to the cliff as his customers tried to decide if they wanted to take pictures or just cling to their seats.

Dave smiled grimly at their agitation. "This is Punalui falls. It's six hundred thirty feet high, the fourth highest falls on the island."



*Kohala sea cliffs*

"It's beautiful," the women said again.

"Wild country," her husband added.

Dave nodded, bored by the repetitive conversation, "Well I'm going in this next weekend. Headed first to that valley over there. Boar tracking is always exciting. I think it's going to be a very interesting trip cause I'm bound to catch something. . . ."

He thought about it, overcoming the fear: It was about stepping up to the plate and doing what needed to be done. The problem was that so many



people were either too timid or too stupid to really take life on, and they depend on, or mooched off of, those with the strength to succeed.

Dave's father was an alcoholic, often abusive, but his mother had put up with it. It was an old story, and its effect was compounded in that Dave was the middle son and the biggest of three brothers. He'd been required to learn from a young age that you simply had to rely on yourself. He felt that if he'd managed it; others could to, and if they couldn't that was just the nature of the world. He had darker ideas than these, half formed ideas, quasi thoughts of domination that he kept just under the level of cognition. He kind of knew they were there. It wasn't a lack of intelligence that kept the thoughts hidden. Experience had taught him long ago that impulsive behavior was less painful. If he kept certain feelings unarticulated then when stimulus brought them to the fore he could act on them as a justified reaction. Then his actions felt innocent, without the guilt that comes from premeditation.

He turned the helicopter back towards civilization. A couple of the remaining endangered palilas, females, flew off their nests in fright for the fifth time that day, and below, Carressa sitting by herself motionless and hidden heard him too. Her heart skipped a couple of beats as the chopper flew over.

But what was a noisy helicopter to the crone against the majesty of the cosmos? She didn't know him, but she suspected correctly that his tourists, after all, were oblivious to the effect their machine was having on the life forms over which they flew.

"We do what we can. That we must do," the old woman mused, "and it's such a useful old cliché that judgments should be proportional and never ultimate."

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## 12. //Tlili's Solo

"You stopped. Are you all right?" Artemis almost shouted at her. Carressa seemed to have drifted off

"Carressa!"

"Yes? . . .

Oh, I'm sorry dear. I'm really getting a bit old you know. . . "

"I'm sorry Carressa. Perhaps I should just let you sleep?"

. "No. No. Let's see, we had left off at. . .

Shortly after the iboga party arrived back at camp there was a raw blood feast to mark the commencement of //Tlili's coming of age ceremony. As in most tribal cultures human menstrual blood was profane, not to be touched or looked upon by a hunter. It represented death and the dark side of the feminine, but it also meant fertility and birth which still had some value. Ungulate blood certainly was not profane, and coming of age was an important enough event that an indirect symbol of it was rather sacred. The hunters had managed to spear a gemsbok, and the adults and //Tlili ate the raw liver.

Afterwards //Tlili was to spend five days alone. The spot chosen for this was a small fissure or cave on the far side of The Kopjes. This was a couple of miles from the camp, and she went there alone with Naia. The old woman showed her the fissure then promptly left.

The cave was uncomfortable; she could barely slither in to where there was a spot wide enough so she could turn around, and there she sat down, leaned back against the rock wall, and faced out. She spent most of the first day watching the opening with her child's spear on her legs, her butt and back cool against the pleasantly clammy stone. While listening, or half listening, for sabertooths, lions, hyenas, and leopards she softly smacked flies and mosquitoes and ran click songs through her head.

At the end of that first day Naia brought food, mongongo and mangetti nuts, and baobab fruit.

//Tlili said, “Naia I know I am to have ‘visions,’ but what precisely am I supposed to be doing out here?”

“As you know, soon, when you drink the iboga you will meet our ancestors, and beyond them you may meet the spirits that make up the world and perhaps even the one spirit beyond. You already know this. All you need to do is prepare yourself. Put into your mind what you want to ask the spirits. Just as we often lose our focus in a dream so you must stay awake when you meet the spirit world.”

That night was //Tlili’s first full night completely alone in the bush. In the near total darkness she spent much of the time craving fire. She sat silently mouthing a fire chant of the clan. She praised the heat of coals and the crackling flames of a great clan bonfire.

Eventually she simply sat in the dark crack through the moonless night, spear ready, with her ears strained for the sound of the lion. As a ward against the chill of the night she wrapped her nakedness in her antelope skin blanket, but she didn’t sleep at all.

The next day //Tlili felt more relaxed, and she fell asleep a few times. The day was safer; it was when predators slept. Still, she kept her awareness up. In the crack sound was the best sense for detecting danger, but sounds from the world outside were muffled by the buzz and whine of flies and mosquitoes. This was an irritation, but she managed to keep the bugs on the edge of her consciousness rather than the center. A group of female elephants came to drink, and she watched them carefully from her crack. Such indestructible towers of strength. They ignored her.

It was on this second day that she began to seriously consider what she wanted to ask the spirits; there were so many questions:

“Must I be forced to mate with my father N!lkua?” She pushed this aside. “The plains teem with life, and it seems that there are legions of all the other types of beings, from baboons to ibexes, giraffes to sunbirds, fruit bats to lions. Why not the People?” Even of the other clan’s that she regularly saw, they were all members of Erectus, of which at a distance she had seen hundreds in her life.

She didn’t have words to count beyond ten, but she had never seen more than fifty of the People all told, and she could sense the difference

quite easily. She had heard from Naia and other elders that there were more clans, or used to be. So why were there so few now? Why weren't there more humans when there were so many Erectus? Didn't Erectus die of the fevers? They seemed less healthy. Maybe they had a secret area where they could find purple wetchla.

Should she ask the spirits where the purple wetchla was?

Then there were the People themselves, which now basically consisted of just her little group of clan members, though from Kwanza she knew something of the Di/lkoa . . .

Kwanza had said that the women in the Dil/koa clan had kicked out the men. Now that was a strange thing to do! Yet it seemed so right. After all N!lkua wasn't helping *her* clan. It seemed a strange thing to even expect him to help. He was certainly a force of the world, a panther, but he was so wrong somehow, like a very bad sickness that a wise shaman should be able to prevent. It seemed obvious to her that the people would do better without him.

The men protected the People, yes, but with N!lkua and the Big Men, on some level everybody was beaten into submission, like dogs in a pack or lions in a pride. Everything just served the big man's needs; all independent powers were sublimated. If for instance, a girl was beautiful then she had a sexual power, which was only allowed if she was subservient and served the big man.

But hadn't N!lkua saved them from the Dil/koa when they attacked? He protected the people. Then again, did the People really need N!lkua to save them from other men who act like N!lkua? Maybe they did. When predators attacked or threatened the men risked their lives to defend the clan. "But something is still wrong though", she muttered to herself. Who was she to have such thoughts? Just a girl, and she had to give him credit for that, she had gotten an initiation ceremony, she was valued, every initiated person was valued, at least to an extent. . .

One advantage of one's total human society consisting of less than thirty members is that, even if the leader thinks you are unimportant or expendable, you know in your bones that it's not true. Your opinion, your input, counts. //Tlili was thirteen, and that's a bit late for *Paleolithic* puberty; still it's a very young age. But young as she was, she was serious now, most

of her cerebral growth had occurred, and she felt her own power. - She knew she was on the cusp of a solution to a profound problem, and the solution seemed hopefully simple.

As she meditated on the foibles of the tribe she studied a small ruddy stone on the floor of the crack. It was a smooth piece of red granite, lovely in and of itself. “Somehow we’re not whole, like that stone.” Then she drifted back to thoughts of Kwanza.

“It’s not men that are the problem, because Kwanza is a man, and he’s not the problem. The Dil/lkoa women are wrong to blame all men, but it is a common type of man or a mostly male behavior that’s too powerful, and that’s the problem; K//t!roa, That’s the word I will use. Ha!”

Artemis, you see it was then that, //Tlili invented a word. Which is an easy thing to do when you are part of the handful of humans who exist and are therefore the sole custodians of the only human language. It was a fortunate thing because it would take a woman of some major cultural power to propagate such a word in the modern patriarchal world. That’s why ‘K//t!roa’ now has no equivalent in most post hunter gatherer languages.

The People, being naked, had a word for when a man’s penis became erect at unfortunate or socially awkward times, of which the closest English equivalent is dork, which means both penis and socially awkward. Paltrorks is the word I will use for //Tlili’s word. It’s a fairly English iteration of the combination of consonants by which //Tlili made K//t!roa because it combines patriarchal, tribal, alpha male, dork, and syndrome. Paltrorks.

//Tlili continued talking to herself, “So then what is ‘*paltrorks*?’ *Paltrorks* is one of the People’s main problems. Big Men like N!lkua are *paltrorks*, domineering, but that makes sense, by dominating everyone they

get all the food and sex. But the People are paltrorks too. It's they who support it. It seems crazy, but I guess it's normal because in the bigger world I guess even the lions do it, and the baboons - they are *paltrorks*

//Tlili sat for hours, and she focused as hard as she could on the problem of N!lkua and paltrorks. It was the very size of her clan, and the existential threat that she was beginning to realize it faced, that made her aware that she needed to think outside of the mores she'd been raised with. The day was nearing its end when the pieces that puzzled her seemed to click together:

The Dil/koa were partly right, they needed a group of women, preferably wise women like Naia, to rule, but men needed to be allowed to participate even help or they would fight, even Kwanza would, they just couldn't have ultimate say, and no one person should; that would end in paltrorks. How this change could be achieved and maintained in her clan she didn't know, but she knew . . .

That it should be a kind of circle of the women who should rule.

Women would care more about keeping the clan going.

Clan members, particularly women and children, would get more respect so they would thrive.

The clan should be like the elephants; they managed it because their focus was bigger; not on the one chief matriarch, but on the group and on themselves individually as part of the group.

//Tlili still felt uncertain that she could defend her point of view, "Then there is Naia. She notices the world. She has compassion. I think the People would thrive if she ruled. She'd be better than N!lkua... But could she stop a pack of hyenas, or Erectus, or other clans?

I think she could, with enough women, but wouldn't that make them just like N!lkua?

No! I don't think most women are like most men. You see it in the little girls; they want to practice taking care of babies, but most of the little boys want to practice hunting and killing. . . .

But we *need* hunters, meat is so good, without it we would starve, but then again the tubers, insects, grubs, and nuts the women gather are what feeds us most of the time.

But not all of the time, not during the heart of the dry times, and nothing satisfies like meat. Still, women, who raise the children and gather most of the food are, if anything, *more* important than hunters.

So Paltrorks goes against much of that which is most useful in us, and it makes our souls small. It makes the People focus inward on themselves only. We don't use our awareness our intelligence to see the world, and we don't see our place in the world. As it is the People haven't noticed the baobab tree, and in their Big Man *paltrorks* selfishness they are dying off."

. She felt elated that she had worked this out, should she tell Naia, or should she ask the spirits if she was right, or both?

That evening Naia brought nothing but a small pile of baobab fruit, and as per tradition //Tlili knew that she was now to see no one for four more days. Naia said nothing, but gravely bowed her head to //Tlili and left. The fruit was to be her only food for three days, and on the last day she was to fast. The People's tradition was that if a young man or woman couldn't survive essentially alone for five days with the courage to face the solitude and with the skill to not be eaten then they were not worthy of the world.

On the second night //Tlili was so tired that she had to sleep, but the mortal awareness that she could easily become a meal kept her from sleeping deeply. She started awake numerous times during the night. She was aided in this by the insects. It seemed there were more and more mosquitoes and flies the longer she stayed in the cave. Most of the places the clan chose to rest or camp in were based largely on the location's inhospitability to bugs. Generally this meant the camps had a consistent gentle breeze. But there was no breeze in the crack, and that combined with its proximity to the water hole made it a great place for insects. //Tlili was miserable, not only due to her physical discomfort but because even in that remote date the novice shaman knew enough to connect annoying bugs with ill health.

The third day arrived and //Tlili was very tired and irritable, but she remembered her coming appointment with the spirits; so she wanted to focus on the baobabs and why they spoke to her. *-This is important Artemis because //Tlili's thoughts about the baobab were not common animism. Her thoughts*

*were different than those of almost any 'primitive' hunter gatherer tribe you might encounter.-*

-Was it really the baobabs? What *did* she like? She emptied her head of words and let herself daydream about the trees. . . .

She liked that the baobab's branches, so often naked, netted the stars, and they held the sky. She liked the waves of wind whipped grass that lapped about the tree boles. She was young enough that sex held no serious appeal, but she loved Kwanza, and knew that adult women could enjoy it. And there was the beautiful, mysterious, but frightening reality of birth. So the vulva like fissures so common in baobabs, and their fat phallic trunks held a kind of deep foreboding allure.

She felt she should ask the spirits something about the baobabs. Why did she love them? Was it really them that she loved? She remembered climbing in them. The people often hammered stick pins into the soft bark to get to the higher branches for eggs, but mostly for honey. It was dangerous. People had fallen to their deaths. But that hadn't been her sense: how secure she felt, and here her mind began to drift again as she thought of climbing with Nixa, and that led to thoughts of the People, of her mother's gentleness, of the girl friends she had slept next to as a small child who had since died, and of all the people she had hugged, of Naia, and now of Kwanza.

Amid her time spent on mingled thoughts of baobabs and people //Tili had to creep out of the crack to drink when no other large mammal was using the water hole. She was returning from her drink, glancing about furtively, when she saw a hollow stick lying among the rocks.

"Well I will be born of a baobab," she whispered, "I'll bet termites hollowed that out."

When she returned to her crack her mind drifted again, and she thought of sunbirds calling and the gravelly voices of the young hunters chanting around bonfires while she danced in the dark, and as she crouched in the rocks one of her hands found her crotch. She rubbed it gently, and she leaned her head against the stone and holding the stick with the other hand she blew sounds into it, mostly raspberries, until she discovered an



amazing haunting sound. This was a revelation. Now she had something to focus on. She practiced and honed the sound for hours, feeling the stick was a kind of mini Baobab. Eventually pleasurably exhausted she cat napped, and then half dozed through the rest of the day and into the early evening when a herd of zebra filed through The Kopjes.

That night she woke to hear lions growling nearby. This brought her back to a state of awareness so tense that eventually she felt she must sooth herself by practicing playing her stick through the darkest part of the night. Did the sound interest the lions? Perhaps, but the crack was so small, they left it alone. Still, she only slept fitfully toward morning.

//Tlili, the young girl woman, was bleary and bug bitten to weary distraction by the fourth day. But she realized that though she certainly had a healthy fear of death, she also knew that the fear didn't run her, and she felt this knowledge would give her grace when she communed with the creators of the world.

On the fourth night she was attacked by hyenas. She was dozing when one tried to lunge into the dark crack, but the spear which was propped up on her knees and pointing outward caught the massive animal sufficiently to stop it. For the next half hour //Tlili poked, stabbed, and beat at growling sounds in the almost total darkness until the hyenas must have wearied, because they left as suddenly as they had attacked.

She sat sobbing in the darkness. The attack had been terrifying, but she had won, and her only injury was that she had skinned her elbows on the rock walls while thrashing with the spear in the darkness. Eventually between the pain, the exhaustion, the bugs, the hunger, and the fear, she began to feel as if she was somehow outside herself, and she continued thus into the dawn limply holding the spear and the hollow stick, and then the full blue sky day was upon her, and Naia arrived with a small rough wooden bowl of nuts and grubs and another of thick iboga root mush. They hugged, and then //Tlili ate the nuts and grubs and then weakly described the events of the previous four days and nights. Naia made no judgment, she simply focused on the insects. "Do you hate the flies and mosquitoes?"

“Yes!”

“Why?”

“They take our dignity.”

“Is that so bad?”

“Surely we should at least have some dignity,” said //Tlili.

“Well then do you hate the hyenas?”

“Yes! I mean No. I, . . . I fear the hyenas, but only so far. “

“Then you don’t hate them?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“The hyenas are just doing what they do. They hunt.”

“Then do you hate Nilkua?”

//Tlili thought this old feeling over in a new light, “maybe not.”

“What do you mean?”

“I should not hate him, but I’m sure I should resist him; it’s like the hyenas.”

“Then what about the flies?”

“I don’t know. I still hate them.”

“It is very hard to find any grace in some of the things in this world.

Now it’s time to return //Tlili, and as soon as we get back to camp you are to eat this mush.”

There was no word for grace in the ancient language, but as she had talked Naia had been able to communicate it with her hands in an elegant dancing wave movement.

On the way to camp, moments after leaving the crack, they stopped briefly at the water hole, and the woman and the girl washed themselves. In her still famished state the girl’s eyes bulged as she looked about for here again, as always, they knew they had to be wary of all manner of predators. Then they left The Skopjes with //Tlili carrying her hollow stick.

### 13. Eating the Bitter Root

When they returned to camp there was pandemonium because in preparation for //Tlili every adult in the tribe had drunk a small quantity of the root. The People seemed unified in disunity, a naked mass of semi human animals. –They surrounded the girl who was to come of age, all the while calling and acting in the spirit of their respective totems, and most of them were possessed of a ferocity that was only barely sublimated to the tribal order.

They growled, roared, and screeched while goading //Tlili to drink the mush. It sounds absurd to tell of such behavior, but the effect was transporting. Only old Naia acted relatively human, though she had drunk the root as well. The shaman held two twisted sticks over //Tlili's head, the symbol of the eland.

A healthy mature eland was the ancient symbol the People had for a fertile woman. It was the largest antelope that the clan commonly hunted, and its round succulent haunches laced with life giving fat made it the most favored animal a hunter could catch in the famine prone dry times. As she offered //Tlili the iboga Naia made the sharp clicking sound often heard from the tendons of a mature eland as it walked through the bush. From time immemorial the people only made this sound when giving iboga to a girl coming of age, and the rest of the women in the clan began to click like a heard of elder eland as //Tlili drank.

//Tlili, being famished, drank the root bark mush quickly, the large initiate's dose. She was Eve, and perhaps it was the forbidden fruit, but though it was potent at the time, in the end I don't think iboga itself was the source of any great change in //Tlili; and at any rate humanity had already eaten it.

Iboga tastes amazingly terrible, and much of it went right through //Tlili's empty stomach into her small intestine where it began to affect her

almost immediately. Her sense of self, of being //Tlili, faded quickly. It felt akin to death, but this didn't cause her undue anxiety; she who had seen her share of death, and she who had just braved a fast, solitude, endless insects, and hyenas, was not afraid.

In what followed //Tlili was to remember no clear timeline. As I said, the important thing, reflecting back on it in later ages of her life, was that most of what she could remember seemed relatively unimportant, though it was sometimes vivid and beautiful, it was, mostly illusion.

Still, she has said that for much of that time she was in a deep unmoving trance, and she remembered laying out on a rock by the camp in daylight, and that the daylight memory somehow bled into a windy night with a sky where the stars formed a kind of shaking scintillating grid. At about the period where the stars were scintillating she remembered vomiting, without great discomfort, until her stomach was empty. Then there was a cruel looking panther staring at her that she knew to be N!lkua, .

Next she remembered laying in a tiny grass lean-to, or werf, created for her to be alone in, and she remembered the kind face of Naia appearing occasionally. She also knew several days passed. And, later, //Tlili remembered the spirits.

She knew that at some indeterminate point she spoke with the spirit of her grandfather, the old big man. She remembered that he was lecturing, barely aware of her. He went on and on. The gist of it was something about the importance of aiding his tribe, keeping it going. --Which she knew was an ironic prospect since he and most of his offspring had been killed and replaced by N!lkua.

Then there was a shaman woman, *the* shaman woman, or was she the mother of all tribes, or the mother of all, perhaps she was the land itself? The Great Mother said nothing to //Tlili. She was old, but beautiful; Instead of hair she had feathers, iridescent as a sunbird's. When she looked at //Tlili the wind began to blow causing all the trees in the savanna except for the Baobabs to bend and undulate, like an ocean of grass the trees also blew in waves, and //Tlili heard a beautiful melodious clicking from hundreds of unseen voices, voices of the ancestors, to the rhythm of

massive drumming sticks, but she never got to ask the mother of all any questions, or rather, it seemed that questions were trivial.

Then, and this she felt was somehow very important, she heard something she felt no human had ever heard before: A chorus of voices singing a full bodied beautiful song, or songs, blending in harmony while bats flew silhouetted against the moon.

Later, perhaps the same night, there was a sky with stars so bright they grew, till they pushed, glittering white with shimmering blue green and yellow rings, against each other, the blackness in between them incidental. This gave way to a sunrise with rows of brilliant orange chips of clouds, a sky full of pulsing bogada.

//Tlili may have lost her sense of self, she no longer knew she was //Tlili, but she knew she was searching for something, the totem animal, and it was eluding her. The clarity of the world she was in waxed and waned. Sometimes the ancient ones were silent shadows, sometimes fully formed -chattering humans. But she wasn't conscious enough to ask them any of her questions. So the ancient ones flitted through and around her, but no animal came to help or comfort her. . .

-Though there was one vision that seemed to repeat itself: The foundations of the earth seemed to buckle and push up on her. The sky was sometimes blue laced with arcs of undulating sunlight, and sometimes it was star filled, but it moved in very close, pressing her down. The wind came up, and the only solid thing was a baobab whose rooty branches held the sky up, yet laced it firmly to the earth. This simple vision of the baobab, the foundation of her real life, was repeated, and it finally brought her back to herself, //Tlili, lying in her little werf.

Four days had passed since she had drunk iboga, and four days before that of fasting in solitude. She was physically spent.

As was traditional the new adult was given until the full moon to recuperate from her communion with the spirits, and then there was another feast, this time a meal of simple fruits, nuts, and tubers.

The feast was followed by a naming bonfire: It started with Nllkua, who was followed by all the men, then all the women, and lastly the new

initiate; everyone was to dance mime their totem animal. It was also traditional that this was done to the beat of sticks on logs. The naming ceremony was taken very seriously because each individual's power came from the veneration of the spirit of their respective totem animal.

Coming of age was also a sexually significant event, particularly for girls; boys may be sexually ready to mate when they come of age, but if they were allowed to stay in the clan at all they had to sublimate their sexuality within the power structure. Girls, on the other hand, were to be considered sexually available soon after coming of age. There were no proper marriages although it was understood that every woman was to submit to the Big Man, should he so choose. But beyond that parenthood was not particularly important since all children were raised by the clan.

When a girl came of age, it was one of the only times that her body was adorned at all, and that was with antelope fat. As the time of the naming bonfire approached //Tlili's mother did this to her, massaging the fat mixed with a little red ocher into her skin, making her body shimmer like the sun just beginning to rise over the savanna, but there was little joy in it because of the mother and daughter's mutual dislike of the Big Man.

The evening finally came when the round moon was rising as the sun was setting, and the fire was lit. N!lkua started the ceremony and his animal was indeed the panther. He moved about the fire striking imagined game or stalking with a fierce graceful sinuosity until all felt that the panther spirit was truly among them. And so it went through the clan. The men tended to be predators, the women generally were prey, most of the People were mammals; one of the hunters, Xinza, was a serpent; the mamba, and predictably //Tlili's mother was a gazelle. Naia not unexpectedly was an elephant.

//Tlili's turn was approaching, and she was excited; though she had no animal she knew she had a totem, and she felt she would not hesitate to say what it was.

When the last woman, her cousin, finished //Tlili took the hollow stick and leaned it against her backside and stood under a Baobab facing the clan. She raised her arms crookedly, fingers outstretched, and was very still, glistening and beautiful in the firelight, her dark eyes shining.

There was confusion among the People. Why didn't she move? It wasn't right; it broke tradition, and for the men in particular it just wasn't sexual enough. What was her animal? Four of the hunters were not that closely related to her; they knew they must submit to N!lkua's will, but they could surely look at this new woman. They wanted to see //Tlili swing her hips, move her young breasts, dance provocatively, spread her legs a bit, and show off her sex. And that wasn't such a bad thing, not at all, even Naia expected it, approved of it. But the human Eve was in touch with the larger world of which animal nature is a vibrant and beautiful part, but only a part.

She said, "My Totem is the baobab. We connect the earth to the heavens. We are the womb *and* that which gives the seed of creation. You can hear the very spirit of life in our rooting branches."

The Initial response of the clan to this statement was shock. They were frightened and angry at this break with tradition, but mostly, after they gaped silently at her and considered the idea, they were just amused and finally bored. It seemed ridiculous that this girl would be so confused and wayward as to choose, or be chosen by, an inert tree for her spirit animal. N!lkua the panther simply rolled his eyes.

But //Tlili wasn't done. She looked at two of the women and pointed to the sticks and logs, "Could you please start making a beat, on that log?"

The parents of the aborigines would not arrive in Australia for another ninety thousand years, yet they too are descended through //Tlili from the People. They brought the Didgeridoo with them from Africa where it has been mostly lost. But //Tlili was the first and one of the best to make the sounds of creation with a hollow stick. As the clan began to feel the beat of the sticks //Tlili blew an earthly guttural bubbling rhythm through her didgeridoo, and with this sound she created a new sense of the world the People thought they knew. She filled the air with the rumble of a running herd of water buffalo, the roar of the lion, the call of the stork, and the sound of distant thunder coming as a melody on the wind, and as she did this she let her body sway as grass in a breeze that now moved close under the tree.

The tribe was transfixed, because it seemed as if the tree was speaking through the girl's stick, and they could feel the flow of the sap moving from the roots to the branches, transpiring into the air. They were drawn in, the sound was flowing, and all the world was connected, and in the center of it was the Tree, creating the living world out of a convergence of deep glorious sound. They were joined, through //Tlili, to the roots of the world as they stamped out the rhythm. It's was as if they had drunk iboga, but it was better for there was no need to return to the reality they were already in. //Tlili played on, and the tribe danced into the night, and so it became clear that //Tlili was an adult, the baobab, and indeed a new sort of shaman.

From that time //Tlili was a true anomaly as a hunter gatherer of the Paleolithic. The people she lived among were immediate and practical. They were already deeply connected to, and a part of their world, to a degree that being conscious of grand connections was for them superfluous. The immediate necessities of survival were far more important. //Tlili's larger awareness was like a third eye. Something freakish and seemingly unnecessary, and yet, somehow, it commanded respect.



## 14. Yellow Fever

Epiphanies don't stop the world from unfolding, and though //Tlili had gained a fine measure of wisdom at a very young age she still didn't know how her vision could come to be.

The moons passed. There were more bonfires where //Tlili's music was called for, and a new form of communion from the world to humanity was born, but the ritual's significance remained unidentified, unnamed. In those first demonstrations, it worked no great change.

The politics of the clan stayed the same; generally when the hunters were out //Tlili, Naia, and Kwanza stayed in camp and when the hunters returned the shaman's party found reason to leave. They were fortunate, because the mighty N!lkua was ageing, and feeling a bit less virile, but //Tlili knew that very soon she would have to submit to N!lkua, and also Kwanza would have to leave or be killed.

However human power struggles certainly aren't the only cause of change. There came a moon when disaster struck. It was towards the end of the rainy season, they were camped again under Nallo's chin, and the weather turned very hot and humid, a haze hung over the land, and the air was still for days. The only way to avoid insects was to cover one's body with mud and ash; not everyone did this, and at night the mosquitoes still gorged themselves, finding their necessary blood-brood meals while the people slept. The virulent strain of yellow fever struck again, and this time it was a calamity. Virtually everyone in the clan got sick. Many natal flame bushes grew not far from the chin, and though Naia was desperate to gather the purple wetchla neither she nor //Tlili could find it.

This time when the fever hit the clan the People had just twenty one members. There were five men, and if you included //Tlili and Naia there were eight women. The remaining eight members were children, and this

included Kwanza because, though he was older than //Tlili, he had not yet come of age.

//Tlili's mother, Luititi, became very ill along with five of the seven remaining adult women, and five of the eight children fell to the fever. Only Kwanza and one of N!lkua's sons, Kundg, who was just four remained healthy. Of the six hunters three were also sick including N!lkua. Kwanza was healthy and //Tlili and Naia were immune.

The shamans had no arcane tribal ritual involving slain animals or smoking sacrifices for the Yellow Fever; this was because they had traditionally known an irrefutable cure, but the wetchla grub was lost, and the ritual of the cure was now but a shell.

Naia moved from patient to patient. She had them drink the tea made from what she called purple wetchla, but which was actually vocan//ka bark. She knew this placebo was a strong analgesic so her dying People did feel a bit better for a few hours. She would also calmly place her soft old hands on each patient.

Then with a slight smile on her benevolent face she quietly chanted, “//Tsi tu /dlow - //Tsi du /dlow! Sari/du tlix /ma tsi!” This ancient fever chant roughly meant: Hot spirit go, cool spirit come, great spirits heal her!”

The three hunters who were healthy continued to bring food, and with them went /Shouhe (she was //Tlili's cousin once removed), and she was the lone healthy woman besides //Tlili and Naia. Those who had their health were not bold enough to overthrow N!lkua, not yet.

//Tlili, like Naia, also moved among her clansmen chanting and holding the sick. She was ambivalent at best about her father's illness, but her mother was delirious and fading, and most of the rest of the ill were her direct family; they were her cousins, her aunts, her brothers and sisters. They were all fading.

“//Tlili water!” It was N!lkua. The fever gave him the shakes, but he was fully conscious. He was furiously angry that fate had made him vulnerable again.

“Why does the spirit of the Wetchla not kill the foul thing that makes me so hot? In the tribe of my youth it always killed this yellow fever, no one died of it.

Naia, and now you, are weak!” he hissed. “Give me more of the Wetchla.”

//Tlili kept her face expressionless, and dutifully brought Naia’s Vocan//ka broth to the big man. Then she took water to her mother who was muttering incoherently, and she laved her brow. Others called for water. As she went among them again, she saw that two of the babies were still.

It was then that it came to her: *“We are about to die out.”*

She was used to death, or at least terribly familiar with it, but the extinction of the People, all of humanity for all time, this new awareness the girl could not bear, nor did she feel she had too, and she felt a bit of a thrill; she must solve this, perhaps she been given bogada by the spirits, perhaps that was how she should have understood it in her totem quest. She must find some.

//Tlili told Naia she was going to look for medicine, and grabbing the climbing stick she left the camp.

A breeze had come up; the oppressive haze was blowing away. As she walked down through the blackwood grove she thought of how big the world was, the savanna and the forests, and she wondered what lay at the edges of her world. Could there be many others lands with People? They would not be her people, but just to know that the human species that she was a part of were not alone would be a comfort. What if she alone in the world survived the fever? Or what if just old Naia survived? Naia was still very venerable; she seemed capable of continually withering away, but never dying.

A shadowy sense of madness pulled at //Tlili when she thought of the possibility of being the last human alone, forever. But for now the sun was shining on her, and she ran her hands down her warm dark strong body, feeling the air blow over her; the same air touching her after its effort of pushing the blue sky’s few tumbling clouds. The wind mounted through the waving grass and moved among the leaves of the blackwoods. The flowers

were out, morning-glories mainly, there were birds singing and she saw several lines of wildebeest walking lazily in the distant plain. She thought again of the baobabs - that they were a part of, but somehow seemed to rise above, the pain of the world. She certainly did not want her race to be wiped out, or to be totally alone. "I will *not* despair!"

It was midday when she arrived at the old Baobab where she had found the bogada before. She had checked it many times since, and twice had found bats, but never bogada. There were no pigeons, but the little goldentailed sunbirds with their long tails were once again flitting through the trees. //Tlili scampered up her stick into the baobab and up to the hole.

Ha! It was occupied. Full, with a squirming mass of roosting bats. Some had babies, and at least three of the mothers had legs covered with the brilliant orange fungus. Belatedly she realized she hadn't brought a bag. Even if she caught one bat and took its fungus the others would get away. What if she blocked the hole with her body? Hardly hesitating she deftly reached in and grabbed an orange legged bat. The others tried to come exploding out of the hole, but she pressed herself against it. She immediately felt the tiny animals scrabbling, clawing, and biting at her stomach and breasts as she hugged the tree with her left arm. She did this while she held the squirming bat in her right fist. She quickly felt absurd about the dilemma she had created for herself; how could she remove any fungus from her bat hand when she was holding herself from falling out of the tree and against the hole with the other arm? It wouldn't work. //Tlili fidgeted a moment then let the rest of the bats come exploding out.

Next, //Tlili carefully straddled a branch so that both her hands were free, then as the bat she held dug its teeth into her index finger she firmly combed the fungus off its legs with the fingernails of her other hand, She now had enough of the bogada to equal the volume of a large bean. She again pushed this into her hair. She felt sorely tempted to crush the little creature that was biting her, but she couldn't forget Kwanza and his gangrene: "You and bogada must be tied up somehow little creature, and in you I must respect its spirit." She opened her palm, and the animal whose mouth was covered with her blood crouched for a moment in bewilderment

before it flew away. Then, examining the baobab's hole, //Tlili removed several chunks of wood that was laced with the still yellow-green mycelium.

As she reached the bottom of the tree //Tlili was thinking of the serious danger of infection from the animal's bites. She quickly decided to rub a tiny portion of the precious fungus into her wounds. The sharp pain from the small puncture marks in her stomach, breasts, and finger were quickly replaced with a pleasant tingling sensation. Elated by the success of her walk //Tlili turned hopefully back to the cave.

The wind had picked up to the point where //Tlili had to lean into it as she walked up the hill. It was difficult walking, but the girl easily found more sensual pleasure in it as it buffeted her skin.

It was late afternoon by the time //Tlili returned to Nallo's chin; two of the children were dead and her mother was in a coma. Several of the other clan members were almost senseless as well.

Naia was crouching by Luititi and quietly murmuring. On the far side of the cave Nilkua was sweating and shaking. He seemed asleep, but actually he was watching the shaman with half lidded eyes.

//Tlili surveyed the untended dead, her family; then she entered the cave and laid her hand on her mother's hot brow. "Oh mother dear, you must stay with us!" //Tlili looked at her mentor, "Naia, I have found more bogada! We *must* use it to save our people."

Naia didn't look up from Luititi. She spoke slowly, "//Tlili I think your bogada is just an antiseptic. It is a gift, to heal scars of this world, but I think these fevers are different." She lowered her voice, "The wetchla, it works from within. I have a very little bit left, you know."

"You do?" //Tlili whispered desperately, "then why do you wait? Please, give it to my mother, and to Chul/lyx - She is such a sweet smart girl. We have to save them Naia."

It would be hard to say what emergency, what situation, Naia was waiting for to use the last of the Purple Wetchla grub. She may not have known herself. Perhaps by saving it she was just following some conservative instinct to never use the last of an important thing if it could

not be replaced. But now it was probably merely love for //Tlili that caused her to decide to give it to Luititi, and to Chul/lyx, a young girl who would be coming of age soon. Naia went furtively to her medicine bag, and from the bottom she pulled out a small pouch with dark purple stains. She was just about to pour it into Luititi's mouth when there was a growling screech from N!lkua.

“Stop, you witch! Klwue! Shoui! Naxa! Stop them!” N!lkua kept calling, then screaming, to his hunters who were somewhere outside. He was dehydrated and had a high fever, but he had already gotten to his feet, and he was tottering towards the women.

When they saw that N!lkua had murder in his yellow eyes Naia and //Tlili scrambled away from Luititi and their other patients to the far side of the cave. N!lkua made an effort to rush at them, and as he passed Luititi the naked caveman kicked his nude comatose wife, his “gazelle,” savagely in the head with the side of his foot. He screamed at Naia, “You will not give her the wetchla instead of me. I don't fear you or your death bone. I heard you spinning your web of lies. All who plot against me will die. I am the Big Man!”

He kept coming, an implacable tower of muscle, towards the withered shaman and her young assistant. Naia reacted to this sudden upheaval with confused shock, but //Tlili now felt no fear, only rage, at the horrible mistreatment of her mother. She swept up a stick from the fire pile.

Seeing //Tlili's effort at self defense enraged N!lkua yet further. So focusing wholly on her he aimed a punch at her head, but //Tlili managed to fend the blow off with her stick, and as he staggered in the follow through of his punch she spun round and cracked him on the back of the head. This brought the fevered man to the ground, but he was half again as tall as //Tlili, and three times her weight. He was a bit stunned, but he still tried to rise.

“Mama!” In grief //Tlili started towards her mother. Naia looked around the cave as N!lkua attempted to get up. The sick or dying People were looking on in bewildered silence. /Shouhe was the only other healthy person there, and she remained crouched in uncertainty by the fire ring.

It was then that Kwanza came running into the cave. He had been sitting on a log, daydreaming, some way down the hill when the screaming began. N!lkua turned, glaring, to Kwanza and said, “You and /Shouhe must help kill these poisonous adders, these witches, or you too will be killed.” Kwanza was confused about what had happened, but he saw enough in the Big Man’s eyes to cause him to avoid responding to N!lkua at all. Instead he shouted at //Tlili and Naia, “We have to run. The hunters are coming, and I think they will kill us!”

N!lkua grabbed a stick, and again rose unsteadily to his feet weakened but still dangerous. He hissed, trying to prepare to strike, but he was shaking violently from the fever, and started to curse them with all manner of scatological Paleolithic curses.

Kwanza looked around the cave, ignoring N!lkua. “Come! //Tlili, Naia, /Shouhe, and anyone else who feels they can leave, we’ve got to get out of here!” He added urgently, “I just saw Naxa and the others coming up the hill!”

//Tlili gripped her stick uncertainly. Shouldn’t she kill N!lkua *now* while she could? But it seemed a terrible tradition to continue, once again killing the old Big Man, who was now her own father. And even if she did the act was so weird, so untrustworthy, from a woman that the hunters would still probably kill her and Naia, shamans or no. Was there another way to work things out? She didn’t see it. “Come Naia!” The old woman seemed frozen; perhaps she was getting too old, but she seemed to have no response to N!lkua at all, save shock. . .

//Tlili spoke softly to her, “Come get your medicine bag.” That worked. In a daze Naia took the bag, and they began to head out of the cave. But they both looked back in terrible uncertainty. What of the sick children? -and the others. Could they abandon their sick family, their own clan that needed them? It was either that, or fight the hunters, or just await their own deaths.

As they moved through the cave //Tlili said to /Shouhe, “Please, will you come with us?” But for /Shouhe, who was //Tlili’s distant cousin, the split between the shaman women and the big man and his hunters was an

event too earth shattering to react to suddenly. She could escape from the abusive men, but she would have to leave her son who was very sick, and who was too big to carry, and the men would probably find the fugitives and kill them for running away. No, she would stay In the cave with the world she knew. /Shouhe nodded a 'No' to //Tlili.

There wasn't time for more discussion. So as fast as old Naia could run the shaman, the very young woman, and the boy now left the cave. Once outside they could see the hunters, still a way off, but running towards Nallo's Chin.

Kwanza began to react to the collective uncertainty. "Do you think they will follow us and kill us?"

//Tlili said softly, "No, I think Naxa would kill us if we stayed as N!lkua wants, but they won't follow us. What could they gain?"

Naia finally spoke. "They may feel they have to kill us as a lesson that independent behavior is not allowed. Though now that I cannot tend to the People or give the last Wetchla to Luititi, or to Chul/lyx, I still will not leave it for N!lkua. They may follow us to retrieve it, but I won't give it under force. . ." Then Naia was silent, and //Tlili started to cry at this terrible event, such a loss for everyone, turning her world upside down.

As one the Paleolithic trio began to run, or alternatively walk whenever old Naia fell behind. They sped horizontally along the base of the anticline.

As far as they could tell they were not pursued, and an hour later as evening came they were far out in the savanna with the wind at their backs, and when they looked behind across the open grassland they saw the hunters still didn't seem to be following them. Naia spoke to the ageless common animal feeling of extreme loss that all beings must eventually bear; she mumbled a chant, giving voice to what is now the impossibly ancient Bushman death lament:

"The day we die a soft breeze will wipe out our footprints in the sand. When the wind dies down, who will tell the timelessness that once we walked this way in the dawn of time?"



Carressa paused. Her story had wound on for well over an hour.

Artemis was getting tired. The fire was burning low, and they hadn't gathered much wood.

"I want to hear the rest of your story, but I need to go to sleep Carressa. I can get up to my nest. I've learned to do it in the dark, and I've gathered this pile of dry leaves that you can sleep in. It stays pretty dry under this cliff, though there may be centipedes in these leaves."

She studied Carressa uncertainly. The old woman's body definitely looked as if it had experienced weather before, but still, it did look very frail to be sleeping nude in a pile of leaves through the rainy chill of the Hawaiian night. She said softly, "Carressa can we talk now for a bit about your story?"

"Certainly," said Carressa, "Maybe we can fold my path in by discussing how //Tlili had moved on the Rose Mandala, because the path she found, I am fairly certain, is the one that our human civilization needs to follow for its survival.

At this point in her life //Tlili had circled the rose gaining wisdom with regard to alpha male psychology and the nature of, or the proper reverence for God."

Artemis thought Carressa's statement was a bit much to swallow. She didn't see that //Tlili had revealed much of anything about God, at least as Artemis understood God. And she was very uncertain about the truth of what Carressa's Mitochondrial Eve thought about alpha males. Artemis said, "I don't see the salvation of our civilization in this, and if alpha males are so horrible why are they so common in many other social species? Isn't their fitness, strength, and leadership useful, not just to themselves, but others? Doesn't the traditional male adventurousness and creativity benefit humanity? I've read a little bit of the German philosopher, Nietzsche; he would have thought that //Tlili's idea of 'Paltrorks' behavior was the very essence of goodness, and, though after the evil antics of Hitler Nietzsche has been largely repudiated, he had a point that surely wasn't altogether wrong. Surely at least for wolves, horses, or elk, having an alpha male is generally an aid to survival."

“Well,” replied Carressa, “You’re right. I can tell I’m telling this story to someone with an active brain. //Tili’s wisdom thus far in the story, and alone, would not save our civilization. Her wisdom that I have tried to articulate is just a portion of what’s needed, and there remains the question of how to make the modern world sufficiently aware of her wisdom for meaningful change. But as to your specific defense of alpha males, and the occasional alpha female, yes they can have a positive effect, but when a human culture allows them to be deeply in control the negatives outweigh the positives. Although sometimes it seems that a fitting solution to a culture’s alpha male problem would be to have them and their minions go and fight the comparable alpha males from other overly paltrorks dominated cultures and leave the rest of us alone. You could put Nero, Caligula, Attila, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, or Osama Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein in with your Curtis LeMay and Dick Cheney on their own Island, or if there are enough of them give them their own continent, and let them fight it out.”

“Who is Curtis LeMay?”

“I suppose you are a little young to remember him. He was the American general who conducted the firebombing campaign over Tokyo in your World War Two. And as commander of the United States air force he argued with Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crises; He wanted to attack Cuba, and, obviously, had LeMay prevailed human civilization would most certainly have been destroyed in 1962.”

“OK so maybe he sounds like a dork, or paltrorks, but what about the in betweens?” said Artemis, “Winston Churchill or Patton for example; they were clearly alpha males, but we needed them.”

“But only to protect us from the alpha males that your ‘modern’ civilization, through alpha male behavior, created. The Hitler that Patton and Churchill were needed to fight against was created by the likes of Clemenceau, and the Kaiser.”

“But why does it work for wolves? And, in the real world mistakes happen, and Hitler’s are created.”

“Yes, and humans do need order and some hierarchy for productive synergy, like the wolf pack, but the pack succeeds because the alpha wolf has evolved to generally show some social restraint. Wolves rarely kill one

another in pack wars or within the pack. A human is less instinctual and more conscious than a wolf. With the ego inflation that the alpha human experiences, or that the alpha male culture or religion experiences for that matter, alpha humans are prone to do any kind of crazy thing – think Curtis LeMay and Fidel Castro with nuclear bombs. They were the leaders of the American military, and the country of Cuba, and they were willing to wield nuclear missiles like egoised penises to screw the entire world.

You mentioned Nietzsche the philosopher; thankfully he is currently largely discredited. His spin on //Tlili's 'paltrorks' was what he called the 'Will to Power'. He saw it as a natural part of the life force, the natural desire for survival. Nature, 'red in tooth and claw,' but nature is more subtle than that. Nature on this earth isn't just about competition, change, and evolution; it is just as much about synergy, cooperation, and a healthy ecosystem. Think of what a loser N!lkua was. Or think of how turtles have lived on this earth largely unchanged for a hundred million years, or think of the undersea crinoids, creatures who have remained unchanged since the Silurian period 300 million years ago. Those species are clearly, in many ways, more successful than we are. Make no mistake Artemis, the mandate of life is to survive, and that only, it is a huge paltrorks mistake to assume that survival means competition only, such that it necessitates dominating and wiping out fellow species or fellow members of your own species.

For much of the time, ever since we separated from the chimps we have been a species obsessed with competitive change. This has often become pathological, even insane, - at least in the modern era of the last few thousand years. It's fueled by individual paltrorks egos, removed from the balancing awareness and love of 'God.' But just as important, for humans who are fully conscious it just isn't logical.

If I know that it's as fundamental a part of being alive as eating and breathing is, to ensure the survival of my genes, and that you are so paltrorks that you think that it is either me or you whose genes get to survive, then I, and every other person who is as conscious as I am, might as well just kill you now, and vice versa.

However, the incredible synergistic survival value of cooperation makes humans too valuable to one another for that. Think of what each of us

gains from human cooperation, from birth and on through life, just with regard to knowledge transfer. Not to mention the cooperative survival value gained by the existence of tribes, villages, cities, specialization in trade, assembly lines, businesses, governments, world economies; the list synergetic benefits seems endless.”

Indeed, paltrorks is still perhaps the main impediment to humanity getting its act together. So we must be vigilantly aware of the manifestations of paltrorks, and consciously identify it as a root cause of misery and failure when we see it; to avoid the mistakes.

Paltrorks in our culture is obviously the huge part of why we almost had, and may yet have, a nuclear war. It is largely behind overpopulation and impending environmental collapse. It accounts for most of human history’s horrors. Yet it remains a subtle and broad concept that’s hard to define. Patriarchal dorks, or socially awkward manliness, or social conformity created by sexual repression and threats of violence only partially defines it, but examples help: The massive dark side of the Roman empire, or Hitler and the Nazis, or Stalin, are great stereotypical examples. In your country many televangelists and their congregations are much more moderate examples.

In modern times Al Qaeda and the terrorist Osama Bin Laden were an almost perfect example of paltrorks. Bin Laden wanted to set himself and his society up completely in the paltrorks mold. He was a polygamist with many wives, and over forty children, the women were cloistered and covered up, and he saw violence (and that’s the barbaric, suicidal, slaughter of innocents type of violence) as an acceptable way to achieve his ends. He saw sexual repression, particularly of women, as a very important way to create cultural ‘harmony.’ His world view was defined in terms of pure competition. He was a racial and cultural bigot. But most importantly he co-opted religion to serve his need for power. This was particularly easy for him to do because much of Islam is already permeated by paltrorks. In Saudi Arabia, the heart of the Islamic world, a huge percentage of Saudis felt that many his behaviors were, and still are, forgivable because he was seen as deeply religious.

Islam isn't alone, all the worlds 'great' religions suffer from paltrorks from their structure to their mythos, but Islam has in recent times been perhaps the worst. Of course paltrorks now, and has virtually always for at least seventy thousand years, permeated the rest of world human culture too, particularly politics. //Tlili had unusual clarity of vision in that she saw that paltrorks, not simply men, or patriarchy, but the culture of the alpha wolf, was killing humanity.”

Emotionally Artemis identified with what Carressa was saying but intellectually she did not, or at least it didn't make complete sense to her:

“First Carressa, I'm not sure if I'm just being the devil's advocate, but it seems that you may be behind the times; in the west patriarchy is already dead, or at least its dying:

There are now more women than men working in America. A lot of men can no longer find a job in our post industrial economy, and women are earning the majority of the college degrees. Matriarchies of unmarried women may be slowly becoming the dominate way that families are raised. Women are beginning to dominate; even as CEO's of large corporations. That's because modern society is finding that things run better with the dominate player acting as a skilled coach, rather than the dictatorial management of a paltrorks alpha male ruler. Manly brawn, we already know, just isn't that useful in a truly civilized post industrial society. Social skills and the ability to focus on the task at hand are.

If there is a problem nowadays it's that men and boys are beginning to feel like a bunch of hopeless outcasts, or a lower caste, in a woman's world.”

“I am not just talking about patriarchy Artemis. As women have moved into power in America, which is certainly partially a good thing, women have often become paltrorks. For example you now have a larger proportion of violence, apparently even mass murder, coming from women.

But your second point is the larger question. If paltrorks tends to fade, as it has somewhat, then women may come to dominate family, the economy, and even the power structure. Although there is great diversity in sexual expression, and stereotyping can be dangerous, there are differences that your modern science has found in the operation of the male versus the female brain. So we probably shouldn't simply advocate for complete sexual

equality, but what then will be the sustainable role of men? I will get to that, but I think it will make more sense closer to the end of my story. And anyway, we are women; what right have we to overstep *our* boundaries in advocating a role for men?”

“Yes, and beyond this discussion Carressa I think there are many other major impediments to progress that may be more profound than ‘paltrorks;’ the human tendency to ignore reality and cling dogmatically to comforting myths for example. Or greed. I don’t fully understand you Carressa. I still think alpha male cultures are primordial and natural, like the Alpha wolves, like bull elk, or bull seals, silverback gorillas, and alpha chimps, and for a hundred thousand years it seems to have worked with humans; why would it kill humanity? Also, in your mitochondrial Eve’s time a man who had forty children would be a good thing. ”

“But not now Artemis! Somehow I must not be communicating clearly.” Carressa paused, “There are too many people now for anyone to have over two children, and Bin Laden had them for the wrong conscious reasons.

Yet beyond your seemingly ill thought out tendency to fall for the ‘naturalistic fallacy’ (the idea that if it seems natural it’s good), you have a point. There are a variety of obvious sound biological survival reasons why an individual, particularly an alpha type individual, would want to create and enforce the culture of the alpha wolf or paltrorks. -- The competitive, strong, cunning individual’s enhanced ability to reproduce being central and obvious; and for those who are lower in the power structure, their genes also survive if they are mates or progeny or are related or even just of the same species as the alpha individual.

This alpha male dominated world also leads to comfort and pleasure in its own synergy, efficiency, safety, and simplicity. Our pre-human psychology clearly evolved in part to find an inherent comfort in such a setup. That is all surely true and natural, ha! A root problem is that the prime motivator of paltrorks social behavior is power and intimidation, and this keeps the individual and the culture’s focus too small. Paltrorks cultures stay in a kind of prolonged immediate thick skinned egoistic survival mode which doesn’t easily notice or take into account the larger world and the larger meaning in life. In religion this is particularly ironic, not to mention

blasphemous, because religion should be about connecting to the transcendently larger mysterious source of Meaning with a capital M, yet a paltrorks infested culture invariably co-ops the religious impulse, and then creates a sheltered, stultifying, repressive, unworldly, and irrational dogma. Ironically that's what is currently called religious fundamentalism, though surely being dominated by the alpha male impulse is almost the opposite of the fundamentals of religion. Right now in your America paltrorks has so polluted the meaning of religion that for many people the very word religion signifies a kind of paltrorks repression. People are acting as if the primitive psychology of the wolf pack is the 'fundamental' nature of religion. After all, it ties Bin Laden and his clan of wives and children to the submissive wives and obscenely large families of Orthodox Judaism, Catholicism, Mormonism, or most obviously in America to the fundamentalist polygamist Mormonism, with its militaristic spirit and Bin Laden-like autocratic prophets. But the root of religion, the true religious impulse, is expansive, not repressive; it's about the love that your American author Annie Dillard feels for the world, or the compassion of the Dali Lama or Saint Francis of Assisi, it's about the connection to that which is transcendently greater.

Take Christianity for instance; its true religious impulse is expressed in Jesus' sermon on the mount, or even more importantly in the three gospels where in response to a question from the Pharisees Jesus purportedly says, "There is only one commandment, to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul." If a person actually followed Jesus one commandment that would lead to transcendent connection. --But consider the modern Christian 'fundamentalist,' their focus on John 3:16 is paltrorks, and as such only the mind of an extreme alpha male personality could conceive of something so venal for the central idea of a religion. It's this: that the momentary weakness of one woman, Eve, should by the deity's order cause the monstrous fate of untold billions of humans going to eternal hellfire unless they believe that the barbaric agricultural springtime blood sacrifice of an innocent will miraculously save them. This paltrorks version of Christianity is largely an appeal to the ego's fear of death, and yet to the alpha male it is supremely useful for the 'Will to Power' Nietzsche spoke of because it creates a culture that will walk in lockstep to one parochial belief system."

“But didn’t Nietzsche hate Christianity?”

“He was a creepy man, but to his credit he was too straightforward and honest about his beliefs to use Christianity for manipulation. People are honest in varying degrees about their core motives. Dishonesty towards others is what we think of most, but dishonesty towards the self is far more insidious in its negativity. He was more honest than most, but ‘Will to Power’ is in reality a horrible meaning for life, and I think he at least intuited the nihilism behind his beliefs, and eventually he went insane.

Still we of the Bogada place our hope that simple ignorance, not deception, is at the root of most of our human misunderstanding. Speaking of which, common paltrorks Christianity is so focused on ego and power that I wonder how many ‘fundamentalist’ Christians there would be if the entire Christian dogma was the same except for the part about the afterlife--

Let’s say, there is a Judeo-Christian god, and Jesus is his son, and he was sacrificed for humanity; but we are ‘saved’ only during this life, and when we die we just die; there is no afterlife. I think most ‘Christians’ would then be totally lost if the afterlife cookie were removed; they wouldn’t care about Jesus’ One Commandment: to love god with all your heart mind and soul. They wouldn’t see any point in the religion.

Your concern about dogmatism and greed is surely fair, but isn’t it important to try to name the root causes of behaviors, and then search for the levers that may help improve them? I think paltrorks is a concept which, once we are aware of it, gives us a lever we can move to help a culture work better.

“Moving on Carressa, I am wondering about the other thing you said; that //Tlili found wisdom regarding the nature of God.”

“Yes, and here her leap was again, subtle, but it was more important than the awareness of paltrorks. When referring to the connection to God I have been using the English word ‘transcendent.’ It is not exactly appropriate. Her word was //Err. It did not mean beyond this world so much as it meant the mystic’s ecstatic state of complete awareness. When her experience of the Baobab was transcendent you could say that by loving the baobab, the tree of life, she had made a leap beyond simple animism,



and although that is somewhat true it is also true that she still embraced a sort of animism, but that's not necessarily such a bad thing."

Well that sounds like a big subject, and I'm not sure how it would, or if it should gel with the idea of a theistic God," said Artemis, "So perhaps I shouldn't ask about it; yet I think we should discuss it tomorrow, but I still don't know who you are, or why you are here."

"You will understand that best when I finish //Tlili's tale. But it *is* late. Goodnight."

## 15. //Tlili's Love & Wilder Country

It was quite late in the night when the rain woke Artemis. She felt her nest swaying lightly in the breeze of an incoming storm. As her dreams faded to reality she found herself thinking vaguely, "My mother's arms -- Ahh me; I was just a baby"

She heard the rain tapping on the leaves, and at first she lay snug as she had for many nights in her dry grassy bed beneath her roof of elephant ear leaves, but then she noticed that the wind was now fairly strong, and it was steadily increasing in strength. There was no moon above the piled clouds, so on this night she couldn't see what was happening at all, but for quite awhile she felt confident in her position. So she gave herself to the storm. With each increasingly powerful gust she rode the treetop like a carnival ride, surrendering herself to sensual disorientation in the velvet darkness of the Kohala canopy.

Eventually, the storm managed to wake her fully, and she sensed that the morning wasn't far off, though she couldn't say why; morning's arrival may have been heralded by a change in the boom of the surf, whose low pitched pattern could almost be felt, rather than heard, through the rain and wind.

The wind continued to increase, and she realized that this was the biggest storm she had experienced in Kohala, and the elation she generally felt about her life, lived so close to the edge, gave way just a bit, to panic. Yet Artemis had a lot of pride in her tiny watertight abode; that is until the wind picked up yet further, almost a gale, and the rain started coming in sheets. Her leaves began to tear, and soon she felt rain trickling and tapping on her belly, her left hip, and her feet. She squirmed to get dry, but the nest was getting clammy, and the grass began to stick to her back and butt. Soon after, as she moved and struggled for comfort she began to feel grimed with bark from the sticks that were the real structure of the nest. . . .

Suddenly Artemis felt something large, and leggy, wriggle under her right hip. Reflexively she thrashed, and she scrambled quickly to lift herself up in the nest, so that in her struggle she inadvertently pushed the remnants of the elephant leaf umbrella into the crown limbs above; then the rain came blowing and streaming in.

Now she was in a predicament. Though there had been insects in the nest before there had never been one so big. She assumed it was a very large centipede. At first the arthropod was all she could focus on, and her mind was filled with unreasoning revulsion, but that was followed almost instantly by feelings of weakness.

The tree whipped and thrashed, she began to wonder, “Is the island getting hit by a typhoon?”

It should be clear by this point that Artemis wasn’t a priss, but almost everyone has their weak spot, and centipedes were hers. She now had no desire to stay in the nest where moments before she had felt proud and snug to be. She squatted among the branches above the remnants of the nest, and consciously took several slow deep breaths. She quickly forgot about the centipede as she surveyed her situation.

Her acacia tree wasn’t easy to climb down during a dry sunny day, and though she could climb it at night Artemis felt she needed at least a little starlight or moonlight. Climbing it in the pitch dark, wet, and having to clutch the trunk as it thrashed in a very strong wind seemed crazy. Eventually she knew she had no choice because even as she hesitated Artemis was soon completely soaked and lashed by the rain.

One of the advantages to going naked in the jungle is that generally rain is not at all unpleasant, it’s just another sensual experience, but on a cool Hawaiian night where the temperature is in the lower sixties, when one is wet and in the wind, and where you can’t even move around to stay warm, hypothermia becomes a real danger, even in Hawaii.

What followed in the young woman’s mind was some brief self doubt-- “I may think I am Artemis herself, until I do something very stupid, like this. Now I could freeze up here. Or, I could fall and die terribly, and

Carressa will find me, and then I'll be shown for the crazy bourgeois dimwitted bimbo that I am. Well maybe, but a dimwitted bimbo wouldn't have survived and found such joy out here, living for over a month on taro and roasted rats. . . . Whoa I'm c-cold! If I can just hold the branches tightly I'll make it down this b-blessed tree. . . .”

In the slippery descent there were two horrible times where, as she clung and dangled from swaying limbs with intertwined slimed fingers, she couldn't remember where in the darkness she was supposed to find a foothold.

It was a very chilled, soaked, and scratched Artemis, with chattering teeth, matted hair, and her body dripping of tree slime, who made her way through the woods to Carressa's cliff. The adrenaline of the climb had warmed her slightly, and she felt humbled but elated that she had survived. For a few minutes she gave herself fully to a rare fantasy of being home with her parents, and wearing clothes, warm dry clothes.

Carressa was huddled under her giant mane of hair, in her leaves, in a nook that was tight under the slight rock overhang of the campfire cliff. She was more or less dry, and fortunately the wind was blowing the rain away from the cliff face. There was almost no room to spare, but fumbling in the dark Artemis pushed her way in apologetically. Then she mounded the leaves about herself and pressed her wet body close by Carressa's tiny, old, and dry, form. “I'm very sorry,” Artemis muttered, “but my nest gave out, I almost died climbing down my tree, and now I'm freezing.”

Carressa sounded totally unconcerned. “That's all right. The fire is quite drowned, and there is naught else to do.” She paused, “I admire your spirit sweet child, but you do need to use your imagination a bit more about the dangers here in the wild, even such a tame ‘wild’ as it is.”

They crouched together for some minutes immersed in the cacophony of the wind, the rain, the engorged rushing waterfall, and the distant roar of the surf. Then Artemis spoke up, “Well, I am still alive, and I'm not going to get hypothermia, but I don't think we are going to get any more sleep. Would you like to continue your story, or explain last night's questions?”

Carressa cheerfully plunged into the story right where she had left off; her voice in Artemis left ear was only just audible above the storm. --

“The night that //Tlili, Naia, and Kwanza abandoned their dying clan to flee from Nllkua and his hunters was a hard night, worse than this stormy night: They were in the middle of the open savanna, and they felt they weren’t big enough, or well enough armed, to match the large prides of lions or the lone saber toothed cats that roamed the plain.

There were small bushes, which they *could* have made into the simple nest/shelter, the werf. Werfs were flimsy structures, but their brushy walls made it very awkward for a predator to attack, so their construction was the standard procedure for protection if caught out at night on the savanna, but on this painful evening they missed the security of the group and they felt strongly that a fire was needed. Fire would offer protection and more. It would help illuminate or chase away some of the shadows that threatened to fill their minds.

Yet there was a problem: the stick to stick configuration the People used to make a fire by friction generally required the strength of a grown man to generate a spark, and fire was considered the province of men. It was a spirit *they* commanded. Women and children rarely ever camped on their own, and Kwanza had been ostracized for so long that he hadn’t been properly taught the ancient craft. (As I have said, fire was already very ancient. It predated humanity at least as far back as the *early* Homo erectus.) Now the boy and the two women knew that they must master the process if they were to survive.

It took awhile just to find the appropriate scrub bush wood for the friction set, and then they had to use Kwanza’s boy sized ax stone to cut the fire stick (or spindle) and the fireboard. Once they finally had the appropriate materials the three of them sat haplessly trying to create a fire as the darkness surrounded them. After considerable experimentation they found that if //Tlili and Kwanza traded off spinning the fire stick between their palms in intense bursts of peak effort against the fireboard they had enough combined strength to form a spark.

Later as they sat around the fire Naia's eyes were wet while //Tlili sat silently crying. None spoke, and time crept by as the dome of stars rotated overhead.

Suddenly //Tlili stood, paced, and then shrieked, "How can we have left them?  
My own poor mother. She was so sick, and *beaten*, by that dung worm! I can't take it!"

Kwanza felt his heart start pounding to each word as she spoke. He was firm: "You had to leave. Your Big Man was clearly going to kill us. We shouldn't focus on it yet. The question is where do we go now?"

Naia was normally the clan's calmest member, but was she feeling lower than she had in her entire life; she turned her anguished face away from the fire, looked up at the stars, and muttered, "Well, I have not prepared for *this* dark path. Neither I, nor the spirits, foretold it. I may need to eat some iboga to find the answers we need."

They were silent for some time, and then Naia removed a small piece of the root from her medicine bag and chewed it slowly.

It was quiet that night on the savanna; there were no insect or animal sounds, but the fire crackled merely, and a cool wind whipped waves through the endless grass with a soft hiss.

When the night was half over, and //Tlili and Kwanza were dozing fitfully at the edge of the fire, Naia woke them, her voice firm and clear: "I am quite old, and I don't want to leave you two alone in the world. I think we need to join with the Dil/koa women -- with Kwanza's clan, which was also my old clan when I was a girl."

//Tlili felt the weight of her grief lift a little -- A tribe of women . . .  
"How will we find them? Kwanza, can you do it?"

"Yes I believe so, but I'm not sure that I want to. My mother's dead, and I don't think there were many mothers of men left among my clanswomen. They were so fierce. It was ridiculous."

Naia said sharply, “Boy, you must realize by now just how fierce *men* are.”

No one felt up to speaking further, and gradually they all closed their eyes as the night wound out into predawn twilight.

The next morning they were very hungry. They foraged with their hands and simple ‘digging sticks,’ and by midmorning they had gathered together sufficient provender. Among the very sparse trees on the savanna they discovered custard apples. Then they also found water roots, grasshoppers, mobane worms (the grub of the emperor moth), and a few lizards. Having eaten they all felt more content, yet the three were a little nervous to have Nilkua and his cronies less than a days walk away. As that first day alone progressed, they each began to feel resolved to find the Dil/koa, and by that afternoon they were on their way.

The trio walked south in the open world through two full moons. The land was trackless, or at least there were no hominoid paths, and these naked barefooted humans lived immersed in a reality of sharp stone, briars, soft grass, cool mud, sharp grass, and dry earth. It was a world of baking heat with dry winds, periodic storms, and cold wet nights. Parasites like mosquitoes, flies, and worms were a difficulty and the three of them were such a small group that they had to be ever wary of predators. Yet outwardly the hike was uneventful; the sun and the moon, and the days and nights, passed in a seamless rhythm.

They had the rarely cooked, fresh, and variable food of the omnivore’s diet. *Far more varied in Paleolithic Africa than it is here in Kohala. . .* Kwanza hunted small game well enough (mostly hares and tortoises), but //Tlili the master gatherer supplied the bulk of their meals: they ate all manner of insects, and they ate roots, fruit, melons, nuts and seeds. Of the varied food that they gathered their chief diet was of mobane worms, grasshoppers, cicadas, mobola plums, and natal mahogany seeds. It was a diet rich in oil and vitamin E, and their skin shone. It was dry country though, and water was often a problem.

There was struggle, but it came from within, for underlying their journey were feelings of grief so deep that as they continued the sense of loss became a part of their personalities. Yet their pain was balanced by a growing sense of freedom such as //Tlili at least had never experienced; there was a rugged ease to the fruitful splendor of the open plains and forested hills.

Now that //Tlili had claimed the baobab as her own totem, the Paleolithic landscape, which was dotted with groves of the fat trees, felt more romantically sensual to her than the home of one's lover would in your modern 'civilized' world; each grove felt like a fragrant oasis of peace and safety, and she formed her own ritual to venerate her totem; upon entering a grove she would blow a greeting for it on the new hollow stick that she had found and crafted into a true, though crude, didgeridoo.

Kwanza had no proper totem, but he respected //Tlili's, and when she entered a grove he would stand some distance away watching for predators while he observed her among the baobabs. After her ritual he would approach her saying, "You are the Baobab/tleva (the fruit of the baobab)," which he soon shortened to Eva.

When Naia watched them she felt mostly resignation, and melancholy, and she bit her lip with frustration that she couldn't be more positive. After the first moon the three of them had essentially mastered fire by friction. It was an imperfect art. They carried the spindle and fireboard with them, but it was still often difficult work, and one evening they had to work the spindle for an exhaustingly long time to finally get a spark. While Kwanza was off gathering wood //Tlili and Naia were sitting by their hard earned fire afterwards, and Naia said to //Tlili, "I know you and Kwanza want to make sparks of another sort. That should wait until we have found the safety of a clan and your body is a bit older. Be mindful of your cousins Kwua and N//tlai and the other girls among the People who have died giving birth."

"Yes Naia mam, but he is a joy isn't he?"

"I *am* glad I saved him. He's kind, almost never sad, dignified enough I suppose, but somewhat ridicules, like the stork."

"My shaman, do you think you could? . . . help give him a totem, otherwise he may never have a proper totem ceremony, a coming of age.



He will be alone. It should be easy Naia mam; I think we all know his totem is the stork.”

“He is to be a man, and I haven’t ever guided a boy to adulthood.”

“But you will, won’t you?”

“We shall see.”

Kwanza and the old shaman discussed their route occasionally, and they chose their course based on their memories of the orientation of distant hills. Walking a south by south westerly path they crossed the great rift over the two hundred mile stretch of Africa between the huge ancient lakes: Tanganyika and Malawi. Thus they left what is now Tanzania and entered what is presently Zambia.

Eventually there came a day when they trekked over a hill to see a wide valley, bisected by a broad river. The boy and the old woman congratulated themselves. They had reached the upper sections of the Luangwa River, which many miles to the south runs into the Zambezi.

## 16. Searching for the Dil/koa Women

They followed the river downstream and in another two days came to where a large creek joined the main water, and at the confluence they found an old campfire ring. At first they wondered if it was Erectus, but after some examination //Tlili found some worked flint which proved to be a broken spear point; they all recognized it as the work of Homo sapiens.

They spent the next day's camping near the site. They were nervous about meeting the Dil/koa women. So at night they slept hidden under some jackal berry bushes about a hundred yards from the fire ring.

//Tlili spent much of her time swimming in the river with Kwanza, and listening to the sound of the current rushing over rocks. They were ever careful of big cats, and of being discovered by the Dil/koa because they didn't know how the women would treat them, but mainly, as they swam they were just mindful of the crocodiles. Occasionally the young Eve saw the reptiles, of course she didn't know they were an old species, already ancient when the dinosaurs went extinct, but when she saw them sunning themselves on the shoals downstream on the far side of the river, and she thought they looked like muddy old stones, stones with eyes.

Still, the young people found the river water to be lovely. It was full of tarpon and redbfin, which they fished with jugged spears. They ate the fish raw, or they shared their catch with Naia, toasting fillets on hot rocks by the campfire at night.

Kwanza loved the water, and he would laugh and yelp as he flipped, cannonballed, or dove into the stream.

//Tlili liked perfecting her dive, and she practiced a straight forward dive repeatedly, minimizing the variation.

They had become wary of touching one another. His penis was often erect, and she noticed that if she merely brushed against him it stood up in a

moment, throbbing, demanding attention, but he wouldn't look at her when this happened, and she said nothing.

One morning flocks of flamingoes had gathered along the river, whorteling and calling. It was a warm cloudless day towards the middle of the dry season when all water seemed a sacred gift, and on a sandstone bluff at the river's edge Kwanza watched amazed as //Tlili made a completely perfect dive. Her body was a play of voluptuous curves shaped into a spear, and she cut into the water with a soft slap and hardly a ripple. When she came up he spoke to her, his voice a low earnest burr,

“Eva, now I know you are more graceful than any ‘//Tlili’, any bird, that ever dove for a fish. On my life I know of nothing prettier. And you are, you're my roots, you, the Baobab/tleva, ground me to this life, and in your world and songs I will roost, held up (ha!), yet filling your vulva, - making us complete; one. I want the budding flower between your limbs, - I want it. I want to fill you up. I'm aching for you. . . .

Eva you must see that we are free, now, here in this land of women, to make our children.“

Looking at him as he spoke she felt he was nothing but beautiful, and though she was astonished by the odd clarity with which he expressed himself, she found that now her mind felt drained of anything save the desire to lie on her back on the warm sandstone and wrap her limbs around this bird like young man and to fill herself with the essence of life that he was offering.

She rose out of the water, dripping. They joined. And together their minds became the void in which the songs of ecstasy roll, and their song was accompanied by the organic notes of flamingoes and of water falling over stone. So it was that the Mitochondrial Eve first mated, and we may take it as an auspicious omen for *our* future that it was very good.

After their passion the two human mammals lay in one another's arms, their wet skin and spines following the contour of the massive stone at the river's edge.

As they held each other on the sandstone //Tlili felt very awake; she asked Kwanza, “You know that if Naia sees us she would still be concerned; we’re young. . .

And, you know, there must be very few Dil/koa. I don’t think anyone is going to come by...

Do you think there are many other People in the world? “

Kwanza was glad she had changed the subject; the momentous experience they just had seemed disrespected by words, for now . . . “I really don’t know.”

“I fear that we are almost the last. Something’s wrong with us, with the People, that the world would treat us this way. We must care more about being alive Kwanza, about children. We should love the world around us. I think I know this; the baobabs seem to be telling me that there is more depth to life, it’s deeper than the selfish desires of a N!lkua. It’s like eating, and drinking, and breathing. It’s basic to what we are. Like being a baobab, or even the piece of stone I had in The Kopjes.”

“What is basic?”

“Having children, children who will also have children. Like a vine, or a rope, through time. Like the seeds of the baobab. That’s it Kwanza! Having children is as basic as eating and breathing, or as being separate and whole. All life does it. We are a conduit of spirit from our ancestors, through our children, to the remote tomorrow. To not put it first, even before pleasure or being happy, is like not putting breathing first. It’s so basic; I think that, once you understand it, to not care about it is to not really want to live.

“Having children isn’t as simple as breathing. Well, or, uh, *making* children may be simple, but that isn’t all there is to *having* them.”

“Ha! That’s right, and that’s why a lot more thought should go into it!” She looked at him. “You know I love you Kwanza. I will have children with you, and we will start it over.”

“I don’t really know what you’re talking about //Tlili, with the baobabs. It’s too much, what you are saying. Mostly I live just by getting through the day. Oh I know I’ll always love *this*, being joined with you, but I know that I also love to fish, to hunt, to hike, and to discover new country, and, well, to swing in the wind in the tops of trees. And from all this I know

that making children would be fine, but I also don't mind being alone. Somehow I feel more alive by myself, though I do love you, but, also, I'm not sure what you are saying has to do with baobabs."

"But you just said, before we coupled, that I am your Baobab/tleva."

"That is from *your* totem, your spirit connection. What it tells you may not make sense to anyone else."

"Well I know I need *your* help. I don't know how to bring the People back, and with more success. Though the difficulty, I think, is simple and twofold: we need to try to somehow see more of the world and our part in it to know what we must do, and we need to find out how to care enough to do it. As Naia says, we need to be fully awake. We must learn to love the world enough to let the power that is in it, and the spirits, and the greatest spirit which Naia thinks is beyond all to flow through us and give us the wisdom we need. That bigger connection is what I feel most strongly in the baobabs. I think the problem has been that we act on desires that are too small, as N!lkua does. He doesn't even care about his own children; that they would need other children, other people to be with. For example somebody, maybe it was Erectus, or maybe it was humans like N!lkua, didn't care enough about the future of the wetchla to leave some living grubs for others to use; they killed the natal bushes and the grubs living on them, and now there's no more wetchla, and we die of the yellow fever. -

Loving the baobabs, the bridge between the heavens and the earth, for me, puts everything in its place, to be cared for in its proper measure. It teaches us, or me, to connect to all."

Kwanza smiled, he reached for her, and held her face tenderly in his hands. "I don't know about any great spirit like Naia speaks of; the great creator the I learned of as a kid was merely Noatcho the god of the east, and his wife always made a fool of him. Do you know the story of where she and her sister pushed him into the pit full of dung?

Well anyway, I am content connecting to you Eva. That's enough to make me very glad, but for now. . . . for now, I think I'll just go for another swim, Ha!" Then he released her, stood up and made a shallow dive off the rocks.

As he left her she felt puzzled. “He’s so simple,” she thought, “What will it mean, really, to take on life with this man-boy whom I love? It feels strange. Men are normally in charge. Well, I love him anyway. His laughter, his lightness, keeps me present. Maybe that will be enough.”

The journey had been emotionally hard on Naia, but it was also physically difficult simply because she was old. The callused toes on her feet were arthritic, her breasts were chafed, and her digestion was now almost always irregular. So she was happy to rest, but now that they were in Dil/koa country how were they to find the women?

She felt they had to try. As she examined the animal bones and the grass growing in the area around the campfire she concluded that it had been several seasons since anyone had camped there. So on the tenth day after their arrival at the Luangwa they set off following the river down the valley. They ended up searching for another full month. They made a number of excursions up valleys and out into the hills and plains beyond the river, but generally they kept moving downstream until there came a day when they saw vultures circling a spot on the far side of the river. When they forded the river they found another fire ring, but this time it was fresh, and the vultures rose from the almost totally clean bones of a young elephant, bones that had been carefully stacked in a spirit circle. They knew they were very close, so early the next day they went forward quietly, and when they saw smoke ahead on the far side of the river they crept as warily as possible through an area of chest high grass on a bluff until they were directly across the river from the fire. //Tlili and Kwanza found a hiding place to camp; it was under another jackal berry thicket, this one growing on the side of the bluff. On the opposing river bank below them they saw an encampment of women.

The Dil/koa had built grass and stick werf shelters around their fire. //Tlili watched as several of them worked on the simple structures while other women toasted what appeared to be fish over the coals and still others worked on tsamma melons and a freshly killed antelope. She whispered,

“There are only about as many women down there as there are days in a month.”

Kwanza didn't care about their number. “They have brought down an antelope! I wonder if they killed that elephant or if was just carrion.”

Naia was worried. “In my childhood there were three bands of Dil/koa, and each was over twice as big as this one. Are there other groups Kwanza?”

“Not that I know of, as there are still no boys or men down there; what am I to do? I think they may kill me. Maybe we should try to join with Erectus.”

“Erectus are not of our kind,” Naia said, “It could never work, by which I mean we'd surely die. Don't be ridiculous! No, I must go among the Dil/koa alone. They're my kin, and they won't fear me. I think I'd have to swim the river here though. I'll go back upstream a ways to do that; then I'll walk back downstream along their side.”

## 17. The Dil/koa Women

Naia walked into the tall grass and quickly disappeared. As they watched the distant camp, //Tlili and Kwanza discussed how the Dil/koa could have diminished so drastically in one lifetime. //Tlili said she assumed they had suffered from the fevers as the People had, and that when a big man had been in charge his leadership may have been as poor as N!lkua's; Kwanza agreed that her theory seemed to conform with his memories.

About an hour later they could see Naia hiking downstream on the far side of the river. //Tlili and Kwanza watched hidden in the grass as she approached the women's camp. Suddenly there was shouting; several of the women were pointing at Naia. They started a high ululating cry, and at that the women came running from all directions. They started to grab spears and gather into a battle circle, but they could all see Naia, and their battle preparations quickly gave way to chaos as they realized that it was just an old woman, an apparition that they apparently hadn't considered preparing for.

Naia stood at the edge of the group of naked, dusty, but well fed women, many of whom were holding spears but none were pointed directly at her. At the group's edge she came to the center fire where several large logs were reduced mostly to embers.

She said softly, "I am Naia. I was born among the Dil/koa. My father was /Kwuyon, and I was given to the /Santo when they used to roam in the savanna by the lakes. I have been their shaman now for two generations, but their Big Man, N!lkua, was going to kill me and my apprentice, //Tlili. So we fled and came here. We wish to live with you. We bring considerable knowledge in the ways of plants; we bring wisdom to heal and to work with the spirits."

The woman who first saw Naia came forward. She was in her late thirties, missing half her teeth, and on her head were stalks of hair tied in



random angles with strips of bark. She had clearly had several children, and one of her breasts was much larger than the other as if only it had been used, and that some time ago, because it was now deflated. “I am Yralla,” she spoke softly, but there was gravel in her voice. She looked into the group more than at Naia. “We Dil/koa women are independent, free of men, and we would like to welcome you, but where is this apprentice you speak of?”

“She’s up across the river, behind me.”

“Will she be with you soon? For as you see we are toasting tarpon and would have you eat with us.”

“Thank you, we are hungry, but that brings up another issue. Some time ago the /Santo were attacked by some men of the Dil/koa, and the Dil/koa men were all defeated, killed, except for a small gentle boy. Who, at the great displeasure of the /Santo Big Man, N!lkua, I and my apprentice //Tlili saved. His name is Kwanza, and he is with //Tlili now. I would like to ask them both to join us.”

Yralla’s face, which had been welcoming as she faced Naia grew blank. She walked back to the group and there was a short whispered conference. When she returned Yralla’s voice was colder: “the boy may not join us. We allow no men to come here. If he sets foot in our camps we will have to slay him.”

“But. Why?”

“It is the only way to be safe.”

“I understood safety, I am not at all happy with violent men myself, but without men there will be no children.”

A woman spoke from the back: “We are saddened by your news that the Dil/koa men, who we are now free of, have been killed; that was not our intention. But we are free, and we value that above all else.”

The woman continued, “We have no pain or death from childbirth, no boys who grow up to be brutal or killed. The loss of children is something we are willing to bear.”

“But you put yourselves out of the cycle of life.”

“What is that to us?” growled the woman in the back, who now moved forward, and Naia saw that she was massive, with a creased scowling face

whose wrinkles made permanent furrowed brows. “What is it to you, old woman, what we do with our lives? If you are here to criticize us you had best be moving on, now.”

“I meant no offense, as I said I’m not too happy with men either. I am just trying to understand.” In the silence that followed Naia realized that the women would remain adamant; apparently the traumas of the past had been too great, “We will see that the boy remains well out of your camp, far from ear or eyesight. Is that acceptable?”

The group drew tightly together, away from Naia, and now she saw that several of the spears were pointed at her. After considerable whispered discussion Yralla came forward again and said, “You are a shaman and are welcome and honored here, but it is our pact that men are not allowed. So if you and your apprentice are to stay the girl must not be with him, and must come down now. You are not to have contact with Kwanza again without the group’s permission. He must not come closer than half a day’s walk from our camps, and no one is to share food with him.”

Naia felt spent. She knew of nowhere else to turn; “I’ll go and get her.”

Predictably //Tlili and Kwanza weren’t happy about the news. //Tlili was furious. “Why should I go, and leave Kwanza? We could go back to the flat rock camp. We don’t need these foul dimwitted women.”

“You are not thinking. I’m very old. When there are just two of you what if you both get sick or are attacked by a pride of lions, sabre-tooths, a pack of hyenas, or Erectus? If you remain alone I’d say that predators and disease will kill you before two wet seasons pass.”

“I have no choice. I cannot leave Kwanza.”

Something (matronizing?) in this talk made Kwanza bristle. He showed his mettle: “I am a bachelor, and a master stalker. I certainly don’t need their food, and I fear no predator.” Then he muttered, “I can survive.

I have so far. I'm not happy being unwanted, though I can take it. . . //Tlili you must go with Naia because there you'll stand a better chance."

"Kwanza??" //Tlili was nonplussed. "To what end? What would the point be? It's just more madness, and I won't be a part of it. But perhaps..." She paused, "perhaps we can still turn them."

When Naia returned to the Dil/koa with her apprentice it was evening, and the women signaled that //Tlili was to eat from the pile of charred blackened fish that were lying on a hot greasy rock by the fire's edge; beyond that they barely acknowledged her save with the occasional grunt.

She was sad to see that most of the women were older, over thirty. There were a few in their late teens or early twenties, but there were no children. //Tlili was the youngest person there, and it felt strange because even in her limited world //Tlili knew that in a typical clan most members should be *under* thirty.

Naia walked slowly to the werfs and began talking quietly with two elder women that she seemed to know.

One of the girls among the few older teens stood out strikingly. She had a slender body painted white with fire ash, and she had caked her hair with clay and fat, creating glistening clunky strands of natty hair. She chattered and gestured as she moved through the mostly silent group. She seemed very interested in //Tlili and approached her, "I am Glyla."

//Tlili munched the fish, relieved to see at least a little kindness, but she stared, slightly alarmed at the girl's attire.

Following her stare Glyla said, "I cover myself with this, you see, because I'm sensitive to insects. Flies, mosquitoes, fleas, even lice, make me swell up with welts. This keeps many of 'em from biting. Don't you ever wear mud or ash?"

"I do. But it's mostly to keep from getting too hot or baked by the sun. I haven't found it helps much with bugs."

"Well I put fleabane flower tea on first. We steep it in the sun, in that indented rock over there. Anyway, what's your name?"

"//Tlili, but Kwanza calls me Eva." //Tlili immediately regretted the pride that had caused her to utter her private nickname.

“Can I call you Eva too?”

“I suppose. . .”

“You know we will have a ceremony at the end of the dry season. It’s coming soon. It will be the season time when we drove out the men. Everyone is to eat iboga, and then we’ll be drawn close.”

Naia questioned the women about who was in charge, but they said there was no leader, no ‘big woman,’ among them. Yralla was clearly not a leader personality. She seemed to have been the speaker merely because she was the first to see the strangers.

When the Dil/koa spoke to Naia of their equality, they expressed disgust at their past and pride in their accomplishment. Yet there were certainly leaders. In the days that now passed, when the women sat at night pressed tightly around a fire, certain women always spoke and others were always quite, but //Tlili noticed that there was one woman, who was generally silent, yet when she spoke, as she had to Naia, the others deferred to her and a decision was quickly reached. Yranlu was her name. She was in her late thirties, short and stout with large pendulous breasts, and she had huge buttocks that stuck straight out; her behind seemed to be cantilevered on a couple of extra lobes of flesh where her bottom met her legs. //Tlili often studied Yranlu’s dark and intense eyes; they never seemed to focus on anyone. It was as if she were talking to someone or something else beyond those present.

The clan of women proudly told the newcomers how they had driven the men off and how thus far they had kept themselves safe. They were very organized; all the Dil/koa seemed continuously alert and skittish, like nervous crows, or, possibly, like African eagles. There were always at least three designated watchers, and when there was a hint of an attack the entire group would practice clustering together into a kind of human thistle, a knot with the spears pointed out, with the strongest women on the perimeter. It was then again that Yranlu would assert herself. She could become formidable as an elephant, and intimidating as a rhinoceros, when she wielded her spear or shouted commands from just inside the outer circle of defense Naia was impressed.

Every few days when //Tlili went out to gather food she secretly returned to Kwanza; he had set up camp some distance back up the river. They were both miserable with the situation, and they knew it couldn't last. They spent a fair amount of their time together discussing the repressiveness of the Dil/koa, "They're ridiculous" //Tlili would say, though they are certainly not worse than N!lkua, and I really like a few of them, especially Glyla."

Despite the difficulties, Naia and //Tlili had begun to settle into their new life.

They had worked out the basics of hunting and gathering in their new environment. //Tlili found that Naia still had much to teach her, particularly of several new varieties of astringents and sedatives among the local flora. Yet, though she searched, she saw no sign of either the wetchla grub, or her bogada. She had used pinches of the bogada as an antiseptic on any wound that she or her two companions, or the Dil/koa had received, and the fungus had met with universal success. Now only half a thumbnail's worth remained, and she searched every hollow tree or overhanging rock for a bat colony that might provide more.

A full moon had passed since they had met the Dil/koa when //Tlili came walking quickly into Kwanza's camp,

"Kwanza! There's a saber-toothed tiger about! I saw the fresh tracks in the mud by the river when I was about half way here, and they were just filling with water."

"I know of this cat. We should not be living or hiking alone here Eva; we won't last. In camp with the fire and these cliffs I am safe, but hunting alone, more often than not, I sense I am also the hunted. It just won't work for you to be walking alone to see me. Predators often stalk solitary humans; they will learn of your habits and ambush you."

“When I was a girl Naia and Naxa both said that in the old days the big cats would almost never attack The People. We had made peace with them. I now think that was because there were more of us.”

“Yes, possibly. Though I have heard the peace was based on mutual respect, but these animals know nothing of humans. I have stalked them, saber-toothed cats, lions, and tigers, and when I look into their eyes I feel it. I think the spirit of cats has become foreign to us.”

“When have you done such things: -looked into their eyes?”

“This past month.”

“I scarcely believe that Kwanza. If it is so, it is you who must be more careful.”

“I haven’t much of a care left in this life. I love hunting and roaming. I love to run, too feel the hard stone or the soft grass pounding under my feet, and the wind tickling my, my balls, free, but I belong to no People. I haven’t spoken of it //Tlili, you see my mother and aunts and cousins were very good to me when I was little, but mother died a long time ago, and I’m tired.”

“Please don’t be. I need you, and I have something to tell you. I haven’t menstruated this moon.”

Kwanza stared at her some moments before he reached for her and held her gently. She hugged him tightly, and felt his penis quickly grow hard against her lower abdomen.

Later as they lay together in the dry grass near his fire, he held her and she said, “There is much hatred and bitterness among these women who have given up on men altogether. Generally they are quiet with down turned mouths. Theirs is a sad sterile existence; and worse, the yellow fever has come here too, last rainy season. It has killed many, and the battle where they drove off their men must have been terrible, killing even more. Perhaps we could still convince them to let you live among them. There is one girl, my friend Glyla, who I am sure would agree.”

Kwanza was uncertain, “I’m a young man, and what man doesn’t dream of being the only man in a world of lonely women? But I really don’t want to live among them; their united disgust is too powerful to be defeated.”

//Tlili mused, “We have worked hard to find the Dil/koa, and I was very interested to see the tribal order they’ve created, but mainly, I am just struck by the vivid easy joy I feel with you when I compare it to the stolid repressed life I have with these women. Most of them are virtually always depressed or cross, and they are always are into each other, and my, business. For example they see fit to concern themselves with who builds the fire, who goes gathering, who cooks . . . With the /Santo we just did these things.

When I was alone in The Kopjes before my coming of age I decided that somehow women needed to be in charge, perhaps like Erectus, but not like this. You see Kwanza it isn’t that women are better than men, it’s just that it seems like they could have a better focus.”

“What do you mean?”

“Women would care more about all of the people, not letting the people die out.”

“Not *my* Dil/koa!”

“They’ve been hurt, and twisted. They need to recapture the joy of life, and relax.”

“Things are what they are, men become twisted too. I’m not sure that you can change them as you seem to think, but my opinion is that perhaps men and women should be equally important,” said Kwanza, “I could live with that.”

“You may be right, but boys by nature are more aggressive than girls, from birth; we have all seen it. I am sorry Kwanza, I mean no offense, but there must be some way we can live where the men don’t totally take over.”

“Well if what you say is true there probably are no more people anyway, so that’s not the main problem is it?” said, Kwanza.

To which //Tlili had no answer except, “Well the Dil/koa certainly aren’t helping with that.”



*marula*

For the next couple of moons //Tlili spent much of her time in the women's camp, when she wasn't working through morning sickness or gathering food she practiced self defense with her spear and an eland bone knife she had made with Glyla's help. With difficulty she managed to keep her morning sickness hidden. It is a primordial competitive trick of evolution that when women live in close proximity, where they will regularly smell one another, their periods become aligned. When menstruating the entire tribe of women traditionally worked lightly --spending long days sitting on dry grass which was later burned so that the blood attracted no predators or carrion eaters. //Tlili knew she mustn't be found out, so she crouched among the women, surreptitiously shuffling her clean straw with their soiled.

She began to notice that her discontent with the Dil/koa generally wasn't reciprocated. They liked her music, her gathering abilities, her beauty, and her general relative good cheer. But on the third moon after her arrival she could no longer keep silent; her pregnancy would soon be visible anyway, so one evening as the group ate around the fire she looked first at Naia for support, then addressed the group,

She spoke to Yralla, but loudly enough for the group to hear: "we are alone you know. Do you see that? We never see any more of the People. Naia and I traveled a great distance; there was nobody. We may be the last. Not only is it our duty to keep the People going, it's such a great opportunity!

And Kwanza, he's near here. He's gentle, and he could get a bunch of you pregnant."



The women were silent. She looked over the group, searching their faces. Most of the women were looking at the ground in some discomfort. //Tlili's heart leapt. Maybe there was some hope here. She saw that four of the women in particular looked very uncomfortable and began to fidget. They had been out gathering marula and chanced upon Kwanza just after she and he had been play wrestling in a clearing. He and //Tlili had heard the women a few moments earlier, and //Tlili had just managed to roll under a bush and hide as the women entered the clearing.

They had not seen him since he was a child, now little Kwanza had become an attractive young man; plus he'd had an erection, and had been laughing infectiously. So now all these sad women were caught with a mental image they found they could not erase.

Yranlu stumped out of the group and stood very close to //Tlili; with feet planted wide, balled fists on her prodigious hips, and her elbows were flung outwards -she spoke loudly to the young Mitochondrial Eve, "We don't need you to tell us what to do! If this is brought up one more time you newcomers will be banished. And you don't know what you are talking about; there are still men left in the bush. We repulsed a couple of bachelor types not four moons ago. The People are still around, but if the Spirits say it's time for the People to disappear there is nothing we could do about it anyway, and besides that, men are dung, they're worse than flies. We are well rid of them; so why should we want to start it over?"

Listening to Yranlu //Tlili now knew she would have to be a bit more diplomatic in her attempt to persuade the Dil/koa to accept a man. She was lucky though; her speech may have caused jealousy, rejection, or even expulsion if it come from another woman, but //Tlili was popular, and the conversation now ended without resentment.

A couple of days later she and Kwanza met at the half way point to his camp. He was very excited. "Come," he said, "I've something to show you."

They trekked up the far side of the river past his hidden camp to where steep cliffs and hills bordered the water and yet on the river's near, or camp,

side the savanna was open with easy paths along its banks. When a large stream issued into the river between two cliffs he waded against the current into a gorge whose sides were lined with bush willow. They rock hopped up the smaller stream between the cliffs, and the creek became increasingly vertical until they came to a water fall that could only be ascended by climbing the rocks among the spray. A short distance above the top of the falls the gorge opened into a broad valley. Some way from the stream on the left //Tlili now saw a large grove of massive ancient fissured Baobabs, many of whom contained room sized hollows. As they approached she saw that In the midst of the grove there was an ancient fire ring.

“It is far safer then Nallo’s Chin,” said Kwanza.

To //Tlili it seemed like a homecoming. “I feel the spirit of the world is dwelling here,” //Tlili felt her breath coming fast, as if she could finally quench a long and painful thirst. She felt she couldn’t contain the joy of it, and giggled spontaneously, “It is a sacred sanctuary Kwanza, and it’s just too beautiful. I haven’t brought my didgeridoo. And, my beloved Stork, I am sure that somewhere here we will find the bogada.”

“There is more.”

He led her a short way further up the valley to where it forked around a low cliff ringed mesa. Then he pushed carefully through some thick whistling thorn plants and what the people called toothbrush bush to a narrow trail that wound then climbed up between two cliff faces. They were climbing the basalt remnant, the plug, of an ancient caldera. When they came onto the top there was a cool breeze, and //Tlili saw that the top of the mesa formed a gentle bowl that was cracked and drained by a deep sheer fissure that came from the cliffs in the direction of the valley’s creek and cut almost to the center of the bowl. About the center of the bowl and on either side of the fissure was another grove of smaller dryer, yet more ancient baobabs.

//Tlili was silent. She sat on a basalt boulder. Here too, there were iridescent and malachite sunbirds moving among the root like branches.

At last she whispered, “Kwanza, I believe you may have brought me to the navel of the world. But that’s not quite it: It’s like the umbilical cord has not been cut, and here it still provides.”

Suddenly Artemis interrupted, “I still don’t get //Tlili’s love of baobabs. She spoke of the Great Spirit, but it sounds like what I guess they call primitive animism, or what my parents would simply call paganism.”

Carressa: “The labels we have used here don’t quite capture the essence of what was occurring. You have said you love your acacia koa. Is that Paganism? . . . .

Maybe it is, but the Judeo Christian god is also said to be known through the beauty of the world, what more direct way is there of knowing the sacred? And the important thing is that by touching and seeing it you connect to beauty and your sense of the wonder of the world grows. Don’t you think Artemis that here in this Kohala forest you have found a profound path to meaning, meaning which naturally transcends your very self in a world so big that it includes you, and me, and all that we know?”

“I’m still not sure what you are saying.”

“The baobab tree may just be the path for a few. But a tree does tie the heaven and earth together, and though it may be parochial, here on earth trees make our home. Perhaps as I continue you will understand....”

## 18. The Massacre

After three months the world had withered; the remaining leaves creaked on the trees, and wind rattled the grasslands creating whirlwinds of dust and dried husks. Then came a red dawn, and at midmorning the sky held up a continent of heavy clouds. By noon the rain was coming down in sheets, and the Dil/koa women began their long planned first annual iboga ritual. It roughly marked the end of a dry season several years past when they had overthrown the men. The younger women built a huge bonfire that hissed in the rain while the elders dug up dried meat and nuts they had been saving, and with fresh game and fruit they feasted, sometime after which they each drank half an ostrich egg of iboga mush and began their communion with the spirits. The celebration had overtones of anger and sadness, and it was very wet and slippery, but within the trance the women found solace in one another and expressed their pent up emotions with cathartic lesbian sex.

Still, as a group they remained lost; the bonobo without the bone. Through it //Tlili played the didgeridoo in the dripping wet shade of the leaning trunk of a blackwood tree, and on a primordial level the earthy drone of the phallic pipe helped the last gathered females of a heretofore rather unsuccessful species transcend the pathos of their nihilistic lives.

The morning found them gathered, half conscious, in sodden clumps in the werfs. //Tlili had taken only a mouthful of the mush. With a smaller dose she felt only the heightened awareness of the hunter, and that or the call of some other instinct had caused her to leave the camp, damning the social consequences; she was feeling an overwhelming desire to find Kwanza. She had walked delicately with the utter silence of a naked ape, avoiding splashing in puddles and mindful of her scent in the rain, through the foggy morning downpour for less than an hour. She was holding her spear, ready to strike, when a man was suddenly in front of her, an apparition in the fog.

“Kwanza!? What are you doing so close to our camp?”

“I was feeling lonely. Why are *you* here? We hadn’t planned to meet, but first, before you answer I must tell you something urgent, there are fresh tracks in the rain. Man tracks. So at least we are *not* the last, but it isn’t safe; I must walk with you, now, back towards the Dil/koa camp.”

Glyla was the next up. She simply needed to relieve herself. She was squatting a stone’s throw out of camp, taking pleasure in the clean rain after the long dusty months, and she was gazing placidly at the landscape when gradually it dawned on her that she was seeing phantom figures in the distance, advancing though the storm from several points. Moments later she dashed into camp screaming, “There are demons with spears charging toward us.”

Or so it seemed, but after the initial horror Glyla saw that they were human men. They had painted their bodies with white ash, and had stripes of red that was surely blood on their faces, ribs, penises, and the tips of their heavy spears, but the rain had caused their artwork to blur and run, creating a fearsome surreal effect unhelped by the iboga. None the less, as they drew near Glyla was certain from their faces that they were not Erectus. She had given the warning, and so the Dil/koa women had at least grabbed their spears when the demons were upon them.

N!lkua, Big Man of the Paleolithic, had a major problem; when the fevers had ended he was left with just six men (including himself), one woman, and a girl. He knew that he must share the women or be killed in his sleep. So he shared her (/Shouhe) with Naxa. The girl, Chul/lx, who had only just come of age, was shared by the other three men - two of which were probably his sons. Then the girl had become pregnant (too soon), whereupon she died in childbirth. So then there had been just the one woman, and she had now gone crazy and become foul by covering herself with her own excrement. But, personally, her madness was of small concern to N!lkua; he received his main social satisfaction from his cronies, from his

grown sons and his old hunting buddies. Yet it was far below his dignity to share one woman with all of them, so her insanity and resulting uselessness had solved the problem. Still, they were all restless; they needed women. So they had abandoned her, and he had taken the men to find these Dil/koa...

“Boys, If I read the signs here a-right, there are more than enough women here for all of you. If what that little louse Kwanza said is true they surely won’t be cooperative. So just keep the ones that we can breed. Kill the old ones.”

“N!lkua, do you really think we will find that old sow-warthog of a shaman and her young apprentice?”

“Do you doubt me Klwue? Fool. Could you not read the signs yourself? They came this way. When we find them kill that Naia on sight. As for //Tlili . . .” he growled remembering his humiliation, “I won’t suffer such a daughter to live. I know you and Shoui want her though. She’s yours, but out of my sight, and kill her afterwards. There will be enough women left.”

Naxa was uncertain. ”N!lkua we must prepare. The old shaman and her apprentice have power among the spirits plus these Dil/koa women are many, and they bested their men. We should purify ourselves with ash.”

“We also bested their men, and we killed them all easily, but as you wish.”

//Tlili heard it first: “Kwanza! Listen! Over the river. There’s screaming. Oh Kwanza! They can’t do this; the camp must be getting attacked.

There aren’t enough of us Kwanza, and there are some good women there!” She started to run towards the women’s camp. “So much for a safe haven.”

“Careful!” said Kwanza, searching his conscience, “the attackers can’t know of us yet. If we are to help we must surprise them.”

The storm was slackening as they crept through the grass on the knoll overlooking the camp. Below, across the river, there was carnage. Yes the men were stronger, they had some element of surprise, and the women were drugged. But the women had the numbers, and the vigor.

To her horror //Tlili saw that at least ten women were slain, along with two men. The remainders of the distant figures were fighting mightily; the four remaining men were charging and thrusting their heavy spears at a knot of women, who were fending the charges with smaller spears. They could hear the echoing voice of Yranlu bellowing orders, but there was a louder voice, and looking down they attached the voice to a large figure, and //Tlili knew she was hearing the harsh commands of her father.

“N!lkua!” //Tlili was dismayed and furious, and now saw that the knot was weakening as several more women fell. “Kwanza we must create a distraction!” She screamed and waved her arms. “Up here you spawn of liver worms! You pus filled scabs!” She started to run straight down the steep hill.

To Kwanza the scene below of the two clans who had rejected him, now fighting one another, seemed tragically just. He was struck by how insignificant the tiny clump of muddy bloody humans looked from this height. The clouds were clearing and he saw that the forests and open plains formed a pleasing varied pattern. He looked at the number and variety of birds that circled and called, from those who were close by to the remote specs moving among the clouds, and he quickly discerned that it would only be a half day’s trek to the plain on his left where he could see a distant grazing herd of wildebeests. “Oh my diving bird,” he muttered under his breath, “I don’t really care if all of them die, except for you.” He charged, building a considerable doleful inertia, as he followed his mate down the hill.

//Tlili screamed, but it did no good; the men were intent, and a blood lust was on them. She leapt into the river with her spear in one hand, and as she did so realized that, though she hadn’t succeeded in creating a distraction, she still had the option of stealth as a weapon.

N!lkua had now lost three of his men, of whom he had seen his right hand Naxa speared. Naxa, his crony for all these years, had died cleanly like a perfectly impaled antelope, but a joy was rising within N!lkua. He and his boys had managed to kill most of the old women and they'd bloodied the choicest young Dil/koa into submission. To see young women lying there after all these months, he, his son, and Kluie all had erections. Rewards were at hand. But where in all this screaming were //Tili and the old witch?

“Stop! Stop! Stop! Please STOP!!” said Artemis, “I really don't need to hear of all this violence. Carressa, please, I do want to know what happened, but though I know there has always been horror in the world, I just don't want to dwell on it. For me, dwelling on the horror gives it more power than it deserves. Could you just tell me how she survived, what there is to learn from her baobabs and her bogada, and while you're at it who you are, and why you are here? The morning has come, and I'm getting hungry.” Artemis was stiff from sitting wet and cold on the stony cliff next to Carressa, and in the grey morning light the hair wrapped old woman looked even more ancient than she had yesterday. “I would like to harvest some food with you Carressa. . . .”

“My dear, there is much more to this story than the violence, and violence must be clearly understood if we are to help the ills which beset us.”

“But isn't there enough violence in the world, and in books, and movies? I would rather focus on a workable vision of something better.”

“I agree with you dear, but you must forgive me, for your questions are related. In my life I am sure that I have seen far more violence and pure horror than you have even dreamed of. As a result, as a teenager, I was consumed by such anger that I have easily committed murder, more than once. . . .

But don't be afraid Artemis! My youth was so long ago that it's almost a miracle, as you shall see, that my memory can stretch back so far. I believe I have been an agent of peace for many many waking years since.”

“Where are you from Carressa?”



“New Zealand.”

“New Zealand? They speak English, but your accent sounds Spanish. I would have never guessed New Zealand. I don’t understand, and you seem to be out here with even less possessions than me, just an old bow and one arrow; at your age. Sorry to be so forward, but it freaks me out a little. I at least have a knife and a way to start a fire.” Artemis now felt very nervous. She had never known anyone who said they had committed murder, and to meet such a person, even an old woman, alone and naked in the jungle, yet looking at her with gentle compassionate eyes, made her feel like she was dreaming. Yet before Carressa could respond Artemis forged ahead, “And, murder? How did that happen?”

“Artemis, I *am* telling you my story; though it’s your story too. I’ve never told the full story to anyone else. Also you needn’t worry about me; I have a few things stashed in this forest, and I can take care of myself just fine. I feel it’s you we may need to be concerned about. But may I finish this story in a proper chronological fashion? I’ve been fairly careful with the violence, but I feel some events are crucial to relate.”

“Well, I s’pose. . . Though I don’t see how a tale about a person who lived one hundred forty thousand years ago could connect to you in ‘proper chronological fashion’.

I’m hungry but I’d guess you are as well. . . I guess it *is* still raining. . .”  
“OK then.” Carressa took a breath . . .

“The men were so intent on their prey in the camp that //Tlili and Kwanza managed to swim the river undetected.

What followed *was* very violent so I will summarize it briefly: N!lkua and his remaining men were killing and raping as //Tlili approached hidden initially by the river which was partially obscured by some willow bushes. Her first thoughts were mainly on Naia. She didn’t see her shaman anywhere.

N!lkua was wrestling with two women at once. Clubbing them enough to subdue them, but he didn’t want to kill them. He was on the opposite side of the camp.

//Tlili stood in the water and aimed her spear at her own half brother while he was in the act of raping a young badly wounded Dil/koa named Chloy, but //Tlili could not bring herself to kill him. So she leapt out of the water, ran over, and stabbed him in the leg instead. He pulled off of Chloy, screaming. Kwanza was right behind //Tlili. He also leapt from the river and kicked the man, Kluie, who was thereby interrupted from ravaging Glyla. Kwanza then clubbed Kluie in the head.

N!lkua saw //Tlili first, and began to aim his spear at her, but Yranlu, from among the presumed dead, managed to trip him. The two downed women he'd been wrestling with stabbed at him in a daze, one of them connected, and in a rage N!lkua killed her then Yranlu. Furious he now charged //Tlili, intending to stab her directly with his spear, but Kwanza got up from the ground where he was fighting with the dying Kluie and fended N!lkua's blow.

N!lkua was now quite wounded, blood came thick from a stab wound just above his stomach. He aimed another blow with the side of his heavy spear at Kwanza, but at the same time he was attacked by //Tlili, Glyla and the dying Chloy. A few other women were crawling and limping towards the melee as well. Though he had killed most of the women, that hadn't been N!lkua's intention. These women had indeed fought more fiercely than he had predicted.

With all his men now dead, save Kluie who was bleeding from his skull, N!lkua, who was unaccustomed to battle failure, now realized the fight really hadn't gone at all his way. Feeling uncharacteristically weak again, he paused and gazed with curious admiration at his indomitable daughter advancing with her spear. Out manned (or womanned) he turned towards the river, and calling Kluie to follow him he limped to the water and dove in, letting the current pull him down the stream.

## 19. Bogada Cure

“//Tlili . . .” Kwanza stumbled toward her. She alone was physically unharmed. Though in this new horror a part of her withdrew, she would not despair even now; she would turn inward to nourish the new life within, and almost all of her remaining wounded awareness was now focused to Kwanza. He had a huge bloody bruise on the right side of his chest, and he now collapsed on the ground breathing shallowly.

Glyla walked towards //Tlili in a daze; with the exception of the debasement that she had suffered she looked very strong, but she threw herself to the ground as well, moaning and indifferent. Chloy and the remaining women now lay still. //Tlili examined them quickly. Where was Naia? //Tlili didn't keep the Shaman's herbal bag, Naia did. She raced to the remnants of the werfs that the men had shattered, and where Naia had been sleeping, but the bag and the shaman were nowhere to be found.

The bag even had the last chip of bogada that she'd gotten from before they'd left Nallo's Chin. //Tlili felt she had so little help to give, but she would do what she must. She quickly rebuilt the smoldering fire as best she could with the driest of the sodden firewood that was stacked nearby. Then she dragged Kwanza to the fire. He was now shivering in shock, and after //Tlili coaxed Glyla to join them at the fire, she wrapped herself around her shaking man. She looked around at the destruction while she massaged his brow. She was appalled, indignant; It was all such a waste, and the tears ran from her eyes.

The last twilight was falling on the three living humans, they were gathered round the fire surrounded by corpses, and the rain was a soft drizzle when the old shaman returned. She had been far from the camp, oblivious to the mayhem. When she took in the scene around her she was sad, very sad, but not distraught. The biggest shock for Naia had been and would remain the loss of her adopted tribe, the /Santo, this destruction was but an aftershock, alarming, but the chief calamity had already occurred.

She moved slowly among the dead, making sure that they were indeed beyond aid, and then she turned to the living, but she could hear buzzards croaking in the fog.

Wordlessly she took in Glyla's condition. She caressed the girl's hair and placed some comiphora leaves against her lips. Obediently Glyla opened her mouth. "Chew," the shaman whispered.

Naia then stood looking down over //Tlili and Kwanza. They both appeared to be asleep. "All praise to you, spirits of baobab and stork." She thought, "They live yet!" Wet and exposed, prone on the sodden earth, the couple lay in a tight embrace and shivered faintly in unison. Naia saw something new: a slight curve of the abdomen, "I haven't been watching this girl as I ought. She's with child." She muttered, "And this boy, Kwanza, look at him; it is exceeding strange that among all this death and suffering of women, caused by men, I have to keep tending this boy, this man." She began to rummage through the bag, working on a poultice.

//Tlili opened her eyes. "Naia mam! Oh the blessed land!" She sat up and Kwanza groaned. "The last bogada. He must have it now, and Glyla. . ."

//Tlili woke up fully, considering, "Naia mam we cannot bury all these women, hyenas, disease, and foul spirits will come. We must leave this place." //Tlili found the last chip of bogada, and ground it into a paste with her hands. Then she placed it on Kwanza's wound and placed the poultice on top.'

*-abruptly Carressa's voice trailed off again. She closed her eye's tight, as if lost in a painful memory.*

## 20. Snails

Makao the solitary banjo player and biology student had arrived. Beyond a general oppressive feeling of loneliness, which seemed to be underlying everything he was doing on this project, he now felt his life path merging with that of *Tornatellidinae*, the endangered snail species he had been assigned to study.

He had summed up his attitude about the snails at a party with his friends in Hilo the week before, “When a species is endangered you tend to appreciate its uniqueness. Cliché, but true. Poor little blighters.”

He thought about it again now that he was in their habitat; as a conscious individual he felt that his *self* held some importance. He liked to think he was unique, and his own death seemed to be a pretty big deal. But he reminded himself it *wasn't* to someone in India or China, nor was it to people in the future, or even to his own descendents a few short generations in the future. Yet when a species came down to a few individuals he felt it made sense that each one rose in importance.”



*Tornatellidinae*

He looked, now, at a *Tornatellidinae* that was stuck to a branch at eye level a few feet away. He could only see the shell because its opening was pressed tightly to the bark, hiding the animal within.

“Hello snail!” he said out loud.

“Even lowly snails like you, that live for years, and make an *entire* life for yourself on a single tree; you gain my sincere empathy. You slimy little mollusk, in your candy striped cone.” Makao walked on.

He had spent the morning laying out a grid, half a kilometer on each side, at the upper end of the Walikahi watershed. He temporarily flagged trees with tape, in accordance with his topo map and his GPS. Then within each hundred square meter plot he carefully began to search for and record every snail he could find.

“Hello torna snail, *Tornatellidinae*, tornado-tailed-snail hey!, boy have I been looking for you. Do you have any mates in these parts?”

Of the four endemic snail species remaining in the Kohala it was Makao’s job to observe and count *Tornatellidinae*. There had been dozens of snail species in Kohala. Of the four only *Achatinellidae Partulina Physa*, the ‘singing’ tree snail, had been protected in a private ‘ranch’ that skirted the Kohala state forest. There were also some scattered snails in the upper watershed highlands (the ‘cloud forest’) some miles further west. The first Hawaiians had reported several snail species as ‘singing’. The current consensus among biologists was that this was probably due to the Hwamie or Laughing Thrush whose habitat was in the same proximity as the snails.

There seemed to be few living snails in his research plot. Even fewer than he had expected. There were a lot of freshly dead shells though. Some were broken. “Rats” he began to grumble. “Or maybe wild boar, or both.”- All his life he had felt annoyance with the invasive organisms, even the old Polynesian rats and pigs. They had been introduced a thousand years ago, but now the evidence was showing they had recently been eating most of the rest of the indigenous torna snails. “Why now?”

And yes, here’s some shells and fresh rat poop. Damn!”

As he searched for the little mollusks he cursed the invasive animals, then humanity as a whole for the mess we’ve made of things. Then he thought of Dave’s comments: “Am I a, what do they call it? A misanthrope?” No he thought. No that was a red herring. At least for him it was. True, he didn’t like what people like Dave had done, or the *Dave* within everyone, but there was a lot about humanity that he did like. He *had* to like John Hartford’s music for instance.

Makao moved on. He admired the beauty of the shells, and the tenacity of the few survivors he was finding. Then, randomly, his mind jumped to her. He didn't know her at all, hadn't known her name till he'd found the bag. Artemis. But her eyes; the subtle crystal glitter of them, they were so . . . . He couldn't find the words, they gave him a thrill in his chest just to remember them. He noticed he was breathing faster.

He was struggling with his focus. A sudden gust of wind caused the trees to rustle. Makao jumped and turned then scolded himself. "Why the hell am I so jumpy?" And he wondered he why was so ridiculously scared the last night, and why was he so lonely? It certainly wasn't just her. . . . It just didn't seem natural for someone to be alone out in the wild, with nobody, but nobody, around. With just one other person he figured he'd be fine.

Makao had been to the snail site once before on a field trip with his professor and two other students. As before, hiking in from the Wiapio had involved crossing numerous small valleys in the upper forest then walking to the head of the next large valley, the Wiamanu, which was practically as big as the Waipio, except that the trail into the Waimanu was often missing. It had been heavily eroded, and landslides from an earthquake a year earlier had sent loose earth and stone across the steep path which threaded along the faces of the cliffs on the valley's side. It was up near the top of the Wiamanu where he had to cross to the next watershed over, the Waiilikahi, where Professor Mitchell had shown them tree snails high in an acacia koa. It had sure seemed easier then, with others.

This time Makao was grimy; slimed with sweat. He was quite irritable when he'd chosen his campsite the evening before near a tiny falls and pool in the headwaters of the Waiilikahi stream. He had decided to strip and wash off in the pool, but he'd chosen an area rife with mosquitoes. They attacked him en masse as soon as he was naked, and he only escaped by plunging into the pool and keeping just his face exposed to the air that was within the bug free mist that hung a few inches from the falls.

At the top of the valley in the cloud forest it drizzled or rained steadily. The peaks on the windward side of the Hawaiian Islands create microclimates that are considered the rainiest on earth. He had climbed out

of the water when it started to rain, which didn't slow the mosquitoes down at all, and then he had hurriedly set up his tent and climbed into it, where, again, he had commenced sweating. But that wasn't the worst of it. When darkness arrived Makao, camping alone for the first time, lay awake wondering at each nighttime sound. Why had he agreed to this? What was that rustling outside the tent? A wild boar? Or was the sound some ghoulish old vet creeping up with a gun to kill him for his money and tent, or kill him because Makao may have stumbled by some hidden field of ganja? He slept fitfully.

At first light he sat up in the tent, and as the drizzle continued Makao tuned up his banjo. Then he began to play, and sing absurdly, some John Hartford tunes before shifting into a banjo rendition of the old Hawaiian ballad, "Hillawe." As he played he thought of the grocery bag with its wallet, cell phone, and bikini.

She was surely alright; if someone had hurt her they would have taken her money. But what if she had left her stuff there, and then she had gotten hurt. She could have fallen off a cliff or gotten raped or killed. But if he went back and called the police, or the search and rescue, they would invade her privacy if she was OK. He could look for her, but what of his project, what of her privacy, if he found her would she think of him as a stalker.

Well he had some time. At least he could explore the place a bit. He would use the evenings after he had been counting for eight or ten hours. It might slow him down but it would keep him sane. After all he was going to be here for ten days. . . .



## 21. //Tlili's Love & The Baobab (Continued)

Artemis watched the old woman. Carressa seemed to have become catatonic in tandem with the rising of the sun that was now breaking through the storm.

'So this old woman has committed murder.' The girl sensed it was true: somewhere under the kindness there was an ocean of fierce anger. 'And she's amazing with that old bow.' The weapon was lying in front of them. Superficially at least it was old and tattered, very primitive looking.

'Even my bow is better, and it's my first lame attempt at the craft. . .

Why am I giving her such a hard time? She's obviously trying to give me something special, and anger or no, I really like her. Whatever she did she certainly radiates enough kindness and innocence, even love, that I've no reason to provoke her. Perhaps it's that she presumes too much in the way she teaches.'

- "Carressa!"

"Yes? . . . Yes I was remembering what I've learned. Tales from my childhood you know . . . Oh yes. We had left off at . . .

-//Tlili.

She and Naia who were sitting by the small fire as Kwanza slept fitfully nearby. And Glyla lay on the ground, seemingly catatonic. Naia answered //Tlili's question ponderously, as if she didn't want to think of trivial things during such a dark time, "Of course you are right //Tlili, we all must move."

"Yes, and I know where," //Tlili said, and quickly she told Naia about the hidden valley and mesa that Kwanza had discovered. "There is already shelter within the hollow trees, and I can't imagine a safer place, from predators or men. We wouldn't be safe anywhere else that I know of around here. --There are saber-teeth about, and Nilkua is still out there. --I don't think he's dead, and these Dil/koa said several times that there are other bachelor types about."

This time Naia was very slow to answer; she built up the fire then lay down near it, and they all dozed in exhausted shock through the dark of the night. Perhaps it had been the noise of the battle, and then the fire, but no scavengers bothered them.

Later, well after sunrise the next morning it was raining again when she answered, “I suppose that’s what we must do. We have to go somewhere.” She paused. “I fear we brought this doom to these poor women. Though I never dreamed N!lkua would come this far.”

Naia bowed her head before the massacre, and as //Tlili watched her the girl felt the oppression. She thought of the silence in a world without humanity while the fire hissed at the rain, and a few small grey colored finches called in the distance.

The vultures were silent too, save for an occasional rustle of wings as members of that species arrived to join the coming feast. Kwanza lay quietly wheezing in his sleep, and through it all, framing the other sounds, the river grumbled as it churned and rolled down over its stony bed.

Eventually Naia stirred, and looked up, “Rouse that Glyla. She must help us, if she will. We have to move Kwanza.”

As they prepared to truly leave //Tlili quickly scoured the camp for objects of value. Like most hunter gatherers before her or since //Tlili was not particularly materialistic because it wasn’t wise to own much more than you could carry, and possessions, like food, were generally shared.

She remembered there were a few well made stone knives and spears in the camp. She retrieved four of them. She also picked up several old antelope hides from within the broken werfs, but the pelts were so full of fleas she decided to leave two and take only the cleanest hide. Her didgeridoo was unharmed, and she also found one, but only one, unbroken ostrich egg cup. All told the entire worthy plunder of the Dil/koa amounted to about an armload.

//Tlili then woke Kwanza. Now that he had rested and felt some of the effects of the bogada and the poultice he seemed at least to be mobile. This was a relief because //Tlili knew she couldn’t carry him alone. It was

likely that he had some broken ribs, but Naia was too old to help, and after her violation Glyla shied away in mortal disgust from any contact with a young man, even the one who had defended her.

Naia and //Tlili filled a pack skin with the useful items, and quickly they left with Kwanza leaning on //Tlili. They walked a short way upstream before they crossed the river.

Glyla stalked along, following them out of the camp, but her mind was far away.

They all heard hyenas and jackals in the remote distance, though the calls were drawing closer; the scavengers were following the visual message of the circling carrion fowl. Many of the bald vultures who had gathered by the score had already landed, and they set to work moments after the four living humans left.

For Kwanza the trek was exceedingly hard. He collapsed twice. The first time he fell they were following the rugged shore of the river. They were struggling among some boulders by the water's edge when he noticed the landscape around him was beginning to spin. The sound of the water became distant, and Kwanza found himself sitting down. He noticed that only his own breathing seemed loud. He observed dispassionately that each movement of his chest caused a stab of pain. Finally he became aware that he was lying in a relatively comfortable heap on the stones. He lay for some time before he found the energy to continue.

The second time he collapsed they were climbing the falls at the hidden valley's entrance. He lay in the falls quietly observing his pain, and could only be made to move after //Tlili managed to revive him with, a pinch of yohimba bark, gotu kola herb, gentle words, and a handful of jackal berries.

The waterfalls helped Glyla. In the ionized air she recovered somewhat from her catatonia, and found her voice, "Where are you dragging us to //Tlili?"

"To a better place, a hidden place, safe from aggression. We will live within hollow baobabs! Surrounded by all that wood I think we'll be warmer when the night is chill, and embraced by the tree's spirit we will start over."

They made their first camp to the left of the stream among the lower grove of baobabs that grew in the valley above the falls. Naia was walking in the back with Glyla, and she murmured to the younger woman, “In my entire life I have never seen or heard of trees this large have you?”

Glyla murmured back, “No, we are as baby mice at an elephant’s feet when we are before these trees. They take my breath away.”

And indeed in the grove’s center there stood giants, well over two hundred feet high and twenty feet in diameter, and among them there were trees lower in height but larger in girth, wooden castles, forty and even fifty feet in diameter. Among the massive labial folds of elephant skinned bark they found several holes leading to dark, often damp, peat and guano floored chambers walled with a soft, blackened, pulpy inner wood.

With the rains the baobabs were in bloom. In the late afternoon the root like branches were covered with the tree’s large white gardenia shaped flowers. The air in the grove was fragrant, and on this day the drizzling rain had just given way to late afternoon sunshine. The grove was filled with all manner of song birds.

In her heart //Tlili knew it, she could even articulate it, that the horror, the pointless random death they had just experienced, and all the pain, were trivial before this beauty. She knew this consciously, but at the moment she couldn’t feel it. The pain and recent horror separated her, but that seemed fair. Why, after all she had seen, should she expect otherwise? She was conflicted: celebration was in order. Yet it would dishonor the dead, and the tragedy of Glyla’s, Kwanza’s, --everyone’s pain, to celebrate the gift of the home they were about to receive, but it would be a kind of blasphemy to just ignore it. --Gift that it seemed to be.

Solemnly //Tlili twirled slowly among the trees. Then, being a bit chilled from their climb through the spray of the falls she pressed herself, breasts splayed, against the rugged soft bark on the side of an old giant. The wood was warm. Drenched by the westering sun, she rolled against the tree, massaging the small of her back, then sank down and wiggled against a rough root, feeling its warm life pressed hard against her anus and labia. Her feet at the tree’s base easily sank partially into the soft loam and leaf carpet that was still wet from the rains. Seated thus, with her head and back

against the tree, she chose to play her didgeridoo, so they could all see the larger beauty, her gift, and they did see it and feel it, albeit through the rotten and heavy skins of their suffering.

The sun moved lower as she played in a slow desultory cadence, it was no less haunting then when she was full of energy. And when //Tlili was done with her guttural music, sound with bark in it, she paused, observing, letting her eyes glide off the living wooden mountains that squatted like gods on the earth. She said, “In a couple of moons there will be fruit everywhere, and bats and small game will come to eat the fruit. The four of us, indeed many of us, may be able to live here and hardly ever have to leave this valley, or the mesa there above us.”

Kwanza, even in his pain, was revitalized by //Tlili’s didgeridoo. With effort he spoke for the first time, “It’s Ule/deni.” *Which in the ancient tongue roughly means ‘fertile land.’* The People of //Tlili’s childhood lived over a hundred thousand years before agriculture, and they had no word for garden, but Ule/deni became the name of their valley.

They all sat or dozed through the remainder of the afternoon, and this time in the ensuing silence they heard the valley’s own little stream chattering among its stones, and over that sound, again, among the music of birds they could discern the calls of sunbirds.

In the evening they moved on, and at close to the exact center of the grove they came to the stones that formed the ancient fire circle. It looked as if a fire hadn’t been built there in at least a generation. The grand sovereign of all the trees overlooked the fire circle, and after searching its vast bole’s myriad bark folds and drapes they found a hole large enough to crawl through. Within the baobab they discovered a chamber that was fairly clean and dry, and it was big enough to hold them all. They found no evidence that any other large animal had been living there.

“Look,” said //Tlili, “There’s light coming in up above. There are several holes open in the upper trunk. Naia don’t you think we could build a fire in here, and the smoke would escape? It wouldn’t even hurt the tree.”

Naia murmured, “This is better, much better, than Nallo’s Chin. Kwanza, you have most certainly found us a home.”

//Tlili responded, “Naia mam it is very good here, but I would prefer it if we moved to that mesa at the top of the valley. It’s safer there; the air feels even better to breath, and the breeze tickles the back, bottom, and breast.

They stayed at the lower camp for three days. Kwanza’s bruise disappeared, but his injury was only moderately less painful. He had three broken ribs, and it would take months to heal.

Shortly after sunrise on the third day //Tlili found Glyla sitting by the stream and staring vacantly at the water. For the first time in her life //Tlili saw clothing. Glyla was wearing a small apron of hide. //Tlili thought for a moment then she asked Glyla to hike with her up to the mesa.

When they reached the top and looked upon the upper ancient grove within the mesa’s bowl //Tlili was once again buoyant, for all their travails, and Glyla noticed it, “How can you be happy now //Tlili? My Dil/koa were slaughtered by those . . . those creatures. Now we are alone. Marooned in an empty world.”

“I don’t know.“ //Tlili gazed back down the valley towards the river that was hidden below the gap of the falls, and now Glyla saw that //Tlili was crying, “I know we need others, and I have been beyond angry, and afraid at our loss, but the People (the /Santo), and the Dil/koa, were so awful. I don’t mean as individuals Glyla. I loved many of them deeply. And on the whole I love being human. I’m proud of it! It’s just that our, that humanity’s, -Attitude, our beliefs, they were so . . . death oriented. Look what they did,” and her voice broke with sobs, “More than the fevers, more than the lions, our tribes did this, our Big Men, the crazed Dil/koa women, --were brutal; look what the men did to you. Then we killed each other off. It’s so, stupid.

I feel that since humans seemed so much more awake then the other animals that we should have known better. It felt filthy. As if we had covered ourselves in our own dung. Alone now, by ourselves, you, Kwanza, Naia, and I: it may be horribly lonely, and scary; I never asked for this. We wanted to prevent it, but I feel free now, and I feel much cleaner. Especially up here. I think these Baobabs may have been here since the beginning.”

//Tlili's ability to shift her attitude was infectious. Glyla looked about. "I do like the sunbirds. Still...it's an evil world." She shivered as if the beauty, felt for a moment, merely served to highlight the violation and horror she had so recently suffered.

"The sunbirds are here for the flowers. . . Glyla I am so sorry."

"Have you ever been raped?"

"No. But I would have been, eventually, by N!lkua my father."

"Then you still can't understand it."

"You are right, but I fear it myself, and in my mind I think I understand it. To me it would be like the death of a loved one, a loss that would cripple me. I don't know how much, but I know I would find it hard to continue."

"That's right."

The two women turned and walked randomly through the gnarled Baobabs in silence for quite a while.

Glyla looked at her apron. "We Dil/koa only wanted to protect ourselves."

"You may hate me, and I may say it as I shouldn't," said //Tlili, "but for all the horror I know vulnerability is a great gift. I've felt it, free and humbling as we journeyed to this land, without it we wouldn't be able to connect to that which is greatest."

"So you talk."

"I'm sorry, but I felt it in my bones. Couldn't the People have done better? Surely we don't have to make each other suffer so?"

-She remembered how wonderful it felt to be a tiny being in the cool morning on the open savanna with the wind caressing and buffeting her mostly hairless body,

but then again it had felt powerful, most excellently useful, to have that club in her hand when N!lkua had come at her, and she had never looked a saber-tooth in the eye.

"So you talk, and just a foolish girl." Glyla walked off, and //Tlili felt shame and even the tears welling up, but she bit her lip, and steeled herself against taking offence. --She felt she always talked too much.

They approached the middle of the mesa. The larger trees were near the center of the bowl around the top end of the steep ravine or fissure that cut into the bowl and opened on the mesa's edge that faced the downstream direction of the valley below and the river beyond. They found many hollow trees, but unlike the grove below none were large enough for all of them to sleep in. //Tlili said she was getting tired, and she found a comfortable looking stone to sit on while Glyla left to explore.

It took considerably less than the remaining half of the day for Glyla to walk around the whole mesa and return to the center grove, "There's no water here," she announced.

Unlike the majority of hunter gatherer humans throughout history, who traveled fairly continuously in rather small family groups, //Tlili's people had always lived when and where there were areas lush enough, and with enough game moving through them, so her people were comparatively sedentary. Their clans had formed and moved between relatively stable seasonal camps that could support a fairly large number of people. Consequently the People had liked their long term camps, and they treated them somewhat as modern people would their homes.

In the end they didn't move to the mesa as //Tlili had wished. They stayed in the lower grove. They saw that water would be a major problem on the mesa in the dry season, and they still only had the one ostrich egg shell. But there were certainly no predators up on the mesa, and when it did rain there they saw the water would drain off through the crack that pierced to the center of the bowl. It was dripping and trickling now. The crack started with a series of bowls and swales and it left the mesa with a waterfall which they saw would generally run during and just after a storm.

One day during the rains Kwanza had an inspiration; he would dam one of the bowls in the mesa crack to create a storage basin of rain water. The next day he, //Tlili, and Glyla returned to the crack, and taking clay and loose stones they created a small dam. Now they were set wherever they lived. The trees provided fruit and the hidden valley below was big enough to provide their small group with nuts, insects, birds, and small game year round, possibly continuously. Not moving, not leaving the valley at all was an alien idea which, though it seemed safe, might become unhygienic. It was



good to leave a camp for at least a season or more, now and then, so it could refresh itself. During the next couple of moons lightning struck the top of the mesa twice, but the low center of the bowl was largely protected.

Glyla spoke for the four of them, “I like not carrying the water when we go up there, but now that the water is there in our little pond, there are mosquitoes.”

Kwanza answered, “I can build a bigger dam, and I can gather some small fish from the river. They will grow to eat the mosquitoes. Then we can eat fish there as well”

And so it was. Kwanza took an ostrich shell from a recent clutch he had found on the far side of the river, and he caught and released small fish into the mesa pool.

## 22. Naia & the Last (or First) Family

As the first wet season in the groves of Ule/deni began to end //Tlili was heavy with child. She and Glyla harvested hackberries and an ancient species of fig from the upper slopes of the valley. They caught the ever plentiful mobane worms, some fruit bats, and of course they gathered the baobab fruit. Kwanza ranged further out of the valley, hunting gazelles, springbok, duk duk, and other larger game.

One evening while the small group feasted on roast gazelle Naia addressed Kwanza, but she spoke so they all could hear: “Kwanza our situation has changed so much, but I don’t wish to ignore your position among us. --You already found your growth some time ago; you’ve even fathered a child, soon to be born, and you bring in the food as a man would. I cannot give you the hidden rituals of the men, but I would not have them be lost.”

“They are lost though aren’t they?” Kwanza spoke slowly, “And I am now as much a man as I ever care to be.”

“What talk is that from one who is soon to be a parent?”

“I don’t know about that. I know I love my mate, and I am happy to raise a child with her. The rest will follow. With our tribes dead the old ways are now gone from us.”

“No. You have known pain, loss, and love. I’ve been watching you though, and you still float on the surface as a leaf does. Not as a tarpon; a tarpon is one with the water yet he can move as he will.”

//Tlili nodded in affirmation with Naia’s words. She knew he needed to be more aware, more conscious, and a bit more in charge of his life. And he lacked something. She remembered him telling her that he had stared at saber-tooths, how he was indifferent to his fate, but she felt that he had changed since her pregnancy, and the death of the Dil/koa.

Kwanza looked strangely pensive for some moments, than he replied, "I hear you Naia, and I suppose you may be right. But please say that I am more like a leaf in the wind. Because I would rather be like a bird. A bird can go more places, faster, and it's lighter than a fish."

Naia said, "So it shall be. I don't know much of men's rituals, but I do know that boys took iboga by themselves, far from the help of their tribesmen. Yet you are the last man we know. --I would not lose you. We still have plenty of Iboga, so you should go tomorrow because your child will be born soon, and it will need a man for a father. Perhaps you can take the Iboga alone on the mesa while we stay at the lower camp. I know you are to go to an unnamed place of your own, but hopefully the mesa will suffice. It is you who discovered this hidden land anyway. 'This Ule/deni.'"

The next day Kwanza left for the mesa with a sack of food, his spear, and enough iboga for a week of trance, and the three women waited.

When Kwanza got to the top of the mesa he ate his meal. Then with an enjoyably full stomach he spent several hours sitting on a thicket of flowering thumbergia vines at the mesa's edge. He watched the lower grove some distance below, and wondered, "Maybe I let them order me around too much. . .

How can I learn to be a man when I'm ordered around by women? But in the end I don't much care. I can always leave. . .

Not that I ever would, for long; she is the best thing I know of.

Whatever the others said, the men, they're dead now. They were stupid. Their ideas about women were no better than anything else they said." Kwanza decided to walk to the back or upper valley side of the mesa, and he saw that the valley circled the mesa and at the back end it formed a stony dead end canyon. Eventually he stood at the top of the mesa cliff looking across the upper valley at the canyon walls on the far side.

"Kwanza!"

He shouted and was pleased to hear his name echo back at him several times, "Is a Man!" The words bounced around.

"The Dil/koa."

"My people"

"are dead!"

The echoes were wonderful but the click language was hard to shout.

“N!lkua. . .

the Big Man,

. . . is an elephant’s ass!”

As Kwanza pondered the men and women he had known he looked off the mesa and became aware of movement on the opposing ridge top up to the right. Was it some sort of ungulate? He had to know, --other concerns were dropped, and he felt it was almost incidental that he drank the iboga shortly before he started down a vertical crevice he found on this side of the mesa, opposite the lower valley.

Of course he had never taken the initiate’s dose before, and not only did it taste unspeakably terrible, which he knew would happen, but he found that he could not help but throw it up almost immediately.

Perhaps it was a sensitive stomach that caused him to end up with a lower dose, or perhaps it was just his disposition, but for Kwanza the effect of the iboga was the reverse of what people normally encountered. He became lucid verbally, though of course there was no one to hear him.

“She didn’t say I *mustn’t* leave the mesa,” he said to aloud as he clambered down the crack, his hands and feet clung to the rough stone, and occasionally he had to brace himself with his back and butt against one side of the crack while his hands and feet were against the other.

“She just said she would prefer that I didn’t leave. Well I don’t think I can keep her wish. I must wander, and hunt.

I like to have a camp, but a bird must leave the nest now and then, to live.”

When he reached the bottom of the mesa his felt clear about his situation: There was no way to know if //Tlili’s theory about there being hardly any people left in the big world was true or not. So it hardly seemed to be his affair, but he now had a camp, and he had women, one woman in particular, who wanted and needed him, and he had a center, so he had love, a focal point in the world, but the world was still open to him. He felt that he was already a man, one with his environment; he could feed himself, outsmart any predator, and travel at will, and hunt to support women and

children. He could do this; he could put energy into his life, but he didn't *really* feel attached to it.

His ribs hurt and his stomach wobbled from the iboga, but he had endured far worse, and, since he felt fairly bound to those who loved him, he was now able to enjoy his freedom.

Kwanza began to jog up the ridge that surrounded the valley, and his big calloused feet spread his weight. He lightly pounded through the coarse grass and stone, dodging the thorns. As he ran his youthful passion took hold in a surge of testosterone. His penis grew hard, slapping back and forth on his thighs with each stride, and the joy of life was such that he cast all pain aside and leaped in the air as he ran.

When Kwanza returned, many days later, he looked sleek and strong. Tlili/ saw him coming out of the bush. He was carrying a single eland horn, and he had a huge hock of meat that was still attached to the antelope's femur, which he used as a carrying stick to hold the meat over his shoulder. A thin drip of old blood ran off the meat down his naked front and back. A small cloud of flies followed him as he walked. She ran to meet him; a feast was in order.



*eland*

”How did you fare? You look a little thinner, but still, you’re looking fine! Do you feel like a man, and where did you get the eland?”

“Harr! I ran a lot. I left the mesa, and I killed and ate part of this eland a day and a half’s walk from here.”

“An eland? Kwanza! N!lkua himself could only kill an eland with a partner. They are so big! They normally take several spears, if you can even get close enough to spear them.”

“I never had to spear her. I chased her until she collapsed in exhaustion.”

“I scarcely believe it!” said //Tlili as she looked at his long slender body in amazement. There had been rumors she had heard as a small child of men from other clans doing this, but no one had in her lifetime.

“I never felt too sad at all //Tlili. I was alone, and I lived. I managed to avoid the lions, the leopard, hyenas, and saber-teeth, but I have done that before. This time, now, I am happier.”

“Why?”

“I think it’s because now I know my place. It’s here with you. No one will prevent it. I’m wanted, and I want to be here, but I will still hunt and wander.”

She looked at him and he laughed, “//Tlili. Baobab/teva. My Eva!”

And so they began life in the grove. In some ways it was still very hard; death could come easily in the Paleolithic. There may have been other humans elsewhere in east Africa. We know there were other men, but we also know there were dangerously few people in the world all told. There was not enough genetic diversity among just the four people of this tale, not for the safe continuation of a species, not at all, *but, it was the best life any of them had known.*

//Tlili for her part loved Naia and Glyla, and she loved her man with a strange intensity, though she remained uncertain that he was any more than a boy.

Before long //Tlili's pregnancy came to term. When her contractions started Naia followed the ancient traditions and gave her a pinch of iboga to ease the birth and allow the newborn child to enter the world with some awareness of both the seen and unseen.

Naia had always said, "the pain of labor puts a woman into a different part of herself, and the path she follows with Iboga can help her see much that otherwise she would never see."

//Tlili took the iboga because she loved Naia, and knew the tradition, but it made her nervous. The herbal side of being a shaman somehow seemed more sacred to her than the 'hidden' spiritual side, and Naia had never had a child. "Naia I am in too much pain. I don't want to vomit during these contractions."

"I don't think you will."

As first births often are, this one was long and hard, but //Tlili's body was well formed to be a mother, and her heart was totally given to it. She lay on the grass having her contractions until the baby's head crowned. Then when it was time for the final pushing, she gave birth squatting. She held onto the lowest branch of a baobab sapling with her knees on either side of the trunk, and eventually she was delivered of a healthy baby daughter.

They all felt that this child, this tiny human was the beginning of something new. The time of the Big Men was over. Typical clan protocol had been for a woman to go off alone into the bush to give birth. The main reason for this was so a woman could make the first choice of what to do with the baby. Even under the patriarchy of the Big Men this first choice was left to the mother. A mother needed at least three years to wean a baby. While she nursed her menstruation would normally stop, but this natural birth control didn't always work. If babies were spaced too close, or if there were twins, a mother may have felt she didn't have enough milk, then in order that two children would not starve a mother sometimes had to make the terrible and ancient choice to bury the newborn with her placenta. Assuming such a choice didn't have to be made she would return from the bush with her baby and present it to the Big Man to decide if the infant would be admitted.

But in the grove the four of adults were so certain that this birth was going to be a positive event that they all choose to be present. Glyla stood behind //Tlili and took the baby as she emerged. She gave it to //Tlili as Naia cut the cord.

It had been taboo for a man to be present. Men hunted, ruled, and defended the tribe from attack, women gathered and gave birth, but due to the rejections that Kwanza had experienced, and the acceptance that he now felt, he was indifferent to the old traditions and even the taboos. Naia was wary of the skinny young man's presence, it seemed indecent and a bad omen, but //Tlili and Glyla were totally unconcerned. //Tlili had convinced Glyla of the Dil/koa that something was quite askew with the old people's roles for men and women, and the lack of male appreciation for a birth was close to the heart of it. So Kwanza watched the birth, and at the first sight of his daughter he was shocked to find that he was filled with a sudden, unexpected, and fierce paternal love for his child.

Naia was astonished, she had never seen any man who was over ten years old cry, but upon seeing his infant child this man did, and as he held his daughter over his head with outstretched arms he spoke firmly, "you, *my* child; I will help you soar over the searing pain of life as a heavy white cloud glides over the scorched desert."

It may seem strange biologically that an animal would be indifferent to their offspring, like N!lkua was. But you know Artemis, the phenomena isn't that rare in nature. An organism often feels that its first priority is itself. The degree of care it shows for its offspring varies sharply from individual to individual, and from species to species. And of course because sperm are much easier to create than eggs, a baby in the womb, or milk, -the males of many mammal species are far more likely than females to only be interested in reproduction to the point of the sex act, not beyond. Quantity, a million little sperm, over quality, a fat rich egg, is practically the definition of the male and female mandates.



Some days later Kwanza picked up his daughter again, who they had now named Ton!qwa, and he spoke to //Tlili in front of the other women, “I am now a man, I know, but my love for my daughter, is more of a revelation to me, then anything I experienced when I was by myself with the Iboga.

I intend to be the stork, who sometimes flies far away, yes, but who is normally a present and attentive parent. ”

Several easy years passed. //Tlili had given birth to another daughter. The birth had not been particularly easy; the baby was too big for an easy birth, but she now had two good natured healthy children. And so //Tlili’s daughters began to grow, they were quite different. Ton!gwa the eldest was a splendid gatherer. The second child, Nayla, was closest to Kwanza, and though she was thin as a reed she fished and threw the rabbit stick with the promise of becoming a fine hunter.

//Tlilis biggest fear was for Nayla. The girl liked to explore. When she was still a baby, and could only crawl they had merely to turn their backs and they would find Nayla in the more remote parts of the grove. When she had been walking for only a few of years she was not allowed out of the valley, but she could traversed up and down the cliff between the valley floor and top of the mesa.

When Ton!gwa was six Glyla and //Tlili were walking in the lower grove picking up baobab fruit. They were both pregnant. //Tlili was looking up, studying the crowns of trees searching for evidence of bat colonies and bogada. For all the promise of the grove she hadn’t found the fungus. She considered the situation; she was bogada’s discoverer, and she had only ever found it in one tree, now far to the north. She knew it must be very rare, so she was distracted. She was wondering how and where she would ever find bogada again when she realized Glyla had been talking to her; “He loves you //Tlili. He’s a good man, in many ways more so then my Dil/koa sisters...unlike what Yranlu said, he’s not mean at all.”

“Yes, //Tlili replied, “He’s unusual. He’s not like the men I knew among my own people.

Maybe he would be unique among men. Now that you are pregnant I am happy, though I suppose I have been jealous, but you need children too, and although he and I were together first I don’t begrudge the joy you’ve found with him. He’s the only man here, but I’m glad it happened to be the Stork who brought us both children because he’s the gentlest man with babies I have ever seen or heard tell of. The girls are as comfortable with him as they are with us. After these girls one of our children will surely be a boy, and I look forward to it. Perhaps then we can finally put an end to this division of man and woman.”

“I don’t know what that would feel like at all //Tlili, though unlike my Dil/koa sisters I do want men, though I was also happy when we drove them and the big man away.”

“I still want to honor the girls. In fact I have a song I want to sing when my girls come of age. Do you want to hear it?”

“Shouldn’t it just be sung at the ceremony, and shouldn’t you ask Naia?”

“I love Naia but she will never be a mother now. You will be, and I would like to try the song just once, perhaps you could learn it.

“Alright.”

At this //Tlili lifted her didgeridoo which she had strung to her shoulder, and then she began to chant, click like an eland, and blow on the didgeridoo. The result left Glyla with a vision of the great mother, sound as the giant baobab squatting in the earth, crowned by the sky, hearty, sensual, and full of sustenance as the eland, and leaping in a bound into the branches and from branch to branch, she saw Kwanza, bird like and busy as a pollinating bee, a crucial part of the picture, virile and vital, but certainly no threat to the tree at all.

“It’s wonderful //Tlili, but perhaps it’s too strong somehow.”

“Perhaps.”

### 23. //Tlili the Shaman

She had been in the valley four years, and now as a grown woman //Tlili had been able to clutch hold of and sometimes place wooden pegs in the soft folded bark of the baobabs until she could climb and reach the lower limbs of any baobab she chose. Consequently she had climbed up most of the trees whose crowns looked at all promising. Kwanza often joined her in the tops of the trees. Many times she had ventured into trees in bloom in the early wet season, and with colonies of bats, but there was still no bogada. With the exception of the bogada she could find virtually all the medicinal herbs she needed in or near the valley of Ule/deni, including iboga. Yet //Tlili was despondent about the situation; it wasn't just that she had discovered bogada with its amazing antiseptic capabilities, it was more about the colors, the brilliant orange and green that had seemed to sing to her, and she couldn't forget it. She thought fantastically of returning to the one tree, now far to the north, or of somehow willing the fungus to grow in her new homeland.

There was repetition in their lives, but it was rarely dull, for there was change within the repetition; //Tlili was out in the valley's edge, and once again gathering mobane worms with Glyla, though this time it was with and Ton!gwa. Their small numbers had caused them to break tradition by taking little Ton!gwa, who had already shown an aptitude for finding and gathering that was similar to her mother.

Glyla was a few years older than //Tlili, her spirit totem was the myna. On this hike Glyla was feeling cheerfully loquacious, chattering about any random thought: “//Tlili did you know that when Ton!gwa was being born, when she was ‘crowning’ and her head was coming out of your vagina, where the top of her head was surrounded by your tight stretched labia, did you know that it made a perfect circle? Naia said such circles are rare enough in nature, and that she supposed it shows some connection between birth and the circles of the sun and the moon.”

“I don’t know how significant that is Glyla, but it does set me thinking: We enter the world between our mother’s excrement filled anus on the one side and her clitoris, the most powerful source of life giving joy on the other, and all our lives we cycle between the holy, or the sacred, and what is often the profane, finding the balance. But it’s also not a circle; it’s more like a curled hair. . . . Ha!”

//Tlili paused, “I think vaginas look like flowers, and from flowers are born fruit. . . . So, you know that birth and creation is the mystery of the flower, and our spirit seems to spiral and spiral, like the petals going round on a flower, like the tiny roses that grow among the stones at the base of the mesa, and as we grow up we create ourselves anew. I am not talking about good and bad you know. Of course we shouldn’t want to be bad. It’s something different. An anus is ok, it’s necessary. I just wouldn’t want to live my life in one. We have to go around, as I said our bowels are necessary, but so often a woman or a man seems to know nothing of finding, getting, or giving that deepest hidden nub of ecstasy that creates the focus. Eventually, hopefully, we can find ourselves closer to a balance with the oft hidden beauties of the greater world, and by that I mean perhaps we can connect more often with the greater spirit we can see in the baobab or the stars on a clear night . . . “

Carressa had been looking out towards the waterfall as she spoke, she turned to Artemis. “So it was, Artemis, that in the distant Paleolithic was born what women of the Bogada now call the Rose Mandala or //Tlili’s Medicine Wheel. It’s about the universal dialectic we all feel, it’s the foundation of all the world’s religions, how the self or ego makes peace and finds meaning with the larger reality, which much of humanity may call ‘God.’ I will draw it here in this clay for you, as //Tlili eventually and gradually worked it out. As I’ve said, it’s kind of like the medicine wheel of the Plains Indians of North America. -With the strange twist that //Tlili’s primordial understanding of nature seems, on the left or east side of the

rose, to parallel the hierarchy of the modern ‘hard’ sciences, so for a little clarity, I will put it in the language of modern science.”

Carressa drew a picture of labia and wrote the notations slowly out in English in the mud, carefully making them legible. Carressa looked up, searching for a spiral. Then she walked to the edge of the falls, picked a native yellow hibiscus, returned and placed it in the center of the drawing.

“On the left is the subjective, your ‘spiritual path’ which leads to that which you accept or have faith in. On the right is the objective, the universe and its laws that we accept to the degree that we accept what we are in this life, this reality. She stamped the ground.

You will notice that when you ask people what they think the meaning of life is you will tend to get just four answers. This shows the wisdom of //Tlili, and after her the native American Plains Indians, because the four answers correspond to the four directions: Where illumination in the East is about understanding what *is* (*survival*). Innocence in the South is about going with the flow and accepting your part, being who you are (pursuing your own happiness). Introspection is about finding how to integrate into the whole (pursuing your spiritual path). Wisdom is about becoming integrated (loving God). And back to what is.

Everything, Artemis, everything that is, and everything that happens can be put on the Rose Mandala. When Kwanza became aware of how he was connected to meaning by the birth of his child he was at ‘Awareness of the Sacred’ that leads to ‘giving,’ but at any particular moment we are all somewhere on the spiral, going round and round. //Tlili found her faith and acceptance in ‘God’ early, and she was grounded enough to make wise connections about ‘the laws of life on Earth’ at a very young age.

## THE REALITY / EGO DIALECTIC



# The Medicine Wheel

*Wisdom* (Old Age, Buffalo)

N



*Introspection*  
(Middle Age, Bear)

W

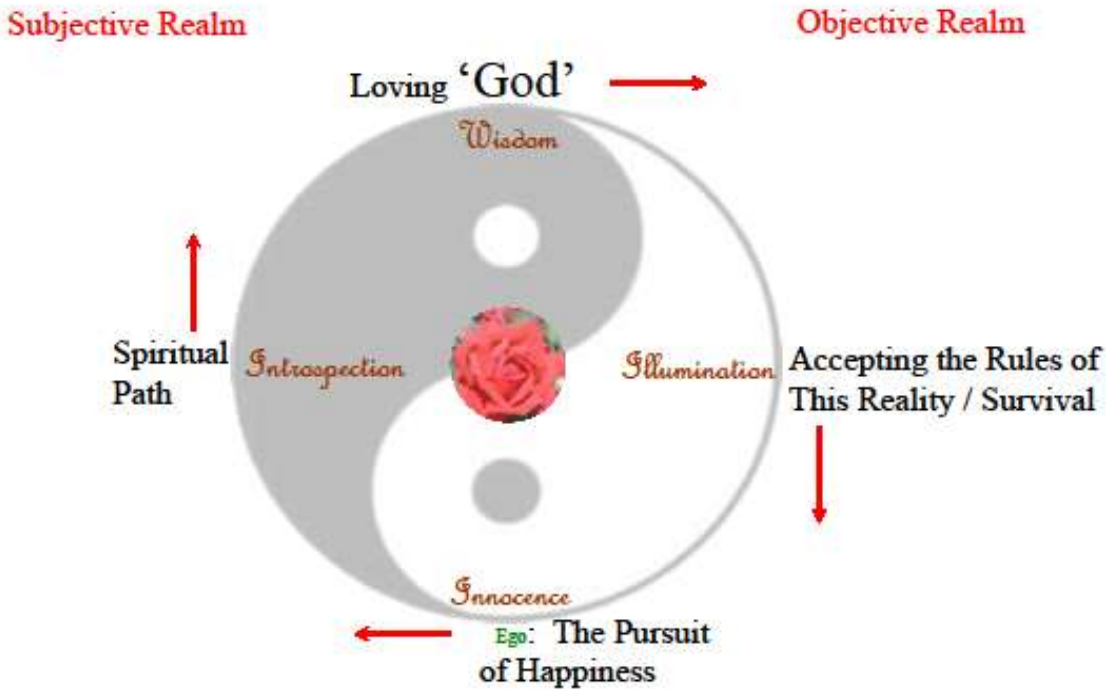
*Illumination*  
(Birth, the Eagle)

E

*Innocence* (Youth, Coyote/Mouse)

S

*The Meaning(s) of Life Circle & Rose Mandala*





# The Rose Mandala



Now I am sure that the map of the ideas that could bring the salvation of our civilization is on this drawing. This is very important. To aid your understanding of the Mandala I will try, and have endeavored throughout my story, at important moments in the lives of these people, to point out where they are on the circle, or spiral.

Again Artemis, on the Mandala you see the serious difference //Tlili would have with modern western value systems, where contemporary humans think that pursuing 'happiness' is the primary value, and they often approach 'God' as merely an aid in their pursuit. Your modern cultures do this particularly in focusing on the attainment of a better afterlife, or, if they are secular and don't believe in god then people often say what happens to the world after they're dead is irrelevant to them.

Many people short circuit the Mandala, often skipping or speeding past uncomfortable parts. In your modern world generally they are 'humanists' whether they are secular or religious, and as such they spend most of their time down at the bottom, literally, of the Mandala. (She pointed at the anus.) Now there is nothing wrong with one's self or ego, and, inherently, there is nothing insolvably wrong with our race. But totally focusing on ourselves, or even focusing on all of humanity, is still missing the overwhelming majority of reality, and it's irreverent to any omnipotent definition of 'God.' We should spiral smoothly all the way around the rose.

You could say this just shows how poorly evolved we are Artemis, because we evolved the feeling of happiness such that its pursuit should ensure our gene's survival, and that has generally worked for us and other semiconscious animal life forms, but the problem is that with our higher intelligence has now come increased power over 'our' world. The problem is created by our valuing the pursuit of our own happiness over the value of loving 'God' first, and within that of loving this universe and living under its laws, or within that, of pursuing true survival (biological law), and survival's attendant need to truly prioritize the survival of our genes into the distant future. Happiness is deeply important as a core value, but it should be subservient to the valuing system that comes from understanding the Mandala as a whole, and that value skewing is at the very heart of what leads

individuals, and civilizations, particularly those dominated by paltrorks, to disaster. Your famous modern sages, Mohammed, Jesus, and Buddha sensed this: The secret comes in putting ‘God,’ in many ways, first. As I have already mentioned, Jesus is to have said that loving God, totally, is the ONLY commandment, even saving your soul, whatever that should mean, was clearly secondary. Though for now paltrorks dominated religion has corrupted what the sages seemed to understand.”

“Are you sure of what you are saying Carressa? When I look at this wheel, or Mandala, it seems to say that no part on the wheel is greater than any other part. Isn’t that the point of a circle; like King Arthur’s round table? And if the self or the ego is pursuing happiness down at the ‘bottom’ then that’s where it’s at, and who is to judge it?”

“Actually you’re right girl, very perceptive. You will notice that when you ask people what they think the meaning of life is you will tend to get just four answers. This shows the wisdom of //Tlili, and after her the native American Plains Indians, because the four answers correspond to the four directions: Where illumination in the East is about understanding what *is* (*survival*). Innocence in the South is about going with the flow and accepting your part, being who you are (pursuing your own happiness). Introspection is about finding how to integrate into the whole (pursuing your spiritual path). Wisdom is about becoming integrated (loving God). And back to what is.

In modern times the plains Indians said that a soul can spend her whole life on one part of the wheel. And you will notice that’s true. However I *will* make the judgment, again, that too often the human culture has gotten stuck at the bottom, ego inflated, pursuing happiness primarily and not caring about the rest of the round table as it were; with quick cycles at best round the rest of the Mandala. This lack of introspective spiritual pursuit, this indifference to loving, giving, and acceptance of god, and the resulting lack of deep awareness of reality and *acceptance* of the laws of life are so endangering our culture that even the pursuit of happiness is in danger. The anus, or asshole, cannot exist by itself!”

“Neither can the clitoris.”

“Touché! Though perhaps we are taking our metaphors too literally, but at least the clitoris provides an astonishing transcendence of the mundane.”

“You keep talking about God,” said Artemis, “but for you who or what is God? You never make your opinion on that very clear. And I never heard that the Bible, the Koran, or the Buddha spoke much about maintaining ones genes into the future.”

“You haven’t? What about the Old Testament God’s promise to Abraham? The story goes that after Abraham revered god above his own son, Isaac, that only then did God say Abraham’s descendants would be as plentiful as stars in the sky. And I haven’t laid out a position on what God ‘is’ because almost by definition we mortals can’t really know, and, strangely, within very rough parameters it really doesn’t matter. . . You see, with cosmology humanity can now know again what humans in the Paleolithic also knew; that the world of God is much bigger then humanity’s, so much bigger as to make us essentially irrelevant. But that irrelevance should only bring up questions about the state of our ego. It says nothing negative about god. You can choose to see our irrelevance as either a bane or a blessing. Faith is about loving god whether or not that love always seems to be returned. The current debates, between atheist’s and theists, are mainly about whether or not there is a supernatural or sentient element to ‘god’. Amazingly, that’s not particularly relevant socially; that is, from the perspective of loving god primarily, -as opposed to primarily wanting to love or ‘save’ yourself.

“How could there not be a supernatural element to god?” Artemis was a little annoyed; it seemed to go against the very definition of God. “And to your point Carressa, In philosophy class I once heard that in ancient times it was Aristotle who said that the meaning of life is to pursue happiness, and some hundreds of years later Augustine echoed Jesus, saying the meaning of life is to love God. But Augustine is considered to be the philosopher most responsible for the European dark ages.

“Dangerous waters those. You are right. Those were relatively ignorant times, and Augustine was a Manichean who believed the physical world was evil, of the devil. With agriculture humanity lost its way, and for a

while the simple pursuit of happiness has cleaved closer to the natural and reasonable way to live than living based on superstitious dogmatic ideas of God. But we circle the Rose. Science has created awareness in modern humanity of knowledge orders of magnitude greater than we had just a couple of generations ago.

Natural 'God' could just be the natural world, the physical universe. Supernatural God would include nature as the holy creation as a superset includes a subset. If you pay attention, and seek to be truly aware of just the physical world that your modern science is showing you, you become humbled by the universe in the same way that early humans were humbled by the earth before humanity came to dominate it so. In our ignorance of the cosmic size of creation, after agriculture, humans thought we were lords of the world, that Jerusalem for instance was the center of the universe, that the stars revolved around the earth, and that God fashioned us particularly out of clay and set us as masters of creation. It was recent, only five hundred years ago with Copernicus and Galileo, that modern humanity learned otherwise, and it was just in the 1920's, less than a hundred years ago, an eye blink, that Edwin Hubble learned more definitively of the truly humbling nature of the 'known' cosmos, with its billions of galaxies each full of hundreds of billions of stars.

The thing is Artemis, secular or no, scientists are the prophets of your time. They may not often speak of God, and it's central to the scientific method to strive, so refreshingly, to not be dogmatic like some 'prophets', but as always the deeper significance of a prophet's message goes largely unheeded by man's oversized ego. You see Artemis, moderns now have a path back to the garden. -Because now you know that the observable universe is so much, so transcendently, vaster than yourselves. To not gain some wisdom from the humbling knowledge offered to us by science is surely the result of irreverence and delusions of ego. You now have the concrete empirical evidence in the astrosiences, and you have merely to accept it, the significance of the Hubble telescope photographs for instance, and your egos may find balance. . .”

It was here for the first time since she had arrived in Kohala that Artemis began to cry. How had Carressa known? Who was this woman who could read the confines of Artemis's peculiar heart?

The old crone smiled gently. "You see it clearly don't you Artemis? If God is greater than nature, well, nature still must be a part of God, and the nature which we are ourselves a part of is so much greater than us it is more like god than we alone are, and hence it is a path to God. Your modern Dali Lama, whatever his human flaws, has clearly pointed this out: that clinging to old human dogmas, like the scriptures of various religions, when they conflict with what we observe in nature is irreverent. And they do conflict significantly. On the first page of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible it says that the earth, the oceans, and the plants and trees were created by the third 'day,' before the stars, on the fourth 'day'. That's human ego inflating and misleading even for mythology. As an old book we can forgive it and its authors for their ignorance. But to cling to such chronology even as myth, to keep our egos inflated, to keep ourselves on our mote of an earth as the center-point of creation is *irreverent*. And trying to go against the laws we know, of the physical universe, is also likely to stem from the same irreverent source, particularly, for instance, when we question our motives and find that they often come from such inflated ego based desires as wanting ourselves or our families to be immortal in some sort of heaven, or reincarnated as long as we wish.

Regarding your question about what the sages say or don't say about maintaining one's genes, the spirit of the idea is there; in that the ethical dualism they always lay out is between loving one's self too much, craving is what the Buddha calls it, versus loving 'god.' That was purportedly Jesus' one commandment for Christians, and that parallels following the basic tenets of Islam for Muslims, or following the eightfold path of Buddhism.

The wisdom of the Upanishads, of Confucius, of Lao Tse. . Loving God; it all means for the large part respecting and revering that which we recognize, or are aware of, as transcendentally greater about the mysterious beautiful, and beautifully reasonable, world that we have been born into. If one reveres the transcendent that is beyond, yet encompass one's self, then maintaining one's genes follows naturally."

“I’m not sure I see that. The fundamentalists certainly wouldn’t.”

“As I said earlier Artemis, the fundamentalists are generally not fundamentalists at all. What they call the fundamentals are normally ego feeding, self or human being elevating dogmas, primitive, tribal alpha male supporting, superstitious dogmas. --It’s paltrorks, and as such corrupts the deepest religious impulses.

“But Carressa, back to loving the Universe: You say loving it and loving God are similar, what of your ‘naturalistic fallacy,’ what if the universe is profane? What if the whole universe is fallen, ruled by a devil? What if it’s just something like a computer program, a ‘matrix’ set up by an evil intelligence, maybe this reality is created by some advanced but creepy alien civilization from a larger dimension somewhere, or what if we humans ourselves gain that kind of power with a super technology of our own, like artificial intelligence?”

“Good questions. But even a creepy alien civilization had to come from something greater, more amazing still, and humbling. To find the awe that transcends but is as real as we can discern, --that is the root of faith that we are driven toward. And here, in Kohala, can you honestly say from the depths of your soul that the universe is profane?”

“No.”

“We should be clear. Horrible things do happen in the natural world: Astronomers tell us that galactic cores irradiate billions of stars with X-rays, and black holes in the center of galaxies suck up star systems by the million. On earth tidal waves and earthquakes kill the innocent. Grotesque diseases disfigure, maim, and kill, and babies get consumed by hideous parasites. These things are terrible and profane, and though when one experiences them one may become lost, if one can retain one’s spiritual, or even intellectual, integrity, one can see the profane is still truly incidental. Ultimately the profane is trivial, before the majesty of the creation that we can plainly feel, taste, smell, hear, and see. Or just breathe. That is what you, unclothed and free of human culture, with all your senses open and active, have discovered here in Kohala. You have found your faith in god.

‘Naturalistic fallacies actually occur only with regard to degree; when one aspect of natural is not properly nested within the order of nature.’

“I don’t think I completely agree with you. But at any rate, I have found faith in something that I know is good and beautiful, I’m not sure I would call it God, but why did I have to come here to discover it? Why did I have to leave humanity behind? What is wrong with people!?”

“A star shines on a planet and gently warms it for five billion years; that the universe and its physical laws should do such a thing is a grand and beautiful mystery. When a nearby supernova wipes the whole thing out that may, briefly, be very very terrible, but the laws of creation behind it are still beautiful in their elegance, and the laws themselves are innocent of the crime, because they are mindless, they just are. If ‘God’ is sentient. If there is a sentient personal mind of god behind the universe, it is normally hidden to most of us, and the (God) of this universe we now know would be so much larger than us and our trivial concerns, that its motives would probably remain beyond our grasp. But the beauty is there, transcending the ugliness. It is not hidden at all. Finding that beauty, immersing oneself in it, until one’s soul is seared and purified, such is the deep visceral root of faith. It’s a faith in God that comes from the existential core realization that one is biologically gifted, for survival, to find that this universe is beautiful and good, far more so than it is banal, ugly, or evil.

A human child is inherently innocent, and thus so is human potential, and humanity is therefore not the problem. It’s the bad decisions we have made, that confusingly are mixed up with the good, and those decisions are now part of our cultural legacy. It’s the bad decisions that create the burden, the fall:

With your global culture and our close genetic kinship; when the Germans kill most of the Jews, when the world comes disgustingly close to the brink of nuclear war (it was just a hair’s breadth from happening), and even when the obscenity of millions of Americans driving SUV’s happens; we are all guilty, all profaned. In a few short hundred years we burn all the coal and oil, laid down over a hundred million years ago, into the atmosphere, poisoning the air and the oceans, mindlessly destroying that which took many millions of years to create, headless of the future. When we overpopulate the finite earth such that we are wiping out millions of species



as an asteroid would, knowingly despoiling the most profound beauty and endangering our own survival, and when some among us torture and kill for fun, then we cannot feel innocent of the horrors that are created. Because to function we need to believe that we are conscious. So, we feel we should know better. And really, how can any person completely avoid being involved in such ubiquitous cultural phenomena? Yet as I say, if we love life we should be aware and conscious, shapers of our own destiny. . .

So until we do a lot better in the modern world the current global culture will feel too profane, and under this burden of ‘the fall’ to find the will to *truly live* one *must* get in touch with the sacred now and then, -so it helps to totally free yourself from human culture occasionally, even your clothes, even language, as you have done. The sages were well aware of this: even with mosquitoes, intestinal worms, sweat, cold, and hunger, the mysterious innocent grandeur of the natural world can wash and clean you, and you may be reborn in beauty.”

“But Carressa, what of N!lkua? Such savages have surely always existed. He was naked, and he lived in the natural world. Or the other characters in your story, they struggled, and they didn’t always seem to find the joy, what you call the faith, which I think I have found. I think of N!lkua’s spirit, for all his immersion, and him being washed in the natural world, his spirit was ugly. Wasn’t it?”

“Be very careful, young woman, with such ultimate judgments about people. Judging one another’s *actions* is risky enough, though it’s something we have to do. You have to choose who to befriend, who to work with, or who to marry. Judging a person’s very essence, their ‘spirit’, is something possibly no human should do.

But to answer your question: first, we of the Bogada have found that nothing is certain in this world, everything is a matter of degree, but that doesn’t mean knowledge isn’t possible, rather the reverse. Accepting the limited but still pragmatic nature of our knowledge of the world frees us from dogmatism and from philosophical paradoxes. In the history of the Bogada culture, as I will tell you, we came to assume that reality itself may be limited; an idea that now appears to have been vindicated by your modern science.

So just being in nature doesn't always work. Sometimes when 'Satan' tempts us in the wilderness, he wins.

Normally we have found that, given the time, most of humanity has the biological disposition to experience unfettered joy when we are healthy in a healthy natural world. This comes from hundreds of thousands of years of evolutionary conditioning. And generally, for the last hundred thousand years, I think we humans now have //Tlili's genes, the Mitochondrial Eve. We are sprung from her, not N!lkua, and that gives me hope."

"Whoa Carressa! Wouldn't //Tlili have had her father's genes?"

"Well . . . yes . . . but his Y chromosomes, the male ones, didn't get passed on. That came from Kwanza and others, as you shall see."

"But one of //Tlili's X chromosomes came from N!lkua, and half of all her others."

"What would you have me say Artemis? None of us are perfect, not even //Tlili, but she had multiple descendents that survived, he had only her, and matrilineally all women descend from her.

So quite often, given the time, all you need to do is remove the trappings of culture; if the culture is profane, the spirit will blossom. However, as N!lkua attests this is not always true. Also, even though his culture was an ancient one it was a twisted one. The paltrorks elements were too strong for human harmony, basic survival of the species, and that is a large part of the reason why humanity found itself in a genetic bottleneck. Cultures lose their way, and their innocence, when they create enough internal stimuli to allow their members to disconnect from the healthy joy a vital brain can find in primordial nature (though not necessarily from other cultures that may be stressing them). The culture becomes a kind of 'hall of mirrors where egos only see themselves and one another. Anthropologists will now tell you, though, that most pre-western-influenced hunter gatherer cultures have happier members than most 'civilized' cultures. With your centuries of indoctrination about 'savages' that's a hard thing to hear.

The second response to your question about why a wild human may be a savage human is that, even though we are products of heredity, environment, and chance, from individual to individual and culture to culture human behavior is essentially impossible to exactly predict. Maybe

you can make statistical or general predictions, but the element of chaos inherent in the human situation makes it prone at least occasionally to point source bifurcations; the flick of the butterfly wing that causes a hurricane across the world, the quantum leap of the electron that fires that one neuron, that causes a life changing epiphany. So we must approach the world as if we and others are existentially free. Real faith and its resulting values come from an individual experiencing the beauty and the goodness in reality at such a deep transcendent level that the ugliness and evils of the world become trivial. For whatever reason, that didn't happen to N!lkua or the leading Dil/koa women. But you can bet that though they loved certain things about their lives, their minds were smart enough to know they were choosing nihilism."

"In school they said that reality, nature, is neutral, not good, evil, beautiful, or ugly."

"That is true, -for a rock. But we are sentient beings, and we are also part of this world, just as a rock is. For any healthy human the joy of an orgasm, or in the ability to understand Newton's law of gravity, is encoded in her very genes, also a part of this world. If most of us were unhealthy enough to not bow before the beauty of this world, the creation, whatever God is; if we found it 'neutral,' our species would have died out long ago, as would be just."

Carressa paused, and they sat for some time watching the water tumbling down the cliff of Artemis' falls.

"But it is all subjective though isn't it? I mean you can choose to believe anything. A person doesn't have to believe in your Rose Mandala, or follow it. Ultimately there is no objective meaning." Artemis felt Carressa was somehow too sure of herself.

"In some ways Artemis you're right. However, though a person may believe 'it's all subjective,' such a person tends to fall into solipsism with all its attendant contradictions. I think the Rose Mandela shows our experience of subjective and objective to be a balance, like Yin and Yang."

"But surely ultimately it's subjective because a person doesn't have to believe or care about anything, much less 'God'."

“You are kind of right, we are free to choose, but within general parameters most humans follow a similar spiritual path, holding some deeply common ideas about the sacred, and their logical faculty tends to compel them towards a unifying principle: ‘God’ defined in the broadest sense is synonymous with unifying principal. But we are now solidly talking about the west or subjective side of the Mandala, and I would like to do that later in the story. . .

“Carressa?”

“Yes?”

“I am getting really hungry. I didn’t look for you and your tale, but you have snared me. I would keep listening, but I really need to eat.”

## 24. Grace by 'Chance'

“So what ever happened to //Tlili?” Artemis was leading the older woman. She was so hungry now! They had decided to go hunting up the valley. The need for some serious food had been coming. Before she met Carressa Artemis had been aware of the fact that she had spent an inordinate amount of time finding provinder. She knew that real hunter gatherers traditionally only spend four hours a day hunting or gathering, but she also knew they sometimes starved, and Hawaii, even Kohala was the modern world. It may have been 'wild' but in the modern world that meant a kind of managed preservation that didn't account for hunter gatherers. So whether it was her skills or it was Kohala, finding wild food was fun and exciting, but it was time consuming, and all this story telling was cutting into her schedule. As she had listened to Carressa a part of her mind had reached a decision she had long been considering when she was alone. She would kill a wild boar. She had never killed such a big animal. Pigs are very smart, and for that reason alone she had humanely started to avoid eating pork her last couple of years in Colorado. But here in Hawaii they were invasive. Killing one would actually help justify her own presence in this last bit of wilderness, and it would feed them both for a long time. Besides, Carressa could help her. The old woman could even teach her a thing or two; that was almost certain from what she had witnessed with the rats. . .

“Actually Artemis, //Tlili's tale winds on,” came the old voice. “You could say it was just beginning, and she was still very young. Do you mind if I talk as we walk?”

“No, not as long as we whisper. I don't know about you but I feel I must always be very wary. I don't think anyone has seen me here yet, except you, and I don't want them to. We have to go all the way up, almost to the top of the valley. I saw pig tracks there three days ago. So, we have a fairly long walk, and I'm not sure what we will find after so much time.”

The day was continually overcast, and the rain which had let up in the mid morning while Carressa talked, back at the waterfall, now started again abruptly. But this was pleasant because the women had been toiling uphill through the forest and sweating even under the clouds. Tropical rain for most modern hikers feels like taking a shower, with your clothes on, but tropical rain on a sweaty naked body feels like excellent hiking weather.

Carressa murmured and Artemis turned to look at her. The old woman's long hair was beginning to adhere to her body, encasing her in grey and white stripes, her bony hips stuck out. "This rain is perfect, and I think it will continue as we climb. The sound of it on the foliage will hide any sound of our approach, and if I'm fairly quiet I can continue with my story. .

She said this, but then she remained silent. Artemis let it pass, and they walked for an hour soundlessly through the rain.

They had been moving even more slowly through a deep tangle of bushes and vines. Artemis was still mostly enjoying the walk, but the pleasure was wearing thin. It was almost a tactile overload; endlessly varied surfaces of wet leaves, vines, branches, and trunks were rubbing and scraping against every part of their slippery and slightly scratched bodies as they stooped, crawled, straddled, climbed, and pushed their way through the vegetation. Artemis felt conscious of her skin as an organ, an eighth inch shell that barely separated her muscles, blood, and entrails from the internal closeness of the jungle. She was thankful for the calluses she had developed on the balls and heels of her feet because occasionally the mud and decaying leaves of the forest floor would open on small patches of surprisingly rough lava that was relatively bare of vegetation.

Eventually Artemis decided to continue the conversation: "So Carressa, what about //Tlili? Surely more people were needed for the clan. Did they find more men? . . ."

They were approaching the top of the valley. Carressa didn't seem cold at all, but her pace was slower than the younger woman's. And even with the heat of hiking up hill, and with the constant struggling through the

undergrowth, Artemis was beginning to take some chill from the heavy rain in these higher altitudes.

“Hush child! We may have discovered a man ourselves.”

Artemis didn't see anything, but she waited as the old woman caught up with her. She noticed that Carressa's floppy skin looked leathery but even thinner than her own. The veins stood out with tracks of water beading down them; somehow it was kind of a mesmerizing vision: the crone. Carressa signaled hastily that they should crouch in the densest part of a riot of native ferns and broad leaf plants. As they climbed into the thicket Artemis recognized the waxy leaved endangered ohai with its curious red flowers, and she shook her head as Carressa almost stepped on one of the plants. A moment later they could both hear someone, crashing loudly through the forest. Artemis thought it sounded like a rhinoceros. No, Artemis smiled, like a bulldozer maybe. A rhinoceros would connote speed.

They saw it was a man struggling through the brush; eventually he lumbered slowly by, oblivious to the women, passing within about eight feet of them, but he seemed urgent and stressed, crashing awkwardly against the undergrowth. “Fuck! GPS not working, and now the banjo's probably going to get fucking ruined in this endless rain. Shit! Oh shit. Surely it can't be that much further!”

He looked to be a young man, Artemis's age. Even though he was angry, and evidently lost, he had a gentle face that hadn't been shaved for at least several days. His clothes clung to him, arresting movement, and he seemed to be sweating even in the rain. Artemis almost called out to him; surely he wasn't a threat. Her solitude had already been broken by Carressa, and the old woman made her feel much less vulnerable, but something held her back.

They waited about a minute after he had gone. “What a silly man! I wonder what the heck a guy like that is doing way out here. Though I guess I like it that he said he brought a banjo.”

“I'm sure that to many his tale would be more plausible than your own.”

Artemis looked at her, “Or yours!”

“What of this plant?”



*obai*

“I don’t know anything about it. Just that it’s endangered. I learned all the endangered plants in this forest as best as I could before I came here. There’s a lot of very rare and fragile flora and fauna, and I didn’t want to be part of the problem.”

“A most worthy goal. You must teach them to me.”

At short distance later they came to the boar tracks. There was also a fresh set of boot prints, obviously from the man; He’d trampled over some recent tracks but the four legged animal’s path was easy to follow. Carressa examined it closely then looked about until she saw another low forked kukui tree which she again climbed slowly into, straddling the fork.

“What’re you doing?”

“With training one finds that certain trees are amenable to a kind of connection were they can become an extension of some of the senses. . . . Of course this rain not only dampens the hearing of prey, it also dampens the hearing of predators: us.”

Carressa embraced the tree and became very still. Artemis stood quietly under another tree out of the open downpour but vulnerable to the continuous dripping from the canopy. Maybe an hour passed and the rain lessened somewhat. Neither woman had moved. For her part Artemis’ mind/spirit continued its dance of sensation and cognition. She now ignored the discomfort of the cold, mindful of the mystery of existence that



was behind it, and drank again from the deep well of pleasure she found by focusing on the sensation of the rain dripping on her naked body, but when she glanced at Carressa she was a bit disconcerted to see the old woman seemed to have actually fallen asleep.

Was there a way to sense the whereabouts of rats and pigs from tree vibrations? The idea seemed silly, but Carressa had been able to find that second rat. Artemis pushed her back, butt, and arms, hands splayed, against her tree. What was this tree anyway? Another kukui?

She tried to imagine extending her senses as part of it, up the trunk, out the branches and out through the leaves and twigs. At that moment a little hog came trotting down the path. It was ridiculous. Artemis hadn't felt or done anything, and she didn't think Carressa had either. She glanced over at the old woman who still seemed to be asleep and whose bow was leaning against the Kukui tree out of easy reach.

Such a small 'wild boar,' it looked intelligent and even sort of cute. Artemis felt a pang of conscience, but, it was an invader, an engine of extinction, and she was hungry. She raised her bow and carefully aimed the arrow. The boar paused and their eyes met. It looked at her quizzically. She hesitated; it seemed very young. Pragmatically though, a smaller animal would be much easier to butcher, more tender, easier to haul, and less likely to start to rot before they had eaten all of it.

The pig lurched to the side and Artemis fired. The arrow struck it cleanly through the heart, but still the boar screamed and ran a few yards into a thicket before it was silent. Artemis felt both remorse and elation at her prowess, but then she looked at Carressa whose open eyes now showed the befuddlement of someone newly awakened.

"It looks like we have food for a couple of days!" Artemis said.

She saw several emotions move across Carressa's face; anger, sorrow, and compassion, it took but a moment, then Carressa smiled broadly, "but first you must give thanks."

It took quite awhile for the two women, with Carressa's skill and Artemis's knife to butcher the hog and bring it back to Artemis's camp and cook it on spits. To Artemis and her suburban conflicted heart the butchering of her largest mammal yet felt slightly perversely intimate.

Carressa seemed to feel no such compunctions, and she removed the viscera and cut off the animal's head as cheerfully as if she were pitting a mango. The feast *was* wonderful. A wild hunger awoke in Artemis's body, long repressed by her Spartan lifestyle. She ate ravenously. "All the blood and guts was weird. I haven't eaten pork since I was a girl, ethical reasons you see." she said between mouthfuls, "Maybe we should have saved and eaten its brain and liver. It's different out here, wild 'introduced species' and all."

"Yes I suppose it is," said Carressa. "Grace can be a subtle thing." She stared at the fire. . .

“. . . Well, //Tlili finally did find the bogada again . . .

It happened quite simply. It was shortly after the start of the rains, and after she had her third child; she had gone by herself onto the mesa to gather pigeon eggs from a baobab that she had seen was full of nests.

The tree was blooming and once again there were Sunbirds. It had all happened before, yet this time there was a difference; she was expecting nothing. She was beyond happy, giddy among the fragrant baobab blossoms that were shining in the morning sun after a new rain. //Tlili was no longer the lithesome young girl of nine and ten but a curvier young mother of three. Still, her hands were strong, as were her arms and legs, and she deftly climbed the lower bark of the nest tree and then grabbed the lowest branch, from the branch she swung herself up into the lower canopy. A short time later she had filled a small duk duk skin bag that hung on her shoulder with several eggs when among the bases of the clustered branches of the crown she chanced to see an opening. This time there was a bigger hole than before. She could almost climb into it.

As I said, she wasn't expecting to find it. Rather, you could say that she had simply been waiting to find it, she was open to and balanced in the present with feelings of both resignation and optimism. She saw the bogada shimmering in the hole before she even saw the bats. Then she saw there were numerous little bats moving in the shadows with the brilliant fungus on their legs, and her first impression was that this was a gift, from whom or what she could not say, -perhaps it was for her. . .

No. The bogada was so bright and peculiar; it seemed that if it was a gift, but it was from the bats to the Baobab. The tree was so strong and green, glowing with health. Or perhaps it was for the bats with their glossy wings and coats; a gift from the Baobab. Somehow she sensed and felt the vibrant colors again, more like a burring wooden sound, heard and felt soundlessly, vibrating in her loins.

Quick as lightning she grabbed a bat from the colony, creating chaos; there was a flurry of wings. But //Tlili managed to release her stripped bat, and she grabbed and defungused four more animals before the colony was vacant. She also retrieved a whole handful of the vibrant green mycelium.

What a perfect day! //Tlili held the baobab for a long time, breathing deeply, celebrating her success.

As she was climbing down the tree she saw the nest of a malachite sunbird, full of light green down and three eggs, and sitting on the eggs was an iridescent wing feather. The normally noisy parents were wheeling silently above her. On impulse she took the feather and left the eggs.

On the way back to the lower camp and her home within the grand sovereign, the great tree, she placed the feather in her hair, and rubbed a pinch of the precious mycelium on her eyelids. As she walked she thought about the situation: She seemed to be only able to find the bogada when the bats were nesting, and the tree was in bloom, and when there were sunbirds present. Why was that? What was it about this herb fungus? Sure it was quite useful, but it seemed to have a hold on her very soul.

When she came into camp her two tiny daughters who could walk ran to meet their mother, who was cloaked in feather and green bogada eye shadow. To them she appeared the shaman indeed.

## 25. The End of N!lkua and Kwanza

It was //Tlili's twentieth year, and she was pregnant with her fourth child. Perhaps it was a blessing, but for some reason (a fluke of her particular hormonal system) she had continued lactating through every pregnancy, and she remained fertile while lactating. I say perhaps, because such fertility was profoundly taxing on her body, and she found herself needing to eat almost continuously. But //Tlili was a great gatherer, and the valley was fecund. Naia had aided every delivery. Though the second had been hard, the third was much easier with very little pain. Naia had said that //Tlili could have done it herself, going alone into the bush as women of the People had done, and would do, from time immemorial, but //Tlili had responded that they were already alone in the bush, and that she and Naia were almost of one spirit anyway.

One morning Glyla and Naia stayed at the hidden camp with the babies while //Tlili and Kwanza went foraging. They were exploring the forest for the first time of another valley that brought a small stream to the river some ways further up the watershed. They were feeling the old exuberant pleasure of simply being healthy omnivores, and they enjoyed the stalking, wild and silent. With slight exceptions another sentient being would have observed that the humans were really no different than any other mammal, naked apes, yet when they paused and rested their soft human skin on a rough log, their conversation was as modern as it is ancient:

“You are jealous that Glyla too has become pregnant.”

“No that's not it at all. I'm happy she's pregnant. I just don't want to share *you*. Though I am sure I should, I still don't like it.”

“It is you I care for Eva, and really you alone, though that may be cruel to poor Glyla. You are the strangest person I have known //Tlili. I have never heard of a woman who acts so, strange because for my part I never thought I could care for someone so much.”

“You haven’t been paying attention if you haven’t noticed that women have issues with sharing a man’s attention. Is it petty that I don’t like the two of you moaning and wrestling together, and I *know* that Glyla deserves some affection? When I was a girl most of the women were just scared of N!lkua, and that’s the way men were, but you are different. Though I love you, and I have said for years that we need children, I can’t seem to make myself like you with Glyla. It’s paltrorks too, though I know it’s you who’s now becoming the big man, but it’s still paltrorks.”

“Eva what would you have me do?”

“I don’t know. Nothing I suppose. . . .”

Let’s search this valley for its secrets, and for what we must give to it, to gather what it has to offer.”

“That’s a strange idea. Alright I’ll start: I think it has termites because I’ve seen aardvark tracks. They love to eat termites even more than we do, and I see a lot of the herb, hoodia. I could easily harvest several types of lizard, ground squirrels, the small antelope (the dik-dik), and, baboon troops move through here regularly.

“I think you’re right Stork-Kwanza, about the four legged animals, and about the hoodia, and I saw the aardvark tracks too, but there aren’t many termites here, none of the wood is quite right for termites.

If you don’t have time to stalk and hunt than whistling thorn beetle grubs, harvester ant larva, and cardamom seeds are the main foods to be easily found here.”

“And how do you know that?”

“The cardamom flowers stopped blooming half a moon ago, and the seeds can be found along with the larva under those mounds. The strangler fig is blooming; there’s bracket fungi on the whistling thorn trees in this valley, and you can hear a cricket singing. The beetle grubs are only big if all three of those things have happened within one season, and they don’t always...”

“How did you come to know that? I’ve never heard anyone make those connections.”

“A shaman must be fully awake; connected to everything with all the senses. Though there’s always more to know, for instance I don’t know why these grubs follow the other life as they do.”

“You would have made a very good hunter.”

“Hunting takes a man’s strength. I could never skewer a large animal with a spear as I’ve seen you and other men do. I am not that big a woman. Let’s go harvest the grubs.”

As they approached a meadow where a baobab had fallen among whistling thorns Kwanza carefully bent down to forage, and //Tlili froze. . .

She was certain that amongst the chorus of cicada voices the lone cricket was no longer singing. Thus alerted she looked up the hill in time to see N!lkua appear from behind a jackal berry bush, and his arm was drawn back with a spear aimed at Kwanza.

”Kwanza! Look Out!” she screamed and pushed her mate out of the way just as N!lkua threw. //Tlili and Kwanza rolled to the ground, pierced by several of the painful thorns; as she was falling the flying spear came so close to her side that she felt the air of its passage.

Kwanza picked up the older man’s errant weapon, as N!lkua came charging, sweeping up a large club-like branch as he ran. Kwanza yelled in simple fearless frustration, “Why can’t you leave us alone!”

N!lkua intended to strike his own spear that Kwanza was aiming at him, and then barrel Kwanza over, but Kwanza deftly deflected the club, and old N!lkua basically impaled himself in the chest by running into his own spear. . .

But the older man still managed to shout. “//Tlili is mine!” he screamed as he swung the club again, and he struck Kwanza in the head with the large stick.

Both men fell to the ground, N!lkua with a great bubbling gash. He thrashed for a moment more then was still.

//Tlili ran to her mate. His skull was purpling with an obvious dent, but after a moment of reflection he still managed to mumble as he gazed dimly at her. The message that his slurred words contained was clear enough:

“Unlike my ma and her Dil/koa sisters I know you’ll love all our children, and they will thrive.”

With that he died. . . .

The sudden shock of it; //Tlili cried and wailed for an interminable time, but gradually trailed into silence, only dimly was she aware of the pain of the thorn wounds.

Eventually the simple reality of day becoming night and the consequent danger of predators began to intrude on her consciousness, but only slightly. She let the silence and darkness envelope her in despair until morning and vultures arrived. Out of her inner blackness came half thoughts:

“The vultures are here. . .

What should I do now? How can I have hope? . . .

I suppose the cycle of life must continue, maybe. . . .”

She felt the growing child in her womb.

“And. I must care for my children just as they must care for theirs.”

The thoughts were there, prodding her, but all she could feel was bitterness. . .

Eventually she got up and with a last look at her mate she dragged herself back towards her children and the baobabs. -

Artemis had stopped eating, and she turned. “So that’s it? That’s all?

Carressa replied: “This is the story of the Mitochondrial Eve. Reality does not always provide for the human sense of justice.”

Artemis was nonplussed, “But must she have left him, unburied: without at least some sort of ceremony? What an ending. . .”

“Vultures, I think, are more dignified than worms. It seems to me more vital that his body feed birds and in that I am in agreement with the Zoroastrians, the Nepalese and the Tibetans who to this day feed their dead to vultures.







## 26. //Tlili Into the Tree

Several months passed, it was the heart of another rainy season, and both of the young women's pregnancies were coming to term more or less simultaneously.

//Tlili now clung to her children (she would *not* lose *them*), but gathering, even breathing, became a drudgery. Naia could still gather, but she had become pretty slow, and //Tlili's girls were too small to offer much help, so Glyla and //Tlili were responsible for providing most of the group's food. Perhaps it was their listlessness but for the first time since Naia was young provender seemed scarce even though the land was blooming. Everyone began to grow thin.

When Glyla went into labor at first they rejoiced, but her contractions went on interminably and the baby would not come. After two days of labor Glyla went into transition and the actual birth began. Glyla held the same baobab branch //Tlili had used, and she pushed, held up by the other women, but it did no good, almost another full day passed and Glyla lapsed into an exhausted delirium. Perhaps she was just too weak, but her child just would not leave the birth canal. Eventually Glyla's unborn child was surely dead, suffocated in transition.

Naia then used the simple emergency measures to save the mother. She broke the baby's head and in order to pull it out.

When it had cleared Glyla's birth canal they saw that the ruined child would have been a boy.

The next day the remnant nucleus of humanity struggled again with almost utter despair. Rain, the soggy companion of misery, poured down outside their tree as the three women wept. Naia and //Tlili held Glyla who shuddered with wet empty eyes, but she resisted their embrace. What else could //Tlili and Naia do? Water trickled down the edges of the smoke

holes at the top of the hollow, and the dark inner trunk glistened in the light of their small fire. To them the weight of life now seemed like a shadow.

//Tlili's mind stumbled once again through a fog of pain, and she struggled, again, with darkness. She felt simply bewildered by this new disaster that had arrived so soon after the loss of her life mate, but a part of her still remained grounded. That part of her mind simply accepted her life's accumulated knowledge: that the world can be fiercely hard.

A while later //Tlili looked up from her grief, marveling in the obvious fact that even now she was surrounded by baobabs, and she still had three healthy children with another on the way, and as she thought about her fortune her heart went out to Glyla who now had no mate and no children.

When they could speak //Tlili said, "Glyla do you know that I believe we are one? I consider you of the Dil/koa, Kwanza's clan, to be my blood sister. You are the mate of my mate. All that I am is yours, and my children are now as much yours as they are mine. They will be who they want to be, but they now have two mothers if that is your desire."

Glyla remained rigid, what was it to her that she could raise //Tlili's children? 'Aunts' and grandmothers had always participated in child raising.

That evening the two other women left Glyla alone for awhile with her grief, but during the night she came and embraced the pregnant //Tlili as she lay in their hollow tree surrounded by the three daughters, and the two women slept through the darkness in one another's arms.

The following morning the rain lessened, and //Tlili felt the need to leave the sad and oppressive lodge of the giant baobab. She took her eldest, Ton!qwa, with her up the valley.

When they came to the mesa she impulsively decided to climb to the upper grove, but //Tlili was so heavy with child that Ton!qwa had to hold her mother's feet on the ledges and her hips against the cliff to help her pregnant body keep balance. When they reached the top of the mesa the clouds were breaking up overhead. The valley below steamed with moving drifts of fog. //Tlili sat down on the edge of the mesa amid the thumbergia vines in the same spot where Kwanza had sat some years before. Suddenly

she realized that perhaps she'd been unforgivably foolhardy to make this climb as she felt a series of labor pains, and then her water broke.

Ton!gwa had been wandering about the grove, and //Tlili called her over.

“Ton!qwa my dear,” she said, “Please listen to me child. I am having this baby. Could you go get Naia? You must be very careful climbing down.”

//Tlili shouldn't have had to call on Naia, but this birth felt different, it was going too fast. //Tlili quickly made her way to a short fat ancient tree she remembered noticing near the center of the bowl. On one side it had a low branch and on the other a small, person sized, hollow slightly above its base.

She squatted, supporting herself by holding and hanging onto the branch over her head, with her knees again against the tree. This labor was very quick, and a few breaths later //Tlili was delivered of another girl. The baby simply dropped smoothly onto the ground, cradled in the roots next to the bowl.

//Tlili was already nursing her new daughter before Ton!gwa even made it back with Naia. The old shaman had only climbed to the mesa a couple of times and was trembling from the effort. Glyla was still recuperating from her still birth pregnancy and had stayed below.

There was a problem. When //Tlili pushed out the placenta there had been pain and now she was leaking a small stream of blood that wouldn't stop flowing. Naia examined the placenta and then her young shaman with great care. She saw that //Tlili was growing drowsy so the older woman said,

“My dear part of your placenta hasn't come out and this bleeding has to stop soon. And the one thing I know of that may help you stop it is iboga. I have seen women enter trance, and with the spirit's help they can stop their own bleeding. As a shaman yourself I believe you could do this.”

“But Naia mam, I am sorry; I have come to dislike the iboga. Please, let me have some bogada.”

Considering //Tlili's condition Naia didn't take offence at her semi-blasphemous comment about the sacred root. Turning to the now frightened Tan!qwa Naia said,

"Tan!qwa, sweet child, I've gotten so old, and I couldn't carry the full medicine bag up onto the mesa. You must go carefully back down the crack to the big hollow tree and get //Tlili's pouch with its bright green and orange bogada."

Wordlessly Tan!qwa ran back to the crack and started down.

Naia turned back to //Tlili, and gathered her and her nursing child in her arms, "My dear you must take it. I have it here, just a pinch of our sacred root. You must call on the bleeding to stop."

//Tlili mumbled and her face looked sour as Naia put a pinch of mashed iboga on her tongue, "I . . . love . . . you ....Mam, . . . But the root . . . It . . . tastes . . . terrible.

Some time later the exhausted little Ton!gwa returned with the bogada, and found the late afternoon sun shining on the naked Paleolithic trio; the old shaman, who was holding Tan!qwa's mother, and the baby, who was nursing her mother's breast. But they sat in a pool of blood, and her mother was unconscious.

Naia took a scoop of the fungus, orange and green, and placed it as far up //Tlili's vagina as she could reach. The blood ran slower then, but it kept coming. Naia chanted, willing the young shaman to health, but Tlili's breathing began to slow. . .

When Naia was no longer able to find a pulse she could not believe it. She shouted,

"This! It is just too much! Don't do this my dear. Please, come back!"

But it was to no avail. The young woman, our mother, the Mitochondrial Eve, recently so vital, the promise of the future and the center of old Naia's life, she now looked cold and lifeless, an empty husk.

## 27. Naia's Choice

Silence. That strange guest of peace and calamity enveloped the small group. Naia was so very weary of it, but she was stubborn and pressed her few failing teeth together.

She sat enfolding the cold mother. The newborn blithely nursing the cooling breast, and the six year old child hugging them all in the gathering darkness. What was the old woman to do? At first she thought she must leave the baby, it would be doomed anyway without //Tlili's milk. Then Naia thought of Glyla who had come to term yesterday; her breasts were still full.

The shaman stood up, and with great effort she and Tonlgwa dragged //Tlili, and placed her in the hollow part of the tree. They managed to get her in, but it was in a partial crouching position with her knees wedged, and her back and head leaning against the inside wall of the tree. Blood still seeped and pooled beneath her crouching figure. Somehow Naia didn't want her //Tlili to be food for the vultures and crows. Her totem had been the baobab. It was fitting to place her dear fishing bird there. Naia then walled up the hole by putting fallen sticks between the outer living tree bark and //Tlili's body. Clenching her jaw to the task at hand the old woman left; taking the little girl and the baby back down the crack to the camp below. Carrying a newborn down that crack in the cliff wall was practically impossible, but Naia managed, she always managed. . . .

It rained again the following day, and none of them were in much shape anyway to return to the mesa. A week later Glyla returned, through the mesh of sticks she saw that //Tlili's body had already turned greenish, cold, and shriveled. There was nothing more to do.

“The Mitochondrial Eve just dies? How very depressing. She was basically my age; for the mother of us all that’s not much time to be a mother.” Artemis had buried a taro root near her tree some days before, and she was digging it as Carressa continued telling the story.

“We must all die eventually,” the crone responded.

“But it’s so sad. All that death; it makes me feel weary.”

“You forget there were also births. Birth and death are sacred arrows.”

Artemis considered Carressa’s response, but looked and felt very indignant.

Carressa was calm. “The birth or death of someone we are close to, the awareness of our own impending death, these arrows point out the path of the sacred, here on the Rose Mandela.” Carressa pointed just inside her withered right thigh. Then she continued as if //Tlili’s death was but a ripple in the unfolding story. . . .

“Glyla was now the adoptive mother of four daughters, and she proved to be a kind and generous soul. The fever came again two years later, and Nayla, the second child, got it. But Glyla under Naia’s instruction nursed Nayla through the deadly illness. The youngest girl they named Liw//li, and she soon proved to be as loquacious as her mother had been.

Glyla’s life became very busy. Hunter gatherers may generally work only four hours per day, but Glyla had to do virtually all the hunting and gathering for six people. The small girls helped some, and Naia tended the lodge tree, but the weight of the group’s needs fell on Glyla. It is a testament to earthly biology’s exuberance that an individual would work so hard to preserve offspring that were not hers. But is that so unbelievable, so unimaginably counter-evolutionary? After all, helping to maintain some of your co-human’s genes is far better than maintaining no genes at all if that is your choice, and look what we owe her. Is she not in truth our mother, all of humanity’s mother, too?

The years passed, and when Liw//ii was five Glyla was delighted that the girl was interested in her mother's old didgeridoo.

When Ton!gwa the eldest came of age she took the iboga from Naia, but the old woman had Glyla carry the eland horn sticks, and Glyla did her best at creating //Tlili's song. But she could barely make a sound with the didgeridoo; so little Liw//ii took the instrument, and played it while Glyla chanted, and Glyla, and Naia made the sound of the eland. This was partially successful ritual may have been adequate, but the grandeur of the great mother spirit in the tree of life was not evoked. Naia certainly missed //Tlili, but only Glyla fully sensed the absence of the gift that //Tlili could have brought them.

The next major event came at least eight years after they had put //Tlili into the tree. The girls rarely left the valley save to hunt, but one day Ton!gwa was feeling hungry and adventurous. She was craving the big chunks of red meat you only find on big game. She trekked out of the valley down to the lower river hunting smaller animals but dreaming of larger ones. When she arrived at the river she saw smoke in the distance.

Ton!gwa was now sixteen years old, and as she had been raised with the belief that her little group of females were the last humans. She stalked the source of the smoke as she would prey and even worked her way toward it from downwind. The smoke was on the far side of the river, but she stayed on the hill above it cutting through the old jackal berry bushes until she saw that the fire was where the Dil/koa had once camped.

I should say that Ton!gwa was a new sort of young woman. She was slender with a high forehead and eyes that were a darker shade of brown. She could remember her gentle father, and she had learned her ideas about the world from //Tlili, then Glyla. Throughout her life in the hollow tree castle, while she was chanting or breaking open Baobab fruit, she had also heard the myriad detailed stories of old Naia.

However it was Glyla who told Ton!gwa and her sisters about their mother's strange and abstract ideas of the world as a vulva and a spiral, and about the need that flows naturally to move out of the profane to touch the sacred, and the path to bring an understanding of the sacred back to the profane.



You may wonder, how did the simple Paleolithic women describe sacred and profane? Sacred meant children who were kind and reasonably obedient, it meant health, clean water, the smell of flowers, coming upon an eland suddenly in the bush, sunbirds streaking across the sky, and their mother's didgeridoo. Profane meant the violence of N!lkua, illness, meanness, and maggots in the meat.

The sixteen year old Ton!gwa of the day I am speaking of had become gentle natured and strong willed. She felt a need to be cautious, but there was no fear. In light of the girl's history it makes sense that, when she saw that the person below was a man, beyond feeling the adrenaline that comes with shock, the thought of having *children* was her immediate response.

She moved closer, and she saw that he was in the prime of life, his early twenties, but he hadn't been eating well. She could see all of his ribs, and his arms were like sticks.

Was he alone? Was he safe?

She wanted him, at least for children, but she would not allow the old paltroks mores to assert themselves. In a flash she decided she would run back to the valley to get her two middle sisters and Glyla.

"We will capture him!" Nayla said excitedly as the four of them climbed down the waterfall. They left the valley, leaving the younger Liw//ii with Naia, and they walked, practically ran, towards the man's fire.

"No little sister, don't be silly;" said Ton!gwa, "we will seduce him, but make him one of us."

Glyla was very ambivalent about the project. Yes children were needed, but with the exception of her brief physical relationship with Kwanza her experiences with men had been limited and bad. "Nayla may be right Ton!gwa. We should capture him."

So it was that the young man, Nabja, suddenly discovered that four women had stalked his camp, and were surrounding him with spears leveled at his chest. But they needn't have worried because he was only too happy to be taken captive.

Such was the nature of the geography around Ule/deni that soon after Nabja's capture another man was found, one Tih/dwi, again by Tonlgwa at the same fire ring of the old Dil/koa

The women's fears proved groundless. Both men were easily incorporated into the little community. Of course this was initially probably because they were lonesome bachelors, shocked by their good fortune to find the fecund Ule/deni, and suddenly to find themselves among fertile women without a Big Man.

But there was more: The women showed the men great kindness, piquing perhaps the mammalian tendency towards reciprocal altruism. Yet at the same time Glyla and the girls, backed by the mysterious old shaman, had an indomitable attitude the men were unused to.

## 28. The Ancient Grandmother

It was a matriarchy, but at the top there was only Naia. She was in her seventy second year; ancient beyond reason, a wrinkled shrunken grasshopper, almost entirely blind, and she now walked with a stick. But she was safe in the great hollow tree. Her old mind was still hale, and under her direction the girls studied a more limited herbology. Plus, she schooled them in the art of storytelling by the fire, and now the task of motherhood. And from her they learned of iboga, bogada, and much else of human culture.

They found they could still gather almost all the food they needed within the valley, and now the girls and women could easily gather enough to feed and totally care for the ancient woman. The men wandered, hunting.

Sons and daughters were born. Cousins mated, and there were grandchildren.

When Naia looked back on her long life she realized what a strange legacy young //Tlili had left. Many of the ideas and beliefs that //Tlili's children, Glyla, and now Naia herself, used to understand and guide their lives came from //Tlili. Certainly life went on much as it always had; they practiced tracking, stalking, and hording mongongo nuts, and they broke open the baobab tree's fruit and dried it, and stored it in hollows they found throughout the grove. Yet one day when Naia was talking to Liw/ii she summed up the valley's new culture:

“These new men hunt as men always have, and they help protect the group from predators, but your mother believed that continuing the People, our line, and allowing it to thrive, must be the central thing we live for. Except, that is, for loving the spirit of the world which it all rests on; she saw that in the baobab. She saw the ability to love and live right as a spiraling path, which rises up like the turning petals of a rose, like a birth, sometimes she even said living right, when you really understand it is like

one grand climax of sex, an ‘orgasm.’ I don’t think I agree with *that*. Yet she also had a deep wariness, of all things ‘paltrorks’. That was her word. I think she was onto something there because these years in this valley, free of the Big Men, have been my happiest.”

Glyla, for her part, told the girls about their mother’s vision of men and women being *kind* as the path to creating a much larger clan focused on the importance of children.

Sadly because of the now failing efforts of the frail Naia, much of the ancient herb lore was being lost, and the idea of the transcendent sacred baobab seemed a vague abstraction. . . Young //Tlili had been a fully trained shaman and taken much accumulated wisdom with her, but her influence still pervaded the valley.

In the middle of the eighteenth wet season after they had entered the valley the yellow fevers returned. Several people became ill, but Naia used the earth’s very last pinches of the now dry and dusty purple wetchla powder to cure them, and in dry season that followed the old shaman died peacefully in her sleep. The little clan carried her shriveled body to a small hollow baobab at a far edge of the lower grove where the tree line climbed the valley’s side. After interring her they sealed the outside of the hollow with clay and sticks. Liw//ii played the didgeridoo, Tid/we and Nabja beat a rhythm with sticks, and Ton!gwa simply chanted,

“The day we die a soft breeze will wipe out our footprints in the sand -  
elephant spirit, elephant tree,  
merge and return,  
When the wind dies down,  
merge and return,  
Elephant spirit you led and we learned,  
merge and return.  
Can our feet find the path?  
Return and be free.”

They left the site with Ton/gwa carrying the half stocked tattered remnants of the medicine bag talisman. The younger women would have to make a new one.

## 29. The Discovery

When anyone was cut or bruised bogada was now the cure. Within a season of Naia's death the bogada in the medicine bag was gone, but this was of small concern because the group had already made a discovery. It had been Glyla who first noticed it. Several years after //Tlili had been put into the tree Glyla had gone to the mesa to hunt eggs, and she'd decided to pay respect to //Tlili at the old baobab which held her. The little clan had generally avoided the tree, as was customary, because the People believed that the spirits of the dead hovered near the place where they had died for some time. The dead were considered fickle; it was best to leave them alone. But //Tlili had been in the tree for quite awhile, and Glyla saw no reason to fear //Tlili's spirit at any event.

When she arrived at the tree she saw that the soft pulpy baobab bark of //Tlili's tree had grown around the hollow in drooping labial folds. The sticks which had blocked the entrance were now gone, - rotten, or missing, and in their place was a porous looking skein of dark greenish material.

Cautiously she scratched some off and saw that underneath the hardened mycelium was the brilliant green of fresh bogada. Respectfully she removed only a pinch.

They now had a supply, and as the years passed they saw that the fungus in the hollow never wilted or seemed to grow old, and they gradually became aware that the tree itself, though it had once looked ancient and withered, had now become the healthiest tree on the mesa. Its leaves were the last to fall in the dry season and the first to form in the wet.

Inexorably the dry seasons followed the wet, and as the cycle of birth and death turned the clan really thrived. //Tlili's small daughters became

respected grandmothers in their own right, and the last spark that was humanity had now grown, -to a small ember.

It was Liw//ii's fifty-first year:

Glyla had died some time ago. Perhaps it was the beauty of the valley, the examples of //Tlili and Naia, and the serious business of being a caregiver, but she had managed to make peace with the travails of life, and was now remembered as a great mother by her adopted daughters. She never slept with another man, and died relatively easily in middle age. Glyla had been out gathering mongongo nuts that she'd found in a valley on the far side of the river, and when she was climbing back up the falls she had fallen and broken her skull.

Despite such mishaps and tragedies, //Tlili's four daughters had each successfully mated with the two young men who had stayed on, and in the intervening years many children were born. Inbreeding was a genetic issue; there was an old somewhat weakened taboo against mating with immediate family, but cousins had long been accepted as partners. Still, the tiny group's genetic stock was now very limited, and the chief effect was that less infants survived than would have otherwise. Because the choices for a mate among *Homo sapiens* had been shrinking for generations even Naia tended to let the old taboos slide. But everyone was at least vaguely aware of the connection between incest and health, and beyond the fear that the little community's peace would be disrupted there was always the hope that some new wanderer would find them. However no more outsiders would be seen by the people for generations; rather the reverse, as the community grew a few couples eventually began to venture farther out for long intervals into the world beyond the valley.

One day at the start of the rainy season Liw//ii decided to visit the Bogada Baobab of her birth mother and play the didgeridoo. Liw//ii had become older middle aged, about fifty, and she had children and grandchildren of her own. She had long mastered the didgeridoo, and when she played it she often thought of the birth mother she had never known, who had died to bring her into the world. Liw//ii was feeling rather melancholy because the rainy season set her thinking of her mother *again*.

Glyla had said that, though the people all celebrated the arrival of the rains, //Tlili was unique; she had seemed to grow much more beautiful in the rains, like a flower blooming.

Liw//ii found the tree. All the baobabs were in bloom, but //Tlili's tree was like a bouquet, its flowers a luxurious riot of botanical fecundity. The older daughter sat down under the lowest of the tree's branches between some comfortable roots with her back against the tree, attempting to avoid a breezy sprinkle of rain. She breathed deeply. There was a strong fragrance in the breeze.

This was the exact spot where she had been born. She was on the far side of the tree from the hole, the bogada's sealed green vulva, and presently she took out her mother's old wooden instrument and began to fill the wet air with a current of resonant sound. The tree seemed to stiffen in the breeze, attentive to the strange relatively new vocabulary born of human communion with wood.

Liw//ii played, and lost herself in the music. What thoughts she had were of her mother.

Surely, hadn't these sounds affected her mom at one time as they now affected her?

Time passed, and the sun moved a few hand widths across the sky. Then gradually over her music, like an eco from a dream, a long slow moan seemed to issue faintly from inside the baobab.

Suddenly Liw//ii was aware of it. The hair on her back sprang up, and she jumped away from her seat. Out of reach of the tree's touch she listened, standing on the wet earth, transfixed. She strained to hear it, and on the edge of her consciousness it sounded much like a *human* moan, a pleasant sound actually. Like, . . . love.

Of course Liw//ii thought her of mother's spirit residing in the tree, but the sound was certainly not the moan of some miserable spirit of the dead.

"Qwa/ii?" Liw//ii put down the didgeridoo and moved around the tree. It sounded like her sister's youngest daughter. But there was no one there, and the sound had stopped.



Surely it had been her imagination. She stared at the mycelium covered hole for awhile, then going back to her birth chair Liw//ii sat back down quietly and listened to the faint patter of raindrops on the season's fresh baobab leaves. There was the soft drone of a few bees, braving the rain, a couple of birds calling, the faint whoop of a distant troop of baboons. Absently she identified the bird calls as a warbler and a thrush, then some light came through the clouds, and she heard the single call of a malachite sunbird.

Liw//ii thought about the moan. It had been a rough feminine sigh, and she observed that it had surely taken her awhile to notice it because it had been creating kind of a counterpoint to the didgeridoo. She decided to play the instrument again.

The moaning started almost immediately.

This time she knew it came from within the tree. She ran round to the hole. The mycelium that covered the hollow formed a dark crust of porous strands. Shaking a little with fear, she scratched through the crust as medicine gatherers had for years, and further in she reached the bogada that was a lighter green. She dug further, and the crunchy mycelium became softer. Liw//ii was afraid to use her hands. Gently she began shoveling the mycelium aside with //Tlili's didgeridoo, and a moment later she uncovered a shoulder.

It was not the rotten or boney shoulder of her long dead mother but one with youthful healthy brown skin. Hesitantly Liw//ii touched it, and found it was warm with life.

Deep within the cavity Liwi//ii saw the bogada mycelium was now a crusty open mass of web-like material. She quickly she tore it away and uncovered a crouching young woman whose bulging breasts seemed to be leaking a thin trickle of milk. The woman was nested in the baobab, and below her waist the web again thickened almost to a solid, but the mass of bogada which the woman straddled looked hardest. As she tore down into it Liw//ii saw that the mycelium actually formed a swirl of brilliant green that wound and spread, and rooted into the walls of the chamber. But under the woman the swirl tightened into a spiral and focused to become a fat twirled cord that seemed to go into, or come out of, the crouching woman's vagina.

The woman was leaning back, her eyes closed tight, and breathing in soft spasms. Liw/ii was bewildered by the intimate tableau, “Who are you in my mother’s tree?”

### 30. Awake!

The didgeridoo, that's what //Tlili recognized. But barely, because the sound was an orgasm made into notes. She heard it through walls of her vagina and particularly through her clitoris, far more than her ears.

Then the outside air and a voice intruded, at which point she slowly began to feel herself disassociating from the tree. -She had shuddered with it through myriad storms and endless wind, through the hot sun of days endlessly flickering with the chill of the nights. She had lived an undreamt of oneness with the baobab; rippling through the wonderful itchy hardness of the dry seasons and the flowing juice and slick wetness of the rains. Time sped up to a headlong pace, and //Tlili awoke, refreshed as to a revelation born from timeless ecstasy.

As she faded into full consciousness she naturally felt torn. On her left hand side light was streaming in, and out in the light there was an older woman she had never met who was shouting at her. The rest of her was still ensconced in the exquisite comfort of the mycelium and the beloved tree.

“I was //Tlili; the colorful fishing bird, the shaman woman of sunbirds and bats. I was. What am I now? Bogada? I am, or more exactly, are we my totem Baobab?”

She felt she must move, so slowly //Tlili began to lift herself off of the fat twirled shaft she had been attached to. Within her she could feel something blissfully giving way and sliding. -Like Kwanza pulling out after an orgasm, or like the pleasure of a perfect bowel movement, or a very easy birth. She looked down at the hard shaft as it emerged and saw that it was tipped with soft sticky ropes of blood and bright green Bogada tendrils that must have gone through her cervix, and on into her uterus. Eland indeed; she thought briefly of the anatomy of female antelope she had butchered. Butchered. . . the history of her life came flooding back.

As she raised her vagina off the shaft, and saw the rope of bogada emerge, both //Tlili and the old woman, her daughter Liw//ii, began to intuit what had happened.

-As a babe in the womb gains air and food, and gives up waste to its mother via the placenta; //Tlili had done the same through her own womb. Her uterus was perhaps now more like a navel, and the bogada that heals as it takes a blood meal was both a placenta and an umbilical cord. It functioned as the placenta in the womb of the baobab tree.

Yet this was a two way relationship. She had certainly gained, on every level of being, but she had given something too. The tree was mightier than she, but she knew that she had given it something. She looked up at its now magnificent trunk. Perhaps it was simply a blood meal, or perhaps it was some of the joy of sentience, and ecstatic sentience at that. . .

Artemis was irritated; she had wanted this story to stay more or less realistic. Interrupting Carressa she half chuckled, but she also looked sad,

“It’s hard enough to believe that people back then were so intelligent, but do you really mean to say that she hibernated for sixty years like Rip Van Winkle, and stayed young?”

“Yes.”

“Well how? I mean, I know a little about biology. What about the heat of the Serengeti, and her lowered metabolism, and it was Africa so how did her body avoid parasites? What about oxidization? Cancer from cosmic rays? Cell aging? Wasn’t her brain affected? And why has no other organism done this? Why don’t people know about it?”

“Those are good questions. The simple answer is we don’t know. -For reasons that will become apparent, your modern science hasn’t been able to examine the phenomena. But we know the baobab tree already has tremendous potential for longevity, and surely the bogada acts in combination with it. And just as the attitude of our consciousness affects our health, when with the help of iboga, we can become a merged symbiot with a tree, body and mind, we live in the drastically slowed time perspective

of a tree's metabolism, and we can enhance the tree's health. That's one thing we provide in the relationship. I suspect we provide some vitamins and amino acids. While the bogada is alive it alone provides incredible protection from parasites and infections; it keeps your skin cells, almost all of your cells, wonderfully healthy. Regarding cancer and brain decay, I think that the metabolic and nutritional interaction via the bogada with the baobab itself must keep nerve axons and cellular DNA in good repair. We know that it is much easier to slow the aging process if the metabolism is slowed down, and virtually the entire time when //Tlili was in the baobab her metabolism was all but stopped. While in the tree she didn't really age at all."

"You said she was having an orgasm the whole time."

"She did for a large portion of it, but as I said, the time she was consciously aware of flowed at a drastically slower rate."

"Hmmm... That still doesn't explain how, if such a thing is possible, evolution hasn't found out about it before."

"Well you could say that life on earth is very old, and regarding a human lifetime that would be true, but with regard to the innumerable potential paths that life via evolution could take we may just be getting started. After all, highly evolved animal consciousness is relatively new, and the life paths between evolved animals and the great flowering trees are long sundered, genetically at least, but some of the greatest leaps of evolution have come from symbiotic survival strategies. So who knows what wild things life may do in the future.

I should also remind you that they were on a cool mesa hundreds of miles south of the current Serengeti. And they were well east of the hot Kalahari. Even though ice ages have passed between now and then It had a climate that was similar to its current one, warm enough, but breezy, occasionally frosty, and rarely ever as hot as the Serengeti now gets regularly.

Artemis I admire your desire to be skeptical. I am all for it, but the world is full of surprises. I encourage you to be as reasonable as you can, but also please be willing to take from this story what you can make sense of.

So . . .

Once she was fully cognizant, or perhaps the way to say it is, once //Tlili was in the same conscious state that most of us are in when we are awake, it only took her a few moments to realize that she had been in what you might call a slowed temporal state of being. It was similar to the hibernation many species exhibited in her savanna biome during the dry season. She hadn't really been unconscious, as in asleep, for most of her time journey. Mentally the biggest difference, beside the tremendously slowed pace of her thoughts, was in the perception part of her consciousness. The boundary between her body, her skin, and the tree's body, its inner bark, its shedding leaves, its fine hair tipped roots, had become very fuzzy. And the boundary between the tree and the rest of the world also had not been nearly as distinct as 'normal' consciousness might find it.

Still, once she was fully cognizant in the normal sense, //Tlili wasn't confused at all about the fact that a great deal of time had passed. She had felt the seasons streaming by. But now that she was in a 'normal' cognizant state it also felt as if it had been only a few minutes since she had been giving birth to her and Kwanza's final child, and bleeding. The bitter iboga that Naia had given her to staunch the hemorrhage still left a taste on her tongue.

Yet now her body seemed to be full of vigor. As it is on a morning when you wake with such energy that you feel you must spring up and sprint towards the rising sun. The pain of the bloody birth was long gone. Nimbly she began to exit the baobab.

She needed to speak of it. In a low raw voice the first thing //Tlili said to Liw//ii as she climbed out was;

"I don't know who you are, but I have perceived the world, though I couldn't see. My eyes were closed, but I could *hear* the world. I felt the seasons pass, many seasons, rolling by like ripples on a river. -or it was like my Kwanza when we mated, moving in and out."

//Tlili looked back at the bogada shaft, "But I could feel the sun, the wind, and the rains on my branches." She rubbed her eyes. She was now

blinking happily, and she studied the branches of the baobab for a long moment. Then //Tlili murmured, “What a wonder this life has been. I will never want, or be able, to forget the pain of my loved ones dying, and I know, I know, that any plant or animal’s life is but a ripple in a stream, or a few spirals around a flower.”

She spoke to the tree, “An individual’s life *really* is but a single small note, a tone in the didgeridoo, briefly held, but hearing any note can be such a joy.”

Then //Tlili looked down and felt her bulging breast, and she gently brushed off the crust of dried milk. She turned slowly then to the now silent Liw//ii and examined her with her deep brown eyes: “I gave birth to a baby daughter. Right here by this root. Do you know anything about that? You said this was your mother’s tree.”

Liw//ii reached out with a trembling hand and touched her mother’s shoulder, she was afraid to except and embrace her unknown parent. “Mother? But it feels like I am dreaming. You look closer to my youngest daughter’s age.”

//Tlili thought about it. “I don’t fully understand what has happened,” she said. “I know I love the great trees, not just for what they are but for what they are a part of, we are one, and I guess I had found an easiness or joy in living that helped me find the bogada. I guess it was well named: connection.”

//Tlili looked a long time into Liw//ii eyes, and smiled, a wide grin. Then //Tlili the shaman, our mother, began to cry. Her tears still came easily. The Mitochondrial Eve’s own dignity was never something she was very concerned with.

Liw//ii was a hunter gatherer of the Paleolithic. Of necessity her mind was oriented towards the immediate and the practical. She thought //Tlili’s grandiloquent speech sounded most foreign. Liw//ii had a fine command of language, but she now stared dumbfounded at her mother.

And what was the Mitochondrial Eve to do? Reaching out, young //Tlili folded old Liw//ii in her arms, “My daughter, you’ve lived much life and grown big, larger than me. You look fine indeed! And I see that you

have been playing my didgeridoo. You must tell me of what has happened here. If you have a child there must be . . . there must also be a man, or men.”

“Mother, come and see, I must show you to them.”



### 31. Moon Milk

The rains paused, but the sky remained overcast as //Tlili went down to the lower camp with Liw//ii. On her way to the crack she saw that the pond was full of fish and there was a young boy of less than ten years fishing there.

“And who is this,” she asked, but at first the boy was very frightened to see //Tlili, a stranger that had evidently suddenly materialized on the mesa, and he ran first to Liw//ii, but after studying //Tlili for a moment or two he walked over to her, “Where is your baby?” he asked. “Your breasts are leaking like my aunt Jo!wa’s. She has a baby, but he’s always angry.”

Liw//ii said, “This is !Ko. He is my sister’s, your daughter Tan!gwa’s grandson. !Ko’s speaking of his cousin //To! Think of it mother, they are your great grandchildren.

//To!, who !Ko is speaking of, is the angriest little child any of us have seen, but //To! is very smart. He is just a few seasons old and already he speaks well.” //Tlili saw that although Liw//ii was very happy to see her it was clear that as the old daughter continued to speak about the members of the growing community she was at a loss as to how to deal with the enormity of what had happened.

“Dear Liw//ii, again, how is this that there are children? And a great grandchild? This is most wonderful, but as there obviously have been men among you, there must be quite a story.”

“Yes, but in all the years of my life there have only been three new strangers, no women, just men, and they were wandering bachelors. Two of the men, my mate Nadja who has been with both Tan!gwa and Nayla, were bachelors left from the Dil/koa clan. Tih/dwi is my daughter T!llia and niece Gliiua’s husband. Though Kwunu, came from far off, many moons to the south. He says that he was forced from a living clan, the Znualla, and that they still had women when he left, they had rumor of yet another people, but he knows of no other clan then those upon the earth.”

“Yet now you, we, are becoming a clan. How many are you now?”

“All told, twice more then all my fingers and toes. Ton!gwa has three daughters and a son, and Nayla has three sons and three daughters. I myself have two daughters and a son. Those are all the first children who have lived. The fevers, hyenas, snake bite, deformity, and the diarrhea have taken others. Yet most of our surviving children are now parents themselves.”

“You are fine daughters; I cannot express the joy you bring to me.”

When they reached the lower grove //Tlili saw that it looked well lived in, perhaps even over used. As I said before Artemis, most hunter gatherer cultures must move regularly, following game and gathering, else wise they deplete the resources of the local environment. //Tlili’s people had not done so, or at least not very often, because the land where the Dil/koa and N!lkua’s people had lived was very fecund. None the less, the little valley had been scoured of firewood, and though there was a seasonal supply of several nuts, some migrating birds, and baobab fruit, much else had been over harvested, and the people now spent much time foraging and gathering outside of the valley. But the hollow tree and the groves were so nice that, despite the lengthy trips that were required outside, it remained continuously occupied.

Outside the vast tree //Tlili and Liw//ii came to the old fire ring. There was a circle of twenty-eight People, by chance almost everyone was there. All ages, male and female sat around the fire cracking nuts and cleaning a couple of hides. Ton!gwa and Nayla were there. They recognized //Tlili almost immediately, before she recognized them, and predictably, astonishment and fear covered their faces.

Nayla reacted quickly. She stood up from the circle, and still being quite vigorous she ran to her mother. The stately eldest, Ton/gwa, long a full shaman followed her. “Mother? How can this be?”

Liw//ii spoke first, “I found mother in her baobab tree, where the bogada grows. She awoke from her long sleep of the many many seasons of my life, when I was playing the didgeridoo.”

“I was just a girl. Mother died. Your skin turned green. We all saw it.” Ton!gwa spoke half as to herself.

This did not mollify the crowd. There was fear. --She must be a spirit of some sort, she must.

But //Tlili's smile was transforming, clearly not that of a malevolent spirit. She went and sat by the fire. Her descendents and son in laws made a wide space for her. But Ton!gwa stayed near her mother, and Nayla and Liw//ii laid their hands on her, reassuring one another, in a manner deeper than speech, of her reality.

The only other person to approach her was the strange fierce baby, //To!. Shortly before her arrival he had been nursing at the breast of his mother, Jo!wa, as she sat by the fire, and she had run dry before he was full. He had become furious and bitten her, again. In frustration and pain Jo!wa had pushed him off her, and the group had turned their backs on him as he lay on the ground kicking and screaming in infant rage.

As //Tlili had approached, in the distance she had heard the crying. Memories of her own babies, of Liw//ii and the pool of blood, flooded up within her, and in answer her aching breasts had opened again in a small stream of milk. She had only partially by force of will managed to staunch the flow when she had arrived at the circle.

In the mean time //To! had gotten up, and found a stick of firewood. So that as //Tlili and Liw//ii drew near the baby was in the process of jabbing one of his younger cousins with the stick.

Then, shortly after she arrived, little //To! was feeling annoyed at the deference his clan was paying to this stranger. He walked around behind //Tlili as she sat by the fire, and with a look of pure mischief, reached between the legs of his grandmother and great aunts, and he poked his young great-grandmother hard in the back with his stick. As the old women reached to grab him, he scampered away to the far side of the circle, gleefully shouting with a baby's lisp, "She an Elephant! I am //To!, the hunter!"

It hurt of course, but //Tlili knew babies, and she was inclined to laugh at first, until she locked eyes with him across the fire. For her part //Tlili saw in a moment that here was paltrorks reborn, N!lkua the alpha male returned yet again, and that it would ever be thus, that though strangely she

found she liked this boy's spark, the clan's culture would have to gird itself from this type of threat. But these thoughts were superficial, bliss reigned over all, and maternal compassion. Here was a baby, and with difficulty she controlled her milk.

For his part //To!, who was studying //Tlili was suddenly aware of her dripping breasts as well. Nursing mothers in Paleolithic clans have ever been fairly comfortable with sharing the chore, if it made sense. In a pinch //To! had been allowed to suckle the breasts of a couple of his aunties, like a pacifier, but these splendid breasts before him had milk, and here was an opportunity for a fine new meal. Without a word he walked over and under the eyes of the entire clan climbed into her lap.

//Tlili's breasts ached with gratitude at this chance. She scanned the circle and picked out who, from her appearance, was most likely the boy's mother, "Granddaughter I know it's strange, but do you mind if your grandmother gives suckle to her great-grandson?"

Eyes turned to the boy's mother. "It would be an honor." What else was there to say? And so the simple requirements of mammalian life joined the culture of the present to the resurrected past, and a measure of peace offset the confusion of the clan.

At first //To! was delighted. Here was more food at last. He latched on, but no mere mother's milk was this. It was human, but it was Eve's and Eve's alone, cured in forty-five years of symbiosis with iboga, bogada, and baobab this was verily an elixir of the exuberant interconnection of life, and no woman has repeated it.

//To! nursed hungrily, until he fell asleep. He slept the rest of that day and through the night. When he awoke the next day he was as rambunctious and precocious as ever, but there was a change. The childish malice was gone, completely. A profound inexplicable change had occurred. Presumably several genetic sequences had been severed, others activated. Eventually the boy would become a great and wise adventurer, who would contribute subtle and important ideas to the People.

As I will explain to you soon Artemis, other women can go into the hibernation state in a baobab with the use of bogada and iboga, but like //Tlili they must be bleeding when they enter for the bogada fungus to take on.

//Tlili already knew that she had a special kind of fertility; though before going into the baobab she had seen it as a major detriment. --She had been one of those rare women whose hormones (we now know), didn't stop her from menstruating during lactation. Even while nursing she had always continued to have regular periods that had always perfectly followed the cycles of the moon. As I said earlier without birth control this issue of sufficient milk could be a major problem for a hunter gatherer woman. They could end up with more children than they could provide milk for, and, if no other woman had milk to spare, infanticide of the newborn might be necessary to prevent the previous baby(s) from starving.

Other women eventually followed //Tlili into the baobabs, the Tree of Life. Yet for the bogada to latch on, for its mycelium to form the symbiotic link from human womb to womb of tree, there needed to be blood, an open uterine placental scar. So a woman needed to be menstruating. But uninterrupted periods aside, if a rare other woman went into the tree while lactating and menstruating her breast would dry up during the hibernation. //Tlili alone could continue to lactate through a hibernation. Perhaps that had something to do with a mutation peculiar to her. No one knows, and she certainly didn't pass the trait on.

As would be expected great excitement and confusion continued long after the return of //Tlili. She was accepted somewhat as just another strange phenomenon in the stream of life, but she was venerated far more. She had discovered bogada, and inadvertently hibernation. It seemed obvious that she also had profoundly altered //To! in a way that everyone was happy about, and she was still a young woman, beautiful, fully voluptuous, and yet far more serene, even, than old Naia. And //Tlili remembered a world before any of them were born; so she had spent more time with Naia than anyone. She was also the master among them of

herbollogy, and she had subtle ideas that only Tonlgwa seemed to be able to follow. She played a deeply haunting didgeridoo. Finally, this young woman was also their matriarch. --*Our* Mitochondrial Eve.

They didn't know what to do with her, but //Tlili had her own history to contend with, and to live:

First, although it was wonderful to see them, they were fully grown older women, to be respected, and though she was deeply and peacefully aware of how it had happened, it still felt very strange, unnatural, to be younger than one's daughters.

Second, she missed Kwanza. Somehow she would always miss Kwanza, and she missed Naia, Glyla, and her mother. Even for a Paleolithic woman she had seen a lot of death.

Third, she loved the memory of being in the tree; who could not? Although she was happy and excited to see her daughters, and the children, and she was delighted that the little human community was thriving, the connection to the baobab, as literal as any connection could be, beckoned her. She felt the pull of her own tree in the bowl up on the mesa, and she felt it most when she slept in the valley below with the clan inside the great hollow of the castle tree. The mystery within the pleasure of connection was the center of her reality now. She sensed the mystery reaching out to the edges of the world, encompassing the entire universe of the greatest spirits.

//Tlili had found a mission, she wanted to give her knowledge and ideas to all of her descendents, and she now had an overwhelming sense of time as a dimension that could be traveled through, like space. There was a human community now, she had helped found it, they were her children, but she was worried it might falter, that the rope through time might fray, and she wanted to continue doing her part, as best she could, in keeping it going.

If the community could be said to have had leaders, they were clearly Tonlgwa, Nayla, and Liw//ii. The words of //Tlili through Glyla, and the attitudes of the Dil/koa and Naia, had had their effect. The old sisters formed a circle, and thus far the wandering bachelors who became their husbands didn't really even want to break it. Nor had their sons shown any

inclination to break it. The men hunted as men always had, and they willingly protected the growing human clan from predators. They were adventurous and they took risks, as men always had, but the authority of the culture of Big Men was shattered. And the sisters were conscious enough, they felt that the birth of a //To! or a N!lkua was something they could weather. They felt it would take a volcanic event to resurrect the big men. The sisters were focused indeed on their children and grandchildren's survival, and the valley, where baobabs grew big and full, was seen as a feminine place. The human family would grow and spread out from the valley, into the world again, but for untold generations the fold between the hills with its little mesa coved with grand trees would hold a hidden authority on how to make human culture work.

## 32. Return to the Baobab

The thought of returning to the baobab was always there, goading her gently as she talked to her daughters and her extended family. It was at the back of the energetic and powerful compulsion that caused her to transfer as much information as she could to her progeny, from the story of her life, to herbology, to music, to her ideas about their future. She spoke with a gentle relentless earnestness to all who would listen, and many did, and for her part she listened as intently as she could to all the news and information about the world they had to offer.

At least once a day //Tlili helped nurse //To!, but the fresh milk she was producing didn't seem to have the same effect as that which she had carried from her time in the tree. A moon passed and //Tlili found herself menstruating. Now she felt a strong, almost magnetic, pull towards the tree, but she resisted it firmly. She stayed off the mesa, and she slept outside of the clan trees' womb room, by the fire ring.

She increased her exchange of information, and savored every moment with her daughters, their men, and her extended family. Because, she knew that with the next menstruation she must go back. She only told her daughters about her intention, and she told them why: That she felt called by the long rope of her future human family, of their children's children's children. That she felt a responsibility to all of them. And that life, her own personal life that is, was but a ripple in a stream and she must do with it as best she could. Then she listened to their stories and asked many probing questions.

Liw//ii made another didgeridoo, and she and //Tlili played before the fire at night while the young women and men danced and drummed with sticks. And during the days as the women gathered nuts and dug for roots //Tlili spoke of the purpose of life, of children, of the Rose Mandala, of women and men, and the clan's mores and taboos, of herbology and the



medicine bag, of Naia, Kwanza, Glyla, and N!lkua. She spoke of the yellow fever, and what the clan must do now that wetchtla was no more, and of sabertooths and lions, and meat like the lovely eland. They discussed geography, iboga, and bogada, and why music is important, and much else besides. But mostly //Tlili spoke of the mighty baobab, with its food, shelter, and fragrant air, and how when it's rooting branches netted the stars while its roots held the earth it showed the way to a larger beauty, that you could feel certainly, but you could also see it if you just looked, or hear it if you simply listened; --a vast timeless pleasure, that laughs at trivial pain.

“I now know,” said Eve “that it's not about me. Our people are what is important. We can be cruel, stupid, and ugly, but that isn't our deeper nature. We are, for all our foolishness, at least as wise as any other animal, and we can be as kind as the mothers of any animal I know.

We must keep going, and now it is *my* people. You are all my children. But I am just a conduit of those before me to those who will follow. I am blessed to be a part of the chain of life moving from the past into the future, and the baobab tree(s), bless them, I feel will help me do my part to keep the chain of my children from failing for a long long time.

### 33. Ule/deni ~ The Garden Grove

When her next period did come one cold morning, //Tlili went and squatted amidst the fresh grass in the women's werf, rubbing her lower back. Then she asked the people to build a large fire. When all the clan were seated in a semicircle and warming themselves on the leeward side of the fire she went to the windward side. She came forward and stood where she could see them all. She pressed her hands to her lower back to alleviate the cramping. Occasionally her curvaceous body was cloaked in smoke and she would have to duck and squint to avoid breathing or being blinded by it. Looking mainly at her daughters across the flames she quickly addressed her descendents:

“My family, thank you for listening with such respect to what I've had to say. And I've learned so much from each of you. I may be your mother of old, and lived a lifetime in union with all the world, but in normal waking life I'm still a young woman who hasn't lived a long and honorable life as you my daughters have, though I have certainly known death and suffering and great evil.

But I'm not complaining. I have been so blessed, so truly blessed that I consider myself the luckiest human to have lived. I have known and still know great love, and I have gotten to know each of you.

My beloved family, I haven't any advice left to give, but I have a favor to ask of you; can we see to it that the mesa top becomes a sacred place? Much joy and understanding can occur there. My presence among you is witness that a person there who is aware of the majesty of the baobabs has a kind of direct connection to the power of the spirits.

A great thing I have seen is that while I was gone my family has come to really enjoy giving gifts to one another. When you climb up to the mesa please try to hold onto the thought and the feeling that this *life* is a gift, and

know also that gratitude requires that we give the gift of our life back. But the giving of gifts is not the same as simple trade, it's more of a dance. I hope we all try to do that.

This grove we are in is as beautiful as the one up there, indeed it's bigger, but for all my talking I don't claim to have the secret of avoiding pain, anger, bitterness, or violence; I certainly know life here in the valley isn't perfect, how could it be? I just feel that as long as we have a place where peace and beauty dominate, where the sacred is revered, then no matter what happens all is not lost. Wherever we are, as long as we know it exists, and have really experienced it, and we know the depth of its power, we can hold the awareness of the sacred in our heart."

She knew they weren't quit following her. Her little speech was now as her thoughts always seemed to have been: much too grandiloquent for the pragmatic people she was born among and now leaving as her slightly altered descendents.

"I don't think I am the only one who can hibernate, communing with a tree. I don't see how a man can, but I suspect any woman can. I say once the survival and happiness of a mother's children is fairly assured, and the child becomes a successful member of the community, if the odd mother among you wants or needs to, then when you are menstruating you should consider joining me in one of your own baobabs on the mesa. But please remember, the trees on the mesa must be protected, quietly and consciously. If you do just that small thing and pass this tradition on then we the People will always have a way to draw upon the power that comes when human animal, plant, earth, and sky are one entity, all of it permeated by the beauty that extends into the beyond and surpasses our understanding.

For my part I am very happy, and proud of all of you. Please do pull me out of the baobab someday, but only when there is a dire need of the knowledge I have been fortunate enough to learn, or, I guess if there is need of my milk, if that's what would truly help."

She had no more to say. She was sure they felt it was a strange speech. Still, they laughed with her, and feasted and danced and played the didgeridoo until midday when all the adults save //Tlili took iboga. Then

she hugged each one of them, her daughters last of all, and left alone for the mesa.

Of course she was completely naked, had no possessions at all, save that she wore the iridescent green feather of a malachite sunbird in her hair, and in her hand she carried a fistful of iboga.



*malachite sunbird*

As evening arrived she made her way up the cliff, and when she came to the little pool //Tlili ate the powerful spirit root, which she had never much liked, and washed it down with the clear water. Then she cupped water in her hands and carefully entered the hollow of her baobab tree. The moment she touched the tree she felt it quiver, or perhaps that was herself. She wondered, “Is there a difference? . . . No.”

The world of color is always in shift at dawn and dusk, and as she washed the bogada shaft the green mycelium and orange ridged fungus on the walls seemed to come vibrantly alive. Then as the trance quickly took hold of her she slumped bloodily onto the shaft and leaned back against the soft inner wall of the chamber. As ‘normal’ consciousness gave way to the great other she feebly reached out with her arm, and while the sun set she arranged a few sticks she had brought weeks earlier. //Tlili constructed a lattice with the sticks against the opening as her soul reeled in the rush of pleasure. Bat’s were weaving about through the air just outside. She could hear their chirps. Were they singing? They had given her this connection, but sadly the primal intimacy of her situation seemed to require that there would be no room to share with them in this womb and this journey.

“Ohhh I *will* work hard. I’m so blessed that you give me the chance to love you world tree, and bless you that I might help keep the People, my children, alive.”

She felt the bogada mycelium rooting against her labia, her clitoris, and internally it was tickling her cervix, seeking the source of her blood, and her cognition faded, into the realm of pure sensation.

“So she screwed a tree. It was god, or she found God, and became immortal. I thought I was a tree hugger, but Yeeooww!, that takes it to a whole new level.” Shortly after blurting this out Artemis started feeling embarrassed at her own flippancy.

“She had already found ‘God’ years earlier,” Carressa replied evenly. “She had already found her path. I would think you would begin to understand, Artemis. In many ways the orgasmic nature of her union was incidental.”

“Some incidental.”

“You are so happy naked here in Kohala, why? Have you not masturbated and had orgasms since you’ve been out here?”

“That’s different. It’s not the center of why I’m happy out here.”

“Precisely. The fact that women, baobab, and bogada can link in perpetual orgasm is just a particular and incidental blessing, a mystery. It’s not as if this reality, which is a gift, that’s cosmically far more important and mysterious than tiny humanity, that this reality should care to condescend to torture Eve just for loving it, for loving ‘God,’ through the Tree of Life, loving so much so that she wants to pass her knowledge of good and evil down the stream of life. Our natural state is to generally see life, just the simple act of breathing, as profoundly pleasurable, as long as we connect, and balance our ego, to god. We are a product of a billion years of evolution. If genetically we hadn’t evolved to find it sufficiently pleasurable to be alive, the struggle wouldn’t be worth it, and we would have died out.

Hence the mystics thorough the ages have discovered that ecstatic union with the essentials of existence is often the optimal and natural state of things for a human as for any other healthy organism. It's normally the influence of paltrorks that conditions us to think otherwise. If one is healthy and well fed then generally suffering and hell are caused by the unbalanced cravings of the disconnected ego."

"Ohh. Oh ho! I see where this is going with your Eve and your 'Tree of Life'. First, some hours ago you said the Genesis creation chronology is cosmically incorrect, wow that was a mouthful. Now you've turned the whole Genesis story on its head. In the real world that's not likely to work. --The fundamentalists will paint you as Satan."

"No! The main point the story shows us is still true. In Genesis the naked Adam and Eve of Eden had the innocent vitality of any other animal. In many ways we have fallen from grace to the degree that we have become conscious, because then we become culpable for the evil of the world; no longer innocent. But consciousness is now a permanent part of the human condition. The fruit is digested, it's part of us, we cannot un-eat it. To willfully destroy it is to destroy life itself. On the flipside, true consciousness tells us to not be embarrassed by our nakedness, that we should embrace, not burn, the remnants of Eden that still surround us, including the tree. In that sense 'primitives' were more conscious then 'moderns'. Consciousness allows us to glimpse the mind of 'God,' but conscious life is now a tightrope walk, the proverbial 'razors edge'. To stay innocent our ego has to take responsibility for the gift of existence that the consciousness illuminates. It's here on the left thigh, the 'East' part of the Rose Mandala. We should love and revere it."

Carressa was pointing at herself, and when Artemis looked again at the old woman's vein lined leg and sagging labia she was shocked to consider how comfortable they both were with the sight. They were so removed from the constraints of modern culture that the old woman's vulva was no different than if Carressa was showing her earlobe or eyelash to make her point.

“And please don’t be embarrassed by your doubtful statements Artemis. As long as you aren’t rude and disrespectful I welcome your questions. I am happy you are thinking this through for yourself. We should all develop our own world view, our own philosophy. Settling dogmatically for the authority of some other human or some book, and not holding your basic beliefs and perception of the truth to the highest standard of reality that your mind can discern is as blasphemous a behavior as I can think of. We of the Bogada revere the Rose Mandala as the ancient archetype of spiritual growth, and it certainly ties together the wisdom of the sages. But it is pointless if it’s simply accepted without question.”

“Well thank you Carressa. Actually I took philosophy 101 from Professor Kimball in my first year at university, and that wasn’t at all the professor’s attitude. I think maybe he had a bit of the paltrorks thing going.”

“That wouldn’t be very Socratic of him. Ha! Yes I’ve studied a fair bit of western philosophy myself.

You know despite the attempts of post-Cartesian modern western philosophy to focus on the aspects of philosophy where ‘certainty’ can be found, pretty much all philosophy is highly subjective anyway. That’s why the field contains so many brilliant minds in diametrical opposition. So in an educational environment the subjectivity is often approached as a problem to be overcome by authority: --Keep on track everybody, don’t deviate from the narrow path that the ‘enlightened’ mandarins have proscribed for you; until free thought is quashed. The problem is that simply doesn’t work. You will end up with a bunch of indifferent, what do you call them? ... Lemmings! --That’s it; who will follow other indifferent ‘authority’ lemmings, off a cliff. Those introductory philosophy students should be encouraged to start by expressing their own philosophies. A professor certainly should cover what other great minds and traditions have taught, but in a way that allows, and perhaps compassionately encourages, the student to grow, to think more clearly, and to integrate the ‘learned’ views that make sense to the student, not to simply give up on or disrespect their own deepest principles.”

“But isn’t this a bit of a tangent Carressa? Isn’t your story of //Tlili supposed to show me how to achieve a gracefully sustainable civilization?”

“Yes! And that’s the advantageous genius of the Rose Mandala. Or the Medicine Wheel. It is a mistake, and it’s misleading, to think that the creation of a world view should be a linear prescriptive process, starting with something like the Cartesian “I think therefore I am.” There are no certain foundations. It’s more like a baby learning to walk. Or it’s like painting a picture. You can help the baby, but you can’t force it to walk, or tell it exactly how it must learn. Let philosophy teachers beware. And when you paint a picture the first brush strokes are rarely a foundation. At most, they are more of an outline, and heaven help the painter who tries to paint a finished picture staring arbitrarily at the left side of the canvas and then be totally finished when she gets to the right.

So it is; as you build your own mandala, as your ego interacts with the larger world. You open yourself to perceptions of the larger reality and your little gravitational eddy develops over time into a galaxy and beyond.”

“Still, it doesn’t seem very reasonable. For instance where does this particular discussion fit on your mandala?”

“Oh but it is. It may not be very rational, but I think it’s reasonable because the Mandala can map how all humans become more conscious, it’s my ‘objective’ left labia, illumination, the rising sun in the east, shows the way reality itself seems to work. And this particular discussion is at the center. The vagina itself. It’s about how the whole process is born.”

“But you can’t argue with it. So you can’t disprove it.”

“Yes you can. If you think reality doesn’t work this way do what philosophers always have; just find where the main contradictions are, and see if you can do better. Find your own mandala.”

“I understand Eve and the vulva of creation, but it’s strange that Eve’s tool for understanding should also be like a compass, focused on directions. That’s such a male thing.

“Actually that compass part is an American Indian medicine wheel add on that seems to us to fit.

Carressa paused, and randomly Artemis said, “I was a cheerleader you know, though I’m not sure why I’m telling you that now Carressa. Do you know what a cheerleader is? Surely they have them in New Zealand.”



“I believe I do know what a cheerleader is, but it has been a very long time since I was from New Zealand. . .”

“Well... I’m just saying that my own background is pretty regular, and I think my freethinking attitude is surely partially what brought me here. But there’s no way I would be able to explain it to my old friends. Why I’m out here, and what’s happened. Living like a wild animal I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. Actually it’s much more than merely being happy, yet there’s something very frustrating about it. --You know, most of my friends would simply think I’m insane. They would never even consider doing this.

Still, it’s certainly gratifying to contemplate that this closeness to nature is kind of how humans have lived for most of our history. Though somehow I feel it’s great for me at least partially because it provides such a vital contrast to ‘civilization.’ It’s not that I dislike civilization, it’s just that it’s so confining, which is ironic cause, on one level, all the technology available to us modern folk *does* give us more choices than ‘primitive’ people had. ”

“Hmmm. . . So then, where do your parents think you are?”

“Actually I’ve been doing work study at the observatory on the top of Mona Kea, about eighty miles from here. That’s the only reason they know of why I came to the big Island. I’m thinking of becoming a cosmologist. They think I’m taking time off from the observatory with some girl friends in Kona, you know, south of here on the coast. Obviously they would freak if they knew I was doing this.”

“I suppose that’s unfortunately true.

Well,” Carressa continued, “it was //Tlili’s culture that ushered in the long epoch where life was both fairly peaceful *and* lived close to the marrow; conscious, so fallen a bit it’s true, but still in the *garden* of Ule/deni. Though making it all work still took some fine tuning.

## 34. Keepers of the Grove

//Tlili's tree quickly formed another sheet of Bogada mycelium that covered the lattice opening. The years passed, and the outer surface of mycelium faded into an unremarkable dull greenish-brown that hardened again into the porous woody screen, yet harder than the soft bark of the Baobab.

As it turned out, no one else really wanted to leave her family to go hibernate in a tree. As by being alone out here, you yourself must have discovered it Artemis, that Homo sapiens is a very social herd-like species, particularly women. Only Liw//ii really knew, and that by second hand observation, of the pleasure involved with baobab symbiosis, and for whatever reason she kept her own counsel. Perhaps it was embarrassment about the intimate act she had seen her mother in, but more likely she was just wanting the sacred union to be taken on by a daughter, granddaughter or niece who demonstrated the appropriate altruistic motives. She herself could not consider it at any case because menopause had ended her periods some years earlier.

The clan continued to thrive but with such a tiny number of available mates incest continued to be unavoidable. Brother and sister didn't often mate, but cousins nearly always did. Eventually Liw//ii's daughter bore another of //Tlili's great granddaughters, and she and Tan/gwa's son bore a daughter named Ko/wu who loved the didgeridoo and turned out to be infertile. Now the People had a real candidate for hibernation, to join the Baobab/tleva in the journey through time in a tree of her own. Ko/wu was in her early twenties when she expressed an intention to go into a tree.

In the meantime //Tlili's three old daughters had evolved what you could call a council circle. They discussed Ko/wu, "She is free to do as she wishes," said the venerable Ton!qwa.

“Certainly, but why does she wish it? Who will awaken her and why?” asked Nayla.

“She is wise for her age already. Perhaps we should teach her as much as we can and then wake her up when our mother is woken,” offered Liw//ii.

“And when should that be?”

“I don’t know, but if we are to help carry the wisdom of Naia and our mother forward surely Ko/wu could do it. She is very smart.”

And so it was that Ko/wu, //Tlili’s great granddaughter, was permitted to place bogada from //Tlili’s hollow inside herself. Then she took iboga and went into another hollow tree on the mesa. She too experienced the orgasmic connection; the mystical union of baobab and bogada. But only a few months later, her sisters and cousins became lonely and concerned for her, and without the fore-knowledge of their grandmothers they went up to the mesa and woke her up.

When they broke into her chamber they found it was very hard to rouse her, and eventually they decided to throw cold water on her. Ko/wu shifted states of consciousness and woke trembling and shaking indignantly, but still she rode her phallus of bogada, and only when she had been fully in a ‘normal’ state for some time did she remove herself reluctantly. She also woke in perfect health, and though eventually she was happy to see her concerned relatives again, Ko/wu insisted that she be allowed to return to her tree the very next time she bled.

This time the ageing council of sisters included some of their daughters in the council circle, and they agreed to let Ko/wu stay in her tree for at least a generation. She went back to her baobab, and they made marks on the lodge tree for twenty-five years; the time it would take for an infant to become a mother with children who the clan could take care of.

The years drifted past, and the clan’s culture continued to solidify along the norms of an elephant herd, or a group of bonobos, solidly matriarchal. The deepening matriarchy was not only due to the influence of the now

somewhat mythical //Tlili and Naia, but because initially the group was overwhelmingly female.

In the earlier years the first men naturally had multiple wives, but as the group grew the number of boys began to equal the number of girls. Since Eve's vision of having children and supporting them as best as one is able was handed down, or encouraged as a primary value, no young man who could hunt was expected to make peace in the role of outcast bachelor, nor was any man overtly subservient to a polygamist alpha male. And no young woman would allow another woman to get a corner on resources. So in effect the clan evolved towards a state of egalitarian monogamy. To this day the oldest hunter gatherer societies are generally very egalitarian and fairly monogamous.

“Carressa, you say that the clan was egalitarian but that last woman, Ko/wu, was ‘allowed’ to go into the tree by the council. Were they some sort of government?”

“Their authority was respected certainly but only as old age and grace are respected. They exerted no force or threat of force. They demanded no services.

As the clan grew, and the resources of Ule/deni valley began to be strained, groups of families became sub clans and started to live wholly outside the valley ranging up and down the river, moving camps and following game according to the seasons.

Coming of age remained the main ritual: The coming of age ceremony for girls centered on the deeper mysteries of one's medicine animal, knowledge of gathering food and herbs, and the admiration of the fecund fitness of the great eland antelope for a fertility symbol. A boy became a man when he single-handedly proved he could bring down one of the larger antelope species and thereby support a family.

Eventually the council became an institution; it was not a government at all as I said, in that it held no powers of coercion. At first there was some

variation in whom, when, and how a woman would go about hibernating. Ko/wu went a total of four times. Other women went for only a month or a couple of years. For some it was merely a hedonistic joy ride; that was certainly a temptation for all who knew of the pleasure involved, but aside from the tradition of respect for the sleeping Baobab/Iteva there was an overriding sense that there was something sacred about the process that transcended simple pleasure. Eventually the council systematically chose or approved of women who it called wisdom holders (or Chan/elis) and they continued to go into baobabs for long hibernation with ritual regularity, at least once a generation. After a fair amount of tragic trial and error it became obvious that a women who lacked passion, and conversely one who was severely emotionally disturbed, were not good candidates for the trees. They and their bogada would often be found dead within a few months after they started to hibernate. It was a rare kind of woman who was interested in leaving the people she had lived her whole life with and then risk death to carry ideas into the future. After several generations of women went into the trees the council of sisters gained a sufficiently numerical sense of time to decide that a woman entering once every two generations, or every 50 years, was all that was needed to send knowledge forward in the form of human time capsules.

Perhaps five hundred years passed. It was a vast span of time for human memory, and through it all in various forms the council continued, backed up by the curious authority of the sacred mesa. Generally the core cultural ideas and taboos set up by //Tlili, Naia, and Glyla managed to endure. //Tlili was remembered, as in a distant creation myth, her remote progeny still knew the tree that she was said to be hibernating in. Actually it couldn't be missed as it had grown to a healthy and beautiful giant. Towering above the mesa as its largest tree, it had taken a couple of bolts of lightning, but these had coursed harmlessly down its outer surface and only destroyed the uppermost branches that took the direct hit. The bogada hole had become just a slit, now some ten feet off the ground.

There were twelve women in total in the trees with a thirteenth being considered. The council was concerned though, the top of the mesa was finite; there were only so many suitable trees.

In the first hundred years two more wandering bachelors had appeared, from far to the west. They were absorbed into the culture. That was it. In the genus Homo, aside from Homo erectus, whatever other members of related Homo sapiens there may have been, faded to nothing. But now there were over ten thousand descendents of //Tlili, the People. Clans had long spread out of the valley and up and down the Luangwa River, all the way to the Zambezi in the south. Yet the council and the grove of Ule/deni still held a kind of sway over the People. It was remembered as a sacred place, a center for the world of humanity, where the spirits of the great mothers merged with the great trees. The People loved their anchor of human empowerment and solidity in the uncertain travails of existence. Humans of all ages journeyed to the valley to resolve disputes and to learn the healing arts of the shamans.

However as the population grew the culture began to experience difficulties. In the first few hundred years' serious violence, rape, murder, and cannibalism were aberrations among the 'primitive' People. But when the ethos of reproduction is strong, the land is fertile, and the lone form of birth control is disease, the only population limit is the number of children a hunter-gatherer woman can birth between nursing and weaning. Under such conditions, if there are no epidemics, the population can grow and fill the land faster than the adventurous spirit of men can spread it.

You know Artemis that if virtually any species, including ourselves, is vital and well adapted to its environment, overpopulation occurs, and only then does aggression within the species become a real problem.”

“What about N!lkua?”

“He was an alpha dork; socially he wasn't well adapted.”

“Wait a minute Carressa. Overpopulation hadn't occurred, and yet aggression within our species *was* a problem, a major problem. And not just with N!lkua, you have basically been saying that 'Big Men' generally were a problem.”

“What I'm saying isn't just a screed about overpopulation. It just makes sense. If you are well adapted to your environment and consequently

it, and you, can easily provide for your survival why would you be like N!lkua and be antisocially competitive within your own species?”

“So why *were* the ‘Big Men’ such dorks?”

“The short answer is we, or at least *I*, really don’t know. Antisocial competition only makes sense when the survival gains to the individual from acquiring limited crucial resources from within one’s species are greater than the genetic and synergetic survival benefits of cooperation. //Tlili’s story of the Big Men doesn’t tell us of any such ‘limited crucial resources;’ food and shelter were plentiful. If I had to speculate I would say that paltrorks in //Tlili’s time was the legacy of a forgotten time when the environment was stressed. As I said earlier the People of her childhood lived at a time when the climate was warming. So it’s possible the earlier mini ice age may have caused the stress.”

“I see. So you think those of us who would condemn paltrorks now would probably only do so from a position of faith that our civilization is up to the task of providing crucial resources such that ‘big men’ like Osama Bin Laden are an antiquated survival strategy.”

“You’ve got it.”

“But Carressa, I’ve studied biology, what about sexual competition? Think about peacock’s tails or moose antlers. Even if a species is thriving in it’s environment many male animals will still compete with one another for females, and females will prefer mating with the male that seems most fit, even to the point of excess extraneous displays of fitness, like peacock tails. .

“Well . . . yes indeed Artemis; you have me there. Though you are still falling for the naturalistic fallacy (or more precisely, an overly subjective or egoized natural law evaluation); the Rose Mandala does revere nature but it recognizes that the laws of nature, and hence the ethics from nature, are *tiered*. I suppose //Tlili and the Chan/elis would say the paltrorks impulse runs deep into nature, and males and females are responsible for it. And you have to wonder, since biologists tell us that 99.9 percent of species in earth’s history have gone extinct; how many individuals have doomed themselves and their species, by making and focusing on heavy antlers, giant colorful tails, etc., because when the environment changes, and the going gets tough a peacock tail can be quite a liability. But for N!lkua it probably

crossed from mal-adaptation to nihilism. For conscious beings that happens when on some level one becomes aware that one is giving into a mal-adaptation and does it anyway. Kind of like an obese person who understands the hunter gather disposition to store fat, for instance, but binges on doughnuts anyway; only paltrorks is worse than eating fatty foods because it affects a whole society.

“But peacocks are so beautiful!”

“Yes, but if peacocks become extinct they are no longer beautiful, because then they don’t exist.”

“C’est la vie.”

“No! That’s not life; it’s death. There is a middle road Artemis, some inner-species competition is useful and good, but since most life relies on members of it’s own species, at least for reproduction, individuals who compete too much, ignoring the well being of their species, will quite often doom themselves, as much as their species. The council didn’t really know about evolution, but due to //Tlili’s foresight they have long discussed these issues, and I will come too it again. . .

Returning to Ule/deni, the math of population growth is simple. Consider that if for five hundred years every childbearing woman had four children from when she came of age, starting with the last time //Tlili left her daughters and went back into the tree, and all those children lived: the population would have doubled every twenty five years and exploded exponentially to over ten million people.

Yet of course it didn’t happen that way, children died, women died in childbirth, people were infertile, malaria swept through the clans several times, other diseases and predators took their toll. There were also violent cannibalistic clan skirmishes with Erectus, but Erectus generally gave way. So even with these expected difficulties the People’s population still grew quickly, and they couldn’t expand into new land as fast as their numbers grew.

They began to have disputes: over hunting lands, over good fishing areas, groves of nut trees, and caves or rock faces to shelter in or under. As is natural, it seemed crucial for survival to mate not just with a good hunter, but the best hunter, not just a fecund woman and a good gatherer, but the



most fecund woman. Paltrorks began to infiltrate the outskirts of the culture, and clan skirmishes and murder started to occur.

As I said the People, or at least the nearby clans, still came to the valley with their disputes. The social instinct in *Homo sapiens* is generally very beneficial for survival: imparting the knowledge of the past, sharing the finding and gathering of fruits of the harvest, sharing in the difficulty of the kill and dividing the meat that followed. However fighting and dominating another for a mate or territory is also beneficial; at least for the victor. What would the council of sisters say? They who still lived in the valley below where the great mother of all the human children ‘slept with the god of the Baobabs’ in the mighty tree on the mesa.

The council of sisters was very fluid. An excellent memory and knowledge of the traditions of the people, with an accompanying ability to relay that knowledge and memory in stories, was the only measurable requirement. Yet membership in the council was based on the desire of the candidate more than any test of merit. --Though it helped if there was a general perception that she had some wisdom. There was also a lively and paradoxical tradition of admiration for independence, for free thought. This tradition came from the egalitarian disdain for paltrorks, which in tandem with the central ethos of helping the People thrive were still remembered as the founding mandates of the Council.

Shaman women who were well past the child bearing years were welcome. They would sometimes leave clans and travel great distances to the valley to learn more of their craft and serve. Families also still lived in the Ule/deni valley, and young men of the valley would be asked to go on journeys to remote clans to find the wisest of the old women, and occasionally to discover a young mother who was very talented, but whose clan and children were healthy and happy enough to spare her for the potential honor of the trees.

None the less it began to become a troubled time anyway, there had been murder as I said, and some clan warfare. Idle women and irritable men of unknown intentions had been secretly climbing onto the Mesa. Paltrorks

culture began to dominate a number of the outlying clans. It reached a point where some foresighted old woman of the council of sisters prevailed in the momentous decision to wake everybody up. A mighty council was to be held. The news spread, and the entire human family began to make their way to the valley.

## 35. The First Great Council

Ule/deni had never been so full of mega fauna since that part of the world was formed. Warm-blooded bipedal vertebrates with smooth skin, alert eyes, and our curious topknots of hair filled the entire basin from wall to wall and all round the sacred space. On the day of the full moon a procession of all the council women climbed the cliff and fanned out over the mesa. They cracked open the trees and mycelium, but it was very hard to wake the Chan/elis. Cold water was used again, and again the waking women complained of the harsh intrusion as sacrilege. Yet they woke up rather quickly. Though profoundly irritated at first they all soon settled into a state of euphoria, and it took some of them almost a day to become fully present.

Two were dead. When their hard outer mycelium crust was broken the hollow within contained humus, and within the dust a few hints of crumbling bones. This was a sobering discovery. And the procession stood silently outside the hollows listening to the birds, mourning the dead, and wondering how the still open possibility of such death should affect the world view of the council.

Three of the wakened Chan/elis kept grinning a little foolishly for a long time after they were woken and had joined the procession. They twitched and struggled to breathe normally; it seems they were still caught in a kind of perpetual orgasm. Yet all the wakened Chan/elis were conscious enough to remember the mesa, and since //Tlili was the first, the great mother, they were all alert enough to understand what was happening when they followed the procession to //Tlili's tree last. A young council woman went up a climbing stick to the hole, and while the stick was steadied by two others she chiseled at the mycelium and the bark with a stone pick, and woke //Tlili up.

This time //Tlili came down from her orgasmic connection much more quickly.

She smiled at the council woman at her window and looking about simply said, “My malachite feather is gone. Do you suppose it has turned to dust? Perhaps it’s lost in my hair!”

The hair on her head had continued to grow. Much more slowly than in waking life, but in five hundred years her kinky hair was loose and dread free, and with the exception of some strands of green mycelium it was clean as carded wool, but so long it hung to her knees. The people had always cropped their hair with sharpened bones. They kept it short to avoid lice. When she climbed down she saw the council women were each wearing colorful sunbird feathers, and she was quickly able to conclude from the hair length and collective euphoria of the crowd that some of the other unadorned women she saw had recently been tree traveling as well.

All of the Chan/elis were at least a little confused and they looked it. None of them knew anyone as they headed down the mesa, but of all the Chan/elis, even aside from her longer hair, //Tlili’s stood out the most because her breasts were bulging and leaking.

For many of the awakened women the numbers of people in the valley and lining the creek was somewhat overwhelming. To //Tlili this sheer multitude was a wonderful surprise. Thousands of people were crowding against each other as they watched the procession from each side of the creek. The Chan/elis and the council walked in and along the west bank of the stream as it wound down till it was adjacent the ancient central fire ring.

The council had no formal chairperson, but the oldest woman held the most authority. The problem was that her voice was no more than a husky whisper, and only those nearest to her could hear her. She tried to extend a welcome to all the people: there was to be a feast, after which the council of sisters and the Chan/elis would retire back up onto the mesa to hold a circle and discuss the state of the People. But no one could hear this little speech, and the crowd became restive.

//Tlili happened to be standing near a large muscled aggressive man from a distant clan on the Zambezi. He towered over the Mitochondrial Eve who was already nursing a child she’d seen crying in the crowd. He was angry. It seemed there was a perceived injustice to his clan, and he made it

clear to all who would listen he'd spent the last two days scoffing at the placating behavior of the old women. The language of this new world was different enough after 500 years that Eve struggled a little to understand what he was saying, but she understood his intent. She deftly handed the baby back to his mother, picked up an ostrich egg from one of the many pilgrim fire circles along the creek path. She expressed some of her milk into it and offered the egg to the Zambezi man. At first he scoffed in disgust, but after disdainfully and hungrily eyeing her he drank the milk. Afterwards there was a long pause, and then he silently embraced her and walked back into the crowd. //Tlili said nothing, gently retrieved the baby from its mother, and continued nursing. Soon it was whispered throughout the crowd that she was the great mother, descended from the mesa to be among them, and her serenity and quiet charisma captured their hearts.

There was some confusion because at over 500 years old //Tlili was the eldest among the Chan/elis, but she looked the youngest. You don't age appreciably when connected to the tree of life. The other Chan/elis were chosen for being past the physically necessary part of motherhood (Their kids had finished nursing to the point where their clans could raise them), and the Chan/elis were chosen for being young enough to bleed but old enough to have some wisdom. So they varied in 'apparent' age from around 28 to around 45. But Eve of course had entered due to childbirth complications at age 23 old, plus the two months she spent out of the tree the last time. Because each Chan/elis had a slightly different rate of hair growth it took the crowd a little while to realize the main identifier of true age was the length of hair.

"You are going to tell me you have time traveled! Aren't you?" said Artemis, "It explains your hair!"

"My part in this story is quite a ways off. That's all I will say for now."

When the procession had worked its way down to the old fire circle //Tlili saw that it hadn't changed much. The fire circle's stones were

different. There were a few new trees, and the old castle tree was a little shabbier. The little stream's course had been altered such that it made a chain of small ponds adjacent to the fire circle. Clearly they were in the later part of a dry season. It was hot, and due to the moving crowds a haze of dust was rising to the tree tops and filling the valley. There were no clouds, just a molten white sun surrounded by infinite blue.

Standing hip deep in the wide part of the creek that was nearest to the circle //Tlili saw a group of eight young women. As the Chan/elis entered the ring the eight women began to rhythmically slap the water and chant a sonorous melody, like spirits calling down through rain, enchanting the arid Ule/deni. //Tlili was enchanted. The singing reminded her of the choral beauty that ended of her coming of age visions, but the luscious sound of the water drumming was something she had simply never imagined.

There followed a day of feasting, singing, and relaxation, and on the morning after the council and Chan/elis returned to the mesa. They all seated themselves in a grand circle surrounding the little well tended fish pond that Kwanza had originally built. All that day they discussed the current and past state of the People. Many ideas and strategies were considered concerning the path forward. //Tlili was very quiet, but as evening arrived she spoke up, "I must say in all honesty that much of what you are discussing is beyond me. And I don't claim to have all the solutions, but there are three points that I want to make, that I'm *sure* need to be heard. So in my life I have said them over and over:

My first point is that our first duty is to see that the people, our children, don't die out, that they thrive, and the main idea attached to that is to make sure they are rooted and happy enough in the world that they want not only themselves but their descendants which in time merge with your descendants to survive happily as well. That is our first duty to each other. In my experience of life it seems the lowest form of selfish blasphemy to so disrespect the gift of life that our indifference to the chain of our children's lives through time should be allowed to weaken in misery or to break.

Second, beware of paltrorks. . ." And here she went on at some length, concluding with: "To an important extent the differences between men and women are innate. Almost from birth boys normally focus on spears and killing and girls focus on dolls and nurturing. You could say that the male

killing instinct is for food and defense and that would be true, but over time when a man is in control, it is just common sense that the male attitude wouldn't be as benevolent as the nurturing female's.

I fear some people might think paltrorks applies to me: my hedonistic desires are being met, and then some, and I get a lot of respect as a kind of leader. But I believe I'm merging through time with my baobab mostly to help my people, my children. I suppose a savvy paltrorks would say the same thing; that they do what they do to help others, but they would also employ a lot of fear as a means to control. . .

My last point is that to succeed (actually it's even about more than success) each one of the people needs the chance to experience . . . I still don't know what to call it. . . Everyone needs *something*, an animal spirit or a plant, to be their totem *which connects them* to powerful meaning. But there is something even deeper: my old shaman Naia-mam called it, or her, the Great Spirit. But to me it's the ecstatic awareness of the greatness at the back of the world through which my spirit finds a oneness. One sense, that sums up that unbearably beautiful mysterious something that binds us to existence, that can make existence not just tolerable but occasionally, divine. There will always be ugliness and evil, but I believe we are pretty much all born with the ability to experience beauty so deeply that the ugliness becomes too petty to worry about. Every one of my children needs the chance to experience the Great Spirit, to find this faith. People sense it in the stork, the kori bustard, the eland, the great elephant, and the mammoth far to the south. I have sensed it in the very stones, and I know it can be found in the tree of life, the baobab, which ties the world together. I was blessed to find it there as a very small girl, long before I ever merged with my tree in hibernation. I ask that the mesa be preserved forever as a sanctuary for this experience. It need not be the only place; it just needs to be held up as an example.

All three of my ideas can be laid out on a rose you know. . .”

There was a long pause. Then a very old councilwoman spoke up, “grandsire Eva, regarding your first point, what if a nurturing parent finds their descendant, their ‘rope of life through time,’ pitted against another child?”

“That’s a paltrorks idea,” said one of the younger council women.

“But it is the way of the world. Even trees in a forest do it, competing for water and the light, and the strongest tree survives. Wouldn’t such competition make us stronger as a people?”

“Certainly not as a people,” said //Tlili, “not such competition as that. Because the losing tree can lose all. It may die without the chance to pass on its seeds at all. So that leaves the potential loser with a set of bad choices. If ultimate survival competition is valid it means the loser can’t reproduce, then once both parties are aware of, or agree, that it’s fundamentally important to maintain the chain, to be a viable link in the chain, then the most straightforward way to ensure that you stay the winner is to kill your opponent. Let me say that again; once you are really clear and fully conscious that survival of your children is the great goal then there isn’t much of a middle ground: either reproductively you don’t compete at all and you support each other’s survival, or if you accept that competition is necessary where only the winner has children, to ensure that you avoid duplicitous behavior in your opponents, you must kill them. . . .

I think we need to be conscious and really care about our descendants. Our minds are powerful enough that if we aren’t invested in it, like N!lkua, or the Dil/koa, then we will die out. If we are invested in it consciously but we believe in competing on this core value the surest way to compete means not just winners and losers, but killing each other outright. Humans who are truly conscious of the prime importance of the value *couldn’t* be like the packs of

hyenas, or dogs, or N!lkua’s cronies where the losers mindlessly support the winner’s ability to raise offspring. The Big Men were killing each other often enough anyway. Assuming the validity of competition, the only reason murder wasn’t constant, with cronies always stabbing Big Men in their sleep, is they just weren’t that connected to the value.”

“I think I understand that,” said the younger council woman. “A woman wants the strongest man, and the best hunter to sire her children. Her children will then be fit. What you are saying may actually be an argument that when the need for competition arises we should be more supportive of war and murder.”



“But that would never work; if only because we need each other to reproduce,” said the old council woman. “Life would become too unpredictable. Even the biggest man and his women are still vulnerable to the spear of a sick weakling, if wielded in the dark. If this council agrees to such a precedent inevitably the People will end up valuing even their own tenuous lives *less*.”

“I have another concern,” said one of the Chan/elis. “If a person is as conscious of the importance of descendants as you say they need to be, so conscious that they would have the right to kill competitors who might prevent the conscious person from having children. If it’s that important what of those whose seed or wombs are weak and can’t have children at all? Wouldn’t those people have *no* purpose in their lives? Shouldn’t they kill themselves?”

“No!” said //Tlili. “My sister from the Dil/koa (Glyla) could not have children because there were no men, and it was she who raised your ancestors. The rope of parent to child from which you are sprung. She raised you, my children.

If a person cannot or will not have children they can still help relatives or the people as a whole because they themselves are still people, and it is statistically the way of the world to help your species be alive. The important difference is that the paltrorks big man will prevent others from having children who would otherwise want and be able to, and survival is an important enough value that why should anyone put up with paltrorks if they don’t have to.

Does that make sense?”

“I suppose,” responded the Chan/elis, “but if you are saying no man should have all the wives then what if someone is married to a man who doesn’t like sex with women, or if it’s my old friend Son/le, married to a man too lazy or too unable to hunt, but her friend’s husband brings home meat every day, enough to feed two or more women and their children. The man cares about children; he just wants them to be his. Isn’t that really the way of the elephants?”

“To that I have no answer,” said //Tlili.

“How about this answer,” said an elder council woman, “it’s not a perfect world. There will always be competition among men, and among women for that matter, and between women and men, but we should do our part to not let it get out of hand. We should help everyone see that paltrorks shouldn’t rise to where any well meaning hard working man or woman can’t have children. Does anyone disagree with that?”

No one spoke. “So it’s settled.” The very eldest council woman said softly, “By agreeing with the Baobab/tleva’s second point we must help the people move forward via cooperation on this most important value of ensuring the survival of one another’s descendants.”

“The hardest thing about that, I deem, is that as our numbers have increased there is less food, water, and shelter where there is too much crowding. That may be the main reason why paltrorks behaviors arise. There was no overcrowding in the time of Nilkua, perhaps the old Big Man behaviors were learned by the People from an earlier time when there was less meat to be found.”

“Perhaps,” several women murmured.

“So,” said the eldest council woman. “Now, we have to find a way to prevent crowding.”

“We have a report,” said another, “of an herb, silphium, from clan shamans far to the north. It prevents children, but is rare, and there is none around here.”

Many of the Chan/elis began to speak.

“There are other methods.”

“They are most unpleasant.”

“But wait!” said the youngest council woman, “We say we don’t want extinction, but then we say we don’t want crowded conditions either? Why worry about overpopulation? Or paltrorks? If the two are together then how can paltrorks create extinction?”

“Paltrorks is too destructive, too anti-life. We don’t know where it can lead.”

“But so are council attempts to create a culture of birth control that could last generations. Shouldn’t we want as many people as possible?”

“Not if they could care less about living.”

“Why not? They may not care much about continuance of the People, but surely they would care about living enough to survive if there’s so many of them.”

“The conditions under paltrorks are often terrible, and the competition between and within clans when there is crowding is terrible too. It seems obvious that we shouldn’t go down that path.”

Chan/elis Lolu spoke, “In my time, the feeling was that you couldn’t influence such deep forms of behavior especially for the entire people. The People did whatever they wanted, and the council’s influence was, and probably even should have been, minimal.”

Chan/lis Owa responded, “I was the next generation after you, Lolu, and we found what was said here in the valley still mattered.”

“That’s right,” others chimed in.

“We aren’t trying to change the people into Erectus or Apes. Our task is just to give all the clans the foresight and the tools to not destroy themselves over time.”

“But *must* we take that role?”

“Remember, the great mother, the Baobab/lteva has said she remembers a time when there were almost no people at all. The People almost died out.”

“And the people, under N!lkua and the Dil/koa, were miserable. Surely that’s important.”

“I agree that that’s important, we’ve seen similar behavior over the generations in many clans, but right now I’d say that dying out is the opposite of our current problem.”

“I have merged with earth and sky for uncounted seasons, eighteen generations,” said Cho/wu. “What of the ‘current’ problem? I see all the People as my family. I don’t want them to suffer without hope of surcease certainly. After all, hopeless suffering leads to indifference. I am even more certain I don’t ever want the people to be indifferent to the prospect of dying out. Foolish and ignorant customs are the danger we can influence and help eradicate to prevent the suffering, large die offs, and the possibility of extinction. This council and this mesa is the bulwark for the People.”

“My time was three generations ago,” said Chan/elis Huit/la. “A few men were allowed into the council. We saw that the distant, but not the *most* outlying clans, were often falling to paltrorks. They weren’t close enough to our influence or far enough to have the freedom of the unknown wilderness. The problem simply is that males generally are big with lots of innate aggressive passion. They tend to be domineering, and, within reason, women tend to like a powerful male, especially a man who can, and wants to support many children. When I went into my Baobab I thought we were giving up the rigid Matriarchy. What has happened?”

## 36. Artemis Wants a Little Clarity

Artemis stirred. “Carressa, I think I understand the relevance of this discussion to our current culture, but I’d like to clarify a couple of things.”

“OK.”

“First I feel that nowadays //Tlili could make traction with the paltrorks idea, and maybe with her ideas about ‘God’, but I can tell you with certainty that *most* people in modern times will say that survival of one’s genes’ is *not* the meaning of life, no matter how you argue it. Emotionally they will deeply resent the idea as being too sterile (as in not ‘spiritual’ enough), and, or they will say it’s too prescriptive. They’ll say the survival of DNA is very low on their list of priorities, and the pursuit of happiness is what they are about, or following their *own* spiritual path, or following their *own* version of God’s will, that it’s their right, and that you should piss off.”

“Is that how *you* feel Artemis?”

“I . . . No . . . No, actually I agree with you. Your ‘Rose Mandala’ makes way too much sense.”

“Well then why do you think that others will disagree? The council didn’t.”

“I am certain I would have disagreed with you before I came out here. I suppose I’m more open now in a way. . . Perhaps possessing no clothes and sleeping in my nest has made me a bit of a Chan/elis myself.”

“I think you have it. The idea of following a spiritual path is to find your own way to transcend the ego or to balance its influence by connecting to whatever it is that is that you discover to be the most ultimate reality. In the modern world of the last ten thousand years the ongoing growth of civilization has increasingly made that difficult. Most modern people can transcend the ego a little, to include humanity, but we of the Bogada have observed that their spiritual paths and their resultant conceptions of God are generally irrationally anthropocentric. Much more often than not they retreat into self-serving fantasies because they are not physically,

emotionally, or spiritually grounded in the vastly larger reality which encompasses the human situation. If your look at the Rose Mandala the subjective side can bend three of the directions to its will but not the center of the objective side that is it's opposite: the definition of life and survival. (pages 186 & 189) No wonder the obvious logic of the objective side of the Mandala isn't compelling to them. As I said earlier most modern people's version of a mandala is shrunk down to little arcs up out and back into the anus."

"That's mean Carressa, and it won't win you converts."

"Thank you Artemis. I suppose you're right. But I probably didn't mean it as judgmentally as you took it to be. I was, after all, making //Tlili's analogy in part specifically because it pushes the bounds of 'well mannered' human culture. Excrement is natural and totally necessary. Anuses are useful, they can produce great pleasure, and they are a necessary part for the 'whole' to function. Ha!"

"Hmmm. I think, if the primacy of survival of the DNA is the core point that our civilization needs to understand and accept, then we are a long ways from success."

"Actually we of the Bogada believe that it will just take a little bit of tweaking by promoting the right rituals."

"I am beginning to feel that 'you of the Bogada' have no idea how far from normal you are."

"The culture of the West has much to offer, but it doesn't have the last word in what it means to be human. There are and have been a great variety of cultures throughout history. Humans can live in a very different fashion than what is currently vogue."

"Well anyway for my second point, and for all the council's discussion, I still don't get the logic of when and why you should pursue your own DNA's survival versus helping your species survive."

"That's a subtle thing to understand. First remember that the earthly biological definition or meaning of life has around 5 parts: life has, 1. cell membranes, 2. metabolizes energy, 3. senses and responds to it's environment, 4. can, but doesn't have too, evolve, and 5. maintains it's genes through time. It's just that if you don't pay attention to some of the parts

(such as having cell membranes (or being individuated) and metabolizing energy by eating and breathing) then the ego would die in short order. So people's egos don't have a problem understanding and agreeing with the importance of those parts. It's the fifth part, keeping your genes moving forward in time, that transcends the ego when we die. So even though it's just as important a part, of the definition, of what it means to be alive as breathing is, people want to discount it and not think too much about what it means.

In our daily actions the priorities for survival of your genes should generally be nested, or tiered, to account for the way life works, that is to say we should be mindful that we as organisms are genetically like strands in a rope. Modern geneticists tell us that even though there are people from Madagascar to Terra Del Fuego people move around enough that only five thousand years ago we are all related. There will be a similar trajectory of our genes merging through our descendents into the future. That is the rope. But as individual organisms, to show reverence for God by being in harmony and acting non-suicidal in accordance with the way that the rest of successful life acts, we are to organize our lives so that we pursue our own DNA's survival because it's what we have the most influence on, but mindful of the rope.

Regarding *imbalanced* competition, where one's descendents, or DNA, survive at the expense of another, or where one person feels they shouldn't reproduce but others do to fill the gap, those who lose out are not going with the grain, or meaning, of life. For many, even most, this is a very hard truth. But the solution isn't to ignore or deny reality. It's to realize that the mandate of nature is only this: those genes that survive, survive. This doesn't mean we have to compete. Generally, if we plan it, within reason almost everyone can pass on their genes. Certainly that could stop or stall human evolution, but the benefit is that the human race will remain the human race. It won't change into something else, and like many species that have remained relatively unchanged for millions of years we can be proud to pass our lovely species on to posterity. It will cultivate an attitude of reverence for the gift of existence, for the creation. It will mean, like many of the world's old species, that we are successful and well fit for survival. In short: once we are conscious of the importance of survival as being a part of

what life in its essence is, then wanting your genes to survive at another's expense is ruthlessly antisocial, and through war, famine, or other calamities you will be partially responsible for the demise of our race. Conversely, blandly allowing others to survive because you are indifferent or want to opt out of the future, is in essence suicidal, and the indifference also makes you partially responsible for our future destruction.

“I was also thinking,” said Artemis, “about what you were saying earlier concerning Osama Bin Laden and Paltrorks. If survival is more important than happiness, and he had lots of rich kids, even if civilization collapses, won't some of his kids be more likely to survive than someone who just has two kids? So if genetic survival is so important wasn't Bin Laden being closer to the 'will of God' than a two child parent?”

“In a way, Ironically, horribly, yes. Though I need to clarify that survival isn't more important than happiness. The way to say it is that as we grow in wisdom we should be more willing to pursue happiness in accordance, first, with the objectively observable nature of reality. But regarding Bin Laden, overpopulation behavior is only in accordance with 'God's will' if cultures and governments let him and other overpopulators get away with it, by themselves not being aware of the order of priority that 'objective' values should be nested in. Perhaps I should clarify something really basic here. Our evolved psychological dispositions are such that our impulses and natural desires generally do 'program' us to try to cause our genes to survive, but in most cultures throughout most of recorded human history your average person hasn't been very conscious of the root 'cause' of their impulses or desires. Indeed there are good reasons why it may be superficially beneficial for individuals to not understand the root driver of their behaviors. That's the reason that sometimes people interpret their impulses in a way that causes them to not have children at all, and sometimes others interpret them to ruthlessly compete to have as many progeny as possible.

Evolutionary psychologists are now shedding some modern light on what's going on with our impulses and desires, but being scientists, whose job is to tell us what *is* rather than what *ought* to be, they haven't focused much on a coherent value system that could function in harmony with 'God'



as the apex of the reasonably nested scientific world view. Their focus gets no larger than human biology and human history. So they tend to stop at utilitarianism's banal and superficially understood goal of maximizing happiness.

“So what's the solution?”

“Love God enough to be conscious of what is really going on, and prioritize values in accordance with their natural order. Circle the Rose.

The question Artemis isn't, so much, should concern for your DNA be such a priority that you want to have two kids and live a life centered on sustainability; the seminal question that proceeds it is the important one. It is: do you love whatever you take to call God enough that you choose to fully accept and revere your part in this reality such that you will live most logically in accordance with what existence in *this* reality means.

If you do that then *that* is what creates the right side of the Mandala, and a logical prioritization of values will occur.”

Carressa drew another picture in the sand. “Specifically, look how normative values, once you accept ‘God’ as the primary, are hierarchically nested the way the sciences are nested down here, to the right; which, again, is the ‘Objective’ or east side of the Mandala. Now, our egos, and cultural morals, are the most flexible parts of the right side of the Rose Mandala. And within a given environment, say the modern American one, it is necessary to bring our evolved psychology, which has some flexibility, first into harmony with God, within that physics, and within that the laws of life.

It may come as a surprise to many that within this grand way of understanding things the evolved human psychology often conflicts with that ‘laws of life’ which says life is concerned with sustaining the thread of one's genes into the future.

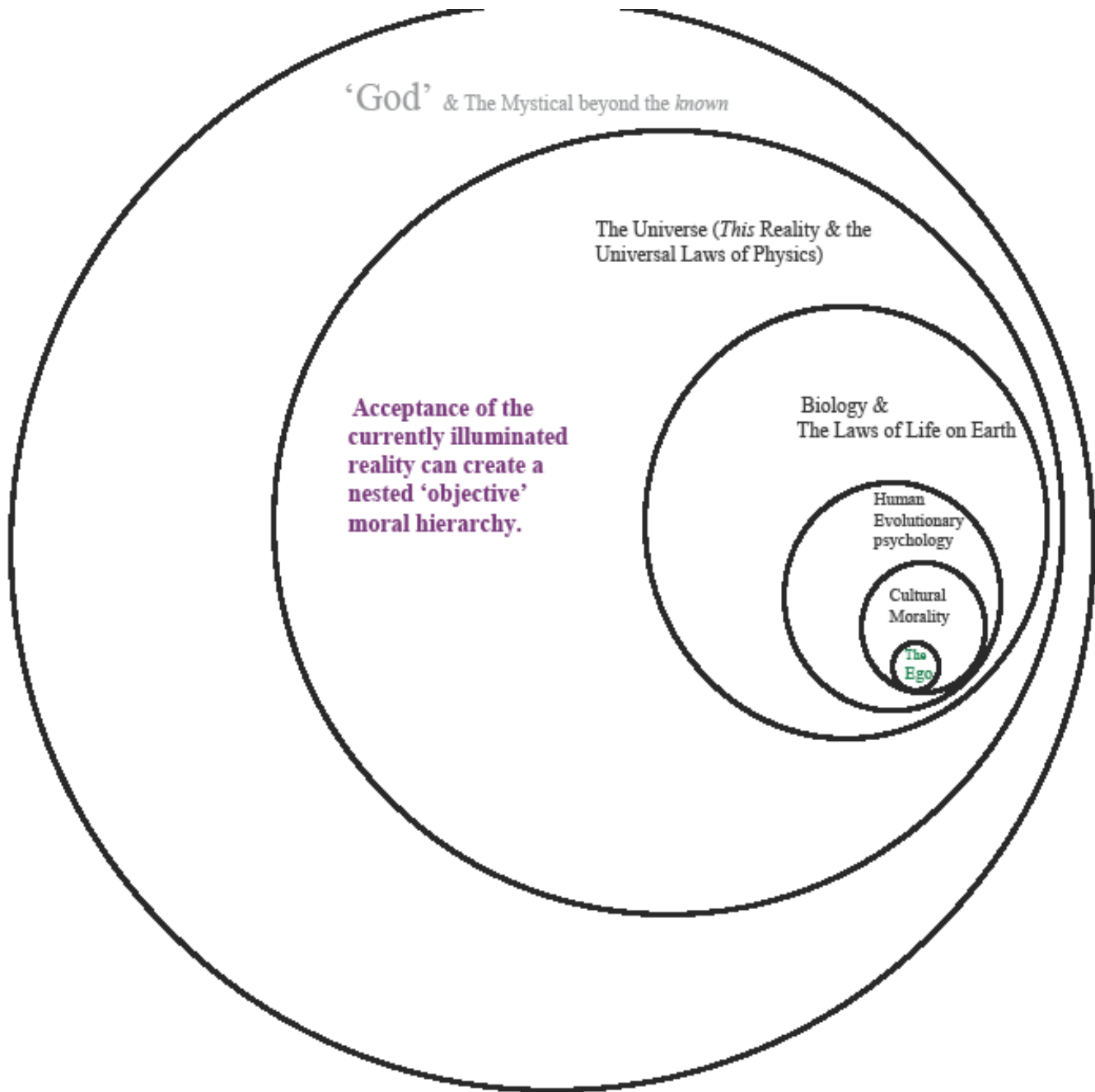
Again, civilizations (and here I would include the ‘civilization’ Eve founded) can be so synergistically beneficial to human survival that the pre, and post, civilization impulses of natural selection that are in our subconscious are often in conflict with *beneficial* civilized behavior (that is, from a basic survival of the genes point of view). For example, again, think

of how our natural selection, particularly paltrorks, impulses almost led to global thermonuclear war. -

To continue down the Mandala, it's human psychology that forms human culture, and finally both mold our egos, but so often this molding is done unconsciously.

The trick is to work with the evolved psychology that we have, and the culture and egos that we have, such that they are properly nested. The problem, again, is that, starting with our psychology the values often get out of whack, and we aren't conscious enough of the big picture to try and right it. We often simply claim that our ego is important enough to 'God' that we can ignore the whole chain of nested values. Such a claim is irreverent. The Mandala shows it:"

(First refer back to the Rose Mandala on page 189)



“If we return to the story, the council had the Rose Mandala, but they didn’t have evolutionary psychology, though they did have the concept of paltrorks, . . . the core root of the difficulty that stirs up the process of creating a peaceful sustainable culture for human survival.

It’s important to note in the study of living cultures that elephant and bonobo matriarchies aren’t monogamous, and if the Dil/koa had accepted a male they wouldn’t have been either. If there is, or was, no alpha male who

*led* the females there was certainly a *dominant* male that all the female elephants or bonobos would want to mate with while the ‘bachelors’ were kept at a distance. The council knew the problem was that such a culture was unstable because resentful bachelors, and even females who aren’t getting enough of the alpha male’s attention, could band together and take over a clan, and the bachelors themselves would most likely be dominated again by another ‘big man.’ This certainly happens with chimps, and humans. With elephants there is rut, and only during rut does the alpha bull even bother with the females, and that’s the only time the bachelors are interested as well. The rest of the year the matriarchy is free to consolidate its social power. So, since human females are continuously in estrus, or rut, it was decided the only way the ancient post Big Man matriarchy could be maintained was via the subtle natural religious authority born of connection to the baobabs.

The council pointed out that the problem of genetic competition doesn’t have to be that huge, and I agree,” Carressa said. “In hunter-gatherer societies the necessary lack of materialism of a moving tribe creates a large degree of natural egalitarianism. So the People’s male and female roles were fairly equal already, ala the Bushmen, the Nuba, the Cherokee, and Aborigines. Women just needed to be proactive with religious ritual and the balance of the sexes would remain subtly matriarchal, but matriarchal enough that the core mandate of the culture, sustainability, would be met.

Now you can understand these dynamics in the common modern language of science. . .”

Artemis interrupted. “I care about science as the study of nature, but many people don’t, and others see it as part of, or even the root of, the problem.”

“I know the birth pangs of your modern scientific method created a rocky history. Rising, in Europe five hundred years ago, in tandem with an extraordinarily disrespectful, even a rapist, attitude towards nature, which was typified by the scientific method’s principal founder, Francis Bacon, and coming most clearly, as I said earlier, from Manichaeism (the two thousand year old philosophy that believes the physical world is inherently evil); it’s

been a problem. Consequently today even scientists have a very primitive understanding of how values most logically and reverentially connect to the natural order that science has discovered. Again, most scientists are simply utilitarian, and the rest of the world overlays the scientific reality that modern humanity lives under with value dogmas from mid agriculture era religions. In some ways those religions may be very fine, wonderful even, in what they offer the psyche. But if their values and ideas about reality conflict with those of science there are bound to be major problems when their disciples live immersed in the world born of science, and even more so if the scientists themselves are unaware of the natural ordering of values and just espouse Utilitarianism.

The Mitochondrial Eve was onto something they missed, something so totally crucial that the survival of our civilization hangs on it. If you moderns clearly understood why genetic survival and consequent sustainability should be the root of cultural values preceding even the pursuit of happiness then your age long history of egocentric politics and war, your overpopulation, and your destruction of the climate and biosphere would not be problems.”

“You say //Tlili said all this,” said Artemis with some heat, “but you say don’t listen blindly to authority. What of her authority? And scientists say she lived 140,000 years ago. You still haven’t shown me how you can possibly speak for her.”

“I will, but, as I said earlier when we were talking about learning philosophy, you must use your own mind, Artemis, your own judgment of the data...And blessedly I think you have been, if you love God, or however you define the path to the transcendent that gives you meaning, then use the authority of your own senses, and your own heart. Bow before no authoritarian human, certainly, or human doctrine. Sage inspired or not. Look at the world yourself. If you love God, it is your work to understand what you must do yourself. Sages may help, but in the end it’s between you and your perception of what you choose to call God.

//Tlili’s genes are in all of us. -Even you know she did something relatively right. 140,000 years is a fairly long time; though 100 million would be better! So regarding //Tlili, whatever I may tell you as an authority, you can follow the genetics yourself.

Perhaps I've said some of this too soon in my story *Artemis*. It may put too much weight, for you, on the east or objective side of the Mandala, and without focusing much yet on the west, the subjective side; it seems out of balance, not enough heart. But we of the Bogada learned much about the subjective, though by definition that's only opinion. I'll talk about it, but mind you the east side is the ultimate social one because we meet and act in the objective world, and it's where our love of god is actually manifested. But I'll continue with the story. There was a council meeting . . .”

### 37. The Council Continues

The eldest looking matriarch spoke, “Of course a large part of the reason the women of this council hold such sway is that it is only here that women travel through time, bounding their spirits with trees. So only here do we access fresh knowledge from our distant ancestors. And it is in this grove that the people can find bogada. Only here is it found, growing on the Baobab/tleva’s tree.”

//Tlili was aghast, “What!?! Why? . . . .Honestly, I hadn’t thought about this, but my heart says that as the people spread they should take Bogada with them, use it for healing, and perhaps now and then create other sacred places where women can travel through time.”

“With all respect Great Mother; it has been tried. But no one has found another source of bogada. Actually the only place it grows where we can take it for a new Chan/elis is on the tree you are in or have been in. We thought you knew. And it doesn’t travel well, not much more than a day’s journey.”

“But why should that be?”

“If you don’t know I am sure we don’t Great Mother. You are surely blessed by the Great Spirit, as in your milk.”

But at that moment //Tlili did not feel blessed. The benevolent power of her milk was fun, but this was far too much responsibility. Only she could be the source of bogada? The great connection. It didn’t seem fair. How could such an important benefit for the race (her children) rest with any one individual, even if she was the Great Mother?

//Tlili said little more. Although she was respected as a symbol and everyone felt a natural warmth towards her, her quiet demeanor was puzzling, and the additional comments she made were very simple; eventually it was taken as perhaps a lack of intellect. She did at one point

suggest avoiding using the cold water when waking the Chan/elis and waking them only with a didgeridoo when the trees were in blossom.

When the council finally ended there were two main decisions. Matriarchy would be subtly continued via the authority of the unions with trees on the mesa, and overpopulation and the resulting misery and paltrorks engendering competition would be studiously prevented by watching the peoples population density, recommending three, two, or one children per person, and when necessary suggesting immigration or birth control via spilling one's seed on the ground, the mysterious herb from the north, or as a last option infanticide the moment of birth (before a child was deemed conscious) .

Eve, and three other women were chosen as the Chan/elis who offered the most to the council. They were sent back into the trees twenty-eight days later with a new recruit.

Four more five hundred year cycles passed. The council learned to count the years very conscientiously. Each cycle they woke all the Chan/elis, they woke Eve and her time traveling descendent feminine progeny up with didgeridoos, and they woke them gently at the flowery wet end of the dry seasons.

The new culture of Homo sapiens kept growing and spreading across east Africa, and its place in the world was harmonious enough that when //Tlili was woken for her seventh cycle she said goodbye to her ancient tree. It was surely four thousand years old, and its age was showing. She blessed it, sensing it should rest, and she moved into a new younger one, suggesting in council that they continue to keep the five hundred year rituals, waking up the others. But she asked to not be disturbed again for ten times five hundred years. And after a month of consultation the Baobab/tlewa was satisfied; passing the hibernation process to others was considered again, but Eve's milk and position as mother of humanity was deemed invaluable, and she went into a younger tree for yet another five millennium.

When she was awakened, fully five thousand years later, her hair had merged with the Bogada, filling her chamber, and it had to be cut off. But



else wise not much changed save that just before the month of information exchange ended, and the bleeding Chan/elis and //Tili returned to the trees, the council of the time threw a grand celebration. Thereafter the cycles rolled forward smoothly.

*And Artemis, it worked. Human culture found sustainable grace; there followed the glory days for Paleolithic humanity.*

The people covered all of east Africa. Herbology thrived and much of humanity lived healthy relatively long lives fairly secure that their families would continue. And happiness? As I said earlier, the irony is that there was much more of it in the glory days than there is now. There were small calamities, occasionally. The fevers swept through the population, and a few other plagues, and occasionally a volcano or a small ice age would disrupt the climate causing some famine, but the tragedies never threatened extinction. There was some natural selection, but generally it favored increasingly social behavior and greater intelligence. Eventually the People even evolved a resistance to the old strain of malaria; even in the long view it seemed as if humanity's prospects were very positive. . .

And with that my young Artemis I really must catch some sleep.”

“Certainly and good night my strange teacher.” Artemis found herself bowing, and when she climbed her tree to her nest hugging the trunk and straddling the branches the rough living wood, so intimate against her nakedness, was most reassuring as a sensual counterpoint to the intellectual and imaginative space she had been in for the last two days.

## 38. Makao's Vision

Makao was sitting in front of his tent with his banjo. Thus far hiking hadn't made him much happier. He thought he should slow down and just relax, but it was dusk and the mosquitoes had been out again, and they were making his life intolerable to the edge of sanity. The annoyance was such that eventually he began daydreaming of malaria. He was fantasizing that then he could give in to the release of delirium, when suddenly a couple of bats had shown up, and in a moment they cleared the air of insects, and right after that the sun came out.

"Geeez. For all my grumbling and misery, look at this, this shivering beauty." Perhaps it was the evening light, but the trees and mountains were now very lovely, and Makao realized suddenly that he was indeed very relaxed. So, he reckoned, now was a pretty good time to play the old John Hartford ballad, his favorite.

He launched into it, an absurd song called 'Back in the Goodle Days' about a high school sweetheart, a pickup truck, and the melancholy side of the passage of time. He sang unselfconsciously, which was an advantage he relished within this otherwise uncomfortable solitude. He loved the lyrics, threw himself at them, and marveled still at the often unexpected striking beauty of Hartford's simple banjo chords.

He was about halfway through the song, when he stopped because he noticed a couple of birds, rare scarlet iwi's, who were flitting about over his head. As he watched them they occasionally took a drink of nectar from the Kukui tree's luminous flowers. The iwi's were flitting about just as the bats had been. Was it the music, his mood, or the late afternoon air? Then he noticed that the sky had a faint sparkle to it. . .

He carefully examined the air over his head. Maybe he was hallucinating, but there seemed to be strands of gossamer green orange iridescence floating in the canopy of the tree.

The phenomena only lasted about a minute, then the sparkle was gone, the birds were gone, and clouds covered the sun. And there was nothing more

to see but the hoary old Kukui trees that surrounded him. One of which was hollow and riddled with holes.

Still, that momentary experience was a turning point for Makao. Somehow he felt different: “Why have I been complaining so much? Wasting my time. I *chose* to come out here. So I should really lighten up, and remember to love the snails. After all if I don’t love em there aren’t many left who will.” With that thought he took off his clothes and jumped into the little pool near his tent.

The water was only a couple of feet deep, but he lay in it stomach down, and he faced downstream with his hands braced against some rocks to stop him from moving. The cool mountain current flowed over his body as he kept just his nose and eyes above the water while observing the many shades of green which covered and created the rain forest. The mosquitoes were stymied while he was submerged, and as he lay there blissfully he wondered why he didn’t skinny-dip more often, it was so lusciously intimate.

A little while later he heard only the slightest sound of rustling above the murmur of the water, and then suddenly he was aware that Dave Hackel in full camouflage, and armed with a bow, had walked into his camp. At first Dave noticed Makao’s tent, and as he turned about, studying the campsite, he saw Makao there naked in the water.

“Akamu! Is this how you do research, with no clothes?”

“I’m cooling off, and what is to you? What the hell are you doing way out here?!”

“I’m hunting wild pigs; doing you a favor. They eat snails you know.”

“There are no pigs around here, only rats.”

“Actually there’s recent boar prints, and kind of a game trail, just a shorts ways down the hill from here.” Dave paused considering. “And there was blood. Looked like a pig’d been shot. And *bare* footprints, smaller than yours I’m sure. It was women, maybe children, but probably women. . . Know anything bout that?”

It was Makao’s turn to pause, and he saw Dave’s eyes grow hard. “I don’t know anything about it. Pretty much the only thing I’ve heard or seen

is the damn mosquitoes. What's with the Kusai eyes? Shouldn't we want anybody to shoot pigs that can?"

"Kusai Eyes eh? Don't ya think it a little pupuli, a little crazy, for women to be way out here hunting boar in barefeet?"

"I dunno," Makao said. He quickly climbed out of the water and wrapped himself in a beach towel that he'd brought. Within a moment the mosquitoes began to surround him; so he climbed into his tent, separating himself from Dave with a screen. The insects didn't seem to be bothering Dave at all anyway; maybe he was wearing repellent. "What does it matter? It's the twenty-first century. Women can do anything they want."

Dave studied him. "You're campin near a swamp. . . Ehh, tell me bro, out here coutin these snails, this makin you happy?"

Bro? After being such an ass back in the valley Dave had the audacity to call him bro? What was with this guy? Why was he getting so personal?

"Makao I know what you're thinkin. You think you're better an smarter than me. Don't matter if I'm gettin richer than you. I feel your elitist judgments. You got that from old man Akamu, your dad."

"Dave what are you sayin this to me for. If you don't like me than leave me alone."

Dave ignored him, "I know more than you think," and he launched into a rather bizarre soliloquy: " People lie to each other, and themselves. The truth is everyone's competing. Life's pretty much all about status. You liberals and enviro's talk about equality and loving and giving, but it's just another power play, but less honest. Your hero's, Mother Teressa, or Gandhi and Martin Luther King, they were all just smooth manipulators. Look at the status and power they managed to get, and still have, even after they're dead. You may say that they helped other's, but the whole thing was just people lookin out for their own. Mother Teressa's 'hospitals' were actually death houses. She didn't carry pain killers because she thought suffering was the will of God. I like it out here because there's no lies. Now it looks like I'm competing with barefoot, maybe bare-assed women, out here on my own turf. They've already got the cities where they keep our balls in a vice. Those tracks show me that this 'wilderness' is too tame. It seems there's no place left for honest men, them strutting around, it really pisses me off."

Makao looked at him. “Well, maybe *everyone*’s a bit of an asshole. But, in answer to your question I just realized I like being out here, sorta, and even though the mosquitoes are a pain, the bats eat them. And I do like the snails, I think, and I want to keep them around.”

“Why? That’s just a game. It’s all talk and play. Your actions have no more power than a gnat in a hurricane, and anyway people should come first.”

“Maybe, but maybe all that gear you have, maybe dressing up in camo, is just a game. You can buy pork at the store.”

“It’s not a game if I *shoot* you, not to *you* it isn’t.” Dave’s voice rose. “You like make beef? I could hide your body where no one would find it. There’s nothing you can do. Even this conversation, it’s just your word against mine.” With that he left.

### 39. Adam and the Volcano

Lower, and some miles closer to the sea than Makao, on the morning of the fourth day after Artemis and Carressa met, the two women woke. After a breakfast that consisted of simply drinking water they walked over the ridge that separated the Punalulu from a larger valley to the east, and from that valley they worked their way down and over to an exposed tidal pool among the rough lava boulders near the base of the Punalulu falls. The sound of the falls and the breakers below left the women feeling very exposed. This was partially due to the possibility of a freak wave or tsunami that could wash them off the cliff, but it was mainly because of the difficulty of hearing the approach of helicopters or zodiacs that could come suddenly from the air or water, rounding the cliffs that stuck out into the sea, and both types of craft would be loaded with wide eyed tourists.

The women's planned escape route was to merely dive into a few scrubby native ferns that grew not far from the pool where the cliff met the boulders. Carressa was showing Artemis how to spear fish.

"I learned to do this on Aotearoa at kolipopo. I mostly caught Hapuku."

"At this stage I'm not even going to ask how that fits into your story."

"I will get there. I swear."

"Before that, I'm curious. Regarding //Tlili, you seem to be saying that due to her, well, her basic immortality, she was the most important person in a culture that lasted. . . How long did it last? --One hundred forty thousand years?"

"There were some very significant changes after seventy thousand years."

"Ha! OK. So seventy thousand years, and one of her jobs was, as I see it, to be a kind of living, storytelling, botanical and sociological library. --A repository for the tricks of human sustainability."

“That’s right.”

“Then how come there wasn’t more change? I mean seventy thousand years, more cultural growth. What’s the point? A culture that static sounds kind of boring.”

Carressa voice was just audible above sounds of crashing water; “They did change over time. There was movement and adaptation to variations in the climate. Our language skills, and our appreciation of music steadily got better, you could say the human brain became more conscious, but that is a subtle and difficult judgment to make. I mean our brains may have changed, but it may be a bias of modernity to say we became ‘more’ conscious. And of course we remained ‘simple’ hunter gatherers. Seventy thousand years may seem a long time for so little change, but even now it’s thought that Australian aboriginal culture has oral traditions that go back thirty thousand years. They didn’t change much either. It isn’t due to poor verbal acuity that most of those cultures don’t even have a word for depression. ‘Primitive’ cultures only become unadvisable options, and miserable, falling into such behaviors as cannibalism and headhunting, when population pressures caused Paltrorks culture to arise. . .

It’s also obviously true that untimely death is more common in ‘primitive’ cultures. That is certainly a negative, but longevity is not the only value, as otherwise hunter-gatherer cultures may be superior at meeting the fundamental needs of sustainability and happiness”

Carressa speared a fish but, just barely.

Artemis grabbed the slimy creature as securely as she could by the tail, “Thank you fish!” and she dashed its head against a chunk of lava, “Yow!

I love being out here. I’ve said I could do this forever, and I mean it, but I don’t want to give up the idea of books, great music, or a society that can create spaceships, nor do I think that humanity could do that with our current numbers. Billions would have to die first.

Anyway, I suppose there are surely alien civilizations somewhere in the universe that have been around for a billion years. I have no idea what that would be like. Yet I guess it would feel kind of cool to be the living end of a string of real modern humanity that goes back a billion years. . . .

But if //Tlili and her council had it so together how did we end up where we are at now?"

"Well, as I was saying, seventy thousand years ago an event occurred that started to change things; Homo sapiens nearly went extinct again.-

Under the sustainable cultures born of the council, humanity had covered all of east Africa. The clans continued to multiply, and those that were to become the modern San, who the world knows as the Bushmen (but who call themselves the Juwasie), drifted south. The rest of the human enterprise expanded to the north and west. The ice age cycles came and went, and there were eons of ease cycling with hardship. Aside from the cultural mores advocated by the council we humans changed, we adapted to the varying environmental conditions, and our success for the long haul, as a truly versatile and viable species seemed assured.

//Tlili had ridden the cycles, seventy thousand years worth. The councils counted the generations, and she was awakened for a month at five thousand year intervals, sometimes to feast; other times they woke her when there was a major struggle of famine or epidemic disease. She gave what was needed of her, but never did she wake to serious calamity.

The council seemed eternal, and did its work well, and Homo sapiens culture surpassed that of Erectus. With the exception of a couple of holdout sup specie cultures of Erectus in remote parts of Indonesia that branch of the hominid family went extinct around a hundred thousand years ago. Much has been made of what may have happened to Erectus. It is commonly thought that *we* displaced them, out competed them, but we didn't so much do that as out-survive them. Before the Baobab/televa their social skills had actually been better than ours, but now with //Tlili, the Mitochondrial Eve, ours were better than theirs.

For //Tlili it had been nineteen cycles of orgasmic connection, but she had only been in a state of 'normal' consciousness for twenty one menstruations, less than two of her years. Her last waking had been



wonderful and easy. The land itself had seemed to revel in fecundity, and there had been voluptuous feasting. That last council had seemed wise, secure, and benevolent, and the valley of Ule/deni had been particularly resplendent, overflowing with her thick, towering, and beloved baobabs. When she last remerged with the bogada a chorus of birds had been singing. Yet //Tlili had learned as a child that, though beauty may be stronger, ugliness would always have great power. A major part of definition is opposition. How could one know beauty if there was no ugliness? So she wasn't too surprised when she was woken by an icy breeze.

The period of extreme cold she woke to was still seventy-four thousand years ago. A super-volcano at what's now Lake Tobia, in Sumatra, had erupted a few years before she awoke with a strength that was more than a thousand times that of the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens. It was the largest eruption in all of human history. . .

For a short while her still transitioning brain clung to ecstatic memories, of riding the baobab in the speed time where days and nights simply flickered by. She remembered it like the play of light that twinkles on the surface of the Luangwa River on a windy day. Her orgasm now seemed connected, in a way, to time itself as she had rode and shuddered in the larger waves of the passing years. The rain and dry seasons had rolled by faster than ocean surf. She'd had the awareness to notice that during the last few wave cycles the light and dark had trailed off into sensations of cold, where the baobab branches extending above her consciousness vibrated with the confused roar of storms.

Eventually the grandmother of all blizzards completely intruded on her temporal journey. It broke off part of the crown of her own tree, exposing the top of the trunk's hollow core, and a painful chill penetrated the baobab womb. The cavity became drafty as wind fingered its way through the pores in her mycelium shell, and she woke in the bottom darkness of her hollow to find her naked body shaking with hypothermia.

It was the first time where no one was there to help the Baobab/tleva make her way back to normal consciousness. Awareness of the cold descended, abrupt and sharp.

Even in such a difficult situation she was still more fortunate than most of humanity. And as //Tlili became fully conscious she grappled at her world with out stretched arms and thus broke up the webbed lattice of bogada mycelium that surrounded her.

Now fully awake, and shaking, she quickly climbed off her bogada phallus, and took stock of her situation: the hard outer mycelium shell, though porous, still covered the entire surface of her hollow. As in previous cycles the endless growth of hair on //Tlili's head had mingled with strands of mycelium through the centuries, and now formed a heavy cloak around her that smelled of baobab humus. She was also aware that she could make an insulating nest of the open inner webs of bogada mycelium, and unlike her Chan/elis cohorts she knew she had at least one high calorie meal, of her own milk. Finally, she was lucky she had been woken by this blizzard as it was the worst, but the last, of a series that had been going on since shortly after the eruption.

The obvious first priority was to get warm. She wrapped herself in her heavy hair, and drank some milk. Like any curious mother she had tried her milk before, and she had already observed that her own milk didn't seem to affect her like it did others. Next she piled the loose mycelium high around herself, over her hair and cowered down into the fetal position in the bottom of the mycelium nest. She was aware of the new opening in the hollow far above her, but the hollow a short way over her head was too narrow to climb. While she waited for the shivering to stop she held the T/lo she'd found while digging and remembered a cycle, it had been the fifth: that was when a council had started giving her and the other Chan/elis T/los, or stone axes, when they went into a tree. Apparently a Chan/elis, named Qoillo, had woken and been unable to get out, and died of thirst. A very sad fate, and a ridiculous oversight. Despite the tragedy itself a great deal of knowledge had been lost Qoillo's death. Now everyone could chisel their way out. . .

“Brrrr, breathe slowly. The world seems to have really changed somehow-”

“I think I will have to get out fast, and just dash to the village below. Surely they will have a fire.”

If anyone had been outside that baobab, in the gray twilight, watching the moving drifts of snow, they would have seen a multi forked crack form in the hard skein of mycelium, then the sharp tip of stone; it would have looked like a chick’s tooth, the //Tlili bird leaving its egg. Eve was the butterfly forced from her chrysalis during untimely winter.

//Tlili had experienced plenty of morning frosts, but this snow was different; the cold burned deeply, biting at her feet as naked Eva bounded across the mesa, long somewhat natted hair flying, seeking the edge.

The branches of the grove looked skeletal, and when she placed her hand in passing on the fat folded bark of an old trunk with a dull patch of bogada mycelium on its side she was certain it must contain a Chan/elis, and she had the disquieting sensation of death. The cambium layer beneath the bark radiated an aura of dryness and rot.

She came to the edge of the cliff and looked down. The castle tree in the valley that //Tlili, Naia, Glyla, and Kwanza had settled in, had of course died many ages ago. Though there had been a succession of other baobab trees large enough inside for many people, none had been so big. In place of the now ancient and remote tree there had long been a tradition of building a large circle of werfs around the ancient fire ring.

She looked down, and yes the fire ring was still there. The area had been lifted by about twenty feet from when Kwanza had first discovered it. Over the generations the People had unconsciously made occasional adjustments to the ring of stones, eventually accommodating sixty thousand years of sediment.

Through the twilight of scouring clouds she could definitely see the fire ring, small and far, but nothing else seemed familiar. She remembered walking through high deserts with Naia as a little girl, but the scene below now looked more vacant to her than any desert. Apparently there had been a fire quite some time ago, in this past cycle, because all that remained were a few blacked stumps and snags, with hunks and shards of bark tilting towards

the sky, and among these she saw a very few small baobabs, looking ruined and cracked.

Why go down? The mesa top seemed withered too, but at least it still held a hint of the Ule/deni she trusted. She turned back and wrapped herself in her hair, and breathed deeply and slowly while she observed her body's desire to shiver in waves in an effort to slow the process of freezing. The peace born of millennia of connection to the baobabs still held as she calmly considered her options:

She could go back to her tree and hunker down in her nest and wait for better weather, but she sensed that might be a very long wait indeed. She would need a month to actually remerge with a tree. She must wait for menses, for the blood bond through her cervix.

She considered finding a tree or trees that held living Chan/elis and waking them. They could at least hug each other; ball up together for more warmth. But a hibernating Chan/elis, if she wasn't dead already would be safer than //Tlili. She hadn't the right to wake one. She began to move around the mesa though. It would be useful to know who, or where, someone was alive.

It was towards the back of the mesa that she saw a reflected glow on the trunks ahead. Her heart quickened; only one thing could cause that glow. On the far side of that trunk in front of her she was sure to find a campfire, warmth, human companionship, and food. But //Tlili, born of the Paleolithic, was a woman well aware of the wisdom of stalking when approaching a stranger, alone. So she made her way towards the fire as cautiously as she could even though she was now freezing.

She stalked the fire circle, moving from the shadow of one trunk to another. Eventually //Tlili was able to peer at it close-up from behind a tree.

She beheld a man, the biggest she had ever seen. He was sitting cross-legged, leaning against the tree that had blocked her view, with the fire just in front of him so the trunk he leaned on reflected the fire's heat back around him, and he was asleep.

He was wrapped in the tattered skin of an eland, and his spear lay beside him. The man was darker than //Tlili. He was bald or shaven with almost no visible hair at all. He was large boned and strikingly handsome though he looked starved. Her glance at his face took in large lips, a long thin nose, wide set eyes and a high forehead. But this wasn't the main thing. The air was filled with the smell of cooking meat. A half eaten leg lay in the embers, and instinctually //Tlili drew back in horror.

It was a human leg, that of a Chan/elis. Who lay there dismembered by the fire. //Tlili now caught sight of the corpse off to the side of the camp. She studied the dead woman's eyes, and those eyes told her that the Chan/elis was freshly dead.

The Baobab/lteva could no longer control her breathing. This destruction, of her children, her people, her culture, the council, the whole resplendent world of the previous cycles, and this dismembered innocent woman, a keeper of knowledge, by a paltrork; he looked to be the definition of a Big Man. It was too much.

The peace gave way to shaking hypothermic anger, and without another thought she picked up a large burning brand and clubbed the big sleeping man on the side of his head, and then she hit him again in the ribcage. He never woke up. With a slight grunt he toppled over.

It took but another moment for it to occur to her, that of course he too was surely descended of old from her womb.

Poor //Tlili now stood up staring, again, -for some moments she paused, wondering. Then with a sob she rolled the leg off the fire, and she went and sat in the man's spot, soaking up the life giving heat, after which she continued to wonder what her next move must be.

Now Artemis, as we've discussed, and you surely know, the genetic difference between men and woman comes from the fact that in the nucleus of every one of our cells are our main chromosomes. A half set comes from the egg and a half set from the sperm. In the fertilized egg that multiplies into all the cells that create us the chromosomes are paired. And among the 23 pairs, or 46 chromosomes that create a human being, there is the pair that

creates the female gender, the two X chromosomes, but the male gender is created by an X and a Y chromosome. The X's are shared by both sexes, but the Y's are only passed father to son. So just as the mitochondrial DNA must be passed mother to daughter through the egg because a man's sperm has no mitochondria. So the Y chromosome is passed father to son through the sperm. This single sex lineage makes it easier to track these genes, and again, for men, scientists have found a single male progenitor who has made it through an extreme time of crises, a bottleneck.

As I have said: modern geneticists have plotted the genetic variation in the mitochondrial DNA back a hundred forty thousand years to one woman, //Tlili, (every human in a continuous maternal line carries her DNA), but it is also a well known fact that geneticists have plotted the Y chromosome back via son to father to the 'Y Chromosome Adam' during the time of the great Volcano.'

However, they certainly didn't know that our unknowing //Tlili, the Mitochondrial Eve, had just broken Adam's rib. . .

//Tlili was glad she didn't know the Chan/elis. The woman must have been placed in her tree in a minor cycle. With a mixture of loathing and reverence she moved the cadaver far out into the snow, but still she was careful that the numbness in her toes did not become complete. Then she sat through the night tending the fire; only minding the discomfort of the cold on a superficial level. "What am I to do? -About the People and much else. -I thought in my foolish pride that we were so secure. And I myself, is it chance, my decisions, or fate set by that which is beyond my knowing that I have lived to witness all of this; why have I lived to be a part of a world where spirit, where even the great Baobab, is turned upside down? It seems even the sunbirds are gone. . .

Then there is this man. He is living still, but he may die yet. When he finds consciousness I must be ready. I suppose I must keep him alive, though I can't quite bring myself to believe he is my long long distant grandson from afar. My heart is not in it like Naia's might have been.

Quite likely I won't be able to keep myself alive. What do I eat? I'm so hungry." She dozed lightly and was relieved to finally see the sky turn red and a wan sun appear.

Later, the shaman in her told //Tlili the man would not wake for some time, if at all. She told herself she was the *Great Mother*. Great Mother she had been called, for twenty-eight hundred generations. This man certainly needed a mother, but for her, witnessing the violence he had done had smashed the chain that connected him to her. She got up to walk.

This time she circled the entire mesa and discovered that at least seven baobabs seemed likely to contain living Chan/elis. Despondent, and feeling the irony of her youthful inexperience, she confirmed that the valley below seemed decimated in every direction, and the cliff descent looked perilously icy. She used all her knowledge as a gatherer to search for food, but on the mesa itself there really was nothing to eat. She had gone days without eating before but never after five thousand years of hibernation.

When she returned to the embers of the fire the Baobab/tlewa was truly famished. With tears of humility our revered Mother decided she must herself eat of the leg of her murdered Chan/elis.

"Ohh, this story is often just too horrible Carressa. It's strange though, because sometimes I truly envy //Tlili, but then her life turns to hell."

"From moment to moment when one approaches life from the most awakened perspective the simple mystery of breathing is generally a blessing, but then again, occasionally, there is no denying that it can be hell. . . "

They hadn't caught more fish due to the distraction of having to dive into the fern bushes over and over to hide from the fossil fuel transported tourists. Now Artemis' appetite was gone. Her butt felt raw on the rough lava where she sat, and the dead fish eyed her accusingly.

"Couldn't she have tried to get off the mesa?"

"Perhaps she did. We have only been told that the routs down were too frozen. It's a modern conceit born of luxury that cannibalism is such a complete taboo; and now those who have partaken in it are so judged that they become permanently tainted. Often in the history of life, and remember this was the Paleolithic era, events such as volcano eruption

could, and can, make existence very hard. She did what she must to survive. The poor Chan/elis was now dead in any event, and as her awareness of her predicament grew //Tlili's misgiving about eating the Chan/elis was outweighed by that of whether or not she should have clubbed the now unconscious man beside her."

//Tlili knew how to fast. She knew that with the heat of a fire, and her mane of hair to keep her warm, this one meal would last her at least two days even with the earth covered with snow. Perhaps in this time the ice would melt sufficiently to allow her to escape the mesa and find food. In the meantime she determined she would also keep the man alive, keep him from freezing by tending the fire.

On the morning of the second day he woke up. Unaware of what had hit him, all he saw was a beautiful woman keeping him warm by his fire. Her breasts bulged with motherhood. The nipple on the left one was tipped with a white drop of milk. She must be one of the fabled women of the trees for she had the long hair. When she spoke it was confirmed. She was using the ancient tongue, but he only knew a few words of it that he had learned from the shaman of his clan when he was a boy. She was jabbering at him. At first his hearing was too foggy to follow what she was saying with her thick dialect, but he determined that there was almost no aggression in her voice.

He turned his head, which unaccountably hurt a great deal, and there beyond the fire he could see the dead Chan/elis. He remembered pulling her from her hole. He had been so hungry. Yes he had done much to keep himself fed these last years. But he was still alive, and the others were dead. To his knowledge all of them were dead. They were weak, and he had few regrets; as it was good for at least someone to be alive.

The tree spirit woman had melted a mouthful of water by holding the snow in a baobab fruit husk over the fire. She got up, and walked towards him bearing the husk. She must know he had killed her tree spirit sister. He



was looking for his spear, where was it?, when he realized that this woman must have hit him.

“I can take her. This eland. No one has hit me so and lived. I am the survivor!

The little fool. Giving me water, she comes too close.”

//Tlili held the husk with water in one hand. He seemed weak, but she would take no chances. She held her t/lo, concealed in the other hand.

“Please drink this. You must be thirsty.”

She set the husk to his lips, but fast as a snake he knocked it away, and it happened so fast she didn’t know how he did it, but he was holding her tight round the waist against him with his right arm while his left hand was closed on hers, prying loose the rock axe.

“I ravage; kill you now!”

“That will only prove that you are very weak and unfit for survival.”

It was not the sort of response he expected. They struggled and he tightened his hold, but he hesitated.

“You think? But I’d enjoy it,” he taunted. “When I finish with you I maybe eat you as well.” She laughed lightly and it confused him. “Strutting men can be *so* blind!,” she said it easily.

He held her and stared as she spoke to him, “It only takes a sharp spear, some muscle, and a desire for death, to destroy or kill another human. That’s nothing. Even a young girl has the muscle and the ability to use a spear to kill someone by surprise, and we are *all* going to die. The hard thing is to figure out how to live gracefully enough to truly add to the rope of life through time. That’s what takes the deepest strength.”

“You fool! Twist words like serpent crawls. My body not forget blows, though now I feel your sweat ass.” He yanked her, tipping her over

As she fell forward she only just managed, perhaps inadvertently, to move her body up and a little over him. Their eyes locked. //Tlili nodded her head, and in her almost incomprehensible speech she said softly, “I didn’t think you were irredeemably paltrorks anyway.” She panted, “And you must understand. It cannot be this way.” She struggled, pressing forward against him.

He opened his mouth to growl, but a drop of milk landed on his tongue. . .

-The sweetest perfection, far better than honey: it was a taste beyond his dreams, and it cut his growl, and the struggle, short. His mouth found her breast. It hurt but she let him drink her breast dry. That took several moments; the other still had milk, but he had already fallen asleep. It had been three days since she left the Baobab, but perhaps there was some major magic left in the milk after all. She thought about what that implied.

She looked at him long into the evening, studying his face. "I don't think I need to worry about this man any more. Tomorrow I'm leaving the mesa." She looked at the Chan/elis' femur, and spoke to the fire, "Please don't bring me to that again."

## 40. Dawn

The next morning //Tlili woke to find herself intact and the man gone. She banked the fire under some slate and shale. Then it was easy to follow his tracks through the snow. He had gone straight to the crack, and she could just make his tracks out in the valley below as they followed the creek downstream towards the river. After breaking the ice and drinking from the pool at the bottom of the mostly broken basin at the mesa's center she determined to follow him.

The morning sun was peaking through a copper colored haze. She would have to keep moving quickly to stay warm. The remaining ice in the crack made it extremely difficult to climb down, but holding her t/lo in her teeth she managed. "I may freeze my 'sweet ass' against this rock before I get down. I can hardly feel it or my hands and feet at all. Brrrr I have never been so cold."

When she reached the valley //Tlili quickly decided that she wouldn't leave Ule/deni, not yet. She hadn't for sixty thousand years, whatever had happened here she didn't want to give up on the belief, at least not without a struggle, that this valley that Kwanza found could sustain human life. As she carefully made her way round the valley floor and up the slopes it became increasingly obvious that the place had been largely empty for generations, at least since the time the fire had occurred. However it was also clear that a very small group of people had been here until but a few years ago. If this change in the climate hadn't caused it, what had happened? Surely it meant that, for some reason, the council had collapsed. The most recently enclosed Chan/elis would surely know, but who would that be, and was she still alive?

There were certainly no human tracks beyond that of the man. Other than that there were only a couple of squirrel prints, quite a few crow prints, and cutting straight across the valley one set of less than a day old lion tracks. She couldn't look at tracks without thinking of Kwanza. It was

sobering to think of the remote past where her lover, Naia, and Nllkua now belonged, but the pain was still there. Kwanza's life, if not cut short by Nllkua, would have been lovely. He would have become a great hunter, and tales of his courage and skill would have passed down for generations. And she, she would still keep his name alive.

On the north east slope of the valley bowl she managed to find a grove of stumps that contained whole colonies of dormant darkling beetle grubs. This was a triumph. Their fat protein rich bodies would easily sustain several people for at least a month. The climb had warmed her up. The freezing hunger and the Chan/elis leg faded quickly to the borders of her consciousness like an ill remembered nightmare. She ate her fill. Now she did want to wake the remaining Chan/elis, but she had no tools beyond her knife, not even a skin or other form of container to carry the grubs up the crack. She would have to return to the mesa empty handed.

As she neared the crack she saw him returning up the stream carrying a heavy load on his shoulders. She decided to wait. There was a quiet breeze, and she danced and jogged about in place to keep warm. As he drew near he smiled broadly. She saw that he carried meat, a fair sized piece of some large mammal, partially wrapped in hide. Some of it seemed rotted but mostly it looked cleanly frozen, though quite old. It seemed to be part of a silvetherium, largest of the Paleolithic land animals. How had it escaped predators and scavengers?

When he spoke this time only the tone made real sense to her. His voice was low, wooden, and resonant, creating a vibration that made her think of bogada, and the desire she became aware of, to accompany his speech with a didgeridoo, seemed as natural as breathing. Such an intense change, and her job was to adapt. As they looked at each other she didn't stop moving about but danced and jogged in place. --Though her movements had become more self-consciously graceful.

He watched her eyes intently for a moment, then laughed and began an imitation dance, oblivious to his burden of meat. His accompaniment betrayed an alert confident physical self awareness she had never seen in a man.

As they turned towards the crack he signaled that the meat was a gift for her. It would last weeks. She pointed up the mesa. “Thank you. I will wake two Chan/elis. We must bring Ule/deni back to life, and we will need their help.” He nodded, his eyes bright and analytical; it seemed he understood the gist of what she was saying.

So it was that the culture and the council continued. Opening the hollow baobabs was a process of grieving, most of the Chan/elis seemed to have died years earlier, but eight Chan/elis yet lived. The living were woken as the first truly warm weather in years arrived. The dead were resealed in their baobab tombs, bonding with their trees (which would never again receive a living woman); to be buried this way, this final connection of human and tree had already become a rare and great honor during the earliest councils.

The cycle of the seasons turned, rains came and a disheveled Ule/deni was slowly reborn.

//Tlili wondered at the chance that caused her to be first among this new people to wake, how the man, the Y chromosome Adam, who she came to know as Pilibwana, or just Pili, how he may have behaved without her milk. Life so easily could have fallen out differently.

The baobabs, iboga, and bogada did their work and the thread of a sustainable human culture was passed on, a new and diminished council continued, but it was quite different. Pili’s paltroirks tendencies may have been turned, but he was a still very much a man, and charismatic. He had a rather overwhelming personality in part because he possessed a formidable intelligence, and with modern understanding we may assume he had tremendous amounts of testosterone. He had probably been a mix, not altogether Paltrorks, but //Tlili’s gift had now turned that formidable intellect fully from aggression to love, and against every Chan/elis’s better judgment the small community of women found themselves practically worshiping him. Upon the rock of his personality the eons long ship of matriarchy began to founder.

When the snow had fully melted Pili went on a hunting trip outside the valley with the eighth and youngest Chan/elis named Hui!koy. //Tlili had

sent Huilkoy, instructing her, “This man may be yours. I have seen his eyes on you, but you can obviously see that we may all have to share him. You are older in waking years than me, and possibly wiser, but I still want to tell you: Meat gives us life, hunt well, but your own life *mustn't* be lost. A new clan will require everyone's womb to do more than sprout bogada. Also, I'm pretty sure he's experienced enough to avoid the great cats, but you yourself must please be very wary.” Pili had walked up to them as //Tlili finished speaking, and the Mitochondrial Eve felt that Hui!koy had barely continued to bother paying attention.

That evening the Baobab/tleva and seven of the Chan/elis sat in a circle round the ancient fire ring in the lower valley. Behind them several rebuilt werfs sheltered the group from a chill southern wind. //Tlili played a new didgeridoo made out of a termite hollowed stick of acacia wood. Two of the women beat sticks together while the whole group, with the exception of //Tlili, chanted:

“We are fruit of the baobab,  
Seeds live long within rind.  
Fruit of the baobab,  
for all human kind.  
Ice from the north, frozen wind from the south,  
will never freeze seed that's kept word of mouth.

Bogada, iboga, and //Tlili the Eve,  
we never need lose and never will grieve.”

How did it come to this again? //Tlili certainly felt a smooth equanimity within, that couldn't *really* be ruffled, even by having to resort to cannibalism. Her thoughts flowed like a sedate river, not much white water, but inexorable. She just wanted to do her part in the business of living, to pass on the energy bred of orgasm and love, to give back merely by sustaining the human thread, seed to tree, as part of the dance, part of the music, just in case the spirits were watching, give them or whoever, even the rocks, the river, and the clouds, give them something that was as beautiful or

graceful as she could help to make it. Why not? But her part would surely end eventually. She was young, yes, but aging, during waking times she was the same as anyone else, she could feel it.

“My milk is drying up.”

“Then even you, great mother, must do your part and have more children. You must keep the bogada alive. We have found no other. And after you bear children you must surely return to the baobab.”

So eventually they each ended up mating with Pili. Children were born to all of them. When //Tlili made love to him it was certainly wonderful. There was the simple heterosexual lust for a fine animal specimen. He was a beautifully built, intelligent, confident man, a successful provider, with a rich deep voice, but he wasn't her mate. It had been over seventy thousand years, yet she couldn't forget: that will to live that sailed light as a stork on a thermal, with humor, right over the pain and indignities of life.

Within a month of //Tlili's awakening she and the Chan/elis held a council circle, and the lone man was allowed to attend. Pili spoke first, “I come five moon's walk from the north. All my people, and everywhere I went, cold made for death. I see, because of tree spirit women, shaman woman's have much power, but not always make best decisions. Don't know how to hunt in far places. Always keep things same. Tree women can't see animals in far places that don't live here, can't see how to dictate way to hunt, how to protect meat. Folks in many tribes, so many people can't take cold and snow. They die. I now see tree woman's want help, but don't know how.

Shaman womens don't know everything, hunters know things too. In cold times meat is what keep peoples alive.

Tree spirit women know much. Power is here on mesa, but not all power.

And I have more to say: 'Tree women talk of 'paltrorks.' Of men who just dominate and don't care about children and future, only self. Sometimes, it's true, but, many men *have* cared about their children. In my youth I know many clans ruled by men. Men who cared about their children. Council should not always be women.”

Hanl//kwa, a fairly recent generation Chan/elis spoke, “I know you are right Pili, but it remains true that most women care about children more than most men, and men compete.”

“So do women, and to compete makes for strong.”

“Here’s the thing Pili. We know you are right; competition makes people stronger, but so does cooperation. A group of lions can bring down prey that a single lion couldn’t, and a group of wildebeests cooperating can defend themselves where one alone couldn’t. But one competitive man, or bull elephant, or silverback gorilla can have many children, other males often just get in their way. But women have to get pregnant and nurse. They have to work hard for every child and otherwise invest a great deal into every child they produce. Sure they might compete in that. But the value to the ‘winning’ woman is more limited, and the cooperation is relatively more useful. Competition may be very useful, over time making people stronger, but it is by nature focused on the winning individual. So when a Big Man is in charge he often gets so self focused that he loses focus on the bigger picture, even the survival of his own children. The People are so smart they can become that way, twisted in selfishness, making themselves miserable with fear, paltrorks, removed from the rope of life through time. And although all men aren’t that way, men are more prone to it than women. That’s why we keep the council female.”

“Thank you Hanl//kwa,” said Tlili. “I think you have expressed the feelings of this council most gracefully.”

Pili shook his head. “But you died. We *died*. All this ‘cooperation’; the weather turned, and the People did not, what is the word? Adapt. They did not adapt.”

Tlili looked at him with admiration. “You understand this don’t you? You’re a mighty hunter, a natural Big Man, but your mind is subtle; whatever Naia might have said. . .

What would you have us do?”

“Keep your council, and your wisdom, but do not rule all the People. Let some them go; do what they will. Let them go, be whatever they be.”

“It is dangerous for clans to do whatever they wish, and yet we do not *rule* them. We merely influence them.” said Hanl//kwa.



“It be dangerous to continue as you have,” Pili responded. “Maybe, maybe paltrorks and circle of women not only choices that can come up.”

//Tlili the Eve was shaken by the Adam’s observations. “Let us reflect on Pili’s words. Perhaps in lieu of new wisdom on this matter we *should* let events unfold as they may.”

After they had been awake and active for a year another small group of the People, three women, a girl, and a man, appeared from the east. They said they had only managed to survive the endless winters (*of the volcano*) because of luck. They had a cave that could be easily heated with fire, and had managed to scavenge and store a great deal of meat from elephants who had frozen in the thickening mud of a nearly dry waterhole.

This new clan knew of the Ule/deni valley culture, but neither they, the most recent Chan/elis, nor Pili, had lived close enough to know what had happened to the valley’s pre volcanic-winter inhabitants. Of course no one knew of the volcano. Humanity hadn’t left Africa, but //Tlili and the Chan/elis certainly were aware that the climate could change dramatically. This had led //Tlili to have faith that the land held a kind of immortal cyclic hospitality. In central Africa she had never encountered advancing or retreating glaciers. Thus her faith in climate was only slightly shaken when she had woken to the severe cold.

That next wet season the fevers returned. Over the eons the council had learned a way to ferment and boil Baobab bark (that is still used in Africa) to mitigate the effects of the fever, but the man from the small group still died, leaving Pili as the community’s only man. Over the next four years he was very busy. Almost all of the women became pregnant and stayed that way when they weren’t lactating. //Tlili’s totemic womb, like her sister Chan/elis’, was a very healthy place, and she easily gave birth to two large boys. Naturally she loved them profoundly, and she came to like Pili well enough, but he would never have the innocent light grace of Kwanza. Her boys were another matter; this time, even with the enticement of ecstasy she didn’t really want to go back into the tree. She felt the duty to the future,

and the unanimous pressure of the Chan/elis, but a mother doesn't easily leave her children behind for any reason. "For all these generations they have called me the Great Mother, but I'm still a relatively young woman, and though I've had six children I haven't raised them to adulthood. I hardly feel like a good mother at all. I could complain about the choice and the duty before me, but I guess I haven't the right."

When she did leave the People again to go back into a young baobab on the mesa there were already sixteen children in the valley. She embraced each Chan/elis, then Pili, then each child, her own last. "As all of you know, please wake me anytime should a major need arise."

Once again she left her family, friends, and a time where she had made a home, once again with no possessions but a small t/lo, a pouch of Iboga (the consumption of which remained the part of the process she did not like), and another of Bogada, and began to climb the cliff. As she felt the stone on her body she thought of the sheer indifferent size and age of the world. She thought of the bones of the lands she had known, of Nallo's Chin and its anticline, of the Kopjes where she had first learned to be alone. And even with the prospect of the baobab she felt kind of melancholy. She was outside the familial comforts other members of her race enjoyed as a matter of course, traveling through time on a survival quest whose conclusion was a mystery. Then she thought of the sunbirds, of dancing under the stars outside the firelight, of Kwanza her mate and his absurd bravery with predators, of Naia and her calm gifts, and of all her children, and she gently chided herself for any feelings of self pity. And that was it. .  
.”

## 40. On the Beach

“But then what happened?” said Artemis. She and Carressa were sitting hidden in the shadow of several large ferns. They had five fish.

It was rather precarious; six zodiacs full of tourists had now gone by. Any of the zodiacs could have beached on their little stretch of rocky shore, and discovery would have been inevitable. Perhaps eight helicopters had also passed, but each time the furtive women had managed to hear the modern dragons, and they'd been able to crouch tightly under the lush native Hawaiian ferns, Carressa silent and inscrutable, Artemis grumbling.

“Well that's the thing,” said Carressa, “We don't really understand it. Humanity grew again, and the council continued. Tlili wasn't woken for several thousand more years, not the regular five thousand; her chrysalis was opened early because a lightning strike appeared to have severely damaged her tree. But by that first awakening the change had already occurred. Humanity was now more aggressive, a mild form of paltrorks became the rule in a clan more often than not. That was probably mainly because the influence of the council never again really extended far beyond the valley. A more aggressive and possibly resilient human culture now expanded; in less than ten thousand years it was all over Africa. This time humanity went into Asia, Europe, and on east as far as Australia.

That new hardiness may have helped to ensure our survival, but now there was no unified benign culture, or at least not beyond the small influence of the Ule/deni valley. Within and around the valley things stayed much the same with the exception that the council was now a little bit secretive, and that was because every few generations there were rumors that some marauding clan might attack the trees. A legend circulated occasionally among the far flung hunter gatherer clans that immortality might be found by eating the fruit of the 'tree of life' in some remote valley protected by elephants. So eventually during a millennial council ceremony some newly wakened Chan/elis advocated for carefully destroying all the

lesser routs up the mesa leaving only the one. The waking council concurred; they also set up a kind of ongoing informal news network of shamans in the neighboring villages.”

“So I see that the matriarchal mores and field of influence of this Ule/deni changed with the new post volcano inhabitants, but are you saying that was intentional? //Tlili’s intention?”

“Yes. I’d think that the tree spirit women would have been able to use the healing qualities of bogada, carried by Shamans near the valley, in order to keep sufficient persuasive cultural power extended at least as far as it had, for so incredibly long. But then again, when only a few people create a whole new culture the results are going to be different than the earlier culture. At first the main change was probably because of the charisma of and competition for Pili. //Tlili and the Chan/elis may also have actively chosen to allow it to happen, following Pili’s advice. Eve never was very clear about this.”

“So the volcano wiped out the more matriarchal human culture. But, *was* the new, and presumably more culturally diverse, humanity hardier?”

“Well yes and no. Consciousness is necessary for foresight. So without a consciously planned sustainable society it was inevitable that there would be population pressures, warfare and, eventually rampant paltrorks, and misery. But happiness and survival aren’t the same thing; these new cultures were organically very adaptive. Without the conformity born of a unifying central authority a thriving cultural diversity could evolve widely different strategies to environmental difficulties. But the paltrorks that often came from cultural competition generally squashed individuality and creativity within those cultures. Also post Tobia volcano humanity *was* undoubtedly on the whole more violent and therefore generally more fearful and miserable, but they were hardy and adaptive. Of course during this time the human brain evolved as well; faster, as would be expected with the increased competition; our brains became bigger and more aggressive.

Now it appears, after seventy thousand *more* years that the lack of a central, agreed upon, harmonious, and natural guiding world view *may* result in the species faltering . . .

Still, back to the story; with some fluctuations humanity thrived and adapted through the succeeding ice ages. In the end, and far beyond the influence of Ule/deni, agriculture was born in fertile controllable environments with high population pressures such as Mesopotamia, the Indus, and the Nile valley.” Carressa shifted positions; her old body looked most uncomfortable, “Do you feel ready to go? Back to your camp?”

Artemis put the fish in her hair net on her back. The smell and slime would simply be a pleasant excuse to dive into her waterfall pool when she got back, and she knew she needed to wash her sponge. The two women started to climb back up a narrow cove behind the main stream. At first the country was rather open and they felt compelled to dart from cover to cover between trees, bushes, and stones. Once they were deeper into the jungle, and after she felt she had waited long enough Artemis said, “Well then what happened, to //Tlili and her trees?”

“You have to understand, implacable woman.” Carressa laughed between breaths, “we have taken her from a hundred forty thousand years ago to ten thousand years ago, and for *her* ten thousand years ago isn’t that long. It’s almost the present. But I know you remember why I’m telling you all of this: to find answers to our current crises. I and others think //Tlili’s Rose Mandala, her ideas about paltrorks, sustainability, and meaning represented by the Baobab, provide only part of the answers we need. But two thousand five hundred years ago a girl was born near Ule/deni whose insights can provide more.”

“Well what insights were those?”

“She led a very wild life and saw a lot of the world. Her useful ideas and the ones she encountered were mostly near the top of the Rose Mandala. The north east ones concerned the ontological nature of the world and how we know about it. You could say her key ideas were about metaphysics, epistemology and logic. But she and those who were with her also came to understand the profound importance of natural rituals; that’s here on the west side, or right labia of the Mandala.”

“What was her Name?”

“Io.”

“So you are not claiming to be her or //Tlili?”

“No, but, my part is coming soon enough. Could you please help me? This rock’s slippery.”

“Right.”

They worked their way up the hill. The crone and the beauty ambled along in their comfortably wild, sky clad and cheerfully vulnerable, human state of nature as they climbed through the Kohala jungle, where awareness of the vital aspects of life seemed physically inevitable. The young zoologist, the tourists, and the Vietnam vets, posed no imminent threat. The two females were of course well aware of the threats that faced naked women in the wild. They knew of the possibilities, but they didn’t know of the actuality of Dave. And Artemis, her mind was spinning, though she felt happily grounded in the present; she also now viscerally sensed the past winding behind her, a vast reel of time. But she looked forward to the distant the future, too. What of the future? What for instance, about the ethos of the Rose Mandala (with its ideas about God, nature, survival, and human competition versus cooperation)? Could it really resolve questions about handling nuclear war, global warming, artificial intelligence, or population expansion and space travel? Yet as Carressa continued to instruct Artemis while they worked their way up the hill, Artemis felt confident that the old woman could handle most any question, or threat, that might come their way.

*End of Book One.*



## The Life Tree Trilogy: First Synopsis

The Life Tree Trilogy is a novel whose purpose is to provide a realistic blueprint for how to move our existing civilization towards graceful sustainability.

The book is overtly didactic, but hopefully it's also entertaining. The map, or perhaps compass, for the book is the Rose Mandala, a world view containing diagram that is applicable to virtually all humans as they act to create a meaningful life. The 'Rose Mandala's' strength for such a purpose rests on its base structure which depicts the *self* versus the '*larger reality*' dialectical process. The book uses the story line and the Mandala to present a philosophical world view, but the focus is on ten core points which for clarity are mapped onto the Rose Mandala. The points are disparate but key concepts on which the author believes awareness needs to be raised for our culture to move forward. The points are very serious and the advocacy for them is hopefully done realistically, but for the purpose of entertaining myth generation the book has a couple of core largely allegorical fantastic elements.

Book one – The Sky Clad Sages. It considers the majority of human history during which we have been hunter gatherers. It begins in the current era with the description of Artemis, a modern young woman and astronomy intern who is on a long 'vacation' living alone in a small patch of Hawaiian wilderness. She meets Carressa, a very old and mysterious woman who starts to tell her a story about the Mitochondrial Eve (//Tlili) who was born a hundred a forty thousand years ago in central east Africa, and who attained a measure of wisdom about the core values that actually work to sustain our species. //Tlili is a medicine woman and herbologist who represents humanity, and who learns to time travel by hibernating via an ecstatic process under trance inside Baobab trees (The Tree of Life). This process is made as plausible and realistic as possible, and it's facilitated by a fictional



symbiotic fungus (representing a mystical transcendent connection) that allows //Tlili to exchange nutrients with the tree via her womb.

Of the ten core points the ones discussed in book one are: Point one: the surprising degree to which humans, of all spiritual or secular paths, can agree on what it means: to be reverent towards, and find meaning with, that which is transcendentally greater than the self. This point is perhaps the core point of the book in that it resolves the modern civilization endangering conflict between science and religion. Point two: the importance of modern cosmology as a tool in helping contemporary humanity find appropriate (realistic) reverent humility. Point three: The core importance and appropriateness of connecting the meaning of life with the biological definition, and how that fits on the self versus larger reality dialectic mapped on the Rose Mandala. Point four: how the alpha leader (normally male) tribal impulse needs to be consciously identified when it's occurring in a culture, and how it is normally destructive to a civilization's ability to sustain itself.

Book two – On the Steps of the Temple. This book considers the agricultural era. It begins with Carressa still telling //Tlili's story and how within the culture which supports //Tlili's time traveling a woman is born named Io who due to expanding Mediterranean empires is abducted to Babylon and serves at the temple of Astarte. From there, using the tremendously ancient gathered knowledge that she possesses, she rises in influence, and eventually meets a Greek merchant who decides to sail with her on a voyage to found another tree time traveling culture as a second, hopefully more secure, repository of accumulated wisdom. After a long journey though southern Asia they end up being the unlikely discoverers, and first humans, to inhabit New Zealand. The culture they founded there lasts one thousand five hundred years in isolation until it is wiped out by a surprise invasion of Polynesians (the Maoris). The lone survivor is Carrassa, who is still a young girl, is tiny, and manages to fly on her pet Hast Eagle (an actual New Zealand species that existed at that time, and is the largest eagle species on record to have ever lived). She ends up making her way to South America and the Tayrona Indians of Columbia where she then tree hibernates a thousand years to the present.

Book two reinforces the points of book one and introduces point six which is about the finite and relative nature of this knowable reality, and how the finite way of understanding the world creates a synthesis of epistemological and metaphysical ideas about induction and logic where most of the conundrums of modern philosophy are annulled and where the conundrums of quantum physics don't so much overturn the underlying assumptions of the modern scientific enterprise but vindicates them. This point then opens the door to philosophy once again being able to generate realistic worldviews on which humanity can find consensus. Point seven is about the need for primitive preferably naked walkabout wilderness *rituals* that create the balance needed by the modern human ego, coping as an evolved hunter-gatherer, in the modern often profane world.

Book Three – Artemis The Star Hunter. In the third book Artemis takes the baton of human potential from //Tlili, through the current human crises (and, yes, some collapse), to the creation of a more sustainable graceful human civilization, and then on to the stars. Point eight is about how in an era of secular existential angst there are five nearly universal paths to the sacred.

There is a conference in current times wherein Artemis, Caressa, //Tlili, and others formally discuss all the points. They also discuss and work on point nine; which is about resolving the false and subjective debate in its various manifestations that exist between collectivism and individualism. This resolution is found via a rational and realistic compromise.

There is also discussion of the nature of the rigor needed for sustainable and graceful technological change, and how that rigor would be implemented.

Point ten is about the need and creation of new forms of social organization for a peaceful egalitarian praxis, or method, of really being able to educate and implement their combined wisdom. They determine that they need, and then successfully create, a simple new model for an internet based organization that spreads virally to: A) create a profound new way for billions of individuals to bond and gain feedback from their friends and family so they feel more empowered to make a difference;

B) help build a better kind of worldwide organization that facilitates people peacefully working out the large scale disagreements that hinder the progress of our civilization.

The structure of the organization is discussed in depth.

The book ends in the distant future with //Tlili staying on earth but Artemis moving to another star system.

Finis