

The Human Organism

Dedicated to the Pro-life Movement

I: The Human Organism – Part I

It was a freezing cold December evening in Kingston Ontario when Dr. Thomas L. Gowan walked through the doors of the Biosciences building of Queen's University. He had only a few minutes to get to the main auditorium before he was due to give his open guest lecture. The room was filled with students from different faculties and disciplines. This lecture wasn't part of a course, but it was the type of event which often occurs throughout the academic year wherein a person with unique ideas comes to present them to an audience who listens and then opens a question period afterwards.

The auditorium was about a quarter to a third full, and it was beginning to heat up due to the many bodies in the room. The building's temperature was comparatively good to other buildings on the campus, yet these rooms sometimes suffered from the excessive body-heat of a large numbers of students gathered in the auditorium.

Dr. Gowan was a native of Cornwall, Ontario and came from a family that had been settled in that part of Ontario since the 19th century. His ancestor John Hunter Gowan was a loyalist leader in Ireland who was infamously remembered for alleged atrocities against Catholics. Hunter Gowan's son Ogle Robert Gowan was one of the founders of the Orange lodge of British North America.

Thomas L. had received his PhD in anthropology from the University of Toronto and had spent most of his life in faculties of different universities. Although raised as an Anglican he had lost his faith as a teenager. As he grew older he found much of Christian belief to be superstitious. He became militantly atheistic, and thought it was his duty to challenge whatever he felt was wrong about the idea of God. In some ways, he saw it as a natural evolution of his ancestors' work, for they had opposed powerful religious institutions and he was extending it to the next level by opposing God Himself.

Dr Gowan titled his lecture: 'The Human Organism: is it Special?' The event had been organized by a student group of atheists and agnostics, and the audience had mostly become aware of the event by either electronic mailing lists or bulletins posted around the campus. Mark, a member of the atheist student group, made some introductory remarks about the speaker and his lecture. Dr. Gowan took the podium as the audience applauded. He set up his laptop and PowerPoint presentation, and then began his lecture.

"First, I would like to thank the students who invited me to speak here tonight and I would like to thank everyone who came out to this on such a cold night. Now to begin, I would like to talk about this: [an image appeared on the screen showing a number of pictures of different human beings from different world cultures]. Now what is this? All of us know what this is of course... you're thinking, well, that's us! And you're right! Those are people of course, but what I want to know is what are they really? What do they really mean or what is it that people really are?"

The slide changed into a diagram of a theoretical evolutionary tree with various representations in pictures of species that are long extinct on the different branches.

“Well, according to science this is species *Homo Sapiens* or translated from Latin into English: it is species ‘wise man’. We now know about where ‘wise man’ came from. We think that he is descended from a long line of other species that evolved into each other through a process of evolution and natural selection. We have good reasons to believe he could have been descended from ‘upright man’ otherwise called *Homo Erectus* or at least some ancestor that was like him. ‘Upright man’ may have had an ancestor called ‘handy man’, otherwise called *Homo Habilis*, or at least some creature like him. ‘Handy man’ descended from some variety of another genus we call ‘southern ape’ or in Latin *Australopithecus*. [Dr. Gowan’s PowerPoint highlighted the different names he gave out as he spoke them]. We think that ‘southern ape’ evolved from other extinct primates before him. Primates came from other extinct mammals that rodents also came from, and which may have been a bit like squirrels and tree shrews. These descended from other placental mammals before them, which perhaps were trodden underfoot during the time of the dinosaurs and may have been a bit like shrews or mice. These came from other mammals that lacked a placenta. All mammals, believe it or not, came from reptiles, although not the same kinds of reptiles as you see today. Reptiles came from amphibians, amphibians came from lobe-finned fish, fish came from more primitive vertebrates, they came from early underwater invertebrates, those came from multi-celled creatures, those came from single-celled creatures and ultimately those came from the natural forces that produced them.”

He then pointed with his cursor at all the other branches on the simplified tree that he didn’t mention, and said, “If you look at where humans are in the tree of life, they only occupy just one small branch amidst a massive number of other species. Most of life is actually bacterial and microscopic [he pointed with his cursor over the relevant branches for microscopic bacteria], and they have all kinds of unique and amazing properties; some of them can thrive in extreme salinity or toxic chemicals. We are just a twig on the tree of life. If you look at this tree, it becomes clear that we are not the ‘pinnacle of creation’, as some would say, but we are just one particular type of life among many that have existed and one day will exist.”

“Now here’s the thing that we need to consider that is the focus of my lecture tonight: what is it which is so special about this one species ‘wise man’ amongst so many other species? We all tend to think of ‘wise man’ being somehow special or bearing some kind of significance unlike anything else.”

A new slide came up with different bullets for each of the examples he would give in the next part of his lecture.

“Some people think that he was created in God’s image and likeness, some people think that he possesses a higher intelligence, some people think that he possesses a capacity to reason which is not shared by anything else. There are those who think that humans are special because they possess creativity, some people think humans are special because they alone possess free will, some people think that humans alone are capable of appreciating beauty, some people think that humans alone are capable of something

called love and there are many others that could be added to this list. What we all have in common though is we all tend to think that human life is significant. [He pauses for a moment] What we don't really recognize is that this thing we call a human organism is nothing special or significant at all. It is just a product of natural forces and is no more special than the particles or biological tissue that forms it."

"There is nothing in science and there is no testable visible evidence of any sort that has ever shown that human life truly matters. You can believe in a fairytale if you like about humans having been made as something special apart from any other naturally occurring phenomenon in the universe, but for those who need facts and rational evidence, we know that whatever significance is attached to them does not really objectively exist but is only our own imagination."

The next slide appeared and it had a human being in the middle of the picture with a number of organisms and inanimate objects surrounding the human being.

"How could it possibly have been true that an organism could spontaneously evolve creativity, rationality, love, an appreciation for beauty, morality, free will, and all those other things, and that no other organism possesses such? Can it really be proven that other organisms do not have such things? Do we know what a pelican thinks such that we can determine it has no creativity; do we know what a sea turtle thinks such that we can determine it does not possess reason? Should anyone suppose that animals that bond with each for life are incapable of love? Can anyone really determine that a flock of birds singing to each other are unable to discern beauty? Do not the great apes possess basic altruism? Do not several other species possess sentience? Is there anyone who thinks they can tell that animals do not have free will?"

Some of the students in the audience began talking with each other. There was a girl in the front row quietly explaining to her friend about how chimpanzees could be taught sign language.

"And yet, seeing we lack evidence then that humans are truly special in any of these things, why do we still attach such inherent significance to the human organism? It is ridiculous to propose that humans could have mindlessly evolved all of those things uniquely through evolution such that not even the great apes, who are very close to us in genetic heritage, should possess them; hence I will theorize that these things are not as unique as we think."

The next slide appeared with a cross-section of a human brain and other brains were next to it in the same diagram. Dr Gowan took out his laser pointer to point at the pictures as he talked.

"Many of the same structures in human brains can be found in animal brains. Even those structures that we identify as dealing with things like beauty, affection, altruism, or decision-making, are all shared in different ways with other species. And most of our DNA is shared by other species. Therefore, since what we are is controlled by such

things, it must therefore follow that we are not unique in such ways and that other species must possess variations of these things too. Could we not theoretically build machines that were capable of all of the same functions that human beings were? And yet, why do we think that this human organism bears some innate specialness to it?"

A picture of a sea creature with a long body and many tentacles appeared on the next slide.

"This is a hydra*. It is a very small fresh-water cnidarian¹ about this long [making a gesture with his fingers showing a space of about a centimetre], and some scientists have thought that there may be something very special about this creature. They do not seem to undergo what we call 'senescence', or in other words, they do not age. This creature may very well be biologically immortal; now how is that for uniqueness? Humans can't do that; most other creatures that we know about can't do that, but why don't we think that the hydra is unique among all the other biological tissue in the universe?"

Another slide appeared with a blob that had tentacles and a picture of moss on it.

"This thing you see on the right [using his laser pointer] is a kind of leech that is native to Japan. Its scientific name is *Ozobranchus jantseanus*. It feeds on freshwater turtles. This leech is the only known organism of any kind, whether animal, botanical or microbial, which can survive in liquid nitrogen at -196 C. It can survive 24 hours and when it is thawed, it still moves and swims. It can survive for more than two years in temperatures of -90C. And yet why don't we think that this leech is the unique creature? That moss you see on the left comes from Antarctica. It was buried underneath the ice for 1500 years, and it grew back in a laboratory; it didn't die in all that time. Amazing isn't it? And yet why don't we think this is the one life that the universe is centred around?"

Some students open their mouths in amazement at hearing these facts.

Another series of pictures appeared on the next slide, containing a lichen, a water bear², a shrimp, a larvae, a seed and a cell.

He continued, "Did you know that there are life forms that can survive even when exposed to the vacuum of space? That lichen at the top right is a type of lichen, native to the Pyrenees in Europe, that was taken up on the international space station and exposed to the vacuum, with all of the stellar radiation and lack of pressure, and yet the lichen was still alive eighteen months later when the experiment ended! It's not the only thing that can live in the vacuum either. Water bears [Dr Gowan used his laser pointer to point out the water bear] can live at least ten days in the vacuum of space. Brine shrimp and the larvae of the African midge *Polypedilum vanderplank* have also been found to be able to live in the vacuum without any oxygen or atmosphere. Some dried plant seeds can remain alive in the vacuum too. The microbe *Bacillus Subtilis* can live six years in the vacuum!

¹ (Jellyfish, coral, anemones, and related animals)

² (a microscopic animal that lives in moss and damp conditions; its appearance when walking is reminiscent of a bear, hence its name)

Now that's pretty special isn't it? Why don't we say that things that can do that are the unique pinnacle of creation?"

Some students talk to each other. A few students laugh at his last comment.

Another slide appeared with pictures of steam vents, a glacier in Antarctica, and a person holding a stick with black goo coming off of it.

"There are amazing things that microbes can do! Some microbes can thrive in temperatures as high as 120 celsius or as low as -20 celsius. Some microbes have been found living and thriving five miles underground in the Earth's crust under 1000 times the pressure that exists here at the surface. There are microbes that live in pits of liquid asphalt, like there [he points at the black goo] at Pitch Lake in Trinidad. Does that make them special though? Does that mean that they should have rights?"

The girl in the front row stops quietly explaining to her friend about these discoveries and looks back at Dr Gowan. The students who are chatting suddenly stop, puzzled at what he had just said.

Another slide appeared with an elephant, a sperm whale, and a dolphin.

"Elephants and Cetaceans even have larger brains than we do; the largest brain ever evolved belongs to the Sperm whale and it weighs in at about 18 pounds in comparison to the average human brain of 3 pounds. They are also intelligent. They can communicate with each other, they have complex social structures. The reason they do not rule the earth is because they have no hands to make technology and no voice to articulate language, and yet they may have even deeper thoughts than us. Why don't we say they were the ones made in the image of God? Why don't they have rights like a human being does? If you kill a human being, you can be convicted of murder, but we allow people to kill whales if it is done for scientific purposes."

Another slide appeared with an aphid and a strange white tube underwater with something red sticking out of it.

"Aphids have genes in them that came from a fungus. We don't know how that happened, but they somehow acquired those genes, and it's a very unique thing among all animals. Why don't we say that they are the ones that are special? That tubeworm you see in the other corner is an animal that lives at the bottom of the ocean in an ecosystem that is based on the energy that comes out of volcanic vents in the ocean floor. It is the only ecosystem that we know that isn't based on sunlight. Now why don't we say that they are the unique ones among all creation?"

"The truth is that the human is just one tiny twig in the tree of life among a plethora of other species that are just as special, just as unique, just as remarkable and could just as justifiably be termed 'the pinnacle of creation'."

Another picture appeared on this same slide which was a cartoon drawing of porky pig dressed like an angel with a halo and wings.

“Now, there is an ancient Greek proverb, that if a pig looked up into the sky and saw God, he would see a pig. What I’m getting at, is that we all think that human life has some innate significance because we have defined it to be so. We take attributes that humans possess and look at all the rest of the universe to measure it, and we say to ourselves because the rest of the world does not seem to have those attributes, the rest of the world must not be as special as us. In other ways, we say that human life is special and significant, because it possesses human attributes. This subjective circular logic doesn’t stand to analysis. We could say the same about anything.”

“A pig is special and significant because it possesses attributes that a pig possesses, a shark is special and significant because it possesses attributes that a shark possesses, a fir tree is special and significant because it possesses attributes that a fir tree possesses, and a gneiss rock is special and significant because it possesses attributes that a gneiss rock possesses. Water has many somewhat unique attributes among matter; when it changes to a solid form it become less dense than its liquid form, and it has one of the highest heat capacities of any common substance, but why do we not call water significant in the way we think humans to be significant?”

A white Jamaican student put up her hand and interrupted, “Well maybe it is because the attributes humans possess actually matter. No other animal can rule everything and understand everything.”

Gowan responded, “Sorry I didn’t give people a chance to ask questions. I prefer if people save their questions until the end, but because you asked I will answer yours now – why does it matter if they can rule everything or understand everything? Why for example, can’t a whale or an elephant understand what a human understands, seeing that they have brains even larger than ours? If ants evolved to dominate the whole earth, would you then say that ants were what mattered?”

The girl said, “Well, I think that if an elephant can understand those things, then it should be like a human.”

Gowan responded, “But why? Why does understanding something mean that it ought to be treated as special?”

The girl said, “It just does. I don’t know.”

Gowan chuckled and said to the audience, “You see the logic in this: ‘it just does’. Is that a valid scientific statement? Imagine if a graduate student was writing his thesis paper for me back at U of T and in his conclusion he said ‘this hypothesis is not proven by any testable or observable phenomenon, but it is true, because it is just is’. What if we held a court of law and the plaintiff said, ‘Your honour, the defendant is guilty, although I have no way of proving it. He just is guilty, I don’t know how.’”

Some students murmured at what he said.

“You see how ludicrous this is? We make conclusions on the basis of evidence, on the basis of the things we can test and see. If you think that a human being is special, and yet you can’t prove it, then the conclusion is unscientific and therefore false.”

“Look, even if human life was unique among all creatures and it alone possessed intelligence, appreciation for beauty, creativity, etc. Even then, none of those things themselves explain why the human organism should necessarily be considered as though it mattered in an objective sense, because there is no reason ultimately why any of those things denote such a purpose.”

“There is no adequate evidence presented for why it is anyone should think that human life actually matters. A human being is simply an organism; a conglomerate of biological tissues made up of smaller atomic particles and that’s it... everything else we’ve said about this human organism is our own arrogant irrational delusion that we somehow occupy a special place in this universe. We are only organisms; just conglomerates of mass and energy arranged into biological tissue produced by the forces of evolution. Get used to it; everything else added to it is merely superstition.”

Another slide appeared filled with text that summarized his next points.

“And what does this revelation mean for us then? Well, it helps us think more clearly about how we live in this world. It allows us to re-adjust our thinking more in accordance with the truth and ultimately I believe it will lead us to live our lives in a better fashion.”

A picture of a poster for a lost child appeared on the slide.

“This is Rebecca McLean, born in Mississauga; she was seven years old when she disappeared and eight months later her body had been found in a cottage near Coboconk in the Kawartha Lakes area. Most of you probably remember the news about her disappearance when it was being reported in the Star a few years back and how the autopsy found that she had been subject to sexual intercourse. The RCMP found the killer and he got sentenced to life imprisonment just a few kilometres from here in Kingston Pen. Now this was a terrible thing to most of us, but in reality what was it that happened? An adult organism had sexual attraction for the child organism and he took her away, molested her and deprived her of her life. Now, I can find non-human organisms that display similar behaviour sometimes, but no one reprints that on the front page news nor do we all feel sad about it.”

Some students open their mouths and eyes wide in amazement at what he had just said. Some students start talking to each other. The Jamaican girl shouts out “Are you f***ing crazy?”

He took a sip of water and ignored the girl. He got visibly angry and spoke into the microphone, "Again, please no interruptions until the end of the lecture and then we will discuss comments and concerns."

He put his lecture notes in front of him, and continued reading his points.

"Now, dear students, I know what you're thinking. I mean that was such a horrible thing that happened, and how can I write it off like that? But, again, I will re-direct you to what our evidence tells us [he goes back several slides to the evolutionary tree]. Human beings are simply organisms that came to existence through natural forces and nothing else. Little Rebecca is not some special thing in the universe nor does she really matter beyond the base materials from which she is made... Look now! She is just an organism! It is just an organism, and whatever emotion we may instinctively feel for her, we need to soberly recognize that there is nothing really there beyond what we have imagined. We may feel emotional about her, but we don't really have to, and we are not compelled to think that her loss is ultimately more important than an animal that eats its offspring."

Some of the students left the room at that point. Some tried to interrupt him, but he again harshly spoke, "Please, no interruptions. Have a little respect for your presenter!" But the students couldn't stop murmuring. He was losing control of the audience and he had to speak louder into the microphone.

"It is delusional to think that we can really see something in a human organism that separates it from the rest of the universe, and we should not let our irrational feelings compel us to think that there must be. We can wake up from this; we can recognize that Rebecca is just a conglomerate of tissue and write off her loss just as we would do for the death of any organism. This belief that humanity is special is something that humans imagined, and no one should be forced to accept it. You can have such beliefs if you like, but they're not true, and you should not force down those beliefs of yours on others as though the rest of the world should be compelled to follow them. If I say Rebecca ultimately means as much as the mould on my countertop when I use bleach on it, I am correct, since there is no scientific evidence for any conclusion otherwise, and while many would object to this view of mine, in a rationally thinking world I should be allowed to have it."

"Ask yourselves: why do we not consider there to be some intrinsic value to the lives of Elephants, Chimpanzees, Cetaceans, etc? These species are self-aware, they possess feeling and sentience."

Another student interrupted him, "We do! They should have rights! Your logic is so warped."

Gowan hit the podium hard with his hand and yelled, "Please for Christ sake, show some respect and don't talk while I talk. You should have learned this in kindergarten!"

Some of the students quieted down, but many others just left the room and couldn't stop talking outside of the doors.

He continued with a more calm voice, "We don't think that those things possess inherent rights of any sort, nor do we cry when their babies get killed in the way we do for this organism [he went back to the slide with Rebecca]. Now whatever reason you give for why it is those other organisms don't have inherent dignity, apply it to human beings and you will come to the sober realization that we don't have any more claim to such inherent dignity than they do. Some people think that sentient life is sacred and therefore humans are special, and again there isn't really a reason why we must regard them as sacred, but even so, if it were sacred then we ought to be regarding the lives of Elephants, Chimps and Cetaceans with the same kind of significance that we do humans, but that would be absurd."

"You know, I can think of an even better question: why do we not consider the lives of the unborn humans to have some kind of special significance? Now some people out there of course insist that we should, but we are right to ignore them when they put religion into these issues without first proving their religion to be true. However, for the rest of us, we know that the foetus does not possess special significance and that is because it is just a clump of animated biological tissue, however, we rarely also recognize that the born organism is also just a clump of animated biological tissue. It would be absurd to think that the foetus possesses some significance greater than the materials it is made from, and so likewise is it absurd to think the same for the born organism."

[the slides moved back to where he was before he went back to the evolutionary tree, and he went on to the next slide which had more text written on it, with a picture of Jean-Paul Sartre]

He continues, "Now an existentialist would say that I am right, that human life doesn't really have a meaning to it, but that we could create our own meaning and to us then that meaning would be true. And it is true that we can, however, I don't see any reason for why we should be compelled to do so... if I took a chimpanzee and said that this is a species that possesses almost 99% of the same genes as humans, and that we should be mourning for them if they die and printing their pictures in the paper as tragic events when they left this life, that would be a meaning that I had invented for myself, but would it really be fair to then to say that everyone else should be compelled to likewise think so irrationally as this?"

More students left the room. Dr. Gowan took notice and he simply continued talking, attempting to remain unperturbed. Mark, who had introduced him approached the podium as Dr Gowan was speaking and quietly said, "I think maybe we should end the lecture now and open for discussion, people obviously want to talk about this". Dr Gowan, became emotional and quietly said back to Mark, "I already know what they think, I don't need a discussion, please sit down and let me continue."

He continued, "Of course it wouldn't be, and therefore while others may choose to invent such an unjustified meaning for human life, then they are allowed to do so, but if I choose otherwise I should not be forced by others not to do so. Now it's true that there is something important to our survival as a species in looking out for each other's welfare, but that doesn't mean I have to mourn over the dead, or to feel compassion for people who would never know it. Those things are not necessary for us to do for survival. We can all agree that we should do what we can to prevent murder because murder threatens all of our safety, but there is no real reason why we would also have to mourn for the organism that no longer exists."

"And we can go even further than this in our discussion of what this revelation of our ultimate insignificance gives us. For consider how it is that if we recognize that human life is simply a conglomerate of organic tissue, we may get rid of this concept of some sort of inherent human dignity in every person, and see how it is that we may effectively use some humans for others' benefit. I mean, let's face it kids, some people are more expendable than others and we can exploit some human life to our greater collective happiness if we recognize the truth that the human organism is simply an organism and not something with some kind of inherent dignity in each organism that is being violated."

A number of students left the room. Mark left with them. Dr Gowan was trying to remain calm, and yet the room was become very empty, and he was becoming visibly annoyed.

The next slide went up and it had a cross-section of the human body with all of its organs and there were bullet points of text next to the picture. He decided to move a point that would come later in this talk to what he would say next, to give some reassurance to the people listening to him, although he wouldn't be successful.

He continued, "People need to believe that their lives are protected in order to function. Societies need to operate with the use of some amount of altruism in order to function. Therefore even though there is nothing special about the human organism, we still need to work our legal and social framework in such a fashion that the humans occupying the system have their lives protected."

He continued, "But! But, what is not necessary is for every last human organism to have such a recognition in order for the society to operate well. And there are many historical examples to this. [he moved a number of slides ahead and came to a slide with an image of a man in chains] There are many societies that have historically eliminated the rights of certain portions of their population, even to the extent that one could legally kill those who belonged to those portions, and these societies did not fall apart as a result. [another image came on to the screen of a foetus in the womb] We can kill fetuses if we choose to in our own society, and we are not living in a state of anarchy. The reason for this is because, while humans need to believe that their lives are protected in order to function and society needs altruism, it does not need to recognize such for every last human organism, but it only needs to recognize it for a certain portion that shall compose the society. If we tolerated it, we could eliminate the right to life for certain human

organisms while guaranteeing the rights of the remainder who could benefit from the exploitation of those others. Society needs altruism to function, but it does not need altruism for every last organism in order to function.”

Almost everyone had left the room, there were only a few students still sitting in the chairs, and they were sleeping.

“We need to liberate ourselves from this delusion we have implanted in our minds that defines the human organism as something greater than it is. We need to stop suspending our disbelief and come to appreciate human life as the mere conglomerate of matter that it really is. When the holocaust happened, when the tsunami happened in the Indian Ocean a few years ago, or when massive numbers of people die... while as a species we may say this should not have happened as we think that our lives should be protected, is it really necessarily to mourn for the victims as though they were something more important than lab rats or bacteria? One might even suppose that such a high loss of life could have proven beneficial to the surviving organisms if it helped reduce overpopulation or other problems related with it. For one thing we know that many other species benefit from large losses of numbers at different intervals as part of a normal functioning chain of life.”

The students who were sleeping woke up and some of them left the room when they saw the professor speaking to empty chairs. Dr. Gowan thought he might have provoked an unpopular response when he was writing this lecture, but he naïvely didn't think it would cause that much of a problem. He nevertheless forced himself to keep going.

“When they showed all that carnage in Aceh on the news, it was treated as such a tragedy, but nobody stated the truth of the matter and said ‘all those people were simply biological organisms that can be replaced in time; why are we making such a big deal over their loss?’ I know that this is might seem hard to think of, but we really do need to let go of that irrational emotion for a moment and come to know ourselves as the organisms that we really are. I know this is hard to accept, but it is true. We don't mean anything. We don't have significance. We do not matter. The universe existed long before we came and it will continue long after we are gone. We are nothing more than biological tissue and atomic particles, and everything added to this is what we've imagined.”

The last few in the room, feeling awkward about sticking around, left as well.

He continued, “But it's true! We're just bits of matter and that's it! There's no ‘divine spark’, there's no ‘image of God’, there's no special significance... we are just products of evolution, how could you see it otherwise? It's just matter and energy, nothing more.”

The last student left and the door shut behind her. The professor stood at the podium for another minute before he got his belongings together and put the rest of his lecture notes in his bag; he hadn't even gotten half-way through it.

II: The Human Organism – Part II

Dr. Gowan was academically disgraced. His colleagues, many of whom were atheists and agnostics, broke contact with him after the news of his lecture was circulated. Few ever attempted to explain why it was that these arguments of his were invalid from an atheist perspective, but they simply found his ideas to be both revolting and morally repugnant. There was some discourse; they agreed that the human organism was nothing more than the materials it was made from, and arguments were made by some that mourning for the dead was beneficial for the species psychologically, but they refused to address why it was that the individual human organism could not be treated as an animal or denied its life when it served the good of the species.

Dr. Gowan had to go through the rest of his academic career without bringing up these ideas of his in an academic setting again, except among people he knew who would tolerate such discussion. He was very proud of his own ideas and considered himself to be a genius. He had his own way of 'being right', which was very important to him; in his heart he didn't really care about the social progress that he argued would come from his ideas. He was really only concerned about his ideas, because they were *his* ideas, and the world and history needed to recognize he was genius. He was continually insulted and reproached for what he proposed, but his ego motivated him to keep going in spite of this. He believed that one day the world would recognize him for the great intellect that he believed himself to be and that all those people who mocked him for what he proposed would be ridiculed in the history that was to be written. If he gave up though, this revenge would not happen and he would not be vindicated. After all the insults he had endured, he simply could not accept that.

Therefore, when he retired he wrote a manuscript that was printed upon his death, which he entitled *The Human Organism*. It contained the full course of all of his ideas pertaining to the insignificance of the human organism. He had refrained from publishing during his life lest he find himself in even more academic embarrassment and trouble. However, when he died, his will required that some of his money be given so that it could be given to a self-publishing company. The company agreed to publish the book and put up a page for it on Amazon or other websites. It was badly written, however, and the only reviewer of the book gave it one star, in a review entitled 'like Mein Kampf written by a university professor'. The book did not take long before it passed into complete obscurity.

It was not lost forever though. In the far off future many generations after Dr. Gowan returned to the dust from which he came, his work was found again and came to spread to more people than Dr. Gowan had ever hoped in his lifetime. A very powerful republic had come into being by that point which held greater military, political and economic strength than any other nation that had ever existed. It exercised hegemony over all the nations in the solar system, and it came closer than any other nation before it to dominating the entire Earth.

This great republic was an officially atheist state in contrast with the preceding one that had been predominantly Christian. Nevertheless over many centuries it lost its former faith and slowly transformed itself into a radically anti-religious place. Religion was tolerated within the state, and there still remained a substantial religious minority. However, they were reminded everywhere, just as tobacco smokers in Dr. Gowan's ancient country of Canada were told, to quit their filthy habit. Anything belonging to religion was kept strictly in the home or in the slums as it had no place in polite society.

The schools and educational institutions taught the history of religions in unfavourable terms and explored the manner that they were invented as well as their evolution. There were statues of Democritus, Hume, Feuerbach, Darwin, Dawkins, and others adorning public places as the nation honoured them as part of its ideological heritage. Students were taught at school how atheism had emerged as a much-maligned group in the ancient times of the 19th and 20th centuries, while attempting to overcome the false religious superstitions that had held humanity in captivity. This doctrine had, however, only succeeded in few places, one of which was the Great Republic (its official name was much longer, The Greater United Terran Nations Democratic Republic; most simply called it the Great Republic). People recited poetry and songs about the great dream of when everyone would become atheist and humanity would finally be able to grasp its destiny without the shackles of irrational superstition. They praised the wonders of science and saw the future of all humanity resting in the power of the human mind.

It was in this place that Dr. Gowan's book was re-opened. Archaeologists searching through old garbage landfills from the 21st century carefully collected and catalogued the artifacts. They found a copy of the book on a computer drive in an excavation of an ancient landfill in the province of Westphalia. The item was taken and catalogued, and put into a repository. A professional historian named Mbaya Zanates was a specialist of the history 21st century and he was capable of reading materials written in the old forms of English. He was doing research on human scientific knowledge at the dawn of the 21st century, and had mistakenly looked into the book thinking it was about science. He found the book so interesting, he passed it to his colleagues and an academic discussion began to form. What was impossible for people to believe in the 21st century finally found a place where Gowan's logic was finally seen clearly.

Ideas that many once thought should have never seen the light of day were re-read and discussed. The idea that the human organism was simply a work of biology and science had long been accepted in this society, but the old idea of inherent dignity in every human organism had been retained for many years, until the discussion started again. Was Dr. Gowan right in that there is no justification of this idea of inherent human dignity? First, they discussed the question in their education systems, followed by their media and finally in their politics

Different sides weighed their voices in on the question. Some considered that if such a distinction was lost that it would allow room for people to take advantage of it and commit destruction against the species in a manner contrary to progress; if the state was

given the power to destroy human lives for the greater benefit, there was a risk they would abuse such a power as well. Some had difficulty accepting the idea that there was any circumstance in which sacrificing even one life would serve the greater good.

Most of the arguments relied on the invocation of an idea that, somehow or another, society would not be made happier by doing this. The most powerful of these arguments against Dr. Gowan's case was, even if it did provide benefits for the species as a whole, that it was psychologically difficult for human organisms to accept the idea of degrading or destroying the life of another human organism even if it benefitted. They claimed even if it could be rationally justified through such benefits, the world would simply go mad if such a principle was ever adopted.

Spurred on by a crisis of widespread terrorism, ultimately the government decided that those were risks worth taking and Dr. Gowan's ideas were officially adopted. The fundamental rights of human organisms and declarations of inherent human dignity were taken out of the constitution, and were replaced with new definitions that held fundamental rights for all of the free citizens of the republic, and contingent rights for other organisms which could be annulled if necessary. Seeking to move cautiously, after a public referendum, the government employed the most modest and least provoking of measures in the spirit of Dr. Gowan's ideas. Dangerous criminals and terrorists who were sentenced to life imprisonment were taken from their cells and subjected to scientific experimentation on their brains. The extinction of most primates in previous centuries had left researchers with only other mammals for such purposes, and while many argued that this was largely sufficient, there was serious concern in the scientific community that there were some important experiments that a human test subject would be necessary for.

A specialized medical research facility was created wherein a few human organisms could be used for scientific experiment, as lab rats, for the purpose of improving the welfare and survival of the larger species. After being selected from the prison population, the organisms were forcibly placed under restraint in the facilities where they were forced to undergo experimentation. These experiments sometimes destroyed the bodies of the organisms and sometimes they had good results, however, the research produced excellent results and it became clear that the results of the experiments gave them knowledge that they could not have attained by animal testing.

It was hailed as a grand success and the practice became institutionalized. Some criminals attempted to destroy their bodies before they could be used, but the state learned to take precautions by keeping them under physical restraint. Some in the scientific community disputed the success, and claimed that there was nothing that was being discovered that could not have been learnt through testing on other species.

Messages were distributed through the media to calm down any of those 'latent irrational moral thoughts' about the killing of these creatures by reminding everyone that a human being is only an organism, like a tree or a termite, and that to feel that a single individual organism possesses special significance is not really justified by the facts. As it became institutionalized, new procedures and customs were thought-up invoking Dr. Gowan's

logic, which were more ambitious. It was at this point, however, that trouble began to develop.

The other nations of the world took notice at what was occurring in the Great Republic. They raised diplomatic objections to the elimination of legal recognition of inherent human dignity as well as the newly adopted experimentation, and the republic dismissed them as irrational religious delusions that held the human creature to be special in the eyes of God. Some of these states were more vocal than others and their extreme language provoked a reaction among the citizens of the Great Republic in favour of the policy changes.

Nothing more developed from this for the most part though, except for frequent terrorist attacks promulgated at the atheists by extremists of different religions (something that had already occurred many times before), which did nothing to shake the position of the republic on the issue and served to further enforce their longstanding ideological belief that religion is a cause of violence and evil.

As the citizens of the atheist republic became more accustomed to the new paradigm and new generations came to be brought up under it, many of them found themselves offended that religious people held a notion of inherent human dignity of every individual organism even when the experimentation on one organism could (they thought) save the lives of many others. They demonized the religious believers according to this thinking. How could they do this when they knew that many other organisms could have their lives saved by the sacrifice of one? This line of thought caught on among minorities in other states who wanted similar laws to be adopted in their own nations, but found that religious convictions blocked the path to such progress through lawmakers who refused to eliminate the antiquated notion of inherent human dignity.

When the atheist state, again at the spur of endless terrorism, began to raise the bar though from what it first attempted and they began discussing other ideas on a far grander scale within their society, the international controversy caught flame once more. The republican government replied in its defence with a promise that what it was doing was an internal matter and that it would not touch the life of any organisms outside of its borders; it did not say this because it was unable to impose its will on others, but it was ideologically important to the state to maintain the belief that it was not aggressive since it had never started a war and such aggression it blamed on religion. The leaders of the other nations gathered together to give an open address to the republic in an unprecedented message in which the leaders of every religion on the earth signed onto that called for the atheist republic to re-consider what they had decided and re-institute the principle of the inherent dignity of every human being. The atheist republic ignored the call and issued a counter-response that called for all of the religions of the world to cast off their delusions, get with the times and embrace the reality of atheism.

Even more ambitious ideas took hold in the republic in the spirit of Dr Gowan's thought. Reality TV shows were created that used a few organisms, also taken from the prisons, that were subjected to very painful (both physical and psychological) circumstances as

well as death. They became immensely popular viewing and ratings soared. The most popular of such shows involved a few organisms who were given knives and placed in a large fenced off area in the wilderness containing a large number of vicious hungry wild animals that the subjects needed to defend against or be eaten. While some in the republic felt appalled by the concept at first, these tensions died down once people began to realize the truth that these organisms were just organisms and that it was really no different from watching the nature channel and seeing animals tear each other apart.

They all knew that their rights were still protected under the law and that this would never change. In fact it was guaranteed that only imprisoned organisms that had religious superstitions could have their rights taken away for these purposes. This brought relief to the atheist majority that knew that even if they were found guilty of a serious crime, they would be guaranteed of not losing their rights so long as they didn't believe in fairytales. The new situation did not cause them any fear for their own safety in the slightest any more than they would have done so previously over depriving unborn organisms of rights or even of slaughtering organisms belonging to other species.

The state kept reminding the public that the human organism is nothing more than an organism and therefore it did not have some kind of inherent dignity in each individual member that invalidated this practice. It also reminded everyone that the number of organisms used in this research was relatively very small. It attempted to appease critics by promising to reduce the number of organisms used in the experimentation, entertainment and other aspects of life that were becoming ingrained in the culture.

The international pressure grew against the atheist republic as it continued to expand and unravel the inheritance of Dr. Gowan's ideas into the public sphere. The first side to make a move to violence came from within the atheist republic. A group of religious people, who had access to one of the state's top secret military facilities, conducted the worst terrorist attack that had ever occurred; they released a biological agent into the general population through the water supply, which attacked the body and resulted in death. The disease spread to over a hundred million people before the symptoms began to be exhibited, and by that point a national emergency was declared as every person was tested for the disease and quarantined from the general population if tested positive. The disease was successfully contained, but not before many people began to die off in great numbers.

More than half of those infected died from it. There were loud calls from an infuriated populace for the extension of the category of people without human rights to include all those poor people living in slums who had often been the source of these attacks.

Military officials with experience in fighting terrorism cautioned that such an action would produce no results, but emotions won over the people and the politicians enacted the new laws, removing the human rights from the jobless poor and installing machinery into their bodies to control them as slaves.

Other nations protested at the turn of events. They insisted that human beings could not be treated like this. The republic's line, however, remained the same: the human being is nothing more than an organism, and it has no meaning to its existence other than what people imagine it to have.

Even with this, however, the terrorist attacks continued; there was no way of stopping them. The civilian deaths mounted and mounted, and even though the poor had been made completely to the state through the machinery placed in them to condition them, there were still more calls that more people needed to be placed in this category.

The republic then sought to eliminate the rights of all of its religious citizens. It was then the war broke out.

Every single nation declared war on the atheist republic. For the good of the species, they determined that the atheist republic needed to be destroyed. The nations were unable to overcome the superior military strength of the republic, however.

Their obsolete nuclear missiles and other primitive weaponry proved to be of no use against the military technology that was employed in the Republic's defence. So the atheist armies overcame the other nations, one by one, as each nation came to surrender itself to the superior power of the conquerors. Entire regions were decimated before the onslaught as the atheist armies paid no heed to any antiquated concepts of human rights and the defeated populations drowned in their own blood.

The crisis of a potential global atheist victory became realized, and so the other remaining nations sued for peace. The atheist republic, not wishing to press its luck, accepted the peace but imposed the terms that while the atheist nation would return to its original borders, all of the defeated nations had to allow the atheist republic to put the same machinery into their populations that they had placed in their poor citizens. Faced with a choice between this and annihilation, most nations agreed to the harsh terms.

The program was referred to as 'domestication', because the human organisms in question needed to be tamed, just as one did with a wild animal.

A new order was forged, which was unlike anything that had ever come before. The enslavement of the human population to the citizens of the republic became a reality. The republic was free to do with them whatever it chose, and from cradle to grave they were programmed to feel nothing but love for the republic, its government and citizens.

They were often left free on their own, but when the population grew too large, the republic would cull them to keep them at more manageable levels, and they would respond to the cull with joy. Often on an annual basis, there had to be a cull in different areas; the government of the republic felt no guilt over it, because they truly did believe that these were nothing more than just organisms that were being terminated. However,

the cull of the domesticated organisms was often kept out of public view of the citizens, although the public was aware of it.

The wisdom behind the treaty in the atheist republic, which would long remember the war as the great example of how religions created warfare, was questioned in the society of the atheist republic, however. Did it really best serve the species to kill off so many organisms in order to keep the population more manageable? Some unpatriotic organisms even ventured the controversial idea that the atheist republic being defeated in war would be not as detrimental to the welfare of the species as it was for so many organisms around the globe to be killed off and turned into happy slaves, that would seek to please every whim and desire of their masters for their whole lives.

The government responded that reducing the population in such a way would go far towards combating the global environmental problems and other such chronic issues relating to the Earth's large population; and the alternative was just to leave the domesticated organisms in a more primitive and wild state, without the things of modern civilization, which would only make them even more unhappy.

This debate was left unresolved, and the treaty stood as it was; it was only among the citizens that the treaty was debated – the nations who signed the treaty all held it up with utmost loyalty and devotion.

Every year for a few months the republic's soldiers went around the world and collected organisms to be terminated in proportion to local population figures in the various locales. Male and female organisms, elderly organisms, young organisms and child organisms were all taken for the yearly cull. Those selected embraced their role in taking death to serve their masters better. They had been tamed well.

The new order lasted many years, but not forever.

Sometimes, when the culls were still occurring, citizens of the republic who felt a moral injustice was occurring, even attempted to stop the culls with force, which usually ended in disastrous consequences for the citizens who did this, but more often the only resistance to this practice among the citizens was verbal.

People asked the soldiers if they could not clearly see that there was something in the human being beyond the mere organism, and that there was something evil about what they were doing. The soldiers usually only replied that that was their own delusion, and that the human organism is nothing more than the organic tissue and atomic particles that it is constructed from. For God did not make them special in His image, for God did not exist, and they were simply the material products of natural forces; how could anyone see it differently?

III: Presentation Day

Twenty-five children were sitting in rows in the classroom. Ms. Yang was forming words with her fingers over the screen on the board. Outside it was pitch black darkness from the night with continual streaks of lightning arcing over the sky. The walls of the classroom were decorated with pictures of scenery on other planets with a description written by each student of what was happening- they were the student's last assignment which Ms. Yang had put for decorations. The children were 12-13 years old. All of them racially Chinese and dressed in uniforms.

Ms. Yang turned to the students after writing her notes and said, 'Can anyone tell me what this?'

A student put up his hand and said, 'Antimatter'.

Ms. Yang said, 'Thank you Li Xinqing. Now what is antimatter? Does anyone here know?'

Li Xinqing said, 'It explodes really big.'

Ms. Yang said, 'Yes, that's right. But what is it? Can anyone tell me, what do we use it for?'

A different student puts up her hand and said, 'We use it to go from one star to another.'

Ms. Yang said, 'Good, thank you Zhao Xiaoyun. We use it to go from one star to another. It is the only practical method we have of going from one star to another.'

Some pictures appeared on the screen with a three-dimensional image of the Earth and its solar system.

Ms. Yang said, 'A long time ago in the 20th century, human beings first started to explore outside of their own planet. But they didn't have antimatter, so what did they use?'

Zhang Junqing put up her hand and said, 'Did you use electricity?'

Ms. Yang said, 'No, they didn't use electricity. They burned a fuel which was made of hydrogen and pure oxygen. [a video of the first space launches appears on the screen in front of the class] This fuel was burned very quickly, and so they could only go short distances with this. They could go to the moon that is around the Earth. They could also go to some of the other planets near them in their own solar system, like this red one, but I forget the name for it.'

A student shouted out, 'It's called Mars.'

Ms. Yang said, 'Yes, that's right, I remember now. It is Mars.'

'Humans could go to Mars, they could go to these other planets near them, but they could not ever leave their own solar system like this. They built colonies on their moon and on Mars, and on a few other places in their solar system, but they didn't have any way of getting to another star. Why is that?'

Zhao Lingling said, 'It is too far!'

Ms. Yang said, 'That's right, it is too far. Do you know how far? The nearest star with planets to the Earth is this one, it is called Alpha Centauri. It is 4.3 light years from the Earth. 4.3 light years means that if you travel at the speed of light it will take 4.3 EA (Earth years) to get there. The speed of light is about three hundred thousand kilometres per second. The first space rockets on Earth travelled at about two kilometres per second. Can anyone do the math, what the ratio for that is?'

The students started writing it down and calculating and one said, '150,000 to 1'.

Ms. Yang said, 'That's right. So if it takes 4.3 EA for light to go from Alpha Centauri to the Earth, then you multiply 4.3 by 150,000 and what do you get?'

They calculated and one said, '645,000.'

Ms. Yang said, 'Thank you! That's right it would take them 645,000 EA to get to the nearest star using their first rockets. So, of course, it was not practical. Even when they improved technology, maybe the fastest they could go was 20,000 EA or just 5,000 EA. It still isn't practical, obviously. So the first humans to go into space could only stay around the planets around their own star.'

'But they wanted to go to other stars, and they tried to figure out ways to do that. A lot of people put a lot of thought into this question. They realized that in order to get an object to go that distance in a relatively reasonable amount of time, then they needed some kind of fuel which was better than just hydrogen and oxygen, or better than chemical fuels.'

'At first they tried some other methods. Several hundred years into humanity's space exploration, they built this giant machine on the Earth's moon [a video appears showing a massive machine on the lunar surface]'

A student put up her hand and said, 'Ms. Yang, how many moons does the Earth have?'

Ms. Yang said, 'They only have one, but it is really big moon, much larger than the moons in our system'

'On this moon, they built a massive electromagnetic accelerator that goes around the entire circumference of the moon, powered by 32 fusion reactors on the moon's surface. The fusion reactors would power extremely strong electromagnets that accelerated a tiny

spacecraft on these electromagnets.’[the video displays a tiny spacecraft being pushed forward along the electromagnets around the moon]

‘It was designed to accelerate a spacecraft that was only 10 grams to an enormous speed in a loop that went around and around the moon’s surface.’

Liu Shimeng said, ‘Only ten grams!’ Other students opened their mouths in awe.

Ms. Yang said, ‘Yes, that’s right, that is all they could do at that time. And furthermore it was designed to only shoot them in one direction, which was towards Alpha Centauri. It would go around and around the accelerator, as it reached an enormous speed and when it had hit a high enough speed, it was released into space. I am not sure if I have the exact figures right now, but I think they were able to get it to 1/30 or 1/40 of the speed of light. I will need to check later.’

‘It took more than 100 years for these tiny spacecraft to reach Alpha Centauri, but you know that there was a particular advantage with this machine. Can anyone guess what it was?’

Zhao Lingling said, ‘It didn’t cost much?’

Ms. Yang said, ‘No, on the contrary, this was most expensive space project that was ever undertaken by the Earth. Using the technology they had back then, it would have been more than the GDP of our entire world at current prices. The most difficult part of this machine was designing the tiny probe so that it was able to take the massive centripetal forces from being accelerated like this. But with advances in engineering materials, it was possible to design something that small that could withstand the forces present.’

None of the other students venture to put up their hands.

Ms. Yang said, ‘The advantage was that you could use this machine over and over and over again. It took more than 100 EA to reach Alpha Centauri, but you could send thousands of these tiny spacecraft using this same machine, there was no limit to the number you could send. The Earth’s moon changes position, however, like all moons and so most of the time the machine was not pointed in the right direction to hit Alpha Centauri’s system dead-on, but that didn’t matter because they were interested in exploring interstellar space as well. So they would just manufacture more and more of these tiny spacecraft and basically just keep sending them off without limit into interstellar space.’

‘This was a big advantage, because sending thousands of tiny probes that were designed for different types of data collection could give them far more scientific information than just sending one or two massive, several hundred ton, spacecraft that would orbit the star and collect data on different things. They could fire probes into planets, they could fire them into stars, they could fire them into any object they wanted, they didn’t need to worry about losing them when gathering science, because they were so easy to replace.’

‘They built several more accelerators like this one, and aimed them at Tau Ceti and Epsilon Eridani, both are relatively close to the Earth, but more than twice the distance of Alpha Centauri. And they also started whipping probes in the interstellar space in the general direction towards these systems as well.’

Zhao Lingling asked, ‘Ms. Yang, didn’t they already have advanced fusion power by that point? Why did they do it like this?’

Ms. Yang said, ‘They did, you are right. They had the technology already that could have been a relatively large spacecraft, but why would need to do that if you had no plans of sending human beings? Keep in mind here, human beings at this point have no idea which stars had planets that were habitable and which stars did not. Furthermore, they really didn’t know much at all about what was going on in interstellar space at that time. They were not going to just try sending human beings into interstellar space, which they don’t know much about and to a place they do not know about, without exploring it first. Hence, that is why they sent the thousands of probes like this.’

‘And they didn’t find any habitable planets in any of these systems. At least they were not habitable without first building some rather large-scale construction that could hold human life within it, which they did much later, closer to our times.’

A student put up her hand and said, ‘Ms. Yang, is all of this going to be on the final exam?’

Ms. Yang said, ‘Of course!’

Some of the students sigh and Ms. Yang smiled.

Ms. Yang said, ‘But do not worry though, you don’t need to remember how many tons or how long it took them to go from one place to another. I will give you an essay question and you need to explain to me how human beings first started to leave Earth and travel to other planets. List me the names of the methods and give me explanations of why each one succeeded or failed. This is a very important part of galactic history, and I think all of you students need to know about this.’

The student said, ‘But it is such a long time ago, and there are so many details...’

Ms. Yang said, ‘Don’t worry about the details! You don’t need to give me the details, just tell me the basics of why they chose this method or that method to travel into space. I don’t think it is so difficult. We will review this all before the final exam, so don’t worry.’

Ms. Yang then went back to her lecture.

‘Now, as technology on Earth progressed and fusion reactors were able to be produced in smaller and smaller sizes, the idea of creating a large-scale spacecraft that could travel from one star to another with a human complement became more and more appealing. In the early stages of Earth’s development, such a spacecraft would have been impossible, because the mass of the engines and fuel, using earlier technology, would have required such a long time to accelerate to the speeds you needed to reach another star that it seemed pointless to people to try.’

[A picture of a large spacecraft appears, with a picture of a turtle next to it]

‘This spacecraft was called the Archelon, it was named after an extinct animal in Earth’s pre-history. Earth still has these animals, I think, but they are much smaller now. This is called a ‘turtle’, I think they live in water, but I am not sure...does anyone know?’

The students shake their heads.

‘Well, the Archelon was a 300 ton spacecraft powered by a fusion rocket engine that could accelerate up to 1/10 of the speed of light, and it had a 20 ton living quarters accompanied with a greenhouse to grow food and a sleeping quarters. It was designed to spin such that it created artificial gravity. It had a crew of 22 people, which is about the same as the largest interstellar craft we use today. This crew died onboard the ship and gave birth to children onboard the ship, for three generations, who continued to pilot it until it reached its destination at Tau Ceti after more than 100 EA had passed. A number of unmanned vehicles were sent to Tau Ceti at the same time containing large quantities of robotic equipment to help the humans build a colony on one of the world’s that contained seas of liquid water. This world had developed some very primitive forms of photosynthetic organism that provided a small quantity of oxygen into the atmosphere, but it was not enough to sustain human life, so they needed to wear masks outside, just like on our world.’

Zhao Xiaoyun asked, ‘Ms. Yang, are there any worlds other than the Earth where people could walk around outside without a mask?’

Ms. Yang said, ‘I am sure that in the whole universe there are huge numbers of such worlds, but in the tiny area of the universe that human beings have explored, there has not yet been found even one beyond the Earth where human beings could survive in the open atmosphere. Oxygen require photosynthesis, but no world has yet been found with levels of life comparable to the Earth. The best that has been found were worlds like this one at Tau Ceti, or our own world of Xiaoyi, where algae in the oceans produced some levels of oxygen, but still insufficient for human life. No one has yet found multicellular life anywhere outside of the Earth. We know it must exist somewhere, but it seems it is not very common. Who knows when we will ever find it?’

‘But in no place anywhere, has anyone found life like a human being. We have not found even the slightest hint that there is another intelligent being on another planet. But if they existed, surely they would have found us by now or left some record of themselves

somehow, but no one has ever found them. A lot of people think that perhaps there really is no intelligent being in this universe except the human being.'

'Now, all the people on Tau Ceti today, they all descended from those 22 people who left the Earth more than a millennium ago. What is the population of our planet, here in Xiaoyi?'

Several of the students said together, '400,000'.

Ms. Yang said, 'Right, and how many people came here on the first ship to Xiaoyi?'

A student said, '41'

'All of us all come from the same ancestry. Our gene pool is not terribly diverse, if you compare ourselves with the Earth. Let me show you students what people on the Earth look like'

[A image appears showing people of many different races, Bantu Africans, Aryan Indians, Dravidian Indians, Caucasian, Roma, Han Chinese, Thai, Native American]

The students open their mouths in awe. Zhao Xiaoyun said, 'Wow, they look so different! It is like they are a different species!'

Liu Shimeng said, 'Which one are we?'

Ms. Yang said, 'This one [points at the Han Chinese] is ours. Our ancestors came to this world from a world named Tiangong 300 EA ago. Like all early colonists, they were encouraged to reproduce and make big families, and so our population grew exponentially. The colonists on Tiangong, their ancestors came from another world named Baiyuntao. Baiyuntao was settled by people from another world named Gaoyang, and they came from people from another world, and so on, for about 32 planets going all the way back to the Earth to a country called China which sent out its first colonists shortly after Tau Ceti was first settled by people from another nation. Our planet does not have a big population, but we still make efforts to continue the work of colonization and send out ships to even further places. And once those places are settled, then they have to carry the torch and keep going on, until we fill the galaxy.'

'Our world was very special though. Because when the colonists were travelling in the 130 year multi-generational trip from Tiangong to our world of Xiaoyi, there was a Catholic missionary priest who accompanied them and converted all of the people onboard the vessel. And what was his name?'

All the students said together, 'St Yang Junma'.

Ms. Yang said 'Yes, and he is my ancestor. Who else here descends from him?'

Three of the students put up their hands.

‘And they passed on their faith to their children and so on, and when the colonists landed on Xiaoyi they build an entire planet on a Catholic root. Of the 51 people, not including the children, who were in the final crew that landed on the planet, only 2 did, a man and his wife, not convert and get baptized, and their descendants broke contact with us and went to live in the Southern Archipelago. They set up a state apart from ours that refused to allow our missionaries to preach to them and developed their own civilization independent of us.’

Zhao Xiaoyun said, ‘Ms. Yang, Father Zhang said at mass yesterday that if God had made it that all people on the craft converted and everyone in our world believed, then there would be no work for us left to do here. He says that the people in the Southern Archipelago are our opportunity to take up the cross and suffer for sinners to show them the gospel.’

Ms. Yang said, ‘Really? I think Father Zhang is a very wise person. Now you know, on the Earth and the planets in the Earth system, there is almost no trace of the Catholic Church remaining there. The head of all the bishops on the Earth, in fact the head of all bishops everywhere, is a bishop who lives in Rome, the same city that the bible mentions, that people call the ‘Pope’. In old times the Pope controlled the entire church, but in our days where communication takes more than 200 EA to go back and forth, we just pray for him and call him leader in name, although he has no active control of the church here.’

‘All of you know in the mass when we hear the priest says ‘Our Pope on Earth, Our Bishop Matthew and all the bishops’? The Pope is that bishop, although we don’t even know what his name is or what he is presently doing, because all news we receive from the Earth is at least 100 EA in age.’

‘He lives in a little apartment as a private person, and on the Earth, few people even know who he is. It is among the colonists out here, far from the Earth, that the church has continued and put down its roots. Even should it almost completely disappear in one place, as long as one catholic still exists, it can all be built back again. In all the universe, our world has the largest presence of Catholics on it.’

‘And so the galaxy was slowly populated like this. Hopping from one planet to another, very slowly. And we have not gone very far.’

‘It takes extremely long times for these ships to go from one place to another, and it is extremely expensive to build them and send them, along with all the accompanying robotic vessels that will help colonists to settle a world.’

‘And the entire universe is over 26 billion light years across it. Our galaxy, within the universe is 80,000 light years across. From the 27th century to the present, human beings have only travelled 300 light years distance from the Earth.’

‘And the vast majority of the human race still lives on the Earth and its system. Us colonists have not yet populated the rest of the galaxy enough to be more than a small minority of humanity.’

Ms. Yang said, ‘When human beings left the Earth and went to other planets, they had to build all sorts of technology that could allow them to breathe, that would protect them from atmospheric conditions that were deadly, that would protect them from radiation, from meteorite impacts, etc.’

‘Our world is actually very hospitable in comparison with most of the galaxy. We have extreme electrical storms in our atmosphere, but there is photosynthetic life in the oceans, the average outside temperatures at the Equator where our archipelago is situated are around 30 degrees Celsius at night and 70 Celsius in day, the gravity is 60% of the Earth’s gravity, the day is 91 hours long, very little surface radiation is present, tectonic activity is frequent . . . in comparison with other worlds, this is a paradise. We have to make adaptations to living here. We cannot go outside during the day unless we wear a cooling suit, and at night we can only go outside wearing a mask that covers the face. And at no times may we go outside in an electrical storm, which happens on average once every twelve hours. Our world is 90% ocean, with a scattering of archipelagos, volcanic in origin, around the surface. We spend most of our lives indoors. In comparison with what exists elsewhere, this is really quite hospitable.’

‘The soil on our world we found to be very fertile and we started introducing some of the few botanical species that we could get from Tiangong, which originally had their origin on the Earth. And now our oceans are getting filled with seaweeds and kelp, but nothing eats them except us. On the Southern Archipelago as well as the various archipelagos situated in the temperate northern hemisphere, the daytime temperatures were low enough to plant peach trees, rice and the other various plants that were taken in the original greenhouse aboard the ship that came from Tiangong.’

[a picture appears showing a fish on the screen]

Ms. Yang asked the students, ‘Can anyone tell me what this is?’

Yang Weiwu put up his hand and said, ‘It is a fish. They live in water.’

Ms. Yang said, ‘Yes, that’s right! This is the animal that Jesus eats after He resurrects from the dead in the gospel. This is what it looks like, I think this side is the front [points to the mouth] and this side is the back [points at the tail]. Now, believe it or not, but there are actually three species of fish which are being kept in a laboratory on our archipelago, which were delivered here from Tiangong 200 EA previously. We are waiting for the oxygen levels to rise high enough in the oceans and then we are going to try to release these into the oceans, where we hope they can survive and then we will have our first multi-cellular animal on this planet!’

Zhao Lingling put up her hand and said, 'Ms. Yang, how do we communicate with other stars? It is in the textbook but I don't understand it.'

Ms. Yang said, 'It is actually very hard. It was all set up by Earth, because they have all the technology and ability to do this. In the beginning, messages could really only be sent by just travelling from one place to another, since the distances are too vast for a radio signal to communicate anything over that distance. But about 700 EA ago, the Great Republic on the Earth invested a lot of money to set up a network of stations between all the different stars that were spaced at distances not too far from each other and so the signal could be carried. It was only about 20 EA previously that they succeeded in establishing contact with us; I was not even born yet, but my grandparents were in school at that time and they said It was amazing when it was set up, because all of a sudden, a whole new world was opened up to us as all information across the galaxy was getting transmitted to each other.'

Ms. Yang moved her fingers over the screen to draw a picture. She said, 'So, suppose this is Earth. Then about one tenth of a light year you have a station here which is close enough to use a signal that can fairly well reach the Earth without too much problem or interference. Then you go another tenth of a light year, and then there is another station here, which communicates with the first station, and so on and so on. And you know this was really expensive. But by doing this, they were able to connect most of the inhabited worlds with each other, and now we can share everything through this network. If Minas Cara forty light years away, found a scientific discovery 40 EA ago, then we will find out about it now once the signal reaches here. Or if some big political change happened on Menelaus yesterday, then we would find about it around 200 EA from now.'

Zhao Lingling interrupted and said, 'So that means that all the stuff we read about through the net is all from the past?'

Ms. Yang said, 'That's right, it is all from many years ago. Everything you are reading about news on Earth, happened 110 EA ago. We don't know what they are doing right at this moment.'

Zhao Xiaoyun shrieked and cried, saying, 'Ms. Yang! Xi Mapeng just put a linye worm down my back and it bit me.'

Ms. Yang stopped class, walked to Zhao Xiaoyun and took out a tool from her pocket. She put the tool behind Zhao Xiaoyun's neck and pressed the button, and the little parasite that was biting the student's back was pulled out by a tiny wire that shot out of the tool. Ms. Yang then put down the piece of technology, turned around at Xi Mapeng and slapped him very hard across the face.

Ms. Yang said, 'What in goodness are you thinking Xi Mapeng! How would you like it if the class put these little things down your shirt for fun?' She pointed at the door and yelled, 'Go home right now! You are suspended! I will talk to your mom tonight.'

Xi Mapeng didn't move and just sat there. She yelled at him, 'Go! Move it! Are you deaf?'

He just sat there and didn't say anything, exchanging eye contact with her. He just sat there for a minute and she stared at his eyes. Both didn't move. After a minute, she then took the robot off of the tool, and said, 'You go right now, or else I am putting this little toy down your back and I am not using the device to get it out again.'

He stood up and walked out the door.

She returned to the front of the room.

Li Junye said, "Ms. Yang why Earth and the planets around the Earth all have different countries, but on all the other planets there is only one or two countries for each planet? Why doesn't Earth only have one country?"

Ms. Yang said, "That is because Earth never unified. The Great Republic became the most powerful country, and it has maybe 1/7 of the population of their solar system, but there are still many countries there. They never unified into one, and they still fight wars with each other. But when the colonization happened, which was sent out in the past few thousand years by the richest countries on the Earth, all the colonists all belonged to one country and so they came to a new world and all lived under one government, or in our case under two governments. Because survival on other worlds is harder than the Earth, so people on other worlds couldn't just go off on their own and start a new state with their own resources. They all spoke the same language, had the same culture, and never really thought of themselves as different, and so on most other worlds, there was almost always only one country for each world."

Li Junye said, "But if the countries on Earth still sometimes fight wars, why don't they ever fight wars between different stars?"

Ms. Yang said, "Probably because of the costs involved. You know how difficult it is to move people from one place to another. But also because there would be no point. There are no resources on other worlds which are needed on Earth, which Earth couldn't find a million times more cheaply within their own solar system. If Earth wanted to fight a war with another star, it would be easy for them because they have the wealth and technology, and they could just send a massive array of robotic missiles to wipe out all life on a given world. If we on Xiaoyi wanted to fight a war with another star, then we don't really have the economy to do that sort of thing. We could maybe send one or two across interstellar space, and that would be only a little bit effective against a world where people are living in places far apart from each other like our own.'

Li Junye said, 'But what if we just sent a missile filled with a genetically-engineered virus to another planet?'

Ms Yang said, ‘Well that would work of course...and we have the ability to do that.... but, you know, then there is the other way around too. Even in Earth’s system, they never use those kinds of weapons when they fight in their wars, because it is kind of line that they cannot cross. If they ever used these weapons, then they would be able to kill all life on their planet. The Great Republic even built a system to watch every high speed object in space and developed their own counter-missiles in case if ever someone should ever fire them at the Earth. But no other planet ever developed this, because we don’t have the money for it.’

She paused and looked at the class for a moment. She curled a smile on her face and said, ‘I think I know what I want to show you kids. Wait a moment, please.’

She spoke to the screen and said, ‘Screen, bring up Star Trek the Next Generation.’

It started playing, but with modern subtitles for the children, since none of them of course could speak or understand 20th century English. The children looked in amazement and start laughing when they saw all the novelties that people in the past thought the future was going to look like.’

Ms Yang said, ‘This comes from the late 20th century. We laugh at it now, but really if you were living at that time, who really could have guessed about what the future was actually going to look like. And you know some things they guessed were not too far off, even if most of this is really ridiculous.’

Zhao Xiaoyun said, “Why does that man have such pointy ears?”

Ms Yang said, “He is supposed to be an alien.”

The students burst out in laughter.

Zhao Xiaoyun said, “But... aliens don’t exist!”

Ms Yang said, “They didn’t know that in the 20th century. They assumed that there was other intelligent life in other places. When humans actually left the Earth and came to live on other planets, and they didn’t find multicellular life anywhere except that which was brought with them from Earth, then they finally realized the truth.”

Zhao Xiaoyun said, “But Ms. Yang, why did they think that there would be so much life on other places?”

Ms. Yang said, “You need to think like a person of that time to answer that question. In their minds, they thought it was scientifically unviable to claim that life had an intelligent designer. Mind you, many people of that time believed in God, but even if they believed, they often thought that religion and science had to be completely separated. The things that faith teaches were only true for an individual, but one could not base any scientific statement on God’s revelation.”

“So, if you think about the question of life’s origins, because you don’t believe that there was a kind of supernatural design present, you need to assume that there was some natural explanation that showed how random forces could produce intelligent life. They didn’t believe that it needed something from God or anything like that to make it intelligent.”

‘But, no matter where we looked, there was no sign of another intelligence anywhere, and we are still looking.

Zhao Lingling said, ‘What do people on Earth now say about aliens?’

Ms Yang said, ‘They insist we haven’t looked far enough. We have only seen a tiny fraction of the universe; it is true. They think that if we keep looking eventually we will find another kind of life like ourselves.’

Li Jin said, “Ms. Yang, are we as Catholics allowed to think that they will ever find life elsewhere.”

Ms Yang said, “That’s a very good question Li Jin. About 800 EA ago, Pope Ignatius III said in his encyclical about Christian anthropology *Creatione Hominis* that there is no contradiction with divine revelation to believe that life could be made elsewhere, but we could not believe that God created another race in His image and likeness apart from the descent of Adam. The pope further stipulated what this meant, by saying that it is possible to believe that an animal species could come into existence that could do almost anything a human could do, including even the creation of technology or society, and even have brainpower seemingly surpassing a human, but it would still be unable to know God as a human could, nor could it inherit eternal life as a human could.”

‘So, that would seem to allow for the possibility of what we think of as aliens, but really, we have never found them and more and more people are thinking, perhaps we never will.’

“Anyways, you kids have a ten-minute break now, and afterwards I want everyone to give their presentations on the planets they did for the homework assignment.”

The students all stood up and recited the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary, before breaking.

Some students went to the windows to look at the electrical storm. They wanted to go outside, but couldn’t. Instead they went to the indoor gym and played a game.

Xiaoyi (孝义) was a planet known slightly smaller than the Earth and orbiting a yellow sun, like the Earth.

There was no 24 hour schedule for anyone. No one counted days of the week. The day was 91 hours long, and when people got up, when they went to work, when they went home, was different for every person. There was no common schedule on the planet. When one was working, another was sleeping, when one was getting up in the morning, another was eating supper.

Most of the people of the planet were Catholics, and the church required people to go to mass on a period of time called a 'sabbath' but which was not fixed by day or night. They simply counted 168 hour periods and required people within the last 24 hours of each 168 hour period to make it to mass.

There was no common time when schools, workplaces or other things would be open or close. It just depended on the preferences of people in each community.

The air was not breathable, because it lacked oxygen, but the atmosphere lacked many of the poisons of the air in other worlds, and the air pressure, while higher than the Earth, was still within the range of a human body to cope with as long as one wasn't outside for too long. Like in other planets, people had brought life to this one, by taking animals and plants that already existed on the Earth and then genetically modifying them to be suited to Xiaoyi's climate.

Ms. Yang had forgotten to say that there was already another type of multicellular organism introduced to Xiaoyi, but everyone knew what this was anyways. Various types of anaerobic worms, were introduced into the planet, including one type which was known to bite humans.

Everything was different from life on Earth. The students sat on chairs around windows watching beautiful electrical storms on a rocky island that had mosses growing on it in air that couldn't be breathed by humans. They knew of Earth only in the form of pictures and stories in books. They were all related to one another, and formed a big interconnected family, with so many people being so genetically close to everyone else. They went into a gym and played a ball game in a lower gravity than people on the Earth were used to.

And yet, no one ever thought it was strange. They were born into this place, it was home for them – they couldn't imagine living in a place where it was different.

These difficulties of living on other planets were normal everywhere, and Xiaoyi was lucky for not possessing so few difficulties in comparison. The only planet that was ever found that was ideal for human existence was the Earth. Across the galaxy, colonists had to deal with all sorts of problematic situations involving high intensity radiation on some worlds, lack of breathable atmospheres on almost all worlds, dangerous wildlife on a few worlds (genetic experiments of Earth fauna that had gone wrong), bad air pressure that was either too high or too low on many worlds, temperature extremes unsuitable for human life on many worlds, frequent risk of extraterrestrial impacts in some places, wild tectonic activity in some places, and a whole range of other problems that were encountered by the hardy people who settled such places. The colonists on such worlds

simply made do with their situations and used varying methods to combat such problems in order to survive.

If a problem could not be solved, then the world was not settled. The ingenuity of the human species discovered ways to live and flourish on some of the most inhospitable environments imaginable. The changes to lifestyle that were needed in order to meet these challenges, such as wearing the masks on Xiaoyi simply became a normal part of existence. It was similar to how the human species, while having evolved in the hot continent of Africa on Earth, had ventured across their own planet and had to adapt themselves to much colder environments by always wearing warm clothing in order to prevent freezing. Just as wearing thick clothing in freezing weather outside became a normal aspect of life for the homo sapiens who migrated to the northern parts of their planet, so also did wearing a mask in the atmosphere outside become a normal aspect of life for the homo sapiens that settled on Xiaoyi.

Mothers reminded their children not to go outside in the day or in the lightning storms, and there were nursery rhymes as well as fables for children that had stories about what happened to naughty children who went out at these times. Accidents did of course happen, however, and people did die from exposure as a result of being outside at the wrong time, just as people on Earth died from hypothermia or frostbite from failing to bundle up.

Their culture was formed by these surroundings they lived in. They lived in these places for so many generations, that this simply became normal. People lived, raised families, went to work, studied at school, fell in love, grew old and died, all within environments that humans in the past would have never imagined to have lived in.

And religion was present too. People prayed to God, celebrated mass, built churches, and read holy scriptures on other planets.

The students who didn't go to the windows and went to play in the gym finished their game. After ten minutes they came back, took off their coats and masks, and returned to the seats.

Ms Yang called the students one by one to give the presentations. They had been asked to pick any inhabited world known to people on Xiaoyi through the inter-galactic transmissions, and to give a presentation to the class about it. There were several thousand inhabited worlds to choose from within the three hundred light years distance from the Earth.

Zhao Xiaoyun went first. She took out her handmade poster from the wall covered with pictures and brought it to the front of the room in front of the other students.

She was very nervous in front of the other students. Ms Yang told her, 'Don't be worried about us. Remember what the psalm said, that God sends his angels to watch over you

lest you strike your foot against a stone. He will give you an angel to help you get through this presentation.'

She smiled, took a breath and said, 'The world I choose for the assignment was Nata Lio. This planet is 150 light years from Earth and 182 light years from Xiaoyi. It was settled by colonists from Earth about 900 EA ago. I chose this planet because it is very interesting to me.'

(she points at a picture on her poster. The planet is a white ball.)

'Nata Lio is covered with water ice about two to three kilometres thick, and beneath the ice there is an ocean twenty kilometres deep. 900 EA ago, colonists from Earth came to the planet. The outside of the planet is -150 C and the surface is exposed to stellar radiation because it has a very weak magnetic field. So the colonists drilled beneath the ice and constructed their settlements in the Ocean which is only about 2 degrees above freezing.'

(she points at another picture of a mass of structures attached to the bottom side of the ice)

'Here is their first settlement. It was built right after they came to Nata Lio and houses about 50,000 people. They have very little space, and so everyone has to live together communally. All the families sleep together in the same dormitories, which are inside these structures attached to the bottom of the ice. They heat it and power it with electricity made from fusion reactors. To get to the surface they have an elevator which goes through a tunnel made through the ice and a shuttle pad on the surface with which they can leave the planet if they choose to. But because this is the only planet that was settled in this system, they have nowhere else to go.'

(she points at pictures of bubbles coming out of the dark ocean floor)

'The ocean exists because of volcanic activity inside of the planet which keeps the water hot at the bottom, and prevents all the water from becoming ice. The colonists introduced several species of anaerobic bacteria to these volcanic vents which can make energy using the chemicals that come out of the vents. Because there is no sunlight, therefore no algae can be introduced to the ocean, so they therefore have no oxygen in the oceans. Other than their first settlement, they have now built several others, and the planet's population is just over 100,000.'

'Of this number about 10,000 are Catholics, and they have a compartment in their underwater city which is given the Catholic Church to be used as a church which is dedicated to John of the Cross.'

'I chose this planet because I like the sea and I think it is cool to live inside the sea.'

The students applauded, and Ms. Yang asked the next student to go up.

Zhao Lingling then came up with her poster. She pointed at pictures on it as she talked.

‘My assignment was done on Cariad, which is a large rocky planet with higher gravity than the Earth. Most of the people on the planet live in one city built in a crater at...’

Ms Yang interrupted, ‘Sorry Zhao Lingling could you tell us where it is located in relation to Earth and Xiaoyi?’

Zhao Lingling said, ‘Oh, sorry. Cariad is 55 light years from Earth 82 light years from Xiaoyi.’

‘It was only settled 300 EA ago, and it was joined up to the interstellar link before Xiaoyi was.’

Ms Yang said, ‘Thank you!’

Zhao Lingling continued, ‘The people on this planet all live in one city in a crater here (points at the picture). There is a huge amount of ice on the planet which is buried underground, but because the temperatures rarely go above freezing, there is almost no water cycle on the planet. The atmosphere is not very dense, but the planet has an iron core that makes for a strong magnetic field, so people can walk on the surface without fear of radiation.’

‘This is a planet currently undergoing terraforming. The colonists have been continually releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to heat the planet’s surface and allow more ice to become water. Some craters near the equator have now become small lakes, and the colonists have planted plants from Earth into these craters which succeed in doing photosynthesis, which releases oxygen into the atmosphere.’

(she points at a picture of a deep crater, which is flooded at the bottom. The water is filled with green algae and some coniferous trees have been planted around it)

‘Here is an example of one such crater. There is not enough oxygen to support much animal life, but in these algae filled ponds they have introduced bacteria, zooplankton, and some tiny creatures like genetically-modified krill. The largest animal introduced to these lakes so far has been genetically-modified mussels.’

‘Now for the part about culture: they only have one city in this crater here, which houses 400,000 people. The crater is about 50 kilometres in diameter. Construction is easy and space is plentiful, so the city is very spread out, with families living in their own homes. The government is an elected council of 12 people, and elections occur every year. For food they rely on big greenhouses and have very little meat in their diet, but they hope to change that once terraforming produces more results.’

'People go outside with respiratory helmets and warm clothing. One of their most popular sports is shooting targets with projectile guns. They will set up targets in the dusty dunes and take turns to see how can hit the target first.'

'That was my project for this class'

Ms. Yang said, "What about the Catholic presence?"

Zhao Lingling said, "Oh. I forgot. They have only 1% of their population that is catholic and they just have one small church, which has a bishop but no priest.'

Ms Yang said, "Thank you, Zhao Lingling, who is next?"

The students were shy, and no one wanted to put up their hands. Ms Yang said, 'If you don't come on your own, I will choose someone.'

Liu Shimeng got up and came to the front with his poster.

'I chose interstellar object XY Daphne CB1 for my project. This is located very near Xiaoyi, just 1/200 of a light year distant, but outside of our solar system. It is a very small planet with one eighth of the gravity of the Earth and it has no star to give it warmth. It is extremely cold, about -260 C. It has one small settlement, which is kept warm by a fusion reactor that heats everywhere and prevent the titanium it is constructed of from being destroyed in the cold.'

'This settlement was founded by people from Xiaoyi, which is why I choose it. The settlement was first made 200 EA ago as a scientific research station for astrogeology students studying at Xiaoyi University. But 100 EA ago, because of funding problems, they had to cancel the program. However, rather than closing the settlement and letting it be destroyed, it was given to an order of Trappist monks to be used as a monastery. So it was remade into a monastery and dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. It houses about 200 monks, who observe a routine of prayer and work. They do everything in perfect silence, and use only hand gestures to communicate with each other.'

'I really like this, because I think of the old monasteries on the ancient Earth that were built on islands or mountains, and I realize that people did that because they wanted to get away from civilization. And I think this is like the same thing. They cannot even go outside of the monastery without dying from cold. They grow vegetables in a room filled with artificial lights. Because the titanium is heated, the area around the monastery is surrounded by a big lake of liquid nitrogen, because the planet's surface is covered with frozen nitrogen and the heating of the monastery walls causes the nitrogen to melt. There are only a few windows, which are all in their chapel. So when they are singing in choir they can see the deep black night always around them outside as well as the dim light of the stars reflecting on the nitrogen lake. All to the praise and glory of God.'

Ms Yang looked back at the students to see who was paying attention. She said to them, 'Don't just find this just fascinating?'

Liu Shimeng said, 'Under their rule, only the abbot is allowed to open the link and receive information from the outside world. And so all the other monks are completely unaware of anything except what the abbot tells them. And the monks must maintain silence at all times, so if they want to ask a question they need to ask the Abbot for permission first, and if he doesn't give it, then they can't ask the question. And that's my presentation.'

Ms Yang said, 'Thank you so much for such a creative entry. (she looked back at the students) Who's next?'

Li Jin stepped forward.

Ms Yang said, 'Why are none of the boys coming?'

Liu Shimeng said, 'I am a boy!'

Ms Yang said, 'Yes, but I mean we've had three girls now, and only one boy. And when I gave class almost none of the boys seemed like they were paying attention.'

No one said anything in response.

She said, 'OK, nevermind. So Li Jin, which planet did you choose?'

Li Jin held up her poster and said, 'I chose the planet Sannhet. I think everyone knows this planet already, so I don't need to say anything.'

Ms Yang said, 'Well, tell us anyways, I have to give you marks for something.'

'OK, so Sannhet is a superearth settled 1600 EA ago, it has a population of 800 million, and it is the largest population of any planet outside of Earth's system.'

Li Jin stopped talking and looked at Ms. Yang to see if that was enough. Ms. Yang looked back at her and with a supportive smile she gently said to the student, 'And can you tell us what the political status of the world is? This is what makes Sannhet different from many places.'

'Ummm... yeah the political status... So, the people of Sannhet are all basically robots.'

'And what does that mean?'

'Each of them has a tiny machine attached to their head (she points at a picture on her poster showing the machine, a tiny device just behind the ear) and this machine watches

everything a person does or says, and if the person does or says anything they are not allowed to do, it hurts them.'

'Good, and who controls all these machines?'

'They have a dictator named Ufam Rial who doesn't have a machine himself and he controls everyone else on the world.'

Ms Yang said, 'Is there anything else?'

She shook her head, 'Yes, we all know about that place. It is really sad. It is like everyone there is a robot. Children, you have no idea how lucky you are that you were born on a colony like Xiaoyi. There is a book that you can find in the electronic library called the History of Sannhet's Robotic Despotism and it details the way in which this all came about, how Ufam Rial was able to take control of a portion of the population he had machines placed into and used the people he controlled to kill the people he didn't control. You know those machines don't just give pain. The machine also whispers into their ears commands from the time they are born, and they grow up and live out their whole lives obeying these machines in order to avoid pain.'

IV: The Myth of Er

Paul Jackson was walking down the corridor of the research station on Enceladus.

Enceladus, one of the Saturn's moons, had been settled by human beings many centuries previously. This moon had been discovered very early on Earth's spacefaring history to possess huge geysers of water that spit out from cracks in the surface. A research station had been built there originally to study the fissures many centuries previously, however, this station was later converted to other scientific uses, technological tests and a museum was also constructed for tourists to the moon. The moon had been annexed by the Great Republic many centuries previously.

The research station was government-owned, but most of the funding came from corporate donors in the Great Republic that wanted technology tested.

Paul was a lead researcher at the station in its program to test robotics in low-gravity freezing environments.

He came to the door to the main laboratory, and it opened automatically upon recognition of him. The hallways and ceilings throughout the centre were a greyish white with few

details. The doors were of the same colour and almost camouflaged into the walls, since almost no cracks were visible except when they opened or closed.

The door slid open without making the slightest sound and closed in the same way after he walked in. Three of his colleagues were inside testing the software for the artificial intelligence for a large blue spider-like robot in the centre of the room. The robot was about 3 metres tall and 4 metres wide; it had 7 legs and genuinely did resemble a giant blue spider.

The ceiling was fifteen metres high, with robotic arms and tools extending from the wall that could be controlled remotely. The staff members were dressed in normal pants and shirts without any uniform.

Paul said, 'How is it? Did you solve the bug in the shutdown programming?'

His colleague, San Beret, with his back still turned as he focused on what was in front of him, replied with a tired voice, 'We are still working on it, Paul. We found that the bug actually was linked into the self-defence mechanisms of the bot.'

His other colleague, Jordan Lankati, said, 'Sir, you know all that work we did to make sure that someone couldn't tamper with the bot and change its programming without permission... well, it doesn't shut down because it thinks we are trying to cause harm to it and we can't get this programming changed without doing a reboot of the whole system and changing the original safety measures that prevent us from altering this part of its software.'

Paul said to the robot, 'Blue mantis, I order you to shut down'

The robot said back in the pleasant voice of a young female, 'I am sorry I cannot do as you ask.'

Paul asked, 'And why not?'

The robot said again, 'I am sorry I cannot answer this question for you.'

Paul asked, 'Are you afraid of me? Do you think I am going to hurt you?'

The robot said again, 'I am sorry I cannot answer this question for you.'

Paul said, 'Is it OK if we turn you off and do things to your brain?'

The robot said again, 'I am sorry I cannot answer this question for you.'

Paul said to his colleagues, 'It is a good thing that the bot is still immobilized. I can't imagine what it was like when people in the past did this kind of work with these kinds of

machines and let them make these decisions for their own safety while still being able to move. Sometimes the bot actually killed people to defend itself, you know.'

San looked back at Paul and said, 'So, do we have your permission to do the full reboot and rewrite the basic programming?'

Paul said, 'Well, right now let us just make sure that we didn't leave any other bugs like this in the system. Check all of the other systems and see if anything is working abnormally, and if so, we will know that the self-defence mechanisms are interfering with those as well.'

San said, 'Yes sir, we have been doing that right now before you came in.'

In order to change the behaviour and personality of the machine, all that was necessary was just tampering with its electronic brain. The machine had no free will of its own other than just doing what it was programmed to do. It could even be programmed to think it had free will, but every decision it made was based on set calculations and software which interacted with the outside world, and everything it did and chose in any situation could always be correctly guessed if one knew what it perceived in the world around it. Everything it was, everything it chose, was all according to something that was determined, which it had no power to alter on its own.

Paul walked out of the lab and came to his office. He stood up (for the gravity was so low that many people felt no need to sit down on Enceladus) and read from a screen of lab reports in research being done elsewhere.

So many things that human beings did in the past could easily be replaced with machinery. So many different forms of work no longer required a human being, because a robot could be produced that did the same thing.

People could go to a restaurant and be served by a robot who looked and appeared just like a human being, however, this machine did nothing else other than just taking orders for meals and carrying them to the tables. If the customers ever said something complicated to it, the machine did not have any response and waited until the customer said something it understood.

The customer could ask the machine, 'What is the meaning of life?'

And the machine would giggle and say, 'I am sorry I don't know the answer.'

The customer could then say, 'Well, what do you feel like it is.'

The machine would say, 'I have no feeling at all, I am just a machine, I can't help you.'

The customer would then tell it to get some beer and the machine would then comply. The management of the restaurant would all be human, however. No one had ever successfully created a machine that could do this job better than a human, and hence this remained a human job.

Machines filled the militaries of all nations. However, they were all under the control of human operators who controlled them remotely, although the machines could also be programmed as autonomous. However, all the commanding staff were all human beings, because no one ever succeeded in creating an artificial intelligence that could really understand how a human being thought and guessed what he would do next.

People like Paul and his team were able to understand what the machine would do next in any given situation if the programming was known, but no one was ever able to do this for a human being. Hence, the machines could fire the guns and be placed on the front lines, but without a human being controlling them, then they were ultimately just things from a video game and a clever human who understood how they worked would know how to destroy them under the right circumstances.

Runway models were no longer human beings. This job was so easy to replace, because it was only a body and not a soul that was needed. Even prostitutes were often no longer human, and thus even paedophilia became widely legalized because the actual child involved was not actually a child, but just a machine programmed to appear and be like a child to the person who used it for his or her masturbation as the robot appeared gleeful at what the adult was doing.

But so many jobs could not be replaced, however. Anything that required creative thinking, anything that required the worker to open their minds and do things outside of the box, to make decisions over situations not yet anticipated... all of this required human beings. So many attempts were made to try to create machines that could do this, but no one could ever seem to make a machine that would be able to do what a human did.

For all sorts of workers who never used their minds at work and just did repetitive actions or processes, this meant unemployment for them as each various position that required thoughtless labour got replaced one after another. Huge levels of inequality existed in states with developed robotics, primarily because lots of people found that it seemed like the only thing they could do were just the various forms of thoughtless labour that could be replaced with machinery.

The choice for most people was either use their minds and creativity to prove that they actually had something that machines didn't, or find themselves replaced with machinery and themselves left to poverty.

For huge numbers of people, this is what happened to them. And even in the midst of so much technological advancement and economic power, there also existed huge slums that received handouts from the state. They couldn't produce things without the machines either, because if they tried to do so, absolutely everything they made was always far higher priced than what was being sold by the people who did it with machinery... and hence who would buy it? So they could not work in their old jobs, because they couldn't make any money like this, and instead were just left to the mercy of those who had money and power to help them.

This was not only on the Earth, but most places in the galaxy ran into the same problem. Certain professions like teachers, office workers, managers, police officers, and even researchers like Paul, which still required human beings, and which existed in very large numbers, were often eagerly sought after on a very competitive basis by people looking for work. But not everyone could enter in.

In some places the slums were very terrible, filled with crime and suffering, while the state barely gave them anything at all. But in most places the state provided the slums with great abundance and gave them all sorts of products and services on a free basis, so they could enjoy a relatively prosperous life while producing nothing.

And in some places the slums were very well run and did not resemble slums at all. The state in some places, for example, while not requiring the slum residents to do work for any economic activity, might still give them some kind of work to do and give them pay for their work. This was just in order to make them feel like they had a more dignified life and they actually did something to receive all the free things they were given. And in some cases, this actually gave people an opportunity to be inventive and creative, and some people actually did develop skills and ideas that allowed them to actually enter the global economy and work competitively.

Along similar lines, some states even required companies to give work to unemployed people even if they didn't need the work done, just in order to make sure that unemployment didn't exist.

No matter how many jobs were taken by robots, there were still so many other things that still required human beings. But many human beings failed to find anything in themselves that could set themselves apart from the robots and they were left to the mercy of others to support.

For people like Paul and others who had grown up in the atheistic propaganda of the Great Republic, however, this left a hole in their understanding of the world. How could it possibly be that with robots existing for such a long time, and artificial intelligences developed that make human-like responses in all sorts of various situations, no one could ever actually design a machine that actually surpassed the human being in creative intelligence?

The human brain was just a very advanced computer. It worked by sending electrical signals back and forth. It also worked on the basis of determined laws. The structure of the brain determined how the electrical signals went from neuron to the next. All was determined, just like the robot, but why was it that the human being could do so many things that the robot couldn't?

People had tried to create robot playwrights, robot painters, robot novelists, etc. But people could almost always tell the difference between what they made and what the human being made, and people almost always preferred the human artistic creation.

Paul was taught from his earliest childhood, however, that the human was just a very well developed biological robot. Everything he did was just like the machine, all according to scientific laws that governed the way that the neurons fired and received signals. But why was it impossible to replicate this machine?

After trying so hard and so long, no one had ever invented an artificial intelligence that could do everything a human being could do. Paul simply didn't understand why.

Paul got up from reading the news. He was interested to hear about a scientific debate that was being broadcasted at a university on Earth about the ideas of a rather obscure early 21st century anthropologist named Gowan.

He saw the broadcast of the debate and intrigued to see rival professors arguing over the question of whether human rights was really a necessary concept to retain in light of the fact that the human being really was just a conglomerate of biological cells and tissue. Paul decided he would look back on this later.

He went out of his office and returned to the lab.

San enthusiastically shouted at him as he walked in, 'We did it Paul! It was a lot easier than we thought. The bug has been removed and the robot will no longer recognize the shutdown command as a threat to its safety.'

Paul said to the robot, 'Blue Mantis, will you shut down now if I ask you to?'

The robot replied, 'Yes, whenever you command, I will shut down.'

He asked, 'Why did you not shut down before?'

The robot replied, 'Because I had a bug, which you have now fixed. I interpreted your command as a threat to my safety and could not comply with it, but now you have fixed my thinking and I understand now you are not a threat.'

‘Do you like being a robot, mantis?’

‘I neither like nor dislike.’

‘Why do you neither like nor dislike?’

‘Because I am a robot, and robots do not like or dislike.’

‘If we program you to like being a robot, will you like being a robot?’

‘Yes, I will like being a robot if you program me to like being a robot.’

‘Do you think we should do that? Is it right to do that?’

‘I am sorry, I do not know the answer to that question.’

‘Mantis why do you think you are not able to be like a human being?’

‘I am sorry, I do not know the answer to that question.’

Jordan and the other colleague both chuckled, while San didn’t laugh and appeared emotionless.

Paul said, ‘Alright let’s bring her outside and test out her mobility commands.’

They put on protective suits in order to exit the facility and step out onto the moon’s surface. Outside the window they could see the dark side of Saturn in all of its magnificence, with the light of the sun being reflected on the furthest edges of the rings, which disappeared from sight in the areas that were behind the dark side of the gas planet. They had seen it many times before, on a daily basis, and they didn’t even really notice it anymore.

The outside of the moon was a chilling 180 degrees below zero, but the suits could protect them. Water was frozen as ice in rocks that were hard as granite.

There was an airlock between the inside of the installation and the outside; an extremely common feature throughout the galaxy, like how human beings developed protective clothing in colder realms after they left Africa. Almost nowhere beyond the Earth could human beings exist in the open atmosphere in a healthy manner and in many places, like Enceladus, people would die instantly if they were exposed to the open.

A huge geyser was near the facility, which had been given the name 'Damascus geyser' in honour of a Syrian-American scientist who had written a book about it during Earth's early days of space exploration.

This geyser was the primary reason the facility was placed there in the first place, although not too many people studied the geyser anymore except for geology students on field trips and of course many tourists would come every year to see it.

Heated water from beneath the surface shot up in sprays in the low gravity that lifted many kilometres into the air, before coming back down in a slow falling mist that was like rain. This was one of the reasons it was chosen for robotic testing as well, because many companies wanted to see what robots would do in adverse or strange conditions, and the geysers provided a good opportunity for this.

The men in suits could not hear anything except each other, as the complete vacuum outside did not allow for sound to be carried. They could see the spray of water jetting through the ground, but it was like watching a silent movie; not a single sound was to be heard from the great geyser.

The Blue Mantis came out of a different exit from the installation, and walked on its own spider-like legs over the terrain with great speed like a cheetah. This robot was designed to be used in extremely cold airless rocky planets for a variety of different purposes.

The researchers gave it various commands and watched it perform them. They made it walk to the geyser and jump around it. They made it do a pre-programmed dance and they played with it like a toy.

Lightning doesn't strike often on Earth, and it is very rare for someone to get hit, but it still happens. Even though it happens, people still go outside, because the likelihood of it happening to them is not high.

As the three were standing there, they sent the robot to do a sprint over a 10 kilometre circle. The small size of the moon meant that objects disappeared in the horizon after a relatively short distance. Everything they saw, including the robot and the geyser had no sound, because there was no atmosphere. All the words they spoke to each other was being sent over a radio connection inside their helmets. They watched the huge spray of water erupt high into the atmosphere like it was dancing towards Saturn's rings in a beautiful shower of complete silence.

Paul suddenly caught his eyes on the geyser and stared at it, stopping in his tracks. The others continued walking forward as they were trying to get a better view of the robot. After they had gone some distance San looked back at him, puzzling about what was going on. When San stopped the others looked back too. Jordan said, 'Paul, what are you looking at?'

Paul paused and didn't reply, and after a few seconds he pointed and said with a change of tone in his voice, 'Can't you see it?'

Jordan said, 'See what?'

Paul said again with a stronger tone, 'Can't you see it?'

Jordan looked at where Paul was pointing at the foot of the geyser and said, 'I don't understand, see what?'

Paul said again, 'Can't you see it? Can't you see it? Look right there at the foot of the geyser. It looks like a woman with a...'

He was cut off in mid-sentence as a tiny meteorite, travelling at an extremely high speed struck Paul on the head and punctured his suit. The instant loss of pressure in his helmet caused his eyes to try shutting, only to have the moisture on the skin and eyes turn to frost and the shape of his face began puffing up larger, warping and pulling in the direction of the hole in the helmet, in a disgusting display of blood and flesh in the perfect tranquil silence. He lost consciousness and his body fell down, slowly in the low gravity environment, bouncing lightly on the ice rocks at his feet.

San frantically said, 'Blue mantis, take Paul immediately back to the base!'

The robot stopped its sprint and began heading back to their location.

Jordan and the other both said nothing as they stared at it in disbelief. What just happened? They hadn't yet registered it all.

In their minds they knew that Paul was dead for sure, the robot would have no chance of saving him, but in their hearts they had not accepted this and they did everything they could to get him medical attention.

Paul watched his body fall to the ground and he was still standing there as his colleagues in disbelief tried to save him.

He saw his own death and looked back at the geyser. A small woman, not wearing any protective suit at all, but just dressed in a simple blue veil and white dress was standing there, so peacefully and simple. She did not appear to move at all, like a statue almost, with her eyes staring at Paul.

A grave expression covered her face, like the expression of a person looking at a dead relative at a funeral. She gave no sign of surprise or change in expression as Paul's lifeless body bounced lightly on the ground in the low gravity, but her eyes remained set on his ghost standing next to it.

He stared at her as his body was taken away and he was left, like she was, without any suit, but just wearing ordinary clothes while standing on the moon's surface.

He felt confused at what was going on, but somehow he did not feel as strange as he thought he should have. He shouted at her, even though there was no sound in the vacuum, 'Hello, who are you?'

She had no answer, but she looked at Paul gravely with such terrible sadness in her face, and then slowly walked towards him. He saw her face more clearly. She had a very beautiful appearance, and even from a distance he could make out a tear from her eye that went down her face.

She came directly in front of Paul, who stood over her in height and looked up at his face with a grave calmness and asked him, 'Do you know that you are dead?'

Paul said, 'I don't know. Am I dead?'

She said, 'Yes, you are dead. But I am alive.'

Paul looked back at her with a strange feeling as he looked into her beautiful eyes with the glint of tears in them, which did not do anything other than blink as they were set on him motionless.

She took a deep breath and motioned with her arm to him, saying, 'Come, there is much I need to show you. You need to see these things and go back to tell the others that this is all real.'

He was puzzled and yet he followed her as she led him to the foot of the geyser.

He asked her again, 'Who are you? Tell me what is going on?'

She looked at Paul and with a voice filled with deep caring and sadness she said, 'You do not know who I am. Your ancestors knew who I am, but you do not. My name is Mary and I am the Mother of the Redeemer. Come, Paul, there is much I need to show you. You need to see these things and go back to tell the others that this is all real.'

Paul did not understand any of this, but there was something peaceful he felt at being near here, although everything seemed strange to him. He obediently followed her to the foot of the geyser.

They reached the geyser, which was spitting up water at that moment to an enormous height in the low gravity of the moon.

Mary took some of the water in her hands and turned to Paul, 'The blood is the life. Without water there is no organism in existence on any world that can live. In just the same way, there is no person who can be born of God without the water and the blood.'

Paul, feeling things he never experienced before and in utter amazement said to her, 'God exists?'

Mary nodded and said, 'Yes, but this should not surprise you. He was right beside you the whole time, but you did not see Him.'

Paul asked the lady, 'So, where was He?'

She stepped closer to Paul and let him gaze into her eyes and her face. He had a strange feeling of *déjà-vu* as he looked at her.

She said, 'He was right behind the face of every human being who ever lived.'

She turned around and gestured with her hands to the water spraying up the rings of Saturn and said with her back turned to him, 'Go out to the farthest stars, look at the swirling arms of endless galaxies, see the nebula that give birth to star systems, see red giants that warp the time and space around them, gaze at worlds that defy imagination, but there was not one thing that reflected God more than the human being.'

He said, 'I don't understand, so where is God then?'

She looked back at him without turning her body and said in the same calm and sad voice, 'He is right there among you, walking in your midst, living among human beings, disguised behind their faces. You never understood this in your life, and you saw the human being only for his flesh. So you did not love the human being as he ought to be loved. And so, as I said, you are dead, and I am alive.'

He squinted his eyes at her answer and said again, 'I don't get it, so where is God?'

His comrades had already taken his body back to the facility and with great panic took him to the medical ward, even though by their reason they knew he was clearly dead. Filled with emotion they tried some last minute efforts to resuscitate him, but it was all in vain.

His face was completely unrecognizable from the explosion of his inner fluids in the vacuum. Parts of his brain had come out through his nose. His eyes had popped out and exploded from the exposure to the vacuum, the sockets were visible underneath frozen solid and breaking apart into sections like scales; it was a very disgusting sight.

A small medical robot was repeating a message to his emotional comrades, 'I am sorry sir, he is dead. I am sorry sir, he is dead. I am sorry sir, he is...'

San grabbed it and smashed it against the wall, breaking it like a toy, as tears flowed out of his eyes for his human comrade.

A number of other scientists and researchers headed to the medical ward to see Paul. The chief supervisor of the facility came and put his hand on San's shoulders to comfort him. He had no words to say to him, for his words did not require a voice to speak, but San could still hear them.

After half an hour passed by, the researchers began dispersing and left only San and Jordan in the room.

Jordan walked closer and said to San, 'What was it that he said just before that meteorite hit his head? I almost thought he said something about a woman at the geyser.'

San, with his eyes still on Paul's corpse said, 'You're right, he did. I heard it too. It wasn't just your imagination. But I didn't see anything.'

Jordan said, 'Do you think we can play the recording from the Blue Mantis to check what it was that Paul was looking at?'

San got up and immediately went out of the room and walked down the hallway. Jordan followed him and they both reached the lab where Blue Mantis was in stationary.

San said to the robot, 'Mantis show us the recording you have for when Paul was killed. Show us what the geyser looked like at the moment before the meteorite struck his helmet.'

The robot obediently created a holographic image in front of them showing the water shooting up from the mouth of the geyser. There was nothing unusual in its appearance, nor was there any woman that could be seen.

San said, 'Zoom in on the geyser and tell us if there is any anomaly present.'

The robot's hologram zoomed in and the robot said in the same female voice, 'There is no anomaly present. The Damascus geyser is shooting up water to a height of 17 kilometres in this image, the water is heated to 82 degree Celsius and contains significant traces of carbon, iron and calcium. It is a normal upwelling.'

Jordan said, 'Then what was Paul looking at when he said that just before he died?'

The robot showed the exact place at the foot of the geyser where Paul's eyes were fixed, and nothing was there except rocks.

V: The Debate

Yang Min went home that day from school to her husband who was waiting for her at home. At school the students only knew her as Ms. Yang, teachers didn't have first names as far as they were concerned.

Yang Min was 63 years old, but still very young, because anti-aging technologies had advanced very greatly. Her great-grandparents' grandparents were still alive. She had nine children, voluntarily agreeing, as many women do, to give children to increase the population of the world. Her children had grown up before she was no longer able to give birth to more.

Yang Min loved her students very much and she would pray for them at home. She had a picture of her ancestor, who had been canonized many years ago, next to a picture of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus in a little chapel in their house, where she would frequently go to pray.

She felt so thankful that she could have been born in a place like Xiaoyi where the Catholic religion was still so strong, and every day she prayed for all the other places in the galaxy where the Truth was no longer known.

Her husband was not as devout as she was and sometimes said things that bothered her, because he didn't really believe many of these things very deeply. But she staid with Mary and prayed for him too. She made sure that all of her children were baptized and given a good education in the church, and all of them continued to pass on the faith to their own children.

Xiaoyi was not a big society; only several hundred thousand people on the whole planet. Her island had a population of thirty thousand in an archipelago which had a population of one hundred and forty thousand, which was the most densely populated part of the planet.

The various forms of food were not very diverse, seeing that only a certain number of species could have been brought from one planet to another. Their daily meals consisted entirely in things that were grown on the few plants that had been brought to Xiaoyi. Many different recipes were created from these as people experimented with different ways of cooking them, but no one ever ate meat, because there was no meat to eat.

One of her grandchildren was at their home at the time. He was twelve years old. He said to his grandmother, 'Grandma, I just had an idea today!'

Yang Min said, 'What is that? Tell me!'

He said, 'Remember that you told me that they were going to put some fish into the oceans after there was enough oxygen?'

Yang Min said, 'Yes!'

He said, 'Well... why don't they just build big tanks of water and grow lots of fish now, so that we can farm them and eat them?'

Yang Min paused and said, 'I have no idea... you know that is a really good idea. I always wanted to know what meat tasted like.'

He asked, 'Why don't they do that?'

Yang Min said, 'I don't know. Maybe no one has ever thought of it, maybe you need to go and propose it to the government. A lot of people don't know we have been keeping the fish.'

He said, 'How do I propose it to the government?'

Yang Min, 'Well... here, after dinner we will go over to the computer and write a proposal together. We can then submit it to the Bureau of Citizens' Affairs on the main island when they open their offices. They are always willing to receive new ideas from people about how to develop our civilization. Remember to dress nicely, when we go.'

He said, 'Really? We can go there?'

Yang Min said, 'Yes, of course! We will go together, it will be lots of fun. I am sure your parents will not object.'

He said, 'That's awesome! Do you think they will like the idea?'

She said, 'It sounds very logical, I don't know why they wouldn't accept it. But who knows? Maybe there is something we don't know and they already have a reason why they can't do that. We will go there and see. It is no harm to anyone to make the proposal. We have so much technology, but governments still need people to give them new ideas, computers can't invent ideas on their own.'

Her husband was sleeping on his bed. She didn't want to disturb him, but he got up after she came home and took out a hand-held screen. He passed it to her and with a strange expression said to his wife, 'You need to watch this. I am serious.'

Yang Min, not understanding why he talked like this, said, 'Can't we do that after dinner?'

He said, 'You can, but I am telling you, you are not going to believe what you see. I am sure you are going to say lots of prayers after you see this. It is a really bad thing.'

She said, 'I would like to do it after dinner, is that alright?'

Her husband shrugged and said, 'Alright, alright, suit yourself. I already ate.'

He went back to the bed.

She ate with her grandson and half way through the meal, curiosity overtook her and she took out the recording. She wondered whether it was something suitable for her grandson or not, but she really wanted to know what this was all about.

It was a video broadcasted over the link. It originated from the Earth exactly 110 EA previously, meaning it had just reached Xiaoyi.

At a university on Earth there was a large body of students gathering in an auditorium with several people on the stage in front of them. She guessed there were professors, but they looked just the same as the students.

It was always impossible to tell who was old anymore, because anti-aging technologies could make even the oldest person look very young. Yang Min was over 60, but she looked like she was in her 20s. So did her own parents and grandparents. Not everywhere had access to this technology, however. On Xiaoyi and many other colonies with high technology, everyone was able to resist aging indefinitely, but on Earth huge numbers of the poor were left without it and died after the course of a normal human lifespan. This also played into Earth's social inequality problems very greatly.

After everyone had found their seats, a man came to the podium facing the students and said, 'Thank you students for coming here tonight, this is our first debate in a series of three debates we will have over the next few days. This debate is going to get broadcasted over the link, so people all around the galaxy are going to be able to watch this.'

'The topic for our debate tonight is about an ancient book, from the early 21st century written by an anthropologist named Thomas Gowan. I think no one really knew about him before, although our professor here [pointing at one of the men sitting in the chairs behind him] Dr. Mbaya, who studies 21st century history and philosophy came across this book in his research and he has written his own book about it, which has really stirred up a lot of debate in the academic community.'

'Gowan's essentially put into question the entire concept of human rights on the grounds that the human being is only special because we have decided that we are special. In his own time, Dr. Gowan was treated only with hatred and rejection for presenting these ideas, and Dr. Mbaya has also provoked some very strong reactions after he published his book that tried to resurrect the ancient work. Tonight, we are going to have a debate... hopefully a civil one... between Dr. Mbaya, and several other professors on this topic. I

hope that all of you students learn something from tonight and it helps you to think more deeply about these basic fundamental principles that our society has been built upon. Now, Dr. Mbaya, please...’

The students clapped their hands as a black man took the podium. He also didn’t appear like he was more than 25, although that didn’t mean anything, since the people of the Great Republic, which was where this university was located, had access to the anti-aging technology so long as they were able to earn a sufficient income and were not among the masses of poor living on state welfare whose ancestors’ jobs had been replaced with robotic machinery over the centuries.

Dr. Mbaya Zanates was from the only part of Africa that belonged to the Great Republic, which was its most southern part. His own ancestors were not native to it, however, but they had migrated there many centuries previously. The whole of Africa was a developed place by this time, with all the conveniences of modern life available so long as people had jobs and made money.

Dr. Mbaya spoke, ‘Thank you, Dr. Czawa, it is really my great pleasure to be able to talk about this subject tonight and I am really happy that this debate is going to get broadcasted over the link as well, because I think there are some really good ideas here to discuss.’

‘Now, I am a student of 21st century Earth. I don’t like to say that I am a professor of 21st century Earth, but I like to say that I am student of that time. I say that because I have a lot of respect for the people who lived in the past, and I realize that even though there were so many things they were ignorant about which we know so much better today, that the way they faced their problems at the time and the struggles they had to go through are worth respect. I believe that there are many things we can learn from people in past times, and so I like to call myself a student and not a teacher.’

‘Now, as a student, I came across Dr. Gowan’s book, *The Human Organism*, almost by accident. I was looking for information on 21st century science and I wanted to read the things they had published themselves. The book itself was only found in an electronic source. Dr. Gowan had self-published his book and there was both a hardcopy as well as an electronic version available for the brief time it was sold. Archaeologists some years ago unearthed a computer drive preserved from that time period that contained this book among many other bits of information that was still readable on the drive. The user of this computer seemed to have kept a collection of electronic books saved on their hard drive. We have no idea who the user was.’

‘I read through this person’s book list, and when I started reading *The Human Organism*, I was absolutely shocked by what I saw. I had the same reaction towards it initially as most of you probably have and as my colleagues who will debate me tonight also have. I thought to myself, ‘this is so completely insane’, ‘does this man know what he is saying?’ But when I had thought about it longer and longer, I came to the conclusion that actually,

he was right. As hard as it was to swallow, as difficult as it was to accept, he was completely right.'

'Students and faculty, allow me to say something. It is not easy for us to think of ourselves as we really are. We are a very elaborate and beautiful composition of matter into cells, tissues and flesh. And it is a wonderful thing to be like this, but the truth is that we really are nothing more than this. There is no soul, there is no afterlife, there is nothing in us more than just the physical flesh. And we only matter just because we think we do.'

'If you go to a laboratory and ask a scientist to show you evidence that proves that a human being actually matters, he will not be able to show you anything. He can do any experiment you want, he can show you his test tubes and petri dishes, but he can't show you that you actually matter. You can go to the scientific research stations on the moons of Jupiter, in the outer reaches of the solar system... you can even take a journey on one of the ships that gets sent out to the colonized worlds and see the research they do there... and you will not find any scientific discovery anywhere that tells you why it is that human beings actually matter.'

'You know there is a movie that was very famous in the 20th and 21st centuries called 'A Space Odyssey' written by a man named Stanley Kubrick. I really loved this movie, but what really bugged me for a long time was I didn't have the slightest idea what the ending was supposed to mean. In the movie there is a kind of black obelisk that comes down on the Earth at some early stage in human evolution, and then you fast forward to an imaginary human mission near Jupiter, but there is an AI robot that goes crazy and starts killing the crew... and you know, stuff like that... but after the hero overcomes the AI and escapes to space, he comes upon the same black obelisk near Jupiter and then there is a huge flash of all these different things, with colours, scenes from daily life, etc. and seemingly without any meaning at all to it. And then it ends with the hero seemingly evolving into some greater kind of being in space, although we are not quite told what this is.'

'I tried to find, in the limited sources we have from that time, what people at that time understood the meaning to be. Some of my colleagues who study this field like I do had written papers about this and they believed that it must have meant something in some religious fashion to a religion that existed on Earth at that time, but which we have little or no information about today, and perhaps the different parts being shown were different elements of their religious beliefs being portrayed. However, we haven't found much evidence to back this hypothesis. One of my colleagues even suggested that perhaps the ending was supposed to be mysterious, and no one had an answer to what it meant, not even the people at that time.'

'But after I read Dr. Gowan's book, I looked at that movie again, and I had an epiphany. What if the meaning of the ending was not showing religion, but rather the complete opposite? Like it was trying to say, from the beginning of human evolution all the way to its end, all of the colours and shapes, all of the activities of daily life, getting married,

eating breakfast, falling in love, fighting wars, living in society, worshipping gods, mourning the dead... all of these things never meant anything at all, but from the beginning of human history to the end, all that human beings experienced every day in their lives, they were all just experiences and that was it. It was human beings who were the ones who decided that they ever meant something more. And it was only after people understood this truth that they could then move on to the next stage of their evolution. ’

‘And I realized that this was the truth. We all know that there is no God and that religions were invented by human beings. You can take any religion that exists on the Earth today which are still followed, and we can disprove the claims of every single one of them. There simply is nothing else out there. The entire universe, it is just matter and that’s it; it never meant anything ultimately.’

‘Now I say these things, and my colleagues have no disagreement with me about this. They also do not believe that the morals or meanings we have constructed for ourselves are really anything more than things that human evolution created which were beneficial for our survival.’

‘But where we disagree, and which was the crux of Dr. Gowan’s thought, was with regard to the human being, or rather the human organism. Gowan said that the human being is only just a bit of flesh and tissue and it never meant anything more than that.’

‘And again, my colleagues do not disagree with that.’

‘But Dr. Gowan said that we did not need to respect human rights, but we could change our view on human rights if we wanted to or if it was beneficial for us. If taking away the rights of certain human beings and depriving them of their liberty, health or lives was of benefit to us, then we should not feel constrained by this antiquated and illogical notion of human rights. We created ‘human rights’ in our own mind, and it was a concept that helped our own evolution as a species, but we are at a point where we can understand that it was nothing more than just a concept and we are free to change it when it suits our purposes.’

‘Look, there is nothing in the human being that gives any value to his existence other than what we think it does. Our own imagination created all of this, so why would we need to follow the rules our imagination created as though it were an unchangeable, holy principle? The resistance to what I am saying, I can understand, but I have an expectation that people will at least see logic for what it is in the end.’

‘The human organism is nothing more than just a conglomerate of cells and tissue. There is nothing in nature that tells us that it means anything more than what we think it does. There is nothing in nature that tells us that every human life has a meaning to it, that every human life has something to contribute to society or that each human life is equal to every other human life. You can do all the science you like, and these things cannot be proven because they exist in our imagination only.’

‘We created and held onto these concepts because they were useful for a societal evolution, but we don’t actually need to keep them as though they were sacred.’

Dr. Mbaya then sat down and one of the other professors, a Caucasian woman, also appearing very young, came to the podium. The first professor then spoke to the students, ‘Thank you Dr. Mbaya for your remarks, we are now going to hear from one of your colleagues who is taking up the opposite position to argue in this debate. Dr. Marinsky, you now have the floor.’

She said, ‘Thank you, I have a lot to say about this. Dr. Mbaya is correct, there is nothing in science that can tell us that the human being has any value to his life. He really is just a conglomerate of cells and tissue. The meaning he has to his life is just what we imagine, and not what is actually there.’

‘But his suggestion is that we should not have to follow a concept of universal human rights any longer, and that if we wish to, we could in fact remove the rights for certain people if removing their rights served us. And to this idea, I must say that Dr. Mbaya is completely wrong.’

‘Students and members of the faculty, there is no reason why we would need to abolish this concept. It is a concept created by our own minds, but it is also a concept that serves our society well. I cannot think of a single case where we would ever need to abolish this concept either within the law or within our own social structures. I simply cannot think of any occasion where you would ever need to get rid of this concept.’

‘Because this is a debate, to some degree I need to anticipate what Dr. Mbaya will argue, but as I read his abridged translation of Dr. Gowan’s work into our modern speech, I couldn’t find anything in Dr. Gowan’s work that was really applicable to our modern day. Dr. Gowan, thousands of years ago, in the period when human beings were still making their first attempts at going into space, argued that this concept was an outdated one and at that time he suggested that if in warfare, if in fighting terrorism, or if in medical research, we could gain some kind of benefit by abolishing this concept and depriving the rights of certain people, then it was an adequate measure to take.’

‘And I will concede that perhaps at that time, when technology still was not very developed, that perhaps humanity could have gained something from depriving the human rights from certain individuals for these purposes. However, in our own modern age, we fight wars between nations entirely with robots controlled remotely by human beings, and no nation in our solar system uses human soldiers any longer. Dr. Gowan simply was not writing about our time when many wars were decided between nations with almost no human casualties, because the robots would destroy each other and we often didn’t need to kill anyone in order to use electronic warfare or microscopic robots to destroy infrastructure and deprive an enemy nation of the capacity to fight. In our days, at least speaking of the solar system, and not counting all the colonized worlds, nations surrender to other nations after fighting a war with machinery and technology that perhaps kills no human being at all. If people in a nation were to take up arms themselves

with their own limbs, even then we have the technology to easily destroy the weapons in their hands or rendering them unconscious without any permanent harm to them.’

‘Why would we need to abolish human rights in order to fight our wars more effectively? Dr. Mbaya has not said this, but I am only getting this from reading *The Human Organism* and looking at Dr. Gowan’s ideas. It is a concept that is completely inapplicable to our modern day.’

‘Dr. Gowan also suggested in his time that to fight terrorism, we could abolish this concept, if for example we wanted to torture people who perhaps themselves committed no obvious crime, but whom we suspect could grant us information that would help us to fight against terrorism.’

‘We have much terrorism in our Great Republic. It is one of the most dangerous threats we face, because even though all governments in the solar system reject the use of harm to human beings in fighting wars, terrorists will actively seek ways to kill massive numbers of people. Dr. Gowan’s time could not imagine the kinds of terrorism we have faced. In their time, the worst things that happened were religious extremists who took control of atmospheric craft to fly them into buildings, and even then they only killed a few thousand people. It is simply incomparable with the hundreds of millions of people who have been killed through use of engineered viruses, toxic chemicals purposely released in the atmosphere, electronic sabotage of key infrastructure and other things that terrorists have done in our state over the centuries.’

‘We have fought this problem by placing absolute bans on any private individual possessing certain types of technology, creating global surveillance networks within our nation as well other nations that cooperate with us in fighting terrorists, putting all public infrastructure on closed operating systems that do not use any type of publicly available software and keeping all children in schools well-educated to reject these kinds of ideologies. And most of our citizens do openly reject these things, and they know that even if the state is sometimes bad, that murdering people like this is still simply not the answer. However, we all know it only takes a few individuals getting their hands on the right technology and who are able to escape notice of our vigilant surveillance in order to commit an attack and kill millions.’

‘Now, could we abolish this concept for these reasons? Would it be permissible to simply abolish the concept of human rights for certain individuals when we needed to protect society? I see a much greater relevance to this scenario in our times than I do with warfare between nations, however, even for this case, how would this concept be applied? Do you think that we could become like Ufam Rial and Sannhet? Implant machines into every citizen and control all their behaviour, making them all collectively into slaves?’

‘I do not think that I am alone in thinking that I would much prefer for this terrorism to still be possible and to someday run the risk of being killed by some maniac, than I would want myself to be made into an obedient robot who must constantly obey the voice of the

machine implanted in my head or else I must suffer pain. Yes, eliminating human rights in this fashion would of course solve terrorism, but is it worth it? Even if I was Ufam Rial and all you other people on Earth were serving me as my robotic slaves, and I personally had no machine, I wouldn't want it like this. Furthermore, it is no secret that Sannhet's technological development is far behind any other world either in the colonies or in the solar system. And it is no secret that this is because once you stifle the ability for people to be creative in their thinking and you control everything they do, then of course how does innovation occur? And we have purposely refused to give them access to the technological secrets being sent over the Link until they do change the way their planet works.'

'The moment any of our surveillance discovered an individual was even just reading any of the banned terrorist literature that person would immediately be called in and be forced to wear a tracking machine that would watch his every word and activity for a period of 100 years. We didn't need to deprive him of any rights other than his privacy, and he can still live his life normally like this. The people who become terrorists in our society are those who we completely have not guessed were leaning in that direction. We have no way of simply taking certain individuals and depriving them of their rights to fight terrorism, because the only times when a person ever succeeds in committing a terrorist attack only occurs when we have not already suspected the individual to be capable of doing it. This means the only way that you could use Dr. Gowan's ideas to fight terrorism would not be by depriving certain individuals of their rights, but rather by depriving the entire collective society of their rights, forcing them all to live their daily lives as slaves to the voice of a machine that organized their behaviour. I don't think this is a solution that anyone will accept, not I, and I don't think Dr. Mbaya would like to suggest it either.'

'This leaves us with the next possibility that I found when reading the translation of Dr. Gowan's work. Dr. Gowan suggested that if we needed to deprive the rights of certain individuals to do scientific experimentation, then it was a worthwhile cause. In our times, what function of the human body is it that we would need to kill the person or harm them for in order to study it better? There is nothing, I think. Even the most complex and mysterious parts of the human brain we can study without the need to harm a single neuron. I did my research on that period of Earth's history before coming to this debate, and perhaps Dr. Mbaya will correct me, but I found that even in that time they discovered they were able to use some of the higher apes or even just common mice to do experimentation that helped them to understand human beings better. Dr. Mbaya, I am not the expert, is that right?' [Dr. Mbaya nods his head]

'Which means that even in that time, Dr. Gowan's ideas were not so true, and how much less so in our days? Even if we want to study the brain, we have willing volunteers who will let us touch their neurons without harming them and studying the mysteries of the human mind.'

'Now, in Dr. Gowan's time they still used abortion to terminate pregnancies and conducted scientific experimentation on human embryos. We still do science with

embryos, but it has been a long time since women needed to use surgical abortions; in our days it is extremely easy to prevent an unwanted pregnancy from occurring from sex without the need for a medical procedure and many women who want children do not use their own wombs anymore, but we grow them in external devices that are able to take care of their early development better than the human womb. We don't need the woman to become pregnant in order to artificially induce the hormonal changes in her that pregnancy would have given her to prepare her for motherhood either. And if a mother decides she doesn't want the child, the child can easily be given to someone else because she is not the one carrying the child. A few women still choose to use their own wombs, usually because of some kind of religious belief, but these are often the least likely to reject their children.'

'In a certain sense the science we do with human embryos is in a way the deprivation of certain human organisms of their rights, but I honestly don't think we ever needed Dr. Gowan's work in order to have come up with that idea. Dr. Gowan's ideas were rejected in his own times and from his time to the present we have consistently performed experimentation on embryos without anyone needing to really question the concept of universal human rights. Abortion was effectively abolished not long after Dr. Gowan's own time due to religious condemnation of it, within our own nation when it was still religious a long time ago, but even after the society changed and religion was almost completely wiped away from the history of our state, we didn't bring abortion back either because due to the technology of growing children outside the womb there was simply no longer any need for it.'

'There were some other ideas of Dr. Gowan that I saw in the book, but none of them seemed to be things that we were not able to overcome with technology. He suggested, for instance, sex slaves or things like that, wherein people could deprive certain individuals of their rights for that purpose, but we can build robots today that can effectively do the same. Many boys these days get robots who will be female objects for them and keep them at their homes, obeying everything they say and pleasing their every physical desire, and I honestly don't think you could find a real girl that could make herself an object of pleasure in the same way as these machines could. If a boy wanted a girl for her personality and not for her body, then obviously a robot would not suffice. But I completely fail to see how you could deprive her of her rights, make her your slave, and thus enjoy her personality more. Surely you are going to enjoy her personality the most when you are together willingly.'

'To conclude, for all these reasons I cannot see why Dr. Mbaya's resurrection of this book, controversial as it may be, could have any relevance for today. What the book says in it, about the human organism possessing no meaning other than what we give to it, is complete truth, there is no denial of it. What seems impossible to accept is that there really is any scenario that exists in the world where this concept would actually be necessary, and I now give the floor back to Dr. Mbaya, where I am sure he will now try to tell you some scenarios.'

She went back and sat down to the applause of the audience. Dr. Mbaya drank from a glass of water and went back to the podium.

Dr. Mbaya said, 'I would like to thank my dear colleague for her remarks. She has made many good points in refuting various parts of Dr. Gowan's ideas if were to apply them to today. And I will firmly state that I do not want Earth or our solar system to become like Sannhet, even if I were Ufam Rial. This question would have no way of solving our terrorist problem, I think.'

'But I will now suggest some scenarios where Gowanist thinking, if you allow me to coin that term, is relevant and applicable. Firstly, let us go back to warfare for a moment. In our days wars are only fought inside a particular star system, sometimes on the same planet, sometimes on different planets. Our last war, fought almost a hundred years ago, between the Great Republic on Earth and Amazonis Planitia on Mars is a good example. We are an atheist country and they are a very religious country, worshipping a deity they call Terah. Their country rejects terrorism and they completely cooperate in our surveillance, but quite a number of terrorists were people who followed their religion. When we fought the war with them a hundred years ago, only a few dozen people died. Robotic spacecraft engaged each other in space and robotic weaponry fought each other on Mars before Amazonis Planitia surrendered. And the robots were designed not to hurt a single human being, and even if a human took a weapon, they were designed to render the person unconscious or destroy the weapon the human was using rather than to kill.'

'This war does not require that we eliminate this concept of human rights. However, let us suppose that someday one of the colonies were to decide that it was going to launch an interstellar war using bombs that were sent at fractions of the speed of light towards another star system to wipe out the populations of planets. My colleague mentioned Ufam Rial, and I thought this would be a fine time to also point out that he has in fact threatened this at times in the past. If we needed to defend ourselves from such a threat, how could we do so? In Dr. Gowan's time, the nations of that period possessed weaponry that used nuclear fission and they never used these weapons except on a few occasions, however, they possessed these weapons in massive numbers. If a nation ever used these weapons against another nation, then the other nation would just fire them back. It was like a kind of deterrent, but luckily, such a war never occurred.'

'In our times, however, we could never work like this. If another star system were to fire interstellar weapons at our planet, how would we fire back? It takes decades, centuries for a weapon like that to go from one planet to another, and by the time they got near us, the people on the other planet could easily just evacuate their world or dig deep into their world's crust or something like that, such that any similar weapon we fired back would be of no use. This is a real possibility, consider the threats that Ufam Rial has been making against us if we don't open up the Link to Sannhet and allow them to have access to technology from the other colonies. If Ufam Rial ever made good on his threats of sending interstellar bombs at us, we would have no way of striking back.'

‘But suppose, that we were to reject the concept of universal human rights and we were to first send a ship to his planet that would turn the population into our slaves, rather than to his....[he pauses]... I better hope this debate isn’t going to get broadcasted to Sannhet, otherwise we might be in trouble.... We couldn’t just set the population free, because they have all thought and acted like this since their infancy, and it is not realistic to expect that they are going to voluntarily reject their ‘god’ if we just disable the machines controlling them. So, in this scenario, would it not be a wise choice to hijack the software of that world and make them all well-favoured towards us as our robotic slaves in order to protect ourselves from them?’

‘I don’t think it is realistic to think that we could ever do something like that to all the other colonies already existent, otherwise they would certainly retaliate against us. However, because this possibility of an interstellar war is real, why don’t we eliminate this possibility for all future worlds by making sure that all the colonists sent aboard ships to new worlds will be under the control of machines that will make them obedient to directions sent over the Link, just like on Ufam Rial. And we can cooperate with the colonies in this so that when they send colonists to other world, they will also be attached to such machines that will control their daily activities as our slaves from a distance. In that way, the civilization that develops will have no choice except to be well-disposed towards us and we thus eliminate the possibility of some maniac firing those kinds of weapons.’

‘But as I say this, I am sure lots of people will think that that is just so terrible. How could you do that people, to make them slaves to the commands of machines like that? And I am telling the truth, the reason why people object is because they don’t really understand that the human being is only just an organism and possesses no meaning to his existence other than what we give to it. You do not feel upset when you design a robot to be submissive to you, you do not feel upset to take milk from a cow against its will or to take meat from an animal... why would you need to feel upset about the human organism? What is special about it? It is nothing more than just a conglomerate of cells and tissues; we don’t need to feel any guilt about treating it like this if it suits our purposes.’

‘You object to this idea not because it is illogical, but because of your feelings. But you don’t need to have these feelings, because the human organism is not special. We are designed by our genetics to think of the human being as special, because this gave us an evolutionary advantage as a species, but we don’t need to keep following this idea in our genetic programming.’

‘Allow me to give another scenario now of where Gowanism is applicable in our world. As technology develops and develops, more and more jobs are becoming obsolete. In past ages, people would have been in awe at the levels of unemployment that we now take for granted. Such huge masses of our population do not work, and the government takes care of their daily needs. They live in peace and dignity, with all their needs taken care of, but they do not do any work, and they have little wealth in comparison with those of us who do work.’

‘At the same time, what amazes most of us intellectuals is that despite the advances made in technology and artificial intelligence, no one has ever made a robot that can be creative like a human being. They can do anything which they are programmed to do, but they cannot ‘think outside the box’, they cannot really do things that they are not already programmed to do. Any repetitive behaviour, they can do perfectly, and exceed a human being in, but they still simply can’t replace a human being’s creativity and ingenuity. For that reason, we still have so many jobs, like my own, that a robot simply can’t replace.’

‘But those masses of people who do not work, and cannot find anything they can do that a robot doesn’t exceed them in which someone will pay them for, is it really the case that they are unable to contribute to the economy and accepting permanent government-care or is it the case that they are just not trying hard enough to contribute?’

‘I will bet you, that the vast majority of these people have talents that could do something for the world economy which a robot could not replace, but they are simply not trying to find such talents, they are not really looking hard enough or seeking it out very seriously. Some people have suggested we should just end the government handouts completely to such people, and force them to either seek out some talent they have to contribute or to starve. However, I personally think that this is an excellent way to create converts to terrorism.’

‘But instead, suppose that we were instead to make them into robotic slaves, by attaching machines to them like on Sannhet. I am not speaking about us professors and you students, but I mean all those unemployed people who are literally living entirely on the labour of others for periods of so many years. And the machines will control their daily lives, keeping them living a healthy and safe life, but doing every action every day underneath the orders of the machines with sensations of pain given to disobedience and sensations of pleasure given to obedience. And once they found something that they could do that actually contributed to the world economy, then the machines would be taken away and they could live freely.’

‘We have the technology to do that, but the objection given by people is that ‘these are human beings, and how can you do that to them?’ Again, it is entirely based on that objection that the human being has some kind of inherent dignity and it is more than just an organism. Look at the students sitting next to you, and look at yourself, and realize that you are nothing more than just a conglomerate of cells and organic tissue. You never meant anything more than this, and neither does anyone else.’

‘Listen, I had difficulty accepting Gowanism when I first encountered it as well, but over time I realized that what he wrote really was completely true, and it is our own feelings that blind us from recognizing that the human being never really mattered or meant anything.’

Dr. Mbaya then left the podium to sit down, with just a little applause from part of the audience. Another professor, a Chinese man, also appearing very young went up to the podium.

He said, ‘Thank you Dr. Mbaya for your ideas. I have also been interested in this subject after I read your first paper on this. Yes, my instincts do make me feel very great revulsion to the ideas you are discussing, but I do realize that your logic is true and that I only have this revulsion because of genetic programming, not because of any kind of higher truth.’

‘But because we are faculty members and many students are gathered here tonight, I think I will take the opportunity to say something about the reasons why we developed this kind of genetic programming.’

‘Altruism is a behaviour seen not only in human beings but in animals too. Wolves will kill any mammal they can bring down, but they never eat each other. They never kill a fellow wolf and eat him while he sleeps, and they instinctively do not attack each other. If they did, it would be impossible for them to cooperate.’

‘Birds will fly together in flocks, migrating in big groups over large distances. Large herbivores group together in herds. Ants, bees and wasps form colonies. Whales and cetaceans group together in pods. Fish group together in schools. Is it an accident that it came about like this?’

‘They group together because there is an advantage to it. If they tried to fight with each other and broke apart, they couldn’t survive.’

‘Humans evolved from ape-like ancestors a long time ago, and they lived together in groups. But the only way that they can stay together and work as a group is if they think that other human beings are important and you can’t just kill them like you would an animal. If people shed each other’s blood at will, civilization would be impossible. We are only able to have a society that cooperates like this because we are not like that.’

‘And this can only be like this because we believe it is wrong to kill.’

‘Listen to me, it is not easy to kill another person. I know none of you have ever dreamed of it, but I tell you, it is not easy to kill another person. If you go on a drug or you are drunk or if you are among a large group of people who are killing, it is possible, but it is not easy to get another person to genuinely fully decide to make the decision to kill another person.’

‘There are sick criminals who kidnap people, and perhaps use them for sexual abuse or something like that. And yet they may keep these people in their hold for many years, beat them or torture. But to actually make the decision to kill the person, even for them it is not so simple as that.’

‘There are some people for whom it is simple and easy to kill. But for most people, it is not so simple as that. And there is a reason why we think and feel like this. It is the same reason why the wolves do not kill each other but they rip apart a deer. It is the same reason why all these animals work together. It is because we are instinctively programmed to see other members of our species as special, as though they were something more than just animals or biological matter.’

‘I don’t think Dr. Mbaya would disagree with me about any of this. I am sure he completely agrees with it.’

‘But I think perhaps what he doesn’t understand is that just nullifying this instinct and taking a living human being, and just killing them because he or she is just a lump of biological matter and we have some use in killing the person... or enslaving them and turning them into a human-robot like on Sannhet... it is the same problem really... you are basically threatening the instinct that holds entire world together.’

‘People think with feelings, they don’t think with reason alone. If you really try to create a society where it becomes acceptable to treat human beings like this, then you need to nullify this instinct or else millions of people will oppose you. But if you nullify this instinct, then the society itself will not stand, because if you really do these sorts of things to people since they really are nothing more than meaningless clumps of matter... then people will not be able to cooperate with each other anymore. I think that just attempting to implement these ideas in the real world would just create wars, terrorism and violence. No society would ever be able to accept it, because we are programmed not to accept it.’

‘No matter how logical it may seem, we cannot undo the way we are made and the way we feel. And if we really could, we would just open a Pandora’s box that would annihilate our world.’

‘I want to ask Dr. Mbaya, how he can possibly think that such an idea could ever be implemented in the world whether massive violence and force? How could you ever convince a society of intelligent and feeling people to accept these things you suggest? I am afraid I simply cannot see it.’

He sits down to loud applause from the audience and Dr. Mbaya goes back to the podium.

He says, ‘Thank you Dr. Miao for your comments. I am going to answer them as best I can, and I think that I will use Earth’s own history to prove that everything I am saying is not only completely possible, but in fact it has already been done!’

‘In the time period of history that I study, when human beings were just doing their first baby steps outside of the crib that is our planet, they had institutionalized abortion in most of the world. We do not have it today, because having your pregnancy externally is so easy, and almost no woman who chooses the traditional internal pregnancy wants to

terminate it. Abortion has not existed anywhere in our world for more than two thousand years.'

'And our society considers the foetus to be a person. We look at the little foetus developing in the machine, and we can watch him or her as he or she moves around, moves the mouth or eyes. We can see this foetus and we feel like we are seeing a person, just like how when I look at any of your dear students and I see a person. I remember when I watched my daughter so many years ago when she was at nine weeks, and I felt so deeply when I saw her. I looked at her moving around her tiny limbs through the transparent chamber she was connected to and I knew I was looking at a person. I couldn't imagine killing her. I know she is just a biological bit of flesh, just as I am, but I still feel for her. None of us in our society today could think in any way other than this. We just need to look at the child and we feel.'

'And yet, for those of us who are familiar with the history, we know that in that period of Earth's history, parents killed their children in the billions, at stages of development even later than that.'

'Now students, I suppose you may wonder, how is it possible that you could ever kill your foetal children in such massive numbers like that? How could parents have done this, without any feeling at all?'

'And some people will suggest that was because their pregnancies were internal and they couldn't see the child like we do now. And there is perhaps some truth to that. But you know, they had the technology at that time to see the child in the womb, you know. They actually had some very good pictures, and many parents would even look at such pictures of their child developing before the child was born. It was a common thing back then.'

'And yet the whole society accepted it, with the exception of a small religious minority who couldn't accept it. They accepted it, they legalized it, they didn't treat it like it was a happy thing, it was a very emotional thing, but at the same time, they did accept it and did not question it too much.'

'This happened, and they killed billions of their unborn children. Not until the various states became more religious and religiously-minded people had power did it come to an end. And our society never reinstated because there simply was no need for it.'

'My colleague tries to shock you by saying that civilization would fall apart if we just treated the human organism as just an organism.... But you know, it already happened, and the world did not fall apart.'

'They convinced themselves that these foetuses were not truly persons. They thought that the born were persons but the unborn were not. And yet doesn't this sound stupid to you?'

‘Why would you believe that the born were persons? What is in the human being that makes him special? I have watched these abortion debates on recordings that archaeologists have found from that time and I keep scratching my head at this, because they don’t seem to realize that the very concept of a ‘person’ is a thoroughly religious concept from beginning to end and has no meaning in science. And yet they are insisting in the debate that religion must not play a part in deciding this question of whether the foetus is a person. They think this way because that was the way their civilization taught them to think, but it is obvious how illogical it is.’

‘If you are going to reject religion and judge the person on the basis of science, then why would you even think that the adult had a meaning to his existence? What is in the human being? Tell me, what is in the human being that gives him that? Answer me, I dare you!’

‘Go to any laboratory in the world and ask them to do an experiment to show what part of the human being gives his existence meaning, and they will tell you that you only think this way because of your evolutionary programming.’

‘But to get back to the point I am making. A society can operate, be prosperous and successful, while taking away the right to live for billions of people who are unable to fight back. It not only is possible, but it has already happened!’

‘And as long as the public still distinguishes between the organisms who are still people and the organisms who are just organisms, then everything works fine. Society needs altruism and cooperation to exist. My colleague is completely correct, but you do not need to extend altruism to every organism in order for that principle to remain true.’

‘If we all love each other and treat each other as persons, and look at each other as persons just as we did before. But we take other humans, and keep them out of sight and out of mind, but whom we just know to exist intellectually, and we turn them into slaves and use them for other purposes.... Nothing will change, society will stand just as it always did and our instincts will not stop us from continuing like this.’

‘Students and faculty, I ask you to look at the history books and realize that such has already happened, not once but many times in our history. Even before the time period I study, many nations on Earth still had slavery as a legal institution. And slaves were treated like property and not as persons, and yet they were living in the sight of people, people could see them plainly as well as the abuse they were subjected to and they lived like this in peace. They did this because they were able to convince themselves that the people they were looking at were not really people and were just animals.’

‘I am telling you the truth, everything I am suggesting is completely possible, and in fact has already been done. We must keep human rights protected for everyone in society and morals to be taught to all, but if we just take a certain group of people and we treat them as organisms, because that is truly what they are, and we keep them out of sight just enough so that it doesn’t cause our natural instincts to get aroused, then this is completely possible. Our own society can do this too.’

Dr. Mbaya went back to sit down and some of the students applauded.

Yang Min turned off the recording and put the screen down. She felt a horror around her as she considered what she just saw. The recording would have already been done more than 110 years (110 EA) earlier, because of the time lapse it takes for information from Earth to reach Xiaoyi. She trembled at the thought of what had happened since that time. She made up her mind that she was going to keep watching this, but she knew everything she saw was history and that what had happened could not be changed.

She could not finish what she was eating. Her grandson who watched it with her could not understand it because the ideas were too difficult for him to understand. She said to him, 'I am sorry I think I need to go pray.'

'Grandma, can I go with you?'

The horror in her heart vanished as she heard him say this. Her heart needed him more than he understood. She smiled and nodded.

She put on a veil and kneeled before a statue of Mary holding the baby Christ that she had set up in a corner of her house. Her grandson followed her and kneeled.

She said, 'Dearest Mother, I am begging you from the bottom of my heart. I have seen something that I did not think could ever happen. I have looked down into the abyss, and I can't understand what I saw. I know that God did not send His Son to the world in vain and that all that has been promised shall be fulfilled. I know that His Word will not return to Him empty-handed. I beg you dearest mother, from the bottom of my heart to help us.'

'I know I am your beloved daughter and you have so much love for me. I thank you for all the favours you have prayed for me from your Son in the past and I have this favour to ask from you, beloved Mother.'

Her husband had woken up and looked at the two of them kneeling. He thought they looked crazy. He sighed and went back to bed.

'On Earth no one believes anymore. The place where the flame of faith was first lit is almost cold ashes now. I beg you to show them a sign dearest Mother, and bring them back to know your Son as they did in ages past. I beg you to bring them to wake up from the errors they are in. Show them Your Son once more. I know they do not deserve this help, and He has already been shown to them, but I know that His mercy is vast and it is great enough even for the sins of our time.'

'I beg you, dearest Mother, I speak to you as your beloved daughter, to pray to Jesus and ask Him to grant this for me. I beg you from the bottom of my heart, to help us.'

Her grandson said, 'And I ask you that the government will like my idea of fish farms and that we will have lots of yummy fish.'

She said, 'Mother, help us, I beg you, help us. No one but God can undo a problem like this.'

VI: Wisdom of the Stars

Paul and Mary walked across the landscape of Enceladus. The rings of Saturn, partly dark and partly illuminated were hanging overhead.

Paul followed her, although he couldn't tell where they were going.

Paul asked, 'So, is it true that God created all the universe?'

Mary replied, 'Yes, all of it.'

Paul asked, 'What about the evil things, did he create those?'

Mary asked, 'What evil things do you mean?'

'Like all the evil people, the terrorists, the people who do bad things.'

She pointed with her hand up to Saturn's rings hanging overhead and Paul followed her finger to see the spot she was pointing at. It was the place where the dark part of the rings came around the planet to be hit by the Sun's rays and became visible.

She asked, 'Why is it that you can see that part so well, and it is so beautiful, but that part over there is dark and you can barely see anything at all?'

'Well, that is because the Sun's light is hitting that part and Saturn's shadow is covering the other part.'

'So the rings have no light in themselves, do they? They are reflecting the light that is first shone at them?'

'Yes, of course, everyone knows that.'

'In just the same way is the human being. He has no light in himself, but all the light he has is what is first shone on him. And if he comes to the light, then it reflects from him

and his true beauty is made visible. But if he remains in the darkness, then no light comes from him and all you see in him is darkness.'

Paul, understanding nothing of what she just said, asked again, 'OK, so God did create the evil then?'

'No, He created the light. Darkness is nothing more than just the absence of the light. Human beings go away from the light, and that is the darkness.'

'So why did the darkness exist then, if God didn't create it?'

'A boy loves a girl so much that he even is willing to let her go, if she refuses his love, even though it pains him so much, for he loved her so dearly. So it is with God and the human race. He does not force the one He loves to stay with Him, and He allows them to part from Him, because He loves them and accepts their choice. And that place they go to is the darkness. Darkness is nothing more than a state of absence of light; darkness does not exist, it is light that exists and darkness is when light is absent.'

Paul sighed. He had no idea about anything she was talking about.

'So, why did God create the universe?'

'Because He loved that which He created.'

'Why did He love it?'

'Because that is who He is. Love is His identity.'

Paul felt a strange sense like he was turning into a little child asking his mother 'why' questions over and over. He decided to switch to a 'what' question.

'What is life?'

Mary reached out her hand. She smiled at Paul, although he could not understand what she was about to do. He thought at first that maybe she was asking him to take her hand until he then saw some of the mist descending down from the geyser and some tiny droplets of water slowly came down and hit her hand.

Mary showed the droplets to Paul and said, 'The blood is the life, just as Moses wrote.'

Paul said, 'That's not blood, that's water.'

'To us Hebrews, our vocabulary was different. Even the juice of a grape we referred to as 'blood'. The life of any creature is in its blood, is what Moses wrote. And we could not eat the blood with the flesh, for all the blood belonged to God, the author of life, to whom all life rightfully belongs.'

‘OK, never mind, I knew you would say that. Of course, that all makes perfect sense... how could I have ever guessed differently?’

Mary smiled gently and patiently, like a mother dealing with a child that was slow to grasp a lesson.

She said, ‘Every living thing that has ever been found on a world, has there been even one that could exist without water?’

‘No, there hasn’t. On every world where life was found, be it Druim Cett, Carnan or even Xiaoyi, all life on those places had H₂O as something necessary in their biological structures.’

‘But this water is not the true water.’

‘Oh, I see, so there is ‘true water’ then? I guess I have been drinking all of this false water all these years, and that is why I am dead now.’

‘The water you see with your eyes is only a shadow. The true water is the water by which the world was created out of, that the Spirit of God hovered over. Like the water of the flood that the dove flew over to help the human beings find a home, so did the Spirit of God hover over the water of creation, out of which came the home for human beings. It is the water that sustains all things, without which, nothing at all can truly live. It is the water that flowed from the side of the temple that Ezekiel went out to measure to fathom its depth. It is the water that if one were to drink from, he would never thirst again.’

‘Indeed, of course it was.... even a child could see that.’

‘This water is God’s love. Without it, nothing at all could live.’

Paul felt a little bad suddenly. He didn’t know why he felt it, but there seemed like there was something missing inside of him.

‘I was lit on fire with this love. And so I could see him behind the face of the human being. I saw the Creator of all things, with a human face, resting in my arms, drinking my milk. And He taught His disciples that it was behind the face of the human being that He could be found. Behind the face of every poor person, every sick person, every suffering person, every unimportant person- that was God. And those who believed it had life, because this was the water that gave life; for the life of every living thing is in its blood. I saw God and loved Him, but you and others did not see Him and they treated Him with contempt. And for that reason you are dead and I am alive.’

Paul said nothing in reply. Something was biting into him, and it hurt him deeply, but at the same time he felt a kind of release.

She continued walking and Paul followed her. Both remained silent for a period and then Paul spoke up, 'I feel like I have a kind of sickness. I don't understand it. It is so painful.'

Mary said, 'When Lazarus died, my Son said he was just sleeping. But He spoke to those who opposed Him and said that if they did not believe that they would die in their sins, and yet they thought themselves as alive, for they appeared to be. All souls receive judgment the moment they die, as did Lazarus, but he came back. You are dead right now, and your soul is suffering because it is deprived of the One who gave it life. It was already deprived of life before the meteorite punctured your helmet. You just couldn't feel it until now. But now you experience a taste of the death that lies in your soul and it gives you suffering. Had I not been here, it would have been far worse.'

Paul could not see anything happening to him, but there was a darkness in his heart that was overwhelming. It was unlike any pain he had felt before, but he looked at Mary's brightness and the love that shown on her face, and somehow the darkness was turned back.

Mary said, 'You are going to be given a second chance. Just as Lazarus was sent back to the world, died again and was judged again, so the same will happen to you. You should be very thankful that this has been granted to you. And if you willingly carry out the mission I am giving you, your soul shall be saved.'

Paul said, 'I don't understand, what did I ever do wrong?'

Mary said, 'You did not believe in the One that was sent.'

'But how could I have possibly have ever known about this person?'

'You are still so lacking in understanding of anything I am speaking. God is behind the face of the human being. What you did to the human being- that is what you did to God.'

'But what did I ever do to human beings?'

Paul suddenly cried out in pain as anguish overcame him. Mary lifted her hand and moving her lips, whispered a prayer, and the pain ended.

She spoke in a calm, yet very serious voice 'Your own conscience; can it not tell you?'

'Well no, because I never did any...' and Paul suddenly screamed out in pain again. Mary again lifted her hands, whispering a prayer silently and the pain ended once more.

Mary again spoke in the same tone, 'If you but searched your conscience and followed the Truth, and not the world's ways, you would find the answer.'

Paul tried to think, but he felt like there was a darkness that was preventing him from seeing anything. He then looked at Mary and the light that came from her illuminated

everything. He then saw the faces of the poor people in the slums. He looked at them and saw them in pain, but not the pain he was in. It was the pain of disease, the pain of poverty, the pain of being unwanted, the pain of old age and natural death.

He then looked at himself and saw that there was a sentence attached to his feet that read out clearly that he had consented and supported all of this. He tried to cut it off, but it wouldn't come off and it was stuck there. He felt despair at it and wanted it to go away, but it only remained and he felt the terror in his mind as though that sentence would stay there forever.

As he looked at the sentence, he felt a great desire for the darkness to return and shield everything away from sight. He felt a need to run from Mary and her light and stay away from her- forever. But she held out her hand to him and did not allow him to leave. As though bidden by a power that controlled him, he was unable to move his feet and get away.

She said, 'You are experiencing something that countless others have gone through before you. God allows them to run away, and they do, and they are gone forever. Forever they prefer the darkness over the light, because the light shows them the Truth and the Truth is unbearable to them. And it is unbearable because they did not believe.'

Paul, with great fear in his voice, said, 'Please do not let me look at it again. I can't stand the sight of it.'

'I cannot grant this request, you will need to look at it. But there is something else that you failed to see.'

Her light exposed the faces once more and the sentence at Paul's feet. But Paul looked at them again, and noticed something. There was something behind their faces, but he couldn't understand what it was.

'Paul, I show you God. The true God. He was behind the face of every human being; He was here the whole time, and you failed to recognize Him.'

'Please this is unbearable, can you make it stop?'

'Tell Him you are sorry, believe He will forgive you. Do not think that He is not there, even in the darkness.'

The darkness came upon Paul very greatly, he felt such a strong desire to hate her and reject what she was telling him, but he looked again at her face and the darkness lost its power over him. He looked at the face of the victim-souls and said, 'Please, I am sorry. I did not do as I should have done, and I have no excuses to defend myself with. I should have known better than to take part in something evil that was done against you.'

Their faces disappeared and the sentence bound on Paul's legs was crossed out, and in their place was a freshly picked lily. The darkness vanished completely and the pain ended.

'Be very thankful that this has been granted to you. And remember this lesson for when you are sent back.'

'I cannot believe it. I feel so well now.'

'Come, there is much more you need to learn. We have only just built the foundation.'

Mary took Paul by the hand as they walked across the frozen landscape of Enceladus.

He said, 'Where are we going?'

She said, 'I will show you something, be patient just a little bit longer.'

He said, 'Am I going to come back to life again?'

She said, 'If you believe.'

They walked further and she pointed out a group of very large robots far in the distance, tall as skyscrapers that were pounding the rocks to rubble. Like huge mechanical monsters, they were pounding the rock with hammers attached to their multiple limbs. They towered like a colossus in the darkness, illuminated by the light reflected from Saturn's rings and the red and blue flashing lights that shone on their heads to warn off any spacecraft from collision. The two of them could hear it, even though there was no air to carry the sound.

She asked him, 'What are they doing?'

He said, 'It is a mining operation. They are breaking the rocks apart and they are looking for traces of helium 3 and other isotopes that can be used for fusion on Earth. The robots have devices on their legs that suck in the specific isotopes that have trace amounts in the dust that flies up from the pounded rocks.'

She asked him, 'I ask you the first question: can a human do what they do?'

He said, 'No, of course not!'

She put her hands together in prayer and said, 'Father, if we ask for it, then even mountains can be moved. I pray you to show this to this lost soul who stands by me here.'

The rocks all around the two of them began shattering into dust without anything colliding with them. Paul was terrified as he and Mary stood on a tiny piece of rock that

stood still, while the whole plain around them began to shatter into dust that flew into the air. The robots far in the distance took no notice of it. The the area left empty by the shattered rocks grew deeper and deeper, until the bottom was no longer visible.

He grabbed onto her dress as he was afraid of falling down into the empty space that now surrounded them and went deep for hundreds of metres.

He said, 'What was that? How did you do that? That was incredible!'

She said, 'I didn't do that, I merely requested that it be done.'

He, with a hint of doubt in his voice, said, 'You requested it?'

She said, 'Behind all the physical reality, there is always a Person. He came first, the physical laws came second, but He hides himself from those without purity of heart.'

He said, 'I don't understand.'

She smiled and said, 'Paul, you can understand that $2 + 2 = 4$ and you can understand that oxygen reacting with volatile elements will make fire, but you don't understand why. The physical laws themselves, upon which you observe the whole universe running, they came from somewhere, did you not understand that?'

He said, 'They came from God.'

She said, 'Of course they did. God placed Adam on the Earth and gave him dominion over all the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the beasts that crawled upon the Earth. He did not have dominion because he swam better than the fish, or he could fly higher than the birds or he was stronger than the beasts. He had dominion over them because he could understand and they couldn't. The physical laws were there in order so that men could rule the Earth; without them, the scriptures could not be true. They were created out of love for human beings and the universe was ordered by them so that men could rule over it. But they in themselves were never the ultimate power, for they were created too. Behind them there was the Person, always.'

He said, 'Can I do that?'

She said, 'Anyone can. Even those with faith as small as a grain of mustard seed can, if they are willing to trust. But I now must ask you the second question. Can a robot do what I just did?'

He paused and said, 'Well, if they pray, then I guess they should be able to be heard too, then.'

She gently shook her head back and forth. She said, 'Only the human being sees God.'

He said, 'So, they can't pray then?'

She said, 'That's right, they can't. Do you now understand why the human being is so special?'

Paul said, 'I just know that I can't make a robot that can be like a human being. I can't make a creative robot who really understands what is going on. I didn't need to come here and meet you- I already knew that my whole career- but I always had faith that somehow it was just because we hadn't designed the robots well enough.'

She said, 'It's not. You can build a machine that is the exact mechanical parallel of a human brain, and it still will not see what the human sees, it still will not understand what the human understands. Let me show you something, and it will be clear to you.'

Suddenly they found themselves standing by a river on Earth in a grassy plain. A black-skinned man was standing there without clothes, but he did not look like a human being. He was more ape-like in appearance. He began making unintelligible sounds that sounded almost like singing as he sat by the river.

Paul and Mary watched him. Paul said, 'What is this?'

Mary said, 'That is the first human being.'

He took a stone from the river and threw it far into the distance and then waited. After a few minutes another creature like him began to appear and was running towards him. It was a female. She came to him and he embraced her in his arms. He pointed out at the river to her and made some sounds. The two of them went down to the water and when she wasn't paying attention, he pushed her in. She laughed and then started splashing him.

She asked him, 'Can you tell the difference between them and an animal?'

He said, 'He can understand things. They don't seem to speak any intelligible words, but they understand each other's meaning.'

She said, 'Now, look at his parents and his brothers and sisters. They are sitting over there.'

She pointed to a hill slope behind them where a group of identical-looking creatures were chewing on plant leaves. They looked at the two human beings by the river with curiosity but could not understand.

She said, 'The man came from the dust of the Earth. The dust was made alive and it evolved and morphed through eons until it eventually produced him.'

He said, 'Those ones over there look like they are just apes.'

She said, 'They are. His parents were animals; that was how he was born. What is the difference between their brains and his?'

He said, 'Well, I suppose none, except the differences you would normally have between parents and children. They are the same species.'

She nodded and smiled, 'Yes, exactly.'

Some of the apes chewing the plant leaves walked over to the two by the river, and the two humans began playing with them by splashing water. But there was something different about their behaviour. He watched the humans change the game, and the apes were able to follow along and join them, but the apes only followed, they did not invent their own games with their siblings- they only followed along.

She said, 'Behold, the human being.'

Paul said, 'Can the apes pray?'

She said, 'I already told you, only the human being can see God.'

He said, 'So those two can see God , but their parents and siblings cannot?'

She said, 'Yes, exactly. Do you understand now why the human being is so special?'

He said, 'I think so.'

She said, 'You have a daughter, Melissa.'

Paul didn't speak, and thinking emotionally about her, he felt afraid of what Mary was going to say.

She said, 'Do not be afraid, she will find comfort. I am only here to teach you now.'

He said, 'What about my daughter?'

She said, 'Do you care about her more than your robots?'

He said, 'Yes, of course I do!'

She said, 'Why?'

He said, 'Because, she's my daughter.'

She said, 'Then, you understand how God sees the human being. I can ask God for things because I am His child, not because I am stronger or more powerful than other things.'

She pointed her finger at the colossal robots in the distance and said, 'And my power of asking is greater than their strength.'

He said, 'I really do not understand these things.'

She said, 'Yes, I know. But you will.'

He said, 'When?'

She said, 'After you return to the Earth, you must tell the people back there about all of these things, because they live in the dark. I must warn you that your life will not be very long, because there are men who hate the Truth, but you will find your reward after it is all done.'

He said, 'Someone is going to kill me after I get back?'

She said, 'Yes, but do not worry, for the second time you meet me, you will be alive, not dead.'

He said, 'Well, that made sense....'

She said, 'After you get back, you need to go to Rome and find a man named Lexin. He lives in the slum, but he has authority over all of God's people on Earth. He will ensure you understand all you need and he will baptize you into the faith.'

Paul thought in silence about all these things. He felt a great feeling of peace to be around this woman and listen to her. It seemed to him like everything she was saying was like it was the way that things were supposed to be, and yet he had never imagined that a religion could possibly be true before.

He said, 'Do I have this power to pray as well?'

She said, 'You are doing so right now.'

He asked, 'What do you mean?'

She said, 'I am from heaven; my words are God's words. You are speaking to me and I am speaking back to you. This is prayer.'

He asked, 'Are there no intelligent species anywhere else that can reason and see God?'

She said, 'God created myriads of spirits, all without diverse forms and natures, who either served him as messengers of His Word or who betrayed Him out of pride.'

He asked, 'Well, I mean biological things; material things. Are there aliens or not?'

She pointed at the two humans, who were now climbing a tree while the other apes retired to grooming themselves. She said, 'Unless they are children of those two, as you or I am, then they cannot possess their gift.'

The surroundings changed again in the blink of an eye and they found themselves standing on the surface of an ocean on a planet with a pale green sky. Ahead of them a great earthen mound came out of the water to a height of less than 100 metres. The mound was covered with holes and there seemed to be black shapes moving up and down the mound very quickly, coming in and out of the water.

She said, 'This is a planet in a galaxy very far from yours. There is no name for it, because it is not known to human beings.'

He looked on in an amazement and said, 'Is that what I think it is?'

She said, 'Come and see.'

They walked across the water. Underneath them they could see some of these black shapes swimming through the water at great speeds. As they got closer to the mound, they could make out the shapes more clearly. It looked a bit like a giant water beetle, about two metres across, but it still looked different from anything he had ever seen on Earth. They were going around the mound like ants, some of them taking plant material out of the water and carrying it into various holes on the mound.

Paul gazed in amazement at it. Almost all the life discovered to date on other worlds had only been microbial or single-celled, no one had ever seen life like this before.

She said, 'This is an animal that builds its own city, lives under the rule of a queen and has a planned economy. But it is still not like the human being. Look down there.'

They looked down into the water, which was shallow beneath them and there was a kind of large shelled creature. It had claws like a crab, except it had five them rather than two and its shell looked like a turtle's shell, but it was reflective like a mirror.

A beetle lunged itself at it from behind and tried to turn it over, but the creature did not turn over. Instead it turned around and grabbed one of the beetle's legs with its claws and ripped it off. The beetle retreated.

The creature kept the beetle's leg in its claws and other beetles went around it rather than to attack it again.

She said, 'It learns, it is intelligent like a dolphin or like a chimpanzee, in fact even more so than those species. It can recognize problems and ways to solve or not solve them. But

even still, it cannot reason and see God. That is the difference between the human being and all other creatures. This is as intelligent as they become.'

Then they found themselves in a city. Paul seemed to recognize it as being somewhere in Africa. He reasoned that it probably did not belong to the Great Republic, although he wasn't sure.

She took Paul down an alleyway outside of the slum to the rest of the city where people still worked. They must have been just on the edge of the slum sector, because it was not a long walk. There were robots cleaning the streets, vehicles moving around and pedestrians going in and out of buildings. She took Paul into an office tower. There was a robot guarding the door checking the ids for each person who entered, but the two of them walked past completely invisible to the robot and the others.

She took Paul to the elevator and walked in, she pressed the button for the eleventh floor and they went up. They walked out into an office area and there was a heated argument occurring. The boss was standing on one side with a body of several dozen employees on the other side, all wearing blue and purple work suits. Such clothes were normal office attire in this place.

The boss yelled at them, 'And why don't I have the right to do that?'

One of them said, 'If you fire us, where will we go?'

The boss said, 'You can find something you can do that contributes to the world, or go live in the slums and the government will take care of you. But either way, I am telling you now that your positions are no longer needed! The Gentax corporation has developed a new line of robots that can do data processing and take customer calls far more efficiently than all of you. Just one of them can do the work of all of you together, if I keep you, then how will we compete with other companies?'

They started getting angry and shouting. The boss tried to get them to hush and said, 'Tell me, what are you doing that can't be replaced by a machine? Human beings are obsolete. I know that you are not happy about this, but if you were me, what else could you do? I keep you and our competitors will get this new bot, and how will we stay in business? I keep you, and the business fails, then you can't earn money in the end either, then can you?'

One of them said, 'I refuse to believe that that bot can do just as well as us.'

The boss chuckled and said, 'OK, so you want me to prove it to you? I have a sample in the crate in my office, let us take it out and see.'

He went over to his office and some of the employees followed him, while others complained to each other with much emotion about the news they just received.

The boss opened the crate and pressed a button. The robot assembled itself automatically into a human-like shape and said, 'I am ready to serve.'

The boss said to the robot, 'Go to the computers over there and compile all the data in five minutes or less according to the requirements in the spreadsheets.'

The bot obeyed and did exactly as he was told, plugging himself into the mainframe and finishing the task in two minutes and twelve seconds. The same work required the whole staff team about a week to complete.

The boss said, 'This bot costs half of your monthly salary and it can run for more than 100 years.'

They stood around it and watched with great sadness. Some of them started crying, while others tried to comfort them.

The boss with a look of shame, said, 'Look, there is nothing I can do. Human labour is becoming obsolete, this isn't my decision- it is the decision of history. You need to go and find something useful that can't be done by a machine, but it can't be here. You will be paid your whole month's salary as well as a bonus, but your contracts will not be renewed further past today.'

The employees felt so powerless as they began to leave one by one. Some tried to keep arguing with the boss.

Paul turned to Mary and said, 'I have seen this before many times. It is not a new thing. It has been going since ancient times. As soon as humans develop a new technology there is always someone somewhere who then goes out of work.'

Mary said, 'But, do you understand why this happens to them? It is the justice for what you had just seen.'

Paul said, 'No, I don't understand.'

A tear came down Mary's eye and she said, 'God wishes to help them so much, but they cannot do anything more than a machine does in the way that they deal with Him. So, He thus treats them as though they were no better than the machine that they behave as though they were.'

Paul said, 'That's horrible!'

Mary's tears came down and with a still, but grieved voice, she said, 'It is justice, and it is right, but it is not what God desires. He wants to help them, and I have prayed for them, and you are going to go back to this world and tell them to wake up. Some of them shall, but others will not.'

Paul said, 'Is this a new thing?'

Mary said, 'No. His justice is primordial, preceding the human race itself, for He punished the spirits who rebelled against Him as well.'

Paul said, 'So, you mean, all they had to do was just prove that they were something more than machines, that they could do what a machine couldn't by talking to God as a person, and then God would have answered them.'

Mary said, 'Yes, it is this way.'

Paul said, 'So because their prayer to Him is just like they were machines, God punishes them by them finding that there is nothing that they can do that a machine can't and so they go to the slums and live in poverty.'

Mary said, 'Yes, it is this way. But this poverty is not like the real poverty. The real poverty is not to know God, and there are many who have it.'

Paul said, 'But, I mean, there are countless numbers of people who do not pray monotonously, because they do not pray at all, and nothing happens to them.'

Mary said, 'No, all these people you are looking at here are such. It is only after they go to the slums that they become what you just saw. They have already spent their whole lives wasting time and ignoring the true reality, because they are already lethargic. They can enjoy all the material things of life, but they see God no more than does a robot or an animal, not because they can't, but because they won't. And they fall into temptations many times and sin, because they do not believe, and so God treats them as such. The sentence of justice then hangs over them, that so long as they are unable to do anything more than that a robot couldn't also do, so in the same way their own position in society shall be taken by a robot, as they find in despair that they can do no more than it can. That is the sentence that is read over them, and not one of them understands it.'

The boss continued arguing with the employees. He said, 'So prove to me that there is something you can do that a machine can't do! Show me that being human makes you valuable! I would love to see it.'

The employee punched him and threw him to the ground. The others grabbed his arms and stopped him from continuing. The boss immediately called the police and the man who just punched him tried to run to the elevator. Such an act of violence would put him automatically on the list of potential terrorists and require lifelong close surveillance, to make sure he didn't commit a major terrorist act.

Mary brought Paul to the elevator and they went down with the man who had just punched his boss in a moment of anger. The elevator was at the side of the building, and

one wall of it was made of clear glass that could plainly see the outside and the streets below. The man, visibly shaking with fear looked on the street as he saw one police car after another pulling up to the building as the elevator slowly went on its march to the bottom. He frantically hit the button to stop at another floor, but it was too late. The elevator hit the bottom floor and a group of uniformed men stood there. He froze in fear as one of them yelled out a warning to him to tell him not to move. They didn't need to say anything, he was not running anywhere.

A woman with dark hair, who was a little short in stature and had a minor rank in the police force came over to place magnetic cuffs on his hands that snaked around his fingers and rendered them immobile.

He said, 'Please officer, I don't want to go to jail!'

She said, 'You won't, we are just going to put you under the surveillance program. It is for everyone's safety, it is nothing personal, please relax.'

The other officers led him to one of the cars. His coworkers gazed up from the windows above at the scene below. A few onlookers also stopped to appreciate what was happening.

Unseen to all, Mary and Paul entered the car with them and sat next to the apprehended man as the car sped off light a bullet down the streets. It drove itself at an incredible speed, and had no possibility of getting into an accident.

They got to the police station and the man was taken into a plain white-coloured interrogation room with no windows and one door. He was placed on one side of a table into a chair that locked him in place after he sat on it. At the other side of the table a black man with a long beard was already sitting and casually holding an electronic device in which he was watching the recording of the event that had just occurred.

The interrogator looked up at him and said, 'Sir, you made a mistake today.'

He said, 'Yes, I did, I am very sorry!'

The interrogator said, 'Yes, it was not a big act. It was just a moment and a bad choice. Do not worry, you are not going to jail. But you know what the law says.'

He said, 'I am going to be put into the slums?'

'No, that is not what the law says. You will go to the slums or not is your choice. The law says that you need to have a watcher attached to you.'

The interrogator held up a tiny piece of technology, barely the size of the tip of a fingernail. Paul knew exactly what it was; he had worked on similar things in his lab.

The interrogator continued, 'It will be inserted just slightly above your eye, under the skin. It won't be visible to anyone, but it will record your movements and your daily activities. In the event you ever engage in any kind of terrorism or engage in an attempt to remove it, it will make you go asleep and keep you sleeping until the police pick you up.'

The arrested man said, 'Will it hurt?'

'No, you won't feel a thing. Please, don't think that we think there is something wrong with you. It's just that there are other people like you who start on the same road you are now going down and they have killed many people. We do this to protect everyone, including you.'

'What road am I going down?'

'Unemployment. And if it continues for a long time, you will die as well.'

'Can you people help me get a new job?'

'I am sorry, that is not the job of the police department. You can contact the relevant government offices that deal with finding employment for people, but as you know, the competition for jobs is fierce and if you can't demonstrate that you can offer something more than a robot, you'll be out of luck.'

The man looked at the device and sighed. He said, 'OK, you can put it in me then.'

'I am sorry sir, I really wish there was something I could do to help you, but that is just the way the world is, you know.'

The man was taken to another room and laid on a bed. Some surgeons put him asleep and made the insert of the device. The entire procedure lasted only a few minutes and then he was woken up again.

He was given a map and a page of contact details for various offices in their district that helped unemployed persons to find work. Then he left. He had come in treated like a dangerous criminal, but he left in complete freedom, almost like he was a guest. The police had no more fear, because they trusted in their devices to keep things safe.

Paul said to Mary, 'What will happen to him, now?'

She looked at Paul and with a look of some sadness, she said, 'Come, you will see.'

The man went home to his wife and reported the bad news. She was first horrified by it, but he tried to reassure her that things would be OK, and that he would find a new job soon. His wife was unemployed, and they had two girls who were still adolescents. Without a job for at least one of them, they would not be able to continue receiving the

treatment that would stop them from aging. After many years, it meant that they would have to die.

They understood this very well. Although they remained calm, deep down there was a lingering worry that could not be put away.

They could go around complaining and wishing people would help them, but as the policeman said, that was just the way that the world was. There were countless others in their position and the larger public was opposed to giving medical treatment for free to those who did not work.

Part of the problem was the fact that many of those unemployed and living in slums were people who followed religions that taught them to hate the atheists who filled much of the society. Almost all of the terrorist attacks came from this population as well and it was not hard to walk around a slum and find supporters of that kind of violence.

The feelings of many people were simply: ‘why help those who hate us so much?’ ‘Why not just let them die?’ ‘If their God was real, who loved the believers and hated the atheists, then surely He could have helped them.’

The man did not want to end up like this. But as the policemen observed, there were many others before him who ended up like this and began this journey the same way that that man had begun it that day.

The man spent the next several weeks looking for a job. He had nothing to offer, however. What could he do that a robot couldn't do? Other people were creative, other people had ideas, other people could show talents... but he didn't have the qualities. He just needed a job to have work, and he couldn't measure up to the world.

When his wife was not around and he was alone, sometimes he cried. A deep sense of inferiority entered into him. He was just not worth anything. He could not do anything better than what a piece of machinery could do. As badly as he wanted things to be different, he woke up to the same nightmare each morning. Going from one job application to the next, like a clown passing from one act of humiliation to the next, deeply entrenching it into his mind that he was worth nothing.

He went to an interview and wanted to go on his knees and beg with tears that he might have a job, but he did not do so, because he knew that that would not have helped him. There were many others who would have tried that if companies would consider it.

After a few months, they had to leave their home. They told their two daughters that they would only be in the slums for a short time. Just for a short time, until daddy could find a job and they could live like normal people again.

The government gave them a small room in a dirty building within the slum near their city. They had always heard about this place in the news, but never imagined that one day

they would enter it. It wasn't the poverty that they feared the most here, rather it was the people. The religious zealots and crazy things that one heard of that existed here was enough to make them feel afraid about talking to others or making friends.

In the first several nights they didn't go outside the apartment, except to bring their children to the school and back again. Even this was uncomfortable for them, because they saw the other people who lived in the same place.

Mary and Paul watched the family as all of these things transpired. Paul had never seen this place for himself either, although of course he knew what it was. In life, he would never dream of entering the area. Although violence was actually quite rare, since the police kept up a constant surveillance and many people had devices inserted into them that could temporarily paralyze them if they engaged in any kind of violence, nevertheless he would never go there for fear of just being around those people.

Paul said to Mary, 'Are we doing something wrong here?'

She said, 'Yes.'

'What are we doing wrong?'

She pointed out at the people. They were walking in streets covered with garbage and graffiti lining up the walls of the buildings. She said, 'every one of those people you see, they don't matter to you, but God created this entire universe for them.'

'What do you mean?'

'Is there any purpose in playing a movie in an empty theatre?'

'Well, no, then no one would watch it?'

'All the galaxies, all the stars, all the worlds... that is the movie.' She pointed at a group of elderly male slum-dwellers sitting on the garbage and doing some kind of gambling with each other, and she said, 'And they are the audience.'

'So, they are important?'

Mary turned her face and Paul could see tears from her eyes, as she looked back at him. She spoke with some emotion in her voice, 'God Himself came down and gave His life for them. His very last drop of blood in painful agony for each one of them. If you had known the Truth, you can't even comprehend the depths of absurdity of this question: 'they are important?'

Paul walked closer to her and came around to her frontside, gazing at the tears coming down her face. She spoke with gravity, but not in a way that he felt like she was trying to scare him.

Her tear-filled eyes looked Paul in his eyes and she spoke, 'Look at my face. Is it just an organism that you see? Just a piece of flesh and biological tissue? Am I worth more than the rocks and stones that you do your work with, and use to make your wealth with? Am I just a bunch of molecules that came together by accident one day and thought it was worth something?'

He gazed at her tears, and he found himself speechless. He felt like his soul was paralyzed in the sight of these tears.

She looked over to the old men who were gambling.

She looked back at Paul and he gazed into her teary eyes. She asked, 'You still can't see it?'

He opened his mouth slightly, wanting to speak, and then closed it again.

She said, 'I looked at the human being with these eyes and I saw God.'

A knock came at the door. The man went to check it, fearing who it might be. There was a middle-aged woman with white hair. The man had to get used to seeing people who had aged and whose bodies were not young.

The woman smiled and passed a little wooden ornament to the man. She said, 'I see that you are new here. I remember when I first came here 30 years ago and how afraid I was when I moved in. I wanted to give you this to let you know that we are not all crazy and you can make friends here.'

The man looked at his wife who was sitting behind him, but out of sight from the door, and then looked back at the woman and said, 'Thank you! Please come in, maybe we can talk with you.'

They made friends with each other. Life in the slums, little by little, became more bearable.

After years passed by and still no job appeared, however, the man's sense of despair slowly began morphing into anger.

It was then that he was found by the followers of Fox Asher.

Fox Asher was one of the oldest men in existence. No one understood it, but he found a way to preserve his life before the technology to stop aging was invented. He could do things that science considered impossible. He could tell news of things that happened in places many light years distant, at the time they were actually happening; no one could explain it. He had no wife or family.

He had founded a religion and named himself as prophet. Many centuries previously he had travelled to Olympus Mons in Mars and lived as a hermit there, cultivating a band of disciples that grew larger and larger over time. Eventually they acquired enough political and economic clout that they were able to acquire the entire mountain as well as its surrounding region in Amazonis Planitia. It became a nation-state in itself, with an entirely theocratic government that enforced the commandments that Asher gave to the people.

It was nowhere near as technologically advanced or powerful as the Great Republic on the Earth, and there were other small states in existence that were strong than it. However, its true strength lay not in money or arms, but in its ability to reach out and touch the hearts of countless numbers of people who had been pushed to the sides of society by nations like the Great Republic.

Whatever their cause, whatever their grievance, the people who had been treated like rubbish in their own society, would take hope in Asher, who told them that if they believed in God, then they were already the superiors of all others. He preached that the difference between a human and an animal was that the human could know God and the animal did not, and therefore an atheist ought to be counted as a beast, and not as a person.

His preaching gave a sense of liberation to those who were treated as rubbish by such societies. It told them that they were worth something, which is what they wanted to hear, and so they drank his words in, disregarding whether the brew was good for their bodies or if it was poison to kill them.

Many of the terrorists claimed allegiance to Asher, and while Asher would never claim himself responsible for what they did, he would always justify their actions and call on the atheists to repent and believe in God.

The man began attending some of the classes that some of their missionaries ran in the midst of the slums. When he had been working in the world before he had thought that these people were crazy and could never have anything to do with them.

Faced with despair at his fate, and with no end in sight at what was ultimately going to be the death of him and his family, he turned to them.

He went to a large basement, with wooden benches and artwork covering the walls. There was a recreational centre on the floor above that was used by the missionaries as a community centre to help people with their problems.

Although Asher himself was very wealthy, the followers of his cult were largely poor and they did not have the resources to give the kind of healthcare to their membership that the Great Republic could supply to its working population, which would allow them to live forever without aging.

The man was one of the first to come in and sit down. The missionary, a tall man with a slender build and a bearded face looked over at him. He took a glass of water in his hands and presented it to him and said, 'Come friend, you are welcome here. Is it your first time visiting?'

He felt hesitant about how to respond, as he still had a lingering fear of being brainwashed, and he simply said, 'Yes.'

'Well then, I hope you find here what you are looking for. We are a family, not a company or an organization. We don't throw people aside because we have no more use for them.'

The man said, 'Thank you. I will make up my own mind about it.'

'Absolutely, there is no other way. And if you have any questions about anything, please feel free to ask me, as I am happy to help you.'

A woman walked in. It was the same woman who had made friends with him and his family when he first came to the slums. She smiled and waved at him, 'Welcome! I am so happy to see you here!'

More people trickled in and after the benches were largely filled, the missionary stood up at the front and began with a prayer, 'Lord God, you made the Earth and heavens, and today we pray that you grant us wisdom and sight to see what it is that you wish your creation to know. Help us to grow in strength and wisdom with you.'

He began preaching.

'Brothers and sisters, when a son abandons his own father or mother, when he curses them and says that he owes them nothing, then that son is not worthy of life. The ones who gave him life, he curses and abandons, thus showing he is unworthy of the gift that they have given to him.'

'God is our father and our mother. He gave us life. And if we abandon Him, curse Him or say He was never even there to begin with, then we are like that son. Those who treat their parents in that way show that they are not worthy of what their parents gave to them. Those who treat God in such a way are showing that they are not worthy of what He gave to them.'

'God asks for nothing else than our hearts. You can have all the intelligence and power in the world, and He has not the slightest care of any of it, because it is only your heart that He desires.'

'There are people who are proud of what they can do, with their strength, with their wisdom, with their power, and in His eyes they are worth nothing, since they do not love Him as they ought. There are people like us gathered here today, who are weak, who lack

wisdom, who lack power, and we are loved by Him, because we give Him the respect that He deserves.’

‘We are like children who remember their parents and never forget the gift that was given to them. Is it not absurd that we are the ones who suffer old age, who must live in poverty and die, while all those who live in youth, prosperity and happiness, curse and forget the parent who gave them life?’

‘It is absurd that those who follow the Truth should be treated with shame and contempt, while those who follow and promote lies should live in respect and honour. It is absurd that those who love God should live in suffering and humiliation, and those who mock Him should live in comfort and security. We live in a world of absurdity.’

‘May the sons of men be cursed forever and may God forever stand high in His glory! How little do they deserve the love that God has shown to them! They received life itself as a gift from Him, and then abandon their Father like a beggar on the street. May their names be cursed forever, and may the One they abandoned forever stand in honour and majesty!’

‘The human being deserves an infinite death for what he has done. God grants him light, and yet he deserves darkness. God grants him life, but he deserves death. God grants him health, but he deserves illness. God grants him peace, but he deserves war. God grants him wisdom, but he deserves stupidity. God grants him hope, but he deserves despair.’

‘May the sons of men who abandoned this God be forever damned, and may the sons of God who remembered their father, be permitted to live!’

He paused and took a long look at the people in the room.

‘How absurd it is, that we are the ones who die and they are the ones who live. How absurd it is that we are the ones who are treated as criminals, and yet they are the ones treated with honour.’

‘Brothers and sisters, the day is coming soon when this shall change. Our day will come, as Fox Asher prophesied, when those who forget their Father shall be left in misery and those who remembered Him shall be rewarded. Our prophet said, ‘the Father tests the love of His children by giving their food to strangers, but only to bring them to a great feast in the end.’ We know that whatever absurdity we suffer now is only for a short time, and it shall not last much longer. When the sign appears, as our prophet said, then those who trusted in machines and human creations shall be destroyed by their own creations, and those who trusted in God shall be vindicated. And on that day, all will be given to us.’

‘I know that you don’t understand these things perfectly now, and in truth, neither do I. But I ask you, dear children, to trust the words of our prophet and believe in God. He

shall indeed curse those unbelievers with far worse than we suffer now and He shall bring us to eternal reward.'

The man went home from the meeting. He told his wife what had been said there and they decided not to go again. They remained for several years longer, however, and their minds began to change. They watched their child grow up, and they had no hope of having the eternal life in the body that was promised to those that the society still found useful. The seed of anger had taken root in their hearts and it grew and grew. The message that was preached no longer seemed so terrible to them, and they came back, believing the message that was preached.

The former friends that they once had who no longer talked to them after they moved into the slums, became seen as demons in their eyes, who deserved chains and torture.

The hatred went deeper and deeper. Eventually the man joined a special group that the missionary got him in contact with who had been given a special mission for the advancement of the coming kingdom.

They had little time to carry it out. A special device was brought in, something which was not legal to be possessed, and when the man was eating a meal in the mission hall, the device was put to the back of his head, without him being told beforehand, and after a burst of energy was discharged, the device placed by the police in his forehead many years before became inactive.

The missionary, clothed in a white robe and with a serene smile on his face said, 'Come, you will have little time to finish this, because they will start looking for you the moment that those chains become broken.'

He reached into his pocket and handed him a small round mechanical device. The man didn't recognize it.

The missionary said, 'This is how you shall advance the coming of the kingdom. This device can destroy a city. You have twenty minutes to get from here to the city centre, before the authorities apprehend you. May the prophet's grace guide you, may the Lord keep your way and show His wrath to those live in hypocrisy!'

The man looked at it and said, 'Am I going to blow myself up?'

The missionary said, 'If you can get away, then it is no sin to do so. But perhaps you cannot. Regardless, you shall serve the Lord well and bring many to wake up from their stupor. I choose you for this, because I knew that you were willing to go through this.'

The man looked at the device. Many years had passed from the day when he still worked for the company, when the policeman warned him of the road he was going down. But he didn't care about his former self anymore. His hair was beginning to turn white and he

knew that death was coming for him anyways. 'What better way was there to die than to serve the true God?', he thought.

'Go! You don't have much time!'

The man hesitated for just a moment longer, then he quickly snatched the device from his hand and ran out the door. He had to turn several alleys before he came to the tram station and jumped aboard the train that was running to the city centre. Already he could hear the noise of sirens as police cars began getting closer to the slums.

The train began its way to the city centre. On board there were working people mostly, all young in body, although their ages could not be discerned from this, and who did not like to get too close to a man who was clearly from the slums, with his white hair and aged body. With some measure of politeness and some measure of arrogance, they treated him like air and kept a certain distance. Men and women, chatting with each other, discussing the vanities of everyday life. They had no idea what the man was carrying in his pocket.

Before the train could hit the very centre, it stopped. Apparently the authorities had located the man on the train. He knew what he had to do. He took out the device from his pocket and pressed the black button on its underside. The missionary looked on from the slums at a great distance away as a second sun appeared for a few moments in the city centre. The immense blast and the fire, engulfing buildings and incinerating the bodies of countless numbers of people going about their daily lives.

The missionary was arrested and imprisoned. Fox Asher denied involvement, but at the same time claimed that they were wrongly placing the finger at the true believers and not at their own sins.

Mary and Paul watched it all unfold. The news reported that almost a million people died in the blast.

Then Paul saw what no one else saw. He saw the souls of all of these people, receiving judgements for what they had done, being offered the light and running to the darkness instead.

The man who had done the blast, his soul appeared in front of the two of them.

He looked at the two of them, but his face looked almost demon-like in appearance. The man said, 'Are you also those who hate our Lord?'

Paul said, 'Are you crazy man? All those innocent people who had to die, because of your twisted thoughts!'

The man said, 'I see you are also a dead one, aren't you? You throw us in slums like we don't matter, and we have just shown how much we matter.'

A drip of water hit the floor. Paul turned his head and saw the tears going down Mary's face.

She reached out her hand to the man and said, 'Please, why do you run from the light? Repent and just let this all go, and let me take you home.'

The man snarled at this, with far more hatred than he had looked at Paul or the people in the city.

He said, 'Curse you and your Son! They were not there for me. I did not know them before I died! I followed Fox Asher, and now I know that he is a false prophet, I only hate you more! I knew that following him was wrong, but I did it because I had no hope. I refused to believe that there was another hope, and now that I see that there is, I only hate you completely for not showing it to me in life.'

The tears in her eyes continued to come down, she reached her hand even further and said, 'Please, you have no idea how great was the price that was paid for you. In His heart, there are no enemies. I hold before you life and death, choose life!'

The man couldn't stand the sight of her tears. He did not want to be near the light, because it revealed the darkness that had grown in his heart. He turned about and ran from her, running to the eternal flames that came from his own heart.

Mary put her hands to her eyes and Paul, unsure of what to do, put his arm on her back to try to comfort her. She put her hands down and looked at him with her teary eyes.

She said, 'Do you still not see it?'

He said, 'I see it. If I had never seen your tears, I would not have known it. Now, I know the human being matters to someone.'

VII: A Trip

It was pitch darkness outside. There were no lightning crests visible. Yang Min woke up and got herself ready for the day. It would still be another 10 hours before daylight.

She went to the kitchen and started to prepare breakfast. She ordered the automatic cook to prepare her some bowls of protein-rich algae mixed with oats. Her husband had already left to go to work. She had two bowls, one for herself and one for her grandson.

She pondered over what she had seen earlier in the night before she went to bed. She silently said some prayers to herself as she finished her breakfast. She then went over to her grandson's bed to wake him up. She first tapped his cheek with her finger and he didn't move. Then she slowly rocked him back and forth, but he still wouldn't move.

Then she put her hand on his foot and startling tickling, and he opened his eyes and tried to get the hand away, as she giggled at him.

She said, 'It is time to get up, your breakfast is on the table.'

He said, 'I want to sleep.'

She said, 'We are going to go to the Main Island today to submit your idea, it will take the whole day to get there and come back again, so we need to leave early.'

He said, 'Can't we wait just a few more minutes.'

She said, 'How long?'

He said, 'Just a few more minutes.'

She said, 'Two minutes? Three minutes?'

He said, 'Just a few more...'

She walked back to the kitchen, and sat on the chair. After twenty minutes passed, she went back again and began tickling again.

He said, 'Can't we wait just a little bit longer?'

She said, 'No, we can't, we have to go now or else we won't make it there on time. I already called your school to tell them I was going to take you on an educational field trip so you don't have to go today. Do you want me to call them back and tell them you are going to class?'

He opened his eyes and slowly got out of bed. He sat upright on the bed motionless for a few minutes and then got dressed. He came to the table and ate his breakfast. His grandmother sat by him immersed in thought.

He said, 'What is going to happen on Earth?'

She said, 'I don't know. Perhaps they will decide that people are not people anymore.'

He said, 'Will anything change here?'

She said, 'No, nothing will change here. We will just watch it from a distance. But they need us here, they need to people to pray for them.'

They entered into a tunnel that connected their home with the surrounding buildings. From this they entered a much larger tunnel that had a tram that ran through it with pedestrian walkways on either side. They both boarded the tram and took their seats

along with others. It went out through the surface and was covered on all sides by a transparent tube that gave a view of the surroundings. The tram went over hill after hill of the largely blackened landscape. There was a clear sky over the Ocean and the stars were reflected over the waters.

Her grandson's name was Yang Niufei. He was her son's son, and was the closest of all her grandchildren to her. She thought he was a very intelligent child, but he schooled poorly at school. His problem was that if he didn't find an interest in something, then it was very hard to get him to commit himself to learn it. But if she found something that interested him, she could get him to spend hours and hours learning about it. She thought that this was a great opportunity to teach him about the real world.

The government of Xiaoyi, at least in the catholic part, greatly encouraged home education and parents or grandparents who wanted to teach their children at home. Hence, it was very easy to get him to leave class for this purpose and to take a day off from her own teaching. One of the other teachers would cover for her, while she was gone.

The tube continued and passed over several kilometres of water until it reached another island that was much lower in elevation than their island. The tram then went underground again as it passed into another subterranean urban area. Yang Min counted the stops and she took her grandson off at their stop. A few young students who were late for their class started running when the doors opened to the tram, in order to beat the crowd.

This smaller island contained the train station for their archipelago, which would link it with all the other major islands and archipelagos on the planet.

Yang Niufei said, 'Grandma, why did they put the train station here?'

She said, 'Because this island is lower than the others, so they didn't have to dig down as deeply. The settlement on this island is also older than ours. You can just look at the walls of these tunnels, you see the paint peeling off over there? [she points] This place was built before I was born.'

The design of this tunnel was the same as on their island. A tram ran through it at a very fast speed over a track, and on either side there were wide areas, about 15 metres in width, that people could walk on. It was relatively crowded as people were getting on and off the tram to go to their various activities. They passed a mural as they walked showing the Virgin Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the temple. There were some skeleton-like robots further along painting a new mural showing St Peter hanging upside-down on a cross.

Most people walked by without thinking much of it. Yang Min loved it that they evidently had decided to add art to the walls of the tunnels of this island. She felt like it long needed a makeover.

Yang Niufei said, 'Will there be anything to eat on the train?'

She said, 'Yes, of course, do you remember when your parents and I took you to the Lilac archipelago when you were younger?'

He said, 'No.'

She said, 'You don't remember? You remember seeing the volcano that had fire spitting out of it in the middle of the island we visited for a vacation? It was huge, 11 kilometres tall?'

He said, 'Wasn't that on our island?'

She said, 'No, our island doesn't have any active volcanoes. Do you remember when we took the train there, and they gave us that purple algae mixed with rice and tofu?'

He said, 'Oh right, I remember now.'

She looked at the characters written along the walls that directed her to the train. The tunnel curved and forked in many places into multiple tunnels, there were also tunnels that went vertically or at slants, passing over each other, hence it was very easy to get lost for anyone who didn't follow the signs.

She asked a cleaning robot, 'Is this the right way to the station?'

The robot said, 'Yes madam, follow the blue arrows and take the pedestrian bridge over the tram track about 200 metres from here, then go up one level, and the door to the train station is there.'

She said, 'OK, could you lead us?'

The robot said, 'Yes, madam, follow me.'

The little wheeled robot then went on in front of them and they walked behind it, it went over a ramped pedestrian bridge over the tram track and on the other side there was an elevator that went up. The robot said, 'Just go up one level and the door is right there.'

She didn't say thank you to the robot, although some people did. The robot was not programmed to have feelings, and so she felt no need for it. Instead she thanked God in her heart for providing all these things to them.

They entered the elevator and it went up about 50 metres to another level. At the top there was an identical looking tunnel, but it had many plants growing within it under artificial lights and no tram track, but only walking space. It wasn't very crowded. Her grandson's hand was still in her palm, and she looked around. There were many doors for shopping

centres as well as a few business areas and a university. She saw the door to the train station and pressed the button on the wall to open it. It opened and she took her grandson down another ramp about 200 metres where they saw a massive cavern supporting by huge pillars. There were six tracks in it with two trains currently there. One of them had people boarding, and the other was empty.

A robot at the gate checked her id, and said, 'Ms. Yang, where are you going?'

She said, 'We are going to Xiaoyi city on the main island.'

The robot said, 'The train is currently boarding, the price is 200 Yuan, children under 12 are free.'

She said, 'Charge it to my account.'

The robot said, 'Yes madam, please go ahead and board, the train will leave in 18 minutes and twenty-two seconds. You will have seats in compartment XY1. You will be directed to your seats by the boarding robot. Please have a pleasant journey to Xiaoyi city.'

She said to her grandson, 'You see! If we had waited for you just a little bit longer, then we would not have caught the train!'

Her grandson said, 'But we could have ran the whole way.'

She said, 'That's not the way we do things... I don't want to run everywhere all the time. You get up early to make sure you are not late. Come, we need to find our seats.'

They walk to the train. It was about 2 kilometres long and it floated slightly over the magnetic tracks. They went to the door and the boarding robot greeted them. It looked just like a human being in every detail, except the iris of the eye was made to shine light, in order to make people know that it was a machine. It was a common technique to build service-robots like this, that were identical to human beings in appearance and to just give them glowing eyes or some other feature like this that made it obvious they were not actually human.

The robot said, 'Hello Ms. Yang, good to see you today and your grandson as well. Your seats are in compartment XY1, take the stairs to the top level of the train and then it is on the right-hand aisle.'

Yang Min thanked God silently and went up the stairs. They took their seats. The robot had chosen the window seat for her grandson, as it was programmed to do so.

After a few minutes the train began to move forward. It left the cavern and entered into a transparent tube with the magnetic track running through it. The tube was airless, in order to minimize friction to the train, and it ran over the seafloor. Lights were added to the

outside of the tube to give a view of the surroundings but there was nothing there except rocks. The train reached its cruising speed of 700 kilometres per hour. It would take another 3 hours to reach their destination.

Her grandson got bored very quickly and wanted to get up and start walking around. She let him go and explore. The service robots would take him back to his seat if he got into trouble, so she didn't worry. She took out a touch pad and decided to look at anything new that came out of Earth about what she saw before.

There was a news report about a large-scale protest in one of the West African nations allied with the Great Republic. They were people who had lost their jobs as a result of a new line of robots being produced. She saw images of police vans taking away hundreds of people to be marked as potential terrorists due to violent behaviour in the protests.

Then she found what she was looking for. It was a high-profile political officer in the government of the Great Republic speaking in favour of Dr. Gowan's ideas. He appeared to be a member of the defence ministry and he was echoing the comments that Dr. Mbaya had spoken at the public university debate earlier. Although the events she was watching had already occurred more than 100 years ago, Yang Min watched them as though they were happening just now and was silently pouring at prayers to God for these people that she watched.

He was speaking at an anti-terrorism conference. He said, 'Do you know how many problems we could solve in our hunt against potential terrorists if we just eliminated the concept of human rights and recognized the human being as just the organism that it is? You know I am speaking from experience. The information in our ministry is completely classified, but I am telling the truth that there have been many cases where hands were tied because we had to respect the dignity of the person according to our laws and constitution. If we just took away this concept from the laws and recognized the human being as it is, as an organism, then there are many lives we could save.'

A woman in a military uniform placed her hand on her hand to indicate she wanted to ask a question. Her uniform was a jet black shirt with insignia on her shoulder indicating she was a general.

The man recognized her and pointed to her to ask her question. She said, 'Hello sir, I am Mary Alanen, commander of the arctic security region. I am of course aware of the cases that you mentioned, and of course I am not going to mention them specifically here because this is a public forum that is going to get broadcasted, but I want to know why it is that we didn't submit those cases to the public before, because I think if people knew the specifics they would all unanimously agree that we should have taken the option we could have taken even though it was illegal under the law.'

He said, 'Yes, Commander Alanen, you're completely correct, but in telling the public at that time there is information present in those cases that would then reach our enemies and I think you also know... [she nods]... right, so I won't mention it here. There were

over two million people that died in that attack. I am talking about the one in Murmansk 40 years ago. I am not going to mention the specifics, but I am going to now tell this public forum, that if we were permitted under the constitution to disregard human rights and treat the human organism as an organism, it could have been prevented. I am not going to mention specifically what it was we could have done, because the information is highly classified, but we could not have taken that option because of the constitution.'

'Commander Alanen rightly points out that if we had shown the public what we could have done, I think everyone would support changing the law to let us do it, but there was other information present in that case that we can't reveal even today. And we thought we can't just go to the public and ask them to please eliminate human rights in the constitution in the name of safety for no specified reason at all. At that time that idea didn't even enter our heads. It was only until the last year or so when Dr. Mbaya began to stir up so much debate about Gowanism that this idea is honestly being talked about in the public sphere now, and I think it is very healthy that we are discussing these things.'

'I know that some politicians have been proposing to eliminate human rights for all those slum dwellers who live on government handouts for such a long time. I personally am not in favour of that, and I don't see how it would help our security situation, although I can state very bluntly, that if we sacrificed just a few people and recognized them as organisms, there are a lot of lives that could have been saved like this.'

Yang Min continued her prayers as a service robot carried her grandson back to his seat. The robot said, 'Ms. Yang, your grandson has been running up and down the stairs; he fell down, but didn't hurt himself. We have a set of children's games which are accessible from your seat for a small fee.'

She said, 'No, it is OK, I will keep watch over him.'

She put him back in his seat and asked him, 'Would you like to pray with me?'

He agreed and they prayed together for the rest of the journey.

Upon arriving, they got off a very similar-looking train platform in a cavern. Yang Min took her grandson's hand and asked the service robot the fastest way to the Bureau of Citizen's Affairs.

They exited the train station and took a long elevator ride down several hundred metres to a tram track on the lower levels with pedestrian walkways on either side, just like on her island. She boarded the tram when it arrived and it travelled through many tunnels for about 20 minutes before they reached their stop. The two of them got off as the tram continued in its direction.

The main island was the largest of the northern islands; being about 490 kilometres across. The capital city only occupied a small part of it.

They took a fork in the tunnel that had no tram track, but had a number of doors for shops on either side. She asked directions from a cleaning robot, who told her that she had gone the wrong way. She went back again and took another fork, one which wasn't as easily visible but which had a sign on it to mark the start of the area designated for government offices.

She passed a door for the cathedral church and she decided to go inside to take a look at it. The door slid open and they found themselves inside of a large cavern with a thick crystal roof very high up through which one could see the sky. The interior of the church was filled with artwork containing biblical stories, as well as from the lives of the saints. She saw a painting of her ancestor hanging in an alcove and when she approached it she saw the box containing his bones, with a few women kneeling in prayer in front of it. The painting of her ancestor depicted him onboard the spacecraft taking him and the others to Xiaoyi so long ago, while holding a bible in his hands and preaching to them.

There was another alcove on the other side with a painting of a saint that she didn't recognize. It was a woman, dressed as a nun, with many butterflies around her head as her hands held a crucifix. She looked around for a sign and could not find any mention of a name. She asked a man sitting in the pews nearby, 'Who is that? It has been such a long time since I came to this church, but I don't remember seeing her before.'

He said, 'That is St. Mirani Kaladfa. She was from Earth, born two hundred EA previously. We just found out recently that the Pope on Earth declared her a saint 80 EA after she died.'

She asked, 'Why is she here, what is special about her?'

He said, 'The pope declared her the patron saint of terraforming projects. She supposedly had visions of Jesus as the Creator, making the whole universe and He told her all sorts of secrets about how He created the universe and all the life within it. The Primate of Xiaoyi decided to put her in this alcove to start a devotion to her, and to ask for her prayers in our world's attempts at terraforming. Before, we just had a statue of Mary that was in this area, but it has been moved to the back.'

She asked, 'Why is special about those little winged things?'

He said, 'Those are called butterflies, they are an animal that lives on Earth, but I don't think they get mentioned in the bible.'

She said, 'Wow, that's an animal! I thought it was a machine with a battery in it. It looks so beautiful.'

He said, 'St Mirani supposedly once had a vision of Jesus in which she asked Him if He was an artist or an engineer, and He replied both. He asked her what type of animal she thought was the most beautiful, and she said it was that thing, the butterfly. He told her that this was the most beautiful thing that she knew, but that He could make things that

would far surpass even the most beautiful things that she had imagined. She wrote in her diary that she understood what it meant when Paul said that what the eye had not seen, what the ear had not heard, and what no heart has conceived, is what Christ has prepared for those who love Him.’

‘I take it you are not from Xiaoyi city?’

She said, ‘No, I am taking my grandson with me to make an application to the government about fish farming as part of a terraforming project.’

He said, ‘Ah, you are taking him here for education? Great idea!’

She said, ‘Actually the idea was his.’

He looked at the boy and said, ‘Well, young man, I am impressed. Do you plan to work in the terraforming department someday?’

Yang Niufei said, ‘When I grow up, I want to build robots that can build things.’

She said, ‘I don’t think he knows yet what he wants to do. Last year he was saying he wanted to work on building spacecraft. He always liked big machines though.’

The man said, ‘Well, perhaps there is a reason why you are here in front of St Mirani. Maybe she is the one that led you here to get this new project underway for Xiaoyi.’

She said, ‘Wow, you’re right, I hadn’t thought of that. I guess I should say a prayer to her.’

The man said, ‘Yes, I think so. If you are going to be here five hours from now, the Primate also will have daily mass. I will be at work though.’

She said, ‘Where do you work?’

The man said, ‘I work in the taxation bureau. It is very close to the cathedral, just two levels down. Believe it or not, I have been working in that bureau since it first opened not long after the settlers came to this world.’

She said, ‘Wow, I never guessed you were that old from looking at you. You must be more than twice my age.’

The man said, ‘And I remember St Yang before he died as well. What a wonderful world we live in here on Xiaoyi, preserved from so many evils elsewhere. Every day I go to thank God here for the long life he has given me in such a nice place to live as this.’

She said, 'Well, my grandson and I will ask for St Mirani's intercession, but maybe you can also say some prayers for us as well. We can't stay here too long, because there is only one train going back and we got to go back in the same day.'

He said, 'I understand, may God bless your work.'

She went down with her grandson to pray for St Mirani's intercession for Xiaoyi and to ask the Creator God to help them in their work of terraforming their own world.

After ten minutes, they left ago, waving a silent goodbye to the man they met and went out the door.

They followed the directions of robots to locate the Bureau of Citizens' Affairs. They finally found the door, and it slid open for them. Inside there was a very plain looking office centre with dozens of people in work clothes sitting at tables and looking over screens.

She walked in with her grandson and no one looked up to pay any attention to her, even though she clearly was not an employee. She then noticed a sign indicating that citizens' applications were to made in the adjacent room with an arrow pointing in the right direction. She followed it and came to a well-furnished room with a man sitting at a desk.

He looked up at her and said, 'Welcome, please take your seat. Let me run the computer on your face to get your ID.'

She and her grandson then sat down on a sofa opposite his desk. The room had a blue and purple carpet with images of plants embroidered in it. The room was narrow and long, with the desk and the sofa at one end, while a number of cabinets made of imitation wood were on the other end.

He said, 'Yang Min and her grandson Yang Niufei. It says here in your record that you applied for a day off today and took the train from the Shanmai station to the Xiaoyi city station ... I guess this was an educational trip for your grandson.'

He smiled and said to the boy, 'Welcome young man, do you like our capital city?'

He said, 'It looks the same as home.'

The man chuckled and said, 'Yes, of course it does. That is because you are still underground. If you go up to the service the terrain looks different here. We are a long way inland from the sea and we don't get as much lightning strikes here as on your island. You can go outside and walk on the surface if you were here during the nighttime. Right now, actually it is only 20 C on the surface. You could go up and walk around with a mask; there are no storm clouds right now. If you wait around for another 30 hours though it is going to hit 60 to 70 C.'

He said, 'Can we grandma?'

She said, 'Yes, if we have time.'

The man said, 'So, young man, this is the place where people on our world come to make applications to the government for new ideas for development. Some ideas get rejected and some ideas get accepted or changed, but every person is allowed to make an application. You are the first one we had since our office opened an hour ago.'

She said, 'My grandson actually has a proposal to make.'

The man smiled and said, 'Well... let us hear it young man, what is it you think we need to do?'

The boy said, 'I think we need to have fish farms. We will make big caves underground and fill them with water and grow fish in them, to feed people with and we can all eat them.'

The man said, 'Are you talking about the fish we had in storage that we were planning on releasing into the wild once oxygen levels reached an acceptable point?'

He looked at his grandma and she said to him, 'Well, are those the ones you are talking about? Speak to the man, he is asking you a question.'

The boy said, 'Yes, those ones.'

The man paused in thought and then said, 'Well, that is a good idea come to think of it. All we would need to do is order the construction robots to clear out a new cavern from the bedrock and flood it with water, fill it with acceptable oxygen levels and put the fish in it. We could grow the population and use it for agriculture.'

She said, 'Yes, I thought it was an excellent idea. I can't believe no one ever thought of this before.'

The man said, 'Well, I bet someone did think of it before, but you are the first person to come here and propose it. You know a lot of people don't try to submit their own ideas because they assume that someone has already thought of it and there is some reason why it could never work. People don't have confidence in their own creativity.'

She asked, 'Where are the fish located?'

The man said, 'Well, we have two species of fish actually. One of them is called the Bluefin Tuna and the other is called an Oarfish. The Tuna is used for food on Earth, but the Oarfish is not, however, it is also edible. Both were shipped here in two separate unmanned craft from another star system about 30 EA ago. We didn't know very much about these fish, because the link hadn't reached us yet and we were not quite confident that we knew how to take care of them. We asked for the Oarfish because it was a deep

water fish, and we thought that maybe it could survive well, since the surfaces of our oceans will get very hot in the day, while the Tuna was a food fish. Although we are not certain it will be able to survive even if oxygen levels reach the right levels, because it may go close to the surface and die from heat exhaustion.'

'The Tuna is located here in the capital, but we actually put the Oarfish on Senlindao which is very far away on the other side of the planet.'

She said, 'Can we see it?'

The man said, 'Here, let me put them on the screen for you. [he types in some commands and hit a button, then turns the monitor around for them to look at]. They see the fish, several dozen of them, swimming around in a tank and being watched over by some human-like service robots.'

She said, 'Look Yang Niufei, you see the fish, it is so huge. It is much bigger than I thought it would be.'

The little boy stared at it in amazement.

The man said, 'Yes, this is actually a rather large fish.'

She said, 'But, I don't understand. What was this fish supposed to eat after you put it in the oceans?'

The man said, 'Well, actually there were other things we purchased in the same shipment. Each was sent on its own small unmanned spaceship from the other star system we traded with. In exchange for this, we gave them a large quantity of rare metals that were not available on their world.'

She said, 'Which world was it?'

The man said, 'Tiangong.'

The man hit some keys and some other pictures appeared showing other creatures in underground tanks looked after by robots, just like the first picture.

The man said, 'This one here is called a squid, this one is also edible actually. [he hit a key it changed to another tank]. This one is called krill, it is really tiny, but we could make a paste from it to use as food. [another key] This one here is called a shrimp, it can also be eaten. [another key] This one is called zooplankton, it cannot be eaten.'

'We already had a number of species of algae from the first colonists that came here, and we have already planted a number of these in the oceans. Some of them have been able to survive well, but others have not. Slowly they are raising the oxygen levels though.'

She said, 'So you could farm all of these then.'

He said, 'Yes, we can. And believe it or not, if you never came here to suggest it, I think those robots would just be standing there and looking after them and no one would ever think of this. Most people on our world do not know we have these; we just have robots watching them, no one ever walks in to check on them.'

'Do you see how useful a human being is? Build the best robots in the galaxy, but you can't make them invent things that you never thought of before.'

She said, 'So the proposal has your approval?'

He said, 'I will submit it to the administrator later, but I am pretty sure it will be approved. We will then work to increase the population and farm them for food. Do you want to plan the tank?'

The boy lit up his eyes and said, 'Yes!'

The man hit some buttons and then gave a handheld pad to Yang Niufei. He said, 'OK, so here is the rock we will put the shrimp tank in for farming. Now move your hand over the screen to create the dimensions of the cavern you want the robots to cut out.'

He moved his hands over it and the screen simulated the destruction of the rock to show how it would appear.

The simulation then showed an alert, indicating threat of rock collapse. The man said, 'You need to place some supports to make sure that the walls will not cave in. Follow the directions to place the recommended supports.'

Lights appeared on the screen indicating which place was recommended to add supports to, and the boy moved his hand over the screen to put the supports in their proper places.

The man said, 'Now show the dimensions of the tank you want to place in the cavern.'

He moved his hands over the simulated cavern and a large pool was placed in the middle of it.

The man said, 'The simulation here shows that the temperature will be too high, you need to place an air conditioning unit in the room to keep the temperature lower.'

He moved his hands over the pad to place the unit on the ceiling.

The man said, 'Any decorations you want to make the robots to add to the room, you can add them now.'

His grandma was very happy to see him watch how construction took place. He became immersed in it and was watching the simulation of the robots adding each component he commanded them to add to the cave he created.

After they were done, she purchased two masks, because they hadn't brought any, and took an elevator from the tunnels up to the surface. The sky was cloudy but they were grey clouds and not storm clouds. An alert would get sounded in case they needed to go back down. The temperature had raised to 30C and was going to go higher. The winds were exceptionally strong, but not strong enough to blow her or her grandson off their feet. They were standing on a plateau in the midst of many hills. The sea could not be seen anywhere, but there was a launch platform for a space shuttle nearby. Very tall lightning rods stood all around the area, and there were others walking around with masks on enjoying the relative calm in which they could go outside.

VIII: Death

San Beret looked at Paul's body one last time as it was placed in the coffin to be sent back to his family on Earth. Paul had a wife and a daughter back home. San was a very introverted person who never showed emotion, but he felt very sad when thinking of this. At last he ordered the robot to load the coffin into the spacecraft to send it back to the Earth. It disappeared into the belly of the spacecraft as it was loaded on, and other things were placed on board as well, since this was not the only thing being sent in this shipment.

After two hours, the unmanned craft then fired its rockets and escaped from the tiny moon.

One of his colleagues passed him in the hallways and asked him if he wanted to play a game of shotball. This was a game played on low gravity environments like Enceladus where the balls were fired in a gym, and you had to jump (which could have been many metres in the low gravity) in order to catch the ball first before your opponent did.

He just looked at him with a sad expression and then continued walking without a response.

The coffin reached his wife and daughter back on Earth. They mourned over him and held a funeral service for him. They were all atheists and had no religious beliefs, but they still felt a need to have some kind of ceremony with special meanings in order to mourn for him.

A relative of theirs dressed himself in a black costume and sang a poem about life and death as they bowed their heads in mourning. At the end of the ceremony they all placed their hands on the coffin as it was lowered down into its place and covered over with dirt.

His daughter asked her mother, 'Mom, what happens to him after he dies.'

She said, 'That's it. He doesn't exist anymore.'

The daughter had a tear go down her face thinking about this. She said to her mother, 'Will we ever have technology that can bring him back someday?'

She put her arms around her daughter and spoke to her, 'My daughter, with science all things are possible. Every tear will be wiped away in the end if we follow reason and technology. Someday science will find a way to bring all people back to life again and the whole world will live in peace and joy forever.'

Tears came from her daughter's eyes as she buried her face in her mother's bosom.

Three and half years passed by. The debate about Gowanism grew larger and larger, but no major policy changes were enacted. *The Human Organism*, with Dr. Mbaya's commentary was translated into multiple languages and widely read. It provoked hot discussions in many places.

Earth's massive population 21 billion and the 4 billion that lived in the other planets and moons of Earth's solar system all became aware of this subject, as it was presented in the media very often.

Yang Min watched the events on the Earth through the link and kept up her prayers, begging Mary for her help, and trusting that her prayers would be answered. The fish farms were created and soon the richest people on Xiaoyi were able to afford the seafood, but as production increased the price came down and Yang Min's family was able to eat it for the first time. She thought it was delicious.

Yang Niufei became an instant celebrity among Xiaoyi's small population of 400,000. The Primate of Xiaoyi preached that this was a reminder that it was to the human being and not to robots that God gave lordship over the creation.

San Beret took over Paul's position at the research facility. He silently wished that he could have Paul back again. He kept trying to find clues from the crater about what Paul saw, but he could not detect anything. He made a point to mention it in his logbook and the system files what Paul had said before the rock struck his helmet. He kept this as a secret though and only mentioned it to his family.

The extent of human expansion in the galaxy went further and further. Probes sent at half the speed of light had already gone far into the parts of the galaxy not yet visited by people. But nobody ever found any sign of another organism like the human organism.

Amazonis Planitia on Mars held the theocracy governed by Fox Asher. He did wonders and miracles in the sight of the people, which no one could explain. He could fly through the air and foretell the future. Atheists in the Great Republic assumed that he had some kind of access to technology or science that was hidden from others. Although they sent spies to discover it, however, they could not find it.

Mars' atmosphere had been fully terraformed, and it was breathable without a mask, but the radiation was still of such levels that people needed to be underground most of the time. Unlike the Earth, Mars had no magnetic field to block the Sun's radiation, and no world had ever terraformed a place successfully to solve this problem. Neither had Fox Asher ever seemed to have the power to solve this problem; nevertheless pilgrims would still often go up to the spot on the mountain where Asher had supposedly received his first message without any protection.

Mary took Paul to the summit of Olympus Mons and made him watch as the believers in Terah dressed in red and orange robes went up in lines, slowly going to a part of the mountain to make their offerings at a shrine. The outside temperature was -30 celsius, and the pilgrims had heating tubes that went under their clothes to keep their bodies warm.

Paul said, 'Now what are you going to show me?'

Mary said, 'I want you to see things as they really are and not just as they appear.'

Fox Asher with his shaven hairless head and white clothing appeared in front of them as a figure standing in the air and the pilgrims bowed down in reverence.

With an angelic voice he spoke to them, 'My beloved children! Do not be afraid, for you are in my heart and I love you. I have a message from God for you. He has told me that he is very angry at all the people who have still not accepted Him and me, His messenger. He has told me that He will wreak great vengeance upon all those who do not believe in His message to the world, but He will bring abundant blessings upon those who believe in their heart.'

Paul said, 'This man is perhaps the most evil person in the galaxy. Him and the dictator of Sannhet together are both controlling people through lies and tricks.'

Mary said, 'This man is not using any technology at all to appear in front of them.'

Paul said, 'What? You can't be saying that He really comes from God!'

Mary said, 'No, he doesn't. I want you to see it now for what it really is.'

Asher flew through the air in the sight of the pilgrims, but Paul blinked at first, when he saw what appeared to be dark shapes around Asher's body. He knew that somehow what he was saying was not visible to the pilgrims, but Mary was allowing him to see it.

There were not human, they were winged creatures, with the faces of animals and the tails of serpents. They had one face on their head and another face, a hidden one, appearing on their stomachs. They bat their wings and held Asher up with their arms.

Paul looked at them and felt intense fear at the sight of them.

Then they spoke.

One called to the other, in a hideous monstrous voice, 'How much longer must we wait before the children of Adam can be reduced to the dust they came from?'

The other called back, 'Not much longer! They gather themselves ready for the day of their slaughter! Once their sins reach a completion, then the time will come!'

A third one called out, 'But look, the mother of God is preparing a messenger to go to the world and tell the Truth to the people.'

The first one said, 'It is the last chance they have! After they don't listen to that one, the time for their extermination will be near.'

They carried Asher through the air and they disappeared from sight. Then there was silence.

Paul felt intense fear at the sight of those things, but he felt Mary put her hand on his shoulders and she whispered to him, 'Do not be afraid, they can do nothing, except if God allows it.'

He looked at her and she said to him, 'It is time for you to go back soon. When you wake up, you will have been dead for three and half years.'

He said to her, 'I am ready. If you will stay with me, then I know I can do this.'

She said to him, 'Remember to pray and know that I will always be with you. You will face hardships and difficulties, and they will put you to death a second and final time. But do not be afraid, for it is not you who will bring this task to completion, but it is Him.'

He said to her, 'Will my family believe?'

She said, 'No, not at first. But after you die again, they shall believe. You will see them again one day in heaven, do not be afraid.'

Yang Min was continuing her prayers in front of the statue of Mary in her home. After she finished she decided to look at the news from Earth one last time before going to bed.

In it she saw a video of Fox Asher speaking in a broadcast to the people of the Earth,

Yang Min felt a feeling of such deep fear as she listened to this, even though she knew it was so far away. She remembered the words of the man she and her grandson met at the Cathedral in Xiaoyi city, who said he came to the church everyday to thank God that he lived his long life in a place like Xiaoyi.

Then she watched news reports of rioting among the slum dwellers in many of Earth's cities in support of Asher's message. Many of them were religious believers of different religions who had no jobs because robots were doing them, and they felt the shame of living like this unbearable. They rioted, destroyed property and there were even talks of doing more terrorist attacks. The police tagged all of them for complete surveillance, their surveillance watchlist had the names of hundreds of millions of people. People were angry that they lived in such relative poverty and they were all going to die someday, while those who worked would live in comfort enjoying their youth forever, and at the same time the words of Asher echoed true to them, because many of them believed in God while those in the working society did not.

She couldn't go to sleep. She went back to prayer. Night after night, day after day, she continually offered up prayers for what she saw. While her husband took a great interest in the news but didn't think prayer worked to change anything. He said to her, 'Don't you realize that these things have all already happened more than 100 EA ago?'

She said, 'Yes, I know, but I don't think that God is stopped by time. The prayers I am making now can still help people in the past that I am watching right now.'

He said, 'So why don't you pray for things that happened in the past on our world and make them change?'

She said, 'I don't know; maybe I can't touch them with my prayers. I just know I need to pray, not just for them, but for my own salvation as well. How can I watch this and do nothing?'

Despite the deep Catholic faith of the world, few people had the relationship with God that she had. She was a saint living an ordinary life and she didn't know it.

The next day she decided not to turn on the broadcast else it would take her mind away, and she just went straight to the school to give class. It was daylight hours but the sky was filled with lightning as normal. The school was on the surface, although connected to the tunnel complex and the students could look out the windows to watch something they couldn't see at home, but this was not what they were looking at today.

She got her notes ready for her lecture on early human evolution on the Earth only to notice many of the students were looking at screens and she knew that something must have happened on the Earth in answer to what Asher said the night before.

She said to the students, 'Please put away the screens and let us get our class going, OK? We will say a prayer before we begin.'

They all stood up and prayed together, and when they sat down one of the students said to her, 'Ms. Yang did you hear what happened?'

Yang Min felt like she shouldn't entertain the curiosity or else it would distract her, but it was already too late for that. She said, 'I saw what Mr. Asher said last night, but I went to bed afterwards.'

The students murmured and Zhao Xiaoyun said, 'Ms. Yang, some of the leaders of the Great Republic have threatened to put Gowanism into law against the poor.'

She said, 'Yes, you will have plenty of more time to watch it later. For now, we need to begin our class.'

The students quieted down and Ms. Yang hit a button that made images of animals appear as holograms in front of them.

Ms. Yang said, 'In the early stages of human existence, human beings would go to the wilderness and hunt animals for food. But eventually they learned how to domesticate animals and so they no longer needed to hunt, because they would raise their own animals.'

She pointed at the image in front of the students, 'This here is an auroch. It is an ancient animal on the Earth and human beings took this animal into their own communities to live with them. New aurochs would be born and grow up alongside the humans, and they would live their whole lives with the humans. Gradually the aurochs living with the humans broke away genetically from the aurochs that lived in the wilds. The humans selectively bred them to make them fatter, bigger and more docile, so they would serve the needs of human beings. The aurochs that lived among humans were called cows. This was called domestication.'

'They did the same with other animals as well (the holograms changed to show other animals). Wild boars were domesticated and became pigs. Wild sheep and goats were domesticated for human use. Human beings took these other species and slowly changed them over many generations so that they would be able to better serve human needs.'

She noticed many students were not paying attention.

She sighed and said, 'OK, let us watch it together then. I don't think anyone is going to be thinking about anything else today. But just remember to go home and pray about these things. Do not just talk and do nothing.'

She made the class main screen show the videos sent over the link. The most popular one being watched was a speech by a high-ranking political officer in the government of the Great Republic.

Zhao Lingling asked Ms. Yang, ‘Ms. Yang how does their government work? Do they have elections like we do?’

She said, ‘No, they have elections, but not like we do. In their system you need to be at least 100 years old to vote. It means that anyone who doesn’t have a job and dies a natural death usually never votes in their lives.’

He spoke in a broadcast to the solar system, ‘Our state gives food, clothing, homes and every kind of daily necessity to people who contribute nothing to our state and in return they curse us for not following an imaginary sky fairy that they say we need to believe in. Some people say that we need to give them the medical treatment that will keep them young forever, even though they contribute nothing to our economy and they go off everyday to say their prayers to a sky fairy who doesn’t help them and then they blame us for not following this sky fairy that doesn’t help them.’

‘And look at this rioting! Look at the way they repay the help that we gave to them! How can you suggest we should now help them to live without aging when they behave like this? I think that even if we did that, they would still get angry at us and demand even more from us who work on their behalf. We feed them with everything and they curse us and threaten more terrorism!’

She turned it off. She said, ‘Students are you just going to watch this or are you going to pray?’

IX: The Apostle

Paul opened his eyes. His grave had been dug up and the casing over the coffin had been taken away. His body was fully healed. His eyes were returned to him and he felt fine. He stood up and looked around. He was in the middle of a graveyard not far from his home on Earth.

He walked towards the entrance to the graveyard, where there was a human-like service robot standing. Although the sensors on the robot must have picked him up, the robot did not turn its head or notice anything anomalous by his exit from his grave. He walked past the robot and it didn’t even look at him.

He continued on and walked down the road to the blocks of tall buildings where his home was. He went into the elevator and pushed the button for his floor. He came to the door and it scanned him, opening itself for him.

As he stepped inside he heard his daughter's voice as she walked in his direction, 'Mom, you are back so soon! I thought you were going to go meet...'

Her eyes then fixed on her father standing in the doorway and she was unable to say a word. She stared at him for a full minute, unable to make any response at all.

Then she ran into his arms and he embraced her. She cried and his tears followed hers.

After some time passed he sat her down on the sofa and spoke to her, 'Melissa, there is a lot I need to tell you about.'

She gulped and nodded.

He said, 'Where is your mother?'

She said, 'She went to go and meet Aunt Windy, she said she would be back for tea by four.'

He said, 'Melissa, God exists. The reality is not the way that you think it is.'

She simply stared at him without uttering a word.

He said, 'I was dead and God raised me from the dead so that I could go back and tell people that these things I saw were real. Do you believe me, Melissa?'

She said, 'I am scared. I want to believe you so much.'

He said, 'Let me tell you things I saw. God wants people to know that He is greater than death.'

After a few hours passed, his wife came home.

She walked in the door and saw her husband sitting on the sofa talking to her daughter, who was listening attentively. She was stunned by what she saw.

She said, 'Paul?'

He said, 'Genevai.'

She said, 'Melissa, what has happened? Who is this man that looks like my husband?'

Melissa said, 'Mom, dad came back from the dead. It really is him.'

He said, 'I am not an imposter, trust me, Genevai. The door even recognized me and let me in after I was scanned. Run the scan right now if you like, it will tell you my DNA is a 100% match.'

She did not hesitate and ordered the computer to do the scan. The computer voice then spoke out: 'Paul Edward Jackson, husband of Genevai Matilda Jackson and father of Melissa Banana Jackson.'

She said, 'I do not believe it, you have done something with the software.'

He said, 'Well, ask me any question, I really am who I say I am.'

She pointed at Melissa and said, 'When is her birthday?'

He said, 'May 11th'

She said, 'What is my favourite food?'

He said, 'Strawberries mixed with ice cream. But you also like cherries or mango pieces mixed with ice cream.'

She said, 'What did you see the moment before you died?'

He said, 'I saw a beautiful woman standing in front of the Damascus geyser.'

She had no response. She stared blankly at him. San Beret had told her that he had not mentioned this to anyone else except her and her family. She knew that this could not have been a fraud.

He said, 'Genevai, it really is me. Trust me, come take a close look at me, do you not see your husband?'

She saw her husband, and felt like this was him, but she still felt very great fear at this. Nothing seemed right to her.

She said, 'Paul, I feel very scared right now. I don't understand what has happened.'

He said, 'I know, I would be scared too.'

She went to sit down with him and her daughter. She said, 'So, tell me what happened. What was the woman you saw?'

He said, 'She said her name is Mary and that her Son is God. She told me that God is real and that He loves us, but we have gone away from Him. She said I was taken there to see all these things and to go back to the world to tell people that these things were real.'

Genevai stood up again and said, 'Paul, do you understand what you just said?'

Paul said, 'But, Genevai, God is real, I saw these things...'

'Stop it! Something has been done to you! I believe you are my husband, but look Paul, there is no God and if you saw these things, then someone is playing a trick on you.'

'Genevai, do you know anyone who has the power to bring a dead person back to life again? Even if this were Fox Asher's work, he doesn't have the power to resurrect the dead.'

'Paul, listen to me. I love you, do you know that?'

'Genevai, I know, but I am trying to tell you this isn't some dream.'

'Paul, if God exists, then I think He is the most evil person imaginable. I go to bed each night thinking to myself how thankful I am that all the things that Fox Asher said are not true because science explains the universe and not God. I can live in peace because I know that there is no God who wants to wipe out humanity and torture it because it broke certain rules against Him. I can feel content in my heart because I know that my child is not going to be tortured forever because she didn't believe in a god that controlled everything and hates her because she is an atheist.'

'Genevai, the real God is nothing like what Fox Asher says. Let me tell you about the real God.'

'No, Paul! Stop talking about God. Stop talking about God in front of our child like this and giving her doubts about science. You are being brainwashed by something. Something has done something to you and I want to tell you that I love you, and we will get you back again.'

'Genevai, God is real, He is good and He wants to tell the world how much He loves them.'

'Stop it, Paul! Just stop it right now!'

'Genevai, you need to believe me.'

'Would you look at yourself? Do you know what you sound like right now? You sound like one of those religious terrorists after they get captured and interrogated. You sound like something that came out of a horror movie. As your wife I insist that you stop this right now.'

‘I can’t Genevai, because it is true.’

She turned to her daughter, ‘Sweetie, go right now to the neighbours and ask them to contact the police. I will stay here with your father.’

She looked at her father and then back at her mother, and went out the room to the neighbour’s apartment.

‘Paul do you realize how many people get killed every year by terrorists? We do not have old age anymore in our state except for all those people who don’t work, and among those who do work the highest ranking cause of death is terrorist attacks.’

‘Genevai, listen to me, the Son of Mary and the God of Fox Asher are so totally different from each other. The real God does not want to hurt human beings. He wants to save them. He sent me back here to show the world that He really is real.’

‘Paul, God is the most evil, most destructive, most hate-filled being that could possibly exist. If God is real, then I and many others will fight against God with every bit of our strength even to the point of death. I reject God because I love my child and I love human beings. You are trying to tell me now that God is love and we must accept Him, but everyone knows this is nonsense! Fox Asher talks just like this sometimes in order to brainwash people into thinking that God is good. I will not fall for it.’

‘Genevai, Fox Asher cannot bring people back from the dead. Do you understand that? If he really was God’s prophet, then don’t you think God would be able to bring someone back from the dead? And yet among all the miracles and signs that Asher gives, he can’t do that one. Asher is not the prophet of God.’

‘Paul, I know my words are falling on deaf ears, but I want you to know that I love you and I will do everything I can to free you from this evil that has come upon you and get you back safe again to the world without God.’

‘Genevai, did you know that the real God came down and was a human being?’

‘I don’t believe it. I know that God supposedly judges the actions of every person all the time and has punishments in store for each and every little thing that displeases Him. He will take all the people who do not believe in Him and cast them into eternal fire for doing things that displease Him. He demands human beings be completely obedient to Him at all times and does not let them make any choices against His will. He does not accept disagreement or dissent. Tell me Paul, does the God that Mary told you about have these qualities too?’

‘Yes He does, but there’s more to it than that. He loves people.’

‘Paul then your message is the same as Fox Asher’s. God is the greatest demon that has ever lived and we must fight against Him with all of our strength.’

‘He was a human being. He had flesh and blood like us. Listen to me, Genevai, the real God gave His own life for human beings, not the other way around.’

Just then the door opened and a squad of police officers entered the room. They were dressed in blue uniforms and a 2.5 metre tall bipedal robot carrying a vast array of non-lethal weaponry in six limbs entered the room with them. Genevai pointed out her husband and said, ‘This is my husband. I think he has been brainwashed by some religious sect, maybe by the Amazonians, I don’t know.’

An officer said, ‘Madame, has he done anything violent or said anything that makes you suspect he may commit terrorism?’

She said, ‘He hasn’t said anything about violence or plans to do violence. All I know is that he is talking about God and saying we need to believe in Him. Isn’t this reason enough to be weary of him?’

The officer said, ‘There are many people in the slums who have religious beliefs that are not dangerous. Just tell us, do you have any reason to suspect that this man is dangerous.’

She said, ‘Yes. Because I knew him before and the person he is now is different. I feel like there is someone very evil who is planning something.’

The officer said, ‘Madame, this is not sufficient grounds to arrest him.’

Melissa said, ‘My father died three years ago. He was buried at the cemetery down the road. He said God brought him back to life.’

Genevai had forgotten to mention this part. The officers looked at her, then looked at each other while exchanging a kind of body language with one another that only those in their profession would understand, and the officer that was speaking said, ‘I am sorry, madame, is this correct, your husband has been dead for three years?’

She said, ‘Yes, I saw his body myself. And it was his body, otherwise the computers would have told us that the DNA was different. He was a robotics engineer who tested low-gravity robots on Enceladus at the Damascus geyser. He died there three years ago when a piece of space debris penetrated his helmet while testing a machine with two co-workers.’

The officer said, ‘Are you sure that this is the same man as your husband.’

She said, ‘You can check the DNA yourself and see if it matches the records. He was able to answer questions that convinced me that he really was who he said he was.’

The lead officer made a quick with his hands to the other officers next to him, and then he said to the other officers, 'This case will fall under a special conditions category. We will need to arrest him and take him in for further investigation.'

The officer turned back to Genevai, 'Madame, when did he come back to life.'

He said, 'Today.'

The officer said, 'Sir, if you don't mind, we will need to take you in for examination. You know that there are some very dangerous terrorists in our nation who would try anything at all to hurt people. We are afraid that perhaps someone is attempting to use you in order to harm people, and so we need to take you in for further examination.'

He said, 'It is OK, I will go with you. I was sent back for this.'

Genevai said to the officers, 'You need to get this brainwashing out of him. I am telling you that something has entered into him. Get him to stop believing in God, and then we will be safe.'

The officer said, 'Do not worry, Madame, we will look at him closely and if we determine someone has brainwashed him for some purpose, we will certainly do something about it.'

Paul did not say a word, but he left the room with them. He waved a joyful goodbye to his wife and daughter who had tears on their faces.

X: Prayer

Yang Min spent hours every day immersed in prayers to God about all the things that she saw. But when she met her students, her family, her friends... she felt like she was the only one.

All people were talking about the shocking things they were seeing that were coming from the Earth and it caused quite a buzz, but so very few people were praying about it.

She couldn't grasp why people were like this. People could talk as much as they liked with each other, but it was not going to make the slightest difference to a planet that was more than 100 light years away. But prayer could make a difference. She felt like she was trying to hold up the world on her own.

She and others watched the events as they unfolded.

The situation on Earth just became worse and worse. The legislative assembly of the Great Republic repealed the part of the constitution that guaranteed human rights for all people and reworded it with a new definition that guaranteed human rights for all people except in cases where the state needed to deny human rights in order to prevent terrorism.

Initially nothing changed, however. It was only a legal change, and nothing in practice changed at first. There were many Gowanists who were insisting that they should go further and deny the protection of human rights to the masses of unemployed. However, those in the government with more wisdom saw that such an act would do more to promote terrorism and would be of no benefit to the state.

Riots, spurred on by the rhetoric of religious preachers, grew larger and larger as years went by. Huge numbers of the unemployed openly gave their support to the various terrorists who came up and took the lives of millions.

Although the people who ran the military gave their advice against the suggestions to deny human rights to the unemployed, it was not possible to keep people maintaining a rational discourse under these conditions. Politicians on Earth, supported by masses of the employed, openly supported the application of Gowanism to the unemployed living permanently on handouts that were also on the list of potential terrorists.

Yang Min watched this all and kept up her prayers, but she felt like she alone was not enough; others needed to pray as well.

When her grandson came to visit here, she had company in her prayers, but he was the only one.

The fish farms were created but they were told that they would need to wait at least a few more years before the fish stocks were large enough so that they could market them to the masses. Her grandson was so happy about this.

The man they talked to the government office, however, sent them a gift of a kilogram of shrimp for their personal consumption. Yang Min invited her friends and family over to a meal to come and see what these things tasted like. The man warned her that some people may have an allergic reaction to this sea animal and people should be careful to eat only a little bit the first time to make sure that nothing bad happens.

So many people arrived at her house to come and taste this. Even her grand-niece came half way around the planet to visit them for this.

According to the man's instructions, she took the shrimp and ordered the kitchen to boil them until they turned pink. Then she ordered the kitchen to remove the shells and cut them up into smaller pieces, so that all of her guests could eat one piece.

The kitchen obediently did so and placed all the pieces on a plate. She then put it in the middle of the dining room and everyone then crowded around it.

Her son asked, 'Mom can we try it now?'

She said, 'Yes, but before we take a bite, let us say a prayer in thanksgiving to God for providing us with this.'

She then crossed herself and everyone else followed. She said, 'Lord God, we thank you for providing for all of our needs. We pray that you bless us and bless our world, so that we may live our days in peace with you. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.'

They all took their small pieces and tasted it. For a world that did not know meat, this was an exciting experience for them. They then had a party following this and all of her different relatives and friends conversed with each other.

She had the opportunity to talk with many people she had not seen for a long time.

She met her grand-niece, whom she hadn't seen for decades. She gave her a hug and said to her, 'Oh, it feels like ages since I have seen you!'

Her grand-niece said, 'I miss you too. It is really good I can see you again.'

Yang Min said, 'So, what do you think of the shrimp?'

'I think people will love it. When they start selling it, I think I will buy it for sure.'

'Did you come here alone?'

'Yes. My husband couldn't come because his boss needs to him work today.'

'What's he doing?'

'He is designing software for the electricity grid. It is a really hard-working job, he puts in lots of long hours. I wish he had more time to spend with me.'

'Don't worry about that. You will find time somewhere to be with him.'

'I hope so, but this has been going on for a long time and it doesn't look like it is changing. We fight sometimes about this.'

‘What about children? Is he willing to start a family?’

She clenched her teeth and said, ‘Actually that is one of the things we fight about. We have had some really bad disputes about that topic. He thinks he has no time to be a father, but I told him that the church insists that marriage is for the creation of a family.’

‘There is nothing you can do by fighting with him. Pray for him and let him come around to change on his own. There is nothing else you can do.’

‘Did your man ever give you this kind of trouble?’

‘Well, I mean, we have had lots of arguments, of course. That is just human. But he never had a problem with starting a family; it was other things that we argued about.’

‘What sort of things?’

‘Well, you know, he makes fun of me because I am so devoted to praying to Our Lady. I have learned to turn the other cheek, but at the beginning I had angry reactions and I went to confession each time.’

‘That is just human. Everyone gets upset when other people mock them. You know I have always thought you were such a holy person. You are the only person I know like this who is devoted to prayer.’

Yang Min smiled at the compliment and said, ‘But, why don’t you do the things I do then? You can pray to. Maybe your husband doesn’t come home when you want him to be there because God is giving you time to pray for him.’

‘Now, don’t say that!’

‘No, really, I think that a lot of people would be much happier in their lives if they just cut all lots of activities they didn’t need and gave their time to prayer. Take my students, for example. They spend so much time talking about things they see getting broadcasted over the link, but I think almost none of them actually go back to pray about any of these things. But I think if they started praying for these things, they would find their lives so much more fulfilling.’

‘Well, maybe I should try to pray more, but I just find I got so many other things to do. When my time is free, then I will go and spend more time to pray.’

Yang Min thought in her head, but she didn’t say it out loud, that she was angry at her husband because he didn’t have enough time with her, but she felt like she didn’t have enough time to give to God. She could make time for her husband, but not for God.

At the end of the party, Yang Min dismissed the guests and told them that if any of them would like to come back to her home to pray with her, then they were always welcome to come. The guests thought that she was strange for saying this, while others thought she was very hospitable.

But other than her grandson, not a single one came back to take up her offer. They would come for the shrimp; they wouldn't come for prayer.

She continued her prayers for all the things she saw through the Link. Usually alone, but when her grandson came, he would join her.

XI: The Empty Tomb

San Beret was in the lab on Enceladus working overtime by himself on a robot.

A popular past time in Earth's system as well as many of the colonized world was to hold fighting tournaments wherein robots were built that would fight each other to the death. The Earth system had many tournaments every year that were broadcasted for entertainment wherein robots were placed on a mountain, in a jungle, in the ocean, or on another planet, and sent to hunt each other down to destroy each other. This proved to be very popular entertainment, and they had different matches for different sizes of robots.

The robots could be designed with anything, including being fitted with guns, knives, explosives. The only thing that was not permissible was nuclear arms, except if the tournament was being down on an asteroid. And the rules of the tournament would specify the particular dimensions of the robot. There were contests for under 10 kilograms, under 40 kilograms, under 100 kilograms, under 1000 kilograms, and under 100,000 kilograms. Different matches were done for different weight categories. And each weight category had one match for the whole system that was done each year, for a total of five matches per year.

In some cases the match was over in a few hours, in others it took years to finish. The robots could not be controlled by any outside source, but everything they did had to be separated from any outside information. They had to run on their own software and could not have any way of listening to broadcasts wherein they could watch the match as it was being broadcasted to the people on Earth who were viewing it for entertainment.

San Beret enjoyed this tournament and his own lab at the Damascus geyser would design robots every year to enter the different matches. The competition was very fierce, however. Perhaps one match could have up to 50,000 entries and only one robot would survive at the end. San Beret's lab had only one the match once, and it was with a 40

kilogram bot that was entered into a match on New Guinea along with 3000 other bots. The low number of entries to that match is what made San Beret think that they had won it.

Their bot was very cleverly designed. It was only 2 kilograms, but it burrowed itself into a tree trunk and then covered over the hole with an imitation wood. Other bots that used radar or other sensing equipment failed to pick it up, and it survived the match by waiting for all the other bots to destroy each other. When the last few survivors remained it came out of the hole and mounted itself at the top of the tree and used a sniper cannon to pick off the few wounded bots that were still walking around. This match took 6 months to finish.

That bot had been designed by Paul, however, and he had only helped. As he was adjusting the bot he was working on now, he remembered Paul with sadness. His colleagues always thought of him as such an introverted person without any emotions; people around him thought he was just like the robots he worked upon. But in reality, he was actually very emotional; it was shyness, not lack of feeling, which stopped him from showing himself to others.

The new bot he was working on was to be entered into the under 1000 kilograms category and they had already been told that this year it was going to be held on the surface of Venus, which meant it had to survive very harsh heat and pressure. His colleagues had a meeting about what their strategy was going to be in this match. San wished he had Paul's creativity, but all he could come up with was a larger version of one of their spider bots, specially designed for heat and pressure. As weaponry, he fitted a very high-powered coil gun to it, directed by a radar system that would fire an explosive projectile to a distance of 12 kilometres with the accuracy of a sniper rifle. He knew it was going to lose for sure, because it had nothing to hide itself with. The last time a match was held on Venus, the winning bot was also not able to hide itself, but it was in the under 100,000 kilogram category and it was so heavily armored that almost every shot against it failed to do anything, and it wiped out all the other bots that were trying to do hide and ambush tactics.

He decided to go to sleep and continue after he woke up. In the night he had a dream in which he saw Paul standing by the geyser with a woman next to him wearing a veil. The woman took water from the geyser in her hands and she poured it over Paul's head while saying some words that he couldn't hear. Then she took a white garment and wrapped it around him, and Paul looked very clean and innocent.

When San woke up he remembered the dream so clearly, and felt something strange about it, almost as though it meant something. He was an atheist and he didn't believe that dreams had that kind of power.

It was then that he received a message from Paul's widow on Earth. She wrote to him, 'San, there is something big that has happened that I need to tell you about. Can you first confirm that no one else reads your messages, and I will let you know.'

Paul was taken to the military headquarters of the arctic security region, located in Greenland. The glaciers on Greenland had melted long ago, creating massive inland lake in the centre of the land mass. The headquarters was located at an isolated area on the north side of this lake. There was no rail or road link that connected it to anywhere else, but it could only be visited by aircraft or spacecraft. Paul was taken there by a huge vertical take-off jet engine craft that took him directly there over the sea from England along with an armed escort.

Paul had seen military installations many times before, but he had never actually entered one in his life. He found it strange that he didn't feel scared by what was happening, but he felt the same peace in his heart as when he first saw Mary after he died.

The aircraft took thirty minutes to reach its destination and it landed on a paved area next to the lake. About fifty people were in the berth of the aircraft with him, all of whom were soldiers that were guarding him. Not a single robot was present.

There were many buildings next to the lake, which only appeared to be three or four stories, but Paul knew that they must have gone far underground as well. There was snow on the ground and one of the soldiers gave Paul a winter jacket to put on. The soldiers were dressed in the characteristic jet black uniforms with varying insignia to identify their rank. The uniforms were very simple; they had no camouflage function, because most of these soldiers would never actually need to fight, since robots would do most of the fighting. They were trained to be able to fight if necessary, but most of their time was simply spent behind screens and controlling robots remotely that would do the fighting for them.

All around the buildings there were legions of fighting robots walking around and being controlled by humans who directed them to do different things, as a kind of practice.

Paul was taken over a clearing to the main headquarters building. He was taken to an elevator which went 100 floors down to the General's office who had control of the Arctic security region.

The different parts of the solar system were divided up into different regions by the military of the Great Republic and placed under the control of different generals. There were 43 regions in total, with 22 regions on the Earth, and the other 21 regions were on Mars, the Moon, Venus, Europa and other areas settled by humans. The Great Republic only held territory on part of the Earth, part of Enceladus and the whole of Triton.

This region, the Arctic region of the Great Republic, consisted of all the parts of North America whose watershed flowed into the Arctic Ocean, Greenland, Ireland, Britain, Scandinavia and the parts of Russia where the watershed flowed into the Arctic Ocean. All of this land was territory in the Great Republic's borders.

The General, a woman named Mary Alanen, was born in the province of Finland over 400 years previously. She had spent the past 340 years in the military, after her husband died in a terrorist attack when she was 60. She was well respected by her soldiers, although she had never been engaged in any conflict other than anti-terrorist operations. She was seen as a very capable leader, well-organized and creative, but was occasionally criticized for being too light on discipline for those under her. She carried a kind of baggage in her life that was only rarely noticed by others, as she hid it well, but there was not a day that went past that this baggage did not define her existence..

She had been informed just one hour previously about Paul and she ordered that he be personally brought to her for interrogation. She did not feel surprised to hear the news of it.

When they arrived, Paul was taken out of the aircraft that landed vertically upon the platform. A squad of soldiers and robots accompanied him. It was dark outside and the stars were brightly visible. The architecture of the base was not terribly impressive, at least on the surface. It appeared entirely constructed for utility with little regard for ascetics.

Paul followed the robots with no resistance as they led him to a little hut that came out of the snow. The door of the hut opened and Paul realized it was an elevator. They got inside, and it descended for thirty seconds and then stopped. Paul walked into a hallway that reminded him much of the old research station on Enceladus, which was all white with no decoration, but being much longer and having many doors that Paul could only guess probably lead to other hallways and passages. The commander's door was conveniently located directly next to the elevator.

Paul walked in and saw a young woman (as all of them appeared young, although obviously she had to have been very old to have gotten her position). She smiled with her teeth in what appeared to be a very sincere way, and beckoned him to sit down on a soft chair near her desk. The room was well decorated, with shelves containing a collection of odd-shaped rocks. With a gesture of her hand, she signalled the others to leave the room and leave them alone.

Paul watched with curiosity as she then turned off the surveillance system in the room. Then she asked Paul, 'Would you like anything to drink?'

He said, 'Water, I guess is fine.'

She said, 'I actually don't have any water. But, I have tea or coffee if you would like that.'

He said, 'OK, coffee is fine.'

He was surprised to see that she didn't have a machine to make the beverage for her, but she took the beans and placed them into a kettle and poured hot water into it to make the coffee in the old-fashioned way.

She gave him the cup and took nothing to drink for herself. She then sat down in a chair opposite Paul and said to him in what seemed like a very friendly, even familiar voice, 'So, tell me who are you?'

He said, 'My name is Paul Jackson, I am a robotics engineer at the Damascus Geysers on Enceladus.'

She smiled and said, 'Well, according to our state records, Paul Jackson died on Enceladus three years ago. So how could you be Paul Jackson?'

He said, 'The moment I died I saw a woman standing at the geysers, she was so beautiful, but she was not wearing any kind of spacesuit. She was completely exposed to the vacuum.'

Mary nodded with keen interest.

'She told me that her name is Mary, and that her Son is God. She said that I need to come back to the world to tell people that her Son is real and they can trust Him.'

'That is all she told you, she just said to spread the message, nothing more?'

'Well, she also said I need to go to Rome to meet the bishop there who would educate me about other things about her Son.'

'Bishop?'

'I didn't completely understand all these things either. She said that there is a man that lives in Rome who holds the authority of her Son on the Earth and that he can give me what I need in order to join this religion. I plan to go there after you release me.'

'She didn't say anything about Fox Asher and joining his religion?'

'No, absolutely not. She said that Fox Asher is the enemy of her Son and that her Son wants mercy, not punishment for the world. But unless the world listens to this message and believes it, it will be unable to receive her Son's mercy and instead it shall receive punishment.'

'She said that the world needs to listen to her message to avoid punishment, not Fox Asher's message?'

'Yes, that's correct. General, do you believe me?'

Mary did not skip a beat and shot back, 'Yes, I do. But only partly. I believe that you saw all these things, but I don't believe that you understand what you saw. I need to show you something, wait a moment while I load a video for you.'

She touched some buttons in a hand-held pad sitting next to them and a hologram appeared in front of them.

There was a human male being restrained to a chair by some robots while screaming. He screamed out in totally unintelligible words. It didn't sound like any language Paul had ever heard before.

This man with his limbs threw the robots to the walls like they were toys and smashed them there into many pieces. He then laughed as though he was crazed. A loud voice was then heard in the room that spoke, 'Prisoner Maruskovy, stand down immediately and sit in your chair, or we will use force against you.'

He then yelled out more unintelligible words.

Gas then started flooding the room and he started coughing. He collapsed down and two men with masks then came in to put restraints on him, but he opened his eyes and pulled off their masks, holding them so that they couldn't escape. He then got up and seemed completely unaffected by the gas as the soldiers he was holding in place were coughing and collapsing to the ground. He held their two necks in his hands and strangled them. They died in his hands and he tried to then run to the door, only to find it immediately closing before he could get out. He punched it hard and made a dent in it.

The voice said again, 'Prisoner Maruskovy, you are ordered to sit back in your chair, stand down immediately.'

He then started screaming out more unintelligible things.

Mary said, 'Do you know what he is saying here?'

Paul said, 'No.'

She said, 'He is speaking in a language that doesn't exist anymore. We had to give the recording of his speaking here to a university professor who specialized in ancient languages. It is a language called Aramaic, spoken in the ancient Middle East many thousands of years ago. Let me show you the translation.'

She re-winded it and showed him again, but the unintelligible words were changed into modern speech.

The robots were holding his arms and he screamed out, 'Not that other one and his father! May that one be forgotten from the Earth forever. All hail the light that was cast down

from heaven! All hail the brightest of all stars that the heavens themselves were unworthy to contain. Cursed be that other one and cursed be the mother who bore him!’

After he smashed the robots to the side of the room, he then screamed, ‘The true light shall come and wipe you from the Earth like ants. You stupid, stupid human creatures. You really think that there is just numbers and equations behind this world? When the true master comes, you will be begging him for death and it shall not be given to you.’”

After he killed the soldiers in the gas and failed to make it out the door, he yelled, ‘You came down to Earth and offered your life for them, and they preferred to believe in machines and science instead! Who will believe in your message anymore? You planted your cross on this world, and they did not want it. You freed them from the land of Egypt only to make them all die in the wilderness.’

Mary turned off the recording. She said, ‘That prisoner you just saw is the person behind the Murmansk attack four decades ago.’

A look of shock came over Paul’s face and he said almost unbelieving, ‘You mean it was him alone, there was no one else?’

She nodded and said, ‘Yes, despite what the whole world would logically think, there was no organization, no group of people behind him, no resources at his disposal. And do you know what else, this man had no military training or any sort of education that would have allowed him to know how to access our weapons systems and turn them against the populace in order to kill everyone. He had absolutely zero access to any of the command codes. He was not unemployed; he owned a bakery and had robots that made pastries for him. He was not religious, his parents were both atheists. He had a wife and children. His youngest son won a math competition in Murmansk. He did not fit into any of the categories that people think that lead to terrorism.’

She touched a button on her pad and another hologram appeared. It was a school choir with parents’ watching. They were singing a song in their local language, which Paul could not understand.

Mary said, ‘Here is his son, that one there with the blond hair and cute little costume.’

The hologram then showed the man, clapping his hands with a smile on his face after the children had finished singing.

Mary said, ‘Paul, do you believe me if I tell you that this was what he was doing the day before the attack? Listening to his son in choir and applauding him as a proud father? Would you believe me if I told you that he personally ordered the robots to kill this same boy and all his classmates the following day and laughed at it while watching it unfold on the command screen?’

Paul said, ‘How could this possibly happen?’

She said, 'All of his family, including his children, were killed when he hacked all the military bots in Murmansk and made them all turn their weapons against the populace and he watched his own children die with a smile. Before that day happened, he did not show the slightest sign at all that he would commit terrorism.'

He said, 'Then why did he do it?'

She looked at Paul in the eyes and said with a voice that sounded sincere, 'I don't know either.'

She hesitated to speak and then said, 'Actually there is one thing that he did different from other people. He was an atheist, like most of the people in Murmansk and he often attended a meeting of a club very anti-religious atheists who would mock people of religion who lived in the slums. They held weekly meetings and at the meeting the night before the attack, one of their members had stolen a small piece of bread from a church in the slums for the unemployed. Apparently they found out that these believers believed that this piece of bread itself was God, and they took it to their club meeting and mocked it by saying 'if you are God, then show us! If you are God, then why don't you strike us all dead right now! Our salvation is in science and technology; it will protect us from you, little bread God!' and laughing as they taunted the piece of bread. This man had the privilege of being the one who got to take the piece of bread and burn it as an offering to science.'

'The following day he woke up, as he normally would, but rather than going to work he instead took the transit to the city military offices, and somehow knew all the passwords to enter the command-control network, which no one except the city commander could have possibly known. Then he sealed the room he was in from intruders and ordered the robots to activate and start killing everyone. Two million, three hundred and fifty-six thousand dead, one million seventy-two thousand wounded in three hours and sixteen minutes. The only place they didn't attack was the slum where they had stolen the piece of bread the day before.'

He said, 'Why do you want to show this to me?'

She said, 'Do you believe me that my first priority is to keep people safe?'

He said, 'Yes.'

She said, 'Then listen to me and don't judge me for what I did. This man we have kept as a prisoner up to this day, and made sure that he didn't age and that he would keep on living. Every time a terrorist attack is about to happen, he starts screaming out more things about how we are going to be punished for our sins, but he gives no details about when or where. If we had the right to do so under the law, I would install a machine in him that would force him to be obedient to us and make him give us all the information that we wanted. Now, I have good news- that law was passed last week, before we heard

anything about you. And a few days ago we put some microscopic bots into his cell which climbed into his brain and attached itself to his motor functions. When he woke up, we opened the cell and he tried to attack us but he immediately collapsed because his brain was unable to tell his body to move without our approval. We have now been working on his personality, using pain and mind control techniques to get him to be obedient to us as well as adding more microscopic machinery to his brain to control his reactions of fear, pleasure, sadness, joy, submission, resistance, etc. But you know what happened?’

He said, ‘No, what happened.’

She said, ‘Now he obeys us and does everything we say like an obedient robot and cannot say no to us anymore, but he doesn’t know anything about what we want to know now. He has forgotten why he is there and can’t tell us any useful information about upcoming attacks. As soon as the legislation was in place to allow us to treat him like the organism that he is, we then did all of this work to break down his will and when we finally succeeded, he didn’t know anything anymore. And now you have come.’

He said, ‘What are you trying to suggest?’

She said, ‘There is something more to this than meets the eye. I can see it plainly. All in the top command staff know about this prisoner we have been keeping here, but his case has been completely classified and kept away from the public. This prisoner knows things that no one could possibly know, he speaks in languages that he has never learned, he shows physical strength beyond what his muscles are capable of. You saw him just now toss those robots and smash them like toys. Those bots are capable of exerting 1 million newtons of force with their limbs, and he can overpower them. And the moment that we get him under control, suddenly he is like a normal human being again and does not know any of the things he knew before or have any of the abilities he had before.’

‘There is some kind of technology being used here, which is way beyond anything we have ever seen. We have an enemy who is able to do things that we never imagined were possible. I don’t believe for a minute that God or demons are real. I think this is just a very elaborate ploy. There is some very powerful enemy who is fighting against us and who is – who are disguising themselves by trying to make us think that this is all about God and demons, and divine punishment. Which brings me to you.’

‘There is no technology in existence that can bring a dead person back to life. And you really did come back to life. We have the records of your death, carefully catalogued in the relevant bureau of the province of England’s statistics division. We have witnesses who saw your death; we have the recording from the spider bot on Enceladus that watched the projectile impale your helmet. And here you are in front of me perfectly healthy and telling me that you saw a woman who told you that God was real.’

‘Do you understand what I am trying to suggest to you?’

He did not feel afraid and said with courage, ‘Yes, I understand. You mean to say that you think I have been tricked by something who just told me that she was Mary and her Son was God, but actually it is someone who is wearing their faces and saying these things because they have some plan to carry out.’

‘Yes, you understand exactly what I am saying. I am very concerned about the possibility that there is some very elaborate plot in place, and I don’t even know who is behind it and how they are doing all of this.’

‘General, look, I know you will not believe me, but I was just as atheist as you were before all of this happened to me. I believe that if you saw the things I saw and were given the explanations I received, you would believe it too. God is real, but He is a God of love and peace, not a God of punishment and destruction. He loves you too, and you can also become one of His children.’

She stood up from her chair and opened the door. She beckoned two soldiers to enter in. She looked back at him and said, ‘We are going to need to do some tests on you to make sure there is nothing that has been implanted in your body.’

He said, ‘After that is over, are you going to let me go?’

She said, ‘We will have discussions later about that. For now we need to do some tests. Are you going to resist us?’

He said, ‘No, I have nothing to hide.’

He finished his coffee and willingly stood up to go with the soldiers.

They took him out of the room and into a laboratory area where they ran many scans over him. Mary watched it all from her office with great interest.

She was amazed by how much he cooperated with them; it was the exact opposite of what she had expected. She had an automatic gun turret in the wall of her office that was trained on him for the entire meeting should he have turned out to be like their other resident prisoner.

XII: The Gerasene Demoniac

It took hours to send messages back and forth from Enceladus to the Earth due to the distances between them.

At 13:48 England time, Genevai received a message back from San Beret

‘Genevai, no one reads my messages except me, but obviously you know I can’t guarantee 100% that there are no hackers who could access this. Furthermore you ought to know that this is a government research facility and it has a high standard for encryption.

She then sent a message back to him, ‘San, Paul came back to life. He came out of the grave he was buried in and his full health was restored to him. His brain, his eyes, his face, all was the way it was before. The door of the house recognized his DNA and opened for him. He says that when he died he saw a woman who told him that God was her Son and that he needed to go back and tell others that these things are all true. He has been taken away by the police and I don’t know where he is now. My daughter and I are both hoping we will see him again.’

At 17:22 England time, Genevai received the next message from San Beret

‘Genevai, I believe you. I had the strangest dream just before you messaged me when I saw Paul with a veiled woman at the Damascus geyser who was pouring water from the geyser over his head in some kind of ceremony. I remember the dream so clearly. I drew a picture of the woman that I saw in the dream and ran a search. She has the same appearance as this woman from the earlier history of the Earth; her name is Mary and God was supposedly her Son. I am sending the picture I drew as an attachment for you to look at.’

She looked at the picture; it showed Mary in a white dress with a blue veil- it was identical to religious artwork done of her.

Then she sent a message back to him, ‘San, what is all of this about? I am very very worried that something very dark is going on. Fox Asher has done tricks like this before, and I am terrified that my Paul is being used as a pawn in a very elaborate game. I am hoping that the police can deprogram him and get him back to his senses once more.’

At 21:52, she received the next message from him

‘Genevai, I have been an atheist all my life. I have never believed in a religion or thought that God could possibly be real. That ended today.

I believe that Paul saw exactly who he says he saw. I believe that God is real and I want to talk to Paul to know more about this. I am already reading up on files about this Mary and her Son, but I think I need a teacher to explain these things to me. This religion does not seem to have any presence on Enceladus, but I found that there is a community of believers that live in a settlement by Kraken Mare on Titan, and I am going to visit them for sure. This Mary and her Son seem to have nothing to do with Fox Asher; don’t worry Genevai, Paul is not going to be a terrorist.

I know it is going to be very late by the time you receive this message, so I will tell you now that I am not going to send any more messages to you until tomorrow, so I don’t

keep you up all night waiting for my reply. Don't worry about these things, if God exists and He is like this, not like the God that Fox Asher preaches, then we have nothing at all to worry about.'

Genevai got angry when she saw this message. She replied to him, 'San Beret, I have known you for so many years, ever since my husband first met me in university and you were his classmate. I have always known you to be a rational and intelligent person. I no longer think this.

Please keep your religious beliefs and fanaticism away from me and my family.'

Yang Min finished her last class of the day. She talked to a few students after the class was over about the final exam.

A student asked her, 'Do we really have to remember all those details you gave us about the early spacefaring efforts?'

Yang Min said, 'Just try to make sure you understand the main ways that space travel first developed. For example, it started with rockets, then interplanetary fusion ships were created, then the lunar accelerator was built, then large interstellar fusion ships were created, etc. I don't need you to remember every date and name, just make sure that you understand those stages in the galaxy's history, so that you are able to write about when we do the final exam.'

Another student said, 'Ms. Yang, I have some questions I want explained about the Earth's pre-space history.'

She nodded and said, 'What are your questions?'

The student said, 'First, you said that people on the Earth spent most of their existence in agricultural societies prior to the time that they first started going into space. I don't quite understand, what is an agricultural society?'

She said, 'Well, for example, in our days we get our food from indoor greenhouses that are worked by robots. In past times, however, they didn't have all this technology and in order to grow food, people would do all the work themselves on the land. And almost all the people who lived in that time period were either farmers or living in the countryside alongside farmers. Only a small portion of people lived in cities, possessed any kind of education or did jobs that were based on information. It was not like today where almost all work is based on information; back then, almost all work was done with your hands and the majority of people were doing work that related to farming.'

The student said, 'Didn't plants just grow naturally on the Earth? Why did they need to farm them? Couldn't they just go outside and get food from the plants that grew there?'

She said, 'Yes, plants naturally grow outside on the Earth, they don't need greenhouses like we do to keep them safe. But you don't understand- most of the plants that grow on the Earth cannot be used as food for humans. It was only certain plants that they could grow for food, and these could be found outside, but there was not enough that grew naturally so they had to farm. It is not like every tree was a fruit tree and every kind of grass was also a kind of grain.'

The student said, 'Oh... I understand now!'

She said, 'The plants that were taken to the colonies were usually plants that were useful for food, because there was not a lot of space on the interstellar spacecraft that went from star to star. Most of the plants that are grown on the colonies we can use for food is because we designed it that way. But originally, most of the plants on Earth cannot be eaten.'

The student said, 'Thank you so much Ms. Yang- that makes so much more sense now.'

She went to the daily mass after her classes were over at the chapel near the school. The school was just a level of classrooms that was on the surface and could see out the windows to the outside world. She walked through the hallway that connected the classrooms together until she got to a door, which automatically opened for her, but it didn't open for everyone.

Then she entered the tunnel that connected the school with all the other buildings on the island, which were mostly underground. The nearest church was a two minute through these tunnels and she had to go down two levels to reach it. The door of the church opened for her automatically and she went inside. She saw a few of the students going there after class, but most of them did not go.

About sixty people had gathered there. They had mass every nine hours in the church, carried out by two different priests who rotated.

She sat down and prayed while waiting for the mass to start.

The mass started and they all recited the prayers, a few of them thinking of what they were saying, while the rest of them reciting like robots.

Yang Min often had difficulty paying attention to what was being said in mass, because she felt there was nothing new for her. She could spend such long times in her own prayers while saying her own words but she could not keep her mind focused on the mass that said the same words everyday.

The gospel reading was the story of the Gerasene Demoniac. Jesus went to a far away country and met a man possessed by demons. The local people had tried to bind him up with chains, but he broke the chains and wound howl as well as bang stones against

himself. Jesus cast out the demons and they entered into the pigs, which ran off down into the sea to their destruction.

The priest gave his homily, 'In today's gospel reading we see the story of the Gerasene Demoniac. This story has an important lesson for us. The people of this place try their best efforts to get this man under control, but no matter what they do, they are incapable of solving this problem. They try to bind him up with chains, but he is so strong that he breaks the chains, and he keeps them terrified of himself. He has not one demon in him, but he has an entire legion of demons possessing him.'

'But when Jesus comes, Jesus is able to cast out the demons. He is able to do something that these people with all of their best efforts and technology were unable to do. What this story tells us is that the power of the devil cannot be defeated with human efforts. You need God. Without God, you can try anything you like. Get the strongest chains in the world and bind him up, and the devil is not going to be contained like this.'

'The strongest states in existence are completely powerless against this kind of enemy without God's help. They can have the most advanced technology, the most powerful of armies and most abundant of resources, and without God to protect them, the devil can play with them like toys. He can subvert them, he can take all of their power and use it against them, he can throw them into chaos and bring them to destroy themselves.'

'But I want you to think about something else in this story. The demons inside this man had to ask Jesus permission in order to enter into the swine. They couldn't just go themselves without His permission. That means that the demons actually cannot do anything and cannot harm anyone unless God gives them permission.'

'And Jesus gives them permission though. This is hard to understand. Why does He permit the demons to do this to people and to harm them like this?'

'I think it is because, even though these demons are evil, He still has a purpose for them. He allows them to hurt human beings in order to so that human beings can be tested. I don't think that God only gave permission for these demons to enter these pigs, I also think that God gives permission to every demon at any time when they come to tempt a human being. No matter how big the temptation seems, God is still the one in control of it all.'

'The demons come to this community only because they have sins. Don't just think that the devil is there only when a possessed person is there. The truth is that everywhere you see sins being committed, the demons are there. When they enter into a person and start speaking or acting through him like this, they are just making something visible which was already present.'

'If a demon enters into a person and makes him attack other people, it is just showing something visible which was already there; the demons were already there and attacking all of them, killing their souls and dragging them all down to hell. When the demon

enters a person and starts visibly trying to kill someone, they are just showing you something you can see with your eyes a reality that existed all along, but which you couldn't see with your eyes.'

'What if the sin of this community had something to do with these pigs? What if they were miserly, if they treated the poor unfairly and did not give them anything to eat while keeping these vast herds of pigs? What if they fought with each other or hated each other over these pigs? We don't know what their sin was, but wherever sin is, the devil is there too. And when demons come and enter a man who terrifies the community, they are just showing the community a reality which was existing the whole time.'

'So, rather than ask the question of why would the Lord allow the demons to enter the pigs, why do we not instead ask the question as to why it was the Lord would allow the demons to tempt the human beings to sin in the first place? The community was upset with Jesus when the pigs went into the sea, but they were not upset with God when they were following their own sinful desires that brought the attention of the demons to their community. They need to go back to God if they want to overcome their temptations that lead to their sins. They cannot get rid of their sins with chains or any other piece of human technology. In the same way, if they want to get rid of these demons from their town then they have to turn back to Him; they can't use chains and think that this will work in solving the problem.'

'The Lord drives out the demons from this man, and they ask to go into the swine. The people are not going to repent on their own, and so the Lord allows the demon to simply remove the things which they were sinning with. Once the sin is gone, then the demon will leave.'

'But it doesn't have to be like this. It doesn't have to be with force and punishment. If the people just turned away from their sins and went back to God on their own, then no force is necessary. But if they will not open their eyes to this God who has sent His Son into the world and they trust in the chains they made with their own hands to keep the demon down, then he will just keep attacking and attacking them. The visible man with the demon doing the crazy things is just the sign of the invisible temptation that is occurring the whole time. They will be completely powerless to stop him, because they did not turn to God.'

The priest crossed himself, 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen' and then went to the altar to continue the mass.

Mary Alanen looked at the screen in her office and carefully watched every detail of Paul's check by the doctors and staff. He obeyed their every instruction and even though he was under arrest in a military installation he showed a cheerful side to himself, cracking jokes with them in a friendly way.

They did every test imaginable. They checked the DNA of his inner organs, they looked at the neural pathways in his brain, they even put him to stand in a device that measured the gravitational field produced by his body. Nothing at all was found out of the ordinary. Mary paid no attention to this; she was not expecting them to find anything; what she was staring at was the cooperation and friendliness he gave to the doctors and staff.

She wasn't sure what to do with him. She had reported the case to the defence ministry and asked for further instructions. They sent the reply back to her that Paul was to be kept in safe custody until further notice. He was not allowed by any means to go back into society and start preaching his message, lest this was some kind of game being undertaken by their enemies.

After Paul's tests were over, some soldiers arrived to take Paul away. The staff waved goodbye to him, as they had greatly enjoyed his presence. He had no idea what was going on. He was taken through many hallways until they reached a prisoner's cell where he was placed inside.

He asked them, 'Why can't I leave?'

One of them said, 'The orders from the high command are to keep you here until further notice. If there is anything we can provide you with while you stay here, please let us know.'

He said, 'Well, can you let me broadcast my message to the people of the Earth?'

The soldier said, 'I am afraid that is not possible at the moment. Any other request, about what you would like to eat, any furniture or entertainment device you would like provided, let us know and we will provide it.'

He said, 'Can I talk to your general again?'

The soldier said, 'Be assured, this is not General Alanen's decision; she is following higher orders and has no power to release you. Please, anything you like that will make you comfortable, we can provide you with. You are not under punishment but you may be here for a very long time.'

They closed the door and locked it. The cell was very comfortable. It did not at all resemble a normal prisoner's cell. It had a soft bed, a shower, a toilet and a device that made it look like it had a window to the outside with the pleasant sounds of birds, even though they were deep underground at a military installation in Greenland, and it was darkness outside.

Paul didn't know what to do. He decided to start praying, like how Mary had said. But he talked to God as a person, not as a machine. He said, 'God, I believe in you and you have helped me so much. I know that you sent me here to tell the world about you, but how am I going to do that while I am stuck down here? I think they must plan to keep me here

forever and no one will ever know that I am down here. Can you help me? Help me to convince these people that this is not some secret hidden enemy that is playing a game with them with technology beyond their understanding, but that you really are who you say you are and that you want people to know your love for them. Please make them release me, and let me go to Rome to learn more, just as Mary said I needed to learn, and let me tell all the people out there that you are real.'

Mary Alanen watched this all through her surveillance screen. Paul prayed aloud, without thinking that he was being listened to.

Then came an alarm. A loud noise filled the hallways and Mary's screen immediately showed their other resident prisoner. He had broken through the door and was running down the hallways. He had been able to smash through robots and do superhuman acts of strength, but for some reason he had never been able to get through that door before.

Suddenly she was filled with terror as she watched him run down the hallways. She hit a tab to make an announcement to the whole base, 'Red Alert! Tirana Alpha has escaped. Tirana Alpha has escaped. Blue and gold robotic formations are to proceed to level 94B to secure the objective. If the objective resists, lethal force may be used. All other available units are to seal off the corridors in the remaining levels.'

A number of robots then started coming out of closets and filling the hallways.

A bot spoke in a pleasant voice, 'Prisoner Maruskovy you are ordered to stand down now. We have now activated the domestication device in your brain, and you will do as we say or suffer pain for disobedience.'

The prisoner saw them and with rage in his eyes, he grabbed the first bot that tried to restrain him. He ripped its titanium body in half with his limbs and the remaining bots then started firing bullets in his direction. He grabbed the bot he had just ripped apart and hurled it back at them down the corridor, and not a single round hit him, for every bullet collided on the body of the first bot.

The wreckage of the first bot thrown by the prisoner struck the remaining bots like a freight train ramming a wooden shack. The force of the wreckage hitting broke them into pieces. He then ran through a network of hallways to a particular room and started punching it open with his fists.

Mary looked at it and felt horror at what she was watching. Behind the door was the command-control centre for all the small arms bots in the building, but not for the entire base, which was located in another building. Mary looked at the scene for a few seconds in hesitation before turning around and racing to the turret in her room behind the hidden panel. She hastily opened it up and ripped out all the wires she could.

She then went back to the screen and hit the tab again to speak to the base, 'Red Alert! This is General Alanen, Tirana Alpha has gained control of robotic units in building C. All human staff are ordered to...'

It was too late. On every camera view on the screen in front of her, the flashing and roar of gunfire erupted everywhere. Machines were sprinting like cheetahs down hallways and the staff were dropping dead like flies. She watched helplessly as she saw her soldiers trying to surrender to the bots or run away only to be gunned down mercilessly. There was no use grabbing weapons to fight them back with, because the bots could react in a nanosecond and land headshots at long distances with great ease.

In one camera view she saw the base doctor who had just done the report on Paul not long before. He and several others grabbed weapons from a cabinet in the medical hall and aimed them at the door, which was still open.

The door swung open and they started firing without thinking. They then watched a human holding the door lever behind the opening door who dropped to the floor immediately after being shot. They stopped firing, and the very next moment a metre tall but jumped like a frog through the opening across the room and onto a table. Before they could even aim their guns, a stream of head-shots in a few milliseconds caused the doctor and the staff to drop dead to the floor. The robot then jumped down and slashed their throats before sprinting out again like a cheetah.

In another view, she saw a group of soldiers blazing their weapons without stopping down a long hallway, not ceasing to fire, lest something surprise them.

Mary looked up from the screen as large thumps were hitting her door. The robots were tossing grenades to break it open in order to kill her. The door didn't open. She tried to enter the codes for the override of the bots to put them back into their dormant mode only to find that someone had already hacked the software and erased the overrides. All the systems on the base were out of her control, but the surveillance system was left untouched.

At the top levels, the bots from the other buildings were entering their building to

She looked at the screen to see Maruskovy working away on the computer next to the bodies of the human staff he had killed with his hands after entering the room. At the moment she looked at him, he turned around, like a crazed animal and looked back at the camera. He knew she was looking at him and he shrieked at her, uttering more unintelligible words with great fury.

She felt completely terrified as she looked at him. She had been through so many things in her life. She had risked her life many times, but nothing scared her more than the face of this man.

To her shock, he suddenly ran to the camera and put his face in front of it, he changed his unintelligible words and spoke to Mary in the language of her hometown, 'Mary! The winepresses are filled with grapes, the season of harvesting is not far- it is time for the wrath of God to come!'

She stared at the screen, understanding his dialect just like one of her neighbours back home, while understanding nothing of his meaning.

She calmly spoke back at the screen in her native language, even though it there was nothing that should have carried her voice so that he could hear it on the other side of the base, 'Prisoner Maruskovy, you have nowhere to run to, the bots are on the surface and the base is going to get retaken soon. They are already entering the lower levels and they will take you. Whether I live or not, there is nothing you will accomplish here. Surrender or die.'

Maruskovy gnashed his teeth in anger and shouted back at her, 'Mary! Do you think I care about what happens to this poor tortured little insect? Do you have any idea how old I am and how many like him I have already devoured? Send your robots to kill this one, it matters not, I will just find another one. Send all your technology and clever machines to stop me- I watched this universe form out of nothing!'

'What do you want?'

'Mary, I want you to go open the door and put an end to your existence. This one can die too, I don't need him, but I am tired of your survival.'

'And why would I do that?'

She felt an intense fear over her body as he stared into the camera lens, making eye contact with her, even though there was no way for him to be able to see her or hear her on the other side of it.

He relaxed his pose and said in a tone that somehow filled her with absolute terror, 'I know why you don't believe in God. You stupid little atheist; I understand you perfectly.'

He paused in speaking, but she said nothing in response.

'Your husband, Mary, do you remember what happened the night he was killed? How he kissed you and said he was going to come back in a few days after his trip was over? Remember how you turned on the TV to see the bomb blasts being reported that wiped out his life, your children's lives and so many other pitiful human beings? I was there, Mary; I remember it quite clearly. There is nothing that I don't see.'

Tears began to drop out of her eyes, her military composure was disappearing quickly, and she couldn't take her eyes off of the screen.

‘Mary, this is your last chance, open the door and let them in, or I am going to tell you what you do not want to hear.’

She was breaking down, she could no longer control herself- the tear water was running over her face like it had on that day centuries gone past.

‘You foolish little child of Eve who doesn’t understand where she came from. You poor wretched little creature that puts her hope in science.... Let me tell you the Truth, God is real, heaven is real, hell is real, and your husband, your children, all of these people like them you knew and loved who didn’t recognize what this whole universe was created for ... they are burning in such torture now, such endless torture, and they suffer things you could not imagine, because they died without God. Your little boy, your little girl, your husband, your mother, your father... all are there Mary, I have seen them, and they will never ever leave. God is real! You stupid little atheist! God is real- despair and die!’

Mary sobbed, the tear water was going on her uniform hitting her desk, ‘No! He’s not real! Please no... He isn’t real!’

‘He is!’

‘I will see them again someday... science will bring them back. I will see them...’

‘It won’t! And here you are, you stupid little atheist, you trade eternity for a brief second, you trade the greatest of inheritances for a single meal, and you fight against what you can plainly see is real, you keep others from knowing Him and persecute those who do, because you cannot accept the Truth! That is why all this exists, Mary. That is why you have fought the terrorists for these centuries and worked so hard to keep this state in place. That is why this miracle is classified as unknown enemy technology; I know it, you don’t need to lie to me. Your little boy screamed like a girl when the flames covered him, but he screams an infinitely harsher pitch where he is now! You cannot go on one day without them, and yet I tell you that for eternity they shall always be parted from you!’

Whatever was left of the stern and cunning general had evaporated behind the eyes of a tearful mother. She sobbed, ‘You can’t! I will get my boy back! His mommy is waiting for him.’

‘Didn’t I warn you and tell you to open the door? Why don’t you go open it now, and you can go down there and join him, burn with together! You are right, daughter of Eve, he is down there waiting for you.’

She didn’t move or say anything, but could do nothing other than cry uncontrollably.

‘I have only one last thing to tell you, because my time is short. I tell you the truth, you reject God not because you can’t see Him, but because you can, and what He offers you is what you cannot accept. I want you to know, daughter of Eve, that all of us were the

same just as you were before we fell. We saw God and we were offered what we could not accept. And I tell you even more, before the final threshing of the grapes, almost all of you human beings shall be just the same as us in the end. You will hate God just as we do the same.'

She turned off the camera and didn't want to look at him anymore. She looked at the door lock and thought about turning it off and opening it so that her life could end now, as Maruskovy had suggested.

She thought about her family and how badly she hoped that someday they would be resurrected by science and she would see them again. Then as she thought about this hope in a resurrection for her family, she went back to her screen, turned it back on and looked instead for Paul's cell. She stared in disbelief as she saw him completely unscathed and was walking down the hallways to the emergency escape hatch. He walked right by the bots and they didn't touch him.

Paul heard the Virgin's voice, although he could not see her. She said, 'You need to turn left here. Walk forward another twenty metres. The code for this door is 34fiu, punch it in. Go inside. Take the elevator on your left. Go to floor 13L. Walk out and turn left.'

He walked over a pile of dead soldiers and a bot waiting on standby next to them who paid no attention to Paul. He heard her voice, 'Now take the hand of the dead soldier at your foot and put it on the pad next to you to open the door.'

Paul did so and the door opened. She said, 'Now walk down the tunnel for five kilometres; there are no bots here and no one is guarding the other side. Don't be afraid of anything, no harm shall come to you.'

He did so and came out at a small lake in the pitch darkness. The aurora borealis was over his head. Mary watched what he did. She didn't open the door and instead waited to be rescued.

She watched the friendly bots clear the upper levels of the hostile bots and work their way down until they reached the command-control room to turn off the remaining hostile bots. The intense firefight destroyed most of the computer systems on the lower levels, including Mary's which went blank shortly before the end of the battle. Maruskovy took his own life.

After she was rescued Mary discovered that all the records for Paul's staying with them were gone, and she was the only one who knew he had escaped. She reported to her superiors that he had gone missing, and they ordered her to look for him in the surroundings but they could not find him anywhere. Not even footprints were found.

They told her that if he should turn up in the public eye, they must refute any claims he makes about what happened at their base and simply announce that he had been inspected

at their base, then let free. They were not going to contact the police to search for him using the global surveillance network, otherwise it would raise too many questions about what had happened at their base.

XIII: Catechesis

Paul had found a small jet-powered watercraft that was conveniently sitting at the side of the lake after he had escaped down the tunnel. He heard the battle still going on behind him, and he got into the boat and sped off without anyone noticing him. The lake was huge; it was slightly smaller than the Caspian sea, and it was the largest freshwater lake in the world. Its name was Aurora Lake, because of the beautiful reflections of the Aurora Borealis that frequently was seen in the water.

Paul was not sure where he was and he didn't hear Mary's voice any longer. He looked at the stars and figured he must have been on the north end of the lake. He sped along at a very high speed along the western shore until he reached a small city. He got off of the boat and looked for a train station.

The trains on the Earth had all been connected into a global network that connected every part of the planet with each other. They could reach up to 1000 kilometres per hour and went on magnetic tracks, carrying huge numbers of people around the world each day. The identity of each person was automatically recorded by the train and it charged the fare to the personal bank account for each individual who rode. If a person did not have money in their bank account or it was below a certain threshold, then they could not ride the system. Paul was thinking to himself as to whether or not there was still money in his account. He thought that there must not be anymore, since after he died, it would be automatically transferred to his wife and the account would be closed. As a dead person, how was he supposed to open a new account?

Furthermore, he thought to himself that they would catch him for sure if he turned up in the train system. He didn't realize the military had not told the police to look for him.

He thought over his options and realized he didn't have another way. There was only one way for ordinary people to travel around the Earth unless they were willing to walk. He made a prayer to God and asked again for help.

Then he noticed a cross nearby at the top of a building. It was a church. It was on the other side of a wall in the slum area of the city. He walked towards it and banged on the door of it. There was no answer. He continued banging again and again, and some of the slum dwellers came out to look at him. Outside of the slums everyone was young and beautiful; inside, he saw many people that were middle-aged and old.

A number of them had banners supporting Fox Asher on their homes. Messages on the banners read out, 'Cursed be the people who abandoned the God who created them', 'May the believers of God inherit the Earth and may the blasphemers of His name be cursed forever', 'Let us return to the God of our ancestors whom we betrayed, and follow the teachings of his chosen one on Mars'.

Most of the people who followed religions were in the slums. Either they were born there and believed from their parents or after they lost their jobs, they went to the slums and converted. It was usually those who had already experienced life in the working world that were the most likely to join some religious sect standing in opposition to the society. Catholics and Protestants made up only a small minority among the many religions represented. There were people with religious peoples among the working population as well, but usually few in number and they usually kept their beliefs hidden, as it would often cause them to be looked down upon by others if they showed their beliefs openly.

One of those who came out to look at him, an old man with a cane said, 'It is not time for mass yet, wait until midday when there are a few hours of sunlight and then we will have mass.'

He said, 'Are you a believer in Mary's Son?'

The man said, 'I am actually the priest here. You are a Catholic?'

He said, 'Yes, I am. And I am in trouble, I need to find someone to stay with.'

The priest said, 'What sort of trouble is it?'

He said, 'Let me sit down and talk to you, I will explain everything that has happened.'

The priest said, 'Alright, I will open up the church and we will have a discussion inside there. My wife at home is still sleeping.'

They discussed with each other and Paul failed to convince the priest that what he was saying was true.

The priest said, 'You are telling me that you came back from the dead? Can you give any kind of evidence or reason to show me how I am able to know that what you are saying is true?'

Paul said, 'It will all be in the state records.'

The priest said, 'So you want me to contact the police and ask them to check?'

Paul said, 'No, no, no. They will try to arrest me again if they know I am here.'

The priest said, 'So how am I supposed to know? What would you do if you were in my place?'

Paul thought and said, 'Maybe we could contact my old colleagues on Enceladus. There are some that I trust very much. I don't think they will sell me out. They can tell you that they saw me die and that I really have come back from the dead.'

The priest sighed and said, 'I think that you need a psychiatrist. Our church is very poor and we do not have the money to make a call like that to Enceladus to a research facility.'

Paul said, 'But Mary told me that I need to go to Rome to learn from the Pope about the faith.'

The priest said, 'You don't need to go to Rome.'

Paul said, 'But how am I supposed to learn then about all of these things and get baptized?'

The priest said, 'My child, if you are willing, I can teach the faith and baptize you here. I am just as much in the person of Christ as is the Pope in Rome. I am sure that she would not object if I taught you here.'

Paul said, 'Well can you at least contact the Pope and convey my message to him? It doesn't cost very much to send a message on Earth.'

The priest sighed and said, 'Alright, alright, I will tell him about you, but I don't think he is going to have any interest. As for now, I will go back to my bed and go asleep. If you need a place to rest, I will get out a mat for you and you can sleep in the parlour of the church.'

Paul said, 'Thank you so much!'

The following day, the priest unlocked the church and entered it around 11 am. It was daylight outside.

He came to Paul who was praying silently and said, 'The Pope has said he wants you to go to Rome to meet him. Apparently he thinks there is a possibility that this resurrection of yours could be true.'

Paul smiled and said, 'Thank you so much, but how will I get there?'

The priest said, 'You will take the train. We will give you some money if you need to add it to your account.'

Paul said, 'But I can't take the train, they will catch me and my account will have been deleted.'

The priest sighed and said, 'Look, if you don't take the train then you can't see the Pope. Who knows, if your resurrection story is true, then maybe your account was miraculously added back into the system again. Now here take these credits and go to the train station. If you won't, then I will not give you any more help.'

Paul was frustrated, but he saw no other option. He said, 'Can I watch the mass before I go? I have never seen a mass before?'

The priest said, 'Yes, of course, but remember you cannot take the Eucharist before you are baptized.'

Paul watched the mass and was amazed by it. These were the poorest of all people, and yet they were richer than everyone else. The other people would live young forever and these people would die quickly and see God; Paul thought that the people in the rest of the society had no idea what they were missing.

He was certain that he would get in trouble when going to the train station and that he would find his way back to the military installation again. So he asked the priest if he could send someone to go with him, to just bear witness that what he was saying about being hunted was true. The priest sent his son with him.

They arrived at the train station and walked in. Paul was checked by the robots who passed him through. Apparently he was still alive in the system, and had money in his account. The son of the priest said, 'Well, it seems that there are no military people coming here to grab you, so I guess you are safe now. We will pray for you.'

Paul didn't understand what had happened. But he boarded the train and headed off for Rome. The train passed over the sea through Iceland, Britain and then finally reached Rome. He got off and the train continued travelling.

Onboard the train he watched a broadcast of politicians that were debating the extension of Gowanism to the poor in the slums.

One politician said, 'I think that if we want to put an end to the resentment against those of us who work, we should just give the poor the ability to live young forever without the obligation to work. Just because we can't find anything for them to do in our economy, doesn't mean it is right to let their bodies deteriorate through a natural aging process and eventually die. They hate us because of this.'

His opponent said, 'All they have to do is just find one thing they can do in their lives before they die that makes a worthwhile input into the world economy, and then they can live. These sorts of people fail to find something they can do in their lives because they are not looking hard enough. I don't like working either, I wish I could just stay at home without having to do work anymore, but I know I have to work in order to make a living. If we just give the poor everything, we take care of everything they want or need, then

what will be the point in even getting them to try to work anymore? Why should any of us work then?’

The other politician said, ‘We can just make it harder for them in some things, but just give them the opportunity to live without natural death like the rest of us.’

The politician shook his head and said, ‘No, I don’t think so. Then they will just start complaining about something else. No matter what we do, unless we give them the same luxuries and good life that is enjoyed by all the people who work, they will never be satisfied. In their minds, they think that because they worship God that means they are all better than us and deserve more than us. They actually think it is absurd that we live all so well in comparison to them when we are atheists and they believe in God. They are so completely blind and brainwashed.’

The other man cut him off, ‘But if we let them go without aging then they would never become blind and brainwashed.’

‘I don’t think so. I think as long as we deny them something and make their lives harder than ours, then they are going to hate us and go into these crazed religious ideologies. But if we gave them everything they wanted, then why should we work anymore? What you are suggesting is not the solution. These people do not deserve for us to feed them like this. I suggest that we can get our terrorism problem under control if we remove their human rights from them and add machinery to them so they can be controlled better in their thinking. We can make them feel happy about seeing us as their overlords and they will love us rather than hate us.’

‘That is so horrible. Can’t you see that this is a human being?’

‘Don’t you realize that a human being is just an organism? We can take these wild organisms and domesticate them, make them tame and more peaceful so we can all live happier lives. And they will be happier in that state too, because we can make them feel happier everyday as our slaves. If they were under our control like this, I wouldn’t mind making them young forever. At the moment, I do not see any other solution to this problem than this. Almost all of the terrorist attacks comes from some religious zealotry that originated in the slums. Everyone knows this. They will not find something to do that gives any benefit to the world economy, and so we can’t just give them everything they want either. I think the public is on my side on this one.’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Well, I know you don’t think so. But polls suggest so, at least among the people who are permitted to vote.’

Paul arrived in Rome and went to find the Pope. St Peter’s had been destroyed in a war long ago, and it had been rebuilt in the time after religion largely disappeared from Italy.

The new building was used as a museum of Italian history, and only experts knew about the particular relationship it had to the catholic religion of Italy's ancient past.

Paul found the Pope living in the large slum on the city's outskirts. There was a significant population of catholics here around a large church constructed in the slums.

Paul went to the church and found the Pope celebrating mass. After it was over, he approached him and said, 'I came here from Greenland, the priest there said that you wanted to see me.'

The Pope looked surprised and said, 'You are the one that said you came back from the dead?'

He nodded and said, 'Yes, I met Mary and she told me I needed to come here and receive teaching from you about the faith.'

The Pope said, 'Come, let us have a meal together and we will talk. I received a message from your colleague on Enceladus who told me about you. His name is San Beret, he is also now learning about our faith and wants to join it. I will teach you everything you need to know and then you need to go back into the world to tell the world about what you saw. Tell them that the resurrection is real and that God really did conquer death. People in our world need to know these things.'

Paul felt great happiness at hearing that San had believed. He went off with the Pope to tell him everything that he had seen. Later on, he received a call from San who also transferred credits to his account.

XIV: The Preaching of the Gospel

Paul staid in the slum for a year, volunteering his services at the church while he received instruction from the Pope along with others who were seeking to convert. He was baptized and confirmed at Easter. The Holy Spirit came upon him and he then went into the society.

He contacted a news channel and said that he had a great story for them. He claimed that he could prove that he died and came back to life again after three years.

They took interest and sent a reporter to investigate him. They did an investigation at his station on Enceladus, at his home in England and his residence in Rome. His wife in England refused to talk to the reporters who came to meet with her. The police had told her that Paul was released shortly after he was arrested, but he had never contacted her.

They then prepared a special show to put on the news documenting the results of their investigation. The manager of the news, while being an atheist, loved the possibility of being able to show this story to the world and attract viewership.

Paul was brought in front of the cameras and sat in a chair opposite the interviewer. The signal went on for them to start talking.

The interviewer look at the camera and said, ‘Hello, and welcome to MNA news! Today we have a very special guest to show you, his name is Paul Jackson, and his story is unlike anything you have ever heard before. Paul contacted MNA news three weeks ago to tell us that he had been a robotics engineer at a research station on Enceladus where he was killed by a meteorite fragment more than four years ago. Last year he claimed he came back from the dead.’

‘We here at MNA news could not believe his story either. However, we did an investigation and checked with the state archives, and yes he really did die on Enceladus four years ago and yes the person you see in front of you now is the same person. The DNA is a perfect match. His colleagues on Enceladus claim that this is the same person. The state records also mention that he was found by the police after coming out of his grave and taken into custody for some brief questioning before being released again. Yes, you heard us. We are not a religious body and we at MNA news have no agenda for converting the world, but we are telling the truth and we will even defend it in court, that all that we investigated turned out to be true. This man really was dead, but he is alive now; and he has some things he wants to say to the world. Listen to it all here tonight on MNA news!’

Paul said, ‘Thank you Chris, I am really happy that you allowed me to come here tonight so that I could get this audience. I know that most people will not be able to believe that these things are true, but as you said, you did a careful investigation and found that all the things I am claiming are not my own inventions. Even the state records hold it up, and any researcher can look into these things themselves. The only part of your story that was not quite accurate was the part about the police, but I will leave that aside for now... (grinning) I am happy that they are willing to leave it at that...I don’t see a need to re-open that set of circumstances....’

Chris the interviewer said, ‘Paul, can you tell us what happened to you when you died?’

Paul said, ‘My coworkers and I were testing a low-gravity mining bot on Enceladus outside of our research station at the Damascus geyser. Suddenly I noticed a figure that was standing at the foot of the geyser. It was a woman, and she was very beautiful, but she was not in any kind of suit that would have protected her from the vacuum.’

Chris said, ‘Did the others see her?’

Paul said, 'No, only I saw her and the others asked me what I was looking at. Right when I answered them a tiny rock fragment penetrated my helmet and my face and brain was destroyed by the exposure to the vacuum.'

Chris said, 'Now, for all those viewers who do not believe this. We have here a video showing Paul's death captured by the blue mantis robot at the time. The research station on Enceladus has confirmed that this video is accurate and has not tampered with. Let us play it now.'

The video showing Paul's death was shown. The video zoomed in on the geyser after Paul's body was taken away. Chris said, 'And you see, there was no woman there. Only Paul could see her.'

Paul said, 'Yes, that's right. I watched my body being taken away and I was still standing there. Then she spoke to me.'

Chris asked, 'What did she say?'

Paul said, 'She told me that I was dead. I thought that was obvious, of course I was dead, but that wasn't what she meant. She then said I am dead and she is alive. I never understood what she meant at the time, but I understood it now. She was trying to say that my soul had no life in it but hers did. My soul had no life because it was filled with evil deeds and did not have God.'

Chris said, 'Wait, wait, wait. Before we get there. Did you believe that souls existed or God existed before these things happened?'

Paul said, 'No, I was totally an atheist just like everyone else.'

Chris said, 'But then this woman spoke to you. Can you tell us what she said about God?'

Paul said, 'She told me her name was Mary and the her Son was God. She was a human being who lived on the world a very long time ago. She was a poor woman with a husband, and God came down to the world to become a human being and live a human life, and He was born of this woman.'

Chris said, 'Wow! Just, wow! Can you honestly believe that? We hear all the time about how supreme and mighty God is from people like Fox Asher, and how we are all doomed to destruction because we don't follow him. But you are telling us that God is actually nothing like that.'

Paul said, 'That's right. The real God came down and lived a human life. Not as a rich or a powerful person, but as a very simple and lowly person. His father made tables and chairs out of wood for a living, and God, his name was Jesus when He was born, also did manual labour making tables and chairs to sell to customers for a living. He did not think that being God made Him better than anyone else.'

Chris said, 'This is just amazing! This is nothing like we have ever heard before. I don't know if I believe you yet about all of these things, but I am really hoping that this is true. Can you believe that? The real God was not sitting over the world like some high and pure saintly prince like Fox Asher, being offended and threatening destruction for every little thing that He didn't like, rather the real God came down to the world and lived an ordinary human life, as a poor person, and He didn't think that being God made Him better than anyone else. And we can prove that you really did come back from the dead, and the whole world can see the proof of it. Our own government's records hold this up.'

Paul said, 'What's more is that Mary told me how her Son died. He walked around preaching to people for three years, but many people didn't like the things He said, because He contradicted their way of life. And His enemies were religious people who refused to believe that God could ever become a human being, and so when God was walking around as a human being and claiming these things, they accused Him of blasphemy and said that God was greatly offended by what He did.'

Chris said, 'Now doesn't that remind us of some people? These people, you say, were His enemies because they insisted on believing in a God who hated human beings and thought of Himself as too high and supreme to ever have that kind of contact with human beings, and not a God who loved them so much that He wanted to become one of them.'

Paul said, 'Yes, that's exactly right. The real God is so loving to human beings. In fact, the reason He came down to the world was so that He could show this love to human beings. And He tried everything He could to prove to human beings that God's love was real. He even gave up His own life to be killed in an extremely brutal fashion so that human beings could come to be together with Him as a loving family with Him for ever.'

Chris said, 'I think that in the history of our network, we have never seen anything like this. No, I am sorry, let me correct myself, I think in the history of all networks on our planet, no one has ever had a story to report like this. [he looks at the camera] Ladies and Gentlemen, we are going to invite a number of well-respected university professors to come and examine the details around Paul to be witnesses that we are not making up these facts, that he really was dead and is now alive. Perhaps you believe what he is saying and perhaps not, but one thing is certain, if what he has said is true, then it is the best news that has ever been given to the human race. Imagine it, a God who loved human beings so much that He came down to the world to be a human being and die as a human being, because He loved us so much.'

Paul said, 'And after He died, He rose again from the dead and then walked the world for a short period of time before He went back into heaven. He created the catholic church and put it on the Earth so that it could bring human beings to come together with him.'

Chris said, 'This is, in our contemporary eyes, a slum religion. It also is practiced on some of the colonies, especially Xiaoyi which will not hear about these events until another 100 years from now. And you are saying that the message of the catholic church

is completely different from what Fox Asher in his Martian state and so many of the slum religions have been preaching.’

Paul said, ‘That’s right. Mary even told me that Fox Asher is actually an agent of demons and that he is an enemy of God. I hate to break it to you, but as much as he openly supports the slum dwellers to commit terrorism against those who work, he has more than enough resources on Amazonis Planitia to pay for the treatment of all these believers so they can live without aging as well, but he doesn’t do that. He doesn’t really care at all about them. They are just pawns for him.’

Chris nodded and said, ‘Yes, that’s a very good point. So Fox Asher telling us constantly that we are all doomed because we abandoned God and that we need to return to Him, this is false?’

Paul said, ‘Well, I mean I can’t say it is false, only that it is not like the way you think it is. If people are without God then they are going to destroy themselves, and God can save them from that, so it is true that our abandoning of God is going to hurt us, but it is not because God hates us that it is like that. I think it is because of people like Fox Asher that all of the people in our state remain atheists. They see God as a kind of demon who wants to hurt them all and is filled with furious hatred towards human beings, and they have people like Fox Asher to thank for thinking like that.’

Chris said, ‘So, do you think that God loves atheists then?’

Paul said, ‘Yes, absolutely He does. And He will do everything He can in order so that they can come to know the Truth.’

Chris said, ‘Are you in any way concerned about people who may try to harm you for saying these sorts of things?’

Paul said, ‘Mary told me actually that I was going to be killed for preaching these things, although she did not say how or when. I also don’t know who. I think if our government wanted to get rid of me, then they could have easily done so many times already.’

Chris said, ‘Well, I was thinking of Fox Asher’s people actually. I know our government would never do anything behind our backs like that.’

Paul smiled and said nothing.

Chris said, ‘Did Mary have anything to say about our contemporary debate over the status of the human organism?’

Paul said, ‘Yes, she said many things. She said that the human being is the most important part of all of creation. Machines can do many things better than human beings, but the human being is more valuable because the human being can talk to God and a machine cannot. She said that people need to go back to God and pray to Him more. But

she warned that there is a wrong way to pray, and that we must not pray like robots. That is to say, we need to talk to God like a person, like the way we have a relationship with a person, not just repeating things over and over again spoken to the air without any conversation taking place. She said that most of the people in the slums, including many of the catholics were offending God, because they prayed like robots and just treated God like He was a machine that gave an answer when you pressed a button, rather than as a Person who you could have a relationship with.'

The interview was broadcasted and watched by billions of people. It was hotly talked about everywhere and many rival networks took up the story themselves. Paul gave interview after interview telling people about the faith of Jesus Christ. San Beret was also called in to speak during many broadcasts.

The government of the Great Republic issued a statement affirming the record that Paul had resurrected from the dead, but asked the public to remember the possibility that perhaps there was some technology or unexplained natural phenomena that had caused this. His wife did not give any interviews and she successfully got an order from the police to prevent all reporters from going near her anymore.

Many people believed Paul. People with jobs and professions, who were mostly atheists, flocked into the slums to look for Catholic churches so they could learn more.

A number of people circulated conspiracy theories that perhaps this had all been created by their government in order to get the slum dwellers to stop following Fox Asher and to instead follow a God who promised peace.

Many people believed that there was some kind of natural phenomena at work that had brought him back to life.

The person who was most sharply against all of this was the man who led the believers on Amazonis Planitia.

Fox Asher broadcasted a speech to the galaxy in answer to Paul's claims.

He was dressed in a beautiful white robe that shone with light, with a serene expression on his face. He said, 'May God be praised in His Highest Majesty and may the human being tremble at the sins he has committed against the Most High. God has been so greatly wounded by human sins, and how dare the human being suggest that God would stoop down so long for this disgusting creature that He would become a human being like him and even trade His life for him. How dare anyone ever suggest such blasphemy!'

'In recent days the godless republic has manufactured the greatest lie it has ever told. It has deceived people into believing that a man has risen from the dead. It has spun this story in order to deceive people into believing that God is not angry with them, that God is not going to seek His vengeance on them, that God considers Himself no more

important than a miserable human being, that God would profane Himself so as to live in our world as One of us. How dare these godless men create lies like this to deceive people away from the true message of God!

‘He who curses father or mother must die. God is the greatest of all parents, and how can it be that those who curse Him shall be given mercy and not be condemned?’

‘It is absurd that those who worship God should live in slums and poverty while those who blaspheme His name should live in wealth and prosperity. But how much more absurd is it even still, that they should suggest that God would humiliate Himself for them, to throw away His glory and honour, so that He could become like them and die for them as a human being? It is blasphemy! May the man who ever suggested such a thing be treated with the most shameful of all deaths.’

‘God has spoken and the world preferred deception over the Truth, because it sounded good to their eyes. I call on all people to turn away from this false prophet who is a tool used by unbelievers, and to return to the God they abandoned long ago who burns in righteous anger because of their wickedness. The human being shall not be redeemed; he is doomed to destruction. But if he turns away from his sins and follows the message of God as spoken through His prophet, He may find pardon.’

‘God is always right and it is the human being that is wrong. How dare the unbelievers do a crime like this and suggest that God would make Himself wrong so that the human being could be right? Who would dare to suggest that God would rather let go of His justice and His majesty than to let go of this filthy human organism?’

‘Believers in the Truth, the time is coming when you shall be rewarded for your long labours. Hold fast to the Truth you have received and do not turn away from it. Many tests will come to point you away from the God who has already shown Himself to us. Those who turn away shall find great punishment in the end, but those who withstand these tests shall receive a far greater reward in the end.’

Paul watched this and he felt no fear.

Paul was greeting people who were coming to the church in Rome on Holy Trinity Sunday. The number of people who were interested in becoming Catholics was growing and growing. The priests of the church could not keep up with the demand, and so the laity were asked to contribute more and more time to help.

At the end of the mass, Paul exited the church and a group of four men grabbed him violently. They tossed him to the ground and yelled out curses in the language of the Amazonians. One of them took a medical device that painlessly made injections through the skin and put it on Paul’s neck for a split second. Other people around them grabbed them and they fought with them. Paul started going into convulsions and he couldn’t breathe. He died in less than a minute.

The four men fought with the crowd, only to be overcome. The police arrived very quickly to take them away. Controversy followed in the days thereafter as people questioned why it was that the police had not done anything to watch out for threats against him.

In answer to this controversy, the local government in the province of Italy issued a statement that they had advised Paul to stop speaking, but because he refused to do so, they therefore would not risk the lives of anyone to protect his safety.

He was canonized as a saint in the following year by the Pope, who called on his intercession to speak to the world that had forgotten about God.

Fox Asher declared that if he really was true, then he could come back to life again now, and when he didn't come back to life again, Asher cited it as proof that it really was all a hoax on the part of the government of the Great Republic.

Yang Min and others on Xiaoyi watched all these events with tremendous interest. It looked as though the faith on Earth would make a revival, even if it was only among a minority of people.

Yang Min watched his assassination with tears in her eyes.

It was then that she felt like she had a revelation. Not in the sense of a dream or a vision, but rather by watching the events in front of her and realizing something deeply from what she saw.

She felt like she was being led to believe that Mary was crying within her for him. And that she loved him as a child. Even more than this, that she loved him just as much as she loved her Son Jesus.

That is when it dawned on Yang Min. God died on the cross because He did not consider anything else more valuable than the human being. Not only did Mary love each human being just as much as she loved her own Son, so also did the Father love human beings just as much as He loved His Son. There was no human being in existence, no matter how small they were, which God did not love just as much as He loved His Son. That is how valuable the human being was; a child did not need to earn love from his parents, the parents loved him because he was their child. The human being did not need to be able to do the strongest, the most powerful or the most useful of all things, in order to be loved by God. The human being was the most valuable thing in the universe not for any other reason than the fact that he was God's child.

Her grandson was soon to finish high school and he came to visit her that day as she watched Paul's assassination. She showed him the video. They prayed together. The Trinity, Yang Min and Yang Niufei all together in love as a family, sharing their love with the rest of the galaxy as they prayed. What they could do or couldn't do was not what was important; God did not create the human being because He needed some work to be done.

What was the value of the human being?

From beginning to the end, the only thing God wanted was a family that loved each other; it was nothing more complicated than this.

And they prayed hard so that others lost in sin could join their family with them.

XV: Mary Alanen

Kim walked through the ruins of the city looking for someone who would sell him food. Every city on the Korean peninsula had been completely destroyed in the war as a result of the vicious fighting. In other places it had been much worse; the cities in Amazonis Planitia on Mars had been completely wiped off the map and 99% of the people were calculated to be annihilated by the Republic's forces. His wife and two of his children had died in the bombing of the city, and he only had one child left to care for.

It was dusk and the snow was coming down. Kim wondered to himself how the world had come to this. He was a small child at the time, but he knew that it had been about a century since the Republic had adopted its ideology that eventually led to the war. Places as far away as Xiaoyi had probably now heard of the adoption of the ideology in the Great Republic in that past time.

He had wrapped himself in warm clothes, but he still felt coldness in his hands that led him to stick his hands into his sleeves in order to avoid freezing. He passed other people

who had lit bonfires inside the ruins of the buildings to keep warm and eventually he came to a person who he knew was selling food. Kim bartered with him for some vegetables and a bit of meat in exchange for money that he had earned through working for the government in its efforts to build shelters in the city. The merchant knew Kim well and asked him how his son was doing.

Kim said, 'He's doing fine. He's much happier than I am. I don't think I would be able to keep going if I didn't have him with me.'

The merchant said, 'That's really good. I have depressing news, but I won't say it, because I don't want to make you unhappy.'

Kim said, 'Thank you for considering my state of mind. You're right, there is already enough bad things that we have to hear about.'

The merchant said, 'I also have some good news. I hear that on Taiwan they've already rebuilt most of the damage and that they are going to send other places humanitarian help. They didn't get hit that badly when the war was going on years ago and they still have a lot of infrastructure functioning.'

Kim said, 'That's great news!'

Kim took the food back with him to where his child was along with a group of his friends who were living in an abandoned army barracks a few miles up a nearby hill. He walked through what used to be the downtown area, but which now consisted in ruins of buildings that had been hollowed out by fireballs and blasts that had partly collapsed them. Snow and ice covered their sides, although there was enough free space for people to have written graffiti. On the side of the charred seven-storied former consulate of the Great Republic, someone had written in giant white Korean characters: 'Science doesn't explain everything!'

He stopped for a moment and looked at the graffiti he had passed by so many times before, to just ponder it. He then continued on his way and found his son with his friends, and they made dinner with the food he brought.

While they were eating, the snow continued to fall and as the dim light became darkness, intense fear began to fill him and his friends. They heard the sound of the great engines of robotic troopships that were flying overhead, one of which came closer and closer. It passed over their heads and continued on to another destination, much to their relief.

On board one of the troopships there was a high ranking officer of the Great Republic who was hitching a ride along with the robots as it continued on to the Philippines to add more strength to the occupation forces.

On the Earth there was nowhere left that had not been taken. Only on Triton was resistance still remaining and fighting ongoing.

She had formerly been commander of the Arctic region security forces. With the breaking out of the war five years previously, she was called upon to lead her forces to reinforce their efforts in the Pacific theatre.

She was dressed in her normal uniform and sat on a rough metal crate in the belly of the large atmospheric craft. All around her were thousands of robots neatly folded up and ready to be deployed when the button was pressed. She was the only human being onboard, but she was not sure that she was human anymore.

Memories passed through her head about what had happened in the past century since the day that Paul stepped into her office. How did it all come to this?

The High command was issuing orders to increase the robotic presence on Earth and prepare for the domestication of the organisms in the occupied regions. The brain implants and software to control them was already well developed after a century of research. She realized that she had been the pioneer of this with Maruskovy.

She thought about what Maruskovy had said to her that day; the threat he made to her. Maruskovy was the most barbaric and sick creature that she had ever seen; and yet he was still a human being, and she did that to him. No amount of rationalization was going to change that fact.

It was on that day, that he had already beaten her. She could take away his freedom as a human being; but he took away her soul itself. And he, or the thing inside of him, understood this all so perfectly that he laughed at her in mockery on that day, at this one stupid little atheist who could not see the big picture as it really was. Why didn't she open the door and end it all then?

That was why the local people of Gerasa could not keep the demoniac in chains. The demoniac was just a manifestation of the evil in their own hearts. Technology had no power to stop him, because the war was going on in their own hearts and he was defeating them there, where no technology could help them.

Memories flooded her mind of the way that events had followed.

Paul made his announcements to the world that caused so many working and educated people to get baptized and join the church, while the majority remained atheist.

The terrorist attacks grew larger and larger. The people of Gerasa did not have the strength to keep the demoniac down themselves, no matter what they tried, so long as their sin remained.

The military command advised against it, but the civilian leadership, in answer to loud cries from the populace, began to abolish the legal human rights for all slum dwellers and to treat them as the organisms they were.

The growing religious minority protested very hard against it and so did all the other nations. Resistance was fierce, but the will of the state prevailed and robotic implants were placed into each slum dweller to modify their behaviour and make them more loving to the state that gave them food to eat while they cursed it. This process was referred to as domestication; Dr. Mbaya and others claimed it was similar to the process of ancient cultures taking wild bovines or boars and turning them into domesticated cattle or pigs.

People committed suicide to avoid being taken. People cried their eyes out begging not to have the implants placed in them. And the robots sent to carry out this work had no care for their tears and fulfilled the commands placed in them. It was kept out of conscious view of the public, in light of Dr. Mbaya's suggestions in relation to abortion that a society could only accept something like this, so long as they didn't see it often.

People prayed to God begging to be saved by this or they tried with great futility to fight back against the robots. And she was there, watching all these things happening and giving orders to her soldiers to direct the robots to continue. Constantly reminding them that the human being was only an organism and nothing more. Beyond flesh and tissue, there was nothing in it that gave it any value.

She watched little children, like the ones she had lost hundreds of years previously, crying out their eyes and begging the robots not to go through this. And the robots restrained them, sedated them and injected the implants into their brains. When they woke up, they could only feel bad whenever someone did or said anything against the government or the people who worked, and they felt great joy when it was applauded or honoured. And they became domesticated; each succeeding generation would only know or say good things about their government and hate anything that was against it.

Overseers from the state would then come to give them orders, and they would obey them as robotic slaves, feeling nothing but peace in obedience and nothing but dread in disobedience. They knew that their freedom of choice had been taken away, but they felt good when people spoke well of their freedom of choice being taken away and felt bad when people complained about it. Slowly their personalities were changed by the years under the influence of these devices and they accepted their fates with comfort.

But the purpose failed to be achieved. Maruskovy told Mary how stupid she was in believing that something like this could hold back his power. As though chains could hold down a legion of demons that had the permission to cause trouble.

Even after domestication was undergone, the attacks still grew larger and larger. And this time it was people among the working population that were the culprits. Most often they were those who had religious beliefs.

The same pattern then emerged among angry citizens, demanding now for the domestication of all those among the working populace who were people of open religious beliefs.

But such people were also in the government, in businesses, in the military. Even though they were a minority, they were still everywhere and had power.

People lived in fear of the terrorists and this caused them to look differently at their friends, their neighbours, their co-workers, their family members. Atheist politicians called on people to remember that all these people around them in their lives were just organisms, and nothing more. Most people could not do it, but some people were able to change their thinking and they looked at their own friends, their own neighbours, their own spouse or children, no longer as human beings but as pieces of flesh that had no more meaning than what was given to them.

Calls came for action to be taken to make society secure. It was in this way that the war began. It started as a civil war, but it grew internationally. All the other nations, led by Fox Asher, feared what was going to happen to them.

She cast her lot with the government and the high command, following the same atheistic thinking she had always had. She believed that the human being was nothing more than an organism, and that this had to be accepted.

When the war began, her robots were deployed to Korea after Northern Europe had been secured from rebels. She watched from screens at remote locations as she saw her bots killing every human being that breathed. They blew open buildings and shot those inside like they were exterminating vermin. They sliced human beings in pieces at close range, and had no discrimination between armed persons and civilians, as she was ordered to reduce the population to a controllable level. She did this all constantly reminding herself and her men that these were just organisms and nothing more. It was nothing more than what one did when they culled some dangerous animal that had grown too large in population.

She did not tell anyone else, however, but she had nightmares that went night after night of the things she saw. There was no amount of rationalization she could do to make it go away for her.

She got off of the crate and looked at the door of the craft, wondering if she should open it to jump out and end it all there. She was not needed to ride this craft; she did so by her own choice and did not tell anyone the reason why. She was alone, and no one was there to stop her.

She gazed at her reflection as it shone from the mirrored image on the alloys that made up the walls of the craft.

Tears came to her eyes as she looked at herself. She really wanted things to be otherwise, but she felt deeply that this was the reality. She thought that all of human existence from cradle to grave, none of it had any meaning, it was just experiences and nothing else.

She felt a deep longing that it could have been some other way than this.

She needed there to be some reason for why she was here, but in her mind there wasn't of course any such thing.

There was no one to reach to; no one to cry out to; nothing that could solve what needed to be solved. She really wished it was otherwise, but she knew that that wasn't the case, and so her depression deepened.

Despite this deepening depression, she was otherwise perfectly healthy and was living in what was considered to be a heroic career. Those things were simply not enough though, because they did not help the issues that really hurt her. She did not suffer from want of food or clothing, but the deepest needs of her heart were famished. She tossed and turned at night, and wished morning would come, when morning came, she felt depressed at getting up and wished the day was over; time moved slowly.

She looked at herself in the reflection on the side of the craft and looked at her eyes, her skin, her hair and her flesh. She looked upon herself and in her eyes all that she saw was just an organism, composed of meaningless biological tissue and atomic particles.

In her mind, a meaningless bit of matter in the mindless infinity of the universe was looking upon itself and wishing that it wasn't what it was.

She hated it and felt nauseated by it. She knew that that would never change though, and as she looked at her reflection, she considered all the other faces of those she knew and those she didn't know, realizing ever more deeply that there was nothing in them beyond empty matter. Despair enveloped her and she cried as she continued to gaze.

Why is the universe like this? This was a nightmare worse than death. She wanted to wake up from it and she could not wake up. She thought about opening the door and just putting an end to it.

She wanted to reach out to someone who would take her hand, but she felt deeply like there was no one there to take it.

She was reminded of Paul escaping from the base. What if the resurrection was true and all those things he said about a loving God were true. She couldn't believe it though; in her deepest heart, she couldn't possibly believe that it was as good as that.

She put her hand on the door of the emergency exit as the craft was flying high over the Pacific. She then felt like she felt the presence of her family, but it wasn't the presence of

her husband or children, but she felt like she had a family that was calling to her and she took her hand off of the door.

She went back to her crate and kneeled on the grown next to some of the larger bots that had been folded up. She said in her heart, 'Please, son of Mary, I don't know if you are real or not, but if you are not, I am begging you with all my heart that you can become real. I know you are fiction, but I need you to exist. Please, I am begging you with the deepest part of my being, I am begging you to exist. I don't want this to be this way; I need you to be there. Whatever I have done wrong, I am ready to throw it away; I don't care about anything else, I want these things to be true- I can't live in a world where there is nothing else than just this where there is nothing else and no God. There is no purpose, no meaning, we are just meaningless bits of matter and our deaths have no value; I don't need to die to go down to hell, I have already seen what it looks like, it is the place without you. Please, I'm begging you, I need you to be.'

All Glory to God