

July 3015

The hotel by the river, in the northernmost neighborhood of Laton, was called the Old Laton Hotel, and it actually was one of the oldest buildings in the community. Toby would usually show up in the early afternoon, after most of the lunch diners had returned to work, and join owners Frank and Frances Frowlee as they took their afternoon break and planned the evening's menu. The hotel had a covered deck along two of its walls, with a nice view of the river and hills beyond, and, on most days, a pleasant breeze. The Frowlees liked that Toby appreciated the unique fish and other foods he had not tasted on Tobus, and would often get his valuable critique of new items for their menu. They were fascinated by his stories of roaming the hills outside Tob Star City on Tobus, when he was young. They wished they could spend more time enjoying his tales. Sometimes Toby would be finishing his meal when their daughter Beth, who had turned 9 years old this month, would come home from school. She would quietly sit by her parents as Toby was finishing one of his stories, soaking up whatever Toby was talking about that day. After a while, she overcame her shyness and started asking Toby questions about his life at home. Toby was delighted to have a new audience, and her parents were happy that they could get back to work while Toby continued talking. This new relationship made Toby wonder about his own children at home. They were grown and on their own, and he had been a little disappointed that none of the 3 followed in his footsteps in a public office. Maybe he didn't spend enough time with them when they were young, as he worked tirelessly at his vision of ruling his planet as best he could. Maybe it was the exercise he was getting on his daily strolls, or something about the air here, but he was feeling better than he had in a long time. He was learning about the people and customs of this place, and getting to be good friends with the Frowlee family. During one of their meetings, Beth told Toby how much she liked her visits to the sacred grove in Adia Woods with her parents. It was fun to leave the car behind, and ride a horse into the woods, and forget about the city life for a little while. In the summer time they would sleep under the stars near the grove. Toby had not thought about if the people of this place had any sort of religion, and it dawned on him that this was a sort of spiritual pilgrimage. He wondered about this sacred grove. Were there other places like this? Did everybody make these journeys periodically? He put it on his mental checklist, as something to do more research about when he had the time.

August 3015

One warm evening Toby had dinner at the home of Shad Hills and his wife. This was a large, one level abode, of stone and wood, nestled in the woods right at the southern border of Laton. After a light meal, the 3 of them sat on the patio, with a stream gurgling in the distance, and the stars starting to come out. Toby worked out an agreement with Shad, who would start work on Toby's home in Comton, at the base of the Listy Mountain, after his current project was done. Toby would join Shad on his journey to Lavia, to learn about the people of that place, and see first hand the quarry from which the materials for many of Ladia's finest buildings was harvested. It would take about a year to build the home, Shad estimated. Toby was still undecided if he would stay in Ladia, or go back to Tobus. He wasn't so sure that everything was going as well there as Israel DeGaulle said in his weekly status updates, received via the satellite in orbit around this planet. News broadcasts were sent periodically from the home planet, but Toby was happy here, and reluctant to spoil his good mood by worrying about things.

September 3015 Laton, Ladia, Lad

Earlier that month, Sally received a message from Joseph, asking if she would like to join him to celebrate the equinox at the Southside Sacred Grove, a few kilometers west of Lisp. Thomas drove Sally down to Joseph and Nadia's farm on a warm evening as the day neared, and she slept in their house, waiting for Joseph to return from his fishing boat the next

day. Their car was charged up and ready to go when Joseph was dropped off at the house by the fishing company bus. Nadia's grandmother handed over several large baskets packed with food for them to share on their pilgrimage. Joseph guided the car south down the highway that was starting to become familiar to Sally. The road turned east, and in a few hours they turned off the main road, onto a rutted path that went through the meadow and marshes towards the sea. The road continued to deteriorate, and he parked the car in front of a large barn, and a house along side. There was only one other car in the lot, and Sally could hear a horse neighing in the barn. Joseph explained that they were going a day or so ahead of the equinox, to avoid the usual uptake in traffic to the site. The custom was to abandon mechanical vehicles and walk or ride horses to the actual grove. Sally was skeptical. Riding was not a skill covered in her space travel training. Joseph talked with the stable manager, and they picked out a horse that was known to be gentle and cooperative, and used to inexperienced riders. Joseph loaded the baskets into the saddlebags of the larger horse he was riding, and Stan the stable manager helped Sally climb into the saddle of her mount. They were soon out of site of the barn, and Sally was happy with the slow pace of their travel, enjoying the unspoiled countryside. Before too long, the smell of water on the beach told her that they were approaching the ocean. The path ended at a clearing with a small barn, and several other buildings of varying sizes. Joseph led them to the barn, where they dismounted their horses, and he tied them to the hitching post. "We'll stay in the smallest house", he said, "and leave the bigger ones for the other visitors". They carried their food and other supplies into the house, and walked down to see the cove. They heard the sea crashing in front of them, and walked to the sand, and saw a group of 3, backs turned to them, sitting cross legged facing the ocean. It was a man, a woman, and a child. "Nobody told me you had to be naked to meditate at the coves and groves", said Sally, a little surprised when she realized the trio was unclothed. Joe answered, "it's not required. To each his own, but some people feel that brings them closer to nature, and enriches the experience". The family, hearing their voices, decided to head back to their own cabin to have dinner. They put their robes on as they got up. They all offered a quiet hello as they passed Sally and Joseph, walking slowly up the sands. They sat down near to where the others had been, but fully clothed. A sense of peace and serenity passed over Sally as she gazed out over the water, with a soft ocean breeze tickling her nose. After a time, she realized she had developed quite an appetite, and said so. They headed back up to their cottage.

There was a room with a pot-bellied stove and some chairs and a small table, and another room with 2 beds. Joseph lit the stove, as it was cool inside the building, and put a pot he took out of one of the baskets on top to warm. He took out cheese and bread and a bottle of wine. They warmed themselves, sitting on the chairs that they pulled in front of the fire. The fragrance of the fish chowder as it reached a boil reminded her of how hungry she was. Joseph opened the wine, and they dined at the little table. Sally enjoyed Joseph's tales of the first times he visited the sacred groves as a child, and what these rituals meant to him. He was equally enthralled by how different her life had been on Tobus, and of how she decided to join the space agency so she could really travel. As the fire burned down, they were ready to turn in after the long day. Sally's back hurt a little, unaccustomed to horseback riding. Joseph said he could help, if she wanted. Sally enjoyed his big, warm hands on her back, and did feel better. They climbed into their beds, covered with thick feathered blankets against the cool night. Sally fell asleep immediately, but woke up in the middle of the night after a confusing, frightening dream that she could not remember clearly. She was sweaty, and a little cold. She got up and quietly slipped into bed with Joseph, who stayed deeply asleep, and slept soundly for the rest of the night.

They both woke up with the sun in the morning, but stayed in bed for quite a while before finally getting up for breakfast. Joseph, ever

resourceful, cooked bacon and eggs to go with more of the cheese and bread, and hot coffee. The sun came out after several days of clouds, and warmed their little house and the beach. They were alone at the cove this time, but naked today as they sat in the sun contemplating the ocean, the waves, and nature.

Joseph needed to get ready for his next fishing expedition, and Sally was due at a meeting with Toby and his staff, so they packed up and rode their horses back to the stable. Soon they were back at the farm. Thomas was waiting when Sally arrived, and it was dark outside by the time they arrived back in Laton.

Sally, Thomas, Roberto, and Godfrey were already assembled in Toby's meeting room, enjoying coffee while waiting for his arrival. Toby told them that after his return from Lavia, they would need to get down to the business of setting up concrete plans to get the tourism industry started on the island. Roberto would be in charge of communications with the home planet, setting up daily transmissions from the lander. Thomas would reach out to the townspeople, to recruit more locals to help with the plans. Godfrey would review his notes and photographs from the tour, and prepare materials for the marketing people at the SpaceTour headquarters on Tobusi. Sally would catch up with what was happening at home, so she could brief Toby on any decisions he would need to make. By lunch time everyone's tasks were clear, and Toby went off to pack for his ocean voyage.

Olla, Ladia, Lad

Toby's ride from Laton with Shad Hills was fairly uneventful. They stopped for lunch, and to swap in some freshly charged batteries for the car, in Vista, enjoying a view of the Island of Hald as they dined. Travel was slow and inconvenient on Lad, and Toby wished progress in modernizing Ladia would move a little more rapidly. They soon arrived in Olla, and were greeted by Armand Hillary, builder of large boats including the freighter they would be sailing on. Shad had made this journey several times before, and was well acquainted with the crew. Toby got a tour of the large ship, and was a bit surprised by how small his cabin was. It was a working vessel, after all, so amenities were sacrificed to allow a large cargo space. The batteries took up quite a bit of space, and he was a bit surprised to see masts and sails that made the craft look a lot like the ancient sailing ships that were tourist attractions back home. A windmill also took up part of the deck, to generate some power to help keep the batteries charged. It would take about 6 days to make the trip to Lavia. They adjourned to their rooms for the night, as the boat was loaded with supplies for the trip.

They set sail early the next day, motoring due south away from the port into the deeper ocean. A good breeze was blowing from the west as the land diminished behind them, so the sails were raised, and they were soon moving briskly east along the southern coast of the island. It was not long before they saw the lighthouse on Hald, and they steered further away from the island towards their destination.

Laton, Ladia, Lad

Sally caught up on the state of Tobus by downloading the latest broadcasts from each of the major broadcast networks, which were each controlled by a political party. Star City Corporation, representing the Tobists, presented reality according to Toby, and of the benevolent but mostly totalitarian rulers in Tob Star City. While Toby was away, Israel DeGaulle's somewhat different view of things prevailed. The Free The Light broadcasting network represented The Freedom Party, and the lightmongers who lived on the Tabby Islands. Fiercely independent, they put forth a viewpoint based on their religion of worship of the star that gave them light, and the land below their feet. The Conservative Party ran the Station of Truth. The tone of this network was set by the

charismatic Prime minister of Tubro, Henry Holland, though many of the people of Tralia also followed the party. Finally, the Tobusi Times Network had been representing the moon since the revolution that freed them from Tobus control.

It made sense to start with Tobland, Toby's home and center of power of the planet, so she started with the summary of yesterday's news, read by dark haired, stern looking newscaster Tatanya Korbosi. "Israel DeGaulle presented his long awaited plan for negotiating with the leaders of the Tabby Islands on construction of badly needed satellite and spacecraft communications facilities. Armed conflict is to be avoided at all costs, he stressed, and economic penalties against the islands would be more effective than violent means. Effective immediately, a 20% tariff would be imposed on all shipments of grain, wine, and beer from Tobland to the islands. More severe punishment will be applied if they do not relent and agree to continue with development of the facilities. On Tubro, prime minister Henry Holland declared that the Tobists regulations are stifling the economy of his continent, and that they were reconsidering their policy of enforcing them. And in sports news, the North Range Rangers took a 2 to 1 lead in the krickball finals against the Star City Yankees. Star City's star cricker, injured in the final game of the regular season, announced that he will play the next game, and promised revenge".

The news from Tobland got Sally interested in learning more about what was happening on the islands, so she downloaded the latest release from the Freedom Party's Light Broadcasting Network. This segment was composed of short interviews with residents of several islands of the chain. Negris, the northernmost island, was chosen by the Tobists as the site of the main link between the planet surface and the large interplanetary communications satellite in orbit. Its tall mountain would be the ideal location for the high bandwidth laser link to the satellite. A local farmer explained that the mountain is even more holy to them than the rest of the land they owed their existence to. He would consider any effort to build something there as a serious intrusion, and was willing to fight to keep it from happening. Tabby, the island in the middle of the chain, relatively close to Tobland, was to be the site of a new airport to improve travel time to the islands, and make them more accessible to the rest of the planet. The mayor of the city between the island's large lake and the site along the shore for the new spaceport, said that one of the local factories was being converted to produce weapons to arm the islanders against the intruders. The Free Party was not ready to sacrifice their freedom and independence for the convenience of the greedy developers. He was confident that the ex-Tabby people who expedited the separation of Tobusi from the union would be more than willing to lend a hand.

The Station of Truth, confident that their Conservative vision was best for everyone, had a different point of view. They thought the talking head newscasts of the other parties was frivolous, and preferred to present their news in print. The most recent release was all about the SpaceTour Corporation, and how their success would make all the continents prosperous. They were somewhat sympathetic with the Tabby's desire to escape the centrist control, but understood that a good communications system was vital to the success of the industry. They were totally opposed to the tariffs, and worried that the Tobists might impose them on their continent if they became too critical of them. Holland was cautiously optimistic that the Tobists, with their leader Toby far away, would not notice if they gradually backed away from the regulations they had imposed.

The Tobusi Times Network presented news of the space tours that had started in January. Flights from the new spaceport on Lavia to SpaceTour's Planet Orbital Terminal were going smoothly, as were the flights to the Moon Orbital Terminal in Tobusi orbit. Space tourism was an expensive vacation, but business was good. They expected much better business as they became more efficient, and could reduce their costs.

Thomas Krost, Toby's aide, wondered how to break through to the townspeople, who seemed pretty set in their ways, to convince them that the new developments would make their lives better. He had met only the officials at each site. Maybe, if he could mingle with the regular people, he could find some who believed in the plan, and be happy to participate in making it happen. Maybe he could spend a few weeks in each place, and get to know the locals. Toby seemed to be fitting right in with the natives in Laton, having a good time with his stories. Maybe Thomas could use his own charm in the other villages, though he was not quite sure he had the same ease in making new friendships as Toby did. If all else fails, he thought, maybe they would respond to bribery. He tried not to think too deeply in that direction.

Godfrey was a little afraid of Robert Pond, the CEO of SpaceTour Corporation. Pond was famous for some of his ruthless decisions on the way to monopolizing the space tourism industry. He would have to produce a thorough and detailed marketing plan if he expected to keep his lucrative position. Failure, he feared, could result in his being permanently assigned to this primitive planet. He was glad that he had a month until Toby was to return, so he would not be interrupted as he developed his material.

Roberto was getting frustrated by his attempts to establish daily communications with Toby's people back on Tobus. His first message, directed to Israel DeGaulle, did not produce a response until 2 days later. And the response was not from Israel, but from his aide Semper Fidless. All the message said was yes, they would commence to send daily updates, but there was no further information. Roberto knew that Toby was concerned about his government's perception of the cost of his journey, so he asked Semper to send a detailed report of expenditures and income for the time that Toby had been away. The report he received after another 2 days was short and lacking in detail. Semper promised another update shortly, with a more thorough analysis. Roberto was starting to become suspicious. He was pretty sure that Israel was up to something, and was wondering who he could engage to try to get to the bottom of it. It would be best if Toby could have a clear picture of the situation.

October 3015 Olla, Ladia, Lad

Loaded with stone, the Sea Horse was sitting quite a bit lower in the water as it approached the dock than it had been when heading out to Lavia 4 weeks ago. Toby was happy that they were approaching the shore, getting away from the wind that howled, unobstructed by mountains and hills, across the open ocean. It was warmer and calmer, and he stood outside on the deck with Shad as electric propeller motors hummed softly below. The trip was very educational for Toby, who had not realized how primitive Lavia was compared to Ladia, which itself was far less advanced than his home planet. Extending the space touring beyond the island he had landed on would have to be a long term possibility. He was also starting to worry about how much of his peoples' funds he was expending on his interplanetary adventure. He was still King Toby, but he knew that there was danger in being so far away from home for so long. He tried to put it out of mind for now, anxious to know how things were going with Sally, Thomas, Roberto and Godfrey, on the projects they had been working on.

October 3015 Tob Star City, Tob Star City Provence, Tobland, Tobus

Israel DeGaulle paced nervously across his office on the top floor of Toby's palace tower, 54 stories above the Misty Sea, shrouded by its morning fog. Henry Holland, Prime minister of Tubro, was late for their meeting. The Station of Truth, mouthpiece of Holland's Conservative Party, had been making a lot of noise recently about rumors of a tax increase, and DeGaulle was determined to quiet things down before they got out of hand. Holland arrived in short order, impeccably dressed and

groomed, and they sat down at the table with coffee for Israel, tea for Holland, and muffins to share. After some cordial small talk, Israel launched into his carefully rehearsed opening remark. "As you know, minister, exploration of space by Tobus has taken an increasing toll on our resources, and increased taxes are the only fair way to pay for it. The increased trade and business that will result from this expansion will ultimately benefit all citizens of our planet. I can assure you that once these efforts start to pay off, taxes can be lowered even below what they are presently. Toby is determined that this is the best course to take at this time, and as his deputy, it is my duty to make sure this goes smoothly." Holland was clearly expecting to hear this, but he did his best to explain how this would be a real hardship for the people of Tubro. After some back and forth, Israel presented the concession he had planned on from the start. "I understand your concern, so here's what I can do. We have been planning to build a major new factory soon, in a new industrial town to be built near the capitol, to support the space industry. We are willing to negotiate with you about putting this factory in Tubro instead of here. This factory will employ thousands of your people, and that should more than compensate for the burden of the new taxes. We can start right away to plan this facility." Holland agreed, they shook hands, and the meeting was over. Israel was trying to figure out how to avoid mentioning the deal in his report to Toby about how the meeting went.

One of the things Toby missed during his journey to Lavia was his lunches at the Old Laton Hotel. When he arrived on a Tuesday afternoon, he was greeted by Frances, daughter Beth, and another woman he did not know. Beth introduced Toby to her aunt Baleena, Frances' sister. Baleena was attractive and very talkative, and seemed very interested in hearing more about Toby. Her questions about life on Tobus went on even after Beth had gone inside to help her mother with dinner preparations. It turns out she worked as clerk for the town of Lango where she lived, but was taking some time off to visit with her sister's family. Toby needed to go to meet with his advisors, but they agreed to get together again for dinner later that week.

Toby learned that the reports being sent to Roberto from his home planet were not as comprehensive as he had hoped they would be. Toby was interested in hearing how the meeting between Israel and Henry Holland had transpired. He knew that the people of Tubro were concerned about the tax increase, and he suspected that Holland would make some difficult demands. He was a little surprised by the report that the meeting had gone very smoothly, and that Holland, once he understood the reason for the taxes, was okay with the plan.

Toby had been looking forward to his dinner with Baleena. They were going to meet at the Star Restaurant, which was recommended by Toby's chef, Pierre Perot. After 7 months on Lad, Toby was missing his wives back on Tobus. It was clear that Nadia was doing her best to avoid him, and he got the message that she was totally uninterested in spending any time with Toby. He was seated at the best table in the house, sipping his beer while waiting for Baleena to arrive. Toby noticed immediately when she arrived how radiant she looked dressed up for dinner in a radiant blue dress. Toby got up and escorted her to her seat, and called to the waiter to bring out a bottle of their best wine to sip with dinner. She was just as friendly and talkative as she had been on their first meeting, and soaked up everything Toby told her about life on Tobus, and his journey to her planet. Toby hoped they would get a chance to spend more time together before she had to return to her work in Lango.

November 3015 Laton

Shad Hills was sitting at the large table in the dining room of his home in the woods outside Laton, across from Toby, as they peered at the plan for Toby's new home. The king was pleased with the sketch of the house that followed the contours of the mountainside near the village of

Comton. The entrance, on the lowest level, was unassuming from the outside, but opened onto the large polished stone floor of the foyer, surrounded by entrances to the kitchen, dining room, and comfortable living room that would be ideal for entertaining. The second floor contained guest bedrooms, and the top floor housed the master bedroom, with a large window looking down the mountain, library and office. Warmed by the large fireplace in Hills' living room, Toby was confident that Shad had come up with a design that Toby would be comfortable in. Groundbreaking was to be later that week, and Toby gave his enthusiastic approval of the plan.

By the end of November, Elvin Thom, Innkeeper of the Grand Hotel in Laton, had started to get used to seeing Baleena trying to be inconspicuous as she left the building in the early morning to walk back to her sister's house in town. Pierre Perot, Toby's chef, had on several occasions brought dinner up to Toby's quarters, instead of in the public dining room where Toby usually enjoyed mingling with the town officials. They kept quiet; Toby had been much less grumpy lately, so they were glad to know that he was enjoying Baleena's company.

December 3015 Outside of Lango

Henry Higgins, Laton town engineer, finally got a chance to check out the spacecraft Toby and his crew had taken from the orbiting Explorer II ship to the surface. Roberto Puck, Toby's crew chief, was proud to be in charge of the craft, and would enjoy showing it off to someone who would be impressed by the advanced technology. Roberto met Henry in Lango, and they travelled in the rover to the lander, with its shiny metal surface gleaming despite the usual overcast sky. As they walked around the spaceship, Roberto pointed out the 3 legs that were built to cushion the landing of the 50 meter tall craft. The nozzle of the single large engine occupied the center of the craft, surrounded on one side by the winch from which the rovers had been lowered, and on the other by the long retractable staircase. At the top of the staircase, they entered the walkway which circled the main engine. They entered the open lift, and slowly ascended past the engine to the level with the fuel tanks and the area in which the rovers had been secured for the flight. Finally they reached the crew and control deck, with its bank of colorful displays and readouts. Henry had many questions about the technology behind this machine, and Roberto was patient about explaining ideas he had come to take for granted, but which were new to someone from the primitive planet they were visiting. Roberto explained how he was responsible for maintaining the lander, and spent several hours every day checking on all the systems to ensure a successful return to orbit when the mission was over.

The committee of citizens of the Laton area assembled again in the small room that had been furnished as Toby's office, with him and his aide Godfrey Lipito. Godfrey unveiled a large placard he had taped to the side wall, with the schedule of developments. He explained that much work needed to be done to build the space port for the tourists. By the beginning of 3016, the conversion of Explorer I, orbiting Tobus presently, would be complete, and it would be renamed "Factory ship I". Materials and equipment for the facility could be fabricated on the ship, and flown down to the plant. By February, construction of SpaceTour I, a large vessel twice the size of Explorers I and II, for transportation of tourists, would begin. This would consist of 2 of the previous sized ships, linked together. The new one would transport paying customers in more comfort than the older generations. In March of 3016 the Explorer I Landing party would leave Lad, rendezvous with the orbiting parent vessel, and they would head back to Tobus. In June of 3016 Factory ship I, with a large attached zero gravity factory, and regular gravity facilities replacing some of the living quarters, would leave Tobus orbit, headed to Lad. Construction of SpaceTour I would be completed by February of 3018, and Factory Ship I would achieve orbit of Lad in June of that year. With new manufacturing facilities ready, rapid progress could be made on the new space port. SpaceTour I was to

leave Tobus orbit in September 3018 with the first set of tourists, and arrive in Tobus orbit by June of the next year. Henry Higgins, the Laton town engineer, and the builder Shad Hills both had questions about the space port. How large would it be? Shad suggested that the farmers in Snill might not be happy about having the facility near their plots. Godfrey said there would be no problem with that. Arnold Firth, the surveyor for Toby's space port project, was a good negotiator, and would smooth out any fears of the locals. Elvin Thom, innkeeper of the Grand Hotel where they were meeting, wondered about the high speed rail line that was to be part of the project. Would it be noisy? Clearly the islanders valued their continued peace and quiet. Toby promised to keep them up to date until the delegation's departure from Lad in March.

Sally had been making up reasons to visit Joseph at the farm south of Laton every few weeks, whenever he had a few days off at home between fishing voyages. It was important to learn more about farming and fishing, the main occupations on Lad, so as to cause the least disruption to their lives as the tourist industry got started. As she spent more time with Joseph, the appeal of the uncomplicated life of the island natives was becoming more apparent to her. The planned date for departure from Lad, in March, was looming larger in her mind. She dreaded the thought of leaving Lad, and maybe never seeing Joseph again. How could she justify staying behind? Would Toby regard this as a betrayal?