

MAGNIFICAT

VOLUME III OF THE
GALACTIC MILIEU TRILOGY

JULIAN MAY



BALLANTINE BOOKS

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The Galactic Milieu Trilogy

Volume I: *Jack the Bodiless*

Volume II: *Diamond Mask*

Volume III: *Magnificat*

MAGNIFICAT

Julian May

**Volume III
of The Galactic Milieu Trilogy**



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For Emy and John Harris

avec mes amitiés

Contents

Cover

Other Books by This Author

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Epigraph

Prologue

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Epilogue

Magnificat anima mea dominum, et exsultavit spiritus meus in deo salutari meo.

LUKE 1:46-4

God said: It is necessary that sin should exist, but all will be well, and all will be well, and every manner of things will be well.

JULIAN OF NORWICH

Love is the only thing that makes things one without destroying them.

PIERRE TELHARD DE CHARDON

PROLOGUE

KAUAI, HAWAII, EARTH 27 OCTOBER 2113

IT WAS DAWN IN THE ISLANDS. IN THE OHIA THICKETS OF THE highland forest, apapane birds and thrushes gave a few drowsy chirps as they tuned up for their sunrise aubade. Inside a rustic house on the mountainside above Shark Rock, the old bookseller called Uncle Rogi Remillard yawned and stopped dictating into his transcriber. He looked out of the big sitting-room window at the dark, choppy Pacific nearly a thousand meters below, pinched the bridge of his long, broken nose, and squeezed his eyes shut for a moment while he gathered his thoughts. The adjacent isle of Niihau was just becoming visible against the rose-gray sky and a few lights in Kekaha village sparkled down along the Kauai shore.

Uncle Rogi was a lanky man with a head of untidy grizzled curls and a face that was deeply tanned after a three-month stay in the islands. He wore a garish aloha shirt and rumpled chinos, and he was dead tired after an all-night session of work on his memoirs, so close to finishing this volume that he couldn't bear to break off and go to bed.

Now only the final page remained.

He picked up the input microphone of the transcriber again, cleared his throat, and began to record:

I stayed on the planet Caledonia with Jack and Dorothee for nearly six weeks, until they bowled me over (along with most of the rest of the Milieu) by announcing that they would marry in the summer of 2078. Then I finally reclaimed the Great Carbuncle, which had done a damn fine job, went back to my home in New Hampshire, and tried to decide what kind of wedding present to give the improbable lovers.

I was feeling wonderful! Le bon dieu was in his heaven and all was right with the Galactic Milieu.

Rogi studied the transcriber's display. Not bad. Not a bad windup at all! He yawned again.

His ten-kilo Maine Coon cat Marcel LaPlume IX stalked into the room and uttered a faint high-pitched miaow. Rogi acknowledged the animal's telepathic greeting with a weary nod. "Eh bien, mon brave chaton. All done with this chunk of family history. Only the worst part left to tell. One more book. Shall we stay here on Kauai and do it, or go back to New Hampshire?"

Marcel levitated onto the desk and sat beside the transcriber, regarding his master with enormous gray-green eyes. He said: *Hot here. Go home.*

Rogi chuckled. Hale Pohakumano was actually situated high enough to be spared the worst of the tropical heat and humidity. But the cat's shaggy gray-black pelt and big furry feet had been designed by nature for snowy northern climes, and even the joys of chasing geckos and picking fights with jungle cocks had finally paled for him.

Home, Marcel said again, fixing Rogi with an owl-like coercive stare.

"Batège, maybe you're right." The bookseller picked up the silver correction stylo, tapped the display, and dictated a final word, changing "the planet Caledonia" on the last page

“Callie.” Then he hit the FILE and PRINT pads of the transcriber. “Yep, I guess it’s time to get o back to Hanover—make sure the bookshop’s okay, enjoy the last of the autumn leaves. Ar put my goddam stupid wishful thinking in the ash can where it belongs. There’s no reason stay here. I’ve got to stop acting like a sentimental sap.”

Marcel inclined his head in silent agreement.

“She’s just not going to show up. Haunani and Tony must have let her know I was staying in her house. If she’d wanted to see me, she had plenty of chances to drop in, casual-like.”

Rogi looked out the window again, letting his inefficient seeker-sense sift through the human auras glimmering far downslope. The residents and holidaymakers in Kekaha village were mostly still asleep, their minds unguarded so that even a metapsychic searcher as clumsy as he was could sort through their identities quickly.

None of those minds belonged to Elaine Donovan, the woman he had loved and lost 13 years ago.

The farsensory search was a futile gesture, bien sûr, and he didn’t bother to check out any of the other towns. Elaine was probably nowhere near the Hawaiian Islands—perhaps not even on the planet Earth.

Borrowing her house while he wrote the penultimate volume of his memoirs had been a bummer of an idea after all, even though the Family Ghost had colluded in it and mysteriously made all the arrangements. Rogi really had thought it wouldn’t matter, sleeping in Elaine’s bed, cooking in her kitchen, eating off the tableware she’d used, mooching around the garden of tropical flowers she had planted.

But it *had* mattered.

Rogi had seen her image on the Tri-D and in durofilm newsprint rather often in recent years, for she was a distinguished patron of the arts, both human and exotic. The rejuvenation techniques of the Galactic Milieu had preserved her beauty. She retained the same silvery eyes, strawberry-blonde hair, and striking features that had left him thunderstruck at their first meeting in 1974.

He had no idea whether or not she still wore Bal à Versailles perfume.

Long ago, his pigheaded pride had made marriage impossible and they had gone their separate ways. He had loved other women since their parting but none of them were his equal: Elaine Donovan, the grandmother of Teresa Kendall and the great-grandmother of Marc Remillard and his mutant younger brother Jack.

The Hawaiian couple who served as caretakers for her house told Rogi that Elaine hadn’t visited the place for over three years. But that wasn’t unusual, they said. She was a busy woman. One day she’d return to Hale Pohakumano ...

The transcriber machine gave a soft bleep and produced a neat stack of infinitely recyclable glass pages. Like most people, Rogi still called the stuff paper. He riffled through the printout, skimming over Dorothea Macdonald’s early life, the challenges she had overcome, her great triumph, her eventual recognition of a very unlikely soul-mate.

“Gotta go into that a tad more thoroughly,” he said to himself. “C’est que’q’chose—what a bizarre pair of saints they were! Little Diamond Mask and Jack the Bodiless.” He thought about them, smiling as his eyes roved over the final page.

But his reverie evaporated as he reached the last line. He was suddenly wide awake with something horrid stirring deep in his gut.

“No, goddammit! I can’t get away with a happy ending. I’m supposed to be telling the whole truth about our family.” He grabbed the mike, barked out a concluding sentence, the reprinted the page and read what he had produced.

Pain tightened Rogi’s face. He slammed the durofilm sheet down on the desk, mouthed a word of obscenity in Canuckois dialect, and sat with his head lowered for a moment before looking up toward the ceiling. “And you say you didn’t have *any* idea who Fury was, mon fantôme?”

Marcel the cat flinched, skinning his ears back, but he held his ground. Rogi wasn’t talking to him and he was used to his master’s eccentric soliloquies.

“You really didn’t know the monster’s identity?” the old man bellowed furiously at the empty air. “Well, why the hell not? You Lylmik are supposed to be the almighty Overlords of the Galactic Milieu, aren’t you? If you didn’t know, it’s because you deliberately chose not to!”

There was silence, except for the dawn chorus of the birds.

Muttering under his breath, Rogi pulled a key ring from his pants pocket and lurched to his feet. A gleaming fob resembling a small ball of red glass enclosed in a metal cage caught the light from the desk lamp as he shook the bunch of old-fashioned keys provocatively.

“Talk to me, Ghost! Answer the questions. If you want me to finish up these memoirs, you better get your invisible ass down to Earth and start explaining why you didn’t prevent all that bad shit! Not just the Fury thing, but the Mental Man fiasco and the war as well. Why did you let it happen? God knows you meddled and manipulated us enough earlier in the game.”

The Family Ghost remained silent.

Rogi crumpled back into the chair and pressed his brow with the knuckles of his tightened fists. The cat jumped lightly into his lap and butted his head against his master’s chest.

Go home, Marcel said.

“Le fantôme familier won’t talk to me,” the old man remarked sadly. He tugged at the cat’s soft ears and scratched his chin. Marcel began to purr. Rogi’s brief spate of wakefulness was fading and he felt an overwhelming fatigue. “The Great Carbuncle always roused the bastard out before. What the hell’s the matter with him? He hasn’t been around prompting me for weeks.”

He’s busy, said a voice in his mind. An’ not feelin’ so good. He come back laytah an’ koku when you really need ’im.

“Who’s that?” Rogi croaked, starting up from the chair.

It’s me, brah. Malama. I got da word from yo’ Lylmik spook eh? Somet’ing you gotta do fo’ you go mainland.

“Oh, shit. Haven’t I had enough grief—”

Hanakokolele Rogue! Try trust yo’ akamai tutu. Dis gonna be plenny good fo’ da kind memoirs. Firs’ t’ing yo’ catch some moemoe den egg on ovah my place. Da Mo’i Lylmik we send special visitors. It say dey gone clarify few t’ings li’ dat fo’ yo’ write summore.

“Who the hell are these visitors?”

Come down in aftanoon fine out. Now sleep. Aloha oe mo’opuna.

“Malama?... Malama?” Rogi spoke a last feeble epithet. Why was his Hawaiian friend being so damned mysterious? What was the Family Ghost up to now, using the kahuna woman as a go-between?

Sleep, urged Marcel. He jumped down from the desk and headed out of the room, pausing to look back over his shoulder.

“Ah, bon, bon,” the old man growled in surrender.

Outside, the sky had turned to gold and wild roosters were crowing in the ravines. Rogi turned off the desk lamp and the transcriber and shuffled after the cat. The key ring with the Great Carbuncle, forgotten, lay on the desk looking very ordinary except for a wan spark of light at the heart of the red fob, reminiscent of a similar, more sinister object buried in Spain.

Rogi slept poorly, plagued by dreams of the Fury monster and its homicidal minion, Hydra. Roused by the pillow alarm at 1400 hours, he slapped shave on his face, showered, put on fresh slacks and a more subdued shirt, and went out to the egg parked on the landing pad at the edge of the garden.

Tony Opelu was trimming a hibiscus hedge with a brushzapper. He waved. “Howzit, Rogi. Goin’ to town? Try bring back couple E-cells fo’ da Jeep, eh? She wen die on me this mornin’.”

“No trouble at all.”

“T’anks, eh? Howza book goin’?”

“Just finished the chunk I was working on. I’ll be taking off for the mainland tomorrow. Leave you and Haunani in peace. It’s been a real pleasure being here, but I’ve got a hankerin’ for home.”

“It happens,” Tony conceded.

“I’ll leave a note for Elaine. Give her my best when you see her again.” Rogi climbed into the ovoid rhocraft, lit up, and lofted slowly into the air under inertialess power.

Rainclouds shrouded the uplands, but the lower slopes of Kauai were in full sunlight. He flew across Waimea Canyon, a spectacular gash in the land that Mark Twain had compared to a miniaturized version of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Beyond were dark lava cliffs, gullies carved in scarlet laterite soil, and lush green ridges with glittering streams and the occasional waterfall. He flew on manual, heading southeast, descending over lowland jungle that had once been flourishing cane fields. Some sugar was still grown on the island, but most of the local people now earned a living catering to tourists. There were also colonies of artists and writers on Kauai, enclaves of retired folks who scorned rejuvenation and intended to die in a paradisiacal setting, two cooperatives dedicated to the preservation of island culture that staged immersive pageants, and a few metapsychic practitioners who specialized in the human “magic” of ancient Polynesia.

Malama Johnson was one of those.

Her picturesque house, deceptively modest on the outside, was in Kukuiula Bay, a few kilometers west of the resort town of Poipu, not far from the place where Jon Remillard and Dorothea Macdonald had resided when they were on Earth. There were no other eggs on the landing pad behind Malama’s place, but a sporty green Lotus groundcar with a discreet National logo on the windscreen was parked in the shade of a silk oak tree next to her elderly Toyota pickup.

Rogi disembarked from his rhocraft and tried farsensing the interior of the house. But Malama had put up an opaque barrier to such spying, and his mind’s ear heard her scolding him in the Pidgin dialect that Hawaiians loved to use among their intimates:

Wassamatta you peephead? Fo' get all yo' manna's o' wot? E komo mai wikiwiki!

With a shamefaced grin, he knocked on the rear screen door and came into the empty kitchen. "Aloha, tutu!"

Malama Johnson called out in perfectly modulated Standard English. "We're in the lanai. Rogi. Come join us."

He passed through the cool, beautifully appointed rooms to the shaded porch at the other end of the house. It was dim and fragrant, with a fine view of the sea. The stout kahuna woman bounced up and embraced him, kissing him on both cheeks. She wore a royal blue muumuu and several leis of rare tiny golden shells from Niihau. "Cloud and Hagen flew here last night from San Francisco," she said, indicating the two guests.

Rogi swallowed his astonishment. "Hey. Nice to see you again."

The fair-haired young man and woman nodded at him but remained seated in their rattan chairs, sipping from tall tumblers of iced fruit juice. They were immaculately attired, she in a snowy cotton safari suit and high white buckskin moccasins, he in a white Lacoste shirt, white slacks, and white Top-Siders. Rogi knew the visitors, all right, but no better than any other members of the Remillard family did. They were still very reclusive and reticent about their early lives. Their presence here on Kauai under these peculiar circumstances came as a considerable shock to the old man.

He took a seat at Malama's urging. On the low koawood table was a tray holding an untouched dish of pupus—Hawaiian snacks—and two beverage pitchers, one half-empty and one that was full. Pouring from the latter, the kahuna offered a glass to Rogi. The drink had a sizable percentage of rum and he gulped it thankfully as he eyed the young people. They were in their early thirties. A remote smile touched the lips of Cloud Remillard as she looked out at the sea. Her brother Hagen was blank-faced, making no pretense of cordiality.

Rogi ventured an awkward attempt at heartiness. "So the Family Ghost put the arm on you two kids to collaborate in the memoirs, eh?"

Hagen Remillard's reply was chill and formal, and every aspect of his mind was inviolably shielded. "We were bespoken by a Lylmik wearing the usual disembodied head manifestation. He ordered us to come here and talk to you about certain events that took place during our exile in the Pliocene Epoch."

"That ... should be mighty interesting." Rogi's grin was wary.

"You know that our entire group was debriefed by the Human Polity Science Directorate when we first came through the time-gate." Hagen did not meet the old bookseller's eyes. "At that time we were instructed not to publicize details of our Pliocene experiences, and we complied scrupulously. Even now, very few people know that the two of us were among the returnees."

"It was a relief, having an official excuse to keep quiet about our identities," Cloud said. "We knew that if the public were spared the more gaudy details of our prehistoric adventures, there would be less likelihood of our lives becoming a media circus. In most of the Milieu, our group was just a nine days' wonder. You know: *Time-Travelers Return!* Whoop-dee-doo ... then on to the next bit of fast-breaking news. My husband, Kuhal, had a hard time of it, but at least he's humanoid and so he adapted. We've been kept busy doing certain work connected with our conditional Unification and we've managed to live more or less in peace—until now."

Hagen said, "The entity who countermanded the Directorate's gag order told us that he was Atoning Unifex, the head of the Milieu's Supervisory Body. Cloud and I were properly overawed at first. But as the Lylmik spoke to us we both experienced a shocking sense of *déjà vu*. After Unifex vanished we were confused—no, we were terrified!—and we wondered if we had experienced some shared delusion, a waking nightmare. Not long afterward, the Lylmik's orders to us were reconfirmed by the First Magnate of the Human Polity and also by the Intendant General of Earth. Both women took some pains to tell us what an extraordinary communication we'd been honored with." The young man's face was sardonic. "That was considerable understatement."

"We agreed to come here and talk to you only after it became evident that we would be coerced if we refused," Cloud added. Her voice was low-pitched, but warm and without rancor. "We've had quite enough of that already in our lives."

"Did you recognize Unifex, then?" Rogi asked softly. "Do you know who he really is?"

"I knew almost immediately," said Cloud. "I was always closer to him than my brother. The realization was ... shattering. Hagen didn't want to believe it."

"Unifex is Marc Remillard," Rogi said. "Your father."

"Damn him!" Hagen exploded to his feet and began striding about the lanai like a caged catamount. "We were so relieved when the time-gate closed after us and the Milieu authorities obliterated the site! Cloud and I and all the rest of us thought we were finally free. Papa was trapped six million years in the past along with that madman Aiken Drum, and he could never hurt us again."

"He never meant to be cruel," Cloud murmured.

Hagen rounded on her. "He never thought of us as thinking, feeling human beings at all. We were nothing but subjects in his grand experiment." He turned to Rogi and Malama. "Do you know what his gang of decrepit Rebel survivors called him behind his back? Abaddon—the Angel of the Abyss! At the end almost all of them repudiated him and his lunatic plan for Mental Man."

"Papa gave it up, too," Cloud insisted. "Or he would never have sent us back through the time-gate."

Hagen's rage seemed suddenly extinguished, leaving hopelessness. He slumped back into his chair. "Now we discover that our father won out after all. Not only did he miraculously survive for six million years, but somehow he also managed to transmute himself into the Overlord of the Galactic Milieu! God help us and our children." He lifted hate-filled eyes to Rogi and Malama. "God help all of you."

"Unifex atoned," the Hawaiian woman said serenely. "During all those endless years he tried to make restitution for his crimes. He performed his penance not only in this galaxy but in the other one—where the Tanu and Firvulag people came from. I know almost nothing about his Pliocene activities and his later accomplishments in Duat, but everything that he has done for the races of the Milky Way has been for the good. He founded the Milieu and guided it every step of the way. Thanks to him there are six coadunate racial Minds secure in Unifex—and thousands more nearly ready to join the galactic confederation."

"Too bad he didn't do a better job shepherding his old home planet," Hagen said bitterly. "preventing natural disasters, plagues, famines, wars—to say nothing of the Metapsychic Rebellion. His Lylmik self just stood idly by while his earlier self nearly destroyed galactic

civilization.”

Malama only smiled. “The greatest spatiotemporal nodalities are immutable and the past, present, and future form a seamless whole. It is impossible to change history. Unifex acted as he must act—and yet his actions were and are freely done. Our own actions are free as well, contributing to and formulating the mystery of the Great Reality.”

Hagen gave a scornful laugh. “And ‘God’s in his heaven and all’s right with the world’?”

“Perhaps,” Malama said.

They sat in silence for several minutes. Then Hagen spoke again. “Something’s just occurred to me. The Lylmik race is the closest thing to Mental Man that our galaxy has produced, but it’s decadent and headed for extinction. What do you want to bet that Papa tried to modify *Lylmik* evolution just as he wanted to modify ours—and failed!”

Rogi shrugged. “Nobody knows a damn thing about Lylmik history.”

“Maybe,” the young man continued slowly, “Papa plans to return to his original scheme now that he’s six million years wiser after the fact ... and he has his original experimental subjects back in hand.”

“Don’t talk like a fool,” Cloud cried out to her brother. “The Galactic Concilium would never permit the Mental Man project to be revived—not even by the arch-Lylmik himself.”

“Would you bet your life on it?” Hagen shot back at her. “Again?”

“I can think of one sure way you two can help prevent it,” Rogi said suddenly, “in the unlikely event that Hagen’s right.”

“How?” the brother and sister demanded.

“Tell me all you know about Marc’s scheme, and I’ll publish it in the fourth volume of my memoirs. The full story of Mental Man has never come out. Most of the details of the plan were suppressed by the Galactic Concilium—supposedly to preserve the tranquillity and good order of the Milieu.”

“You were on the brink of the Metapsychic Rebellion then, weren’t you?” Cloud asked.

“Right. Officially, the Rebellion was fought to liberate humanity from the Milieu and insure Unity. But the main reason Marc decided to declare war was because he was so pissed off at having his great dream condemned. He caused a monumental uproar when the Mental Man project was cancelled, charging that the exotic magnates and their loyalist human confederates were conspiring to deprive our race of a great genetic breakthrough. He said that the Milieu was afraid humanity would become mentally superior to all the rest of creation, and the only solution was breaking away, as the Rebel faction had advocated for so long. A lot of normals believed that the Mental Man project would insure that all the children would grow up to be metapsychic operants. But Marc and his people never did explain to the general public exactly how this miracle was going to be accomplished.”

“He didn’t dare,” Hagen muttered. “They would have lynched him.”

Cloud said, “It was years before Hagen and I finally discovered what Papa had planned. When our mother found out the truth ... well, you know what happened.”

“No, I don’t,” Rogi said. “Not really. Tell me! Help me tell the story to the whole Galactic Milieu. That’s got to be the reason why you two were sent here to talk to me. I don’t understand why Unifex doesn’t give me the information himself, but he must have his reasons.”

“It was his worst sin,” Malama Johnson stated in her calm voice. “Worse than leading the

Rebellion into violent conflict and causing the deaths of all those people. Deep in his heart, Marc thought the war against the Galactic Milieu and its Unity was justified, as his followers did. But the Mental Man project was quite different. He knew it was wrong, and yet he couldn't resist the awful elegance of the concept—the opportunity to personally engineer a great leap forward in human mental and physical evolution.”

The three others stared at her wordlessly.

“Don't you see, dear grandchildren?” Malama spread her hands, embracing all their minds in huna healing. “Unifex is too ashamed to talk about it. Even now.”

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF ROGATIEN REMILLARD

I FLEW HOME TO NEW ENGLAND ON AUTO-VEE THE NEXT DAY, sleeping most of the way with my cat curled up beside me on the rear banquette. Oddly enough, I didn't have bad dreams after the interview with Marc's son and daughter, for which I suppose I can thank Malama Johnson. God knows I would never be able to think of Marc—or the Family Ghost—in the same way again after the horrors that poor Cloud and Hagen disclosed to me back on Kauai.

I woke up, feeling fairly decent, as the egg announced that we were nearly home and demanded further navigational instructions. We traced a leisurely holding pattern 12000 meters above Hanover, New Hampshire. It was a lovely morning and the old college town by the Connecticut River was at its most charming, spread out below like a patchwork quilt of bright colors thanks to the autumn foliage.

I discovered that I was ravenously hungry. Half a dozen congenial campus eateries lay within strolling distance of my apartment, and I had opened my mouth to give the command to descend—when suddenly a completely different notion on where to break my fast occurred to me.

Sheer serendipity.

Right.

I programmed the aircraft for Vee-flight to Bretton Woods, and a few minutes later we whizzed 90 kilometers northeast and descended into the egg-park area of the old White Mountain Resort Hotel. It crouched at the foot of Mount Washington, a gargantuan white wooden confection with bright red roofs on its gabled wings and quaint towers. As the rhocraft landed, I announced myself over the RF com and confirmed that the establishment would be delighted to accommodate Citizen Remillard for breakfast.

I opaqued the egg's dome for decency's sake, used the facilities, freshened up with a Bear Wipe, combed my hair, and donned my old corduroy jacket. Then I opened a pouch of cat food for Marcel and thrust him into his carrier-cage. He bespoke telepathic indignation as he realized I was about to go off and leave him behind.

"Sorry, old boy. No companion animals allowed in the hotel dining room. Old Yankee custom."

Marcel gave a bitter hiss of betrayal as I exited the rhocraft. Silly brute. When were the goddam cats going to admit that the *raison d'être* of the human race was not humble service to felinity?

I came through the gardens, where chrysanthemums and dahlias and winter pansies still bloomed, and ambled into the hotel's main entrance, giving my nostalgia free rein as I sopped up the familiar Edwardian ambiance. I hadn't been here in thirty years, but the old place beautifully restored, subtly tricked out now with high-tech innovations to allow year-round operation and adapted to accommodate other races besides humankind, looked almost exactly as I remembered it. The lobby was crowded with tourists, both human and exotic, many of them preparing to ascend Mount Washington via the antique cog railway.

I went out on the veranda, where there was a gorgeous view of the Presidential Range, now yet touched by snow. The lower slopes were a blazing mosaic of dark evergreens and golden and-scarlet sugar maples.

Memories overwhelmed me like a psychic avalanche. The wedding of Jack and Dorothea had been held here in 2078, and I'd been the ring-bearer and killed a man for the second time in my life. And in 2082, the last time I had stood on the mountain, my nephew Denis had been with me.

Denis. And the other.

But I dared not think of that yet. So I went in and had a fine breakfast, then returned to my egg, where Marcel had retaliated against my perfidy in the time-honored catty fashion. He didn't even bother to chide him, only turned on the aircraft's environmental deodorizer full blast and flew home. It was time to begin writing again, with or without the Family Ghost's help.

It was more than happenstance that brought me back to the White Mountain Hotel.

In my younger days, before opening the bookshop, I worked at the place as a conventional manager. My nephew Denis, who adopted me as his father figure when my twin brother Don let him down, first visited the hotel in 1974 when he was seven years old. We rode the smoke-belching cog train to the summit of Mount Washington together, and it was there that the boy and I first met Elaine Donovan and made the joyous discovery that there were other people on Earth with operant higher mindpowers besides ourselves.

Fifteen years later, as I attended mass in the Catholic chapel in nearby Bretton Woods, I heard my wretched brother's telepathic death-scream. Even worse, I experienced Don's last burst of furious hatred for me—and also, mysteriously, for himself. At his funeral I received disquieting news from Denis, who was then a professor at Dartmouth College in Hanover and one of the most famous metapsychic researchers in the country. My nephew blamed himself for not preventing his father's death. Denis also told me that Don had been murdered, and that I myself was in deadly danger. He urged me to come live near him—so that he could protect me and also help me to attain my full metapotential.

I didn't want to leave the White Mountain Hotel. I had a job that I was good at and thoroughly enjoyed, and nobody in the place knew I was a metapsychic operant—which suited me just dandy. In the end, however, Denis did convince me to join him. I moved to Hanover and became an antiquarian bookseller, sole proprietor of the shop called The Eloquent Page; but from then on the relationship between Denis and me was more ambiguous and troubling.

I loved my foster son dearly. But deep in my heart I was afraid of him and his tremendous mindpowers—as I was also afraid of my own metafunctions. The fear was entirely irrational, rooted deep in my unconscious, and I never have managed to shake free of it.

Like many geniuses, Denis Remillard was a man of unexceptional appearance. He was fair and slightly built, with a manner that seemed gentle and self-effacing—unless you happened to look directly into his electric blue eyes and feel the strength of the coercive power lurking there. Whereupon you might be excused for thinking that your skeleton had suddenly liquefied and seeped out through your paralyzed toes.

Denis's intellectual achievements were even more prodigious than his metapsychic talents. His research earned him a Nobel Prize in psychiatric medicine, and his books and monographs are classics, still highly respected thirty years after his death. As is Denis himself.

The 2013 Congress on Metapsychology was held at the White Mountain Hotel at his instigation, and its fateful climax was largely his doing. Prominent metas came to New Hampshire from all over the world for what was supposed to be their last annual convocation. They were a beleaguered minority in those early days of the twenty-first century, weary of being assailed and misunderstood by hostile normals, discouraged by the apparent inability of our race to live together in peace and fellowship, but still hopeful that they might somehow be able to use their higher mindpowers for the good of all humanity.

On the last night of the Congress, the operants were scheduled to dine at the spectacular Summit Chalet atop Mount Washington ... and there they were also supposed to die. Other historians in addition to myself have told how the operant madman Kieran O'Connell conspired with Denis's younger brother Victor to murder the Congress delegates. The failure of the plot has been ascribed by some people to fortuitous coincidence—by others to the aggressive use of metaconcerted mindpower by numbers of the delegates under attack.

In these memoirs, I have told what actually happened. Some of the besieged operants did use their mindpowers as weapons. But then, rallied by Denis, they resisted the temptation to strike back mentally at their enemies. It was Denis who integrated their minds—and the minds of countless other human beings of good will, both operant and nonoperant—into a benevolent mental alliance that extended worldwide. That unique, loving metaconcerted foreshadowing the greater one forged by Jack and Dorothee in 2083, lasted only for a few moments. But it was sufficient.

The planet Earth had shown the watching Milieu that its immature, quarrelsome Mind was worth saving. The sky above Mount Washington—and above every major population center in the world—filled with exotic starships, and the human race was inducted willy-nilly into galactic confederation.

I also had a hand in it, and so did a certain Lylmik. But the Great Intervention would never have happened without my nephew Denis.

Et maintenant la leçon touche à sa fin.

HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE, EARTH
2 FEBRUARY 2078

THE RUDALM-COMPOSER MULMUL ZIML LANDED ITS RHOCRAFT across the street from The Eloquent Page bookshop, climbed out, and stood in the snow for some time absorbing the local telluric auras and giggling in unashamed rapture at the heady stimulation of it all. Earth in winter! The veritable heart-nest of the Remillard clan! It was inimitable. Sublime. Very near-inenarrable!

The hermaphroditic exotic had feared that Rogatien Remillard's place of work and residence would have been tarted up and modernized by now, sixty-five years after the Great Intervention. But no—there the exquisite old three-storey building stood, Federal-style clapboards gleaming in the thickening snowfall, windows cheerily alight (the upper ones had green shutters), and sloping metal roof softly blanketed. So evocative. So *human*! One might readily compose a worthy rudalm on this enchanting scene alone. (But, alas, if one expected to sell the work to the lucrative Human Polity market as well as to one's own, more aesthetically sensitive Gi race, the leitmotif required more interspecies appeal and pizzazz.)

The planet's sun had long since set. Increasing numbers of crystalline flakes danced in the frigid atmosphere, glistening as they drifted through the beams of streetlights and the headlamps of passing groundcars. Melting grids were working full tilt to keep the sidewalks and streets clear for pedestrians and vehicles, but fresh snow was already thick on the bare branches of the trees and other unheated surfaces. It lay nine cents deep on the little patch of frozen lawn in front of the bookshop and whitened the concrete footing and the evergreen shrubs around the building's central vestibule steps.

The Gi musician's tall quasi-avian body was clad in a rented environmental suit, and its enormous yellow eyes peered out through a transparent protective visor. The creature found the nocturnal townscape to be almost unbearably ravishing, especially when savored through the pla'akst sensory circuit, but it now began to shiver and feel incipient chilblains in its feet and hypersensitive external genitalia. Turning up the suit's thermostat didn't seem to help. Reluctantly, the Gi decided it had accumulated enough outdoor imagery. It was time to get on with the interview and the full-sensory extraction.

MulMul Ziml tripped off heedlessly across Main Street, only barely managing to dodge a scannerless, aged groundcar full of Dartmouth students that skidded on the wet pavement trying to avoid it. The reversed turbine whined and a horn blared furiously. The near-disaster had been entirely the Gi's own fault and it prayed forgiveness from the Cosmic All as it scrambled clumsily onto the opposite sidewalk. Fortunately, the human occupants of the vehicle weren't metapsychic operants, so MulMul's excruciating telepathic cry of terror had not distressed them unnecessarily.

The door of the bookshop opened and an operant human male peered out, broadcasting emanations of anxiety. "God! Are you all right?"

"Quite safe, quite safe," the Gi fluted. "How kind of you to inquire! It was so silly of me"

not to calculate the velocity of the approaching vehicle before attempting to cross the street but I'd forgotten how fast you Earthlings drive."

"Well, come inside before we both freeze our bizounes off," the man said rather tetchily. "I suppose you're the one Dorothee said was coming."

"Yes, the Dirigent most kindly—" The Gi broke off, did a double take, and shrieked in delight. "It's *you!* Uncle Rogi!"

The bookseller sighed and shut the door behind the exotic visitor. "That's what everybody in town calls me. You might as well, too. Take off your things and come sit by the stove with me and my buddy. Tell us about this opera or whatever it is you're writing."

An antique cast-iron heating device and several chairs occupied one corner of the bookshop. There were also reading lamps and a small table with a coffee-making machine. Another male human, weakly metapsychic like Rogi, was sitting there quaffing from a mug. His mind-tone was amiable and a species of small domestic animal rested on his lap.

MulMul hesitated. "You're sure you won't mind if I divest? Some Earthlings feel uncomfortable in the presence of unclothed members of my race."

The bookseller laughed. "Hell, no. Go right ahead. Me and Kyle need more than a buck-nekkid Gi to shock us. Just hang your suit on the clothes-tree there and kick off your boots. I know you folks can't abide coffee, so I'm going to make you a hot toddy. You look like you need one."

Rogi went off to the back of the shop and MulMul shyly undressed, shaking out its compressed filoplumage and untangling its testicular peduncles and accessory mammilla. "The rental agent at Anticosti Starport assured me that this garment would keep me comfortable in the coldest weather," the Gi remarked, "but I fear it may be defective. My toes have turned quite blue with cold and just *look* at my poor phallus."

The second man seemed to choke slightly on his drink, but he recovered quickly and gave a sympathetic nod. He was a robust specimen with abundant brown hair and a ruddy complexion. "Aweel now, Citizen, that's truly a scandal. The stuff they hire out these days just can't be trusted. You be sure to raise a stink when you return it and likely they'll cancel the fee."

"Oh, I'd never *dream* of complaining!"

"By damn, of course you will," Rogi said, returning with a steaming cup, which he thrust into the Gi's elongated, near-humanoid hands. "When on Earth, you gotta do as the locals do. Stick up for your rights! Sit down there now and toast your tootsies and let's get on with whatever it is you want from me. I'm planning to close the shop early because of the snow ... Oh, by the way, this is my old friend Kyle Macdonald. You won't mind if he sits in?"

"Not at all!" MulMul Ziml burred. "The Diligent's grandfather! What a signal honor to make your acquaintance." The exotic flopped into the indicated chair and extended its large four-toed feet toward the stove. What a relief it was to be warm again! And the hot drink was truly delightful, its generous alcoholic content enhanced with butterfat and a large helping of maple sugar. The Gi expressed its gratitude after belatedly introducing itself.

"As Dirigent Macdonald may have explained, I am a composer. My specialty is the rudalma—a musical artform that some critics have called a cantata virtuale. Recently, rudalma has enjoyed considerable favor among human music-lovers. They are not true operatic works, but rather full-sensory impressions of a significant event or scene, virtually realized for opera."

attendees, accompanied by a Gi choir.”

“And you’re doing the deliverance of Caledonia,” Rogi said.

“Precisely! The inherent excitement of the event—together with the participation of distinguished beings such as Jon and Marc Remillard—make it what you humans deem ‘natural’ for both Gi and human audiences.”

“My granddaughter Dorrie and a few other folk had a wee hand in saving Callie, too,” Kyle Macdonald put in, flashing a chilly smile.

“Yes, of *course*! Oh, dear—I didn’t mean to imply otherwise. Most especially since Dirige Dorothea Macdonald and the Caledonian geophysical team have been so cooperative in sharing their own memorecall of the averted catastrophe. Unfortunately, I’ve been unable to secure the memories of Jon or Marc Remillard. They seem to be occupied with other affairs just now. The Dirigent suggested that I come to you instead, Uncle Rogi, since you *were* there during the incident and you enjoy such a close rapport with the heroic Remillard brothers.”

“Umm.” The old bookseller looked dubious.

“What a singular challenge it must have been!” the hermaphrodite caroled. “Using metaconcerted mindpower to defuse an ascending magmatic plume that threatened to destroy the colony!”

“Not a plume,” said Rogi. “A diatrema. Different kinda thing. With plumes, you don’t get diamonds in the eruption.”

The Gi’s huge eyes glazed in ecstasy. “And what a climax that fantastic shower of gems would provide in virtual experience! I’ve viewed the media recordings of the event, of course, but *you* were a sensory witness—”

Rogi shook his head. “Only viewed the blowout on monitor equipment in the observation bunker. Still, it was quite a show.”

“If you would consent to share your impressions, you’ll provide invaluable input on the entire sequence of events. The Dirigent said that you *did* witness Marc Remillard’s arrival on Caledonia, and you also persuaded him to intervene in the geophysical operation. This occasion is *crucial* to the exposition of my work.”

The Gi took something small from its feathered armpit orifice and held it out to Rogi. The device looked something like a badminton shuttlecock with a narrow, spongy tip. “This futuristic sensory extractor will absorb your perceptions of the entire episode in short order. The process is quite painless. All we do is insert the soft end into your ear, and I ask you a few questions—”

“Now, just a damned minute, you!” Rogi barked, starting up from his seat. “Nobody mind probes me. Nobody!”

The Gi fell back in confusion. “But—”

“You won’t coerce me, either! I can put up a damn strong mind-shield if I have to. And I don’t care if Dorothee sent you or not. To hell with this virtual operetta, or whatever it is, it means fucking around in my brainpan!”

The hypersensitive exotic uttered a heart-wrenching soprano wail and sank slowly to the floor in a disheveled heap of plumage and quivering primary and secondary sexual organs. “I never meant ... I never intended ... Oh, forgive me!” The melodious voice coarsened to a rasp, the saucer eyes rolled up into the Gi’s head, and it swooned away.

“Now you’ve done it, you great clumsy gowk.” Kyle Macdonald dumped the cat Marc

from his lap and knelt beside the collapsed exotic. Unable to locate any of the Gi's hearts the mass of fluffy body feathers, nipples, and ovarian externalia, he felt for a pulse in its stringy neck. "Could y'not have been more tactful? The big birdies are ower delicate things. Sometimes they drop dead just to emphasize a point."

"Aw, shit." The dismayed bookseller helped his Scottish friend lift the Gi into a chair. Its eyelids were beginning to flutter. "I didn't mean to hurt its feelings. But dammitall, I don't even let members of my own family past my mindscreens nowadays."

"It wasn't going to probe, ye steamin' nit. Yon wee gadget just records memories as a man thinks 'em. There's no ferreting or forcing as with mechanical mind-sifters ... Uist! I think the critter's coming round."

"Hey, I'm really sorry about that," Rogi said to the exotic composer. "I didn't mean to knock you for a loop."

MulMul Ziml opened its eyes and managed a tremulous smile. "You are quite blameless dear Uncle Rogi. We Gi have a psyche that is unfortunately a trifle fragile. One does realize *objectively* that overly emphatic discourse is commonplace among humans and not *necessarily* charged with mortal hostility, but—"

"I misunderstood you," Rogi said. He retrieved the fallen full-sensory extractor. "I'll be glad to do what you want if you promise to stick to matters concerning the diatrema." He gestured to Kyle. "My friend will make sure that your memory requests are on the up-and-up. Okay?"

"Excellent!" The Gi bounced to its feet, miraculously recovered. Its pseudomammillary areolae, which had gone waxy pale when it fainted, engorged to an enthusiastic cerise and its intromittent organ became tumescent with anticipatory joy. "Just relax in your chair—splendid! Let me help you with the extractor. Now, as I announce successive events, just close your eyes and try to relive them briefly in a daydream. Don't worry about the details—the device will capture them. Ready?"

"I guess." Rogi's expression was resigned.

"Now!" The Gi crouched in front of Rogi and spoke with soft coercion. Kyle Macdonald, grinning fiendishly in the background, made twiddling motions with his fingers, parodying a symphonic conductor. "Think about when you and Jon Remillard first landed on Caledonia and learned details of the imminent seismic peril to that planet."

"Wake up, old son," said Kyle. "It's all over and your fine feathered friend is gone, floating on cloud nine. It promised to send you a special presentation fleck of the rudalm just as soon as the thing is produced."

Rogi groaned and stretched. "Putain! Wait till I get my hands on that chit Dorothee, siccing that oversexed turkey on me ... Look at that rug! It was just back from the cleaners."

"Och, don't be such a cranky old fart. So the Gi did get a wee bit transported. The music the birdies make is glorious and their virtual vision's unique. Fascinating the way they manage to put an erotic luster on everything. I can hardly wait to see what they do with the Callie diamond shower."

"Three guesses." Grumpily, Rogi rolled up the rag rug with its fluorescent pink cum-stain. "For God's sake, Kyle, grow up. Virtual-reality porn was old hat before you were even born."

"The Gi rudalma are nothing like that. No tickle-suits or buzz-hats or other paraphernalia."

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