

Compassion

© Copyright 2001 by silli_artie@hotmail.com

This work may not be reposted or redistributed without the prior express written permission of the author.

A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

Doctor Glass sighed, examining his feelings. This was a disturbing case, a challenging case, a unique case. He looked at the holo recording cylinder in his left hand. Yes, each case is challenging, each is unique, yet this one...

It started with a message from a student. Could he visit, soon, with another? Doctor Glass would have turned down the request out of hand, rerouting the request through normal channels, had it not been for the offer of Hidden Valley Tea.

He received his student, accompanied by another, a week later. His student smiled, bowed, and withdrew.

"Doctor Glass," intoned the visitor with a polite bow, and then drew from the case he was carrying a container which must have held a kilogram of Tea!

Doctor Glass had been startled, amazed -- such riches! Who was this person, in the simple garb of a traveler? Doctor Glass didn't need his decades of psychoanalytical experience to tell that this was no ordinary visitor.

He accepted the package with one hand, embracing the visitor's hand with the other, observing.

His visitor looked to be early middle aged, perhaps a hundred and eighty, slightly taller than average. He wore the plain tunic of a traveler, bare of insignia, ornamentation, or badge, giving no clue as to affiliation or rank. Yet his posture told a different story, and his eyes -- Glass recognized in his visitor the Void Gaze of a Ship's Captain -- yet the flesh of his head lacked the telltale markings that came from constantly wearing a polycrystal flight crown. A Captain and yet not a Captain? His posture told of a position of authority, and comfort within that position. Here was a man used to moving in circles of power, relaxed, in appearance at least, in new surroundings.

Curiouser and curiouser -- his link told him the man standing before him, offering a gift of fabulous expense, was Lord of the Spacing Guild! Here from ManHome to see him? Why?

"My Lord, you have traveled far. To what do I owe this great courtesy?" he asked.

Compassion

The visitor smiled and nodded. "I thank *you*, Doctor, for the courtesy of receiving me on short notice. I should like to speak to you about a matter. But perhaps first we could share tea?"

Glass smiled and bowed slightly. "Certainly, my Lord. I'd prepared, but not for this!"

The visitor nodded. "Rest assured, Doctor, the tea is yours, regardless of the outcome of our conversation. And please call me Raphael."

"As you wish, Sir -- Raphael -- please call me Felix. This way." Doctor Glass led his visitor back to his study.

As was the custom on Canticle, Doctor Glass lived in a small cottage which was his residence, his private office, and his study. The University campus, with libraries, classrooms, and his formal office was a short walk away.

The last members of the Spacing Guild he'd seen had been.... He caught his mind anticipating, and brought it back to the moment. There would be time -- let the tablet remain blank -- let others supply information, and then he would blend it together -- but for now, separate observation from interpretation.

They entered his reception area, a warm and cozy room with comfortable chairs, a small table, and a separate table with a crystal tea set for brewing Hidden Valley Tea.

As he gestured to his visitor to sit, Doctor Glass recalled the case associated with the tea set -- twelve years ago -- a powerful House on one of the major worlds, and a problem child. With a rueful smile he recalled what he taught his students -- that barring organic causes, the child and their behavior is a perfect reflection of their environment. Still, once the problems had been addressed, the family had been most thankful.

He opened the container of treasure, removed two small spheres of Tea using crystal tongs, and placed them in the cups. He quickly resealed the container, and touched the control to start the brewing cycle.

A soft chime announced the Tea was ready. Doctor Glass picked up a cup and handed it to his visitor with a bow. It was accepted with a bow, and Doctor Glass picked up the remaining cup, cradling it in his hands, and returned to his seat.

He made momentary eye contact with his visitor, and with a mutual bow, closed his eyes and turned his attention to the Tea.

He held the cup near his mouth and nose, feeling the warmth seep through the thin crystal of the cup to his hands, feeling the warm, moist vapors diffusing to his face. He inhaled slowly, fully, through his nose, filling himself with Tea essence. He exhaled slowly, through his mouth, exhaling into the cup, feeling the warmth swirl around his face. Inhaling once more through his nose, he raised the cup, touching it to his lips, taking the Tea into his mouth.

He allowed the warmth and flavor to diffuse through his mouth as he felt the warmth of the vapors diffuse through his body. He swallowed, slowly, feeling the warmth of the liquid spread within him, spreading through his mouth, to his throat, to his stomach, and from there to every part of him.

He focused on the simple act of drinking Tea, drinking it with his whole body.

Some minutes later, Doctor Glass relaxed back further in his chair, enjoying the warm glow the Tea produced. He looked to his guest, who was smiling, relaxed -- but that was only superficial, Doctor Glass observed.

Doctor Glass felt secure in his cottage; normally matters of privacy and confidentiality were assumed. But... “Well, Sir, Raphael, I would ask you to speak of your matter, but I am not sure this is a suitable location.”

Raphael nodded, reached into a pocket, and withdrew a small rectangular object. He placed it on the table between them, pressing a small indentation on the object’s top. It emitted a pinging noise, and Doctor Glass felt a sensation similar to his ears popping.

“I assure you, Doctor, this location is now as secure as our Guild is able to make it.”

“Very well, Sir -- how may I be of assistance?”

“Please call me Raphael. As you might imagine, it involves a child.”

Glass nodded. He was, after all, one of the foremost child therapists practicing.

“I must tell you, Raphael, that I am approached on behalf of many.”

“Oh, we understand; I understand. And while, as you say, every child is unique, I think *this* particular child will interest you. We and her parents are very concerned about her.”

With a nod, Felix asked, “And this child is?”

He watched Raphael’s cloak of relaxation and ease fray and fall apart. The man became tense, troubled, concerned.

“She is Joan, daughter of Celeste and Adam,” Raphael said.

Felix allowed himself a sigh. He knew the parents -- both Great Captains, both the children of Great Captains, both born to the Void. He remembered with fondness the time he’d spent working with them during their periods of study on Canticle. Had that been a decade ago? Longer?

“I remember the two parents well. They are the first of a new generation.”

Raphael nodded. “Indeed -- a new generation, or a new race?”

Felix looked at his guest, and saw the concern on his face. It was not merely a professional concern, but a human concern, a personal concern.

Felix asked, “We only hear rumors, stories. I know the planet Pentecost is no more, destroyed by the Invader, and have heard a little about New Haven. What can you tell me? From what little I have heard, her twin brother was a casualty of the Invader attack on New Haven -- it’s not surprising the child would be most traumatized.”

Raphael looked to his cup, now empty, sighing as he looked up at Felix again. “It’s strange, isn’t it, that in a society which we consider so free, among the few things embargoed are news and religion? Our historians are already calling it the [Nanosecond War](#), as that’s how long it lasted -- about twelve hundred nanoseconds over the two incidents. Yet in that time, all life on and near Pentecost was destroyed, and hundreds of millions on New Haven perished. Celeste and Adam, and their children, Joan and Peter, were on New Haven at the time. Peter was one of many who perished.”

“That I have heard,” Felix said, “And that would be sufficient to traumatize anyone.”

Raphael nodded once more. “And what you did not hear, and are not hearing now? That Joan was the sole survivor in an area of the planet that was devastated beyond belief? I’ve seen it, stood there, and can hardly believe it. How did she survive? Celeste and Adam saved New Haven, and their daughter, and all the other sons and daughters on New Haven.”

Felix nodded, allowing himself to voice a common interpretation. “The child suffered greatly, and now could be holding herself responsible for the death of her twin, and possibly others. But you have people in your Guild -- my colleagues and I have trained them...”

“Yes, we have skilled therapists now in the Guild -- that we learned from the [Folly](#). Our people have approached, but after the first few, she ... sent them away. The parents ask for you.”

As much as he practiced a skill, Felix knew he practiced an art, and an art reliant on intuition and insight. “You said, ‘sent them away,’ in an interesting manner. Please explain.”

Raphael nodded, becoming more intense. “Yes, you would intuit that. Doctor, Felix -- this again you did not hear, you do not hear -- Celeste and Adam saved New Haven by Jumping the planet -- the entire planet! -- out of its orbit and back again! For some hundreds of nanoseconds, New Haven was not in its orbit! Where was it? We have no idea! They did that, as far as we know, without benefit of instrumentalities! That is what this new race is capable of! We still do not know all of what happened in those last nanoseconds of the War. We know that the Invader no longer exists, and Celeste and Adam are responsible, somehow.”

Raphael paused and ran a hand through his hair.

Felix noted the look in his eyes -- the Void Gaze, but filled with terror, wonder, jealousy?

Raphael continued. "As would be expected, the entire family showed signs of distress. Our counselors met with them, worked with them, especially the daughter, within days of New Haven. We have recordings of the interviews with those who purported to treat her. The daughter's difficulties seemed to increase, especially in the last months. We continued to send people to assist the family. We made our last attempt to have one of our specialists, a young man you helped train, Doctor, talk to Joan some months ago."

Raphael shook his head, smiling slightly. "When Joan's parents inquired about what happened to the man, Joan told them, 'I sent him home.' At that time, they were aboard ship, deep in intergalactic space on a scientific survey mission. She sent him home, Doctor -- our specialist walked into a Guild office on his birth-world and arranged transport back to ManHome -- Joan sent him home, unharmed, without any ship, over a staggering distance, effectively instantaneously."

"Has she shown any hostility or acted out to others? Her parents? Herself?"

"On the contrary. In most respects, she is a loving, caring, curious child."

"And in those other respects?"

"What is normal for a child born of parents who move worlds, a child born to the Void, a six year old child who can send people across the galaxy, and think little of it? You studied her parents -- was their upbringing 'normal?' She is moody, sometimes melancholy, experiences night terrors, although they have diminished, and some times goes off by herself. Pardon me if I use terms of your art incorrectly." Raphael looked at his hands.

Felix inferred his visitor was exerting effort to keep his hands from trembling. Felix allowed himself a smile. This man would profit greatly from therapy, he thought.

"Goes off *where* by herself?" Felix asked.

Raphael looked up and laughed, a nervous almost painful laugh. "I apologize, Doctor -- I was warned I would be naked before you. She leaves the ship -- some times for a short time, some times for a day or more. The longest so far has been for two days."

Felix nodded. "And she goes where?"

Raphael leaned forward, speaking with soft intensity. "You don't understand. She leaves the ship -- while it's on planet, or in interstellar space, or even mid-Jump! Where does she go? Who knows! Where *could* she go? When asked, she says she's looking for her brother. The last time, she was gone for two days. When she returned, and her parents told her she had held up the schedule of the Ship, she apologized, and told them they didn't have to wait for her -- she would catch up with them!"

Felix nodded. "Did this behavior -- leaving the ship -- start recently, after New Haven, or had it been going on for some time?"

Raphael looked troubled. "I... I don't have an answer to that question."

Felix nodded. "What makes you think she will see me?"

That broke Raphael's agitation, or at least shifted it. He sat up, taking a holo recording cylinder from his tunic.

"We knew of your customary request for a holo of the child at solitary play. In anticipation of this meeting, we had her parents make such a recording. We also have all the usual medical records." He handed the cylinder to Felix.

"And this was made without the child's knowledge?"

Raphael smiled, but Felix sensed -- terror? amusement? -- underneath that smile.

"Her parents did not inform her the recording was being made. They have not viewed it. I have viewed it, as has one other in the Guild -- we have viewed it a number of times."

"And?" Felix asked.

Raphael's smile broadened. "Perhaps we should have more Tea, and view the recording."

Felix nodded. He sensed his visitor was under great strain.

Felix fixed them each another cup of Tea -- two cups in a single day! He sighed at the thought -- two cups in a year had been more than he could imagine, but now... He sensed something -- something about Celeste and Adam, something about their daughter. He did not let his mind speculate more -- to do so would be to foreclose options, and in this case, those options could be wide ranging indeed... Observe first -- interpret later.

Their second cup completed, Felix slipped the holo cylinder into the viewer. He oriented the projected image so that it was facing between his guest and himself.

The static image showed a small girl sitting cross-legged on a grassy surface. Felix was unfamiliar with growth patterns of Siren young -- the girl showed strong Siren heritage, covered in a creamy white fur. Rather than a crown, she had what looked to be a band of polycrystal around her head -- or was it *in* her head, and what seemed to be bracelets on her wrists. Regardless of her chronological age, the serious look on her face was not what he would expect of even an eight year old child.

"Where and when was this made?" Felix asked.

“The home of a relative on Almost, twenty standard days ago,” Raphael replied.

“The crown she’s wearing -- it looks strange yet familiar. And are those bracelets?”

Raphael nodded. “The crown and bracelets are not, ah, of our manufacture. The parents have them as well. Sometimes they are visible above the skin, sometimes not. What chance we have had to examine them show them to be similar to polycrystals, but so advanced as to be barely recognizable. They wear and use them as others use the crowns.”

Felix nodded. “Yes, that’s where I’d seen them -- on the parents, on return from their wanderjahr. You and this recording have taken quite the journey in twenty standard days.” He started the recording playing back with motion and sound.

The child hummed and sang to herself, her hands in her lap. After a while she raised her hands as if holding a large ball slightly in front of her. Her eyes filled with the Void Gaze as she exhaled and the image of a world, a planet appeared floating in front of her, about half a meter in diameter. She looked on it silently with a slight smile. The recording caught flickers of light from her bracelets and the band around her head.

Felix froze playback. “What world is that?”

“Bertram’s World,” Raphael told him. “The parents recorded this, as it is a play sequence she repeats often of late, always starting with this world.”

Felix resumed playback. The child hummed and sang, looking at the image floating in front of her. She paused and sighed, and a different world appeared.

“And this one?” Felix asked.

“It’s called Dweedle -- an outpost world.”

The sequence continued, with a new image appearing every ten seconds to a minute. Felix asked for the identity, and Raphael supplied it quickly, until....

“And this one?” Felix asked.

“We have no idea,” Raphael said flatly.

Felix paused the recording. “What?”

Raphael nodded. “We have no idea. That particular image has been viewed by every Great Captain of the Guild, except for Celeste and Adam, and none can identify that world. The best analytical tools of the Guild have been unable to locate it.”

Felix took a breath, and continued playback.

With the next world coming into view, Raphael said unasked, "This one is called Island."

Felix paused the recording. "The kaelen place? I thought that was an embargoed world."

Raphael smiled grimly. "It is visited occasionally. We still have much to learn from it. You'll recognize the next one."

Felix resumed playback. After a few seconds, a different world floated in Joan's lap.

"I thought images of Pentecost were embargoed," Felix said.

"That isn't an image," Raphael stated flatly.

Felix looked at his guest, who merely said, "Continue. I'll explain, such as I'm able, at the end."

They saw more worlds, then New Haven, then ManHome, then another world, a world which seemed familiar, bearing a huge scar on its surface. Felix paused playback and looked to his visitor.

"New Haven again, afterwards," Raphael spoke grimly.

Felix resumed playback. After another sequence of worlds, when Raphael didn't immediately name the world in view, Felix paused the recording.

"We have no idea," Raphael said.

Felix raised an eyebrow, and resumed the recording.

The pattern continued -- known worlds interspersed with unknowns.

Felix paused the recording as it showed the most industrialized planet he'd ever seen -- a planet glowing with industrialization. "Is that Wolfram?" he asked, looking to Raphael.

The way Raphael shook his head slowly side to side sent a cold chill through Felix. A planet with that degree of industrialization -- and unknown?

They resumed the pattern, with known worlds and only one more unknown -- a pretty looking place, clear skies above rich blue oceans, green and green-brown land masses, white poles, with no visible marks of civilization.

After a few more known worlds, it happened.

The world floating in Joan's lap, which Raphael named Zinger, disappeared.

Compassion

Joan turned and looked up, staring directly at Felix. The hair on the back of his neck went up. She stared *directly* at him. Yet how was such a thing possible? He was viewing a recording! He moved to his right a little, lowering his head, and she moved to face him directly again, smiling. How?

“Doctor, don’t you know it’s impolite to spy on people?” her voice rang out from the holo, a voice with the overtones one would expect of an adult, an irritated adult. Even the light from her crown radiated irritation.

Felix reminded himself to breathe -- he’d been holding his breath in fear.

The image of Joan in the holo smiled. “Let’s see,” she said. She looked to her lap again, Void Gaze returning, holding her hands out. A world appeared.

“Fullham,” Raphael said.

“My birth world,” added Felix.

A succession of worlds appeared. Raphael named them as they appeared, and after the third, so did Felix -- they were all the worlds he’d visited. At one, though, Raphael didn’t say anything. Felix looked at it. Where had he visited after Pendragon?

“Remember this one?” the girl in the holo said, looking directly at Felix once more. “You were only there for a day.”

“How?” Felix breathed out, a crawling sensation on his skin.

The progression of worlds continued, reaching Canticle, tracking his off-world visits and returning to Canticle, then to a world he didn’t recognize. He paused the recording.

“Is that Zinger again? How did she do that? I haven’t been there.”

Raphael smiled and leaned back. “Not yet you haven’t. It is Zinger, or will be.”

Continuing playback, another world appeared in her lap.

“That’s ManHome!” Felix said. Raphael nodded.

One more appeared. “Almost,” said Raphael.

That world disappeared. The girl turned once more to Felix. This time she was smiling. She nodded her head. “We can help each other, Doctor. I’d like to see you,” she said. Then she reached out with a finger, giggled, and the recording stopped.

Felix shook, physically. He looked to Raphael. “They stopped the recording there?”

Compassion

Raphael shook his head slowly. "She stopped it."

"How?" Felix asked with a furrowed brow.

Raphael shrugged his shoulders. "We don't know."

Felix sat back, looking at the spot the holo had occupied. "How did she ... ?"

Raphael actually smiled. "We don't know that either. Doctor, I was as amazed as you were -- no, more so. How did she know where you would be sitting? That you would move, just so? When I first viewed that holo, I watched her stare at something off to the side, say the things she did. We don't know how she did it."

"The holos we saw -- those worlds -- what can you tell me?"

Raphael sighed again. "Those were not holos. There was no holo projector anywhere near her, and as far as we can tell, she was not linked to one. She plays in that manner periodically, so her parents report."

Felix furrowed his brow again. "Then what were we seeing, if not holos?"

"We're still figuring it out. The best we understand, the first sequence of worlds represents all the worlds she has visited. Detailed analysis of day-phase planetary illumination, starfields, and other artifacts allowed us to calculate times with reasonable certainty. Most are in the past; some are in the future. Guild records give us dates and times for when they reached a number of the worlds, and those match. The unknown worlds, at least those after New Haven, seem to correspond to the periods when she was off the ship."

"She conjures images out of time? Sees the future?"

Raphael nodded, then smiled, leaning forward. "It would seem she picks images out of space-time -- and the first world we saw? Would you care to guess how old she was then?"

The hair on the back of Felix's neck rose again. "Just after birth? Six months?"

Raphael smiled, a cold smile, and shook his head. "No, Doctor -- about three months -- *before* she was born."

Felix looked around the room. He suddenly felt cold, exposed, and very, very small.

Raphael continued. "And the second parade of worlds, I think you recognized. It's your history -- all the worlds you have visited -- except that Zinger, ManHome, and Almost are in the future. I won't tell you when."

Felix shook his head. They sat in silence for many minutes.

Compassion

Finally, Felix said, "It will take me a day or so before I can leave ... for Zinger."

Raphael nodded. "Thank you, Doctor. We were hoping you would find this... interesting."

Felix laughed -- but it was a nervous laugh, a laugh with a jagged edge on it -- as Raphael's laughter had been. He thought for a moment.

"Sir, will you be accompanying me?" Felix asked

Raphael nodded. "I will, if that is acceptable to you."

"It is -- I will undoubtedly have many questions."

"I'm not sure how many answers I'll be able to supply, but if I have them, or can get them, I will share them with you."

Felix looked to his visitor again. "Sir, if you have no other plans, I have a colleague you might wish to visit in the interim, if you wish, of course."

Raphael let out a ragged sigh, leaning back into the chair. "Doctor, I would be most grateful. You relieve me of the great burden of asking. You can understand my reticence to seek assistance from our own people."

Felix stood up. "Yes, I understand. It's a short walk, and I could use the air."

Raphael stood. He removed an infopak from a pocket and handed it to Felix. "The interviews I mentioned, and complete medical records, including brain scans and evoked cerebral potentials. Those last should be shared very cautiously, if at all."

Felix accepted the chip, and held Raphael's hand. Both their hands felt cool and clammy. "That much of this matter I understand," he said. He motioned to the door. "This way, Sir."

It was three days before they left Canticle.

When Felix answered the knock on his cottage door, he greeted a much-changed Raphael. The man looked fuller, rounder, more at ease.

"You look well, Sir," Felix said, extending his hand.

Raphael smiled, holding Felix's hand. "Thanks to you, Sir and Doctor, and to the skill and compassion of your colleague. Shall we go? The ship awaits nearby."

Felix picked up his travel bag, slung it over his shoulder, and closed the door behind him.

Compassion

The Ship was oval in shape, and gray in color save for the flickering band of polycrystal girding it. It was small, no more than 20 meters on its major axis, but had a feeling about it, a feeling of great power, as it sat nestled in the clearing at the floor of a small valley nearby.

Raphael paused on the path a few hundred meters from the ship, and turned to Felix, extending a hand.

“Doctor,” he said, “I thank you again for the recommendation of your colleague. She was of great assistance to me, although I fear the weight of the burden I left with her.” He looked to the egg-shaped ship, then back to Felix. “This is a Great Ship, run by a Great Captain. Dita is also the only other person I know of who has viewed the holo. We have worked together for many years. She has my utmost trust.”

Felix held Raphael’s hand, feeling the warmth, and the peace now filling the man. “Sir, you have the Void Gaze of a Captain.”

Raphael smiled, a somewhat sad smile. “Yes. I was one of the early Captains. I have the Talent to a small degree, not at all to the level of Dita, or the other Great Captains. It became obvious that my path was elsewhere in the Guild.”

“And the Talent of the child, and her parents?”

Raphael shook his head once again. “Who knows? There are many Mysteries to the Void, my friend.”

They crossed the remaining distance to the ship.

Felix had made many voyages through the Void, not as many as some of his colleagues, but more than most. The ship they approached was unlike any he had known. In its oval shape, and seemingly thick hull, it was a throwback to earlier Ages of Space. The Ships he had traveled on had all resembled planetary dwellings, some including elaborate grounds.

“This Ship is an interesting design,” Felix said out loud.

Raphael responded. “Yes, it is a new Ship, a new design. We may discuss it when safely on board.”

As they approached, a small hatch opened in the side of the egg, a ramp growing out to the ground. Felix looked to the top of the ramp, and saw a woman dressed in gray, a thick mane of Void-black hair partially obscuring a polycrystal crown.

At the top of the ramp, Raphael embraced the woman briefly, then turned to Felix.

“Dita, may I present Doctor Felix Glass. Doctor Glass, Captain Dita.”

Compassion

Felix extended his hand and accepted the Captain's. With a bow he said, "I am honored, Sir and Captain."

She spoke in a melodious and powerful voice. "*We* are honored, Sir and Doctor. We hope you can be of assistance. This is a matter of great concern to many."

She led them further into the ship, the heavy hatch closing automatically behind them.

Felix glanced around openly. The ship seemed to be a throwback indeed -- even the cargo ships he had traveled on provided more than the bare walls now surrounding them.

Felix had seen holos of a Ship's bridge before, but had never been present on one. He knew the Captain stood behind the pedestal through which the Ship was controlled. He knew the gray walls would be replaced by holos of their surroundings. Yet this place felt -- armored, if that was the ancient word. He closed his eyes and explored a twinge of claustrophobia within himself, a feeling of being encased. Did he feel smothered, protected, or both? Tomb or womb?

As he explored the sensations within, he sensed approach, and opened his eyes.

Dita stood before him, holding a polycrystal crown.

"Doctor?" she said, holding the crown out to him.

Felix understood the necessity for the crowns -- keeping intact the fragile human psyche. He had made many jumps, all unmedicated, wearing crowns. Yet this crown -- the polycrystals were more numerous and far larger than in the crowns he had worn in the past.

"Yes, Doctor, this is a Flight crown," Dita told him.

As he furrowed his brow, he heard Raphael laughing softly beside him. "No, Doctor, this will not be an Awakening. Your evoked potentials show a number of interesting features, but not the Talent, as you undoubtedly know. You will be open to experience far more than you would with a passenger or crew crown. We wish to give you as much insight as we can."

Dita placed the crown on his head. He felt the curious contact -- more intensely than ever before. And he heard her say, "That, and Guild Predictors demand it."

Felix closed his eyes and focused on his breath, and the sensations of the crown. Guild Predictors? Possibly he should devote his next twenty year cycle to studying them -- this matter might give him access to those shadows within shadows... More Mysteries -- did the Predictors, or Captains, or Great Leaders for that matter -- did they through acts of their Will sense the future, or did they form it? Where does observation end, and interpretation begin?

"We will touch you, hold hands," Dita said.

Compassion

Eyes still closed, he extended his arms, and felt himself being moved. He would be open to experience more, Raphael said -- in all his previous travels, jumps were a mere flash, and seemed to go unnoticed by some of his fellow travelers. What would he experience this time?

He opened his eyes to see the three of them standing around the pedestal.

And the room was lit with the fire-light from their polycrystal crowns, light which danced with life, with energy. He looked into the Void Gaze filling Dita's eyes, and glanced to Raphael -- he too, had the Void Gaze.

Then in response to something, Felix shifted somehow, the empath in him coming to the fore as he shifted internally and exhaled.

He felt part of his vision fall away, but at the same time grow vaster. For a moment he saw through Raphael's eyes, saw the Void Gaze filling his own face, a face framed by a crown of living light. The tingling he felt on his skin only served to draw him further into the Void.

A voice called to him from inside, Dita's voice. Felix felt her Gift, her Talent. He felt tears form on his face as he shared the joy of one Called to the Void. He breathed it, and felt it -- through her, and through Raphael.

They moved closer together, interlocking arms and more, close around the pedestal. He felt them lift gently from the planet's surface, and understood they did so out of courtesy -- they could have Jumped from the surface.

With their help, Felix looked into the Void. He expected vastness, and the transfinite cardinality of Paths through the Void that the Captain winnowed down to the One. The vastness was there -- through Dita and Raphael, it felt comfortable. But he sensed only one Path before them, or was it a transfinite cardinality of the same Path?

As he contemplated, they Jumped.

They jumped long and deep.

They jumped on Dita's Will, carrying them beneath the stars.

Until -- it was as if a hand raised in front of them, a child's hand -- *that* child's hand. The hand, the child, diverted them along a different Path.

They no longer moved on Dita's Will, but on the Will of another.

They arrived, returning to normal space.

Felix wasn't sure if he saw with his physical his eyes or not. They were in deep space, not within a star system he could observe. He observed the brightness of an ecliptic plane, the increased density of stars -- or were they galaxies?

Compassion

He turned his observation to his companions. They were standing close around the pedestal, gripping each other's arms. As much as Felix was holding on to them, they were gripping him, and each other, with far more intensity.

He looked to Dita -- looking both inside and outside. Was it the crown which let him do this? She was filled with terror, with doubt, with anger. They had been deflected mid-Jump, taken over by a force she could neither comprehend nor resist.

As Felix observed, he interpreted her state to be a quite reasonable response to events. He reached to Dita and helped calm the terror, the doubt. As he did, the anger subsided, and he became aware of another feeling in her, another part -- the excited little girl encountering a new puzzle, a new mystery -- and he brought that part out more, blending and tempering the others. Dita returned to calm, to contemplation, to wonder.

He turned to Raphael -- in him as well was terror, but also grief, jealousy, envy, anger -- anger directed at others and inward both. Felix saw Raphael's self-image, the image of a misshapen, stunted misfit, a man unfit, unloved, alone.

Felix felt Dita near him. Felix looked upon Raphael, and was filled with compassion. He moved to hold and comfort the small child that had grown into the misshapen man. With compassion he helped the child, and the misshapen man, and the jealous man, and the angry man. Through compassion, he helped them forgive, heal, and grow together.

Felix knew he was opening his physical eyes. They were still on the bridge, a ways from the control pedestal, on the floor. Dita was holding Raphael, who was crying.

Felix reached to them again, touching Dita and Raphael. He sensed the bond between them. He saw the healing progressing in both of them.

Felix left the bridge, so Dita and Raphael could practice a far more ancient healing art.

He found he had walked to the ship's small galley. He sat in a chair, linking the controls which projected a view of the surrounding space around him. He saw the stars, so far away. He linked to the ship's systems again, querying their position. The supposedly advanced artificial intelligence was lost and gibbering. Felix told it to stop searching, and it quieted down.

He got a glass of cold water to drink, and sat down again. What had happened? They'd been deflected, their course altered -- by *her*. He'd felt her presence.

But what happened afterwards? It must have been the crown. He extended his hands, and with an exhale, looked at them. For the first time in his life, he'd been able to *see* within people, and to help them heal! All his training, his studying, his practice, had come together. What he'd done with Dita would have taken days normally. And Raphael -- that was a process which would have taken months, at least! But he'd been able to *see* inside, to *move* inside.

Compassion

He sat at the table, holding the glass, taking the occasional sip. He had the feeling of tiredness and satisfaction he got after successful work with a client. This had been special, he thought.

He sensed Dita and Raphael approaching. He sensed them -- and the glow they radiated. They were both healing and helping each other heal. He stood as they approached.

The three hugged in the galley.

“Thank you, Doctor -- you have changed our lives,” Raphael said.

Felix hugged Raphael, then Dita. “You have changed my life as well -- you’ve given sight to the blind.”

Dita sat down, Felix following. Raphael moved to a console and selected a meal for them.

Felix felt the unease returning to Dita.

“Did your Predictors see this?” he asked.

She sighed and looked to Raphael. “Wait,” she requested.

Felix was surprised at how hungry he was. He was also surprised to find that over nine standard hours had passed since the ship left Canticle.

After they finished eating, Dita extended her hands. The three held hands again.

“What happened? Was it predicted? I thought we were going to Zither?” Felix asked.

“Zinger,” Dita corrected with a smile. Then she sighed and furrowed her brow.

“When I first looked into the Void after leaving the planet, I saw only one Path -- that is unusual enough, but that path led to Zinger, as we all expected. We Jumped.”

Felix nodded. “And she?”

Raphael said, “You felt her as well?”

Felix responded, “I felt her raise her hand. I thought I heard her say, ‘No,’ and we moved ... along a different Path. I felt your distress, my Captain.”

Dita nodded, looking into the void. “I was powerless! There was nothing I could do! We were taken ... here.”

“And that is?” Felix asked.

“Where she wants us,” said Raphael.

Dita nodded. “Where she wants us to be. And there are no Paths out! None! That’s one of the reasons Ship was so upset until you calmed it. That’s one of the reasons we were so afraid.” She looked to Raphael and squeezed his hand. Then she smiled and looked to Felix.

“I was more afraid than I’ve ever been in my life. I’ve never felt so helpless, so confused...” she whispered.

“So angry,” added Felix.

She nodded. “You touched me, and brought such relief.” Dita laughed. “I realized the wonder of it all -- how did she do it? What did she do? What a grand Mystery!”

Felix nodded. He turned to Raphael. “And you, Sir?”

Raphael shook his head, smiling. “My friend, you healed something long broken.”

Dita spoke up. “And Doctor, what did you do?”

Felix let his inner sight drift to vastness again, feeling the three of them sitting inside the small Ship, floating in the vastness of the Void. “You gave sight to a blind man. All my life it is as if I have been working by touch alone -- and suddenly I could see! Was it the crown? Was it our Jump together? Oh such a Mystery! But I could see to heal!”

As he looked with his eyes again, Dita smiled.

“Sir and Doctor, I observed you. You see from here,” she touched the corner of an eye, “But you heal from here.” She placed a hand on her heart, then on Felix’s heart.

Felix felt ... the rightness of it. Just as he’d felt Dita’s union with the Void, so he felt about the healing process -- it did come from the heart.

The three held hands again.

“What do we do now?” Felix asked.

“We wait,” Dita said.

“For her,” Raphael added.

They waited one and a half standard days.

<*>Predictors

Felix was on the bridge, immersed in the Void. He felt *her* approaching -- she would be here soon. He reached to inform the others, but sensed them hurrying to the bridge.

The Great Ship *Second Promise* appeared around them, nestling them in a clearing in front of its green buildings. Felix sensed confusion and alarm among the crew. He sensed the parents, Celeste and Adam as they stood on their bridge. They were calm, waiting. He sensed her, Joan, walking toward their ship.

As Dita and Raphael entered the bridge, he said, "I must go. Go to the parents. Help calm the crew."

Dita nodded, and they went down to the hatch.

At the bottom of the ramp, Dita and Raphael headed to the buildings. Felix turned and walked to the ship's Rim, to a small figure seated on the grass.

As he approached, Joan looked up at him. He saw the body of a child, but her expression -- was of one who has seen so much, too much. Felix felt his heart reaching out to her. *Ask for my help*, he thought to himself, moisture filling his eyes, *and I will help you however I can*.

He sat down on the soft grass next to her. He looked into her eyes for a while, letting himself look with that newfound second sight. Such vastness within her! Such pain -- she had seen so many die, felt so many die. She was holding back so much, hiding so much. And, there was much he simply could not understand.

"Thank you for coming, Doctor," she said with a slight smile.

He nodded. "Thank you for your invitation."

He sat and waited. He watched anguish form on her face, twisting first her face, and then her entire body.

"He is dead," he said simply, softly.

Anger formed in her face. A ring of living light flickered angrily around her head. He felt her reaching, as if ...

He opened his heart further. *Please let me help*, he thought. Something within him added, no -- begged, *I need to help*.

She sighed, and her anger flowed away. She shook her head slowly, reaching over and touching the moisture on his face. "No, Doctor. Believe me, I know dead. I have seen dead, and death. My brother is not dead -- he is gone. I see the problem now -- I've been misunderstood. In the instant of the attack, my brother fled. He fled in pain, and in terror -- they wounded him, as none has ever been wounded before. They paused, unsure whether to press

their attack on the planet, or to follow him. In that instant, my father Jumped us out of harm, and my mother attacked.”

Felix nodded. “Thank you. Please help me understand as best I can. Where did he go?”

She smiled a little more. “Where? I’ve looked for him. I’ve found traces of him. He’s still running. Some times I can barely feel him. Other times ... He isn’t as afraid now, oh, but he is still hurt. He has been hurt so much.”

Felix looked at her again, looked into her again. He felt the hidden areas within her unfold. He saw -- a remarkably well-adapted person, not a child. He saw constructs he recognized -- people he recognized? He saw parts of her parents, of others, integrated into her.

“Why did you bring me here? You don’t need me,” he told her.

She shook her head. “Oh, but I do, Doctor. He needs you. He has been hurt so badly -- and I am the only one who can find him, talk to him, and heal him. And for that, I need ...”

He saw her hands reach out to him. He felt her approach. He saw the living light of the crown around her head, and the bracelets on her wrists. He saw, and felt, the light engulf him.

She swallowed him, took him into her. He knew she was allowing him to experience the process, the integration. He recognized one of his students in her, and was saddened by what he saw -- he had learned so little.

Then they were sitting on the grass again, and she was holding his hands.

“No, Doctor,” she chided in a voice barely above a whisper, “He learned much from you! They have all learned so much from you, and respect you so much. But he only learned part of your art, the part you practice with your head. I sent him and the others away because they could not teach me more. You have taught me the most important part -- if I am to help my brother, it must be through my heart.”

Felix felt her resolve. She had his skills now, skills backed by her own love. But...

“But why here? Why not Zinger?” he asked.

He saw a look of fierce determination in her, determination along with sadness.

“I had to try,” she said softly, shaking her head. “I had to.” She looked into him, and past him. He felt energies moving within her, vast energies.

“Yes, I saw us meeting on Zinger,” she said. She held out her hands and Zinger appeared floating before them.

“And I saw this world. I’ve walked this world, as has my brother.”

Compassion

A pristine world appeared, blue seas and green lands, sprinkled with snowcapped mountains and pale deserts.

“But where my brother walks, pain and injury remains. And if I can’t heal my brother, this world turns into...”

What had been a pristine world changed into the industrialized world he’d seen before.

“And that leads to...”

A world appeared, a world which he knew had been wracked by hideous weapons, and was devoid of life. It disappeared, to be replaced by another destroyed world, and another, and another, and another...

The husk of another world disappeared from between them.

“That is what will happen if I can’t help my brother -- Armageddon -- entire universes will be destroyed.”

Then she smiled with grim determination. “But already, it’s getting harder to see. I’ve changed the pattern -- we didn’t meet on Zinger. I didn’t send you to ManHome in a fit of anger. Thank you, Doctor, thank you so much! I understand better now -- I understand with my heart -- Love under Will is the Whole of the Law. Without love, even though I *can* move worlds, I am but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. But with love, I *can* take away the sins of these worlds. I *can* heal them. I *can* heal my brother, and I *will*.”

Felix felt her resolve. She would succeed. But he also felt the price she would pay for that success -- and her understanding of that as well.

“Is there another way?” he asked, his eyes filling with tears, for himself, for her parents, for all who loved her.

She stood, taking his hands. He stood as well.

“Now I see through the Void darkly; but then I will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I shall know even as I have been known. Love will find the way,” she said, looking up to him.

“You can make another Path -- you’ve done that already.” Felix was in tears as he pleaded, pleaded for her life, going to his knees before her.

She nodded, smiling. “Ah, but you have asked that question -- do we make the Paths, or just see them, choose them? Are they hidden, waiting for us in the shadows, or unformed? There are still many Mysteries to the Void.”

She looked at him again, and drew him into the Void. He held her hands, clutched her hands, as she pulled him. He felt the Void -- he felt shifting and reordering, somehow knowing that one great crisis had been averted, but others still loomed.

They were standing on the grass once more, surrounded by clouds of living light. Felix looked into the Void again, and felt his own Paths open up. For him, a decision loomed -- a great forking in the Path.

“Yes, Doctor, you have a choice.”

The sound of her voice brought him back. He blinked. He could tell his own crown was glowing with life.

“Will you choose the easy Path, or will you choose to help?” she asked.

Felix laughed, throwing his head back, looking up into the Void, the tears streaming down his face. What choice did he have, when put that way? That was his weakness -- his flaw -- he could not turn away from helping, no matter what the cost to himself.

“How may I help?” he asked.

“Oh, but you *do* have a choice -- we all have choices, although some times they are hard to see,” she said.

He smiled slightly and nodded. “Do we see them, or make them?”

She nodded. “I understand that better now as well. The ancient one, Heisenberg, said that by observing a system, you change it.”

Felix looked again. Yes, he had choices, so many paths.

“I see one Path,” he said, “tangled with yours.” He caught his breath at the intensity and turbulence of sensations sweeping through him. “It is a difficult Path, but one which promises great rewards for us all.”

She looked at him once more, somber now. “Only you can choose the Path you take.”

He decided, and asked again, “How may I help?”

She nodded. “Take off your crown and follow me.”

He let go of her hands. He reached up to his head, and removed the crown. Its blaze of light dimmed quickly. He held it and glanced to her. She shrugged her shoulders. He dropped it on the grass and reached for her hands again.

He felt a tugging, a slipping as if sideways.

They were floating in living light, so bright and turbulent that he couldn't see, couldn't orient himself. He held on to her hands.

"Let go of my hands. Rely on yourself," she told him.

But if he let go, how would he ... ? He took a breath, and released one hand, and quickly, deliberately, before his fear could increase, released the other. He floated in the light, buffeted.

"Relax! Let them carry you! Let them *help* you!"

He closed his eyes and let himself relax. He let go, and let the light fill him. He focused on not tensing up, not pulling away. The buffeting eased, and changed to a caress.

Felix found himself being held and caressed. He wanted to grab on to the feeling, but remained still, remained relaxed, letting it hold and comfort. Gradually he found he could relax, more and more, breathing living light into his entire being.

He awoke, sitting up on soft moss near a stream. A wave of panic started to rise, but dissipated before it could really form. He felt safe. He could sense her a few hundred meters away. He felt strong and secure.

He knelt by the stream and drank a handful of cool, clear water. It was delicious; he drank his fill.

He knew Joan was in the nearby meadow. He felt her -- he felt her getting ready to -- to do what?

He needed to be near her, to help her, now! He took a step...

And fell. He was in the meadow, about ten meters from her. How? He started to stand, to approach, but she glanced at him. He knew he should stay where he was.

She rose a few meters into the air. Raising her hands above her head as she looked up, she was surrounded by white light.

He watched as she drew something from the planet, something dark. She drew it through herself, and into a sphere floating above her raised hands. He heard and felt her pain; what she was doing took a great effort, and caused her great pain, yet he could also feel her love, and her love was greater than the pain.

The sphere above her head filled, growing and rising above her as she settled to the ground. The sphere rose higher and higher, becoming brighter and brighter, until it was gone.

She approached. He could see she had recovered from the effort, the pain.

“I have cleansed this world of my brother’s passing,” she said. She smiled, then looked up with a sigh. “The first of many.”

“What *is* this place?” he asked.

“For now, it is nameless once again. It *had* a past, and a future, and a name which would become synonymous with death and destruction. But those are gone. It will become a place of comfort, of solace, of acceptance, and of strength.”

He nodded, and then felt fear welling up inside. “You are leaving,” he said.

She nodded.

“You have taken in much,” he said, becoming the teacher, the tutor once more, “but you need time and practice to make it your own, to integrate it.”

She nodded again. “I agree, Doctor. I will have time, and I will have practice.”

He reached out again. “I can help...”

She looked at him with a stern smile. “You have and you will, Doctor. You know our paths will cross again.”

Felix asked, “But how will you find him?”

She smiled and sat on the grass. Felix sat next to her.

“I will answer the question you have not asked,” she said, “the question you asked the Guild Lord.”

Felix frowned, trying to remember. So much had happened!

<Hide and seek>

“Take my hand,” she said, in a tone an adult would use with a child. “It is time.”

He took her hand, and once again felt that tugging, sideways motion.

They were in another clearing. The sun was going ... down, he decided. It looked familiar. “This is the place...” he started to say.

“Where the recording was made. Yes, we are on Almost. I wondered why I’d stopped here.” She smiled. “Now I know.” She took his hand and pulled him along again. They walked, approaching a dwelling.

Compassion

“Good Doctor, this is the house of a great Siren, a healer like yourself. Give yourself to her, and she will heal you, and strengthen you for what lies ahead.”

Felix had the same feeling he'd had during that first Jump -- he was powerless to do anything else.

At the simple, ancient door, Joan put her hand on the annunciator plate. He heard a chime sound within.

“Doctor,” she said, turning him slightly to face her, “when you are done here, go back and say goodbye to my parents for me. If all goes well, I will see them again.”

He started to speak, but the door opened. He turned and saw a Siren of incredible beauty standing before him. He looked into her eyes and was lost. He heard a small voice behind him say, “Lady Yanu, he is hurt; please heal him.”

Lady Yanu smiled. As she reached out for him, he gave himself to her, letting himself be pulled into her softness and warmth.

Felix sat by Lady Yanu's feet, massaging them gently as they enjoyed the mid-morning breeze in the garden.

“My Lady,” he said, “I should be going.”

She looked to him with a sparkle in her eyes. “That's what you said two days ago,” she said with a growl and a smile.

He laughed and kissed her feet. “And I have recovered from our goodbyes, My Lady.”

She removed her foot from his hands and stood, pulling him to standing. She held him again, felt him let go to her embrace. “Call for me, or visit me. I will help as I am able,” she whispered to him.

With a sigh, Felix stood again, taking half a step back. “I know, My Lady. We will see each other again.”

“How will you find them?” she asked.

How indeed, Felix thought. He looked to the palms of his hands. He reached for the presence, the presence of the living light, in the palms of his hands, the soles of his feet, and the band around his head. He reached into the Void.

“I have found them, My Lady. Until we meet again,” he said, still focused on the Void.

Compassion

Lady Yanu watched light spring from the stone set in his forehead. She watched as his presence flickered, and disappeared. She sighed, turned, and walked back to her house, wiping a tear as she did.

Felix was once more aboard the *Second Promise*. The crown he had once worn lay on the grass near his feet. He picked it up and walked to the bridge.

They met him on the veranda, Adam and Celeste, Dita and Raphael.

“Doctor!” Dita cried.

He embraced them all, but then turned to Celeste and Adam. He held their hands. “She asked me to say goodbye. She will see you again; she will see me again.”

“Where did she go?” Raphael asked.

“To the glory and salvation of us all,” Felix whispered. Celeste and Adam nodded.

“Where did you go?” Dita asked.

Felix sensed something. “How long was I gone?”

Dita said, “A few standard hours. We were beginning to worry.”

Felix nodded. “Thank you for your concern.”

He sensed more questions, more unease. “Shall we go to the bridge?” he suggested.

He watched Celeste and Adam hold each other as they led the group to the bridge. He could tell they’d experienced something. Much of the sadness he’d felt in them earlier was gone, hope shining through -- hope, and above all, love.

Felix held out his hands. They formed a star around the control pedestal. Felix reached into the Void once again. He heard a gasp of surprise from Dita, and for a moment saw himself through Raphael’s eyes. He saw eyes filled with the Void Gaze, with a pulsing jewel of light in the middle of his forehead, a jewel connected to a ring of fire surrounding his head.

Felix looked into the Void -- and found her. They saw Joan, on the beach of a nameless world. She was glowing white, floating above the sand, drawing something dark and painful from the planet and into a ball of light floating above her hands. As the ball above her head grew, Joan cried, and they felt her pain. As she settled to the ground, the ball lifted into the air, getting higher and brighter, until it dissolved.

The ancient words came to Felix from somewhere deep. He didn’t recognize them, but felt their strength as he whispered:

Compassion

*Agnus Dei Qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis,
Agnus Dei Qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis,
Agnus Dei Qui tollis peccata mundi
Dona nobis pacem.*

Something told Felix to stay with it longer, not return to the ship just yet. He watched, they watched, as Joan slumped to the sand momentarily, then stood up and ran laughing into the surf, playing in the water.

Their vision aboard ship once more, Felix shifted to Celeste and Adam. The healing process was well underway within them. He helped it along as best he could, showing them what he'd learned. Gasps of astonishment on learning their son still lived were tempered by the understanding that he was injured and Joan was the only one who could help him.

Felix opened his eyes and dropped his hands. "Well, Great Captains, where shall we go?" he asked. He looked to Raphael.

"Perhaps ManHome would be best," Raphael said, "But how?"

Dita smiled and took Raphael's hand. The others joined hands once more. They all turned to Raphael. As Raphael looked deep into the Void, Felix did something to give him a nudge.

Raphael saw the Path. He Jumped. They appeared in orbit around Saturn.

Felix smiled, watching Raphael take Dita's arm in his.

Raphael turned to Felix and said, "Doctor, would you share lunch with us? They will be busy for some time landing the ship." He gave a nod of his head to Celeste and Adam. "It is their ship, their responsibility, after all." Everyone laughed.

Felix bowed, first to Celeste and Adam, then to Dita and Raphael. He left the bridge with them.

They sat outside, and an excited crewman brought them lunch. Small craft whizzed by them, ignoring regulations to satisfy curiosity piqued by the unexpected arrival of a Great Ship.

At one point in the meal, Raphael said, "Doctor, there are those in our Guild who would like to speak with you."

Felix made a grunting noise. "I'm sure there are those within your Guild who would like to dissect me."

Stabbing a morsel on his plate, Raphael said, "Oh, quite true -- but it is *your* Guild now as well -- *she* didn't send you back to the ship, did she?"

Felix smiled and shook his head slowly side to side.

Dita raised an eyebrow. "And on the bridge -- *you* opened the Path."

"I don't think so," Felix said. "I nudged the Great Captain toward it, that's all."

It was Raphael's turn to grunt. "And the crown you now wear? Where did you get *that*?"

"I don't know," he said, his gaze slipping once more into the Void.

He felt, he *knew*, a future when he would take the daughter of Dita and Raphael to that place. In another breath, he knew he would take her there, along with his son, the son he would have with ...

"Doctor?" Dita said, putting a hand on his.

Felix turned to Dita with tears in his eyes, to be interrupted by Celeste walking to them, sighing as she adjusted her formal gray Captain's uniform.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but we've stirred up a nest of sneeches. Every Predictor with the slightest amount of Talent has been hollering about us. My Lord, My Lady, I suggest you put on your formal uniforms. Doctor, if you will follow me, we'll have Ship fit you with Grays. Did you bring some of your own formal insignia?"

Felix nodded, "Yes, in my bag aboard ship."

Celeste nodded. "I'll have a crewman fetch them, with your permission, of course."

Felix nodded and spoke his assent, "As you wish."

She turned to Raphael, and with a smile, bowed formally and asked, "My Lord, would you authorize Ship to make two insignias for Great Captains?"

Raphael sighed but smiled. "Of course -- so authorized."

Celeste turned once more to Felix. "Sir, Doctor -- if you would please follow me."

As Felix followed Celeste into the ship, she muttered, "It's going to take all the brass we've got to get us safely to Guild Headquarters -- and then I don't know how safe we'll be."

"Brass?" Felix asked.

Celeste shook her head. "Ancient shipboard term for medals, insignia, and the like -- indicia of rank."

Compassion

Ship quickly measured Felix and produced a simple gray uniform. Celeste helped him put it on. Still holding his gray cape, she said, “Back to the bridge.”

Once on the bridge, Felix took his bag and began lacing his medical insignia on the gray tunic top. Chaos reigned around him.

Dita stepped to him and took one of the pins. “Here, let me. We’ll need room for another two.”

As soon as she’d finished his medical insignia, she looked to Raphael and the bridge grew quiet.

Felix turned as Raphael approached.

“Sir and Doctor,” Raphael said formally, “On this day you have become a Captain of our Guild.” He placed the cape on Felix’s shoulders, then attached another insignia to Felix’s tunic.

Then Adam and Celeste stepped forward.

Adam said, “It is the custom of our Guild that a new Captain be presented by the highest ranking official available. That part of the ceremony is complete.”

Raphael chuckled and muttered, “And the rest will have to be done by someone else.”

To mild laughter, Adam and Celeste turned to Raphael.

Celeste said, “But this honor, My Lord, can only be bestowed by a Great Captain, acknowledging another to our ranks. My Lord Raphael, in recognition of your Great Jump from Somewhere to ManHome, we recognize you as a Great Captain.” She attached the insignia to Raphael’s gray tunic, a tunic already quite cluttered.

She turned to Felix. “And to you, Sir, Doctor, and now Captain, in recognition of your Great Jump to Somewhere from Somewhere Else, we recognize *you* as a Great Captain.” She attached the insignia to Felix’s tunic.

“Congratulations to all,” Adam intoned, “And may it be enough to get us past the mobs. Planetfall in two minutes. Stations, please.”

Work in Progress
Rev 2007/02/07

Compassion

Compassion

By silli_artie@hotmail.com
<http://www.asstr.org/~artie>