

Sky Pilot

Chapter 1.

Magritte Cymo Fu walked in and looked out on the classroom full of young faces. She thought '*Could I have ever been that young?*' The noise-level increased as the students saw her black lipstick, blue-spiked hair and multiple silver earrings and crosses. Several of the students also had red- or orange-spiked hair, multiple chains and crosses on their necks. Black fingernail polish was present, and black lipstick was in abundance on both boys and girls.

"Good morning, class," she started, hesitantly. "I'm Magritte Fu. I'll be your instructor. You're here for lots of different reasons, but I need you to focus on how important it is to succeed here. Only the ultimate danger of being a *Sky Pilot* can lead to the ultimate reward – a ticket to the other side. I'll attempt to teach you, but it is you, as individuals, who must learn." The students settled down a little, but they saw her long, black dress that identified her as Goth chick. She looked too young to be a teacher, so they kept talking among themselves – she didn't look like she could command respect, so they didn't give her any. They whispered "She can't be the *First Sky Pilot*" "She's Goth" "She isn't old enough to teach" "Is it break-time yet?" – and the buzz in the classroom increased. Most of the students' iPods blared Death Metal music so loud that the room almost hummed with the pulsating percussion.

She was short and thin, so she pulled a step-stool out from behind the desk and stood on it. Then she drew herself up to her full height of 150 centimeters, and in a quiet, firm voice, she began her first lecture.

"A Death-asteroid screamed into Earth's atmosphere on December 12, 2012. It wasn't there by chance. I want you to understand something: it was sent halfway across the Universe specially to sterilize our planet. It was like a Q-ball bank shot of incredible proportions – it left a gouge in South America that removed most of the Amazon Basin, and then it skipped back into space and eyed the moon. The Death-asteroid lost so much momentum from smashing across Earth that it couldn't escape the moon's gravity well. It buried itself deep in the rocky terrain of the *Frau Mauro* highlands, and changed the center of mass of the moon. The Earth-moon gravitational duopoly accorded for a couple of hundred years, wreaking havoc on parent and child alike, until the moon, on its final, wild orbit, kissed the Earth, smashing Mount Kilimanjaro flat. And then Newton's tyranny caused it to be ejected from the Solar system forever."

Now she had everyone's attention – nobody had ever talked to them like that before. And none of them had seen the original moon – most of them were born in the Universal Birthing Tube Complex that was built after the Great Disaster, in order to rebuild the population of Earth. Their parents rarely talked about the Great Disaster, so they hoped this black-cloaked waif would tell them more about that. They all looked at her with new respect – they knew that she was the *First Sky Pilot*, and maybe, just maybe, she had an interesting story to tell – perhaps they'd give her a chance.

They watched her eyes, which were looking towards the ceiling, focused on a place far, far away. Suddenly, her Goth clothes didn't distract the students so much. Instead, they focused on the legend herself: she had walked among the stars and met the entity named *Pure White*. She was a friend of *Deep Blue*, whom they had been told, was the creator of Earth. The class became quieter, and more respectful. Then the morning sun hit the side of her face that had 9 silver rings pierced into a raised-scar on her cheek. And she raised both of her hands above her head and looked towards the sky. The flowing black sleeves of her dress fell from her thin arms. The red and black tattoos from her elbows to her palms told a story of her previous life, when she was young like them. Her pale white skin was translucent. Every eye was now upon her as she spread her arms like wings of some ancient creature, learning, against impossible odds, to fly. Then she moved her arms, and the ringed-fingers went up and down in one tiny stroke. Suddenly, she made a claw of each hand, and then she slightly twitched her shiny black index fingers, and in an instant, she was floating a half-meter above the step-stool. Instantly, the classroom became silent as she told the tale of the history of the Universe.

Chapter 2.

"Just after the Beginning, *Pure White* was created. And then, after a very long time, *Pure White* saw that the Universe was expanding so rapidly that he couldn't seed it all with life, which was his job, so he created a family of powerful entities called *The Ones*. When *Pure White* spoke to them for the first time he said: '*I can't do it all -- you will need to help me by creating life forms everywhere.*' Then he set powerful quasars in the sky as beacons and boundaries. '*Each of you will take one area, bounded by 9 quasars. I have given you each enough raw materials to build billions of worlds and billions of life forms. The life forms you create will walk with us among the stars. You will each establish trade, and transportation routes to all parts of the Universe. All creatures will share the riches of the Universe in peace and harmony.*'

"For an eon, *Pure White* taught them everything, and then he pointed to a star map and said '*Deep Blue, Infrared, Dark Violet, Green, Turquoise, here are your areas. I put you in the western portion of the Universe. Maroon, Plum, Ultra-yellow: here is your area in the northern section. Fire Orange, Silver, Hot Pink: you shall be in the south.*'

"But *Infrared* wasn't pleased that he had just an irregular-shaped chunk of the far, far western Universe, yet most of his sisters and brothers had nice, large areas, close to the Core, to work with. He suddenly interrupted '*Father, I prefer that area right there – let me trade mine with Deep Blue – she won't mind.*'"

"*Deep Blue* jumped right in '*Of course I mind – did you think that just because you're a boy, that Father should treat you better? Remember, I was born before you, and I have first choice.*'"

"*Infrared*, just take that area that I gave you and bring forth life. It has plenty of possibilities', said *Pure White*. '*Leave Deep Blue alone – why are you always picking on her? Now go, both of you: you have lots of work to do.*'"

"*Deep Blue* raised her nose and humphed at *Infrared* and then she turned her back on him. She looked at her Father and said '*He's always been a bully, along with our sister Dark Violet, who's always so bossy. I don't know why you put them next to me. Send them to the southern part of the Universe, where they belong.*'"

"*Just try to get along out there, my child. There's enough Universe for all of you – it's expanding, you know.*'"

"*Yes, Father*' was all she said, but she was dejected that her least-favorite brother and a mean sister were on her boundaries."

"Finally, each of *The Ones* was assigned their area, and then each of them rode the 11-dimensional threads that bound the Universe together. Finally, each of them was sitting in the center of an 11-dimensional web – their own special area. *Infrared* and *Dark Violet* flew off to their areas mad. Both were pondering ways to get even with their sister, who got a much nicer area than they felt she deserved.

"*Deep Blue* looked around at the gas clouds that permeated her area and thought joyfully '*Now I can begin the Great Task, and I shall begin right over there.*' Then, over a period of a few billion years, she made a small yellow star named Xyphos. Then she seeded the Xyphos system with enough dust and matter to make a few nice planets. '*There now – that's pretty good for a first attempt. Father will be proud. Now I shall create some life forms.*'

"Then *Deep Blue* thought hard and finally she created bacteria, which, she found out, were very difficult to make. '*DNA is hard to twist just the right way*', she complained, and she was correct. The lovely 4th planet of the Xyphos system, Xylon, was quickly overwhelmed with bacteria – big ones; small ones; juicy ones; black ones; mean ones. '*This isn't easy*', *Deep Blue* said in frustration. After an age of trying to educate the bacteria, she was in distraught and nearly in tears. '*How am I supposed to teach them to walk among the stars and participate in commerce with the other Ones' children? I need to ask Father for help.*'

"She flew back to her Father, who was busy in the Core of the Universe, trying to control a host of uncontrollable black holes. '*What, child? I'm very busy right now. I really don't have time for you. Can you come back in a couple of billion years, dear*'

"*Deep Blue* was upset, but she was a good daughter, and so she left her Father alone – she could easily see how a million mean black holes could wreak havoc in the Core, so she flew home to her area and was instantly shocked to find what happened in her absence: Xylon was split asunder, and the life forms were all quite dead. She instantly looked towards *Infrared's* part of the Universe and screamed '*You horrible, miserable brother! You killed my creations.*'

"*Infrared* pulsed on and off in quiet laughter – he'd sent a Death-asteroid from his quadrant with a simple flick of his index finger. The perfect shot split Xylon to bits. '*You shouldn't leave your so-called children alone for so long, sister. Maybe the planet was just defective – like you.*' She looked towards *Dark Violet* and glared '*You're not my sister any more. You could have stopped Infrared, but you did nothing. I hate you both!*'

"*Deep Blue* wandered her area for an age, shouting and raging against her evil brother and sister. Finally, she realized that she could go far away, near a white nebula, thick with stars, in the eastern part of her territory. '*There's where I'll create life*', she thought. '*Far away from those mean idiots.*' Then she found a medium-sized yellow star named Sol, and helped condense the planets from the surrounding dust. She referred to her *Galactic Cookbook* several times – she wanted to make sure that the new life forms would be able to evolve past the simple one-celled life forms that she once created. Occasionally, she looked over her shoulder towards the far west and north, and silently beamed hatred towards her brother and sister.

"But then, suddenly, *Deep Blue* had her hands full – life sprang out of the 3rd planet, named Earth, quickly and easily. It multiplied beyond her wildest hopes. It was rich and varied, and made the leap from bacteria to complex life forms suddenly, in a totally fulfilling way. '*I simply must show Father*', she cried out proudly. '*He'll be so delighted.*'

"She raced through the 11 Dimensions, towards the Core of the Universe and saw her Father, still juggling the million-plus black holes. '*Father, come see my creation*', she called. In her hand, she held a trilobite, which was about as advanced as anything she'd created.

""*I'd love to, my dear*', he cried out. '*But you can see my problem here – and I dare not fail, else the entire Universe will collapse. What can I do? I can't leave.*'"

'*I understand, Father. I can come back later*', was all *Deep Blue* could say.

"When she returned to Earth, it was in ruins – a Death-asteroid, and a swarm of smaller asteroids had slammed into the planet. Plus, a small planetoid had been hurled from a different direction, and had smashed into Earth from an odd-angle. '*You're horrible!*' she screamed at her brother and sister.

'You've destroyed my planet again. 'I'll get even with you!' she shouted against the cold reality of a planet that now had a fat, white moon, where there had been nothing before.

"For an age she cried tears onto Earth, and filled in the low lands with water. When *Deep Blue* stopped sulking and screaming at *Infrared* and *Deep Violet*, she realized that the moon and the water were both good things for breeding life. 'According to the *Galactic Cookbook*, a water-filled planet is much easier to seed with life. And look at this footnote: "A planet with a relatively-large moon will be gravitationally-balanced, and therefore it will have regular seasons. This is good for all life forms." 'Aha!' she cried out. 'You thought you'd ruin my planet, but you've helped it out.'"

"Then *Deep Blue* reached out into the deepest parts of the cold solar system and added some icy comets to the mix – crashing thousands of them into the lifeless planet below. 'I'll rebuild an even better place', she cried, with her index finger raised in the black void, she pointed towards *Infrared* and shouted in defiance – 'I'll never let you defeat me again!'"

"*Dark Violet*, who had sent the planetoid crashing into Earth, stared at the new Earth/moon combination and she wondered why she hadn't thought of that before. 'I need to try that here next time: better stability for life forms, the book says. Hmm.'"

"*Infrared* stared in anger at the new, improved planet called Earth. Next time, he'd send a Death-asteroid that would split *Deep Blue's* world. 'Then I can take over her sector, too', he dreamed. 'Father's way too busy in the Core to notice.'"

"Over the millennia, new life forms on Earth grew and multiplied in such a great spurt of growth that *Deep Blue* couldn't keep track of it all. She nudged DNA molecules, and nursed the more advanced life forms. 'Someday you will walk among the stars', she breathed into every new life form."

"Slowly, over a period of two hundred million years, *Deep Blue* struggled to turn some of them into intelligent *Sky Pilots*, but she was unable to accomplish that goal. She tried teaching them the Dance, and she tried teaching them the Song, but nothing worked. She spent millennia trying to explain the complex dance steps that would let the beasts fly through the Dimensions as *Sky Pilots*, but nothing worked."

"'The only way you can get past Dimension 6 is this', she'd say, and then she spun in Dimension 5 and flipped in Dimension 4 at the same time. But the beasts were content to chew on the lush plant life and stare at her with uncomprehending eyes."

"'Listen to me', she said to a herd of bright, fast raptors, 'Sing the Song with me' – and she sang the dual-tone song that would cause the Dimension 9 gatekeeper to open wide and let them pass. But the giant Tyrannosaurs just tried to bite her, as she rode high in the sky on a white cloud."

"'I was a fool to bring these pathetic beings to life. My DNA skills are imperfect.' And then she cried, and cooled off the hot planet with her tears."

"She wanted to fly to her Father and show him her creatures, but she wasn't going to leave the Earth unguarded against the threat of Death-asteroids from *Infrared*, so she split one of the outer planets in her fist and set up a rich ring of large boulders on the outskirts of the solar system. 'That will deflect asteroids from my idiot brother', she thought."

"*Deep Blue* picked some fine dinosaur specimens and then she flew to the Core to visit her Father. His first question was 'Why don't they fly by themselves?' You're supposed to create life forms that can walk

the stars and be equal to the life forms of the rest of the Universe. Your brothers and sisters are doing so much better', and he shook his head in disappointment.

"Just then, one of the large, fierce raptors jumped up and snapped at Pure White. 'What's this?' he cried, 'you've made life forms that would try to harm me? Deep Blue, I'm so very disappointed. Maybe I should have trusted Infrared's judgment and given him that sector of the Universe. He couldn't do worse. You're supposed to train Sky Pilots, and instead you've created these huge, ugly creatures.'"

"Deep Blue was crushed. Her Father was not pleased; her irritating brother was apparently favored now; furthermore, the snarly life forms that she'd bred were fearful, loathsome creatures. 'Father, I've done my best, but I'm constantly plagued by Infrared and Deep Violet hurling Death-asteroids at my planets. The result is that it has taken me extra-long to bring forth advanced life forms.'"

"Pure White cleared his throat and uttered 'Deep Blue: it's a poor craftsman who blames his tools for his failure, and that includes you. If you're not able to do the job, I can easily find one of your brothers or sisters who can – is that what you want? These life forms are called dinosaurs on other planets – obviously they will never walk the stars – can't you see that? They are severely handicapped – look, all they want to do is eat each other. This isn't what you're supposed to create. Didn't I give you the Galactic Cookbook? Can't you follow my instructions?'"

"Deep Blue sobbed, and then she openly wept. She didn't do her job exactly right, but she didn't want her Father to give her part of the Universe to her mean brother and sister."

"'Just look', he said in a highly-irritated voice, 'Some of these foul creatures have long necks and many have huge, sharp teeth. None of them are very intelligent. You did a poor job. I've taken star systems away from some of my other children who created dinosaurs – they're dead-end creatures. Now, are you willing to fix the problem, or are you just going to stand there and cry? I have things to do here that won't wait. Make up your mind.'"

"'Sorry, Father. I'll try again', was all she could say as she flew home."

"'You need retraining', he said with his anger barely under control. 'Until you get it, you will not be allowed to make any more life forms.'"

"Infrared and Dark Violet saw that Pure White was disappointed and angry that Deep Blue had made such a mess of an entire solar system, so, to be 'helpful', they flung a huge meteor from the Orion sector towards Earth. When it got there, the direct hit was supposed to sterilize the planet, but it bumped into one of the blocking asteroids that Deep Blue had put in place. When the Death-asteroid hit Earth it inflicted great damage: it sent up a cloud of water that blocked the sun for an age. Her dino-children all died. Deep Blue felt sorry for them, especially the ones who were vaporized from the strike. But she was mostly embarrassed that her brother Ones had to step in and clean up her mess."

"Thus, Deep Blue was sanctioned for an eon, and forbidden to make another solar system until she was retrained in DNA folding. Then, finally, she was allowed to seed a solar system again. Her brothers and sisters labeled her "flawed," which was the ultimate insult for the child of Pure White. Worse yet, she knew that Pure White was watching her now, and He would not tolerate imperfection a second time."

"But the Death-asteroid didn't kill off all life on Earth, as Infrared and Dark Violet had planned. Instead, the small life form called mammals, which lived by stealing dinosaur eggs, survived the onslaught, and they were fruitful and multiplied and evolved – they seriously evolved once the raptors were dead and

gone. Sixty five million years passed and a species called "humans" came forth and inhabited the Earth, and they didn't know about *The Ones*. But hundreds of millions of years of *Deep Blue's* contacts with the dinosaurs were buried deep within their mammalian DNA."

"*Deep Blue* had always been present with the dinosaurs, trying to correct her mistakes, but without much success. But the small mammals that she'd ignored had been watching, and they learned, and in secret they worshiped her. They were glad that the planet was cleansed of dinosaurs, whom the mammals considered stupid, lazy and beyond ignorant. Some nights, when the moon was full, deep in the primeval forests, hollowed logs boomed, and mammals shrieked. In secret, they danced *Deep Blue's* Dance."

"Finally *Deep Blue's* retraining was complete and she was allowed to create a new solar system, and she concentrated all her efforts mightily on the new solar system called *Antiminus*, deep in the Deneb sector. Over the millennia, occasionally, *Deep Blue* heard jumbled calls for help in her mind, but she ignored them, since the very thought of her failure on Earth made her cringe. She knew that her brother's Death-asteroid had wiped the planet clean, so when she heard the prayers from that solar system, she just thought that she was fantasizing. Still – they were calling her Mother, and she liked that, so when she was able to take a break from seeding Antiminus, she traveled back towards Earth.

"'*I'll just take a quick look*', she thought as she flew the 11 Dimensions of entangled webs that hold the galaxies together. She was stunned when she arrived: small, hairy mammals covered the planet. And none of them looked like her first children at all!"

"She observed them from a high place in the clouds: the beings called humans were all so proud and willful, which she didn't like, but they worshiped her, so in secret, she liked that. *Pure White* had prohibited worship of *The Ones* by any of the civilizations that they created. He told them all very sternly that a society that was based on worship of a *One* would fail. '*It will cause great divisions and eternal wars. Your children must be given the ability to worship as they please, not how you dictate*', he decreed. '*It would be too easy to create a race of beings that bring you the pleasure of being worshiped, but your vicarious pleasure and desire for worship will destroy spirits, not create free souls.*'"

"*Deep Blue* remembered that command, somewhere deep inside, yet the thought of millions of small, intelligent beings worshiping her was titillating. She saw how tiny they were, yet they possessed the spirit of *The Ones*, so she knew that they were her progeny. She heard them pray to her, and she tried to tell them not to, since she wasn't the right one to hear the prayers. She liked being called '*Mother Nature*' – it suited her well."

"She spent an age with her children and taught them the basics of the Dance and the Song. They were apt pupils. When it rained, they thanked her with a song. When the sun shown bright, they thanked her with a dance. When the moon was full, they celebrated her bounteous ways. She was wary of her Father finding out that she was being worshiped. When she realized that it would bring his wrath down on Earth, she started thinking about departing – the last thing she wanted was for these clever little people to be wiped out in a bolt of anger from the Core."

"So *Deep Blue* returned to Antiminus, because life there was at a critical point in evolution, and she was needed. As she was making the final adjustments that would change RNA to DNA, she heard a scream from a billion souls, who prayed for her to intercede."

"All this time, *Infrared* was watching Earth, and he was not pleased with the flora or fauna of the planet. He was surprised that the last Death-meteor hadn't sterilized the planet and that now it teemed with

strange, hairy life forms. He told *Dark Violet* 'Pure White will be disturbed. I should not have flung that boulder into Deep Blue's realm – she should have sterilized the planet herself. Now she's out by Antiminus, trying to create life, but the Earth needs cleansing. Here's a rock that's just the right size. If I flip it carefully, then the planet will finally be sterilized, and it will look just like an accident' – and a flip of his middle finger against a rock was all it took."

"When *Deep Blue* heard the humans scream and die, she raced to that small section of her sphere and tried to find out what was wrong. As a skilled *Sky Pilot*, she knew how to move at maximum speed in all 11 Dimensions, but she was too late – over 95% of the mammals were dead, and the rest were near death."

"Of course for her it was child's play to manipulate Dimension 4, so she reacted instantly and threw up a time-shield around the planet. "I have to come up with a real solution this time." She glared in anger towards *Infrared*, whom she knew was evil for doing this to a sentient race. "I'll get even with you, brother," she promised. Then she pondered her current problem."

"The Earth's water supply was gone, blasted into space by the great Death-asteroid. The moon was gone too. So once again, she gathered some far-away comets and rained them down onto Earth, to replenish the oceans and lakes. The planet had wild seasonal temperature changes, which were caused by Earth's orbit – it was still feeling the lack of a moon, but *Deep Blue* wasn't thinking about gravity that day. She pondered deeply about how to simply recover Earth's inhabitants."

"One day when her tears filled the oceans to overflowing, she stopped crying. And then she realized that the moon was gone. From her earlier days, she recalled the value of a large moon, and how its tides were a good influence on the stability of a planet's seasons. So she gathered up some rocks and made Luna II, and then she put it into the precise orbit of the old Luna. It didn't look the same – it was flat and free of craters, but she was sure that it was the right mass, distance and center of gravity."

"When Earth was finally re-stabilized, she slowly withdrew the time-shield. That gave plants and animals a chance to renew themselves and prepare for the return of the humans. Finally she spoke a command that healed all her small children. When they awoke, one after another, they caught a glimpse of her in their minds. They begged her to stay with them forever, and finally her heart broke. She promised that they would get some protection from the rocks of space. She thought about putting a large shield around the planet so that it could not be bombarded with rogue rocks."

"They cried 'No! We don't care about the rocks. We want to be with you and worship you.'"

"Then she took pity on them, because, after all, they were tiny and pathetic creatures. They had no way to be with her in her walks in her quasar-bounded area. 'If I tell them that they can never walk with me, then they'll lose all hope. But I can't lie to my children.'"

"She pondered the dilemma and finally decided to make an announcement to the recovered human race: 'I will let you walk with me among the stars – I will teach you to become Sky Pilots.'

"The tiny creatures looked at her with empty eyes 'We can't keep up with you', they complained. 'Your one step is equal to millions of ours. How shall we walk among the stars if we can't even take one step with you?'"

"I shall teach you about mind, space and time. If you learn, then you will be able to follow me. If not, then you will have to stay here."

"How shall we learn these things?' they cried out."

"*Pick a few of your best, and I shall be their mentor. I shall show them how to be Sky Pilots and fly among the distant stars.*"

"Humans wanted to walk among the stars, so they picked the best of the best for the task. They built the great Universal Birthing Tube Complex, called the UBTC, and they bred the best of the human race, so that they could be taught how to walk among the stars."

"One of the new breed was named Magritte Cymo Fu: that's me."

The evening sun came in through the western wall of glass and shone on the roomful of students, but not a single one moved towards the door – they all wanted to hear more about the *First Sky Pilot*. A bell rang somewhere, but it was ignored. Magritte floated near the ceiling and looked down at the room. '*At least I have their undivided attention*', she thought. '*That's a start.*' She slowly drifted back down to a height of a half-meter above her foot stool.

"Since each of you is now wondering about it, I'll tell you a little about me."

Chapter 3.

"Twenty years ago today, I was created in the Universal Birthing Tube Complex, and I'll tell you more about that in a little while. My human parents had 42 children. As you know, we're all from big families, as we try to re-populate Earth after the Great Disaster."

"My father is a judge who is known for his stern interpretation of the law. My mother is 'distant', and I never really knew her. Truthfully, I didn't mature like the other girls in school – the doctors thought that the oak DNA in my body was slowing my growth pattern. I liked dancing and gymnastics, but the bigger girls always wanted all the attention, so I usually practiced in secret."

"The bullies at school were vicious. I became withdrawn and reclusive. Finally, I started hanging with the Goth crowd at school. I spiked my hair purple and I began wearing black, flowing clothes with buckles and studs. I quickly found out that Goths are just free thinkers, or people who don't accept things just because '*they're supposed to be that way.*' Goths reject dogma, which I sure did."

At this point, the classroom filled with a buzz. Most of the students had similar backgrounds, even the ones who weren't Goths, and they understood her completely. When the room quieted down, she floated down from the ceiling and continued.

"I knew at an early age that I was not 'normal', but hey, my Goth friends accepted me as a sister, without question. My musical tastes were very bizarre to most of my classmates, but Goths just accepted the death-rock music that I craved. My iPod was always loaded with hard, screaming Goth rock, which my teachers were always telling me to put away, and I just ignored them. Truthfully, not all the music was good, but I danced away the bullies and the bothersome boys, and the irritating girls who just wanted attention. When my music was blasting, I was left alone, and that's all that counted."

"I went to my father and tried to ask him questions about why I saw such strange images in my mind at night. 'Magritte, I have a big case that I have to finish tonight. Can you come back next week?' he said."

"When one of the bullies at school grabbed me in a nasty place, I went to my dad in tears 'Daddy, I was grabbed today', I started to say."

"'Hon, if you can take care of school problems, then I can make a living and take care of the family', he said."

"I decided that having a busy dad and a distant mom were about the worst things that could happen to any young girl."

"At night, I made the Goth scene in town, almost every night. Every club in town knew me – my hard dancing, my obsidian eye shadow, and my far-out ways. I was told that it was like something 'elemental' to watch me dance – in fact, I often cleared the floor, as the other Goths couldn't fathom the depths of my rhythm."

"The club owner once said 'Watching you dance is something from deep, dark times past.'

"And I kidded with him 'Yeah, sometimes, images of saber-toothed tigers or dinosaurs scatter across my brain, as the loud music devolves into an elemental booming that hasn't been heard since the ancient times.'"

"He just squunched up his face when I said that – I guess I knew then that nobody ever understands someone else, not really, but I guess I partially meant it, though."

"My family became more and more distant, as I painted my nails black and rejected more and more of 'normal' culture."

"I remember one time when my parents took a few of us kids to a carnival and I had fun until the Ferris wheel jammed while I was near the top, stuck upside-down. I screamed and screamed for hours – I'd always been afraid of heights, but this terror was the worst of my life. When I got down from the ride, EMT's treated me for shock – my fear of heights had completely overwhelmed me."

"Finally one day I left home. I simply ran away from responsibility. I withdrew from all the mean things that were surrounding me. I thought that I could live alone, only me and my music. But living on the streets was tough, and I became tough as nails."

"One night I was picked up by the local police when a man on the street propositioned me, and I refused his advances. He started shouting at me, and a nearby beat-cop came over to find out what the problem was. The guy lied and said that I'd propositioned him, and that I tried to steal his wallet. The cops took one look at me, cuffed me and threw me into the squad car. When I got to the police station, they finger-printed me and found out that I was one of the special children bred as a possible *Sky Pilot* – worse yet, I was the daughter of a Judge. They quickly contacted my father, who came and picked me up. He drove me home and gave me a stern talking to."

"He said 'Magritte, you must accept the responsibility that was assigned to you when you were conceived. You were bred to be a *Sky Pilot*. Now take it seriously.'"

"I planted my hands on my hips and asked 'What's in it for me?'"

"Purity of heart and purity of thought," he replied quietly. "You will train with the best Zen masters, and then commune with the spirit that we call Mother Nature, and who calls herself *Deep Blue*. And then you will fly among the stars. Would you like to do that?"

"I just said 'Okay, cool', because I was surprised at his question."

"His curiosity was peeked and he asked 'Why do you say that now – we lost you a year ago, but now you're just fine and back on track – what's up?'"

"I looked up at him and said 'Oh daddy, it's simple – for once, you didn't tell me what to do, you asked me if I wanted to do it.'"

"I was taken to the *Temple of Mother Nature*, and given over to the Priests for training. My father hugged me and said 'My child, make me proud. You are not of my body, but you are of my mind and heart.' He bent down and whispered in my ear 'Dare to be a *Sky Pilot!*'"

"I looked at him and knew his heart. Then I took out the ear buds that I'd worn continuously for the last several years and tossed the iPod into my gig bag. I said 'I love you, dad' as I turned and climbed the blue steps of the temple into the future."

"I was quickly engulfed in the new cause: I really wanted to be a *Sky Pilot*. I worshiped in the special way that the priests of the *Temple of Mother Nature* taught – and they taught all things to the chosen ones. They gave me understanding of the *Yi Ching*, or Book of Changes: changes about philosophy and

changes in the stars. I was made to understand the dynamic balance of opposites, the evolution of events as a process, and acceptance of the inevitability of change. Day after day, I was taught, and month after month I questioned and learned the mysteries of the cosmos."

"On my 17th birthday, I finally understood the symbol 易, or Yi, which means 'easy' and 'change' at the same time. Three priests taught me at the same time. Each had a simple, yet profound message. *'It is important for you to understand simplicity, variability and persistency'*, taught the first priest. *'The fundamental law underlying everything in the Universe is utterly plain and simple, no matter how abstruse or complex some things may appear to be. The roots of yourself live here, in quiet simplicity.'*"

"Understand that everything in the Universe continually changes', taught the second priest. *'You must be prepared to deal with many simultaneous, yet diverse situations. This is how you master the use of things.'*"

"The third priest sat cross-legged and quietly said *'There is a principle that applies to everything that is changing, and this part of the substance does not vary with space and time. You will be you, whether you are or not. You are the essence of you – that part of you cannot change.'*"

"When I understood those things, then I was ready. And then finally, all the chosen ones were ready. Then, on a certain day, *Deep Blue* floated above the world and gathered up the humans who would dare to challenge her for a ticket to the other side."

Chapter 4.

"The different human breeds, and the different training for each human showed up in many ways. But none of them could master *Deep Blue's* lessons about the Dimensions, and why there were ways from each to the other, and back. She spoke into our minds about suns and moons far away, and told us how to get there, but we did not understand her. A few of the brave ones tried to cross over, but when they tried to go from Dimension 3 to Dimension 4, they failed, and they wound up as ancient clumps of muck, instead of young humans. I remember seeing some horrible creature, with a long neck and fierce teeth pluck my friends from their trip, and tear them to ribbons, before swallowing them whole. *'Those horrible creatures are from Dimension 8', Deep Blue warned us: 'They are very, very ill-tempered, and dangerous.'*"

"One day I was called – *Deep Blue* spoke into my mind as I was dancing the Dance and meditating by singing the Song. *'What have you learned, my child?'*"

"I have learned where my roots are', I replied, quietly."

"*'Is that all?'* she asked."

"I have learned Yi, 易. I know that change is easy."

"She thought-spoke *'You will need that, too. But have you learned nothing else?'*"

"I have learned that part of myself, which is my immutable self. No one and no thing can take that away from me. I am.' I told her. I was humble and I bowed flat to the ground to honor Mother Nature."

"*'Then I shall teach you',* she replied. *'And if you have learned those things well, then you shall see the other side.'*"

"Training never stopped from then on. There was no time for eating or sleeping. There was no playing or having fun. *Deep Blue* was a tough, thorough teacher."

"In the *Universal Birthing Tube Complex*, when I was engineered, my human DNA was enhanced with DNA from an oak tree: for endurance and strength; DNA from an eagle: for keen sight; and DNA from a horse: for great speed. Other UBTC-bred humans had other combinations of DNA, to ensure that some of them would be ready to learn from *Deep Blue*. We all had the totality of human history and learning programmed into our brains."

"The oak tree DNA in my body took hold and supported me. The keen sight of the eagle served me well, for there were many stars, moons and planets to avoid in the darkness of the Universe. I was able to master my fear of heights, but not totally."

"*Deep Blue* gathered us and spoke to our minds about space and time. She told us the history of the Universe: *'Just after the Beginning, my Father, Pure White, was created. The Universe was expanding so rapidly that he couldn't seed it all with life, which was his job, so he created a family and called us The Ones. Each of us was just one color, a small part of his total range of color. He told us: 'I can't do it all -- you will need to help me by creating life forms everywhere.'* Then he set powerful quasars in the sky as beacons and boundaries for us. We were each given a bounded area and enough raw material to create billions of worlds, with billions of life forms. Our Great Task was to create life forms that could walk among the stars. Each culture would share all the riches of the new Universe in peace and harmony."

"Then she showed us the Navigation-quasars and built a navigation-image-map in our minds. *'Here are Boolea and Umab. Over there is the Watra and Gortondo pair. See Doala and Grexta, she pointed. The giant Choken and B'nam are up there, and Themad, at the point there, are my boundaries. These powerful quasars were among the first things created, and they'll be around until the end, so they're really good gate posts'*, she said. It was easy to picture the oblong-oval shape of her area."

"She wept many times at the small things that were her creation – how pathetic and challenged we were. We knew she was thinking that, but she didn't know that we knew how she felt. We knew that she thought that we would never walk among the stars with *The Ones*."

"But we knew that we would."

"When the training was done, the *Sky Pilot* candidates were greeted by all of humanity, who wished us well – even if everyone couldn't go, at least a few could. A huge corporation named "StarDrive Logistics" was formed. They made lots of very fast rocket ships that we were supposed to pilot, and then they contacted *Deep Blue*."

"She could barely contain her laughter at their pathetic attempt to walk among the stars: puny beings with puny rocket ships, but there we were, humans hadn't given up."

"She said *'Don't you humans understand? Travel by mechanical device takes eons and eons to complete. You must put aside those silly ideas about chemical-powered rockets. Even the boldest nuclear-powered ship would take billions of years to cross just my territory, let alone venture into one of the surrounding neighborhoods. Only a Sky Pilot can show you the way.'*"

"She spoke to our minds and told us how to fold space so that journeys would be infinitely quick, but we couldn't comprehend what she said, therefore all who tried to fly to the stars died, one after another. These poor, desperate, children were stuck in four dimensions in their minds, and therefore they were doomed to grow old and die. Horrible creatures from Dimension 8 snapped them up in one gulp. Sometimes *Deep Blue* hated herself for making such a flawed race. It was a terrible time of failure and death."

The classroom rumbled to life as the vivid images from Magritte Cymo Fu's mind filled them with wonder and terror. 'How can we do that?' 'We're not capable of that!' 'She's got to be kidding'

Magritte floated back down from the ceiling and stabbed each one of her students with a look that would freeze the heart of a navigation-quasar. "You Can Do This. You can fly the stars with The Ones. Listen, my children, and I shall tell you of my first test as a *Sky Pilot*, and of my failure."

Chapter 5.

"I knew that only the ultimate danger of being a *Sky Pilot* could lead to the ultimate reward – and it was time to try. After all, I was born and bred for the job, and well-trained by the best. Soon, it would be the test of my first trip across. I might die like all the others before me, but like all the others before me, I was arrogant enough to believe that I could succeed."

"One day I heard '*Come to me, Magritte Cymo Fu, my young Priestess*' as *Deep Blue* spoke into my mind, just as I was awakening from a long sleep. '*You shall fly among the stars today. Are you ready for the test?*'"

"I took a deep breath and worried about my continuing fear of heights. And then I remembered Yi, 易, and all the training became easy, and the changing dimensions became simple, and the part of me that was immutable, could not be crushed by time and space. "I am ready, Mistress," I said."

"*Deep Blue* lifted me high above Earth and breathed a path to the stars for me. I spread my arms thus, to heavens' call, and went forth as a soul who was ready to walk the stars with *The Ones*."

"But that day, flying among the stars was not my fate. When I glanced at the ground, far below, I panicked. My fear of heights overtook my training and I fell and fell. I was about to die when *Deep Blue* reached out and cushioned my fall."

"I'm sorry," I told her. "I have failed you. What shall I do now? I can't serve you any more, since I am flawed."

"*No, my child, you have not failed me. I have failed you. My expectations were too high for the first test. Let's train some more, and then we shall try again, okay?*"

"I was crying, and then *Deep Blue* began crying, and she hugged me. '*My daughter, have no fear of failure. I, too, have failed. But I tried again.*'"

"And did it work?' I asked."

"*My child, I don't know yet*', was all she would say."

"I returned to the *Temple of Mother Nature* for more training, and more, and more, and more."

"*Deep Blue* came to me many times during my meditations, and in my sleep. '*You must understand how vital it is for you to succeed*', she always said, but she didn't say why. However, ideas leaked from her mind into my mind, and I saw a horrible creature named *Infrared*, and another creature named *Dark Violet* – she couldn't hide them from me. I knew that they meant to harm all humans, and especially me."

"While I slept, she Danced with me in my mind, and showed me moves that were impossible to do in 3 dimensions, so I knew that she was preparing me for more. The priests taught me more and more of how to control my fears, and I grew less-fearful of heights as time went by. Some nights she Sang to me, so the gatekeepers of Dimension 9 would open their gates and let me fly through their world."

"One day, *Deep Blue* disappeared. I kept my spirits high for a long time, but *Deep Blue* seemed to be gone. I called out for her, but there was no answer for a long, long time. I finally decided that she had abandoned me, like my parents had abandoned me – there were more important things to do in the

Universe than teach a silly Goth girl how to be a *Sky Pilot*, I figured. I stormed out of the Temple, and decided that I'd never return. 'Course I couldn't have known that *Deep Blue* was at a critical point in constructing the new solar system called Antiminus, deep in the Deneb sector. I was just acting like a spoiled brat, and I'm sorry I did that."

The classroom gasped – they'd never heard that the *First Sky Pilot* had quit during her training. 'Then what happened???' they all asked at the same time.

Magritte drifted slowly down from the ceiling and took a deep breath as she recalled the pain of the most horrible day in her life – which was also the most beautiful, as it turned out.

"One night I was dancing at the club, and deep in my mind I heard a horrifying scream from *Deep Blue*. '*You're miserable!*' she shrieked. And then I heard her rushing through the 11 Dimensions towards Earth. But she was just a tad slower than when the Universe was younger.

"The horrifying creatures known to me as *Infrared* and *Dark Violet* had both flung Death-planetoids towards Earth at the same time. *Deep Blue* was rushing to save her creations, us, from extinction. Just as she arrived, the two giant boulders struck her from different angles and sent her into a spin towards the Sun, mortally wounded. I didn't hesitate for an instant. '*I'll save you!*' I shouted, and my dancing changed from elemental Goth to advanced-Dimensional in a heartbeat."

"As I shifted effortlessly from Dimension 4 to Dimension 5, and then higher, my horse DNA outraced *Deep Blue* to the edge of the Sun. And then I turned and twisted through the higher-dimensions. The creatures from Dimension 8 snapped and growled, but I just told them as I passed '*It is simple and free to dance*', and I laughed for the first time ever, and it was a good laugh, heard throughout the Old Universe. I easily plucked *Deep Blue* from the fury of the beating heart of the sun and tumbled back to dimensions that were far better known to me – I had saved her from certain death."

"*Infrared* and *Dark Violet* heard my laughter and saw *Deep Blue* soaring the 11-dimensional thread of the Universe with one of the hairy children of the almost-forgotten planet called Earth. They called words of encouragement to *Deep Blue* because they didn't realize that any of her children were capable of walking the stars, and they apologized to her out loud. And then *Deep Blue* laughed for the first time – she was suddenly proud to be a mother."

"When I landed back on Earth, I had in my heart and in my mind a ticket to the other side. I was finally and surely the *First Sky Pilot*."

Chapter 6.

"But *Deep Blue* still had a bone to pick with *Infrared*. He'd almost wiped out her cute race of sentient beings, and after all, we were her children, not his. She'd avoided *Pure White* for eons because she didn't want to get his stern look when she tried to explain that the hairy children on Earth were worth saving. Now, finally, she had cause to visit her father, and she decided to take her star pupil with – and that would be me."

"*'Young Magritte, would you join me on a visit to my Father?'* she asked."

"Sure," I replied. "Where does he live?"

"*'At the Core'*, was all *Deep Blue* would say."

"On our way there, I Danced the ancient Dance, and the Dimensions shrank away behind me. Sometimes my laughter echoed down the halls of Dimension 8, and I knew that the strange entities therein were terrified of it. I sang the strange Song, and passed easily through the gates of Dimension 9."

"As we traveled, I realized that *Deep Blue* had changed – she was very much like the sister that I had wished for when I was younger."

"*'My father is very stern'*, she said suddenly."

"I explained 'My father is too. It's because he makes too many rules.'"

"*'My father does too. He is Pure White, so the rules he makes are for the Good of All.'*"

"My father thinks that too, but he's wrong: people work better without a lot of rules."

"*'What about gravity and the laws of physics? What would your Universe be without them?'* she wondered into my mind."

"I laughed at her: 'Your father has set a speed limit on light, but we're here, Dancing and Singing our way around the Universe, on the threads that pierce each Dimension. That violation of the rules sounds like you want the speed limit to only apply to others, not *The Ones*. Seems a little two-faced.'"

"*Deep Blue* knew that she'd been insulted, but she didn't have a reply ready. We flipped and turned again and the sparkling light of the Core finally became visible."

"*'How do you deal with your father?'* asked *Deep Blue*."

"I mostly just try to love him. He's off in his own world most of the time, and he doesn't even know that I exist unless I create a ruckus. When everything's going fine, I'm out of his life. That's why I became a Goth."

"*'Goth? What's that?'*"

"I explained 'We're really a group of free-thinkers, but more than that, we dress a certain way so that we recognize each other. Watch this'," as I mussed my pink-spiked hair. 'See: that freaks people out, but it doesn't really mean much. Sometimes acting weird is the only way you can get anybody's attention.'"

"*Deep Blue* looked at me closely and suddenly, great lightning bolts formed arches around her head. 'You go girl!' I laughed at her, and she laughed back. Then I saw that she'd formed 9 energy rings that looked like a corona, expanding from the Sun, and she planted them on one side of her face."

"Mean," I told her, and tried to high-five her, but of course that didn't work."

"She winced in pain: '*Ear rings are too hard if you don't have ears*' she said, and then we both laughed so hard we cried as we tumbled the Dimensional webs, just being girls."

"Finally she spoke again. '*But you obey your father all the time, right?*'"

"I told her 'Not exactly: see, his ideas are good for him, and mine are good for me, understand?'"

"'*Not exactly?*' she muttered, since the thought of disobedience had never occurred to her."

"'*My brothers make me mad!*' she stated bluntly, as we rounded an acute curve in Dimension 10."

"'Mine, too', I assured her."

"'*Well, how do you deal with that?*' she asked in earnest."

"'Simple', I told her. 'I ignore 'em. Men are just boys, off in their own testosterone-laden Universe – they have a whole set of problems that we don't want to get involved with.'"

"*Deep Blue* was confused. '*Eh? What's that? How can you ignore problems? I always try to solve problems. Like when the second Death-asteroid hit your planet, I dropped everything and came running. I wanted to help you out.*'"

"I challenged her thinking: 'Sure, but wherever you were, what happened to them when you split suddenly? Maybe that planet will have so many mosquitoes that nothing but plants can exist – did you think of that? Sometimes when you think you're doing a good thing, it's a bad thing. And sometimes when you think you're doing a bad thing, it turns out good. Look, we girls have enough of our own problems. Sometimes we want to be silly and have fun, and sometimes we want to be serious and bear children. Men can never know that range of feelings – they're driven by other, more primitive things.'"

"*Deep Blue* pondered for a moment. '*I think you may be right – sometimes I'm stressed and I don't know why.*'"

"I chuckled. 'Shoot, that's called a bad hair day – that's just proof you're female, 's all.'"

"The white light at the Core was breaking up into multiple rainbow shades as we slowly tumbled through the lower dimensions and stopped, stock-still at the feet of *Pure White*. A rainbow of infinite colors emanated from his head. The lines of color connected his thoughts to each one of his children. But I could see that many of the colors that sprang from the rainbow fount of his head didn't get very far before their light petered out."

"The old, old entity looked into my mind and spoke, but '???' was all I heard."

"When I didn't answer, *Deep Blue* realized that there was a communications failure. '*Father, this is the First Sky Pilot from the race called 'humans' at the eastern edge of my area. I don't think she can hear you.*'"

"He said *'That's on purpose, daughter – is this another one of your 'Special Needs' children like those idiotic dinosaurs you brought last time? I didn't know that these hairy creatures could fly. How did that happen? Infrared told me that an accident had wiped them out.'*"

"Deep Blue explained: *'Father, she is the first human Sky Pilot, and I taught her. The race called 'humans' is not what I expected, but it's what I produced. I'm very proud of them. As far as 'an accident', Infrared could not be farther from the truth. He and that incorrigible Deep Purple and Dark Violet smashed a Death-asteroid into the planet called Earth. They did it on purpose, and it almost sterilized the whole planet and destroyed these delicate creatures.'*"

"Pure White thought-spoke again: *"You need to go back to the Deneb sector and finish Antiminus. The life forms there have called to me for help. You need to finish your work, not skip around the old sector, so."*

"She cried *'But father...'*"

"But Pure White cut her off in mid-sentence: *"Deep Blue: Go now. Finish your work on Antiminus."*

"Deep Blue planted her hands on her hips and said in a cold voice *'No, father: I won't. Humans are ready to walk the stars with us, and this human is proof. I shall concentrate on training them.'* She reminded me of me, when I really wanted an answer from an adult, and they weren't taking my question seriously."

"*'No, you won't!'* thundered Pure White, and the black holes of the Core trembled from his might."

"*'Yes, father, I will'*, she insisted. *'You don't know everything. This time, I'm right. Humans have earned their rightful place in the stars, and I am their mentor. You've spent too much time in the Core – you need to get out and see the new Universe that has been created.'*"

"Pure White shook with rage. *'Daughter, are you defying me?'*"

"Deep Blue pulled herself up to her full height and announced *'Yes father: your wisdom has failed you. You are disappointed: you think that these small mammals are not up to your standards of Sky Pilots, but they are – they just don't look or act the way you expect. They are stubborn and willful, and they secretly worship me, but I shall lead them to the webs of space-time, and help them fly. They are mine, and I love them.'* I was scared – Mother Nature, aroused and mad, was a terrifying sight to behold."

"A long period of silence followed. Pure White stared at the tiny spike-haired human, who stood there facing him directly – that was me. I just planted my hands on my hips, like Deep Blue, and I waited for him to decide what he'd do – to me, with me, or for me – but I wasn't going to be bullied by him, that was for sure. If this guy thought he was a bad dude, he was going to have to deal with two shriekin' bad dudettes. *'I've been bullied by worse than you and I've lived on the streets long enough to know that I don't fear you'*, I told him quietly, but firmly. *'Do your worst, and then leave us alone. We just traveled half-way across the Universe, but if you're going to be mean, Deep Blue 'n me are outta here!'*, and I reached for her hand."

"Pure White pondered the outburst from a life form that he thought was obsolete and extinct – and surely way too small to be making such bold statements. And then he chuckled and I heard his thoughts to Deep Blue: *'Daughter, now I am pleased. Your brothers and sisters have never been bold enough to stand up and fight for any race that they created. They had many blunders, and they simply abandoned the creatures and left. Your willingness to work with these tiny mammals is worthy of The Ones. You*

shall work with your humans; and when you are done, bring them to me, so that I may learn their ways. I need to learn how they made you so strong."

"She explained '*Father, what I have learned from humans would take a long time to communicate. When they are trained and walking free in the Universe, I shall bring them to you from time to time, and you'll see your grandchildren, and Father: they are very fine grandchildren indeed.*'"

"I remember standing in front of the old man. My hair was spiked purple, pink and blue that day, and my eyes were tinted with black and blue mascara. I had probably a hundred pieces of dull silver stuck out from me at odd angles. Bits of star stuff, captured from Dimension 6, during a spectacular tumble into Dimension 7, stuck to my long black dress. My hands were on my hips, and I looked at the old, old spirit and smiled. *Pure White* saw that I had no fear – instead, I think, he saw a little bit of himself, but from long, long time before."

"Then he smiled at me, and I broke into laughter. I knew that was the one thing that could be heard in every Dimension, and I saw the tears flow from his eyes and then I wept, too – I'm just a girl, after all."

"*'Come to me, my child. I'm so proud of you'*, he graciously said into my mind."

"And I guess that I flew to his arms and gave him a hug that only a teenager can gift to a grandfather."

"He felt my beating heart, and he knew that it was full of pure and good thoughts for him, and then I pulled out my iPod from my gig bag and offered the ear buds to him. 'Wanna hear some really great tunes?' I asked."

"*Pure White* smiled at me, the daughter of *Deep Blue*, a mammal called a 'human' and he realized that he had a lot of catching up to do. "*Yes my dear, I believe that I would like to hear your great tunes.*" And then, as the black holes in the Core danced and bounced into each other, he took a break. He settled into his chair, and he held me gently as he listened to each and every song."

The classroom saw the sun rise, and Magritte floated down from the ceiling once again. "Time for a break," she said. "Everybody out. Go on now. Come back tomorrow and I'll tell you the rest of the tale. After all, you've only heard about me and my trip to the other side. There's more – much more."

One of the rough-looking Goth boys stood up and asked politely: "Ma'am, what more can there be? You met *Pure White* and saved *Deep Blue*. How can there be more?"

"My dear boy, don't call me ma'am. *Infrared* and *Dark Violet* are now madder than ever. Their Father is constantly pointing to *Deep Blue* and asking them '*Why can't you do that? Why can't any of your creatures fly to me and treat me like that?*'"

"The hatred in their hearts grows every day. We need an army of Goth *Sky Pilots* roaming our part of the Universe, trying to keep them away, lest they destroy us all. *Infrared* has become a true terrorist, and deep in her heart, *Dark Violet* harbors hatred for all things human. They will attack Earth again – it's only a matter of time."

"So we must be ready?" he asked.

"We must be ready, yes. You're going to be the first line of defense against *The Ones*, and it isn't an easy job. Like soldiers everywhere, you will need to be brave when everyone else is too scared to function. The entire human race is counting on you."

"*Sky Pilots!*" shouted the class in unison. And then an ancient voice echoed in their minds: '*Hooah!*' they heard, and they knew what it meant, and they knew that *Pure White* was on their side, and that they couldn't fail. *Infrared* and *Dark Violet* would be defeated, like all other great evil forces before them.

The classroom full of young Gothic-looking soldiers, boys and girls, was ready for battle: spiked hair standing on end, tons of silver crosses hung, earrings spread across their young bodies, tattoos showing. And their teacher was ready, too.

Just then *Deep Blue* looked down from her large white cloud, where she let loose a mother's tear, and then she let through a piercing ray of sunlight onto her daughter, Magritte. And *Deep Blue* was proud – very proud, as only a mother can be, when her sons and daughters go off to war.

Chapter 7.

When the class resumed after 2 days, Magritte, floating just above her stool started out quietly: "I was on a practice flight with *Deep Blue* one time when she started to speak about her travels to other parts of the Universe.

"In the farthest eastern portion of the Universe, Bright Yellow and Peach were happily at work in adjoining quadrants, building races of creatures that were happy and prosperous. Thousands of Sky Pilots shared the 11-dimensional threads that bound the Universe together. There was never war, or even a serious boundary dispute. Everything belonged to everybody, and the deep-rooted training that Bright Yellow and Peach provided caused joy to abound in every creature in their realms."

'Once, when their sister Chartreuse visited, she could not believe the peace and prosperity that was in abundance in every civilization in the 2 quadrants. 'How did you do that, my brothers? Alas, I have not been so lucky. The sludge-creatures that I created never matured. I tried several times now, and nothing, but nothing like intelligent star walkers ever happened.'

'We just decided that this was the way we wanted our children to be, and we bred for this kind of success', answered Peach.'

'Yes, whenever we encountered bad creatures or bullies, we eliminated them from the genetic pool. What's left is countless thousands of billions of caring, loving souls', added Bright Yellow.'

'Chartreuse gasped 'You killed off bad creatures and bullies? Isn't that prohibited by Pure White? How can you do that? I'm stunned!'

'Bright Yellow and Peach both shrugged. 'How do you think you can get thousands of billions of caring, loving flowers without pulling a few weeds?' they both asked.'

'I guess I hadn't thought about it at all – I'm still trying to get viable DNA in my quadrant', replied Chartreuse. 'But I guess I'll have to consider your approach one day.'

'Chartreuse sailed away to the west and north, way past the Core, which she caught a glimpse of, as she passed. Pure White looked up and saw her pass, but he was way too busy trying to sort out a million black holes to really get involved in her trip.'

'I wish you could get out for a walkabout, Father. You'd be pretty amazed at what's going on, especially east of here.'

'I'm sure, dear, but if I stop juggling these black holes for even a brief moment, the entire Universe will collapse.' He didn't even have time to ask her about her quadrant, as she sailed by.'

'Maroon, Plum, and Ultra-yellow lived in quadrants 1, 2, and 3, out from the Core. Chartreuse visited each of them and was amazed at the variety of life forms in their domains. Maroon, my dear sister, how did you get those beautiful sea-creatures to swim among the stars? It is so awesome.'

'Maroon looked at her sister and wondered why she was roaming free, while she, Maroon, was sweating and struggling to keep the two cultures of space-sharks and space-whales apart.'

'Have a nice day, Chartreuse. See you later, Chartreuse. Good bye, Chartreuse,' Maroon called. 'What does she have on her mind, that she can just go cruising the Universe, instead of tending to business –

doesn't she know that there is a Great Task that needs to be accomplished? I wish Father wasn't always so busy. What's he doing that so important, anyway?

'Chartreuse briefly visited the hairy creatures that Deep Blue had created and nurtured. She wasn't impressed.'

'Finally, she swung around the outermost western quadrant of the Universe and then she saw her brother Infrared toiling with multiple hot blue suns. He hadn't seen her since the Beginning, so he hollered and waved at his sister, and she came to him.'

'So good to see you, my brother. How's the last few millennia been to you? Seen any of the family lately? You're sure out here on the wild fringe, eh?'

'Good to see you too, Chartreuse. Yeah, don't remind me – I've only really seen Dark Violet a couple of times, and, oh yeah, I saw Deep Blue, and her dumb creatures that she calls 'humans' – you should see them: dark, tiny, hairy things – quite disgusting.'

'I did see them, and I agree: they're not worth looking at. What did she have on her mind, anyway? Well, I haven't been very lucky – I can't get DNA to live in my quadrant. How 'bout you?'

'No luck here. I think these hot suns kill off life within a certain range, so I'm herding them together, and when that's done, I'll try to create life, way over there, to the south.'

'I hadn't thought of that, Infrared. My quadrant has a Blazar right in the center, and you know how radiant and dangerous they are. Maybe that's been the problem all along. I don't have a clue how to go about fixing that, though. You can't just flick it away with a finger.'

'Yeah, like a Death-asteroid, or a planetoid', he replied, offhandedly.'

'What does that mean?' she asked, sensing that something was up.'

'Ah, er, nothing. Once, I helped Deep Blue clean off one of her worlds, 's all.'

'You're not supposed to do that – that's why we have quasar-bounded areas that we're all supposed to honor. You can't harm Deep Blue's creations – Father would be very disturbed.'

'Yeah, well, I'm mad at Father. 'Where's my grandchildren, he says. 'Why aren't they like Deep Blue's creations?' he asks. Those snotty little so-called humans are a real pain in the butt, if you know what I mean – Pure White was simply gushing at how great the humans were, once he met one. If he'd given me a decent quadrant, I'd have brought forth life – but look around: did you ever see a worse quadrant anywhere?'

'Don't get upset, brother – it's not Father's fault that every quadrant isn't created equally ready for life. You'll get it. I like your idea of herding the suns to a certain part of the quadrant – I'm sure it'll work.'

'Yeah, well you should be upset too. You haven't been able to create any life, and that's our Great Task, so-called. Don't you ever just want to get even? Don't you ever want to just crush the life out of a few of these bubbly, fun quadrants where our brothers and sisters didn't have to do any real work to get life forms? Don't you ever get upset?'

'Chartreuse looked at Infrared – she was starting to burn with anger. It was true that her quadrant was lifeless, and she'd seen other lifeless quadrants during her walkabout. 'Yeah, I get upset, but there's really nothing to do. Father knows best. He chose the quadrants for us.'

'Yeah, but I didn't want this useless quadrant, and I told him that from the start. Dark Violet and I are a few billion years behind Deep Blue, over there, and we're mad – we won't take it anymore. Would you care to join us? We're going to Father for a long conversation – want to come along?'

'I don't think he's got the time to resolve the issues. Last time I saw him, he was so busy juggling the black holes in the Core that he barely waved to me. Besides, what do you think he's going to do? He never changes his mind. It'll be like talking to a wall.'

'You're right, sister. He's not going to be any help. I just wish that Deep Blue didn't keep rubbing in her success with the humans – it makes me sick to hear about how much Father likes them. Someday, something real bad is going to happen to their puny little planet. Just an accident, I'm sure.'

'Chartreuse suddenly understood what Infrared was asking for. 'A mistake, or an accident, yeah, I understand – they happen all the time, don't they? A little setback for humans would buy us some time for the Great Task, wouldn't it? Of course, it would be a tragedy.'

'Chartreuse quietly replied 'Of course.'

"I couldn't believe what I was hearing, so I interrupted Deep Blue. 'So this was the plot: an accident would happen that would bring about the end of the human race, make Pure White stop asking about grandchildren, and totally destroy Deep Blue's spirit – what a great deal it all was. And only the details of the accident remained to be planned.'"

'Right', continued Deep Blue. 'Infrared called Dark Violet, but she was off with some new race that she was creating, so she couldn't join them.'

'Chartreuse winked 'No matter. She'll be glad when she hears what happens.'

'Indeed she will.' replied Infrared. 'Yes, indeed, she will.'

Chapter 8.

The *New Gothic Army* was built one member at a time. The most important qualification was being able to reject dogma – *'the ability to think outside the box'*, Magritte kept emphasizing to her students, *'is more important than being able to discharge a weapon, or do push-ups. We don't know what it will take to defend Earth against Infrared, but conventional thinking will not be what saves us.'*

One afternoon, Magritte was visited by *Deep Blue*, who was obviously in a rush; and in a panic. *'Magritte, I am more concerned than ever. I just found out that Chartreuse has aligned herself with Infrared. It's also possible that Dark Violet may join them. Our whole northern and western flanks are exposed to attack – from the very beings who trashed Earth several times already.'*

"I remember you told me that this happened before several times – I guess we never talked about it happening again. *Infrared* wiped out the dinosaurs, didn't he?"

'Let me tell you: Infrared is very dangerous. He has always coveted this quadrant. How are your plans for a defending-army coming along – I wish we knew more about the timing of Infrared's attack. He wiped out the early life forms on Earth a couple of times – he's just pure mean and jealous.'

"As you know, it's very hard to find qualified *Sky Pilots*. Plus they have to be free-thinkers, for sure."

'I wish my Father wasn't so busy all the time – he could give us some advice.'

"Hey, that's a good idea. I think I'll ask my dad for some advice, too."

"Magritte! I'm so glad to see you, dear," her father said. "I'm so sorry that I've been this busy. Please tell me everything that's going on in your life. I see some new rings in your cheek – I guess you must have been doing some traveling?"

"Oh, daddy," she exhaled. "I know that you're a busy judge. Have I been doing some traveling... Where do I begin?"

"Well, just last week, a couple of agents from the FBI came around and asked questions about you. I told them that I didn't know exactly where you were, but they kept pressing me for answers. They said something about you flying to another planet?"

"Well, it's like this daddy: first, I'm a *Sky Pilot*, and I'm darned good at it."

"Ummm... sorry Magritte – I was told that you were bred for that, and I kind of know what that is, but not really," he shrugged. "I'm just a judge: I know the law. What is it you really do?"

"Hmmm. Well look daddy, there're these other dimensions, see? And I can travel between them, in a certain way. Remember when I took dance lessons and gymnastics; well, they came in mighty handy. Then there're these entities, kinda like made out of pure energy or thought, and they have a connection to their Father, who is in the core of the Universe – he's called *Pure White*, and his children, these beings, are called by their color – my friend is called *Deep Blue*. She's like, ah, like Mother Nature in some ways. She made us, or at least I think she did. Anyway, she saved Earth from some of the other beings in the Universe who are mean – get it? I fly around the dimensions to help keep Earth safe."

Magritte's dad just looked at his thin, Goth-clad warrior daughter, and then he smiled and crossed his arms across his chest. "Magritte, you've always been pretty far out there, so I'm betting that you'll find a way to keep Earth safe. Anyway, I wouldn't want to be on the other side. Just what's involved?"

"Well, daddy, I'm building an army of *Sky Pilots*, and then we'll attack the mean entities, I guess. I don't know how we're going to do that, exactly, because they're huge and powerful, but we'll have to think of something."

"Why not glue the dimensions back together to stop the mean entities?"

Magritte put her hands on her hips and looked at her father. "I didn't know you thought outside the box like that, daddy. What do you mean by that?"

"You said that the mean entities are connected to their father, who is at the core of the universe – I'm just guessing that they've been cut off from him. So if you glue some of the dimensions together, then their connection to their father will be restored, right? Maybe? If he's at the core of the universe, I'm betting that he's very wise, and he'll stop his children from being destructive, right?"

"You *are* a free-thinker, daddy – I had no idea. Anyway, I'll have to ask *Deep Blue* about that – she might know how to do it. What did the FBI guys want, anyway?"

"The President is trying to locate you – I guess he wants to talk to you and get your advice on something. Maybe you should call the White House and ask for him. Here, you can use my phone."

"Okay, daddy. Thanks."

"White House switchboard. How may I direct your call?"

"My name is Magritte Cymo Fu and I want to talk to the President."

"Yes, we have your name on the list here. Please hold on and I'll connect you. Have a nice day."

She stood, waiting while the phone played elevator music, and then, like lightning, an FBI SWAT team broke down the Judge's chambers door. "This is the FBI. Get down on the floor. *Now!*"

In a heartbeat, Magritte was handcuffed and whisked off to a waiting black van. Her dad was guarded by 3 heavily-armed agents and told "Stay still, sir. Your daughter won't be harmed."

Chapter 9.

Magritte could have easily escaped the bonds that held her – obviously her knowledge of all 11-dimensions left her unshackled from the 3-dimensional world of handcuffs and the 4-dimensional world of FBI agents. "What do you want?" she demanded. "I want to know right now: What's the deal? Otherwise, I'm leaving."

But before they could answer, *Deep Blue* came into her mind – she had thought-shared with Magritte from afar many times. This time, she'd been roaming the northern and western quadrants, gathering intelligence. By chance, she came upon *Dark Violet*, who was draping a planet with herself, and encouraging the life forms to grow and prosper.

Magritte heard '*Dark Violet, we need to talk. I know that you sent a planetoid against Earth a long time ago. I need to know now if you're allied with Infrared, because if you are, then you and I are going to fight it out right here and now. Earth is mine, and I intend to protect it, get it?*'

'*Sister, first I want to apologize. When I sent that rock crashing into Earth, I was very frustrated with a lot of things. Now that I've created life, I really see what that means. It's affected my spirit in ways I didn't think possible. I would never abandon my O-oleans, so I understand about your children, too. No, dear, I'm not going to do anything against Earth ever again. Soon, my O-oleans will be ready to travel, and I hope to send them to your planet for trade and friendship.*'

Deep Blue saw that *Dark Violet* was sincere. '*Thank you my sister. I may need to call on you to help me guard Earth against Infrared and Chartreuse.*'

'*I'll be here, Deep Blue. Just call me.*' And then she draped herself all over O-olea and rained some cooling, refreshing rain.

Deep Blue traveled the outer quadrants and eventually caught up with *Bright Yellow* and *Peach* who both suggest eliminating *Infrared*. '*He's a bully*', they both said at once. '*Yeah*', said *Peach*, '*he's not connected anymore. It's almost like he's lost his light.*'

When *Deep Blue* heard enough, she was convinced that *Infrared* was a grave danger to Earth, and there was no time to lose. '*Next, I've got to get back to Earth – I must make sure that Magritte's army is prepared for battle.*'

As suddenly as she appeared in Magritte's mind, *Deep Blue* was gone. Magritte was suddenly back to the reality of the back seat of a black van, surrounded by FBI agents.

Chapter 10.

"Miss Fu, the President has been searching for you. We're just here to make sure you get to his office. We'll deliver you to him, and then we'll free you."

When the short caravan of black vans rolled to a stop at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, her handcuffs were removed and she was helped out of the van. "Miss Fu, please follow us," said one of the agents. And then they all disappeared into the White House, where the President was standing, with his arms crossed, and a scowl on his face.

"I hope they didn't startle you? Miss Fu, my name is Dick Fountain," and he held out his hand in greeting. "I really need some time with you. Alone."

She looked around the room and shook back her floor-length black outfit. "Okay, Mr. President. I guess no harm done."

"Please come this way, Miss Fu."

"Ah, Mr. President, please call me Magritte."

"Alright, Magritte. Please call me Dick."

They disappeared into a small elevator and the President punched the Down button. Magritte felt her stomach rise for quite a while, and when the elevator car settled to a stop, the President said "We've got this little 'safe room' down here. Won't you please join me?," and he extended his left arm in courtesy, and they exited into a huge cavern that looked like something out of a sci-fi vid.

"First, Magritte – you are now my *Special Envoy to the Interplanetary Spaces*. You have all the power that my office has. Whatever you need that I can supply is yours. Now tell me how I can help you – the FBI told me that there's a problem with some spirits or beings that want to destroy our planet. Can you please tell me about that?"

"How did you find out? Only a few people know."

"No, Magritte, lots of people know that you're building an army of *Sky Pilots*. Did you think you could keep that a secret? You know that our Agencies listen to all kinds of IM chats, phone calls and just casual discussions. At first, we thought you were some kind of terrorist, because..."

"Cause of the way I dress," Magritte interrupted. "You establishment dudes need to get real – just because Goths have a few body piercings and colorful hair doesn't give you the right to snoop..."

"Wait, Magritte: I'm on your side," interrupted the President. "That's what I told the FBI when they came to me about you. Look at that picture of me when I was a teenager," he pointed to the top of an ancient oak roll top desk. "That's me when I was into punk rock and Goth. I guess you're too young to vote, because everyone in the U.S. news media got their shots in because of all my tattoos and piercings."

Magritte reached out and touched his left ear gently. "Well I'll be darned. You're pierced all over. Too bad they made you take 'em out."

"Well, Magritte, my wife and I still come down here sometimes and relive our youth, shall we say? Anyway, we're here in private, and nobody's listening. Tell me about this *Sky Pilot* thing, and the creatures from another dimension."

"Well, it's like this: in each quadrant of the Universe there are beings or spirits who add life to their area. In the Core of the Universe is their Father, called *Pure White*. They're all connected to him by colors in Dimension 9 and 10."

"Is he *God*?" asked the President. "Sure sounds like it."

"I don't think so. But I think that these were the first intelligent things in the new Universe, right after it started up. *Deep Blue* hasn't told me enough about the beginning, and sometimes the stuff she tells me is way too hard for me to understand."

"I see. Just who is '*Deep Blue*'?"

"She's like what we call 'Mother Nature', I guess. Only, she's responsible for our quadrant, which includes the Milky Way, and other galaxies and stuff. She's really fun, but she can be serious, too. She warned me about *Infrared* – he's the one that's going to destroy Earth. He hates us."

"Now just who is '*Infrared*'? Why's he trying to destroy us?"

"He's mad that his quadrant is on the edge of the Universe, and we're closer-in. Plus, he's jealous that *Deep Blue* created life, and he's having trouble doing that. He's just a mean guy, I guess."

"A bully, okay – I know about bullies, and I bet you do too. So what's the plan? Do you need the Army or the Air Force? How can you protect the Earth from this creature?"

"Nah, your weapons wouldn't begin to affect *Infrared* – he's just too big and powerful. And right now, we don't know how we can defeat him, or even if we can. I'm going to go to the Core with *Deep Blue* and ask her Father, *Pure White* for help."

"Well, Magritte, how can an army of Goths expect to defeat this thing? Let's face it, I know enough to know how hard that will be. I was a bad dude, back in the day, so people left me alone. But if this bully is as bad as you say, then you'll need some mighty powerful help. How are you finding members for your army? What's your recruiting plan?"

"We're not advertising, if you know what I mean – it's all word of mouth. We didn't want outsiders to find out, but I guess we didn't do a very good job of hiding ourselves, did we?"

"No, but that's a good thing. Now I can help you. How about if I handle the advertising and recruiting for you – after all, I am Commander-in-Chief. I bet I can get you lots of good recruits, what do you think?"

"Sounds good to me. Gee, sorry I didn't know that you're cool. Hey, I bet dad's going to be mad. Your guys really broke down his door and scared us both."

"Magritte, they're already fixing it, plus I'm sure they've already explained it all to him. He'll be fine. He's a good judge, and someday, I hope he'll run for the Senate. We need good men like him in office. How about letting me show you around the White House, and then my wife Sandy can join us for dinner. I'll have my helicopter take you home – would you like that?"

Magritte looked at the President and said "Do you realize that I can be home in less than a microsecond? I told you that I'm a *Sky Pilot*. I don't need a helicopter, or anything, in order to move anywhere in the Universe."

"I got that. I was just trying to make up for the rough way that the FBI picked you up. Let's say that the neighbors might be confused. If you come back in my helicopter, they'll know that everything's okay. Get it?"

"Yeah, sorry. Okay – when's the tour?" she laughed. "I'm starved."

"Let's go back upstairs. Here's a cell phone just for you. You can call me 24-7. Whatever you need, you got."

"Okay, thanks Mr. President."

"Dick."

"Okay, Mr. President."

The tour lasted an hour, and the First Lady, Sandy Fountain, joined them in the west Wing, where they were served a nice dinner.

Sandy started the conversation. "Magritte, Dick tells me that you fly, is that right? You seem young to be a pilot"

Magritte squunched up her face and looked at the First Lady. "Well, yes and no. I don't fly airplanes; I fly through the 11 dimensions of the Universe. I'm a *Sky Pilot*."

"I'm not exactly sure what that means, dear. I see you're a Goth, and I've know my husband since he was one, too. Is that thing with the dimensions something Gothic?"

"No, Mrs. Fountain," replied Magritte, patiently. "I travel through the 11 dimensions of the Universe and I'm a Goth chick – they're two different things."

"I see," replied the First Lady, but she didn't.

"Watch." Magritte moved to the other side of the dining room instantly. Then she appeared in the far-corner of the ceiling, and then she was back at the table again. "That's how I do it. I can find the strings and dance on them, or through them, if you want the truth. It's easy."

"Magritte is building an army to defend Earth from invasion by some bad beings in outer space. I'm going to help her draft an army," the President chimed in. "I'll be her recruiter."

"Well, dear, it's all more than I can possibly understand: beings from outer space, strings, and dimensions. Sorry, I must have missed that class at Vassar. You two have fun, and make your army. I'm sure that you'll get along just fine."

Dick Fountain winked at Magritte, and she touched her left ear and made the metal earrings tinkle. Then they both laughed. Finally, Sandy joined in the fun, and they finished dinner on a high-note.

Later that night, the *First Chopper* slowly settled down in Magritte's neighborhood. Everyone in the neighborhood ran out of their houses to see what the racket was about.

"Look, it's that Fu girl. I thought she was arrested," they said.

"Well, that's the President's helicopter, so that couldn't be," they said.

"Still, she's pretty weird – look at that blue hair and those things in her ears and on her face. What makes kids like that?" they said.

"Glad you're home, dear," said her dad, as 40 of her siblings surrounded her on the front lawn.

"Thanks daddy. Good to be home," as she spread her arms and spun around like helicopter rotor blades. "Did those guys fix the door?"

"Yes, dear. And they explained why the President wanted to see you. Is everything okay?"

"Sure daddy. He says he has great hopes for you."

"I'm glad, pumpkin. He's an honorable man. I knew him when he was wearing piercings and tattoos, just like you. Didn't you ever wonder why I never freaked out at your costume and your looks? I just love you as my daughter, just the way you are."

"You haven't called me pumpkin since I was an infant – I still remember it. Thanks daddy. I love you."

"I love you too, Magritte. Let's go inside now – tell your brothers and sisters all about your trip, eh?"

"Let's do that," as they watched the President's helicopter slowly rise and bank to the east for the journey home.

Chapter 11.

Deep Blue and Magritte traveled to the Core, where *Pure White* was busy, trying to keep millions of black holes from sucking in the whole Universe.

"What's he doing, *Deep Blue*?" asked Magritte as they tumbled around the Dimension 11, pondering *Pure White*'s moves. Even though she was familiar and comfortable with navigation through all the dimensions, she never even thought about the kind of dance moves that he was performing – it was incredible to watch.

'I don't understand it all, but we were taught that the Creator put black holes in the center of almost everything, kinda like glue. Every galaxy has a black hole at the center, and when galaxies merge, the black holes gobble each other up and grow bigger. Here at the Core, is where the most black holes are, so the Universe itself has enough gravity to prevent the galaxies from flying apart into nowhere. Father is just trying to get the right balance between the black holes merging and staying apart. If too many of them merge, then the galaxies will come rushing back to the Core, and they'll be gobbled up and crushed. It's just physics – really nothing anyone can do about it.'

'You know about rules: you don't have to like them or agree with them: you just have to observe them. Same here. Same with everything. When it comes down to it, the laws of physics were put in place to benefit everyone. Gravity and centripetal force are always fighting each other for dominance of moving objects. The Universe has a delicate balance because Father takes care of that. And because the Universe is constantly expanding, it's a full-time job juggling the gravitational wells at the Core.'

Magritte never learned any physics, so the whole explanation just went over her blue-spiked head. She just tumbled around the Core learning and listening. "Why can't he just relax for a minute? We need to talk to him."

'Father, we need your advice. Please, Father, do you have some time? We need you now, Father', called *Deep Blue*, in a teasing, come-on voice.

'Sorry, daughter, but the situation here has only gotten worse. I don't have a microsecond to spare.' And then he was gone and busy doing his dance, holding the black holes apart.

"Why..."

Deep Blue interrupted her *'Sorry, Magritte. I guess we'll just have to figure it all out ourselves.'* She was obviously in a rush to get back to Earth, but Magritte was twitching the tips of her fingers in just a certain way, and *Deep Blue* realized once again that her daughter was an exceptionally-gifted *Sky Pilot*.

They tumbled and twisted in Dimension 11, watching in awe as *Pure White* danced a dance that was beyond their abilities, creating enough energy to hold a million black holes in their certain orbits. But suddenly Magritte started to incorporate some of his *Gravity Dance* moves into her repertoire. She felt like her flowing black Goth robe was holding her back, so she flung it off and dropped it down a hole in Dimension 10. "I'm getting this. It's not impossible – it's fun!"

Deep Blue finally tried a few moves and she was instantly able to keep up with Magritte. *'You're right. I didn't know that I could learn new dance moves at my age',* she said.

"You go, girl!," shouted Magritte in near-terminal fun mode. "Check this out," as she incorporated some Dimension 6 flips in and out of Dimension 11.

Deep Blue found herself laughing and having more fun than she'd had in billions of years, across a million star systems. She stopped the twisting dance and looked at her daughter, a human being, who was spinning wildly out of control, naked as a jay-bird, her blue-spiked hair whirling in at least 7 dimensions, and tiny human was laughing like the Universe depended on it. *'I love you Magritte'* she whispered and brushed a finger against her cheek. A tiny bit of static-energy had accumulated while they were whirling through the Dimension 11 dance. It snapped Magritte's face like a fly swatter, and she stopped laughing and spinning at once.

"Ouch! That hurt!" she cried.

'I am so sorry my dear. I didn't expect an electrical discharge. Please forgive me – I'm so terribly sorry. There's more to this Gravity Dance that meets the eye.'

Magritte felt the sting her face and decided that she'd live after all. *"It's okay – I know you didn't mean to hurt me. I'll just put some new rings there to cover up the scar."*

Deep Blue reached over and gently placed 9 silver rings in Magritte's cheek. *'My daughter, I am so proud of you.'* and then she cried a thunderstorm-full of rain, right there in the Core of the Universe, and she didn't care who saw.

Magritte touched her cheek and realized that the rings would be there forever, and then, with great insight, she somehow knew that they were there before forever even began. *"Mostly I don't understand about how the dimensions work, but I understand this: you are, and always have been my Mother, and I will always love you."*

The two school-children / mother-daughters grabbed hands and spun around the Core laughing and twisting and turning without a care in the Universe.

Suddenly Magritte remembered her father's advice: "Hey, my father said that *Infrared* might actually be disconnected from his Father. Maybe that's what makes him so mean. Can we reconnect him, somehow?"

'I'm afraid he has to do that himself', replied *Deep Blue* with a shrug.

"Let's bring him here – surely the colors will reconnect themselves."

'I don't know if that will work, but we can try. In the mean time, we've got to get going. Infrared won't wait much longer. Your new army has to be made ready.'

Magritte knew that *Deep Blue* was right. She stopped tumbling and dancing, picked up her robe and donned it. Then they zoomed and tumbled back to the Milky Way quadrant and she flipped one last time before landing gently on Earth.

Now, Magritte's *New Goth Army* grew by leaps and bounds. The President was a great recruiter. He made a 3-D video commercial. "You may be able to help in Earth's defense" he said. "If you've got what it takes, go to your local recruiting station and take a brief test. If you think outside the box, you might learn to be a *Sky Pilot* and travel throughout the Universe."

Then the commercial showed pictures of some of the members of the NGA with piercings, colored-spiked-hair and a lot of smiles. Finally, the commercial faded to a picture of the President, in his Sunday Goth best. "We're all in this together," he said as he tweaked his earring-studded ear and the sound of metal music, amped up high rang out. Then, he stroked his guitar a lick as the commercial ended.

The buzz was amazing: people who weren't Goths suddenly realized that it was okay to be, well, Gothic.

"It's about free-thinking," they said.

"The earrings don't mean anything," they said.

"Hey, pink and blue hair is cool," they said.

"The President used to be a Goth punk rocker and look how nice he turned out," they said.

In a few months, tens of thousands of new recruits were ready and waiting for training as *Sky Pilots* at the newly-established *Sky Pilot Base School* in northern Alabama.

Magritte looked out at the throngs of recruits and raised her arms above her blue-spiked head. Her black lipsticked lips quietly spoke, and the crowd noise died down.

"You want to be *Sky Pilots*? Some of you will succeed and some won't. For the ones that don't make it as *Sky Pilots*, we need people on the ground here, providing logistics and support for the *New Goth Army*. Can you dig it?"

"Hoorah!" they all cried out.

"Okay, here we go. Team leaders, each of you grab a bunch of these recruits. Let's see who's ready to fly."

The teams split up, and they all suddenly had their hands full with the new recruits. Magritte circulated, helping her instructors wherever she could. Out of the thousands, hundreds would ultimately become *Sky Pilots*, she knew.

"Hey, you're my brother Jeremy!" she cried out.

"Course, silly. Did you think we'd let you have all the fun? Here are all your sisters and brothers. We've all come to support you, Magritte."

Magritte broke down and cried. Her whole family was here, ready to become *Sky Pilots*. "You're the greatest family ever."

"Sure, sis. Just don't cry, okay? It makes your blue mascara run, right?"

"Okay Jeremy. At least you guys can give me a hug."

The group-hug lasted practically forever.

During the winter, most students dropped out because they couldn't conquer the Dimension 4 test, but quite a few remained and learned how to find the threads of the higher-dimensions. There was no way to predict who would make it, and who would fail.

"The NGA looks like a Noah's Ark of humans," she observed one night after graduation. "Two of every kind of human on the planet became a *Sky Pilot* in that class: tall, short, thin, fat, Chinese, German, Greek and Persian, very old and very young. And they're all ready for duty in any Dimension."

Magritte's *New Goth Army* was ready – all they were missing was a battle plan.

"I need a few volunteers to gather intelligence from *Infrared's* quadrant," she said.

Two hundred hands shot up instantly.

"Thank you, friends," she replied as she picked a squad of 8. "Here's the plan: we need to know where *Infrared* is, and when he's planning to launch his attack. Anything you find out will be valuable. Be brave – this will be a very dangerous mission."

The squad disappeared in an instant, and the First Recon Squadron was suddenly far, far away, in a quadrant near the very edge of the Universe.

But the Squad ran into problems quickly. After all, they were not seasoned *Sky Pilots* yet. As they rolled and jiggied through Dimension 8, the worst possible thing happened – they lost their nerve. The horrible creatures with long necks and sharp teeth snapped like razor-whips as the Squad tried to bounce through their territory. One of the old women was cut in half with a pair of jaws the size of Texas. That brought the rest of the Squad to a halt, which was exactly the wrong thing to do.

"Squad! Flee!" shouted the Squadron leader. "We're in grave danger here. You must flee. Remember the Song for Dimension 9. We need to do it right n..."

In the middle of his plea, he was chomped in half. The scream from the other Squad members was heard throughout the quadrant. Mostly, *Chartreuse* heard it, although what she was doing, dipping down into Dimension 8 is questionable, at least. "*What're they doing there?*" she muttered. "*Those little Earth creatures – there can't be that many of them! And how did they get to Dimension 8 anyway?*"

Then *Chartreuse* realized that they must be spies for *Deep Blue*, and she shrieked. "*Infrared! Infrared! The humans have come! Deep Blue sent humans to spy on us.*"

Infrared was mad – madder than he'd ever been. "*My Death-planetoid isn't going to be compromised by a bunch of sissy little human entities, no indeed.*" And then he reached out with a blue bolt of lightning-energy a mile in diameter and 100 miles long. The horrible power of the lightning vaporized some of the Dimension 8 creatures, and gave the Squad time to escape in another direction. Another lightning bolt struck, and suddenly, *Deep Blue* and Magritte Cymo Fu came storming in from near the Core.

"*Stop it you fool! Leave the Earth children alone!*", shouted *Deep Blue*, as she unleashed a bolt of plasma fire in the direction of her brother, and sent 999 huge bolts of lightning in his direction, just for effect.

Infrared was barely able to contain his laughter. "*Sister, I will crush you right here, right now if you interfere with me. You're in my quadrant now, and I will do as I please here!*" The energy in his eyes boiled out in sheets of flames, thousands of miles long.

Magritte was circling close by *Deep Blue* and she said "*It is simple and free to dance.*" And then she danced *Pure White's* dance – the one that he used to keep the black holes in order. Suddenly, the energy generated from the dance created forces in the quadrant that were unheard of since the

Beginning. *Infrared* and *Chartreuse* were flung to the far side of their galaxy. They landed ignominiously at the very edge of the Universe with a great "HMPPPH! THUMP!"

Chartreuse didn't believe the power of the tiny human, so she got up to return fire, but she couldn't walk steadily, so she sat back down again. *Infrared* was out of it for several moments, and then he sat up. He remembered last time that he spent time in the Core, watching his Father juggle the black holes. *'How did she learn my Father's Gravity Dance? It is beyond their pathetic abilities. I'll get even with them!'*

Magritte and *Deep Blue* circled around for a moment in time, and then they left without a reply. *'They deserved that'*, said *Deep Blue*, who was in a huffy mood. *'I'm sorry you had to do it to one of The Ones, that's all.'*

Magritte snapped "Let's find First Recon Squad – right now! They're in big trouble, and the Dimension 8 creatures will be back in less than a moment."

So they swooped down and picked up the rest of the Squad and brushed them off. *'There, now let's sing ourselves into Dimension 9.'*

And as the jaws of death snapped around them, off they went, on their way backhome. But the mission was blown – *Infrared* knew that they were there, and that they were spying on him. When he regained his composure he realized that he needed to launch the attack as soon as possible. *'No more meddling from Deep Blue and her pet. I won't get hit with that kind of gravity wave again. Now where's Chartreuse? We've got work to do.'*

Chapter 12.

'Chartreuse, Deep Blue and her pets know about the Death-planetoid that we have aimed at the Earth.'

'How do you know that?' Chartreuse asked.

'Didn't you see those filthy little spies, crawling around Dimension 8. If those monsters hadn't chewed a couple of 'em up, they'd have found out our plan, for sure. In fact, we have to assume that they found out. We have to find out what they know – it's as simple as that. Let's fling a small asteroid at Earth, just to see how they react. If they realize it's coming, and they defend their planet, then we know what they know, and we can try a different attack. How does that sound?'

'Okay, I guess. But if they don't know, then after the asteroid attack, they'll know for sure that we're preparing an attack.'

'You're right, sister. But we need to find out what they know, and I don't know of a better way, do you?'

'No, I guess not,' sighed Chartreuse.

Infrared picked a small chunk of rock and carefully lined it up. Then he cocked his middle-finger against his thumb and POP! – there it went, a quick trajectory to the 3rd rock of the yellow star called Sol.

"Earth is gearing up for a fight" said the President in his weekly commercial. "If you've got what it takes, we need you, like right now, dude." Two Goths surrounded him and played the new NGA theme song – "Hard rock for Hard times." Then President Fountain grabbed his axe and started shredding. Within a few days, hundreds of new recruits showed up, itching for a fight.

"Where's *Infrared*?" they asked.

"Who's *Dark Violet*?" they asked.

"Let's just kick butt!" they said.

After they listened to Magritte Fu's introduction, they trained hard, and prepared for a battle against giants that were almost incomprehensible in terms of size and strength. But Earth's people, and especially the Gothic teens comprising the majority of the NGA, really had no fear of beings from outer space. "Bring it on!" they said.

And so it happened – a small asteroid, the size of Manhattan Island, came screaming out of the darkness of the western skies and headed for Earth on a vector intended to harm humans as much as possible. And it was gifted by *Infrared*, who was following its progress through *Deep Blue's* quadrant.

Magritte heard a scream in one of the Dimensions, and then a sharp gasp from another one. "Everyone but me knows what's going on – so, what's going on out there?"

She leaped into Dimension 6, 7, 8 and 9 in a heartbeat – and then she heard it: the screams were from Dimension 5, for sure. Someone had been injured down there. "I'll help you – just wait a moment," she cried out.

But it was too late – the asteroid had smashed through a herd of Dimension 5 creatures which were peacefully grazing energy on the slopes of the northwestern quadrant. Now, dozens of the herd were

dead, and their Keeper was in shock. *'Who's the nasty One who did that? These creatures are peaceful energy-beings. Why did one of you fling a rock here?'*

Magritte was instantly alert. She whipped out the cell phone and pushed the single red button on it that said 'PRESIDENT'. It was the middle of the night in Washington, but within 10 seconds, he said "Yes, Magritte. What do you need?"

"Mr. President, you need to launch all your missiles at an incoming asteroid. I'll send you the coordinates and speed information in a few seconds. Can you do that, sir?"

"Yes Magritte. Stand by. Send the coordinates to this number."

Within 5 minutes, hell's fury broke loose in the space, 300 miles above the Earth. Hundreds of missiles, aimed at a particular point in the sky, and coordinated to arrive at the same time, exploded the asteroid into a million bits of harmless space-junk.

Magritte clapped her hands and shouted, and then she spun and flipped in Dimension 6, and then she dropped back down into Dimension 5 and apologized to the Keeper. *'How do you do, sir? I am Magritte Cymo Fu, from the planet called Earth. We destroyed the rock that killed your flock.'*

'Why thank you, little human being. I thought I heard about humans from Deep Blue. Have a nice day, and thanks.'

Infrared watched, his wrath growing. *'Those stupid, hairy little animals have a mighty nasty bite. Next time, they won't have a chance. I've got just the rock for the job.'*

In a moment, Magritte realized "I've got to find *Deep Blue* right now! *Infrared* is responsible for that attack, I'm sure of it. Earth needs a defensive shield, and only she can provide it."

Chapter 13.

Within hours, Russia, China, Iran and North Korea declared war on the U.S. "You have violated all the U.N. treaties," claimed the Russian ambassador. "Exactly what did you think would happen? Were you trying to intimidate us?"

President Fountain called his military chief in the Pacific region. "Admiral Boyn, be prepared for almost anything. I haven't been able to talk directly with the ambassadors of Russia and China yet, and I really don't want to talk to the ambassadors of Iran and north Korea. I should have called them before we wasted that meteor, but there was no time. Now we'll have to play politics. Heck, we'd still be here debating whether we should knock that thing out of the sky, and we'd all be dead by now."

"Yes, sir. Mr. President, we'll get the satellites ready for intense monitoring. In the meantime, there's not a lot we can do, other than tell them what happened. Truth always wins."

"Well Buck, at least you fired everything when I told you to, and you didn't argue. I'm not sure how that Magritte knew where the meteor was going to be, but she sure was right. We'll be seeing meteor showers for a year from that thing."

"Yes, sir. Some of my men had just picked it up on the Early Warning system. We'd have been cooked 'well-done' if we'd have waited for confirmation. She saved us, sir."

"Yes she did, Buck. When I see her, I'll remind her of that. Okay now, keep your head down – those Ruskies might pull off anything."

"Yes, sir. Good night."

But Magritte was on her way to the northwest quadrant, in search of *Deep Blue*. A plan was forming in her mind, and she wanted to ask if it would work. For now, she just tumbled and danced through the dimensions, hoping to find *Deep Blue*, but no luck so far.

The next day, the Russian ambassador visited the White House and delivered a scathing speech to the President. "Your country's imperialism continues to amaze us, Mr. President. Were you thinking that you could destroy our country and then just march in? We will defend ourselves against your aggression, you know that, don't you?"

"Yuri, my friend," started the President. "Here, now sit down here and calm down. We're not in any mood to take over anything. Let me show you the classified satellite photos of the shoot-down yesterday, and then we can talk. Come on now: have a seat."

During the presentation, one of the President's aides arrived with a single sheet of paper, and dropped it on his desk. After the movie was over, the ambassador said "How do I know that you didn't doctor these tapes? They're pretty grainy, just before the missile strike. Your government is trying to do something funny, no?"

"No, Yuri. Here, look at this. We calculated the orbit of the meteor, and it was going to hit St. Petersburg, right here," and he pointed to a large map. "Have you heard of the young lady named Magritte Fu? She's managed to save your country, Yuri. You should be thanking her, not making a fuss about all this."

"Let me look at that trajectory data," Yuri replied. "Yessss, I see it now. It seems you were right, after all. Well, Mr. President, I have to go now – before my government takes retaliatory action that we'll all regret. Have a nice day, Mr. President," and in an instant, he was gone.

"Yes, Premier, I'm sure their data was genuine. Yes, the attack came from outside. Yes, there will be another attack soon. I could tell that the President was very nervous. He is expecting the world to be obliterated by the force from outer space. Yes, Premier, it is the perfect time to attack them – they've expended all their missiles on that meteor. We would not meet any resistance. Yes sir, I will await your decision."

Magritte caught up with *Deep Blue* near a planet called Antiminus, not far from the star called Deneb. "Please help us, *Deep Blue*. *Infrared* launched an asteroid attack against Earth. We were able to destroy it, but now the Earth is in a panic. Every night, small bits of meteor rain down on our planet. Everyone is freakin' out, awaiting our certain destruction. Everyone has lost faith, and they are wandering around in a panicked state of lawlessness. The President called me and asked me to beg you for help, and that's what I'm doing. We need a shield to protect Earth from death at the hands of *Infrared*, and *Chartreuse*, too. Please come back with me."

Deep Blue shook her head in great sadness. '*Magritte, my dear. Do you remember when you asked me "wherever you were, what happened to them?" That's the situation right now on Antiminus. Life forms there are at a critical stage. If I leave them, they're doomed. Furthermore, if I set up a powerful shield to protect Earth, it will tie me up there for a long time, so this whole planet will die. Is that what you're asking for?*

"No, I guess not. I didn't know. Sorry I asked. Humans will have to fight for ourselves, I guess. We have an army, but we don't have a plan. We'll think of something. Take care of your new children," and then she was gone in a tumble, down the Dimensions towards Earth – and certain war – with an uncertain future.

She landed directly on the South Lawn of the White House and brushed herself off. A handful of Secret Service agents surrounded her immediately and when she reached for her special phone, they drew weapons. "Hold on, guys. I need to talk to your boss."

They watched as she slowly pulled the cell phone out of her long black dress and showed them the red button labeled 'President'. They let her push it.

Instantly, President Fountain answered. "Magritte! I need you here *now*! Where are you?"

"Look out your back window, Mr. President. A few of your guards are holding me captive."

The President looked outside and saw the guards surrounding Magritte. He pressed the button under his desk and the room flooded with Secret Service agents in a heartbeat. "*Free her!*" he cried out. "Bring her to me at once!"

The Secret Service agents in the garden immediately holstered their weapons and escorted her to the Oval Office. "Mr. President, Sir. Here she is," and they left quietly.

When the door clicked he said "I'm afraid you have a new role, Magritte. I have so much to tell you and so little time. Please join me in the 'Bat Cave', won't you?" as he swept his left arm towards the secret elevator to the deep sub-basement hideaway.

When they were safely in the Presidential hideout he turned to her and said "First, thank you for the timely warning – that meteor would have crashed into Russia and destroyed millions of lives. By the way, the Russian ambassador owes you a 'thanks', too."

"Next, we're almost at a state of war with Russia and China. They know that we shot all our ready-weapons at the meteor, and they know that we'll take months to build up our supply again. Our intelligence agencies are all clamoring for more information, but they all agree that Russia and China are planning an invasion of the U.S. Magritte: I need you and your *New Goth Army* to defend our country against our own kind! The being called *Infrared* may attack us at any time, but the threat today is from the other side of our world. Will you help me, Magritte? Will you bring your NGA troops in to help out?" the President implored.

Magritte stood there with her hands on her hips and looked up at the President. Then, for no particular reason, she twitched her black fingertips and levitated herself to eye level with him. "What's the deal? You have tens of thousands of troops at your disposal, right? You're the Commander-in-Chief of the world's most feared armed forces. You're asking for help from a bunch of *Sky Pilots*? I'm not sure I understand?"

"If the Russians or Chinese see us step up our activities, they'll launch an attack immediately. Their combined strength, between Russian missiles and Chinese troops would be impossible to defeat. We blew up all our options for peace on that meteor."

"Okay, I get it now. If you move, they'll attack now, but if you stall, they'll attack, just later, right?"

"You've got it, Magritte. You're the Commander of the only force that is unknown outside of the United States. And even if the leaders of Russia and China know about you, they're surely not going to take you seriously, are they?"

"You're right there – one look at us as a defensive force, and they'll think you've lost your mind."

"Right-o. Now here's the deal. I'm going to appoint you to the rank of General of the Armies, which carries 5 stars. All Allied troops will be at your command, but I hope you don't have to use them – we have to avoid a nuclear war at all costs. Billions of lives are at stake here. I want the Generals to listen to you, and I want you to think out of the box, and come up with a solution that prevents war, not causes it. My Generals are a bit.."

"Testosterone-laden?" she laughed. "Sir, I'd be glad to involve my NGA troops. We can go anywhere, unnoticed. We can infiltrate the most tightly-guarded secure area. We can..."

"Keep the peace?" he finished her sentence. "Young lady: I need you to keep the peace. Can you do that with your army?"

"It's not what we trained for, but it's what we must do. Mr. President, I must get going now," and she disappeared instantly.

As he looked around his hideaway, a hundred feet under the White House, his cell phone rang and he flipped it open.

"And, Mr. President: have a nice day!" and then a click followed.

"Assemble the squad leaders at 15:00 hours," she ordered. The hot sun beat down on the *Sky Pilot Base School* buildings on Redstone Arsenal in northern Alabama. "Tonight, we fight."

That afternoon, Magritte pondered the impossible question of how to keep the peace with her bunch of out-of-the-box thinkers known as the *New Goth Army*. She saw a few dozen of them walking around outside. The women wore long black dresses, and the guys wore black-studded jeans. Spiked hair was visible in hues of reds, yellows, blues and greens. Black lipstick and black nail polish was on everyone. Piercings with silver crosses and body rings were everywhere. "My troops," she sighed, smiling. "I'd put them up against any force in the Universe, and I guess I'm going to have to."

The afternoon wore on as she tried over and over again to realize a plan that would work: defeat an overwhelmingly powerful pair of armies without alerting them to the fact that it was the U.S. who was defeating them. Then, stay ready for a possible attack from *Infrared* and *Chartreuse*. "It's enough to get a girl downright depressed," she shook her head and muttered. As she did, a few bits of star stuff fell out of her long hair, onto the floor, and she knew the answer: "I'll..."

Her cell phone shrieked and she instantly clicked it open. "Magritte!" whispered the President in a terrified voice. "It's beginning right now. Russia has just launched missiles against the U.S."

Suddenly, one of Magritte's Captains tumbled in from the outside, formed in the air and came to a stop right in front of her. "Stand by," she told the President. "I have fresh intelligence coming in right now."

A breathless *Sky Pilot* named Sue Lange stood at attention and said "*Infrared* and *Chartreuse* have completed their plan for a double-launch of a train of Death-planetoids. Earth is doomed!"

"Mr. President, as you just heard, the Russian missiles are the least of our worries. I need to go right now." She clicked the phone closed and stared at the evening sky. "I wish *Deep Blue* was here," as she choked back tears.

The eve of battle was suddenly and horribly upon them all.

Chapter 14.

"Captain Lange, I need you to pay attention and do exactly what I do and what I say," Magritte announced to the young Goth Captain, who stood at attention in front of her. "The future of Earth depends on you following my orders exactly."

Magritte explained her strategy and then disappeared into Dimension 5, to find her friend there. "Hopefully, the Keeper of the peaceful energy-grazing entities will help me out. In fact, I'm counting on it!"

"Why yes, little human – I remember you. You tried to help my herd out one time. You were very courteous to an old man. What can I do for you?"

"Sir, I need your help. I need to deflect two Death-planetoids that are heading towards Earth, on a collision course. Can you help me out?"

"Well, I'm not sure? What did you have in mind?"

"I was hoping that your energy-beings could just graze a little of the energy from the area just above the North Pole of Earth. If they just absorb some of the excess energy there, then the missiles will swing wide, and leave Earth's orbit. Can you do that? I'm not asking you to harm any of your creatures, just to move them to a different pasture."

"Why sure. That's no problem. When would you like for me to do that?"

"Right now, sir. I'm going to need to rush so that I can take care of another problem there, but I want to thank you for your help."

"Okay, young human, we're on the move," replied the Dimension 5 Keeper.

Magritte's thoughts were with Captain Lange, but she had to stay here and help with the roundup.

Captain Lange landed in Dimension 8 with her Company of NGA soldiers, who instantly began chasing them. "It's working," she thought, as the evil beasts bore down on her troops.

At her command, the Goths turned on a dime and faced the monsters, who were expecting lunch, but instead they were approaching the most ferocious entities that had ever traveled through their Dimension. "NOW!" shouted Captain Lange, and the *New Goth Army* lifted up and danced *Pure White's Gravity Dance*, which Captain Lange had memorized in one brief moment, courtesy of Magritte.

The herd of beasts stumbled into each other, fell down, and stopped with a horrible scream that ripped through all the lower Dimensions. A few of the Goths were crushed by the out-of-control herd of beasts. Captain Lange watched in horror, but she had only one thing on her mind: hope – hope that Magritte knew *The Ones* well enough.

Dark Violet heard the screams of the Dimension 8 creatures and watched the brave Goths die – she'd been busy creating a race of human-like creatures, so she empathized with Earth's *Sky Pilots*.

She looked down at her planet and said "I'm sorry, children. I have to help your cousins," and she flipped through the Dimensions and headed towards the screaming Dimension 8 mess.

"*Dark Violet*, reporting for duty," she announced as she streaked across the Dimension 8 gateway, and just in time, too. The Dimension 8 monsters were snapping at the invaders, and they had *Sky Pilots* on the top of their dinner menu.

"*Dark Violet*, I'm Captain Lange. Please assist these *Sky Pilots*. We're trying to drive these entities into the path of the two Death-planetoids that are heading towards Earth. If you drive them from behind, we will lead them from in front."

'*Okay, Captain*', she replied. '*These bad-boys have been out of control for a long time. They're mean-tempered, foul entities. If you're ready to lead, then I'm ready to drive them.*'

Dark Violet cracked a 1,000 kilometer-long energy-whip that drove the Dimension 8 beasts on a charge across the Universe, towards the Death-planetoids. Even at 1,000 million kilometers per second, the huge rocks were slow, compared to a herd of terrified Dimension 8 creatures being whipped into frenzy by an enraged daughter of *Pure White*.

Captain Lange's army of *Sky Pilots* split into 2 groups, and the Dimension 8 creatures split up too, hoping to catch them and devour them. But of course, they were no match for the *Sky Pilots*, who were able to move in all 11 Dimensions.

As they all crossed paths with the Death-planetoids, Captain Lange shouted "NOW!," and her Company stopped on a dime, but the beasts overtook them – they couldn't stop fast enough. Suddenly: BANG! THUMP! BANG! The Death-planetoids slammed into the stumbling herd of Dimension 8 entities, mowing them down and destroying them.

Captain Lange looked at the carnage and suppressed a shout for joy – she'd lost several of her troops, so there would be no celebrating today. She looked over her shoulder at the area of the Milky Way where she knew Magritte was going to be. "Luck, girl," she mouthed.

"All right, Company. Well done. Now let's pick it up and head for Earth. We're going to be needed there very soon."

On the way home, *Dark Violet* danced with them all the way to Earth – she was proud that she'd helped these humans out. '*Building a race of creatures like this is going to be fun*', she said to Captain Lange.

"Yeah, but remember, we can be a challenge sometimes, too."

'*Copy that*', replied *Dark Violet*, with a chuckle.

Chapter 15.

Magritte waited patiently as the Dimension 5 Keeper moved his herd close to Earth – it seemed to take forever, but she dare not push him.

"Thank you for all your help," she said to him.

"Oh, no problem, little human. *Deep Blue* is a good friend of mine. She helped me gather energy for my herd when one of the stars went out."

Finally, they arrived, and within seconds, the Russian missiles were visible, arcing towards the U.S. But the Dimension 5 animals were hungry from the long drive across the quadrant, and as they chomped down on the available energy fields, the missiles started falling harmlessly to Earth, and many of them fell into the Arctic Ocean.

Magritte pumped her fist in the air. "*Take that!*" she cried out to no one in particular. Then she watched as dozens of new missiles were launched from across Russia and China. "My, aren't we in a snit?" she quipped.

The Keeper and his herd grazed on the fresh energy field, which meant that none of the missiles had the slightest chance of hitting anything.

Magritte whipped out her special cell phone and pushed the button. In a second, President Fountain answered. "Magritte! What's going on there? NORAD tells me that the missiles are falling out of the sky! Is that true?"

"Yes, Mr. President. Let's just say that a kind rancher is grazing his herd nearby. Have you spotted the incoming Death-planetoids yet?"

"We saw two of them explode, just near Jupiter. Was that you're doing?"

"Nah, I delegated that activity to Captain Lange. Glad to see she succeeded."

"Goodbye for now," said Magritte, who suddenly realized that she was perspiring like a spring shower.

Dark Violet suddenly sensed *Infrared's* shriek of madness throughout the quadrant. '*Captain Lange, I think you need to know that Infrared is very, very mad. He'll probably launch another Death-planetoid soon. I don't think we can use the Dimension 8 entities again.*'

"Yeah, that was pretty much of a one-shot gamble," she replied. "Got any ideas?"

'Well, I'm going to be needed back on O-olea in a few cycles, but until then, I can guard your planet against my brother's rocks – how about that?'

"That's very gracious of you, and I thank you kindly. I hope your children have a lot of you in them – you're a good Mother."

Dark Violet just blushed and remained quiet.

What Captain Lange saw was a series of pulsing, purple energy rings rising from *Dark Violet*, who looked just like the other spike-haired Goth warriors. "Glad to have you on the team, soldier," she said.

Dark Violet pulsed purple with pride.

Magritte finally had to play her last card. "I have to stop this craziness once and for all. We can't have crazy entities flinging rocks at Earth every time they get mad. I'm going to the Core for help. Pure White: you're going to help us. Busy or not, here I come."

Chapter 16.

As Magritte landed at the feet of *Pure White*, he looked down at her, surprised. *'What brings you here, child? Where is Deep Blue? Is there trouble?'*

Magritte floated up to his eye level and quietly said "Grandfather, we need your help. *Infrared* and *Dark Violet* have threatened the Earth several times over the planet's history, but that has to end. You need to stop them from ever attacking us again. Will you do that for us?"

'My child, I just can't. If I leave the Core, the black holes will win their battle, and the Universe is doomed. As important as your request is, I just can't do it. I can't leave here – the safety of the entire Universe is at stake.'

"I can Dance your *Gravity Dance*. I watched you do it last time – watch."

Pure White watched as the young *Sky Pilot* danced the *Gravity Dance* just so. *'I see that you really can do it. Alright then: I'll help out with your request and I'll be back as soon as I can. Can you hold on until I return?'*

"Yes Grandfather. And thanks – I love you!" she shouted as he disappeared in a great arc towards the northwestern quadrants of the Universe.

'Son, my son: why do you disturb these human creatures?' *Pure White* asked as he entered *Infrared's* quadrant. 'Can't you see that they're your nephews, and my grandchildren?'

And as he entered the quadrant, he saw *Infrared* lining up a whole series of Death-planetoids. *Infrared* stopped and stared – he never expected to see his Father out this far in the Universe.

'Father!' was all he said as suddenly the *Infrared* color from his head re-connected with the rainbow of colors from his Father's head, and he was at once peaceful and feeling fine.

'I don't know what got into me, Father. I haven't been feeling good for a long time. I'm so glad to see you. Who is minding the Core?'

'My granddaughter from Earth. She's a first-class Sky Pilot. I have great hope for her. Now where's Chartreuse? I need to reconnect with her, too.'

'Over there', said *Infrared*, pointing east.

'I'll be back, son.'

When *Pure White* entered *Chartreuse's* quadrant, a blinding bright yellow-green light jumped from him to his daughter.

'Father!' she cried. *'I wasn't expecting you. Can you stay for a while? I've missed you so much.'*

The war was over.

Magritte was relieved to see *Pure White* return – had he picked up a shade or two of color? Even though no time passed in Dimension 11, she was feeling the strain of the *Gravity Dance*. Following close behind him was the *New Goth Army*, with Captain Lange in the lead.

As *Pure White* took over the Dance, Magritte shook her head just to hear her metal's dull ring. "Good afternoon, Captain. Report."

"Eight casualties, sir. *Dark Violet* will be here shortly. 800 Dimension 8 entities killed in action. Sir."

And then they both high-fived and spun around the Core as *Pure White* juggled the black holes.

Dark Violet arrived and said hello to everyone. '*Father, these are very brave entities, even though they're very small.*'

'I agree. Bravery is where you find it. It never has anything to do with size.'

Magritte and Captain Lange mourned for their lost comrades, and then they agreed to have a celebration when they returned to Earth.

'I have to leave now' said *Dark Violet*. *Something special is about to happen on O-olea.'*

"Good bye my friend," said Captain Lange. "I hope to see you again."

And then *Dark Violet* was gone in a flash.

Magritte watched *Pure White* dancing, and then she commented "Did you pick up a little color on your trip out there? You seem to be livelier than last time I saw you."

'I did, young one. I was able to reconnect with two of my children', he replied. *'That was a very pleasant experience.'*

"You know, Grandfather, anytime you want to reconnect with more of your children, I can Dance for you."

'I'd like that, dear child. Come back when you can – I'd like to do a Walkabout, just to see how the Universe is growing.'

Many times over the next long time, Magritte showed up, unannounced and let *Pure White* travel the threads of the Universe, for which he was very grateful. But she was always very glad when he returned!

Chapter 17.

On a cool day in late October, a squadron of *Sky Pilots* from the neighboring northwest quadrant came tumbling, laughing, and dancing in. They had bright purple eyes, long necks, dark skin, 3-fingered hands, with black-painted nails, and purple spiked hair – oh, and they looked like Satan's children – complete with horns and a tail.

"*Namaste*" said a Hindu priest who first spotted the O-oleans in a market in Mumbai, India.

The O-olean leader's name was Axterix, and he looked up *Namaste* in his translation dictionary, but couldn't find it. "I don't understand you, but I bring greetings from O-olea," then he turned to *Sky Pilot* Ju'ul and said "Look up that word – it must be important if it is their first communications."

A dozen women and girls giggled and pointed, and the men surrounding the *Sky Pilots* quickly realized the problem. "You need to wear some clothing if you're going to visit Dehli," the priest said. "You'll catch a cold."

"I don't understand you, but I bring greetings from O-olea."

Ju'ul finally found the word in his translation dictionary. "Commander, here's what the word *Namaste* means: 'That which is divine in me, greets that which is of the Divine one, in you'. That's as close as I can get. I don't know how they can get so many thoughts into one word."

The crowd laughed and twittered "Their voices are so high that we can't understand them," the people said. "Are they from China?"

Axterix turned to his squadron and shrugged. "Their voices are too low for us to understand. Do we have some other way to talk to them? They're obviously all pointing and laughing at us, so they must be happy that we're here; their greeting was appropriate and friendly."

Ju'ul looked at the Earth people and suddenly realized what they were pointing to. "They're laughing because we don't wear external garments. Look, they're all wrapped in some woven material. Earth seems very cool, so that makes sense."

"Will you trade some of your cloth for some of our earrings?" asked Axterix.

"What are they saying?" asked the crowd. "Why are they naked?" "What do they want with us?" Finally a deaf beggar named Gopi saw the commotion and walked over. He signed to Axterix, and waited for a reply.

"Look" said Axterix. "He uses his hands for meaning. They have signs that they use for speech. That's what we need. We can't speak like them, and they can't speak like us." He watched the hand gestures for a minute, and then he repeated some of the signs.

"Look! He's talking to us." The crowd was suddenly happy.

In an hour, they were all exchanging basic nouns and verbs. "We need clothes" signed Axterix, touching the beggar's shirt.

"Aha! They want clothes," Gopi announced, and one of the shopkeepers brought out a stack of white cotton robes, which the visitors quickly donned.

"Thank you," Axterix signed.

The evening passed to night, and the stars of the Southern hemisphere glowed dimly through the haze and smog of India's biggest city. Axterix and the beggar taught each other more vocabulary with hand signs, and then they all laid down on the warm street and fell asleep.

In the morning, a BBC news crew was there to record the great event. The beggar told them "I will translate for you at a cost of 10,000 Rupees," which was quickly produced.

"Tell them welcome and ask where they came from," asked the reporter who shoved a camera in the face of several of the aliens. "Ask them why they look like that."

Gopi and Axterix were communicating well, even with their limited vocabulary. Axterix replied "Our planet is O-olea. It is over there," and he pointed west. "We're here to trade and barter, and meet other *Sky Pilots*. We come in peace."

"They are here from O-olea. They want to trade goods. They are peaceful," Gopi told the reporter.

"Ask them what they brought to trade," she asked.

Axterix produced a large tray of hand-crafted rings and ornamental jewelry, made from a beautiful obsidian-dark metal. "Ooooh," went the crowd. The women all wanted some of the wonderful rings and bracelets. Some of them took off their gold jewelry and placed it on the ground. Axterix looked at their offerings and he laid down some of the black rings. "*Shukria*" the women said. "Thank you," echoed Gopi. Trade and commerce had been established between the far-flung worlds.

From far, far away, *Dark Violet* was watching over her children and smiling – she'd partially patterned them after Captain Lange, Magritte Fu, and the *New Goth Army*, because she saw that they were good, sturdy bipedal beings. When *Dark Violet* used Magritte's tattoo of Satan, she couldn't possibly have known that the tattoos were Gothic in nature, not at all like a heroic image, which is what she assumed the drawings represented. '*Pure White will be pleased. I must go find Deep Blue and tell her the good news.*'

Televi images of a squadron of dark, extraterrestrial, satanic-looking figures, wearing white robes, was way too much for the viewers that night. The BBC reporter got close-up shots of the O-oleans, and also got sound tracks of their unusual high-pitched squealing, which wasn't unlike the sound of a herd of Alabama mosquitoes in the summer.

Axterix looked at the crowd, which swelled larger by the minute. "Well they seem to be pleasant enough. Let's spread out and see the countryside. This is a good planet, it's just very cold," he said as he pulled his new white robe close.

Ju'ul said, "Yeah, their sun's the wrong color. What's that deal?" The O-olean sun, which cooked them all dark black, was much larger and more energetic. "It lacks the bright ultra-violet rays from our glorious sun – too bad. No wonder these humans are so light-colored."

Axterix said "You're a scientist, so I believe you. I thought that all bipedal beings would have tails for balance and support, oh well. Okay, let's go meet the beings who live here – humans are supposed to be interesting. Remember: be friendly. I'm going to look for the human *Sky Pilot* named Magritte Cymo Fu. Coming?" he asked Ju'ul. And then they broke up into small groups and dispersed to the major cities of Earth to trade their wares, but mostly to meet the new race of tailless creatures called 'humans.'

Humans were startled to see the off-world Goths show up and just start selling ear rings and other artifacts, but the O-oleans were friendly enough, and the rings were very nicely crafted. A system of barter was quickly established, but the nagging problem of communications between the two races continued to be annoying. Axterix became very good at signing, and everywhere he went, a deaf person showed up and became his voice to the crowd of startled observers.

"John," Axterix asked of his New York interpreter, "why do humans point at us so? We're wearing clothing now. I don't understand."

John replied "Sir, it's not the clothing, it's your looks. You look like mythical creatures from our past."

"I guess that's good, then?"

"No sir, it's not good at all. You're quite shocking to a substantial portion of our people. You look like children of Satan to us. Let me get a reference for you to study." John brought Axterix and Ju'ul to an internet cafe and used the search engine to find an image of Satan. "Here, sir – that's what you remind us of."

"Why, I didn't know that any of my race had visited earth before! Ju'ul – isn't he from your clan?"

"No, Axterix, I recognize him – he's from the Lax-ola clan."

John suddenly understood what was happening. "Sir, he's a character out of mythology. Satan is the representation of evil to many people on Earth. That's why people are pointing at you. Sorry, sir."

Axterix and Ju'ul looked at each other and then back at the picture. They looked at the large crowd that had gathered outside and they were pointing at the O-oleans. "Well, I guess we'll have to ask our maker about our history. *Dark Violet* must have had a reason for our looks."

"John, we would like to meet your leaders. It is time to exchange formal greetings, no?"

"Well, sir. I heard on the Televid news last night that riots are breaking out all over Earth because of your visit. Sorry, but we're just not used to seeing such creatures walking about as if everything is okay.."

John was interrupted by the thump of a large rock that someone in the crowd sent sailing through the window towards the O-oleans. "Go back to hell, you devils!" shouted a burly construction worker. "Yeah!" said the surging crowd. "Go back to hell!" And then rocks and chunks of detritus pummeled the O-oleans, who instantly skipped out of the way, and out of New York, entirely.

"Ouch, I'm hurt," complained Axterix, rubbing his shoulder. "What did they think they were doing back there?"

"I got hit, too," replied Ju'ul. "Some of them aren't very friendly after all. We better call the rest of our Squadron and make sure they're okay."

"Right," said Axterix. "*Sky Pilot* Squadron, this is Commander Axterix: Report."

The radio hissed and crackled for a minute, and then he heard "Squad 1 reporting: Commander, we've been attacked twice. We're in a country called Ireland."

"Squad 2 reporting: Commander, we're under attack now. We're in a city called Vatican. Our translator was hauled away and beaten badly."

"Squad 3..."

Suddenly, the crack of a rifle rang out and a bullet went right by Ju'ul's ear. "Hit the dirt!" he cried as he jumped across Axterix and knocked him down an instant before the next shot rang out.

"Ooof! Ju'ul, you weigh too much. I'm safe now, if you'll let me breathe. We need to leave now. Let's meet back in Mumbai. They were friendly there. *Sky Pilots: meet in Mumbai!*"

From the relative safety of Mumbai, Axterix met with many human leaders by Vidphone – and they didn't like him. "Mr. Axterix," said the President of the U.S., "wherever you go, you seem to cause problems, or at least problems seem to find you. We've received reports from all over the world about fights, and shooting, and your group always seem to be in the middle of it."

"Sir, we're not responsible for starting the hostilities, and we've tried very hard to ignore the hostile acts against us. We wished to meet with you and other leaders and extend a welcome from O-olea."

"I'm sorry, Axterix, but my schedule is really full, and it will be full for the foreseeable future. Good bye, now."

The same hostile conversation greeted the O-oleans from half a dozen leaders around the world. "They're not very friendly, that's for sure. We ought to go home," suggested Ju'ul.

Axterix shrugged "I haven't met their First *Sky Pilot* yet. I'd like to do that. I think she's in a place called Alabama now. Let's go."

Suddenly the O-olean *Sky Pilots* flipped and danced right to the *Sky Pilot Base School* in northern Alabama.

"Greetings," Axterix said.

"Identification, sir: please show me some identification. You are on a restricted facility. Please put your hands up, sir," said the well-armed Marine who suddenly saw what looked like a dozen brothers of Satan materialize 10 meters away. Within a second, his rifle was leveled at Axterix' head. "Sir: put up your hands now."

Axterix and the Marine had no possible way to communicate, yet Axterix knew that the weapon that was aimed at his head was extremely dangerous and that the young human was under intense stress and could misinterpret any action on their part. "Squad, put your hands on top of your heads and sit down quietly. Do it now."

As they all sat down, the Marine got on his radio and asked his commander for orders.

Minutes passed.

Finally a military vehicle zigzagged across the rocky field and a translator bailed out and approached. "Sergeant, I'm Specialist Rooney, your translator. What do you want me to tell them?"

"I want their identification."

Specialist Rooney signed and Axterix replied to him "Sorry, we don't have any Earth identification. On O-olea, we're well-known and therefore we don't require any special identification. We're here to meet Magritte Cymo Fu – have you heard of her?"

"Ah yes," he pointed to a low, red-colored building across a pond. "She teaches at the *Sky Pilot* school. We can go there now. I'll call for more vehicles, and we'll escort you there."

"Thanks," signed Axterix, "but we don't need vehicles, or an escort." In an instant, they were all inside the *Sky Pilot* school, and who should be floating near the ceiling, but Magritte.

"Oh!" she gasped, and then she floated down from the ceiling, and bowed low before the O-oleans. "Welcome to Earth. I am Magritte Cymo Fu, First *Sky Pilot*."

Axterix signed to her, but Magritte was unschooled in sign language. "We'll wait for the translator," said Axterix.

"Well I don't understand you, but you are my guests here. Please tell me where you came from?"

But at that instant, a very irritated Marine Sergeant burst into the room. "Down on the floor! Now!"

Specialist Rooney signed to Axterix, who immediately knew that they were in grave danger. "Tell the Sergeant that we're not a threat." "Squad, sit down."

The room quickly became quiet as the Marine called for backup on his radio: "But sir, how am I supposed to control them when they can move any distance in any dimension? No sir, they're no threat – they just look menacing. Yes sir."

"Tell them to get up slowly. Is that the leader? Ask him not to go flying around like that again."

The Specialist signed and Axterix replied "Okay."

"Sergeant, he's not going to do that again. He came here to meet that *Sky Pilot* there," as he pointed to Magritte.

"I understand that, but this is a military base, and he can't just move around without authorization, got it?"

Axterix signed "Okay."

Magritte interrupted. "Sergeant, I'm in charge here. These *Sky Pilots* are my guests. You may leave now. Thank you."

The Sergeant spoke into his radio briefly, and then he left.

She looked at the translator and said "Please tell him who I am and give him greetings."

Axterix signed "Okay."

Ju'ul looked around the room at the student *Sky Pilots* and just felt relief. "We've come a long way," he said to Axterix.

"A long, long way, Ju'ul." And then Axterix went to Magritte. He towered over her, but he bent down in a bow to the floor and said "Magritte Cymo Fu, I am *Sky Pilot* Axterix, and I bring greetings from O-olea."

The translator replied "She says hello, and welcome, Mr. Axterix."

Then all the students realized the enormity of the day and the situation – these beings were their cousins from a far place, and they felt like celebrating the occasion. The room broke out in applause for the O-oleans, and many of the students hugged or shook hands with them.

"At least we're safe here," commented Ju'ul.

But Axterix was watching some of the humans who were hanging back, and he saw that same look of fear and loathing that he'd seen in the streets of New York just before the rocks came flying at him. "We'll need to be very careful, even with this bunch, I think." And then he signed to the translator "We've been attacked and we don't feel very comfortable here. Perhaps Magritte could come with us and then we could talk?"

Magritte quickly agreed. Suddenly, one of the O-oleans grabbed Magritte's arm with his 3-fingered hand. "Look! She has a picture of the Lax-ola clan leader on her body!" All the O-oleans stared at it.

"That's just an image – a tattoo," she tried to explain, when she saw the distressful looks from the visitors. "It's really nothing."

One of the students from California rose, thinking she'd defend Magritte against the O-olean who had just grabbed her arm. "Let go of her, you big brute!" she said.

"They're not hurting me, dear. They're studying one of my tattoos, 's all."

But the O-oleans remembered the renegade Laun Lax-ola and his clan well – he'd been responsible for death and destruction all across the La'aun desert for 10 years, before he was captured and executed.

"Why does she worship him?" one of them asked. "Is she crazy?"

"Maybe she just doesn't know?"

"We can't trust these people. If that's their leader, then we may have walked into a trap set by Laun Lax-ola."

Axterix spoke softly "Caution, Squadron. Caution."

Finally Magritte floated up above the crowded room and motioned for silence. "My students should leave now. Your class is over for today. Axterix: I know that your team is upset about something, but I don't know what. I'm sending my team away so that we can talk alone. Is that okay with you?"

"Okay," signed Axterix, but he was in a very tense, defensive posture. "Squadron, please wait outside."

Magritte and Axterix waited till the room emptied. "Axterix, I don't know what upset you so much?"

"The image on your arm – that's a well-known enemy of ours. How did he get there?" demanded Axterix. "Do you worship him?"

"No, that's nobody you know. We wear tattoos as an expression of art. This is not the image of anyone you know."

Axterix just stood silently, not knowing what to think.

"Look Axterix, we're glad you're here. We should celebrate, not be driven apart, scared of each other – we're *Sky Pilots* here. We're brothers, or at least cousins."

Axterix remained silent, watching Magritte, but not knowing if she was sincere, or if he was about to need weapons and a strategy for escape.

"Axterix – I'm sorry we hit it off wrong. I really don't know why people are attacking you, or why this tattoo has negative meaning, but you're just mistaken. I have visited with *Pure White*, and he will tell you that I don't lie."

"I heard that you met with him. I guess we'll just have to believe you. But your people – some of them obviously were very hostile to us; our looks, our speech – we were shot at and some people threw rocks at us. Look at my head where I was injured earlier today."

Magritte immediately floated to his side and put her hand in his, and then looked him in the eye. "Axterix, please, please relax. I'm not going to hurt you, nor will I allow anyone else to hurt you. In this room, we're all *Sky Pilots*, first. Won't you relax for a few minutes and tell me about your home world?"

Axterix looked down at the small Earth girl and her five-fingered hand, so small in his large 3-fingered hand that it got lost. He had to trust her or go home, it was that simple. "Yes, Magritte, I will relax. And I have brought many stories. *Dark Violet* is our guide, and she told us that humans were interesting. I just had no idea that she meant it this way."

When Magritte heard *Dark Violet's* name, she flinched. She remembered *Deep Blue's* tale about *Infrared* and *Dark Violet's* attack on Earth.

Axterix saw the look of hurt and worry cross Magritte's face and withdrew his hand from hers. Now he was sure he couldn't trust her. "I need to be with my Squadron now," he stated coldly, and then he went outside and saw his *Sky Pilots*, now completely encircled by well-armed Marines. "Squadron, execute Plan De-Eah" he uttered quietly. In the smallest-possible micro-instant in time, they vanished.

As Magritte floated outside, she saw the O-olean *Sky Pilots* dance away, and almost immediately her phone rang, and she answered quickly.

"Yes," she replied, "No. No, Mr. President. Yes, I'll be there tomorrow."

And then the phone went silent. As a tear flowed down her cheek and rippled across the 9 rings that *Deep Blue* put there long ago, Magritte looked around and said "Well, that didn't go very well, now did it?" to nobody in particular.

Then she felt her arm where the O-oleans had grabbed her and argued with each other, and she looked at the tattoo of Satan that one of her friends named Trash had buzzed onto her skin, so long ago.

"When you drew it, I remember saying that I was going to be the ultimate rebel, and that Satan was always going to be my friend", as her tears flowed freely she thought "I guess that didn't work out very well, either." Magritte Cymo Fu sank to the ground in ultimate defeat and cried for hours.

Chapter 18.

Magritte entered the Oval office by the usual means: she suddenly showed up. "President Fountain, I hope I didn't startle you", she said, when she saw that he was clearly upset and jittery.

He waved his hand towards the Secret Service agents that instantly swarmed into the room. "Everything's fine. I invited her here. You may return to your post."

"Magritte, this is getting entirely out of hand – the thing with the *Sky Pilots*, I mean."

"What do you mean, sir? I know we didn't do very well with the O-leans, but I believe that we can explain it to them. See, my tattoo..."

"Magritte," the President interrupted, "Haven't you heard? More *Sky Pilots* have just arrived in Russia and Alaska! It's like we've been invaded."

Magritte looked startled and asked "Who landed, sir?"

"They all have yellow-spiked hair – you tell me."

"Oh boy – I bet they're from the eastern quadrants. I heard *Deep Blue* talking once about *Bright Yellow* and *Peach*. They're going to require special attention, sir. I'll be back."

"No, wait Magritte!" but she was gone.

Magritte danced and tumbled to the Song that she sang so well, and when she crossed into Dimension 7, she saw a light from many souls, and she steered towards them. She didn't need dimensions higher than 7 to travel all around Earth.

And as she approached the newly-landed *Sky Pilots*, she saw *Deep Blue*, laughing and dancing with a troupe of lovely girls, all with yellow-spiked hair, circling Dimension 6, waiting to land. "*Deep Blue!* Oh, I've missed you so!", and she flung herself into *Deep Blue's* bosom and wept with joy.

"*Magritte, meet my new Sky Pilots from Antiminus. See, they're all just like you.*"

Magritte stared at the squadron of *Sky Pilots* and saw that these girls were all just like she was, 2 years ago, or was it thousands of centuries ago? She wept with joy as the squadron circled her in the Dance, and sang the Song, which Magritte knew so well that she joined in, and they were all like sisters, meeting for the first time.

"*Deep Blue*, I was hoping to find you. I'm on my way to meet *Sky Pilots* that I think are from the eastern quadrants. I think you told me *Bright Yellow* and *Peach* are over there, right?"

"*Oh yes, my child, but they want to reform all the other quadrants and remove all the bullies, like they did in their quadrants. And Magritte, they especially hate Goths, whom they consider to be independent trouble-makers.*"

As Magritte and her new sisters were dancing and singing, the children of *Bright Yellow* and *Peach* were already beginning to establish a new religion on Earth – based on peace without bullies. And they were very successful.

"Look," they said, "every one of you has been bullied, right?"

"Amen," cried the crowds of listeners.

"Well we're from a part of the Universe where bullies are not allowed. We live in peace, because we like peace. Would you like peace?"

"Amen," cried the crowds of listeners.

"Well here's what we all have to do. First, we get rid of all the bullies that are out there now, and you know who they are..."

"Amen," interrupted the crowd.

"...and then we carefully screen all new-born children for mean, nasty or evil tendencies."

The crowd suddenly turned quiet and ugly.

"And then we just get rid of them! Poof! No more problem children...they're just removed from society. What do you think of that?"

The crowd booed and hissed. "Nobody from outer space can tell us how to run our lives," they shouted. "G'wan back where you came from!" "Yeah, we don't need your advice here. We don't kill children."

"Wait, friends..."

But the crowd was having nothing of this kind of poison. Stones flew and pistols were pulled out. The children of *Bright Yellow* and *Peach* were suddenly and violently attacked.

Just as suddenly, *Bright Yellow* and *Peach* scrambled through Dimension 11 to save their children from certain harm.

And just as suddenly, *Deep Blue* interceded and put herself between Earth and her sisters. '*Just stop right there! I'm in charge here. You can take your Sky Pilots home. Their ideas are not welcome here.*'

Bright Yellow and *Peach* were startled to see their enraged sister, whom they hadn't seen in an age. "Deep Blue, dear, our children are just trying to make a peaceful Universe. What could possibly be wrong with that?"

"Sisters, it's not your place to bring your ideas about bullies into my quadrant. Please take your Sky Pilots and their preaching, and leave now."

Bright Yellow and *Peach* looked at each other and at their enraged sister and decided that discretion was better than fighting. "We'll come back when things have settled down," they whispered to each other. "The idea of no bullies will eventually catch on everywhere. Sky Pilots, let's go home. We're not wanted here now, but we shall return!"

The *Sky Pilots* left Earth and headed east, and weren't heard from again for a long, long time.

Magritte thanked *Deep Blue* for her help. "Thank you Mother, and now I have more trouble. We were visited by *Sky Pilots* from *Dark Violet's* quadrant. They seemed nice enough, but their bodies were reminiscent of a cultural anti-hero of ours. I'm afraid that it's my fault," she said with her eyes down.

"*Dark Violet* – she can be a real problem. We better ask Father what to do. We don't want to wind up with Earth in her sights again. Let's visit the Core." So they Danced and tumbled and sang, and headed for the Core – and for some of *Pure White's* fatherly advice.

Pure White's Gravity Dance didn't stop for a second. 'Sorry, my children, as usual, you have caught me at a bad time. The black holes need tending right now. Can you come back in, oh, say, a billion years or so?'

'No, Father,' replied *Deep Blue*. 'Can Magritte handle that task for you while we talk? I need some advice.'

'Magritte? Are you up to that?' asked *Pure White*.

"Why yes, Grandfather. I'd be glad to do it. Here, let me get in there..."

While Magritte juggled the millions of black holes in the Core of the Universe, *Deep Blue* and *Pure White* caught up on what was happening in the western quadrants.

'Father, life is springing up in many places now. We have cultures that have established trade and commerce between themselves.'

'Yes, dear, I know – I hear some things here, you know.'

'But there have been problems, too. I'm afraid that my children on Earth have angered the children of *Dark Violet*, and you know how temperamental she is. I fear that she will fling another planetoid towards Earth.'

Magritte overheard that and missed juggling a small black hole, which was quickly gobbled up by a larger black hole. *Pure White* gasped – he knew the consequences if the delicate balance was disturbed. 'Here now,' he boomed. 'Better let me take over.' And he promptly did. Magritte was disturbed at her failure, and she watched his strong dance, and it made an impression on her. "Grandfather, what are we supposed to do about *Dark Violet's Sky Pilots*?"

'Granddaughter, contacts between cultures are necessary, but not necessarily fun. One culture is usually destroyed in the process,' as he turned away and concentrated all his energy on the new balancing act.

Deep Blue and Magritte knew that was the end of the conversation – they just wondered if it was the end of Earth. They slowly tumbled back and far away west, in total silence, both lost in thoughts of the ultimate battle; neither one was visualizing success.

Chapter 19.

When Magritte landed in the *Sky Pilot Base School* in Huntsville, Alabama, she was extremely worried and tense. "Now what? What is one person supposed to do against these forces? Where did it all go wrong?"

Her cell phone buzzed, and there were 4 messages from the President, just waiting for her.

"Yes, Mr. President. No, Mr. President. Yes, Mr. President, I'll be right there."

And she was.

"Magritte, how do you explain it? Hundreds and hundreds of *Sky Pilots* are arriving every day. They're coming in from all over. There are red ones and green ones. There are blue and aqua and rust-colored ones. And why are they all coming here? They're looking for you! Somehow, you are famous all around the Universe, it seems. I need you to straighten this mess out.

Magritte planted her hands on her hips and asked "What do you want me to do?"

"Earth leaders everywhere want the off-worlders to leave – they're too disruptive. Some of the visitors from a place called the eastern quadrant have decided to stay, and they've got some kind of church up there in Alaska that wants to start killing babies. Do you know anything about that? All of the visitors are very Goth looking and, no offense, that disturbs the voters, you understand? Congressmen and police and the local PTA's are all demanding that the visiting *Sky Pilots* leave. They're just terribly disruptive."

"Mr. President, they're here to establish trade and commerce. They won't actually harm anyone."

"Magritte – don't you understand? I'm afraid for them! When crowds see them, they go berserk. The constant stream of visitors had turned into an ugly mess."

Magritte lowered her eyes and said "Sorry, President Fountain. I'll try to figure it out," and then she was gone.

Meanwhile, bands of Earth people started forming vigilante squads and anti-Visitor Leagues sprung up, intended to keep off-worlders away. It wasn't long before the first lynching took place, and the whole world seemed to be on the brink of a horrible disaster.

"I don't have any answers for this," Magritte told her friend Casey at the *Sky Pilot Base School*. It's gotten out of hand, somehow. It was supposed to be peaceful relationships between co-equal species from far-flung quadrants of the Universe, but look what's happened. And now one of them's been murdered, and who knows what retribution that'll bring?"

Casey hugged Magritte and tried to calm her down. "Magritte, you can't expect to keep all this under control – there are forces much bigger than you in play. Just solve one crisis at a time."

Magritte heard that advice and realized how good it was. "That's just right! One crisis at a time – I can do that!"

And then, she was gone in a heartbeat.

In the western quadrant, *Dark Violet* was brooding over her children. "I won't let those human beings hurt my O-oleans. I should have never listened to my sister like that. She was duplicitous, no she was a liar! I'm going to have to snuff out Earth, once and for all. They're nothing but trouble down there. I just need to find a good-sized chunk of rock. Now where did I put one?"

Magritte landed on O-olea and looked at the twin suns: one bright blue-white and one deep purple and very fat. "If I can just find Axterix now..."

A squad of police surrounded her and began chattering to her in their very high-pitched voices. She didn't understand a word, but they were obviously telling her to kneel down and put her hands up. "I come in peace. I am looking for Axterix. Where is he?" she asked, but she knew that they would not understand her.

Suddenly one of the policemen started shaking his 3-fingered hands at her, and then he repeated the gestures a couple of times.

"Sign language!" she cried. "That's what Axterix used. I must get to Axterix," she said to the policeman. "Where is he?"

The policeman was unable to communicate, but he knew that she was looking for Axterix, for sure. "Come with me," he signed.

She looked around and decided that these Satanic-looking beings were really just like humans, except for the bodies, so she stood up. The policemen followed her with their weapons, but made no other hostile moves. "Let's go to Axterix," she said to the signer.

"You are very brave to come here alone," he began. "You don't have your *Sky Pilots* and your soldiers with you to defend you," Axterix began.

Magritte ran to him, elevated herself to his eye level and grabbed him in a giant hug. "Axterix, I'm so glad to see you," she began. Weapons were all pointed at her, but they couldn't shoot her without risking Axterix too, so they held off. "We have to talk. I need to tell you about this tattoo, and about why it's there. I need to make you understand that you're welcome on Earth, and most of all that this is entirely my fault. Will you listen to me?"

Axterix didn't have a clue what the small Earth female was saying, but she was giving him a sincere hug, that was for sure. "Okay," he signed, and then he gently put her on the ground and signed "Okay" again.

Magritte and Axterix had a long way to go in building a relationship, but she was sure that communications was the first step. It took her a couple of weeks to become competent in signing. And none too soon –

Dark Violet had a nice fat planetoid lined up and ready to be flung at Earth. This time, she was going to nail Earth cold, and split it apart forever. "I'm just not going to be friendly with beings that refuse to be friendly," she said. "When the gravitational forces are aligned, then Pow! You pathetic humans gone."

"Axterix, I need to explain about Goths on Earth, and why I got that tattoo of Satan on my arm. Then I need to explain why you're patterned after it. And then I need to explain why we can all work around it and become friends," she signed.

Axterix sat down with her and looked in her eyes. "You're sincere, I can tell that," he signed. "But if you lie to me, then you'll never see Earth again, because it will be destroyed by our Spirit of Nature, understand?"

She signed "Okay," and began her tale. "When I was a teenager..."

When she was done, Axterix understood and believed it all, and he hung his head in defeat. "How can we visit Earth if we look like the meanest spirit that you have conjured up? People will always hate us."

"No, it's a matter of education. There are lots of free-thinkers who don't care about what you look like. Plus, not all religions believe in Satan, so you won't have much of an adverse effect on them."

"So that's why we were accepted in Mumbai, but not Vatican?" he asked.

"Right. We just need to be lots more careful about where you can do commerce and set up cultural exchanges. Not all Earth people will hate you, but most will think that you look strange – even I think you look strange. But I also think that you're very handsome people, too. You're curiously good looking, let's say – a girl could get used to you, maybe, understand?" as she lowered her eyes.

Axterix suddenly got it. "We need to tell our Spirit of Nature not to attack your planet. *Dark Violet* is getting ready to do that because she is very mad at how we were treated."

"I hope you can talk to her, Axterix. I really do," and Magritte held his hand and looked up at him, "because I'm beginning to like you."

Axterix and his Squadron jumped up and found *Dark Violet* was bent down, middle-finger cocked against her thumb, lining up in a certain way, when Axterix Danced in.

"Please, *Dark Violet*, please spare that planet – Earth. They're actually good beings, and their *First Sky Pilot* is here, visiting, and she explained it all to me."

Dark Violet paused for a second, watching the gravity waves roll in and out.

"And I kind of like her..."

Dark Violet brushed the planetoid aside and looked at her son. "I'm very proud of you, Axterix. You have been a good leader of the *Sky Pilots*. But I'm not sure that I can let you ignore the grave insult from those beings. It will put you in a very weak bargaining position in the future. Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Squadron, what do you want?" he turned and asked. "Shall we return to Earth, under certain conditions and restrictions, or should we blast the planet to rubble? It's up to you."

There was no hesitation "Let's go back to Earth!" they all shouted. "It's a grand planet."

And Ju'ul chimed in "Just a tad cold, that's all," and everyone laughed and agreed.

Dark Violet hugged them all and agreed to lead them back to Earth, in order to make sure that they wouldn't get surprised again.

"No, Spirit of Nature, you stay here," said Axterix. "You've given us free-will, and you've taught us to be what we are, and that's sufficient. We'll be alright."

And then *Dark Violet's* tears flowed on O-olea, and the floods cleared the streets and filled the streams, and all the people celebrated the rain.

Magritte, Axterix and the O-olean *Sky Pilots* Danced and Sang and went through the Dimensions with joy. But as they went into Dimension 8, one of the creatures reached up and scratched Axterix, infecting him badly. "I can't believe I didn't get out of the way fast enough," he whimpered. "Oooh, that hurts."

"We'll be back on Earth soon. They can take care of it there," replied Magritte. And, even as she Danced, she bound up his arm with a strip of cloth from her long black dress. And he looked at her and something pulled gently on his heart as he saw the tiny Earth female nursing him back to health. "Thank you, Magritte," he said quietly.

"You're welcome," she said, but her eyes were shy, and her cheeks were flushed. The 9 rings on her face were on fire from her tears. "I can't lose you now, you big brute – I just found you."

When they landed, they chose Dehli. "The people are friendly; they don't have a big issue with your looks; plus, they like your rings and artifacts..."

"Plus, it's warm!" shouted Ju'ul, and everybody laughed and landed in Squadron formation, near the Indira Gandhi International Airport in western Dehli.

Time passed quickly, it seemed. Axterix and his *Sky Pilots* were engaged in commerce and trade all over the world, but citizens of the U.S. and a few other countries had to order the hand-crafted items by mail, for obvious reasons. Night after night, Axterix and Magritte flipped between Sky Pilot School in Alabama, and home, in Delhi – it only took a small fraction of a microsecond for the commute.

The President was grateful for the O-olean's help with the other cultures who were arriving, and he appointed Axterix 'Ambassador, Extraordinary.' Axterix enjoyed his new role and worked hard to manage the new visitors, and to explain the "rules of Earth."

Once, Magritte and Axterix visited *Deep Blue*, who was busy on a new star system, and she barely had time to talk. "Why are there suddenly so many *Sky Pilots*?" asked Magritte.

'Simple, dear. The Universe is such a big place that you'd never meet any other races if it was left purely up to chance. Part of our job, the children of Pure White, is to make sure that time gets into synchronization when new races are born – that way you'll be able to enjoy each other's company, and establish long-lasting relationships.'

Magritte looked at Axterix, who looked back at her. They both shrugged at that answer. "Better not to ask a question like that, Magritte, you'll get an answer that you don't understand, for sure!" laughed Axterix. And then Magritte joined in. And then they Danced around Dimension 11 for a while and watched *Deep Blue* pull a new race out of a large, green planet, that circled a dual-sun system, not far from Earth. "We'll see you little folks later," said Magritte as she and Axterix held hands and flipped off to the west, and home.

Months later, after Earth was more used to the idea of visiting O-oleans, Eedorans, Flip-ooneans, Tildadoons, Rongs, and all the other off-worlders, who arrived every day, it seemed, one day Axterix turned to Magritte and asked "Is it time to return to O-olea? I'd like to introduce you to my parents, after all." Magritte turned several shades of dark red and her tears flowed down her face.

"I'll never figure out Earth girls," shrugged Axterix.

"Of course not, you big brute," she humphed. "You're just a man."

When they arrived on O-olea, she was treated like a rock star. Day after day, she told stories of Earth, and of *Deep Blue*, and of the other children of *Pure White*. The O-oleans loved her tales and her adventurous spirit – mostly they loved the Death Metal music loaded in her iPod. Months passed, and turned into years. Visiting *Sky Pilots* from other cultures came Dancing in, from time to time, and established their cultural influences and their own patterns of trade.

One day Axterix came home and told Magritte "There are rumors of war between the *The Ones*. *Pure White* has become disconnected from some of his Children and they're plotting against Earth and some of the other planets. They're going to need our help."

She looked up at him and said "Here we go again!" and they both held hands and laughed a laugh that could be heard in all the Dimensions. And then they Danced and tumbled towards Earth and an uncertain future, except for one thing.

"I love you Magritte Cymo Fu," Axterix shouted at her as she raced ahead. Her arms were extended; black-painted fingernails moving with a curious rhythm; her blue- and violet-spiked hair flowing free in several Dimensions at once.

But Magritte was feeling the fresh rush of adventure, and the Dance was in her soul, and today she was feeling like the young Goth girl who first faced the ultimate danger of being a *Sky Pilot*. She had truly received the ultimate reward, and earned her ticket to the other side.

Suddenly, she felt like her flowing black Goth robe was holding her back, so she flung it off and dropped it down a hole in Dimension 10. And then she laughed at Axterix. "Ha! Catch me if you can, you big brute!" as she flipped a Dimension 6 flip in and out of Dimension 11, and left him completely in the dust.