

We had decided to establish several colonies on the planets. The Counsel had decided that off loading some of the civilians to establish these colonies was fair, civilians had that choice as was the Erai custom. Every man was free to pursue his life as he saw fit, such had been our custom since our early beginnings. We had established this custom because of instances like the Trials. They had been cooped up on these ships during our lengthy journey. It was their choice and so I granted permission, despite circumstances. The Counsel managed the civilian populace, though they were under military protection. But I felt it a tactical move to have some of our people relocate to these planets. They could under these circumstances grow and establish our civilization once more, it was worth the risk.

The Counsel had their concerns which I let them pursue what was in their best interests. I had my own concerns.

We had assembled scores of exploration teams to further investigate the planet more in depth. Other exploration teams were deployed to investigate the other planets as well, no stone would be left unturned! Exploration drones, probes and robotic explorers had been sent out to map the planet, take specific readings such as gravity anomalies, areas rich in resources, magnetic anomalies, etc. The more in depth scrutiny and survey of the planet itself was

left to the exploration teams who were sent in by land, air and water. The teams moved by boat, hovercraft, horesback and on foot so that nothing was missed. The assignments were always lengthy, but many took them just to get away for a while. It gave an individual time to think and consider things. Remembering my days as a cadet, I took a number of similiar assignments myself.

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The exploration teams were months into their assignments when they made a startling discovery. Something amazing had been discovered, something the likes of which no one had ever seen before.

“What, repeat team one, a what” I heard our communication officer inquiring?

“We’ve discovered some kind of ‘Sanctuary’, the teams are not quite sure what it is. There's a 'Library' and 'Control Room'. The Commander should come down and look at it herself, over”, came the reply.

“We’re not exactly sure what we're looking at, you’d better send some of the 'Lore Masters' to take a look at this stuff, we don't know what to make of it”, came another inquisitive message. “Just send everyone, this place is extensive goes for miles,” the team leader exclaimed!

My council went over the details a few days to put together the right team. There were already several archeological survey teams scouring the planets surface and focusing on several ancient sites. According to some of the teams, this region was vast and filled with ancient machinery. This machinery apparently was still in working order. Stranger still, the machines had switched themselves on and were powering up? There were plenty of automated systems and we knew the planet was running on some kind of sophisticated 'Artifiscial Synthetic Intelligence'. But it too was something we were unfamiliar with, our teams had no idea where the central core was located?

As was the case with most of the discoveries, upon this enigmatic planet. Several key archeologists, anthropologists, linguists, scholars and engineers were pulled from other sites and deployed to the new place rather hastily.

A few days later after teams were dispatched to the location, this transmission came over the coms. “A ladder, a ladder of ascension, we got the worlds highest ladder here! My god it reaches into the heavens, you got to see this thing to even imagine it” the surveyor exclaimed over his '*ODT*! The messages were pouring in regarding this 'Sanctuary', what ever it was?

A ladder that climbed into the heavens, I tried to imagine what such a ladder was for? Why had the Alta(n) constructed it and for what purpose? My mind mused and drifted off into deep thought, as I imagined climbing the ladder and making the discovery of a lifetime!

“Your orders, ma’am”, I heard the surveyor ask?

“Secure the perimeter, I’m coming out for a look at this myself”, I said.

“Understood” came the reply.

I should have already been down there with the teams. But work with the Council and other concerns had kept me for the past couple of days. I mused over these thoughts and others as I boarded the transport. With me, I brought another science team and more Loresmasters, it looked like between the “Sanctuary” and the “Ladder” we'd be busy.

Upon our arrival we split up into smaller groups, unlike most of the structures through out the planet which were huge, these were smaller and not so grandiose! The science team split up and had a look around. I entered the building where the ladder was erected, I wanted to take a closer look at this thing

and figure out its exact purpose? This was something not typical of this planet and we had learned a lot in the short time we had been here. One thing we had learned was that, there was nothing typical, about this planet or the former inhabitants!

When I thought of a “Ladder Ascending to Heaven”, I had several different ideas but what I discovered was not as I had imagined.

A non descript modern ladder (stretching into the heavens) is what awaited me upon my arrival. The strange looks from the members of the exploration teams was becoming common place. Besides its modern configuration the ladder (we noted), was made out of an unidentified metal of unknown origin and composition. It did not come up on any of our data scanners from the many worlds we had discovered or traded with.

Like the unidentified metal the structure (from an engineering point of view) was using unknown and unidentified means in its construction and configuration.

We were surprised to see that whoever had built this thing was quite clever. Though it appeared as a “ladder” one did not have to climb, but simply step up upon the first rung. The mechanism rapidly

shifted the climber to the end.

In what we later realized was the control room there were strange alien crystal interfaces. We recognized the language of the Alta(n), alongside our own and another unidentified one. Days after our arrival and investigation the system knew our language preference. The AI installed it on all systems everywhere, no programming required. They were for controlling the various “**Planetary Systems**” which covered the entire planet. The Planetary Systems had various and different functions and purposes. From environmental control to weather, defenses, communications, the teletransporter, many systems were controlled by the mechanisms. The mechanisms and the interfaces were highly sophisticated. Some of the technology was purely for experience of nature itself. From the Alta(n) point of view “nature” was not something one simply looked at! They had floating lakes, streams and rivers (for example), which initially we didn't understand its purpose. The Alta(n) didn't want one to just see and hear nature, but experience it in a way that had meaning and purpose, again using these Planetary Systems. This was an advanced form of “**Earth Based**” technologies of an unknown configuration.

The composition of the structure we currently found ourselves in was made of an unidentified metal and

crystal combination. Our scanners could not detect its origin, composition or the fabrication method. This information did not appear in any of our data bases on our ODTs. We sent messages to the Library to look into this.

There were displays and interfaces everywhere, all of an unidentified crystal composition. Once again the written language of the Alta(n), our own and the unidentified language flashed across the screens.

There were also strange mechanisms and systems that were online but idling as if waiting for someone to access the system? These unknown technologies unfamiliar to us. We had come across many places in our travels, but nothing here resembled them. Some of our men tried to compare this stuff to other planets we had investigated. I had to remind the teams to do away with the practice. Nothing upon those planets came close, to what we had here! The Alta(n) were advanced over our own knowledge, but they had obviously had help from someone more advanced than themselves? The Maker and the Library had no answers to those questions!