

The Watchhounds of Ambit

by

Sam Aurelius Milam III
c/o 4984 Peach Mountain Drive
Gainesville, Georgia 30507

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Chapter One Invasion

Good execution will probably not compensate for a bad plan.
Poor execution can ruin even a good plan.

—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

No story ever really has a beginning. There are only events that were the ends of some things and the beginnings of other things. The tellers of tales choose a place to begin and they call it the beginning. I'll begin this story at the attempted theft of a flatbed truck.

My name is Garth. I was part of a Dexios incursion triad that was sent into Ambit. Gordon was in command of the triad, which consisted of me, him, and Benson. None of us knew a lot about the big picture, about what was going on throughout Ambit. A lot of what I'll write here I learned later, some of it quite recently. Some of it is pure speculation. Most of it is fact. All that we really knew at the time was that I was to steal the flatbed truck, Benson was to steal the sedan, and Gordon was to steal the pickup truck. We were to follow the Bear Gap Road, cross the Escarpment at Bear Gap, and be back in Dexios before dawn.

All went well at first. We'd spent most of the week on foot, covering the distance to the particular farmhouse that was our target, and learning the lay of the land. We'd been very careful and nobody had seen us. On the appointed night, we hid a short distance from the house, watched the lights go out one by one, and then gave them an extra 40 minutes to get to sleep. Of course, we didn't have any trouble at all with the hounds. We were natives of Dexios. Animals were our lives. Those particular two of the dreaded watchhounds of Ambit had been close friends of ours for almost two days by the time that we crept in to steal the vehicles.

We didn't do as well with the vehicles as we'd done with the hounds. We crept up to the vehicles that night to examine the locks only to discover that the door of the sedan was already unlocked. As a precaution, and since it was a small vehicle and easily pushed, we pushed it a hundred yards or so down the road, where Benson stayed with it to try to start it. The doors on both trucks were locked, but I opened the flatbed with a piece of wire that I took from a bale of hay. Gordon just pushed in a side window of the pickup.

Of the three of us, only Gordon had any real talent for mechanics. I was still trying to get to the back of the start switch, or what I thought was the start switch, when Gordon started the pickup. God! Who'd have ever thought that it would be so loud. I learned later about things called mufflers but they hadn't taught us about them during our briefing. We didn't know that it was important for a truck to have one.

What a horrible noise it was! When it began, I banged my head on the under side of the dashboard and slid out of the cab and onto the ground. It was a drop of about two and a half feet. The noise changed our plans immediately. There certainly

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wouldn't be any chance now to get the flatbed, so I ran for the pickup. Gordon was trying to work the controls and the truck jerked into forward motion as I ran toward it. I wanted to be in the back, so I dived ahead of my target just as it stalled in front of me. As a result, I crashed head first into the side of the cab. I'm lucky that I didn't break my fool neck.

Lights came on in the house and Gordon cursed under his breath as he tried to restart the truck. I crawled over the edge and flopped into the bed, partially stunned. Gordon restarted the truck and got us going again but the damned thing moved at a crawl, with its engine whining. The farmer dashed from the house and chased us down the short driveway and onto the road. Gordon revved the engine to the point that even I, ignorant as I was, could tell that it was an unhappy machine. The farmer was obviously going to catch us and I tried to recover my wits enough to do something about it. I was groggy from my crash into the side of the truck and I didn't particularly want to try fighting anybody just then. Fortunately there happened to be a big sack of some kind of feed in the back of the truck so I heaved it at the farmer just as he came up to the tailgate. He hadn't noticed me in back of the truck until I raised up with the feed so it took him completely by surprise. He was a brave and sturdy man and he didn't deserve to be laughed at. Chasing unknown villains into the night is beyond the spunk of most men. The sight of him flat on his back on the road, with a big sack of feed across his chest, with only his legs waving furiously at me, while his dread Ambit watchhounds gamboled about him and yawped in delight, was more than I could bear. I laughed myself breathless.

While I rolled around in the bed of the pickup in helpless mirth, not knowing whether to hold my head, which still hurt from crashing into the side of the truck, or my belly, which ached from laughing so hard, Gordon got to where Benson had given up on the sedan and was waiting for us. Benson was unclear about what had happened and, when he jumped in back with me, he seemed more than a little puzzled by my attitude. Gordon slowed slightly, to study the controls, figured out how to shift the gears, and we were on our way.

It was only a mile or so to the turn onto Bear Gap Road but, just as we made the turn, we saw lights and heard sirens behind us. Gordon did his best but we got only about two miles before we were overtaken by drivers who were, without a doubt, more skillful than we would ever be. They stopped us by the simple tactic of getting in front of us and slowing down. Then, at gun point, we were loaded into a truck that was only about half full of other Dexios men. Before the night was over, it was stuffed. I learned later that, of the many Dexios triads that were involved, only one of them actually got a vehicle across the border. They did so with all three of them riding on it, a lone motorcycle that had to be abandoned shortly afterward when its chain broke. The triad escaped capture, but the motorcycle was recovered by Gauland forces.

Chapter Two The Plan That Failed

A man without a weapon isn't necessarily disarmed. Sometimes a circumstance can be a weapon. Sometimes, armament is a state of mind.—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

The next morning, about 500 of us were under guard in the football field in Fort Gauland. That's in Trantor, which is the capitol of Ambit. The football field was the only handy place that was big enough to hold all of us. While we were standing around with nothing to do we swapped a lot of information. Even so, we couldn't figure out how the plan could have been such a failure. It seemed unreasonable that so many of us had been captured. I didn't learn the whole story of the invasion until quite a long time afterward. Eventually, during my later studies, I had the opportunity to examine the original plan in detail, as the Sociology Triad had issued it. I'll digress from my story here and briefly describe the plan that failed.

In order to understand the plan you must first understand a little of the geography of Pyrus, the world's only continent. Pyrus is shaped somewhat like a pear, with the big end at the north, extending well past the pole and capping the planet with permanent glaciers. The resulting abundance of icebergs throughout the world's ocean and, of course, the lack of anyplace else to go, has discouraged shipping. Such shipping as there is consists mostly of a few fishing fleets and an occasional research expedition by scientists. They say that it's indescribably lonely at the antipodes and that the waves go on forever. The narrower southern end of the continent reaches well into the subtropical region but is cold due to high elevation and dry due to even higher coastal mountains. The place is unoccupied and is called the High Plateau.

Ambit sits between Dexios and Gauland. Dexios occupies the eastern portion of the continent. It consists of low-lying flat land, only a few feet above sea level. It extends as far north as the Arctic winters will allow and is bordered on the south by the High Plateau. On the western border of Dexios, between Dexios and Ambit, extending from the glaciers to the High Plateau, is the Dexios Escarpment. It's a cliff, sometimes sheer and sometimes gradual, that adds up to a total change in elevation of at least two thousand feet. Where Dexios is almost entirely flat, low-lying land, most of Ambit is at least 2000 feet above sea level, and mountainous. There are various passes, valleys, and so forth across the Escarpment, and various roads that take advantage of them. The roads are all somewhat of an adventure to use and the Escarpment immovably defines the boundary between Dexios and Ambit. Gauland is on the west coast. Like Dexios, it's mostly flat, low-lying land. As with Dexios, it's bounded on the north by the glaciers and on the south by the High Plateau. It's eastern boundary is defined by the Gauland Escarpment which is pretty much the same as the Dexios Escarpment except that it faces west instead of east.

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Around the south end of Pyrus, encircling the High Plateau all the way from Dexios to Gauland, is the Southern Beach. During the winter, when the ice cap grows and sea level drops a few inches, the Southern Beach is exposed. In some locations, it's only a few yards wide. In other locations, when it's fully exposed, it extends away from the edge of the High Plateau for miles. That geological feature was an aspect of the plan. Somebody had decided that, with vehicles, we could launch a sneak attack along the Southern Beach, all the way around the High Plateau, and enter Gauland from the south, completely unexpected. The strategy was ridiculous on several points.

Dexios has traditionally been a nation of hunters and gatherers. In fact, after I'd thought about it for a while, I was amazed that anybody had managed to create a sufficient bureaucracy in Dexios to even organize the invasion. Anyway, Dexios isn't industrialized. There weren't more than a handful of vehicles in all of Dexios. We just didn't have a need for them. Since we couldn't make them, we tried to steal them. Nobody knows if we'd have made it all of the way around the Southern Beach and into Gauland undetected. We usually maneuver on foot. Probably, we'd never have been able to keep all of those vehicles running long enough to get all the way around. I suppose that it's just as well that we never got to try it. If we'd been caught by the rising water on that long curve of beach at the end of winter, with 3000 or more feet of elevation on the right and endless ocean on the left, then we'd have been very tired of wading by the time that we finally made it back to Dexios.

Some of the other tactics weren't much better. Part of the plan had been to disrupt both power and communications in Ambit shortly after dark on the night of our heist, to cover our operations. Because of that, the raid was planned for early summer because, at that time of the year, with the glaciers melting, most of the power generation in Ambit is hydroelectric. Other kinds of plants are usually down for maintenance. At any other time of the year, we'd have had to disrupt power from a dozen or more smaller power plants. Only when the glaciers were melting could the power be disrupted by sabotage at only the two locations. Thus, the vehicles had to be stolen during the early summer but we couldn't launch our invasion until late the following winter, when the Southern Beach was exposed. That time delay was sure to be a problem. I don't know why none of us in Dexios thought of that.

Dobio Dam, on the Dobio river in the northwest, and the Kenyon Reservoir below the Kenyon Glacier in the northeast provide the water to generate most of Ambit's electricity during that time of the year. Of course, we didn't intend to break the dams. Nobody would be that stupid. We intended to break the power lines by toppling some of the big steel towers. Several towers at Dobio were successfully toppled, breaking the power lines and plunging western Ambit, and much of Gauland, into darkness. Naturally, most of us were working in eastern Ambit, closer to the Dexios border. The devices planted by our saboteurs near the Kenyon

Reservoir Power Station failed to explode. Power transmission was undisturbed where we most needed a blackout, in eastern Ambit.

Gauland military communications were to have been jammed by jamming transmitters, broadcasting a strong signal on the Gauland military frequencies. The devices were smuggled in advance into strategic positions and were to be activated just after dark. One of them was inadvertently activated several hours early. It was a tip-off to the Gauland communications people that something was in the wind. Dozens of transmitters going at once would have been difficult to locate but a solitary transmitter was child's play. Triangulation, they call it. The Gauland technicians are good at that sort of thing. After they discovered the first transmitter and then several others, the mousetrap was out of the sack.

We might still have driven a few vehicles across the border except that a good many of the undiscovered transmitters didn't work properly when they were activated. According to subsequent news reports, there were several problems. Some of the transmitters had dead batteries. A few didn't have antennas. Most of the ones that worked were so weak that they jammed communications for only a few yards. The one that was activated early and alerted the Gauland communications people was, sadly, one of the few that actually had a useful range. Some were tuned improperly and jammed the Ambit frequencies, but not the Gauland military frequencies.

I know now that the failures were planned. We were intentionally sabotaged. I know that because I read the Project Planning Report that was written by the staff of the Sociology Triad. They planned the whole fiasco for reasons of their own and it was intended to fail. They even had a dummy retail corporation with agents provocateur posing as hunter-gathers inside of Dexios. The agents provocateur sold our normal products to the corporation. Those agents used the funds to buy the explosives and the electronic jammers. They were the people who actually organized the invasion. It took them a good many years of scheming to get it done. Anyway, the stuff was all manufactured by Gauland manufacturers and sold to us to use against them. The material specifications were that the equipment would be marginal. The project triad QC people verified the marginal functionality of the equipment as a standard procedure.

Anyway, enough of that for now. I'll get back to my story. By about ten o'clock that morning, several thousand of the local citizens of Trantor had taken the day off and gathered in the spectator portion of the stadium to observe us. We were standing in a roughly circular cluster in the field, surrounded by about 80 armed Gauland soldiers. Most of the remaining Gauland soldiers in Ambit were out looking for more of our men. By then, most of our people were either captured or back in Dexios, but the Gauland soldiers were still having great fun searching for invaders, rushing up and down the roads, startling milkbeasts and birds, and in general having a good time. While those of us who'd been captured were all standing around, getting hungry, and wondering what would happen next, the commander of

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the Gauland forces in Ambit walked onto a wooden stage that stood at the 50 yard line. He wasn't alone. With him was a triad of armed guards, and a lone prisoner. The prisoner was Gondor Morgan, our commander. We learned later that he'd been captured with the fall of his forward observation post at the top end of the Jenkins Grade, right at the top of the Escarpment. At the time, however, we knew only that he'd been captured. There was a disappointed murmur when we saw him, then silence.

The Gauland commander had a microphone, but he didn't use it. Instead, he handed it to Gondor. He must have expected Gondor to recite some prepared statement, but no one will ever know for sure. Gondor held the microphone for several seconds while the silence deepened throughout the stadium. Then, speaking into the microphone in a quiet, steady voice he said, "Kill the bastards". He turned and, with a little flourish, he handed the microphone back to the Gauland commander. The commander, startled by the unexpected statement, received the microphone as if one was handed to him every day. Momentarily off guard, he was unprepared for what happened next. It happened very quickly. Gondor kicked him in the groin and then slapped the sides of his head. The Gauland commander dropped like a rock. Without breaking his motion, Gondor side-kicked the nearest armed guard in the knee. The two remaining guards shot Gondor. There was a brief silence while the echoes of the gunshots faded away. Gondor's body made a thump when it hit the wooden floor of the stage.

As Gondor's body rolled onto its back and came to rest, we turned as a man and attacked our 80 armed guards. They shot eighty-five of us during the 20 or so seconds that it took for us to defeat them. Less than 60 seconds after the Gauland commander had handed the microphone to Gondor Morgan, not a soul had moved among the spectators, dozens of men had been wounded as the spectators watched, several men had been killed, and history had been changed. We all drew a breath, and then another. The remaining armed guards on the stage grabbed their injured companion and scrambled off of the stage.

As I've said, most of the Gauland soldiers were scouring the countryside, looking for additional car thieves. The walls of Fort Gauland were lightly guarded, with little expectation of an attack. There wasn't any expectation at all of an attack from inside of the fort. We stormed the walls from inside and the fort was easily taken. When we held Fort Gauland, we held Trantor. With Trantor, we held Ambit. Thus it happened that a terrible plan to invade Gauland, incompetently executed, achieved in one day the unexpected and unintended capture of Ambit.

Chapter Three The Siege That Never Was

Scarcity of provender will eventually transform a militia into a mob.
—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

We of Dexios were ill prepared to stand a siege. No, we were not prepared for one at all. We'd all intended to be home for breakfast, or at least back among friends for breakfast. None of us had with him much more than the trail rations that we'd carried with us for our little car theft operation. While we'd been trying to secure the walls of Fort Gauland, a few shrewd Gauland officers had torched the Gauland Stores. We weren't an army. To even call ourselves a militia would have been stretching the truth. We'd started the day as itinerant car thieves and ended it as an impromptu, understaffed, unprovisioned, and largely untrained garrison under siege. The soldiers of Gauland had all planned on lunch at the mess hall. By evening, they wanted back inside of their walls. Since we wouldn't let them in, they were annoyed. The hungrier they got, the madder they got. They asked the Ambits to order us out, but the Ambits wouldn't do it. The men of Ambit never take sides. We asked the Ambits for an escort through the blockade, so that we could get some reinforcements and some supplies. They wouldn't do it.

A few units of the little Gauland Air Force buzzed overhead but I guess they didn't know who to shoot or if they should shoot anyone. Air attacks are almost never made inside of Ambit, since it's impossible to know from the air who you're killing. Neither we of Dexios nor the men of Gauland want to kill the men of Ambit. Since there weren't any sufficient concentrations of anything in Dexios to make bombing worthwhile, the Gauland Air Force was mostly a form of reconnaissance. Gauland might have sent an overwhelming land force against us but our victory had been so unexpected that they didn't have such a force ready. The situation seemed so temporary that nobody thought that we'd be there long enough for a force to be raised against us. Everybody just hesitated and we all started to get hungry.

They say that the end of civilization is never more than three days away. I guess that's about right. It wasn't long before we were sneaking people out of the fort to steal food from the people of Trantor. Outside of the walls, the Gauland soldiers were breaking into homes for food.

For the next few days, the people of Ambit bore up under the job of being victims. It didn't take long for our men to become so disorganized that they no longer constituted a viable garrison. During the same time, the siege dissolved into a collection of stray gangs, mostly drifting west toward Gauland. As their guys trickled home, so did ours. If the Ambits had become involved in any way other than as victims, then the thing might have gone on for months. As it was, none of us really wanted to molest them. Since none of the men on either side had much of a commitment to the confrontation, the men on both sides just drifted home, except for me.

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Chapter Four The Plan That Worked

Observation is a good way to learn. Study is another. Both require a receptive mind.

—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

During the few days that I was at Fort Gauland, I became acquainted with a local lady, a citizen of Ambit. She was a civilian who worked part-time for the Gauland army as a librarian. She ran the little library that they had at the fort. She took an interest in me right away, while we were still trying to maintain our occupation of the place during the siege. She even smuggled in some food for me. So, I started hanging around the library during my spare time. One day about the time that the siege was failing and our guys were starting to drift home, I was waiting for her to clock out. I was just sitting there and wondering if I wanted to go back to Dexios or not. While I was sitting there and waiting, I happened to overhear an argument between some Ambit scholars who were having a meeting in the next cubicle. At the time, I assumed that they were in the Fort Gauland library to do some kind of research. In a sense, I was almost right. However, I'm getting ahead of my story.

I first started to pay attention to the scholars when one of them raised his voice in exasperation and declared that Dexios needed more technology. The others were aghast at the idea. They insisted that even a pastoral culture in Dexios was unwise and that an agrarian culture was positively dangerous. A hunter-gatherer culture, they said, was the only possible situation that would maintain the status quo. Technology, they insisted, was out of the question. Any degree of centralization would destroy the attitudes in Dexios that were the necessary counterpoint to the centrally directed culture of Gauland. The Sociology Triad, they argued, must reverse the present trends.

Back then, I didn't know anything at all about sociology. I was a hunter. I'd never dreamed of such a thing as cultural management. After I overheard the argument, I began to wonder about it. The argument suggested that there was some sort of control of the other two nations by Ambit. I'd always believed, if I thought about it at all, that we in Dexios hunted beasts because we needed food to eat. We sold a lot of extra meat to Ambit, and through Ambit to Gauland, because we had more than we needed. Sure, we bought hunting equipment from Gauland, through Ambit. Why not? Gauland made the equipment better than we could. They bought timber and meat from us because they'd stripped their land ages ago and we still had plenty of forests and range land. Nobody has everything. Sure, the trade was managed by businessmen in Ambit but the scholars and their little debate annoyed me. They made me feel like we'd all been manipulated. They piqued my curiosity.

Both Gordon and Benson had been killed in the skirmish in the football field and I was beginning to feel an attachment to the librarian. So, when our men started to drift home, I was undecided what to do. The lady was persuasive and, after

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delaying my departure for a few extra days, so that I could think about it, I decided to stay in Ambit. When my lady friend learned that I was going to stay, she seemed pleased. I was very cooperative with her at that point in our relationship so it was easy for her to get me to do things. She encouraged me toward an interest in sociology, particularly in cultural management. I should mention, of course, that I had only rudimentary reading skills. Most of the people in Dexios, being hunter-gatherers, didn't read at all. I'd learned a little because I'd spent a lot of time at a trading post near the Escarpment. I eventually learned that my tendency to hang around the trading post, and my rudimentary reading skills, were part of the reason that I'd — but I'm getting ahead of my story again. Anyway, I had to learn to read first but, if she wanted me to learn to read then I'd learn to read. I'd probably have tried to learn to fly if that was what she'd wanted. Women can have that kind of power over men, at least at the beginning of a relationship. Later, not so much.

Eventually, after I'd learned to read, I started to read about sociology. Twenty years later, I became the only man of Dexios in recorded history to graduate from an Ambit University. I graduated from Trantor University itself. The degree normally takes about 10 years. It took me 20 years because I started out with only the education of a hunter. It took a lot of time to learn the basics of an ordinary formal education, but I did it. There's only one kind of degree that's awarded at Trantor University. All other courses of study are subsidiary to it. My subsidiary specialties were Genetic Engineering and the Calculus of History. My degree, of course, was the only one available, Sociology.

Chapter Five

The Watchhound of Ambit

For the sake of our sanity, God has arranged that we never see ourselves as others see us.

—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

Some time ago, some of the scholars in Ambit began to suspect the existence of some flaw within their nation. They couldn't observe it directly, as a man cannot directly observe his own face. They deduced the flaw's existence from changes in Dexios and in Gauland. There were a lot of things that caused the concern. For example, why were Dexios and Gauland enemies? That hadn't been the case for most of recorded history. Until quite recently, maybe within the last few centuries, Dexios and Gauland had been amiable trading partners. They still traded but it wasn't a companionable relationship any more. Three hundred years ago, Gauland had formed an army. Why did Gauland need an army? Because it felt threatened by Dexios? How could that be possible? Dexios was nothing but a bunch of hunters, gatherers, and woodsmen. At least it had been for most of recorded history. There were indications of some changes happening within Dexios. Why did Gauland need a fort inside of the borders of Ambit? Nobody had ever been a threat to anybody until a few centuries ago. The men of Ambit who studied such things knew that something was amiss but they didn't know what it was. That was the beginning of Project Watchhound named, of course, after the dogs.

The project triad eventually decided that the changes in the relationship between Gauland and Dexios must be a consequence of some change or set of changes in Ambit itself. They couldn't understand what those changes could be. They decided that they needed a mirror, figuratively speaking, by which they could better understand their own nation and the attitudes of its people. The idea that was eventually accepted was that some man, or maybe some small group of men, from outside of Ambit would be able to view the situation without the preconceived notions that prevented the scholars in Ambit from understanding the problem. The Sociology Triad decided that such a man or group of men should be located, recruited, and trained in the science of Cultural Management. The search began in both Gauland and Dexios, and lasted for decades. With the eventual selection of several likely candidates, the Sociology Triad engineered several situations intended to develop the potential of those candidates. One such plan created, over several years, the attitudes and the situation in Dexios that resulted in our bungled car thefts. Of the various plans that were initiated, that plan was the only one that actually went to completion. The fact is that I was one of the candidates that had been selected to serve as a mirror. I'd come to the attention of a covert researcher as a consequence of spending so much time at the trading post that I mentioned earlier. The whole point of the stupid invasion had been to create a certain set of circumstances that resulted in me being captured and finding myself in a certain situation. The entire sequence of events, the bungled car thefts, the skirmish in the

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football field, the siege, the librarian, all of it had been planned. All of those spectators at the football field had known in advance approximately what was going to happen. I will say in fairness to the planners that the skirmish turned out to be more brutal than they'd expected but I must also say that they did anticipate the possibility of some deaths. The whole point of the charade had been to get me interested in Sociology and, particularly in cultural management, without me having the least idea that I was being manipulated. They'd carefully arranged for me to be in the right place at the right time, and in the right frame of mind, so that they could perform that particular conversation for me to hear in the library. The scholars had, after all, known that I was there. Everything had been carefully orchestrated so that I'd react in just the right way. After I was hooked into the university, my librarian went on to other things. It had all been just another job for her.

The scholars were taking a big risk. In retrospect, I doubt if they even recognized it. Here's the problem. For centuries the scholars of Ambit had been managing cultures. For the first time, they were trying to manipulate individuals. The more finely you manipulate, the more fragile becomes the target. The precision of their maneuvering introduced into the result a lot of uncertainty. I did, as they had intended, see them with the eyes of an outsider. However, before I'd become sufficiently educated to be useful to them, I'd learned things that fashioned my objectives in other directions than they had intended, beyond their awareness, and beyond their control.

My studies naturally tended to focus on the situation in Dexios. That tendency was encouraged by my associates and advisors. They wanted to understand and to resolve the problems that were growing in Dexios. Some important aspects of the situation went back several generations. For some time, a tendency had been developing for hunters in Dexios to enclose portions of range land, making it easier to catch the game, and kill it. The practice of enclosing portions of the range land was encouraging a tendency to domesticate the animals. At the time that I researched my thesis, several herds were enclosed in fenced pastures. That practice had already modified the hunter-gatherer attitudes of many people, encouraging the development of pastoral practices. Once begun, the trend would continue. Enclosed herds would create the need for farming to feed them. After that, an agrarian society would develop. Farmers would need more and fancier equipment, encouraging industrial development. Unless the trend was interrupted, those few fenced pastures would eventually lead to the industrialization of Dexios. That was a circumstance that the scholars of Ambit considered to be undesirable, even unacceptable. As the subject of my thesis, I proposed a simple program of genetic engineering that I claimed would remove the trend. My plan was approved and I was awarded my degree. The members of the Sociology Triad failed to realize that my plan would only delay the trend, and not remove it. In reality, to delay the

trend wasn't the main purpose of my proposal. Its primary purpose had been a test of Ambit.

Based on my thesis, the genetic engineers developed a carefully engineered virus that would be endemic in the herds and be acquired by flies. The virus would infect humans who were bitten by the flies. The virus couldn't survive in humans but it would cause severe illness during the two weeks necessary for its death. The virus had an even shorter life expectancy in the flies and died within about 15 minutes. Thus, the incidence of human infection by the virus was very strongly dependent upon the proximity of large numbers of infected flies. That required the proximity of infected animals. Within a few months after we implemented the project, it became very unhealthy for a human to stay near an enclosed herd of beasts in Dexios. The virus, of course, had a timed mortality gene. Within six months it was extinct. Six months was long enough. By then, the herds had kicked the fences apart and the men of Dexios were disinclined to rebuild them, at least any time soon.

My graduation thesis accomplished three things, only two of which were visible to the scholars. First, it got me my degree. Second, it delayed a tendency of Dexios to centralize. The third accomplishment existed within the blind spot, the part of the culture of Ambit that the scholars couldn't see. That third accomplishment was to confirm what I had already begun to suspect about Ambit.

For 4000 years, according to the written record, the men of Ambit had been learning to manage the cultures of Dexios and Gauland, for the benefit of everyone. I've studied the history of that management in detail. I'm familiar with the techniques that were used. I'm the only one who noticed the change in that management and in those techniques within the last few centuries. There are sometimes things about a culture that its people tend not to notice. The change in Ambit was the failure of the cultural managers in Ambit to recognize in their own methods the end of management and the beginning of exploitation. Management preserves. Exploitation consumes. Exploitation also creates a defense reflex in whoever is being exploited. That's what was causing the animosity between Gauland and Dexios. They were reacting to exploitation by Ambit. Since the people of both other nations regard Ambit as a benefactor, almost instinctively, the reaction in each nation was against the other nation, not against Ambit.

I first became suspicious of the nature of the change when I learned the truth about the football field skirmish, when I learned that the whole thing had been planned. Five hundred years ago, such a scheme would never have been created. I'll admit that the planners didn't anticipate Gondor Morgan's input but they did anticipate some deaths. Indeed, the achievement of my intended frame of mind was calculated to require the deaths of both Gordon and Benson, in addition to the charm of my lovely librarian. Those two deaths had been arranged in advance to insure that I would linger in Trantor for a while. The football field skirmish just happened to kill

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them first. That doesn't relieve the conspirators of the guilt for what they'd intended. Anyway, five hundred years ago, the planners in Ambit would have devised a different, less brutal plan to achieve their mirror. Of course, five hundred years ago they didn't need the mirror.

Five hundred years ago, the Sociology Triad would have insisted that the pastoral trend in Dexios should be terminated by some less punitive method. There wouldn't have been any deaths. There wouldn't even have been much suffering. However, they accepted my plan, which created gastric anguish among humans for two weeks and even a few consequential deaths. We knew beforehand that such would be the case but the Sociology Triad approved the plan anyway. After the viral infestation was accepted and applauded, I knew what I had to do. I graduated with flying colors and earned a reputation for myself with several other projects that delayed other trends toward centralization in Dexios. Then, I asked for and received the leadership of Project Watchhound.

Chapter Six

Wheels Within Wheels

Since the quantity of information potentially available is infinite, any amount of knowledge is, in itself, neither a large amount nor a small amount. The magnitude of knowledge can be judged, in practice, only by comparison to the wisdom by which it is accompanied.

—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

The abilities of a culture are not a result of just the culture's knowledge, but of both its knowledge and its wisdom. A culture with vast knowledge and vast wisdom isn't likely to injure itself or others. Its knowledge will probably not result in anything harmful, at least not intentionally. A culture with even a little knowledge, but no wisdom, always lives on borrowed time. It's a constant danger to itself and to any others with which it has contact. The problem in Ambit was a long term accumulation of knowledge and a slow erosion of wisdom. The people of Ambit had become so able to control the cultures of Dexios and Gauland that they had begun to feel as though they were above the natural laws that they so easily manipulated. They applied the principles of cultural management to others but felt exempt from any consequences of their own behavior. Such exemption of self always enhances arrogance at the expense of humility.

I took over Project Watchhound about 10 years after my graduation and have managed it now for almost 30 years. The project has been slowly reversing undesirable trends in both Dexios and Gauland. In fact, that is but a treatment of symptoms. Those trends represent a growing independence on the part of both nations, an unconscious defensive reaction to the growing exploitation by Ambit.

Some time after I took over the leadership of Project Watchhound, I realized that the triad consisting of Ambit, Dexios, and Gauland had become corrupted and must be renewed. I kept the realization to myself. After a few more years of study, I came to an unpleasant conclusion. I determined that the only effective way to solve the problem is the destruction of the present culture of Ambit. That was followed by an even more unpleasant conclusion. The only way to reliably destroy the culture of Ambit is by the complete elimination of the population of Ambit. I could not then and I cannot now discover any other way to solve the problem. With that objective in mind, I secretly created Project Mutt within Project Watchhound.

I carefully staffed Project Mutt with a few trusted colleagues who I had persuaded to my conclusions. Over the next few years, we covertly and gradually transferred our operations south, onto the High Plateau. Eventually, we completed the development of the specialized flea that will be the vector of a new bacterium, Ambit's pathological nemesis. It was necessary to protect Dexios and Gauland from the infection. Precise environmental sensitivities will restrict the flea to Ambit. Among other protective design features, the flea lives only on certain squirrels that are unsuited to the lowland environments of the two other countries.

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The bacterium is contagious only through the fleas. As a final protection, it's mortality gene will eliminate it about a year after we trigger the epigenetic tag, whenever that might be.

The project has carefully established all of the genetic, social, and ecological machinery that's necessary to assure the complete elimination of the population of Ambit and the maximum possible preservation of human life in both Dexios and Gauland. Here in the deep south, on the barren High Plateau, Project Mutt has also preserved the people from whom the future population of Ambit can grow. Although the bacterium ought not to be viable here, we've developed an acquired immunity to the bacterium, just in case. The environmental sensitivities of the squirrels, the bacterium, and the fleas ought to protect us here but an immunity is a good idea anyway. However, Project Mutt has also failed a test, and I with it.

Chapter Seven On the High Plateau

One sees further, looking back.

—translated from an Ancient Manuscript

I eventually realized that even Project Mutt is infected. To replace a diseased culture with a cured culture might not be reprehensible but to kill the people of the diseased culture is murder. It seems that murder always creates situations that can be resolved only by more murder. In my opinion, all of the tainted parties, each and every one, must die if the problem is to be solved. No smallest part of the infection can be left in existence. The fine art inherent in the cure is to arrange the situation so that, somehow, some untainted replacements can arise within the ruins. I became convinced that those of us in retreat on this High Plateau are as tainted as the main population of Ambit. That was the beginning of a nameless project of which no one knows but me.

While Project Mutt was developing the flea and the bacterium, I took over the development of our immunity and made it my own personal project without a name. I alone developed the immunity. I made sure that it will not work. Thus, those of us who are prepared to march into Ambit after the plague has eliminated the tainted population, those of us who presume ourselves alone to be above reproach, those of us who are as tainted with arrogance as are those others, we will also die after we march into the empty land. The bacterium will not yet be extinct and, believing themselves to be immune, the self-styled replacements for the dead population won't take any precautions.

From the understanding of cultural management achieved in Ambit, which has become its downfall and which I have studied for nearly 60 years, I can predict the eventual results. Those results will not occur if there are any people of Ambit left alive. They must all die, including those of us who hide here upon the High Plateau. That complete removal of all tainted attitudes will establish the conditions for the growth of a new and healthy Ambit.

For several generations after Ambit is destroyed, Dexios and Gauland will be separated by a void. That unsupervised estrangement will reinforce their differences more than all of the superficial meddling of Project Watchhound. It will retrieve and preserve the unique differences of each culture, for the future. Dexios will retain its hunters, its gatherers, its woodsmen, and its nomads. Pride in its traditional ways will endure. A dislike for the citified life of the people of Gauland will restore and preserve the culture of Dexios. Gauland will retain its factories and its roads. The love of its people for their luxuries and their comforts will insure such a future. The love of each nation for its own ways, and its suspicion for the ways of its distant neighbor, will preserve the necessary differences between them. However, neither population is composed of fools. They all realize that each nation needs things that it cannot provide for itself, things that can be obtained only by

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trade with its distant neighbor. Although they will view one another with suspicion, they will nevertheless maintain the minimum of trade that's necessary for survival. Imported things will be scarce for a while in each nation but there will be sufficient trade. Both nations will survive. That necessity for survival within each nation will guarantee the establishment of the necessary trade routes between them, across empty Ambit. Their mutual suspicion will also guarantee the establishment of middle-men in the empty region between them. Thus, they'll be able to deal with the middle men and not with each other. Given time, those traders, living outside of the direct influence of either nation, will stray from the ideas of either culture. They will become, along the trade routes, a new merchant class that will some day grow into the new Ambit. My calculations indicate that a dangerous level of arrogance in the new Ambit, and a consequent reckless exploitation of knowledge, will not accumulate again for nearly four thousand years. I now realize the significance of the length of our recorded history. The way that events have coincided is too timely to be coincidence.

Chapter Eight Triads in Circles

Things didn't go as planned.

—Garth of Ambit

There is, on this high plateau, a location that any inhabitants of the plateau will eventually discover. We eventually discovered it. The location is a sheltered valley, not obvious from any great distance. The valley has a moderate climate, compared to the rest of the plateau. It has fertile soil. It has sustained us during our exile here. It has sustained others like us, in the past.

In a sheltered cave within the sheltered valley, we found manuscripts, records of previous occupations. They were sealed in ceramic jars. The jars were stored in a dry, cold cavern, deep within the cave. Thus, the manuscripts are as well preserved as it is possible to preserve them. Some of the oldest of them have deteriorated. They are nothing but brittle fragments. Others are more recent. Several of them appeared to be reproductions, copied by hand, of earlier manuscripts with which they were bundled. They are all in unknown languages, although the set that seems to be the most recent is written in an alphabet that is very much like our own. We could not read any of the manuscripts.

We had not yet launched our solution to the problem of Ambit when we discovered the manuscripts so we sent someone back to Trantor University. That messenger carried with him a single page from the manuscript that appeared to be the most recent. We made a copy of it first, of course. There's very little need for a linguist on Pyrus. The languages of the three nations are very similar. For the most part, they're nothing more than different dialects of the same language. However, linguistics does exist as a theoretical science, and there are linguists. After some inquiries, our courier located among the faculty of the university a linguist who had a known passion for ancient variations in our language. After a few minutes of studying the page from the manuscript, that linguist was ready to leave everything that he had, to make any promise that he could make, and to start his pilgrimage into the wilderness immediately if only he could hold in his own hands and study the manuscript from which the page had been taken. Thus, we acquired a translator.

It took the linguist several years to achieve a translation. During his work, it was necessary for him to retrieve from the library at Trantor University several scholarly works that dealt with the early languages of Ambit. We took some considerable risk of exposing our objectives but we allowed him his necessary resources. We had to delay our project while he worked but we needed to understand the manuscripts. When we learned the message that they contained, we then needed to copy them onto new paper. We needed to preserve the new copy with the old ones, copies fading back to a past that none of us had previously

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suspected. Archive paper of a very durable quality is available in Ambit and we obtained a sufficient quantity.

We now know that others like ourselves have lived in exile here before us. The manuscripts were unquestionably written by people similar to ourselves. The most recent was written about 4000 years ago. From that manuscript, we have learned certain bits of ancient history that have been generally forgotten. One of them deals with the origin of the triad, the accepted structure of almost everything that we do. That record has been transferred to each new document by each group of people who retreated here. We, in our turn, have done the same.

Within our societies, in each of the three nations, the triad is pervasive. We see it in the authority of a Judge over his two Counsels, defense and prosecution. We see it in the relationship of a husband and his two wives. I always viewed the triad as inherent in our fundamental nature. Indeed, the pervasive structure of the triad reflects our biological nature but that nature isn't as it originally was. Originally, the proportion of male to female births was about equal, not two females per male, as we expect today. Marriages were between two people only, not three. The inherent stability of triple relationships was undiscovered and a kind of individualism that can scarcely be imagined was prevalent. From it developed cultures that were fundamentally different from the ones that we know. Men, and even women, acted purely in their own self interest. They formed relationships, organizations, and even nations without regard to stability. At one time, according to the history that is preserved here, as many as eight different nations existed simultaneously on Pyrus, all competing haphazardly, each trying to be self sufficient, each trying to gain some advantage over the others. Driven by unchecked ambition, those first people developed a technological ability, and a clear predisposition to use it, that could have destroyed all life on the continent. Survival was achieved by an advancement of knowledge in an unexpected direction. At first, after I learned of it, I admired the wisdom of that advancement. Now, I'm not so sure. It might not have been such a good thing after all but, at least it allowed survival.

A small group of scholars retreated to this high and barren place, the first such group to do so in our long history. They must have been masters not only of sociology but also of biology. From here, they covertly conducted upon the inhabitants of the continent a genetic change. We don't know today how to do what they did then. We won't survive long enough to learn it and, indeed, I think that it is something that should not be learned. We might be tempted to reverse the change. Are we wiser than the ancients who made the change. I think not.

Those ancient scientists, the first to retreat here to the High Plateau, changed the behavior of the x and y chromosomes within the people of Pyrus. Previously, pregnancies produced about the same number of males as females. After the change, pregnancies produce two females for every male. Thus, they invented the

Triad and inserted it into the character of our ancestors at the genetic level. The change, over time, completely transformed the cultures that existed at the time. It established for all time the stability of the triangle. Today, the structure of the triad begins within our genes and extends even to the arrangement of the nations on Pyrus. The next time that you see a husband walking serenely along between his two happily bickering wives, consider the position of Ambit between Dexios and Gauland. You can easily see why Ambit doesn't need an army.

Simplicity is the mark genius. It's easy to see the simplicity of the concept that those original scientists executed. Their intentions were of the most noble sort and their accomplishment was ingenious. Sadly, the problem that they solved was replaced by a different, unforeseen problem. I can't believe that they ever intended to lock future generation into a recurring trap that forces the destruction of the culture, and the murder of millions of people, every 4,000 years. Surely, they must have had some other expectation than that. They must have believed that future generations would continue to grow in strength and wisdom. Things don't always go as planned.

There have been here before me an unknown number of others like myself. They are more my kin than my adopted kinsmen in Ambit, whose destiny I have secured and must now share. That is, I have recently become acquainted with the new flea. The others have gone into empty Ambit, intending to start the new culture. In spite of their expectations of immunity, they will die as did the members of the main population. I will stay here in this vault, alone until the end. Though I will be forgotten, what I have done will be a beginning. Some day, 4000 years from now, some other scholar will retreat onto this plateau. He might find here the remains of my visit and these memoirs, if these clay jars do their job. He might draw comfort from the past but I hope that he does otherwise. I don't know if our kind increases its wisdom with each cycle of destruction or if these necessary atrocities are slowly ruining us. I hope that, some day, those who come here to do a terrible work of great and necessary good might find a better solution to the problem.

No story ever really has an end. There are only the events that were the ends of some things and the beginnings of others. The tellers of tales merely pick some favored event and call it the end. Now, having done what at first seemed necessary but now seems like a terrible waste, I write this memoir and choose to end it here.

—Garth of Ambit

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