

1.

After a nine-day voyage on ThoughtShip Antares, our landing party arrived on Planet Thrax, the third orbital of Star 4300. Its parent is a smallish star on the outskirts of the galaxy called Sol on its only habitable world.

The planet is high-density and high-gravity. Life forms are highly evolved physically, but underdeveloped in other important ways, which I will discuss shortly.

We followed our customary procedures, monitoring and observing life on Thrax as we neared. At the speeds we travel on Antares, there are only a few short minutes to receive and digest data about our destination that has any relevance to the current timeline. Any earlier information is centuries out-of-date.

This was an instance where we didn't have enough time to completely understand the information. We debated about much of what we saw and heard as we drew closer, especially about dominance. We never agreed on that important issue.

Based on our observations, Farna and I decided to put down on this subcontinent because it is the warm climate we prefer.

As we arrived, we had to make instantaneous decisions. We could not let the native species behold us in our homeworld configurations. In keeping with our strict mission protocols, we immediately assumed the forms of the Thraxian dominants.

I reconfigured as a bovine and Farna as a human.

Dismayed but duty-bound, I am forced to report that she is missing.

2.

The occupation of physical bodies is one of the most difficult aspects of our exploration process.

On earlier expeditions, we entered the bodies of existing creatures, displacing (in fact, effacing) our hosts. Our problem then was to act as if nothing had changed, so as not to draw attention to ourselves. But we never had the time to study the particular individual and become familiar with his or her personal habits. How were we to know how to act?

This led to awkward situations, more than a few. We were quickly noticed, as often as not. We were rarely identified as alien visitors, but our host creature was usually thought to be ill and was removed from the general population for treatment. The upshot was that our visit and our orderly observations were seriously disrupted.

To avoid these problems, we decided to transform into new individuals. This was the first time this kind of entrance was attempted.

We didn't have to replace anybody else, but we did have to orient ourselves quickly and to blend in. The object again was to not be noticed. If they were aware that there was a new member of their population, people (human or bovine or whatever) would wonder where s/he came from.

When Farna transformed into a human, she instantly disappeared into their highly competitive, hurried and aggressive lifestyle.

I appeared in a haze of dust within a smallish interior enclosure, a wooden stall. I lifted my hoof to stop the squealing of the small furred creature beneath it. A cat that spat and slunk away.

The transition appeared to be successful in my case. Neither bovine nor human made any comment about my entrance. The bovine in the same stall made no sign that I was there. She showed no surprise.

The bovine in the neighboring cubicle looked up at me, blinked and then looked away. My newness did not seem to be disturbing.

What about Farna? Was her arrival successful? Or did she surprise the humans and provoke their curiosity? Was there uninterrupted routine, as I enjoyed, or were there negative consequences?

I had no way of knowing.

Hard to believe there were no emergency procedures for such a situation, but that was the fact. This was the first time such an accident happened. We had never before explored a planet as confusing as Thrax.

I appreciated that I was in a quandary of unenviable proportion. I determined to follow my training as best I could. I would do two things:

1. Faithfully store my impressions, findings and actions in hopes of eventual upload to the thoughtship fleet; and
2. Somehow locate my shipmate.

I took scant comfort in knowing that Farna wanted to find me as much as I her. Without the two of us to enter our codes simultaneously, we could not recall Antares.

We shouldn't have come together. One of us should have stayed aboard the ship, tracking the other. But Thrax seemed so inviting in all its complexities and contradictions. We both wanted to see for ourselves.

We should have known better.