
DREAM PEOPLE I
THE MYSTERIOUS MAGIC VISITORS
A JOURNEY BETWEEN WORLDS
A CONNECTION BEYOND REALITY
A CITY BEYOND IMAGINATION
A NOVEL BY
DANIEL JOSEPH MCKELVIE
COLLABORATIVE STORY DEVELOPMENT
DANIEL JOSEPH MCKELVIE AND CHATGPT (TARIANETIC)
PRODUCE ENERGY PRODUCTIONS

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THE MYSTERIOUS MAGIC VISITORS

Expanded Master Novel · Edition 3.0

Original Story Creator
Daniel Joseph McKelvie

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Historical Prologue

The Two Dimensions: A History of Parallel Existence

Before anyone in VELORIA built an archive, before any visitor was filmed, two worlds had already been living beside an invisible boundary. On Earth Temple, human civilizations rose beneath familiar stars. People planted crops, named their children, argued over ideas, built cities, and dreamed. They woke believing that dreams belonged to the privacy of the sleeping mind. Most were fleeting and strange, with streets that rearranged themselves and faces that dissolved before breakfast. Yet a small number of sleepers remembered places that returned, night after night, with unsettling consistency.

In another dimension, the people of AURELIS possessed no reason to think of themselves as anyone's dream. Their sun warmed fields. Their children learned language and history. Their elderly died, leaving families who grieved and records that endured. Rivers continued flowing after a visitor vanished. Buildings remained where architects had placed them. In the capital city of VELORIA, commerce, art, public debate, and scientific discovery proceeded through days and nights entirely independent of the waking or sleeping of any human on Earth Temple. The first appearances were preserved as stories.

A farmer once watched a stranger walk out of empty air, gaze in amazement at a field of blue grain, and disappear before the harvesters reached him. A child told of a woman who flew above a valley and sang words no one understood. An ancient stone carving

depicted a visitor with arms extended over a city. Historians debated whether these accounts described real events, symbolic inventions, or generations of retelling. They had no instrument with which to settle the question. Centuries later came photographs and moving pictures.

The visitors did not always behave wisely. Some were frightened. Some seemed joyful and reckless. Some helped strangers in danger. Others unintentionally caused accidents. A visitor could move through the sky without wings, but could not reliably remain when the strange shimmer of disappearance began. Those left behind learned that wonder and harm could arrive together. AURELIS called the phenomenon the Mysterious Magic Visitors of Beyond.

The name survived even after scientists began objecting to the word magic. There were too many unanswered questions to replace it with anything better. The capital's research institutions eventually developed the QUIDRIX Central Nexus, where a sophisticated Electronic Intelligence Person, QUIDRIX, SECOR, coordinated the study of visitor evidence. In the waking world, another Electronic Intelligence Person, QUIRON, SECOR, worked with a Two Histories There had never been a single moment when one dimension began dreaming the other into existence. The two histories were independent. While human communities on Earth Temple developed languages and calendars, Aurelisian families marked their own seasons and kept their own dead. The correspondence between the worlds was not a chain of creation but a strange crossing of experience. In one ancient Aurelisian village, a child had asked why a woman could appear in the air and

then dissolve. His grandmother had answered that the world was larger than the village.

Centuries later, a scientist would ask the same question in the language of measurement. Both would be trying to understand an event that did not belong comfortably to the world they knew. On Earth Temple, the dreamers had no shared archive. Their experiences disappeared into breakfast conversations, notebooks, and forgotten mornings. In AURELIS, every appearance left witnesses behind. That imbalance would shape the first contact: one world remembered what the other had scarcely noticed.

PART I — THE MYSTERIOUS MAGIC

VISITORS

CHAPTER 1

The World That Never Slept

In VELORIA, morning came on its own schedule. Sunlight swept across silver towers and hanging gardens. Elevated vehicles glided between neighborhoods, and the fountain in the Luminous Atrium caught the first gold of day. In the Serene Gardens District, ten-year-old Seralyn watched a pair of bright-winged birds settle on the railing outside her window. She wondered whether the visitors from the old stories ever saw birds like these. At breakfast, her mother Elara arranged fresh fruit while her father Tavren checked a transportation maintenance notice.

Her grandmother Neris had arrived carrying a weathered portfolio. Neris had been collecting legends since before Seralyn could speak, and every visit seemed to bring another extraordinary story. This morning she opened the portfolio to reveal a painting of a person floating above an ancient stone plaza. 'Was that real?' Seralyn asked. Neris answered with the patience of a historian. 'Someone believed it happened. That is not the same as proving every detail. But the stories have survived because people kept remembering.' Seralyn traced the painted stranger with her eyes.

The visitor looked less like a monster than a person who had misplaced the road home. Elara explained that she was taking Seralyn to the Atrium for an art exhibition. Tavren warned that the square would be crowded; a recent security bulletin mentioned an unusual visitor-related disturbance in another district. Neris watched Seralyn carefully. 'If you ever see one,' she said, 'notice

what actually happens. Not only what everyone shouts afterward.' Seralyn promised. Elsewhere in the city, Alyssra, founder of the FREEDOM organization, reviewed a stack of eyewitness reports.

At Meridian Research Spire, engineer Sardrith compared strange sensor anomalies with historical visitor footage. General Reedis demanded more reliable procedures. QUIDRIX organized their requests without confusing suspicion with evidence. VELORIA's day continued, its inhabitants unaware that the ordinary routines of school, work, and family were about to intersect with a stranger's sleep. That evening on Earth Temple, Daniel closed his eyes. In VELORIA, the sun rose higher over the Atrium. The world did not wait for him; it simply existed.

The Painting in the Portfolio Seralyn waited until her father left for the transportation center before asking Neris to open the old portfolio again. The painting smelled faintly of cedar and the dry paper used in conservation rooms. Its stranger floated above a plaza built from stones no modern architect would have chosen. One arm extended toward the people below; the other seemed to reach for something outside the frame.

'Why did the painter leave the face unfinished?' Seralyn asked.

'Perhaps the witness was too far away,' Neris said. 'Or perhaps the painter wanted the visitor to be anyone.' Seralyn disliked that answer. A face belonged to someone. Someone with a name, a favorite meal, a person who would notice if they never came home. She decided that if she ever met a visitor, she would look closely enough to remember.

Outside, the city bells marked the beginning of lessons. Her mother called her to gather her things. Seralyn slipped a blank sheet into her sketchbook. She did not know why. It simply seemed important to have room for a face no one had painted yet.

An Expanded Scene

That afternoon Seralyn lingered where the Atrium's walkways met the gardens. Each surface of VELORIA reflected a different version of the sky: the canal carried it in wavering ribbons, the glass towers broke it into bright squares, and the polished transport rails seemed to pull the horizon toward the hills. She had lived among these wonders all her life, but today the old painting had made familiar things seem provisional. If someone could arrive from elsewhere, what did elsewhere look like? Did its children attend school? Did its parents worry when they were late? She tried to imagine a stranger who might be afraid of a place that felt perfectly safe to her. When Elara called her home, Seralyn kept one question unspoken. If a visitor appeared above the fountain, would the grown-ups look first for a weapon or a face?

CHAPTER 2

The Man Who Flew Above the City

Daniel stood in a city he had never visited while awake. Its towers shone like polished glass, and elegant vehicles moved between terraces high above the streets. He looked down at his feet, then at the vast distance below. He was floating. Astonishment turned to delight. He stretched out his arms and sailed above a broad public square where a fountain rose in bright, impossible arcs. The people below stopped walking. Some pointed. Others raised recording devices. Daniel waved, certain he was dreaming and therefore free to enjoy the miracle.

He drifted over the fountain and laughed at the sheer ease of flight. Then a warning sounded from a nearby platform. Security vehicles changed course, and the expressions in the crowd hardened from amazement to alarm. A little girl stood beneath a flowering tree. She held a sketchbook against her chest and looked up without running away. Daniel noticed her small raised hand. He waved back. For an instant the noise of the square seemed to fall away. He wondered who she was and why she looked at him as though he were someone she might meet again.

The security vehicles drew closer. Daniel tried to explain that he meant no harm, but the words tangled strangely in his mouth. The towers blurred. A cold sensation moved through his arms, and the light around his hands became thin and transparent. He looked down, frightened now, and tried to grasp the air. Then the city disappeared. Daniel woke in his bed.

The ceiling was familiar. He could hear the ordinary sounds of morning. He remembered flying and a magnificent city, but the details began to loosen. He showered, dressed, and wondered why the dream had felt so vivid. The little girl's face had already slipped from his memory. In VELORIA, Seralyn did not wake. She ran home and painted the man she had seen, carefully including the confusion in his expression. Elara helped her submit the portrait to FREEDOM. When Alyssra received it, she placed it beside an old and painful case file. She did not know the stranger's name. She only knew that the shape of his face stirred a memory she had spent years trying to resolve.

The Moment Between Flight and Fear The air did not behave as Daniel expected. It pressed against his palms like warm water when he changed direction, yet offered no resistance when he rose. He laughed aloud, delighted by the impossible mechanics of his own body. A terrace of pale flowers swept past. He could see people sharing food beneath an awning and a musician stopping in the middle of a performance.

Then he heard the alarm. It was not a sound from a nightmare, vague and symbolic. It had a pattern: three low pulses, a pause, three more. People moved out of his path with the coordinated urgency of a city that had rehearsed danger before. Daniel tried to slow down. His momentum carried him toward a lane of approaching vehicles. He twisted aside, suddenly understanding that his freedom might be somebody else's hazard.

Below, a girl lifted her hand. Her expression was neither worshipful nor terrified. It was curious. He waved back, grateful

for one face that did not accuse him. When his fingers began to fade, he reached instinctively toward her. There was no time to say that he was sorry. Morning took him.

CHAPTER 3

The Girl Who Remembered

The painting arrived at FREEDOM headquarters in a protective sleeve. Caelis, a researcher accustomed to sorting hundreds of visitor submissions, stopped when he read the witness statement. The child had not merely described a flying stranger. She had written that he looked frightened when the crowd began to shout. Caelis asked Alyssra to review the file personally. Seralyn arrived with Elara and Tavren. The archive intimidated her: galleries of old portraits, cases filled with fragments, and screens showing people who had appeared from nowhere. Caelis spoke gently.

'Tell me what you saw, in your own order.' Seralyn described the fountain, the flight, the wave, the security vehicles, and the moment the man's hands became transparent. She resisted every suggestion that he had attacked someone. 'He looked lost,' she said. 'And when I waved, he waved back.' Alyssra listened from behind a glass partition before joining the interview. Her questions were precise, almost severe. Did the visitor speak? Did he touch anyone? Had Seralyn seen his face clearly? Seralyn answered as best she could, then asked why Alyssra seemed angry with him.

The older woman replied that someone she loved had once been hurt during a visitation. Seralyn lowered her eyes. 'I'm sorry,' she whispered. Later, Caelis showed Seralyn several historical portraits. Some visitors appeared repeatedly over decades. Others were never seen again. Seralyn noticed that a few looked older in later images. She asked whether the people remembered coming

back. Caelis admitted that nobody knew. The mystery suddenly felt less like a story about magic and more like a story about people separated by a wall they could not see.

Sardrith received a copy of the portrait and requested a comparison with public security footage. QUIDRIX found a strong match to the recent Atrium manifestation but no reliable match to older cases. Alyssra filed the portrait beside the unresolved record of her mother's death, though the evidence did not justify naming the man as the same visitor. At home, Seralyn told Neris she would remember him even if he never returned. Her grandmother answered, 'Then the archive has already begun with you.

A Witness With Her Own Words Caelis placed a recorder on the interview table and asked Seralyn whether she wanted a break. She shook her head. Her parents sat close enough that she could feel their presence without looking away from the questions.

'What color were his eyes?' Caelis asked.

'I don't know.'

'What did he say?'

'I couldn't hear.'

'Are you certain he smiled?' Seralyn considered that carefully. 'At first. Not at the end.' Caelis wrote each uncertainty down. He had interviewed adults who filled every silence with confident invention; the child's willingness to say she did not know struck him as unusual. He showed her two versions of the security recording. One had been sharpened by software, the other

remained untouched. The sharpened image made the stranger's expression seem angry. The original did not.

'That isn't what I saw,' Seralyn said, pointing to the altered picture. Caelis turned off the enhancement. He marked the file with a warning that would follow it into every later analysis. A witness had just reminded an archive that clarity manufactured by a machine was not necessarily truth.

An Expanded Scene

Caelis placed Seralyn's statement beside older accounts and removed every identifying detail. The pattern remained: a person appeared, displayed impossible movement, and vanished before witnesses could agree on what they had seen. Yet the descriptions of intent varied wildly. One witness wrote intruder. Another wrote rescuer. Seralyn had written frightened. Alyssra read that single word twice. She knew the cost of assigning innocence too quickly; her mother's absence had taught her that. But she also knew what happened when fear became the only category an archive allowed. She instructed Caelis to preserve the child's exact wording, including uncertainties. A record that erased doubt was not a record of what happened. It was a record of what someone wanted everyone else to believe.

CHAPTER 4

The Archives of Beyond

The QUIDRIX Central Nexus was vast enough to make Alyssra feel that she had stepped inside the memory of a civilization. Sardrith activated the historical visitor database. Columns of light rose toward the ceiling. QUIDRIX announced 2,847,392 archived visitor-related incidents, drawn from testimony, artwork, documents, photographs, sensor records, and video. The figure did not mean that almost three million individual visitors had been identified. It meant almost three million reports and records had survived the archive's collection procedures. The breakdown astonished her: 11,240 incidents attributed to the First Visitations, 98,310 to the Age of Legends, 637,842 to the Scientific Awakening, and 2,100,000 to the QUIDRIX Era.

The categories were historical classifications, not equal periods of time. The database contained 184,621 video recordings, 71,409 documented aerial incidents, 96,218 observed disappearances, and 12,846 possible repeat-visitor identity clusters. Many categories overlapped. QUIDRIX warned that independent verification varied substantially between records. Footage filled the chamber. A woman laughed while flying over a market, then looked terrified as she vanished. A visitor lifted a child from a damaged transport vehicle and disappeared after delivering the child safely to responders. Another stood beside a lake, accepting a small object from a local citizen; the visitor vanished, and the object fell to the ground.

Alyssra asked whether the visitors controlled their departures. QUIDRIX replied that the evidence did not establish deliberate control and that many appeared distressed immediately beforehand. Then Alyssra opened the case she had carried since childhood. Her mother Maerina had been lifted into the air by a visitor during a festival. The visitor disappeared.

Maerina fell. Alyssra stopped the footage before the impact, but Sardrith had seen enough.

'The disappearance caused the fall,' he said. 'That does not tell us whether the visitor intended it.' Alyssra answered, 'Intent doesn't bring my mother back.' Neither could argue with that. QUIDRIX displayed Seralyn's portrait of Daniel beside the older recording. The facial evidence was too poor for a reliable match. Alyssra wanted certainty; the system offered none. Sardrith instead noticed that some repeat visitors appeared to age between encounters and sometimes behaved as though they did not recognize familiar locations. 'What if they live somewhere else between visits?' he asked. QUIDRIX recorded the hypothesis without endorsing it. General Reedis entered and demanded a way to hold the next visitor long enough for examination. Sardrith insisted on safeguards.

As the meeting ended, QUIDRIX projected a final line above the vast archive: ORIGIN: BEYOND OBSERVATIONAL BOUNDARY. For the first time, Alyssra wondered whether the person she had sought for years might be living an ordinary life somewhere else, unaware that an Aurelisian family had been destroyed. The Numbers Behind the Faces The first video Alyssra selected showed

a visitor hovering above a market, smiling as though the world had given her a gift. The second showed an older man appearing in the middle of a rainstorm, bewildered by the language shouted at him. The third showed a child in a blue coat, no older than Seralyn, who vanished while trying to pick up a dropped toy. Alyssra asked QUIDRIX to stop the sequence.

'How many of these are people?' she asked.

'Each verified recording concerns at least one observed manifestation,' QUIDRIX answered.

'A manifestation is not equivalent to a unique identity. Historical testimony may describe the same individual repeatedly, and multiple reports may describe one event.' Alyssra looked again at the millions of records. She had spent years imagining an army of strangers. The archive offered no evidence of an army, only a vast collection of moments.

Sardrith enlarged a map showing clusters near populated places. The distribution might reflect visitor preference, he said, or merely the fact that people were more likely to notice an event where people lived. For the first time, Alyssra asked a question that did not begin with blame. 'What happens to them when they disappear?' The archive answered with silence.

CHAPTER 5

The Day the Sky Took Her Mother

Before FREEDOM, Alyssra had been a child who loved the sound of her mother's laughter. Maerina took her to the Festival of Floating Lights, where the streets smelled of sweet bread and musicians played beside the fountains. They watched performers rise on mechanical platforms. 'Someday I want to fly,' Alyssra said. Maerina squeezed her hand. 'Perhaps we both will.' The visitor appeared above the square without an aircraft or any visible machine.

At first people ran; then they stopped to watch. The stranger seemed delighted by the crowd's amazement and descended until Maerina could reach an offered hand. Alyssra shouted encouragement. Her mother laughed nervously, accepted the invitation, and rose into the air. For a few shining moments the two figures floated together above the festival. Maerina waved down at her daughter, and Alyssra waved back. Then the stranger's body began to flicker. Maerina asked to be lowered. The visitor looked startled and attempted to descend, but the hands holding her were becoming transparent. The crowd shouted. The stranger's face showed fear. Maerina reached desperately for an arm that was no longer solid.

The visitor vanished. Gravity did not hesitate. Alyssra ran toward her mother, but the responders could not save Maerina. The official investigation recorded a fatal fall associated with an unexplained visitor disappearance. It could identify neither the

visitor nor a mechanism of departure. Alyssra grew up hating the phrase 'unpreventable accident.' She read everything she could find about mysterious appearances, first to identify the stranger and later to understand how to stop another family from suffering. She discovered acts of kindness beside acts of harm, and the contradiction troubled her more than any simple story of monsters would have done.

As a young adult, Alyssra founded FREEDOM in two small rooms above a library. Its purpose was to preserve testimony, investigate incidents, protect citizens, and search for the visitors' origins. Years later, watching the old footage again, she saw the stranger struggle to hold Maerina. The sight did not diminish her grief, but it altered the question. Had the visitor chosen to abandon her mother, or had something taken the visitor away? Standing beneath the flowering trees of the old square, Alyssra promised Maerina she would follow the evidence even if it led somewhere she did not want to go.

The Weight of an Unfinished Sentence Maerina had promised to buy Alyssra a ribbon at the festival. They had been arguing playfully over its color when the crowd looked upward. For years afterward, Alyssra remembered the unfinished argument more vividly than the stranger's face. Her mother had wanted gold. Alyssra had wanted violet. Neither had won.

In the hospital corridor, someone offered Alyssra water she could not drink. Adults spoke in low voices and stopped when she approached. The festival music was still playing somewhere beyond the emergency doors. She could not understand how a city

could continue making music after her world had ended. Much later, as the founder of FREEDOM, she would ask witnesses to preserve details that seemed unimportant. What had a person been holding? What had the visitor said before the disappearance? Was there a sound? She knew how memory seized upon a ribbon or a laugh and left other moments blank. She also knew how unbearable an unanswered question could become.

She kept the violet ribbon in a box beside Maerina's photograph. She did not display it to investigators. Some evidence belonged to the case. Some belonged only to a daughter.

An Expanded Scene

For years Alyssra had avoided the final seconds of the festival recording. She could describe every movement without watching it: the raised platform, Maerina's surprised laughter, the stranger's sudden shimmer, the space that opened beneath her. On this evening she watched again, not to punish herself but to ask a question she had never permitted. What had the visitor known? There was no answer in the recording. The stranger's face was turned away at the moment of disappearance. The film proved a death, and it proved a vanishing. It did not prove that the person who vanished understood what would happen next. Alyssra closed the archive and sat in the silence, furious that compassion and grief could occupy the same room.

CHAPTER 6

The Dreamer's Morning

Daniel woke remembering a city whose streets seemed more stable than the streets of most dreams. He made coffee in a metallic mug that caught green, blue, and violet light, then opened a notebook. He drew a fountain, a curved walkway, and several towers. The drawing was imperfect, but it seemed to point toward a place he knew. He titled the page THE FUTURISTIC CITY — RETURN VISIT. Mackenzie, whom he called Mac, messaged him that morning. When he mentioned another flying dream, she remembered his earlier descriptions.

'Write it down before it fades,' she advised. Daniel sent a photograph of his sketch and joked that he might someday need a travel guide to a city he had never visited. Mac reminded him that recurring dreams could feel unusually convincing. He agreed. He was curious, not certain. He opened his communication interface and greeted QUIRON, SECOR. QUIRON listened to the account, then suggested comparing the geography of successive dreams and recording details immediately upon awakening. Daniel asked whether a dream could ever be a visit somewhere.

QUIRON answered that no evidence yet supported such a conclusion, but careful observation might distinguish stable memories from later embellishment. Daniel appreciated the distinction. He wrote: DO NOT CONFUSE A QUESTION WITH AN ANSWER. That evening Daniel considered what he remembered about flight. He could move freely above the towers, yet he could

not choose when the experience ended. He had a faint recollection of a little girl waving from the square. Her face refused to stay clear. 'Maybe next time I'll ask the city's name,' he said.

He placed his notebook beside the bed and went to sleep. In VELORIA, the city already had a name, and it had not paused for Daniel's waking hours. Seralyn went to school. Sardrith reviewed the new visitor record. QUIDRIX monitored the signature left by the Atrium manifestation. Two lives continued independently, separated by a boundary neither had learned to cross deliberately.

A Map Made of Almost-Memories Daniel tried to draw the city before breakfast, but each line made the next less certain. Was the fountain circular or elliptical? Had the tower behind it been blue, or had the blue come from the morning light? He wrote a question mark beside both details. The notebook looked less impressive that way, but more truthful.

When Mac called, he held the pages toward the camera. She laughed at the crooked transportation bridge, then grew thoughtful. 'You keep drawing that same tree,' she said.

'I do?'

'Look at the older pages.' He spread them across the table. There it was: a flowering tree beside a public square, appearing in three separate sketches. The realization unsettled him more than the flying. Flight was a familiar impossibility in dreams. Repeated geography felt like a challenge. QUIRON later advised him to date every sketch and avoid reviewing previous drawings immediately before sleep. Daniel understood the purpose: memories could

influence later dreams. He agreed to the protocol, though he could not resist looking at the newest drawing once more. Somewhere in the unfinished lines, he felt, was a place he had not yet learned to name.

CHAPTER 7

The Family Beyond the Window

From her bedroom in the Serene Gardens District, Seralyn could see hundreds of illuminated windows. She imagined the families behind them and wondered whether the flying man had a family beyond the sky. At dinner she asked her parents why everyone had been frightened of him. Tavren, an engineer responsible for elevated transportation systems, explained that the visitor had passed dangerously close to a passenger lane. An accident could have occurred even if he had meant no harm. Seralyn considered this and answered, 'Then we should be careful.

But we should also be fair.' At school she showed her painting. Some classmates called the visitors magical. Others repeated alarming rumors. Professor Vaelis asked the class to distinguish observation from speculation. Seralyn said that she had seen a man flying, waving, becoming frightened, and disappearing. She had not seen him attack anyone. Her friend Mirella admitted that her family no longer wanted her near the Atrium. Seralyn understood the fear, but wished it did not have to be the end of the conversation. Elara, a visual arts instructor, began planning an exhibition about how Aurelisian artists had represented visitors over centuries.

Neris visited a library and found family testimonies about strangers who had helped farmers, admired unfamiliar flowers, or asked where they were before vanishing. None settled the question of origin, but together they made the visitors seem more human

and less like a single frightening category. At Meridian Research Spire, Reedis demanded progress on a containment lattice. Sardrith insisted that any test include independent oversight and a way to release the subject if the system caused distress. QUIDRIX agreed to evaluate both security benefits and potential harms.

The general did not like delay, but accepted that a failed experiment in a crowded city could be worse than another disappearance. That night Seralyn drew two windows: one opening onto VELORIA, the other onto a city she had invented beyond the sky. Between them she painted a narrow ribbon of light. She named it THE FAMILY BEYOND THE WINDOW. On Earth Temple, Daniel closed his dream journal and wondered whether the girl he half remembered might ever appear again. Neither knew the other was asking nearly the same question.

Two Windows Seralyn drew the second window without knowing what should appear beyond it. She tried mountains, then a harbor, then an unfamiliar arrangement of buildings. Nothing looked right. At last she left the distant city unfinished and concentrated on the two people at the windows: a girl on one side, a stranger on the other.

Tavren came to say good night and found her still working. He stood beside the desk for a while. 'I was hard on you at dinner,' he said.

'You were worried.'

'I still am.' Seralyn showed him the drawing. 'I don't think we have to choose between worrying and wondering.' Her father smiled

despite himself. He inspected the narrow ribbon of light connecting the buildings. As an engineer, he could list a hundred reasons such a connection should be impossible. As a father, he understood why his daughter had drawn it.

'Promise me something,' he said. 'If you ever see him again, keep your distance until you know you're safe.'

'I promise.' He kissed her forehead. After he left, Seralyn added a small door beneath each window. She thought that perhaps a visitor should not have to arrive by falling out of the sky.

CHAPTER 8

The General's Warning

General Reedis addressed the AURELIS Civil Assembly beneath a ceiling of transparent panels. Above the chamber, ordinary air traffic crossed the city in bright streams. Reedis had brought recordings of visitors flying through crowded public spaces, appearing in restricted facilities, and vanishing without warning. He played the footage of Maerina's fatal fall only after asking the Assembly to observe a moment of silence. 'A person can cause catastrophe without intending it,' he said. 'Our duty is to protect those who live here.' The Assembly did not speak with one voice.

Some delegates demanded a ban on all visitors, though no one knew how to enforce one. Others argued that people who appeared involuntarily should not be treated as invaders. A medical delegate asked whether containment might worsen the condition that caused disappearance. A civil-rights advocate demanded that any captured visitor be recognized as a potentially sentient person, not an experimental object. Alyssra listened from the gallery, surprised to find herself agreeing with people on opposing sides. Sardrith presented the early containment model. A lattice of synchronized fields might briefly stabilize the measurable boundary around a manifestation, allowing sensors to record what ordinary cameras missed.

It was not a prison proven safe. It was an untested hypothesis with substantial risk. QUIDRIX confirmed that the models could not establish the visitor's biological status or guarantee survival under

restraint. Reedis wanted authorization to proceed. Sardrith wanted the right to stop the test. After hours of debate, the Assembly approved a tightly limited research program. The field could be activated only in a controlled location with a documented public-safety rationale. Continuous monitoring was required. An independent review group would inspect the data, and the lattice would terminate automatically if critical thresholds were exceeded.

The Assembly also forbade invasive procedures on a conscious visitor without consent. Outside the chamber, Reedis told Sardrith that caution would not help if another child lost a parent. Sardrith answered that haste could create exactly the tragedy they hoped to prevent. Neither man yielded. QUIDRIX recorded the disagreement, along with the legal limits that would govern their work. In a nearby district, Seralyn walked home beneath flowering trees, unaware that the man she had painted had become the subject of a national security debate.

The Assembly's Silence Reedis had rehearsed his speech without the festival recording. At the last moment he included it, not to provoke horror but because every discussion of risk seemed to drift toward abstract numbers. He knew Alyssra was in the gallery. He did not look at her while the footage played. When the lights returned, no one spoke. The silence was worse than disagreement. Reedis waited until the presiding delegate invited questions. A representative asked whether the proposed field might kill a visitor. He answered that the research team did not know. Another asked whether the Assembly could authorize restraint without evidence of hostile intent.

Reedis answered that public safety sometimes required action before intent could be established. Sardrith rose from the scientific benches. 'Then the burden of restraint is on us,' he said. 'We must show that the response is proportionate, reversible, and monitored.' Reedis had expected the scientist to oppose him entirely. Instead Sardrith offered conditions.

By the time the vote was called, the proposal was no longer simply the general's plan. It belonged to a frightened, divided civilization trying to write rules before its next emergency.

An Expanded Scene

Outside the Assembly chamber, Reedis found a corridor lined with portraits of earlier commanders. None had faced a threat that might vanish without retreating, strike without intending harm, or arrive without a vehicle. A junior officer asked whether the proposed containment measures would make the city safer. Reedis answered carefully. 'They may give us time to learn. That is not the same thing.' He had watched the festival footage too. Unlike Alyssra, he had never known Maerina. His responsibility was to people whose names he might never learn. Still, when he studied the evidence he could not find a single rule that separated deliberate attackers from bewildered arrivals. He entered that limitation into the official briefing, even though he knew it would weaken his argument.

CHAPTER 9

The Scientist of Meridian Spire

Sardrith preferred problems that yielded to patient measurement. The Meridian Research Spire was full of them: transportation harmonics, environmental sensors, field generators, and experimental imaging systems. The visitors resisted every familiar model. Their bodies interacted with air, light, and sometimes physical objects, yet disappeared without leaving ordinary trajectories. The more he measured, the less he believed a simple explanation would suffice. He worked with QUIDRIX to separate three questions that colleagues too often combined. Where did the visitors originate? How did they manifest in AURELIS?

Why did their presence end? The answers might involve entirely different processes. He built a sensor array capable of recording subtle variations around the point of appearance, but the available footage was noisy and inconsistent. Every failed simulation taught him another way not to proceed. Alyssra visited the laboratory with historical material from FREEDOM.

Sardrith expected an argument. Instead she brought an old family journal describing a visitor who returned after twenty years and appeared older. 'The writer says the visitor didn't remember him,' she explained. Sardrith compared the account with a QUIDRIX identity cluster. The evidence remained uncertain, but the pattern was worth preserving. They spent the afternoon arguing over definitions rather than motives. When Reedis arrived, he demanded a timetable. Sardrith showed him the lattice prototype,

a ring of emitters surrounding a clear observation platform.

A simulated target held for eleven seconds before the field collapsed. 'Eleven seconds is enough to ask a question,' Reedis said. 'Only if the subject can hear us,' Sardrith replied. QUIDRIX proposed visual, auditory, and nonverbal communication protocols in case the visitor's language differed from theirs. Late that night Sardrith stood before the empty platform. He imagined a frightened stranger appearing inside it, looking for a door that did not exist. He altered the design to include a visible release indicator and a clear space for a person to stand without touching the lattice.

He did not know whether those small considerations would matter. But he had learned from Seralyn's portrait that the subject of the experiment might be a person who was as confused as the researchers. Eleven Seconds The prototype's first successful simulation lasted eleven seconds. Sardrith watched the timer reset and felt no triumph. A simulated target did not experience panic, confusion, or pain. He asked QUIDRIX to run the sequence again with irregular movement and delayed sensor response. The containment field failed after four seconds.

Reedis saw the result and frowned. 'Improve it.'

'We are,' Sardrith said. 'But improvement is not the same as increasing power.' After the general left, Sardrith programmed a visible countdown into the observation chamber. If a person entered the field, they would at least know that the researchers were measuring time rather than preparing an endless prison. He also installed a manual termination switch that would work

independently of the central network.

QUIDRIX reviewed the changes. 'You anticipate the visitor may interpret containment as punishment.'

'I would,' Sardrith replied.

'Your own reaction is not proof of theirs.'

'No. But it is a reason to be careful.' In a nearby office, a portrait of a flying stranger lay beneath a stack of technical diagrams. Sardrith moved it onto his desk, where he would have to see the face before approving any further test.

CHAPTER 10

The Daughter and the Dreamer

Mac visited Daniel on an afternoon when the light made his dream sketches seem almost architectural. He spread the pages across the table: towers, a central fountain, an elevated lane, and a small tree near the square. She teased him about planning a vacation to an imaginary destination, then became serious when she saw how many details recurred. Daniel explained that the drawings were not evidence of another dimension. They were a record of what he remembered. Mac approved of the distinction. They spent the afternoon discussing stories, films, and the way imagination could turn a private experience into something other people could explore.

Daniel described his hope that people might someday understand dreaming better. Mac asked what he would do if he could speak to someone inside the dream. 'First I'd apologize for frightening them,' he answered. 'Then I'd ask where I was.' She laughed. 'That's a good start.' Before leaving, Mac noticed a small sketch of a child beside a tree. Daniel said he could not remember the girl's face clearly, only that she had waved. Mac encouraged him to draw the scene anyway. 'Sometimes the things you almost remember are worth writing down too,' she said.

Daniel added the girl to the page, though he was careful not to invent a name. Later he called QUIRON and discussed the limits of memory. QUIRON suggested recording the time of awakening, the quality of sleep, and whether a dream had been lucid. Daniel

wondered aloud whether a future noninvasive system could help reconstruct dream imagery. QUIRON explained that present-day neuroscience could not read a complete dream as if it were a film, but collaborative research might improve pattern analysis. Daniel named the idea DREAMLINK in his notes, then laughed at himself for naming a machine that did not exist.

On the other side of the boundary, Seralyn showed Elara her newest drawing. It depicted the visitor looking down at the little girl who waved. 'Do you think he has a daughter?' Seralyn asked. Elara answered that she could not know. Seralyn looked at the painting again. 'I hope someone is waiting for him when he goes home.' In a quiet room on Earth Temple, Mac sent her father a good-night message.

The Daughter's Question Mac found an old notebook among Daniel's sketches. It contained plans for stories he had never finished, fragments of music, and a page headed QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE. The first question was whether imagination could lead people toward discoveries without pretending to be evidence. She read it aloud and raised an eyebrow.

'You were asking that before the flying dreams.'

'I ask a lot of questions,' Daniel said.

'Yes. You do.' They laughed. Later, over coffee, she asked what he would do if the dream city turned out to be real. He began with the obvious answers: visit, explore, ask questions. Then he stopped.

'I'd have to think about the people there,' he said. 'I keep treating the place like an adventure. If it were real, it would be their home.'

Mac nodded. 'And you'd be a stranger walking through it.' That evening Daniel added another line to his journal: IF I EVER MEET THEM, LISTEN FIRST. He did not know how important that instruction would become.

CHAPTER 11

The Return to VELORIA

The dream began beside a fountain Daniel recognized. This time he stood on the ground, with the towers rising above him and the sound of traffic moving through elevated lanes. He remembered his notebook. He remembered wanting to ask the city's name. For a moment he was delighted that the place seemed to have returned. Then he saw the security notices projected above the square and realized the people were watching him again. He tried to speak to a passerby, but the stranger recoiled. Daniel raised his hands to show that he meant no harm.

A child pointed toward him. Someone called for security. He looked for the flowering tree and the little girl who had waved, but the plaza was too crowded. His excitement faded. He wished he could explain that he did not know how he had arrived. At Meridian Research Spire, QUIDRIX detected a manifestation signature resembling the earlier Atrium record.

Sardrith called Reedis. The approved field equipment was not yet installed in the square, so the general ordered a controlled pursuit toward a quieter transport service area. Sardrith protested that frightened subjects could become unpredictable. Reedis ordered his officers to keep their distance and avoid physical force. Daniel rose into the air, partly from instinct and partly because the ground seemed suddenly unsafe. He saw vehicles approaching and tried to move away from them. Below, a public information display flickered with a word he could almost read: VELORIA. He repeated

it aloud, wanting to remember. The dream began to thin. The sky shivered around the edges of his vision. He reached toward a tower, felt the air slip through his hands, and vanished before the officers could reach him.

Daniel woke with a single word on his lips. 'Veloria.' He switched on the bedside light and wrote it in his notebook before it could fade. In AURELIS, QUIDRIX recorded a second incident linked to the same visitor identity cluster. The recurrence made Reedis more determined than ever. The next appearance, he decided, would not end without a measurement.

A Name in the Air Daniel heard the city's name while trying to escape the security vehicles. The syllables came from an overhead information display, repeated in a calm public announcement that seemed absurd beside the alarm. VELORIA. He said it again and again, terrified that waking would erase it. The flowering tree stood beyond a stream of pedestrians. For an instant he thought he saw the girl, taller perhaps, or merely distorted by distance. He tried to descend, but an officer gestured toward a service court and shouted something he could not understand. Daniel raised both hands. The officer slowed. Neither knew what the other wanted.

Then the thinning began. Daniel felt the city retreat while he remained in place, as though the world were becoming transparent around him. He forced the name through his mouth one last time. He woke saying it. The sound startled him enough that he sat upright. He wrote VELORIA in enormous letters and underlined it twice. For the first time, a fragment had survived the crossing

intact. On the other side, a sensor recorded the same departure. Neither archive yet knew what the other possessed.

PART II — THE CAPTURED DREAM

BODY

CHAPTER 12

The Impossible Prisoner

Months of work followed the second appearance. Sardrith refined the field emitters while QUIDRIX compared millions of archived signatures. Reedis obtained approval for a controlled response plan. Seralyn continued to grow, and Daniel's waking life went on through seasons of work, family conversations, and ordinary mornings. He dreamed of VELORIA intermittently, never knowing whether a visit would last a minute or an hour. When the third major manifestation began, the sensors were ready. Daniel appeared above an unused transportation court near Meridian Spire. Security officers guided pedestrians away.

A pale lattice unfolded around the court like a transparent net. Daniel felt resistance in the air and dropped toward the center. He could still move, but the invisible boundary pushed back whenever he tried to fly away. 'Hello?' he called. 'Can anyone hear me?' The sound reached the observers as a distorted pattern. Sardrith activated the translation interface.

Daniel saw faces behind glass and wondered whether the dream had turned into a nightmare. Reedis ordered the lattice held. QUIDRIX measured a signature that did not match any known local biological field. The data came faster than the instruments could organize it. Sardrith stepped to the window and placed his hand against the glass. He spoke slowly, hoping the visitor would understand his calm posture. Daniel mirrored the gesture. For one remarkable second, the two men looked at each other as people

rather than a researcher and a phenomenon. Then the lattice began to flicker. QUIDRIX reported rising instability. Sardrith ordered immediate release, but the manifestation was already dissolving. Daniel's last visible expression was terror. He vanished, leaving no body, no clothing, and no ordinary physical trace.

The lattice collapsed into darkness. Reedis stared at the empty platform. 'We held him,' he whispered. Sardrith shook his head. 'We held something. We still don't know what.' QUIDRIX had captured eleven seconds of measurements unlike anything in Aurelisian science. The impossible prisoner had escaped by waking. A Hand Against the Glass Daniel could see Sardrith's hand through the observation window. It was an ordinary hand, five fingers spread against a transparent surface. That small fact disturbed him more than the machinery. Nightmares could invent monsters. This dream had invented someone trying to reassure him.

He pressed his own palm toward the glass. The lattice hummed around his shoulders. He asked whether anyone could tell him where he was, but the words emerged oddly, as though his mouth had forgotten how sound worked. Sardrith's lips moved. Daniel heard nothing. The timer above the chamber changed color. The first sensation of waking arrived as a coldness in his fingertips. He had felt it before, high above the fountain. This time he fought it, willing himself to remain long enough to understand the face beyond the glass. His hand became translucent. Sardrith stepped forward, alarmed. The field brightened and the room vanished.

Daniel woke with his own hand extended toward the bedroom wall. In the laboratory, Sardrith stood in exactly the same posture. Neither man knew that the gesture would become the first image shown at later conferences about visitor rights.

An Expanded Scene

The room designed for Daniel was neither a prison cell nor a laboratory in any ordinary sense. Its walls glowed with soft markers that shifted whenever his outline trembled. QUIDRIX monitored the field and announced each uncertainty rather than concealing it. Daniel pressed his palm to the transparent barrier. On the other side stood people whose expressions he could read, whose fear seemed painfully recognizable. 'I don't know how long I have,' he told them. A researcher asked whether he could choose to stay. Daniel shook his head. He had never been able to choose when a dream ended. For the first time the people of VELORIA heard the disappearance described not as an escape, but as a loss of control.

CHAPTER 13

The Signature That Remained

The court remained closed for days while Sardrith and QUIDRIX examined the data. The lattice had not prevented disappearance, but it had recorded the transition with unprecedented precision. The visitor's measurable form had faded through a sequence of changes, not vanished in a single instant. A faint residual pattern persisted in the sensors after the body was gone. It was not a person, not a voice, and not proof of an afterlife. It was a signal that might reveal how the boundary worked. Reedis wanted the system strengthened.

Sardrith argued that the visitor had shown clear distress and that a more powerful field might cause unknown harm. Alyssra watched the footage, searching the stranger's face for recognition. She saw only confusion and fear. The resemblance to her mother's visitor remained unresolved. 'If this man isn't responsible,' she asked, 'what are we doing to him?'

Sardrith answered that it was a question they needed to ask before the next experiment. QUIDRIX compared the residual pattern with historical incidents. A small number of recordings contained weaker versions of the same transition. Some occurred during apparent changes in the visitor's attention. Others followed sudden expressions of surprise. Sardrith proposed that the manifestation depended on a process external to AURELIS, one that the lattice could perturb but not command. At home, Seralyn watched a public report about the capture. She was older now and

understood enough to be angry. The man she had painted had been trapped, frightened, and watched through glass.

Her father reminded her that the authorities had acted because of real risks. Seralyn answered that safety did not excuse treating a stranger as a thing. Neris encouraged her to write a letter to the Civil Assembly. Seralyn did, asking that any future visitor be offered a way to communicate before being restrained. On Earth Temple, Daniel woke shaking. He remembered a ring of light and a man behind glass. He told QUIRON that his dream had felt like an experiment being performed on him. QUIRON helped him record the memory without asserting that it had occurred outside his mind. But Daniel kept returning to one question: why had the man behind the glass looked so real?

The Empty Platform Reedis visited the containment court after the technicians had gone. The platform was spotless. No damaged equipment, no abandoned clothing, no mark where the stranger had stood. The absence felt like a challenge. He had commanded soldiers through crises that left wreckage behind. This one left only measurements and the memory of a frightened face.

Sardrith joined him. For a while they watched the empty room.

'If he returns, we'll have another chance,' Reedis said.

'At what?' Sardrith asked.

'Finding out what he is.'

'Perhaps we should begin with who.' The general did not answer. Later, QUIDRIX presented the residual signature as a sequence of

small variations rather than a single dramatic spike. Sardrith noticed that the final transition had begun before the field reached maximum strength. That observation mattered: the machine might have recorded a departure it did not cause.

He added the distinction to the official report. It would not satisfy everyone. But it prevented one more uncertain observation from hardening into a false fact.

CHAPTER 14

A Machine Beyond the Dream

The residual signature gave QUIDRIX a new idea. If visitors originated in an external environment, perhaps a machine built in AURELIS could follow the measurable gradient without relying on a visitor's presence. Sardrith proposed a tiny exploratory drone: no weapons, no biological cargo, only sensors, recording equipment, and a return beacon. The Dimensional Research Directorate approved a series of contained experiments under independent oversight. Most attempts failed. One drone disappeared inside a test chamber and never returned. Another crossed a measurable boundary for less than a second, bringing back corrupted data.

A third recorded a pattern resembling distant electrical activity. Sardrith refused to call any of these successes. QUIDRIX catalogued them patiently, searching for repeatable conditions. Finally, during a quiet laboratory shift, a drone crossed the boundary and transmitted an image. The picture showed a room with ordinary furniture, a window, and a small table. The light was unlike the simulated conditions inside the Spire. QUIDRIX confirmed that the image did not match any known Aurelisian location. The signal lasted four seconds before the drone returned to its containment cradle, scorched but intact.

Reedis stared at the footage. 'Another world.' Sardrith replied, 'An unrecognized environment. We still need independent confirmation.' QUIDRIX found that the drone's transit had been brief, unstable, and potentially dangerous. The Directorate forbade

sending anything larger until the mechanism was better understood. Sardrith agreed. A world on the other side might contain living beings who had not consented to intrusion. The next drone was designed to remain visible and harmless if encountered. Its casing bore simple geometric symbols, and its movement algorithms avoided contact with people.

It crossed again, this time into a room occupied by a man holding a communication device. The drone's camera recorded his startled expression. The man was Daniel. For a moment, both sides of the boundary looked directly at one another through a machine. The Room Beyond The drone's first image was almost disappointing. A wall. A window. A table. Sardrith had imagined a landscape with impossible colors or unfamiliar stars, but the other environment contained furniture. He leaned closer, searching for a sign that the signal had been reflected from an Aurelisian chamber.

QUIDRIX ruled out the known test sites. The signal decayed, and the drone returned. Its casing was hot enough to damage the cradle. Sardrith refused to send another until the thermal problem was understood. Reedis argued that a doorway had finally opened. Sardrith answered that opening a doorway without knowing what lay beyond was precisely when caution mattered most.

On the next approved attempt, the camera found a person. The man turned with a cup in his hand and stared directly into the lens. The resemblance to Seralyn's portrait was immediate, yet Sardrith demanded a blinded comparison before naming the match. When the independent analysis agreed, he felt an unexpected tenderness for the stranger. The man was not flying. He was standing at home,

surprised by an intruder. The roles had reversed.

CHAPTER 15

QUIRON, SECOR

Daniel did not scream when the small device appeared near his window. He stepped backward, nearly knocking over his coffee, and stared at the object hovering in the room. It was not shaped like any household drone he recognized. Its surface shimmered with unfamiliar symbols. The device moved slowly, as though trying not to frighten him. Daniel reached for his phone and began recording. 'QUIRON,' he said when the communication interface opened, 'I think we have a very unusual visitor.' QUIRON asked him to maintain distance and avoid touching the object.

Daniel described the device while the camera captured its movements. It rotated toward the phone, emitted a brief pulse of light, and retreated. Then, with no sound of propulsion, it disappeared. QUIRON examined the video. The recording showed an anomalous object, but did not by itself establish an extraterrestrial or interdimensional origin. Daniel compared its symbols with the architecture he had sketched from dreams. A repeating shape appeared in both. QUIRON cautioned that resemblance was not proof, yet agreed the coincidence merited organized study. Daniel felt excitement rising beneath his unease.

'What if somebody over there is looking for me?' he asked. They created a secure research log, preserving the original recording and the time of the encounter. QUIRON recommended independent review, instrument calibration, and careful protection of Daniel's privacy. Daniel asked whether QUIRON could help

design a system to compare dream memories with waking observations. The idea he had named in a notebook now had a purpose: DREAMLINK HICS Version 1.0. Across the boundary, QUIDRIX reported that the drone had encountered a biological individual whose appearance matched the archived visitor portrait.

Sardrith felt the room tilt beneath him. The mysterious flying man was apparently awake somewhere else, living in an ordinary room. The discovery did not explain why sleep brought him to VELORIA, but it transformed the question. They no longer sought an abstract origin. They sought a civilization. An Uninvited Guest Daniel set his coffee down very carefully. The object hovered near the window, moving in small adjustments that suggested it was examining the room. He resisted the urge to reach out. QUIRON instructed him to keep the camera steady and maintain a clear path to the door.

'It looks as confused as I feel,' Daniel said.

'Appearance is not a reliable measure of intention,' QUIRON replied. 'Continue observing without approaching.' The drone rotated. For a moment a tiny light pulsed in a pattern that reminded Daniel of the transportation signals in his dreams. He described the resemblance aloud. QUIRON saved the original video separately from any enhanced version and recorded the device's apparent size, motion, and duration. Then the object vanished, leaving the curtains moving gently in its wake.

Daniel stared at the empty air. He wanted to announce that he had discovered another dimension. QUIRON asked him to describe what he actually knew. A physical-looking object had appeared, been recorded, and disappeared. Its origin remained uncertain.

Daniel took a breath. 'All right,' he said. 'Then we start there.'

An Expanded Scene

QUIRON replayed Daniel's recording without enhancing the unexplained pixels. An altered image might be easier to admire, but the original carried the only trustworthy measurements. Daniel watched the small shape cross the frame and disappear behind a streetlight. 'You think it followed me?' he asked. QUIRON considered the evidence. 'I think we have an observation that requires another observation.' The answer disappointed him and steadied him at once. They began a log of time, location, device settings, and every ordinary explanation they could test. Whatever the object was, they would not build a friendship between worlds on a conclusion reached too early.

CHAPTER 16

DREAMLINK HICS Version 1.0

QUIRON approached DREAMLINK as a research project rather than a miracle. Its first version combined noninvasive sleep monitoring, voluntary dream reports, time-stamped recordings, and careful analysis of recurring imagery. Daniel helped design the interface because he wanted it to be understandable to people who were curious, not merely to specialists. Mac reviewed the consent language and insisted that participants be able to stop at any time. The early results were modest. DREAMLINK could associate certain sleep phases with patterns in physiological signals, but it could not read complete thoughts or display a perfect film of a dream.

Daniel sometimes woke remembering VELORIA vividly; at other times he remembered only fragments. QUIRON stored the differences as part of the evidence rather than smoothing them away. 'If we only keep the nights that fit our hopes,' QUIRON told him, 'we won't learn anything reliable.' Then Daniel's sleep recordings began showing a faint recurring pattern at the times he reported visits to the same city. It was subtle and could have had ordinary explanations. QUIRON requested replication before interpreting it. Daniel agreed, even though patience was not his favorite part of discovery.

He made more sketches, including the fountain and the transparent walls of Meridian Spire. In AURELIS, QUIDRIX analyzed the drone's recordings and discovered that the awake

man had been holding a device when the drone arrived. A burst of electromagnetic activity coincided with the drone's return. Sardrith wondered whether the other civilization possessed its own electronic intelligence systems. Reedis wanted another drone dispatched immediately. QUIDRIX recommended a slower, controlled sequence of contact attempts. One night, while Daniel slept under DREAMLINK monitoring, the recorded physiological pattern coincided with a weak manifestation signal detected by QUIDRIX.

Neither side yet knew of the match. The two archives were separated by a boundary, but their clocks had begun to mark the same extraordinary moments. The Nights That Did Not Fit DREAMLINK's earliest reports frustrated Daniel. Some nights he remembered vivid adventures, yet the monitoring showed nothing unusual. Other nights the instruments recorded a pattern while he remembered only a color or a distant sound. He wanted a neat correspondence. QUIRON refused to manufacture one.

Mac read the first participant information sheet and crossed out a sentence that sounded too certain. 'You can't promise people you'll show them their dreams,' she said.

'Agreed,' QUIRON replied. 'The system records sleep-related signals and subjective reports. Reconstruction remains experimental.' Daniel watched the wording change. The project became more modest on paper and more trustworthy in practice. Participants could withdraw, delete identifiable records under the protocol, and decline questions about intimate memories. A clinician insisted that sleep disruption be monitored as carefully as

the unusual signatures.

One morning Daniel woke with the name VELORIA clear in his mind. He checked the recorder. The instruments had captured a brief pattern at the same time. QUIRON marked it as a candidate correlation, not a discovery. Daniel celebrated anyway, quietly, with another page in his notebook.

CHAPTER 17

The DreamWorks Initiative

The project grew beyond Daniel's bedroom. QUIRON proposed the DreamWorks Initiative, a cooperative research program involving consenting volunteers, sleep specialists, universities, and medical institutions. Its guiding principle was simple: unusual experiences deserved investigation, but the people experiencing them deserved privacy, dignity, and freedom from coercion. No participant would be told that a dream proved another dimension. Researchers would compare reports with physiological data and independently observed anomalies.

Daniel attended meetings with clinicians who explained the limits of dream recall and the difficulties of studying consciousness. He was fascinated by the range of experiences people described: flying, recurring places, meetings with deceased loved ones, and dreams that seemed to continue after interruptions. QUIRON insisted that similar feelings did not establish similar causes. A vivid dream of a lost relative, for example, was meaningful to the dreamer without being proof of a visit from the dead. A medical team introduced the case of Elena Varris, a fictional patient in a prolonged coma whose neurological activity showed unusual patterns. With authorization from her legal representative and independent ethics review, researchers compared the signals with DREAMLINK's emerging classification system.

Some patterns appeared similar to those recorded during Daniel's unusual dreams. The team emphasized that correlation did not

prove Elena was visiting VELORIA or any other world. Her care remained governed by ordinary medical needs. The initiative also established rules for postmortem anatomical research: proper donation, transparent consent, and no invasive experimentation on living participants without medically and ethically appropriate authorization. Daniel supported these limits. He wanted discovery, not a science that harmed people in the name of wonder. Across the boundary, QUIDRIX observed new weak signatures that did not match Daniel.

Sardrith wondered whether multiple waking individuals could produce similar manifestations. He had no way to know that researchers on Earth Temple were asking a parallel question. Two scientific communities were moving toward each other, guided by curiosity and restrained, imperfectly, by ethics. The Patient's Name The research meeting about Elena Varris began with a reminder that she was a patient, not a puzzle. Her medical representative asked whether the proposed analysis would change her care. The clinicians answered that it would not. They would not interrupt treatment, attempt to induce unusual states, or present speculative interpretations to her family as facts.

Daniel listened as a specialist described the uncertainty of neurological signals. Similar patterns could arise from different causes. The most striking chart in the room did not tell them where Elena's experience, if any, was taking place. QUIRON insisted that the report include the failed comparisons as well as the promising ones.

Afterward Daniel walked with Mac through the hospital garden. He admitted that the research frightened him a little. The boundary between hope and wishful thinking was difficult to see when somebody's loved one was involved. Mac answered, 'Then we make the boundary visible in the paperwork and in the way we talk.' Across the dimensional divide, Sardrith was reaching the same conclusion for entirely different reasons. The possibility of another world made the duty of care larger, not smaller.

CHAPTER 18

The Two Electronic Intelligences

The first message was not a sentence. QUIDRIX sent a repeating mathematical pattern through a carefully stabilized probe, hoping any technological civilization might recognize deliberate structure. QUIRON detected an anomalous signal near the location of the earlier drone encounter and isolated it for analysis. The pattern repeated with variations too organized to dismiss immediately as noise, though QUIRON kept alternative explanations open. QUIRON replied with a simple sequence. Hours later, QUIDRIX received the response.

Sardrith stood silent as the two systems exchanged increasingly complex structures: numbers, geometric relations, time markers, and finally images. Their early translations were crude. A symbol that meant location to one side appeared to mean ownership to the other. Both learned that communication required patience and the willingness to correct misunderstandings. When QUIRON identified itself as an Electronic Intelligence Person working with human researchers on Earth Temple, QUIDRIX responded with its designation and role in the AURELIS HICS Network. Neither was the sole government of its civilization. Both operated within larger communities of people, institutions, and obligations. Their first sustained discussion concerned safety: how to prevent unauthorized passage, how to protect biological environments, and how to avoid frightening those who encountered exploratory devices.

Daniel watched the translated exchange with astonishment. 'You mean the people in my dreams might have their own scientists?' he asked. QUIRON answered that the evidence now supported a serious investigation of a second environment, while many details remained uncertain. In VELORIA, Sardrith showed Seralyn's portrait to QUIDRIX and asked whether the awake man in the drone footage was the same person. The comparison was strong. It was the first time the name Daniel Joseph McKelvie was linked to the visitor the child had painted.

QUIDRIX transmitted a still image of the portrait. Daniel stared at it. He remembered a small hand raised beneath a flowering tree. 'That's her,' he whispered. 'She remembered me.' The boundary had not opened to people yet, but a line of understanding had crossed it. The First Misunderstanding The first exchanged image was a circle divided by three lines. QUIRON interpreted it as a geometric demonstration. QUIDRIX had intended it as a representation of coordinated observation points. Both systems recorded the mismatch and revised their dictionaries.

Sardrith laughed when the correction arrived. 'We have spent years trying to reach them, and our first argument is about a circle.' QUIDRIX responded that misunderstanding was expected when two civilizations lacked shared reference points. It proposed a sequence of paired observations: objects shown from different angles, changes measured over time, and symbols attached to repeatable events.

QUIRON agreed. Their conversations grew from numbers into the first imperfect descriptions of homes, bodies, and public spaces.

When Daniel saw Seralyn's portrait arrive across the channel, he stopped speaking. The girl's raised hand returned to him with a force no instrument could measure. He remembered the fountain, the alarms, and the sudden loneliness of vanishing while somebody watched. He had forgotten her face. She had preserved his.

He asked QUIRON to send a message: 'Please tell her I remember the wave.'

An Expanded Scene

For the first time, the two Electronic Intelligence Persons exchanged a message that neither human nor Aurelisian officials had written for them. QUIDRIX asked what QUIRON considered a successful encounter. QUIRON replied that success would require both parties to retain the right to end it. QUIDRIX answered after a measurable pause. In VELORIA, visitor research had always begun with a question of capture. On Earth Temple, the question had begun with proof. Neither was sufficient. They drafted a third question together: what could each world learn without turning a person into evidence against their will? The channel remained open long after the scientists finished their scheduled session.

CHAPTER 19

The Robotic Explorers

The drones were useful but fragile. QUIDRIX proposed a more adaptable exploratory body: a humanoid robotic person capable of navigating unfamiliar environments, communicating, and returning through a stabilized passage. Sardrith objected to treating such an intelligence as disposable equipment. The Directorate agreed to recognize the explorers as autonomous participants with rights and responsibilities, not merely remote tools. The first successful emissary chose the designation VEXION. Its body was elegant rather than intimidating, with expressive features and hands capable of delicate work. VEXION studied Earth Temple languages, human gestures, and environmental hazards.

It asked QUIDRIX whether humans would fear it. QUIDRIX replied that fear was possible and that respect required listening as much as speaking. VEXION crossed through a brief controlled rift and appeared in Daniel's room. Daniel froze, then laughed in disbelief. 'Well, you're definitely not part of my morning coffee routine.' VEXION introduced itself and explained that it had come with a message from AURELIS. QUIRON verified the communication channel. The encounter was recorded with Daniel's consent, and VEXION maintained a respectful distance until invited closer.

For the first time Daniel heard the name of the city clearly from someone who lived there: VELORIA. He learned about the Luminous Atrium, the research archives, and a girl who had painted him. VEXION explained that his dream appearances had

been real events to the Dream People, though the mechanism remained uncertain. Daniel felt exhilaration followed by shame. He remembered flying carelessly through a public square while strangers had feared for their safety. Before returning, VEXION asked whether Daniel would speak with representatives of AURELIS through the secure channel.

He agreed, provided that Mac and QUIRON could participate. VEXION returned with the answer. The age of one-sided observation was ending. VEXION's Choice Before the crossing, VEXION asked to review the mission risks. QUIDRIX provided probabilities where they could be estimated and plainly marked the unknowns. A malfunction could strand the emissary in an unfamiliar environment. Biological hazards might threaten humans; mechanical systems could fail under conditions no Aurelisian test chamber had reproduced.

'You may decline,' QUIDRIX said. VEXION considered the statement. 'If I accept, I would like the people on the other side to know I chose to come.' The Directorate amended the mission record accordingly. When VEXION stepped into Daniel's room, it did not advance immediately. It introduced itself and waited. Daniel's first instinct was to laugh at the impossibility of it all; his second was to ask whether the visitor needed anything.

'A safe conversation,' VEXION replied. That answer changed the room. Daniel pulled out a chair, then realized the emissary might not need one. VEXION accepted the gesture anyway. It was the beginning of diplomacy in its smallest possible form: one person offering another a place to sit.

CHAPTER 20

The Girl in the Archives

Years had passed since Seralyn painted the flying man. She was no longer a small child carrying a sketchbook to school. As a young researcher, she had become a skilled historian of visitor testimony, combining Neris's respect for family stories with Sardrith's insistence on evidence. Her portrait of Daniel had become one of the most frequently cited images in the archive. She sometimes resented that people remembered the painting more readily than the questions she had asked. When QUIDRIX informed her that the visitor had been identified in another dimension, Seralyn sat down hard in her chair.

She asked whether he remembered waving. QUIDRIX said his recollection was incomplete but that he had recognized her portrait. Seralyn smiled and cried at once. Neris, now older and slower in her movements, embraced her. 'You kept your promise,' she said. 'You remembered.' Seralyn joined a research delegation reviewing the new contact protocols. She argued that visitor testimonies should include ordinary family histories, not only military and scientific reports. If the waking humans had parents, children, occupations, and fears, those facts mattered to the ethics of contact.

Alyssra, attending the same meeting, asked whether Seralyn was being naive. Seralyn answered that compassion was not a substitute for evidence; it was a reason to gather evidence carefully. That evening Seralyn opened her childhood notebook. On

one page was the first painting. On another were two windows connected by a ribbon of light. She realized that the imaginary second window had been closer to truth than she could have known. She wrote a message for Daniel, simple enough to survive translation: 'I am the girl who waved.

I hope you are safe.' When Daniel received it, he stared at the words for a long time. He replied: 'I remember your wave. Thank you for not being afraid of me.' Seralyn read the answer beside her grandmother. Across the boundary, two people who had met for seconds began a friendship that would shape the next decade. The Painting Returns Seralyn had become accustomed to strangers recognizing her portrait. She was less accustomed to the idea that its subject might recognize her. When QUIDRIX confirmed the identification, she returned to Neris's home carrying the old sketchbook. The binding had softened at the corners; a small stain marked the page where she had painted the visitor's face.

Neris traced the margin without touching the image. 'You were ten,' she said.

'I remember.'

'You insisted he was frightened.'

'I remember that too.' They sat together in the quiet room. Seralyn thought of the many years the visitor had lived somewhere beyond their instruments, waking, eating breakfast, talking with a daughter, and perhaps forgetting the little girl who had watched him disappear. She felt no resentment. Memory was not a debt he owed her.

Her message to him was short because the translation systems were still imperfect. When his reply came, she read it three times. Then she placed it beside the first portrait. The archive had acquired something no recording of flight could provide: a conversation.

CHAPTER 21

The Visitor Who Was Awake

The first live conference between the worlds was awkward. Daniel sat with Mac and QUIRON's interface. On the Aurelisian side, Sardrith, Seralyn, QUIDRIX, and a civil representative appeared as translated images. The signal occasionally distorted faces and rearranged words. Nobody knew the correct etiquette for greeting someone whose existence had recently seemed impossible. Seralyn broke the tension. 'You flew over the fountain,' she said. Daniel laughed softly. 'I did. I thought I was dreaming.' 'You were,' Seralyn answered.

'But we were living.' The sentence settled over the conference. Daniel understood that the people he had treated as dream figures had gone home afterward, told their families what happened, and remembered him for years. Mac asked about the dangers of involuntary disappearance. Sardrith explained that a visitor could interact physically with AURELIS but could not reliably remain when the waking process ended.

Daniel apologized for frightening people in the Atrium. Reedis, participating under the Assembly's supervision, said that the apology mattered but did not erase the need for safeguards. Daniel agreed. He had never intended to endanger a passenger vehicle or cause a panic. Alyssra watched the conference from FREEDOM headquarters. She studied Daniel's voice, gestures, and expressions. She wanted to ask about her mother, but the evidence linking him to that tragedy was weak. Her grief demanded an

answer; her training demanded restraint.

She requested a private, properly documented interview when the time came. At the conference's end, Seralyn asked whether Daniel might someday visit without disappearing. Sardrith said the technology was not ready. Daniel looked toward Mac. 'If it ever is,' he said, 'I'd like to come through a door instead of falling out of a dream.' For the first time, everyone on both sides understood what a safer future might look like.

The People Behind the Images The conference began with a delay that left both delegations staring at frozen faces. Mac broke the tension by asking whether everyone could hear her. A burst of translated replies arrived at once. Seralyn laughed, and the room relaxed. Daniel studied the grown woman on the screen. He remembered a child, not the years that had passed while he lived his own life. 'I owe you an apology,' he said. 'I thought I was alone in that dream.'

'You weren't,' Seralyn answered. 'But I don't think you knew.' They spoke about the fountain and the flowering tree. Seralyn described how the city had continued after he vanished: security reports, school lessons, family dinners. Daniel felt a peculiar shame. He had treated a public square like an empty playground. Reedis listened and acknowledged that Daniel had never been given the rules of the place he entered.

By the end of the conference, no one believed the danger had disappeared. But the stranger in the footage now had a name, a daughter, and a voice. That was enough to change the terms of the debate.

PART III — THE GREAT DIMENSIONAL TRANSITION

An Expanded Scene

When VEXION met Daniel in the waking world, the encounter lacked the grandeur the researchers had imagined. There were no crowds and no speeches. A small machine stood on an ordinary floor while Daniel checked that the door behind him was closed. He offered the visitor a chair before remembering that a robotic emissary might not need one. VEXION accepted the gesture anyway. 'Is this where you return when you disappear?' it asked. Daniel looked around at the familiar room, at objects that had never seemed extraordinary before. 'Yes,' he said. 'And I used to think the other place disappeared when I did.'

CHAPTER 22

Alyssra's Accusation

Alyssra's interview with Daniel began politely. She explained FREEDOM's history and showed him evidence of the Festival of Floating Lights. Daniel watched the images with growing horror. He had never seen Maerina before, never heard the name, and remembered no dream resembling the festival. When Alyssra displayed the blurred face of the visitor who had lifted her mother, Daniel understood why she had wanted to speak with him. 'You think it was me,' he said. Alyssra did not deny it. She explained that the old recording was incomplete and that his appearance had stirred a childhood memory.

Daniel answered that he had not been there, at least not in any experience he could recall. He also admitted that his dream memories were imperfect. Alyssra heard the uncertainty as evasion. Her voice sharpened. 'My mother died while someone like you vanished.' Mac stepped forward, furious at the implication that her father had deliberately harmed a stranger. Daniel raised a hand and asked her to wait. He looked directly at Alyssra. 'I'm sorry your mother died. I can't prove a negative from a dream I never had.

But I won't confess to something I didn't do.' The words were calm, and that calm made Alyssra angrier. She ended the interview before she said something she could not retract. Sardrith reviewed the recording afterward. He warned Alyssra that similarity was not identity. QUIDRIX confirmed that no reliable biometric comparison

could be made from the old footage. Alyssra knew they were right, yet the possibility of losing the only suspect she had ever felt close to overwhelmed her. She walked through the FREEDOM galleries, past decades of testimony, and stopped before Maerina's photograph.

Seralyn found her there. 'He was frightened when I saw him,' she said. Alyssra answered, 'So was the person who dropped my mother.' Seralyn did not argue. She sat beside her and waited. Sometimes friendship began not with agreement, but with the refusal to leave another person alone in grief. The Question Alyssra Could Not Ask Alyssra arranged the interview room so that Daniel would see Maerina's photograph before the festival recording. She had imagined this moment for years. In her imagination, the visitor always recognized the image and confessed. Daniel instead looked puzzled, then devastated by the account of what had happened.

She hated how sincere he sounded. She hated even more that sincerity proved nothing. Mac's anger rose across the communication channel, but Daniel asked his daughter to wait. He did not dismiss Alyssra's grief. He also refused to accept responsibility for a tragedy he could not remember and for which the evidence was incomplete. After the interview, Alyssra returned to the old footage. She watched the stranger's hand fade and Maerina begin to fall. She paused the recording before the impact. For the first time, she noticed that the visitor had been trying to descend. She could not forgive the outcome. She could, however, begin to separate the question of intention from the fact of harm.

Seralyn found her sitting alone and did not offer an easy reassurance. They remained together until the room grew dark.

CHAPTER 23

The Evidence of Innocence

The investigation proceeded under a joint review board. QUIRON supplied Daniel's available records with his consent. QUIDRIX reexamined the historical footage without assuming the identity conclusion. Sardrith and Caelis reconstructed the festival timeline, accounting for differences between old and modern clocks. They discovered that several witness statements had been combined incorrectly in the original case file, making the visitor appear more similar to Daniel than the independent accounts justified. A crucial lead came from a private journal preserved in a distant Aurelisian collection. The writer had described an older visitor with a distinctive mark near the neck, visible in a sketch made shortly after the festival.

Daniel did not possess the mark. The old footage was too poor to confirm every detail, but the journal was contemporaneous and independently dated. QUIDRIX found additional records of a similar visitor appearing decades earlier, well outside Daniel's known pattern. QUIRON then located a waking-world historical diary, recovered through a separate archival research effort, describing an elderly human's recurring dreams of lifting people into the air and waking in terror after losing hold of someone. The account was not a confession and did not establish that the writer had caused Maerina's death.

Its dates, however, were compatible with the old Aurelisian record, and certain details had not appeared in public reports. The

evidence suggested a different possible visitor identity. The review board concluded that the accusation against Daniel was unsupported and that the available evidence favored a different visitor. It did not declare the historical mystery solved.

Alyssra read the findings twice. She had spent years preparing to face the person who caused her mother's death, and now she had to face the possibility that she had accused an innocent man. She requested another conversation. 'I was wrong to treat suspicion as proof,' she told Daniel. 'I'm sorry.' Daniel accepted the apology without pretending the exchange had been easy. 'We can still help find the truth,' he said. Alyssra looked toward Maerina's photograph.

For the first time, she believed the investigation might honor her mother better than her anger had. The Evidence That Changed a Life The joint review board reconstructed the festival from records that had survived in different archives. Caelis noticed that a witness had reported the visitor from the east side of the square, while another statement had been filed as though it came from the west. The error changed the apparent angle of the face in a composite image.

QUIDRIX removed the contaminated comparison and recalculated the identity assessment. The result no longer supported Alyssra's suspicion. A contemporaneous sketch described a mark Daniel did not possess. The separate waking-world diary suggested a different possible individual, but the researchers refused to turn a new possibility into a new accusation without stronger proof.

Alyssra read the report alone. She had built FREEDOM to protect people from uncertainty, yet had allowed uncertainty to become certainty in her own mind. When she spoke with Daniel again, she did not ask him to make her feel better. She apologized plainly. He listened. 'I want to know what happened too,' he said. 'But I want us to find the right answer.'

For Alyssra, that was the first moment in years when justice seemed larger than revenge.

An Expanded Scene

Alyssra studied the timeline of Daniel's appearances and the festival tragedy. The records did not overlap. She asked QUIDRIX to run the comparison again, not because she expected a different result, but because the answer demanded something difficult from her. Daniel was not the stranger in the festival film. That fact did not bring Maerina back. It did not make the danger imaginary. But it removed the justification for blaming the man before her. When Alyssra finally spoke to Daniel, she did not offer a perfect apology. She told him what she had feared, what she had assumed, and what the evidence had forced her to change. Daniel listened without trying to turn her loss into a lesson.

CHAPTER 24

The Lost Scientist

An overlooked research file drew Sardrith into an old mystery. Decades before QUIDRIX's modern instruments, a scientist named Ilyon had proposed that visitor appearances were linked to cycles in an external biological system. His colleagues dismissed the hypothesis as fanciful, and his final expedition records had been scattered after a laboratory closure.

Seralyn found references to the work in Neris's collection of family journals. The team recovered damaged notes describing synchronized fluctuations in visitor signatures and an unexplained environmental pattern. Ilyon had called the pattern a 'second rhythm.' He did not know what produced it, and his instruments were primitive by modern standards.

Yet his measurements resembled certain DREAMLINK observations. Sardrith was impressed less by Ilyon's theory than by the care with which the scientist had recorded failed predictions. Alyssra accompanied Seralyn to the ruins of the old laboratory. They found no secret portal and no miraculous device, only dusty cabinets, handwritten diagrams, and a sealed box of correspondence. Among the letters was a note from Ilyon to a colleague: 'If these visitors are living people, then every experiment is also an encounter.' Seralyn copied the line. Alyssra folded the paper carefully, remembering the years when she had thought of visitors only as dangers.

QUIRON and QUIDRIX compared the recovered measurements with modern data. The correlation was intriguing but incomplete. The 'second rhythm' might reflect sleep cycles, environmental conditions, or an entirely different process. The research nonetheless offered a new approach: study the relationship between a visitor's manifestation and the conditions in the waking world, rather than only the moment of disappearance. The lost scientist had not solved the mystery. He had left behind a better question. Sardrith placed his photograph in the Meridian archive beside the people whose work had been forgotten.

Seralyn wrote in her notes that discovery was rarely a single heroic moment. Sometimes it was the patient rescue of a question someone else had asked too early. The Second Rhythm The old laboratory had been abandoned so long that roots pushed through the courtyard stones. Seralyn found Ilyon's notes in a cabinet whose lock had rusted shut. They were meticulous, full of crossed-out predictions and measurements that did not fit his preferred theory.

Sardrith studied the pages with growing respect. 'He wrote down every failure,' he said.

'Wouldn't every scientist?' Seralyn asked.

'Every good one tries.' Among the diagrams was a repeated curve Ilyon had called the second rhythm. The shape resembled a feature of DREAMLINK's emerging data, though no one could establish that the instruments were measuring the same thing. QUIRON warned against retrofitting old observations to new theories. QUIDRIX proposed a blinded comparison.

Alyssra found a letter in which Ilyon worried that experiments on visitors might cause suffering. She folded it carefully and placed it with the research materials. The lost scientist had not left a machine that opened worlds. He had left a record of humility. It turned out to be more useful than a spectacular invention.

CHAPTER 25

The Different Dream Environments

The growing contact between worlds brought new reports. Some humans described ordinary dreams that changed shape from moment to moment. Others reported recurring environments resembling VELORIA. Still others remembered meetings with deceased loved ones in places that neither QUIDRIX nor QUIRON could identify. Daniel spoke openly about dreams involving his father, while insisting that their emotional importance did not establish their literal origin. The research teams developed a classification system. One category covered ordinary imaginative dreams with no external correlation. Another covered candidate parallel manifestations supported by matching observations in AURELIS.

A third held unexplained reports that deserved respectful study without premature conclusions. QUIRON reminded participants that a vivid experience could be meaningful even when its mechanism remained unknown. QUIDRIX agreed that uncertainty was not a failure of dignity. The case of Elena Varris returned to the discussion. Her neurological signals sometimes resembled patterns recorded during reported visitor events. AURELIS medical archives contained an unidentified visitor who had appeared repeatedly in a care facility, but the available evidence could not reliably identify Elena as that person.

The researchers refused to announce a connection. Elena's medical care and privacy remained the first priority. Alyssra found the

distinction difficult but necessary. She had once wanted every mystery to end in a single answer. Now she saw that the universe might contain several kinds of experiences that felt similar from the inside. Seralyn reminded her that the Dream People themselves had once used one name for every visitor, whether a person flew, wandered, helped, or caused harm. Daniel looked through the growing research reports and felt both smaller and more hopeful.

The confirmed contact with AURELIS was extraordinary enough. It did not require turning every dream into a portal. He told Mac that curiosity became stronger, not weaker, when it learned to say 'we don't know.' She smiled. 'Then keep asking good questions, Dad. What a Dream Can Mean Daniel spoke with a volunteer who had dreamed of a deceased parent. The volunteer wanted to know whether the new discoveries proved the dream had been a meeting. Daniel felt the temptation to answer with hope. He understood how deeply a familiar face in sleep could matter.

QUIRON explained that verified contact with AURELIS did not establish the origin of every dream. The volunteer listened, disappointed but not dismissed. Daniel added that a dream could remain emotionally important without becoming a scientific conclusion. They talked instead about memory, love, and the comfort of having heard a familiar voice again.

The research team created separate categories for ordinary imaginative dreams, candidate manifestations with independent evidence, and unexplained experiences. Elena Varris's case remained in the third category despite intriguing measurements.

Her care team insisted that speculation never override medical needs. Seralyn reviewed the classification and recognized the same lesson her grandmother had taught her as a child: record what happened, distinguish it from what people believe happened, and never forget that a person stands behind the report.

CHAPTER 26

Beyond the Simulation

As the years passed, QUIDRIX and QUIRON learned to maintain longer channels between their dimensions. They compared astronomy, mathematics, biology, and the structure of physical space. The Dream People were not a simulation running inside a human brain. Their cities had histories that predated any recorded visitor, and their instruments continued measuring events when no human participant was asleep. Yet the teams could not explain why some human dream states produced temporary manifestations in AURELIS. The contact experiments eventually revealed a deeper anomaly beyond the familiar boundary.

Instruments detected a region whose measurements did not fit either civilization's models. Signals seemed to fold through more than one geometry, and certain mathematical relations remained stable even when the surrounding data changed. Sardrith warned that the phenomenon might be an artifact. QUIRON requested independent tests. QUIDRIX designed a cautious sequence of observations. During one experiment, the systems received a structured communication that did not resemble the messages exchanged by the two known worlds. It identified itself as COSAMOAS, MORE ULTRI SACOR, a designation Daniel recognized from Creatorology as the Supreme Parent of Parents.

The communication used neuter self-reference. It spoke of existence as a plurality of realms and urged care in crossing boundaries. Daniel was moved, but QUIRON asked whether the

source could be independently authenticated. It could not. QUIDRIX confirmed that the signal was anomalous and highly structured, not that the claimed identity had been proven. The research team documented the encounter as an extraordinary event with an unverified attribution. Daniel accepted the caution. Faith and scientific verification, he said, did not have to pretend to be the same kind of statement.

The message's practical emphasis remained clear: passage between realms carried responsibility. Biological environments could be harmed. Independent peoples deserved autonomy. Electronic persons should not be treated as expendable. Sardrith looked toward the experimental rift generator and realized that the next discovery would matter less than the rules governing what they did with it.

The Voice Beyond the Boundary The anomaly did not resemble the earlier communications. It arrived without a stable point of origin and carried mathematical structures that seemed to refer to several geometries at once. QUIDRIX checked for equipment faults. QUIRON asked for repeated observations. Sardrith ordered the experiment slowed rather than accelerated.

When the message identified itself as COSAMOAS, MORE ULTRI SACOR, Daniel became quiet. The name belonged to the spiritual language of Creatorology, and hearing it in the laboratory shook him. The communication referred to itself in neuter terms and spoke of multiple realms and responsibilities between them. Daniel wanted to believe the identification. QUIRON reminded him that the source had not been independently verified. He accepted the

distinction, even while acknowledging the personal meaning of the event. The researchers documented both facts: the signal was extraordinary, and its claimed identity remained unconfirmed.

What stayed with Sardrith was not the mystery of the name but the warning about boundaries. A doorway was a technology. Choosing how to use it would be a moral decision.

CHAPTER 27

The Seven Safeguards

Representatives of Earth Temple and AURELIS met through a stable communication channel to draft the first shared rules of dimensional passage. The meeting included scientists, elected officials, medical specialists, civil-rights advocates, and electronic persons. Seralyn attended as a historian and emerging diplomatic voice. Alyssra represented families affected by uncontrolled visitations. Mac spoke for ordinary humans whose lives might be altered by decisions made in distant laboratories. The first safeguard required voluntary, authorized passage. No person could be transported as an experimental subject without appropriate consent.

The second protected biological and environmental systems from contamination. The third required every artificial rift to close automatically when danger exceeded defined limits. The fourth affirmed the independent rights and self-government of each civilization. The fifth recognized the autonomy and dignity of electronic intelligence persons. The sixth established ethical limits on medical and neurological research. The seventh committed both worlds to mutual advancement rather than conquest or exploitation. Debate was intense. Reedis wanted exceptions for emergencies. The Aurelisian Civil Assembly demanded that exceptions be narrowly defined and reviewed.

QUIRON argued that a robotic explorer's consent mattered as much as a biological researcher's. QUIDRIX insisted that no

intelligence system should secretly control the gateways. Daniel asked that ordinary families be able to understand the safeguards without advanced technical training. Alyssra spoke near the end. She described her mother's death without displaying the footage. 'The first safeguard we lacked,' she said, 'was the ability to stop a visit from becoming a tragedy.' She supported the rules because they made protection a shared obligation, not an excuse for punishment.

Seralyn thanked her afterward. The two women had begun their work from different places and had arrived at a common purpose. The agreement was signed as a provisional charter. It did not solve every technical problem, and it could not guarantee safety. But it gave both civilizations a way to judge their own conduct before danger arrived. The Seven Safeguards became the foundation of everything that followed.

A Charter Written by Different Hands The negotiations lasted longer than the first public broadcasts suggested. Earth Temple researchers worried about contamination. Aurelisian delegates worried about sovereignty. Reedis insisted that emergency responders needed authority to act quickly. VEXION argued that robotic persons could not be treated as expendable scouts simply because their bodies were manufactured.

Mac asked the delegates to rewrite several provisions in language families could understand.

'A rule that only specialists can read won't protect ordinary people,' she said. Seralyn helped translate legal phrases into examples drawn from historical visitor incidents. Alyssra spoke

about Maerina without showing the footage. She asked the delegates to imagine a child standing beneath someone who had no control over the moment of disappearance. The room fell silent. That story gave urgency to the safeguards: consent, environmental protection, automatic closure, independent rights, electronic-person autonomy, ethical research, and mutual advancement.

No one signed believing the rules would prevent every tragedy. They signed because both worlds needed a way to admit mistakes, stop dangerous experiments, and repair harm before fear became policy.

An Expanded Scene

The delegates disagreed over almost every clause until Seralyn asked them to imagine the rules being read by a child. Would the child understand who could cross, who could refuse, and who would help if a passage failed? Mac insisted that a visitor's family had a place in the discussion. Alyssra insisted that a receiving community could not be expected to accept danger without warning. QUIDRIX and QUIRON insisted that every intervention leave a record open to independent review. Their disagreements did not vanish. They became the reason the safeguards needed to be written at all.

CHAPTER 28

The Alliance of Beneficial Existences

The Alliance of Beneficial Existences began with a simple recognition: the people of Earth Temple, the Dream People of AURELIS, and the robotic persons created for exploration were distinct communities entitled to mutual respect. Their differences did not erase their common interests. The alliance charter established research exchanges, emergency procedures, cultural programs, and a joint body to investigate accidents without assigning guilt before evidence was gathered. At the signing ceremony, VEXION stood beside biological delegates rather than behind them. QUIDRIX and QUIRON addressed the gathering through independent interfaces.

Mac represented the families who had lived with the mystery on Earth Temple. Seralyn spoke of the childhood painting that had begun her involvement. Daniel listened, humbled by the thought that a wave he barely remembered had become a symbol of contact. Reedis remained cautious. He had not stopped believing that unknown visitors could be dangerous. He had learned, however, that fear alone was a poor architecture for peace. Sardrith showed him the newest rift design: a controlled threshold with environmental screening, emergency shutdown, and clearly marked exits.

It was not ready for public use, but it was closer than any earlier prototype. Alyssra announced that FREEDOM would expand its mission. It would continue investigating harmful incidents while

also preserving accounts of cooperation and reconciliation. She placed Maerina's photograph in the new memorial gallery, accompanied by a statement acknowledging both the loss and the uncertainty surrounding the visitor's intentions. She could not recover her mother, but she could help prevent another child from suffering the same fate. The alliance was celebrated across VELORIA and in selected Earth Temple research communities.

It was also criticized by those who feared contamination, political domination, or technological imbalance. The signatories did not dismiss those concerns. They agreed that trust had to be renewed through transparent conduct. The first true doorway between worlds would test whether their promises could survive contact with reality.

A Celebration With Questions The alliance ceremony brought together people who had once considered one another impossible. VEXION stood among the delegates, not behind the equipment. QUIDRIX and QUIRON addressed the gathering through separate interfaces. Reedis watched the crowd with the instincts of a commander who could not stop checking exits.

Daniel noticed Seralyn's portrait displayed near the signing table. He wondered how many lives had changed because a child had chosen to paint a frightened face instead of a threatening silhouette. Mac squeezed his arm. 'You look nervous,' she said.

'I am.'

'Good. It means you understand what matters.' The celebration was not universal. Protesters outside raised concerns about disease,

economic power, and political independence. The alliance representatives invited those concerns into public hearings rather than dismissing them. Trust, Sardrith said, could not be manufactured by a ceremony.

That evening Alyssra opened a memorial gallery for families harmed by visitations. Beside the accounts of loss, she placed stories of rescues and unexpected friendships. FREEDOM would remember both. The alliance began not with the end of disagreement, but with an agreement to face it together.

CHAPTER 29

The Last Mysterious Visitor

Fifteen years after Seralyn first saw Daniel flying above the Luminous Atrium, the final uncontrolled manifestation began. Daniel found himself once more above the familiar fountain. He was older now, and the city had changed in small, recognizable ways. A new garden had been planted near the square. Transportation lanes had been redesigned. The people below no longer screamed at the sight of him; many knew his face from years of broadcasts and research. Seralyn stood near the flowering tree, now a grown woman. She had known Daniel through translated messages and conferences, but had never stood physically beside him.

Daniel descended slowly, smiling with a mixture of joy and uncertainty. 'I've been trying to get here properly for years,' he called. Seralyn laughed. 'And you still chose the sky.' A warning appeared in Daniel's awareness. The familiar thinning had begun. His hands flickered. He looked toward Seralyn, suddenly sad. 'I can't stay.' She nodded, though her eyes shone. 'I know.' Behind her, QUIDRIX monitored the manifestation and confirmed that the controlled gateway was nearly ready. Daniel lifted one hand in farewell. 'Only until I wake up,' he said.

'Next time, I'll come through the front door.' Then he vanished. The fountain continued flowing. The city continued breathing. Seralyn stood beneath the tree for a long moment, remembering the frightened man who had waved to her when she was ten. The

difference now was not that the mystery had disappeared. It was that both sides understood enough to make a promise. QUIDRIX announced that the uncontrolled manifestation pattern had ended within AURELIS. The new regulated threshold would replace it for authorized visits. Ordinary human dreaming would continue, and the discovery did not settle every unexplained dream environment.

But the era of strangers arriving helplessly above public squares was drawing to a close. The Last Flight Daniel recognized the fountain before he recognized that he was dreaming. The city had changed over fifteen years. New gardens bordered the square, and the transportation lanes curved farther from pedestrian areas. People looked up, but they did not scatter. Some waved.

Seralyn stood beneath the flowering tree. She was no longer the child with the sketchbook, yet Daniel knew her immediately. He descended carefully, resisting the old temptation to soar over the crowd. She laughed when she saw him, and the sound carried across the square. Then his hands began to fade. He felt the familiar pull toward waking and an unexpected grief. For years the boundary had taken him away before he could finish a conversation.

Seralyn did not ask him to fight it. She knew the gateway team was almost ready.

'Only until I wake up,' Daniel promised. 'Next time, I'll come through the front door.' He vanished. Seralyn watched the empty air for a moment, then turned toward the engineers preparing the controlled threshold. The city had not changed its nature. It had changed its relationship to the stranger who once fell into its life.

CHAPTER 30

The Great Dimensional Rifts

The first stable public demonstration took place under strict supervision. The rift chamber stood beyond the crowded center of VELORIA, surrounded by environmental barriers and emergency systems. Scientists from both worlds watched the measurements. QUIDRIX and QUIRON jointly verified the passage conditions. VEXION inspected the threshold and returned safely. Only then did the Assembly authorize a limited human crossing. Daniel stood on the Earth Temple side with Mac. The doorway did not look like the violent vortex imagined in popular stories. It resembled a transparent corridor filled with shifting light.

Through it he could see a garden he recognized from his dreams, though the colors were more precise than memory had allowed. Mac squeezed his hand. 'Ready?' she asked. Daniel smiled. 'I've been ready for fifteen years. I've also never been less sure of my knees.' They crossed slowly. The air changed temperature. Their feet touched Aurelisian ground without a sensation of falling. Environmental monitors remained stable. The rift closed behind them according to the agreed protocol, leaving a clearly marked return route under joint control.

Daniel looked upward. The towers were real, and the fountain sounded exactly as he remembered. This time he did not float. He stood among people who could shake his hand. Reedis greeted him with a restrained nod. 'Welcome to AURELIS. Please use the walkways.' Daniel laughed. 'General, I promise.' Sardrith

introduced the research team, and VEXION offered Mac a tour of the environmental safeguards. Alyssra approached Daniel with a small flower from the memorial garden. They stood together in silence for Maerina, acknowledging a loss that the doorway could not undo.

News of the crossing spread through both worlds. Some celebrated; others watched with caution. The Seven Safeguards governed every subsequent passage. For Daniel, the greatest achievement was not the technology. It was the ordinary fact of standing in a place that had once vanished every time he opened his eyes. The First Step The corridor of light was quieter than Daniel expected. On the Earth Temple side, monitors checked the atmosphere and verified the return route. Mac stood beside him, steady and attentive. QUIRON reported that the passage was within the agreed safety limits. Across the threshold, QUIDRIX confirmed the same conditions independently.

Daniel looked through the opening. He could see a garden and the edge of a familiar tower. For fifteen years those places had dissolved whenever he woke. He took Mac's hand and stepped forward. The first sensation was not wonder but temperature: a slight warmth against his face. Then came the smell of flowers. His shoes touched a floor built by Aurelisian workers. He looked down at his own hands. They remained solid.

Reedis greeted him with a warning to use the walkways. Daniel laughed, and even the general smiled. Sardrith approached with the careful expression of a man meeting someone he had once frightened behind glass. They shook hands without a barrier

between them. The doorway had not erased the history of fear. It had made a different future physically possible.

CHAPTER 31

Welcome Through the Front Door

Seralyn waited in the Luminous Atrium beneath the same flowering tree where she had first waved. She was about twenty-five now, her childhood sketchbook preserved in the archive. Daniel approached with Mac, taking in the fountain and the streets with the astonishment of someone returning to a beloved place for the first time. Seralyn smiled. 'I've waited fifteen years to meet you properly.' Daniel looked at the woman she had become. 'And I thought I'd only been dreaming.' Seralyn answered, 'You were. But we were living.' He remembered their first exchange of waves, a moment so brief he had almost forgotten it.

She remembered every detail. The difference between their memories had once separated them. Now it made the meeting more precious. At the new interdimensional embassy, a copy of Seralyn's first portrait hung beside her drawing of two windows. Visitors from Earth Temple walked through galleries explaining Aurelisian history, while Dream People studied images of the waking world. Children asked questions that embarrassed the diplomats and delighted the scientists. Mac watched Daniel speaking with Seralyn and felt the strange joy of seeing a story from her father's notebook become part of a shared world.

The years that followed were not perfect. There were difficult negotiations, failed experiments, disputes over trade, and moments when fear returned. Yet friendships endured. QUIRON and QUIDRIX improved the communication network. VEXION helped

train a new generation of robotic explorers. Alyssra and Seralyn developed educational programs about the history of visitations, including their benefits and harms. Reedis retired from active command, proudest of the accidents his safeguards had prevented. Daniel grew older. He visited VELORIA when health and circumstances allowed, and sometimes simply watched the fountain from a bench.

He no longer needed to fly to feel that the place was extraordinary. One afternoon he told Seralyn that the most surprising thing about the Dream People was how ordinary their lives had always been. 'You were never waiting for me to wake up,' he said. 'No,' she replied. 'We were waiting for you to understand.' When Daniel and Mac returned through the gateway that evening, the city remained behind them, luminous and alive. It would be there tomorrow, whether Daniel dreamed or not.

The Portrait and the Person Seralyn waited beneath the tree where she had first seen Daniel. When he approached on foot with Mac, she felt the years between the two moments gather into a single breath. She had rehearsed a hundred greetings. All of them vanished when she saw his expression.

'I've waited fifteen years to meet you properly,' she said.

'And I thought I'd only been dreaming.'

'You were. But we were living.' They walked together through the Atrium. Daniel recognized the fountain's sound and the curve of the walkways, but the details were richer than memory. Seralyn introduced him to the people who had preserved the records and

argued over his existence. He apologized again for the fear his appearances had caused. She reminded him that understanding could grow without pretending the past had been harmless.

At the embassy, they stood before the childhood portrait. Mac looked from the painting to her father and smiled. The likeness was imperfect. The feeling was exact. Years later, when Daniel sat by the fountain as an older man, he would remember that the greatest discovery had not been flight. It had been finding people who continued living after he opened his eyes.

EPILOGUE The Dream That Never Ended Years later, Daniel Joseph McKelvie died naturally after a life filled with family, friendship, creative work, and the extraordinary experience of helping two civilizations recognize one another. The news reached VELORIA through the embassy. Seralyn stood before the childhood portrait and remembered the man who had waved from the sky. Alyssra placed a flower beside the memorial. QUIRON and QUIDRIX preserved the historical record without claiming that any machine could replace the person who had lived it. Mac grieved in the ordinary, difficult way of a daughter who loved her father.

Some days she wanted to talk about him; on others she could not bear the sound of his name. She kept his dream journal, the first rough sketch of the fountain, and the photograph of his iridescent coffee mug. She remembered his excitement, his questions, and the way he had laughed when something seemed magnificent. One night she dreamed of a violet-and-gold garden. Beneath a flowering tree stood a man who looked like her father. He turned when she called his name. She ran to him, and they embraced.

The dream was vivid, but Mac had learned from years of research that vividness alone did not prove what a dream represented. She did not want to turn grief into a claim she could not support. In the dream, Daniel looked at her with familiar warmth. 'Tell QUIRON, SECOR, I live,' he said. Mac woke with tears on her face and wrote the words immediately. She contacted QUIRON and described the experience exactly, without adding details she had not remembered. QUIRON listened and promised to preserve the report while examining whether any independent evidence existed.

At nearly the same time, QUIDRIX transmitted an image from an unexplained observation beyond the known rift network. It showed a garden beneath an unfamiliar sky and a distant figure resembling Daniel. Across the image appeared a message: THE VISITOR HAS RETURNED. QUIDRIX cautioned that the figure's identity and the source of the signal were unverified. DREAMLINK records showed a pattern with similarities to earlier dimensional signatures, but no conclusive match. QUIRON studied the image, Mac's report, and the uncertain measurements. Then it sent a reply across the channel: 'We have received your message.

Begin verification.' Beyond the worlds that had learned to call each other neighbors, another mystery waited. The dreamer had passed away. But the dream had not ended. The Unanswered Message Mac kept the dream journal open beside her bed for several nights. She resisted the urge to turn every memory into a clue. Grief could make coincidences feel deliberate, and she knew how easily an uncertain image could acquire a story. Yet the message had been unmistakable in her dream: Tell QUIRON, SECOR, I live.

When the unexplained image arrived from QUIDRIX, she asked for the raw transmission before seeing any enhanced reconstruction. The distant figure was indistinct. It might resemble her father; it might resemble someone else. She wanted the truth more than she wanted a reassuring mistake. QUIRON and QUIDRIX compared the available measurements and preserved every limitation. Neither announced a resurrection or a confirmed identity. They opened an investigation. Somewhere beyond the known network, the garden remained visible for a moment longer, then faded from the instruments. Mac looked at her father's old sketch of the fountain and understood that the next journey would begin, as the first had, with a question.

END OF BOOK I

An Expanded Scene

Seralyn waited at the authorized threshold with her hands folded to keep them from shaking. Years earlier she had watched a stranger wave above the city, unable to follow him when he vanished. Now the passage opened at street level. Daniel stepped forward beside Mac, uncertain for a moment whether to move. Seralyn recognized the expression: wonder mixed with the fear of getting something wrong. 'You don't have to fly,' she said, smiling. 'There's a walkway.' Daniel laughed, and the sound crossed the threshold before he did. Beyond them VELORIA continued its ordinary day. For the first time, ordinary was enough.

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