

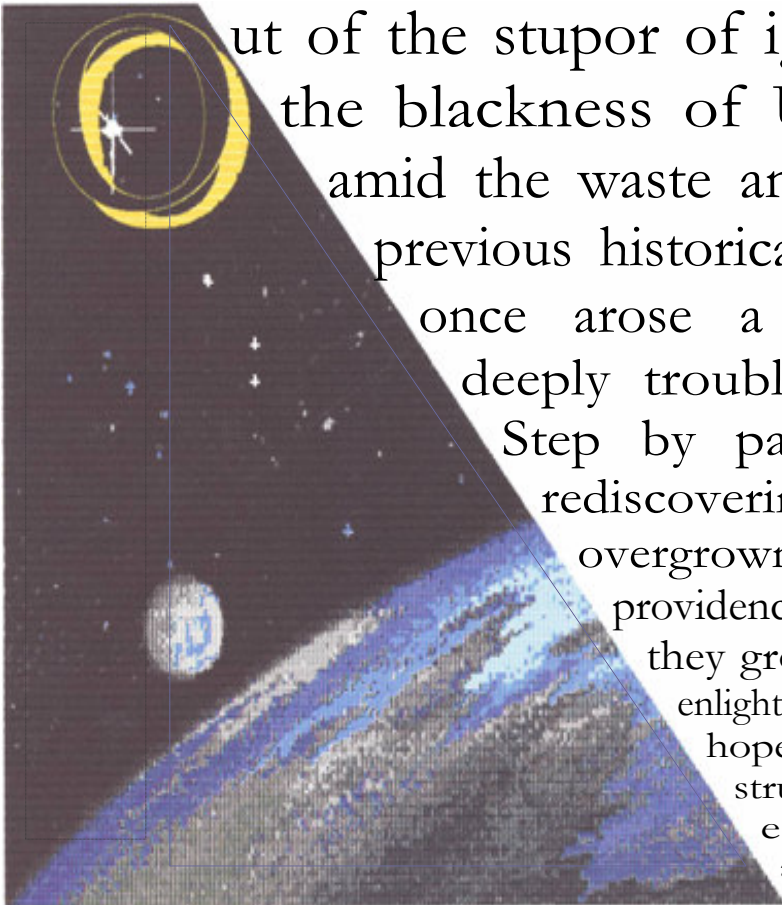


COUNTERDANCE OF THE CYBERGODS

PRELUDE

The GALACTIC EXODUS

Out of the stupor of ignorance and the blackness of Under-Earth, amid the waste and ruin of the previous historical epoch, there once arose a powerful but deeply troubled civilization. Step by painstaking step, rediscovering the ancient, overgrown paths through providence and persistence as they groped toward enlightenment, the more hopeful of its leaders struggled valiantly to escape from the abysmal depression.



Up the steep and rocky slopes, encouraged by the promising flicker of increasing knowledge, they dragged the foresightless; the closed-minded; the nay-sayers; the less confident many until, peering at last over the edge of their bleak chasm, they saw only their own impending doom more clearly illuminated by a scorching and unforgiving sun. The evidence was conclusive and, in spite of the steadily intensifying heat, the verdict was chilling: the eventual, inevitable, and irretrievable loss of their life-mother—Earth, herself.

Desperate to elude extinction, they redoubled their efforts to demystify nature's seemingly inexhaustible energy. Many were ready to kneel again before the very nuclear demon which had played the major role in delivering their forebears to the great Salvation Shelter, the monumental but nonetheless morbid hole that looked more than ever as if it would be humanity's burial vault. Yet, in only a few generations, with amazing effort against seemingly impossible odds, they managed to cast forth the first extraterrestrial wanderers: latter-day Vasco da Gamas and Magellans who would explore the Solar System prior to the first meager efforts at colonization.

The expansion would continue indefinitely, propelled by even mightier souls. More like Moses and Noah than a Leif Ericsson or Columbus, great captains of humanity were to gather millions of their despairing brethren into marvelous city-ships in which to search the galaxy for sustenance, would-be citizens of the cosmos, never to return. By far the greatest of these few wonderful expeditions, and the living bridge between the authors of this history and your own Lost World, is the subject of our full presentation, GALACTIC EXODUS.

The 'present time' in this special segment of that mighty epic is the Age of Helenya, the dawning of which coincides with an unexpected and world-reshaping revolution. We find our descendents just short of the halfway point in the first long segment of this greatest of quests. For several thousands of years this civilization-in-transit has been passing through the seemingly endless void of outer space. The infinitely patient seekers, only now, are noticeably approaching the first oasis, a small, binary stellar-system called Azores.

For the first few millennia of the voyage the main star, a dwarf of unremarkable luminance, was hardly distinguishable among so many and more splendid celestial beacons. It seemed inconceivably distant, seldom occupying the thoughts of travelers whose lives and whose children's lives and whose descendants' lives, for as far into the future as they could practically imagine, were all to end well before the first landfall.

The dawning of the Helenyaean Era, however, finds 'The Twelve' (the magnificent eikodromes of the Second Fleet, with their surrounding clusters of satellite outposts—plus the sizable, wandering asteroid, BACCHUS) closing to within a few short centuries of distributing their first expeditionary parties among the Azores planets and their various moons. The tiny, double-sun system blazes prominently during this era in both the fore-sky and the mind's eye, though it provides barely a glimmer of hope that among its few known orbiting bodies a reasonably hospitable new home for the human race and its supporting bio-systems might be found.

The citizens of the Second Fleet pray dearly against the unfavorable odds and speak optimistically of colonization. Certain of the importance of this mission in the eyes of God, their 'Keeper,' they fully expect such a miracle to occur. Their burden, though borne seriously, is not generally painful at this point in the journey; and their lives are by no means

overly somber. Yet all about them there are reminders of the massive weight of their obligation to succeed. For, to their knowledge, they are all that is left of humanity; of conscious intelligence; and, possibly, of biotic existence in the present Universe.

The whole of the Galactic Exodus consists of fifteen world-ships: traveling, self-contained 'eikodromes' carrying their human cargo, sometimes austere, sometimes terrifyingly, but, for most of their voyaging, perhaps all too comfortably and securely across unfathomable nothingness. Each eikodrome is a specialized, gigantic, fully automated Noah's Ark, teeming with active, suspended, and potential humans, plus a wealth of diverse 'lower,' but nonetheless necessary life forms. The Exodus is a laudable, if (especially in the eyes of your age) unlikely attempt to transplant the complete Earthian life-system to another planet, to find another beneficent sun.

Unbeknownst to most of your Earth-fellows (particularly those of individualistic bent, but increasingly suspected by the more enlightened), yours, Reader, are among the last few shining cycles of the greatest of Earth's golden ages. You are near the summit of the highest peak of civilization achieved on your ill-fated planet. You are also perched dangerously near the abyss. Take care! For Gaea, with an indifferent shrug, may cast you down.

MIND ACROSS the AGES

As in every era, the busy and more mundane affairs of daily life tend to obscure an individual's view of the larger, encompassing purpose of Nature: the generation, preservation, and extension of life itself, including the development and expansion of consciousness. The arts have always provided marvelous reminders of the vast mindscape beyond our personal limits, encouraging us to raise our sights and to consider what might lie over the horizon. The art of music is, we believe, the very best means of keeping in touch with that deeper purpose. Listening to great old works enhances our sense of the historical importance of our duty to Nature and to humanity by cultivating a strong sense of the unity of Mankind beyond the artificial divisions mistakenly but inevitably drawn between past, present, and future.

Well into the fifteenth millennium of the Galactic Exodus, the instruments used in performing the ancient tunes of the lost Earth, as well as by far the greater part of contemporary 'acoustical' art-music, have changed very little, attesting to the extraordinary skill of artisans during the last few centuries Pre-Contamination. And all of their instruments were built without benefit of computer design, high-tech assistance, high-speed tools, or high-level corporate executives—even without electricity. Those original instruments must have been wondrous, indeed; but it is certainly no wonder the truly fine were rare.

There have always been experiments, of course: new materials; new shapes; new tuning patterns and fingering systems, and a continuing search for improvement in range, dynamics, tone and pitch control, as well as ease of playing. But the idea of progress, whatever its many and obvious advantages, is not without drawbacks—the loss, for instance, of old-world arts and ways. So we must be thankful, also, that there will always be some among us who assume the duty of preservation and revival of tradition. Antiquarian musicians will strive in every age to give our past a truer tone; to reproduce the no-less-beautiful sonic qualities of 'period'

instruments, which the old masters had it specifically in mind to exploit in their compositions.

And so it is with the Exodus. In spite of some real improvements in the old types and the development of several new non-electronic instruments, those generally played by musicians devoted to the highly treasured works of the Lost World still, and throughout history always will, resemble their ancient precursors.

In the aftermath of what was a complete collapse of civilization on Earth's surface (at least as you, Reader, now experience it) the 'Blessed Ones,' the 'Preserved,' for the centuries spent in their concrete cocoons deep within the planet's bowels, held the arts in especially high esteem. The 'salvation shelters' were aptly named, prolonging life and sustaining genetic vitality by reducing radiation and toxic contamination. Though these inverted 'palaces of the Preserved' were understandably coveted by the even more miserable surface dwellers (and life therein has been outrageously romanticized by ensuing centuries), they were, nonetheless, dank dungeons of the soul. The muse served humanity well in those bleak days and, doubtless, saved many minds from stupefaction by lifting them from the depths of depression and carrying them, if only briefly, beyond their temporary physical encasement.

Artists continue to perform that valuable role, and have done so for the several millennia of the Galactic Exodus under the somewhat similar constraints of the protective eikodromes, while humanity, light years from nowhere, races through the vastness of the void like a tiny but willful sub-particle of intelligence detached from its nucleus and tumbling in the cosmic wind.

The artifacts of the Lost World; the superannuated sculpture; the re-colored and re-executed paintings; an incredible mass of unintelligible literature chronicling an otherwise speechless past are priceless relics to these castaways of Earth; fragments of their heritage; pictures and descriptions and a few precious remnants of a place they would never see; tantalizing puzzle-pieces to be continually studied, rearranged, and reinterpreted in the vain but perfectly natural attempt to understand their ancestry: you, Readers; the last of the pre-contaminated ages before the Further Fall.

Esteemed and valuable as are these physical treasures, they can hardly compare with actual participation in a living yet timeless art-form; a form that easily transcends the mortality of its creators and its various performers; a form that survives the rise and fall of whole civilizations while preserving much of their character; a form that can endure even the demise of its very planet of origin (should humanity manage to persevere) while suffering only minor, insignificant alterations and virtually no decay—the art of music.

Certainly, the plastic artworks provide observers with memories, if vague, of ancient artists. And they do stand in constant testimony to talent and genius—that is until even the most brilliant and durable examples fade to unrecognizability or crumble into formlessness and, however well executed and faithful to the originals, only copies by others survive.

Surely, then, the poets and playwrights of the past are truly enduring. For, in their more metaphysical mode, their dependence on eroding material is reduced by forming their images in the mind through the power of description, using alphanumeric codes to be unraveled afresh by each new present-day's imagining. Yet it is by that very means that their works, too, become distorted. Just as our changes in perception alter history; change in usage, and

especially misuse (and, finally, non-use), erodes languages. Meaning is twisted ever more eccentrically until, tragically, it is altogether lost. Precious few literary works actually break the bonds of comprehension that hold them tightly to their respective eras of conception. Hardly any remain relevant beyond a handful of years. In but a century from their creation, if reproduced in original form, they present uncertainties to an unfamiliar audience. Ultimately, across increasing distance, we can see even the greatest of them only through translations, which (we can never be sure) might have done more to obscure than to clarify their messages by changing the carefully crafted words of the artists to those of their interpreters—as exemplified in the very book you are holding.

**Þe knowe eek, that in forme of spech is chaunge
 With-inne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
 That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and straunge
 Us thinketh hem; and yet they spake hem so,
 And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
 Eek for to winne love in sundry ages,
 In sundry londes, sundry been usages.¹**

Chaucer

Troilus and Cressida

Proem from The Second Book, v.4

But when bows are drawn across taut strings; when drums and bells are struck, setting the present air into rhythmic undulations; and when the breath of living men is forced through those curious tubes and curving cones, then old Bach himself, and Beethoven, and all their fellow wizards can be raised again. We can dance the courtly *allemande* or a jouncy *courante* or a toyish *sarabande* with the masters of the Early Baroque; whirl through a waltz with the Strauss family; wonder at the grace and progressional logic of Mozart, Haydn, and Gluck; laugh gaily at the *opera buffa*, as if right by the side of a mirthful Rossini; weep passionately with Tchaikovsky and Gesualdo; worship meditatively beneath the luminous mosaics in Palestrina's sonic cathedrals; gasp at the sheer genius of Beethoven; and be whisked beyond time-space into the magical, mythological realms conjured by the sumptuous scores of Richard Wagner. Though unattended for millennia, the ancient composers are revived by a flick of the baton. For a few precious moments, in a way, they live again and sing to us.

Then, with the echoes of the closing cadence, once more they dissolve to renew their slumber in the quiet corners of the music library.

In a year or so, or ten, or in another century we might rouse this one or that one—or, be it tens-of-thousands of years, no matter. However long their sleep, at each musical séance they awake: refreshed; vibrant; as animated as the inspired performers who call them forth.

¹ In GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD (see footnote in *Apology & Proem*, p.-14-, above)