

Beauty in the Weeds



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“Let your empathy guide your gardening. Let your compassion define your care.”

- *Anonymous Elder*

(from the memory cells of Gardener 426)

The Lonely Occupant of Despera

The day started for G-426 exactly like the previous 5,148,912. Once he was fully charged and rested, he sat up in bed with a wide yawn and stretch. The emotion medal on his chest displayed the word, “hopeful”, much like it had every morning for the last 5,264 years. G-426 stood up and looked around the room. His gardening tools sat in the corner of the room, unused. They had been that way for the duration of his stay, which was exactly 5,264 years and 720 days. He surveyed his desk where he kept 3 framed photographs. Each was from a world where he had befriended those who needed befriending or those who had befriended him when he most needed it. His emotion medal read, “joyful”.

He raised his lanky metal body and looked out his window at the barren, icy and crystalline world outside his shelter. There were no gardens here. He was a gardener. His purpose was to nurture and cultivate the gardens of the galaxy. At least, that was the purpose he knew. It had been so exceedingly long since his creation. He really did not remember the creators. He barely remembered those from his oldest memories, the Elders. The Elder race had long since disappeared from the galaxy. In the vacuum of their departure, another race, the An, became a dominant force that extended throughout known space. When the An found G-426, inactive on the planet Reiol'd, they repurposed him, or rather they distorted his original purpose.

The An sent him to perform tasks that would assist the expansion of their rule. He would seek out precious raw resources and was provided instructions on existing lifeforms, including sentient creatures. All of this was designed to ensure the will of the An was achieved. Many attempts were made to reprogram him. They soon realized that his gardening programming could not be overwritten or discarded. Therefore, they sought to manipulate his routines so that they would align with their objectives. They did this by using carefully selected instructions that were similar in nature to instructions he was accustomed to. For example, they would instruct him to eliminate identified “weeds”.

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They surmised that such framing of their plans would surely fit directly within his purpose, logic, and programming. After all, every gardener understands eliminating the weeds. However, the An underestimated the wisdom that a Celestial Gardener would obtain cultivating countless worlds throughout the galaxy.

The An also found and claimed two others of his kind, G-371 and G-159 in the ruins on Taberon. All were repurposed to seek out resources and eliminate weeds. Many mishaps occurred. The majority involved G-426. The circumstances were such that the An viewed him as malfunctioning. His failures were viewed as incompetence at best and dissension at worst. Either way, the decision was made to leave him on Despera, the 2nd moon of the planet Xiprio. This would be his prison. The rationale was to teach him a lesson... cooperate or spend eternity unable to perform his given purpose.

So, it came to pass that G-159 met his doom 700 years ago when a super volcano erupted with him directly above the epicenter. Digging with a seismic shovel may be a poor choice in hindsight. G-371 was the sole gardener for the last 700 years, until more recently, when he was ripped apart by a marauding gang of wild Hytogenese Shark Bears, who did not take lightly to their habitat being destroyed. This left G-426 to be the last of his kind... the last of the Celestial Gardeners. Built in time immemorial, the gardeners once numbered in the thousands. Now only one remains.

Just as G-426 was adding yet another check mark to the interior of his shelter to signify day 5,148,913, the whole shelter began to shake, and he could hear the roar of rocket engines from just beyond the visible horizon. "Visitors?", he asked himself. He darted across the snow and ice to the landing pad where he was dropped off so many, many years ago. To get there he had to weave in between the crystal structure that jutted from the surface. When he crested the hilltop, he could see what had made all the noise. It was a solitary rocket ship. He walked closer to investigate. "Puzzling", he thought. There were no doors. There were no hatches. There was only a sleek body atop some massive engines. The side facing him had a ladder that extended nearly to the ground and was easily reachable for him. When he surveyed the situation, he

noticed that atop the ladder was an access panel that contained one large red button labeled, "PRESS HERE".

So, he climbed the ladder and paused to stare at the big red button. It had been so long. What did this mean? Where had it come from? His memory files contained no reference for any vessel like that which he stood on. With caution, he pushed the button. He could hear gears and machines within the massive rocket moving. He decided to evacuate the ladder. Just as he safely reached the ground, a small hole opened on the side of the rocket. From that hole, a telescopic pole appeared, and a horn emerged from the pole. In a loud, booming voice, an unseen source announced, "Gardener 426, you are hereby ordered back into service. You are to receive further instructions once you are in orbit. Your efforts are required by the Supreme Leader of the An." G-426's emotion medal displays a simple "gleeful". He was overwhelmed with excitement. "After all these centuries, I am finally able to resume my purpose", he thought.

His excitement quickly became bewilderment. How would he reach orbit? There were no doors, no hatches. There was only the small hole from where the announcement horn appeared. Looking up at the vessel, he uttered his first audible words in a long time. "How am I supposed to leave here? I see no doors", he exclaimed loudly. He had no more than finished the question, that the nose cone of the rocket flipped open and from inside came a smaller spacecraft, suitable for a passenger of his size. The craft slowly floated down alongside our robot gardener. As it descended, he recognized the stylized features of the An. His memory is filled with travel using similar ships in the distant past. The ship came to rest on the icy surface and the access stairs were deployed from underneath. G-426 turned back in the direction of his shelter and paused for one last, long look and then he slowly entered his ride.

The Council of Nine

The room was pitch black. Nothing was visible except for G-426's sight devices glowing dimly. Suddenly, a spotlight focused down directly above him. He raised his head and looked around, but could see nothing but the chair he was seated in. There was silence in the room. So much so, that one could hear a pin drop. His emotion medal read, "confused". A loud booming voice came out of the darkness. "Gardener 426, you are accused of dereliction of duties, disobeying the orders of the Supreme Leader and crimes against the An. You have been brought before us, the Jury and Council of Nine to answer for these accusations. If found guilty of all accusations, you will be disassembled, and your parts will be repurposed. Do you understand?" "Yes. I understand", G-426 replied.

As if responding to his acknowledgement, the lights within the entire room rose. The room he found himself in was foreign. He had never been here before. The room was circular. There were nine walls that rose high above his position. On each wall there were two displays, one round and one rectangular. Above those were signs and symbols he recognized as belonging to the An. Above those were nine members of the An. They were standing with their gaze affixed downwardly towards him.

He surveyed the faces he could see from that position. He could only see but five of the nine. He recognized many of the faces. All had a look of disdain and anger. There was Sekhmet and her lioness face staring down. There was Mushussu, the dragon. There was Dalaah, the shadow. There was Garuda, the eagle. Directly in front of him was Utu. It was Utu's booming voice that came out of the darkness. It was Utu who would preside over the situation he found himself in.

"G-426, last of the Gardeners, servant of the Elders, servant of the An, do you know how you arrived to be here?" Utu looked sternly at G-426 as he delivered his opening question. "I arrived via the splendid ship you provided. The same one that you provided

for my journey to Terra Beta”, he replied. “Thankful” was what his emotion medal displayed at that moment. “NO... FOOL! Do you understand how you arrived in this predicament?!?!”, Utu loudly snapped. After a moment of thought, G-426 sheepishly answered, “I suppose I do”. His emotion medal suddenly said, “alarmed”.

Utu clapped his hands together twice and asked that the evidence against G-426 begin being shown. All the round monitors switch on to display the icy prison where he spent the last 5,264 years. He recognized Despera immediately. “This is where you were sent following your previous failures, gardener. We assumed that, given the demise of your kind, along with an opportunity to fall back in favor with the An, you would seize such an opportunity and yet, here you are. This failure that stands out beyond all other failures demands our attention”. Utu went on to say, “Let us go back to an earlier failure. Let us remember the story of... the Rew”. He instructed him to tell the account of what occurred nearly 50,000 years before.

Andrew of the Rew

The Rew were a tiny species that inhabited the planet of the same name. Rew was a rich planet, full of life and beauty. As a gardener to the Elders, G-426 had fleeting memories of cultivating the life there and all the hard work he did to make Rew the paradise it was. When the An spread throughout the galaxy and discovered the Rew, (who were the most evolved sentient species on the planet), they determined they had a plan for them. Because all Rew were nearly identical to each other and naturally agile for their size, the An wanted to genetically modify them. They had determined the rest of the planet's species to be obsolete, or "weeds". G-426 was ordered to make the necessary genetic changes to the Rew and in doing so, make them a military force to use throughout the galaxy. To make room for all the military facilities, all species but those domesticated as food sources were ordered to be eliminated. Unnecessary forests were ordered destroyed.

This seemed absurd to G-426. The Rew were small and cute, and they welcomed him as part of their tribe. Their leader was Andrew. Andrew was fond of him and found G-426 to be wise and kind. Because of his fondness for Andrew and the Rew population, he postponed the An's wishes for as long as he could. It was not until the An sent the three Watchers, Eroc, Terroc and Gemul to check on his progress, that he was forced to move forward. The threat was issued that if he did not move forward, asteroids would be placed in the planet's path. So, it was with reluctance that he took Andrew aboard his ship to perform the genetic modifications. His emotion medal said "guilt" and that is exactly what he felt doing the An's bidding. The Rew were spirited and trusting as a people and here he was about to betray that trust. They were about to become slave soldiers.

As fate would have it, something possibly even more tragic occurred. A huge solar flare hits Rew close to where G-426's ship rested. The result was the equipment went haywire and much was fried beyond repair. Andrew shrieked in agony and collapsed to the floor. G-426 knelt to gather him and carried him back to his tribe. When he awoke, he pointed at some food and motioned to his mouth. The only thing he would utter was

“Andrew” repeatedly. When he touched another of the Rew, an orangish static charge would transfer to them and their bodies would shake wildly from the electrical shock. This multiplied as the Rew encountered each other.

G-426 was relieved. Not only did he not have to eliminate the other species, but the Rew seemed to have escaped their fate planned by the An. So, he left the planet in search of gardens to garden and to await new instructions. Meanwhile, back on Rew, the bad became worse. It seemed that the events with the solar flare occurring mid procedure had dire consequences on the Rew. They all developed ravenous appetites and would eat any form of matter they could get their hands on, other than rock or each other. They also lost the ability to talk except for one word, “Andrew”. They would say that one word often in chorus with the entirety of the population. The final side-effect of the experiment gone bad was they seemed to live indefinitely.

Over the course of two of their solar years, the Rew would eat every other species on the planet along with all flora and fauna until the only thing that remained were the Rew themselves, and their now rocky barren planet. And so, it remained as such for another 200 years until a race of explorers happened to hear the chants of “Andrew, Andrew, Andrew...” from space. When they landed, they were met by the Rew, who trampled each other in attempts to get to the ship and eat it and its passengers.

Once the explorers realized they were in danger, they departed the planet as quickly as possible. Little did they know that a single Rew had chewed its way onto the ship, but the cold of space rendered him frozen. This would later be known as the Great Destruction of the Salet System. For you see, that one little Rew would split like an amoeba and multiply. The few became the many. They would become responsible for the destruction of an entire solar system. War ensued. Despite the best efforts of the An, the Rew were resilient and thwarted the attempt to exterminate them. The Salet System, along with the Rew home world were made inaccessible. Visiting what remains of them continues to be forbidden. The Rew, despite their cute appearance were labeled, “The Scourge of Galaxy”.

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Utu asked G-426 in a calmer voice, “do you recall these events, and do you deny your role in them occurring?” “I do remember the Rew. I remember Andrew. I do not deny I did not want to see them become an army to be used as disposable pawns, but I did not purposefully cause the destruction of the Salet System.”

Utu said to continue and with another clap the round screen shifted from Rew to Ricsus 5. The larger rectangular screen shifted from Andrew to someone whose picture he looked at every day for thousands of years. It was his friend Glibbi, the Amphocian leader.

The Transplanted

“Invasive species were your responsibility to control, gardener”, touted Utu as he demanded a recount of why G-426 disobeyed the orders he had been given. Ricsus 5 had been identified and labeled at “Category 3B”. This meant that the planet was rich with Abuntanium, a resource highly prized by the An and a fundamental asset in the creation of their technology. There were other precious resources like gold, diamonds and two massive oceans. Water was also a precious resource to be treasured. He had performed his duties. He reported back his discovery of the resources that were so abundant, he felt for certain he could broker a deal that would result in the sharing of their resources. However, the An were far too greedy to share what could simply be taken. He was later tasked to drill to the planet’s core, where he would place a mining device. That device, when detonated, would splinter the planet into transportable pieces. The industry ships would then collect all the water and raw materials for processing. This had been done on many different worlds. However, this was the first that he participated in. The An had grown to view such destruction as beneath them to perform. Therefore, they adopted the practice of sending robots for such tasks.

It was when he was sent to Ricsus 5 on that first scouting mission that he met and became friends with the Amphocians. He found them to be a very peaceful and fun-loving species. He also found them to be wise beyond their short history. They lived on land and in the freshwater bodies of their world. The Amphocians were the first and last sentient species on Ricsus 5. He began to suspect the An intended to eliminate all life on the planet to gather what they wanted. His reports back to them contained all his biological and zoological findings. Communication back to him only requested data on water and Abuntanium. It was during his second extended visit to the planet that he devised a plan.

G-426 developed a strong relationship with one Amphocian in particular. Glibbi had become his best friend. When he arrived, it was Glibbi that greeted him and welcomed him to his village and into his home. He was never feared or distrusted. He was invited to experience everything about the Amphocian culture. The days he would cherish the

most were when Glibbi and his family would go to the sea. He always had great fun when played with Glibbi's children. His gardener tendency was to look after the young. He took great care and responsibility in planting the seeds of compassion and empathy. He would cultivate species and encourage them to find their potential. The Amphocians must have sensed his good nature. It was not long before the leaders of the Amphocian hailed him as an ally and honorary Amphocian. He felt as though he had been adopted by them.

Once he had been informed of the plan for Ricsus 5, he knew he could not stand by and let his friends die such a horrible death. Therefore, it was decided that he would explain to the elders and leaders of the Amphocians, that their very lives were in danger, not from him, but from those that sent him. They were, of course, very confused by this revelation. How could they possibly abandon all they held sacred? He eventually convinced them to trust what he was saying was truthful and unavoidable. Before the summit of all their elders, he announced that he would return in two months' time with the means to save them but emphasized the urgency of beginning the preparations immediately. He could tell by the looks on their faces as he departed that uncertainty and fear had enveloped them.

He returned to brief the An commander and convinced him that he needed a larger transport to harvest surface-level precious resources that should be gathered while access was so easy. He did not lie per se. He was gathering resources, it just happened to be the Amphocians themselves. He was granted permission to use a freighter of appropriate size and returned to Ricsus 5 exactly two months to the day as promised.

It was on the way back to gain permission for use of the larger ship, that he stopped by to see another old friend of his, Thrawn T'awn. Thrawn was the anointed queen of the Oscolean. The Oscolean hail from the planet Seren, which has five moons. All five have thriving life and Seren, itself, is mostly Savannah and balmy swamps. It was a fine choice for the relocation of the Amphocian. The An had great respect for the Oscolean,

as they were fierce fighters and had successfully fought off multiple attempts to ensnare Seren into joining the An Empire.

Thrawn spoke to the Oscolean leadership on his behalf and pleaded the case for adopting the Amphocians and allowing them to inhabit the home world or one of the moons. One of the Oscolean elder shamans, Japheat told those who were assembled that she foresaw great purpose in the Amphocians and that they should be welcomed expeditiously. That sealed the deal. He had a home for his friends. He needed only to secure a transport. Now that was secured as well.

When he arrived back on Ricsus 5, the Amphocians were waiting with a surprisingly limited number of items to take with them. He could not help but notice that so many of them carried little tightly sealed clay jars. He had noticed them before in homes and always assumed they were the cremated ashes of ancestors. He decided to casually ask the next one who walked by with one exactly what they were. A mother with three tadpoles replied, “these are part of the Amphocian wisdom and talent”. That struck him as odd. Before he could ask more questions for clarity, the departure time was upon them. All were ready. Many wept. More gripped each other tightly. They were leaving so much behind.

So, it came to be that the Amphocian came to coexist with the Oscolean, and together they entered a time of great prosperity. G-426 would visit them frequently and often stay for years. His friendship with Thrawn and Glibbi grew. The three were often inseparable. He remembered the day the photograph was taken of the three of them. They had worked together to stop the spread of Gynset virus among the population of Tyrites on Mongelo. It was then that he learned that the Amphocian jars brought from Ricsus 5 were seeds to grow plants that were indigenous to their prior home world. All were for use in food and medicine. Food and medicine were the same word in their language. His memory banks were full of triumphant moments like that. When he would reflect on them, his emotion medal always read, “Joyful”. He missed the two of them tremendously and valued the moments they had as treasure.

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“You disobeyed our orders and the Amphocian species have overran Seren. We decide the fate of species, not you. Your role is to garden as we see fit.” Utu was visibly frustrated as he looked down at G-426 with a stern scowl. “Do you deny that you purposely deceived us, evacuated weeds and allowed for those weeds to thrive elsewhere?”, he asked. G-426’s head lowered, and he simply replied, “no”.

A Plot for Revenge

These were the two major accounts that he was forced to relive and be accountable for. Utu also brought the small misunderstanding where a communication transmission was disrupted and led to issues. The An had instructed him to introduce avian life to Mylar, a gas giant in a neighboring solar system. Specifically, he was told to bring 200 pairs of Puffin to the planet and release them. Puffins are mellow enough to make for good company to Mylarians. The supreme leader told them that having birds would provide them with company, like appropriate pets for gas giant residing people.

The Mylarians, themselves resembled balloons. They were round and were void of arms and legs under most circumstances. They could extend limbs when necessary, by pushing out a portion of their bodies, but they were usually seen in their circular balloon form, floating around the planet. As part of a treaty with the An, the leader of the Mylarians sent his son to live with the ruling family. It was soon learned that the royal children would take their Mylarian guest around in public via a string tied to him. Malad, son of Maltath, ruler of Mylar voiced his objection to being put on display and drug around by a tether. He was punched upon and kicked like he was a sports ball. He was no longer an honored guest. Rather he had become a prisoner of the An. When news of this reached Mylar, all were infuriated.

This happened to be the latest of many sufferings at the hands of the An. G-426, himself, accidentally delivered such a travesty. It was his mistake. Despite taking ownership of his error, the Mylarians squarely placed blame on the An. Had they not decided to meddle in the ecology and culture of their world, many lives would not have been lost. He thought he was following the directions given to him. However, he did not deliver the Puffin as he had been ordered. The transmission was garbled. He was able to discern he was to gather a species from Terra Beta, which was teeming with life forms of every variety. However, instead of hearing “Puffin”, he heard, “Puffer”.

Disaster ensued. Mylarians were gathered in masses when the gardener released ten thousand Spiny Puffer fish. In this excitement, the Puffer inflated and drifted into the

crowd popping and bursting one after another until G-426 retrieved them all. He felt tremendous guilt for all the injuries and deaths that occurred. It was his friend, Madge that defended him and placed the blame on the An, who interfered without their consent.

When the An children on An Prime saw the Mylarian leader's son on the string, they all desired to have one of their own. Being sons and daughters of the elite, they understood their status meant their parents could influence the rulers to seize more. They told their parents of that desire repeatedly. News of this and lobbyists had already reached the royal palace. The Supreme Leader summoned the Council of Nine and asked for their counsel. After little debate, it was decided that the Mylarians should be happy that their children can grow up amongst them. He then ordered that enough Mylarian children be gathered and brought to An Prime. This is how the enslavement of the Mylarian people came to be.

It was long, long after those events that the Mylarians devised a plan to enact their revenge. There was a compound on Mylar that was deadly to most humanoid type species. Knowledge of it was completely missing from any An archives. The Mylarian were not eager to let them know about it either. Mylarian scientists weaponized the compound and developed a delayed release. It would first kill the children. Contact with others would spread the virus. Making it undetectable until it is too late resulted in the perfect weapon and the perfect tool for revenge. Plans were made to release the toxin. Secrets were whispered and quickly made their way to the ear of someone who felt obligated to speak out against the plan. Madge's great, great, great granddaughter Magi discovered the murder plot and called for an emergency session with the Mylarian leadership. She pleaded that two wrongs do not make a right. No one was happy with their treatment at the hands of the An. All of those assembled understood when she asked, "have we become them?" After a small amount of debate, they agreed that their course of action was wrong and the attack on the An was rescinded. They chose to accept, for the time being, the circumstances as they were. Their children would continue to be taken for the amusement of their captors.

Once the decision was made and tempers calmed, there was agreement amongst the majority that their planned actions would only have resulted in war and the possible extinction of their kind. Not all saw it that way. One Mylarian general, Thog, did not agree with this decision. His daughter, Shito was to be on the next transport to An Prime. If they would not act, he would on his own. He made the decision to act on behalf of his people, regardless of the consequence. Even if war was to be the outcome, he was convinced that a blow to An and their arrogance was overdue.

Thog knew he had little time to waste. He rounded up a handful of troops loyal to him and raided the lab where the toxin was being kept. He would not kill his own kind. The scientists and security would be hostages if necessary and simply detainees should everything go as planned. The toxin was mixed with a perfumed liquid and filled into a spray device. Mylarian custom was to spray travelers when departing for good luck and good health. Everything did go as the conspirators had hoped. Parents were gathered to say farewell to their loved ones. Each child drifted through the mist unaware they were now carrying a pathogen. Things were now in motion that were part of a plan millions of years in the making.

At the same time, the Mylarian plot was being executed, G-426 was being sent to Terra Beta after he was collected and dispatched from Despera. It is on Terra Beta where he would defy the An for the last time. It was his actions there that resulted in him being brought before the council of nine. It was Terra Beta that sealed his fate it seemed.

Terra Beta

G-426 was so excited. His emotion medal displayed, “Elated” as he settled in for his trip to a destination unknown. So much time had passed since he last was engaged to garden the galaxy. There was no message that explained the mission he had been able to discover so far during his trip. Even with the speed of interstellar travel, this trip seemed to be taking an excessive amount of time. He wondered where he was being sent. He daydreamed about a world that was budding with new life that he could cultivate and help grow into astonishing civilizations.

His ship came out of hyperspace on the edge of a familiar solar system. He determined this was system B963771-239B. He had been here a long time ago. The 3rd and 4th planets were fertile and teeming with life. The An desired to mine precious metals from the 3rd planet. The civilization on the 4th planet opposed their claim to perform any such operation. They themselves claimed dominion over their neighboring world. Their leaders demanded the An leave the system. They were unprepared for the swift response by the An. The An had determined that the presence of the gigantic predators on their target planet, and the interference by the inhabitants of its neighbor, presented a threat to their plans. They would have none of that. The An possessed the capacity for kindness. He rarely saw anything beyond crumbs of kindness scattered here and there. They moreover had a great propensity for cruelty and malice. He watched as the An forces pushed several behemoth-sized asteroids toward the two worlds. His emotion medal read “horrified” as witnessed the resulting devastation. The An commander even boasted that his talents at removing weeds surpassed the gardener’s. G-426 could not reply. It went unnoticed that his emotion medal said, “disgusted”.

Time passed. Much changed. He found himself informed that he would once again be returning to Terra Beta. This time they had modified existing hominids to perform the difficult and dangerous mining operations. This was yet another race enslaved to do their bidding. His task was to cultivate and stimulate their cognitive growth. He was to observe their development into a civilization. His charter was specific, in that he was to

promote creativity while weeding out any dissent. He loved to watch how different species would express themselves creatively. He was most fond of poetry, music, and art. He concluded nothing needed to be weeded out as the path, like those creative art forms, needs to be uniquely determined and created by those living it.

He had become very fond of a boy and girl who always ran to greet him. No matter what tasks he had planned, they would convince him that having an adventure with them was more important. He would tell them of the many worlds and peoples he had met. They loved his stories. At the conclusion of each, Lindel would always ask for more. Lindel was the little boy's name. Hers was Loshi. Loshi and Lindel had a younger brother and older sister. Their mother and father would often refer to him as "Grrrrreat Grandpa", saying he was like a grandfather to them... only significantly more ancient. They always insisted that if they were bothering him, to send them home and inform them. He would never do such a thing. They would catch fish and insects. They would imagine shapes in the clouds. They would run through streams. A full year had passed, and his masters were requesting his service. He promised them he would visit them often as he boarded his ship to perform his other assignments.

He would return within the year to visit and observe the new their progress. His first stop was Lindel's and Loshi's village. He had brought her some of the Rolubus candy he had told her about. He brought him a flying toy. It was their father Qasan, who met him at the entry of their hut. He explained that a garrison soldier came and took them both to the mines. They determined that she could work bringing water to the miners and he was big enough to push small carts in and out of the mine. There had been an accident. The mine collapsed and everyone, including his friends, had perished.

The candy and toy he carried fell from his hands. His emotion medal barely had room to display what he was feeling, which was "heartbroken". Loshi and Lindel had been like family. He was heartbroken for their family. Had he been there, he might have been able to convince the soldier to find an older person to give out the water and cart

stones. He partially blamed himself. He told Qasan and Olean he would return to visit. He never did. Instead, he was banished to Despera.

Here he was though. Again. The blues, browns, greens, and whites of the planet looked as inviting as ever. He could not help but think of Loshi and Lindel as his ship slowed to establish an orbit around Terra Beta. "Magnificent sight" he thought to himself. He thought about the decisions that had resulted in his banishment to Despera. He had wondered about the people here and whether they had thrived or faded away. After all, Terra Beta was one of the lushest planets before and after the asteroid impact. His hope was that they would grow into a kind and generous civilization. He hoped they would choose to stick together for the good of all. He feared that the presence and contamination of the An in their distance past had corrupted them, like so many other worlds that were in their path.

Instrument panels began to glow, and a voice came from a small speaker. "Attention! Attention! Attention!", the voice announced. "Gardener 426... The Supreme Leader of the An, himself, has ordered that you be forgiven for your past mistakes. It is from the wellspring of his grace that you were rescued from your banishment on Despera. It is by his decree that you are hereby ordered to prune Terra Beta. Our scouts, as well as the Watchers have reported that the virus, that is the dominant hominid, has brought the planet to brink of perilous annihilation. The Supreme Leader has declared them to be a threat to the An. You are to eliminate them by deploying the weapon aboard this vessel."

Weeds in the Garden

G-426 had been in this position before. The weight of what to do next had his circuits heating up. He carefully examined the ship's logs as expediently as possible. His hope was to find a way to defuse this doomsday device. He found none. It was hard coded to deploy and detonate in 27 hours. It seemed there was nothing he could do. His emotion medal displayed "hopeless".

He decided that he would do the only thing he could do, visit the planet's surface, and see what changes had occurred in the last 5,000 years. Perhaps, he could preserve some seeds. Were the people he once knew still there and evolving? Had previous civilizations developed into industrial and technological stages? How was the garden doing, he once tended to with such care and precision? As he sat in his chair, he pondered these things.

Using the ships' equipment, he was able to access planetary communications in the form of media broadcast from the surface. The world had changed. He was able to access millions of records in just a short period of time. He saw great feats. He saw the populous achieving space travel, though in its infancy. He saw great achievements in science and technology. He also saw great atrocities and war. He saw the rise and fall of those desperate for power. He saw all the good and bad the custodians of the planet could muster over the centuries. "How could one species be responsible for such wonder and beauty and terror and evil at the same time?", he thought. This is the question he sought to answer in the short time he had left to observe them. He did not agree with the decision to eradicate them. However, he did understand why the An were fearful of the inhabitants. Their hatred for their own kind and brutality over belief systems made them unpredictable. Much of their history is a series of war and destruction. The trigger for the An was their ability to create destruction on a planetary level and their ability to soon reach other planets.

He wanted to find a place where he could observe them and take in the precious nature he helped cultivate here so exceedingly long ago. As he navigated down through the

atmosphere, he found a lush spot in the middle of the closest continent. He found a meadow where birds were chirping, and deer scampered. There was life everywhere. As he walked around the tree line, he was taking it all in. There were insects and mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. There was also discarded waste and clutter that had been tossed into a creek bed. He told himself that such stuff did not belong there.

Beyond the tree line was a road of finely reduced rocks. From his absorption of the planet's media, he knew this to be a gravel road and he knew that the inhabitants used such roads for traveling via their rolling vehicles. He followed the road for a short distance only to find a small dwelling. He carefully approached the home. Based on what he had seen on the ship, he was concerned that he would be met with hostility, if discovered.

So, he stood behind some shrubs and bushes and looked to see if he could see any of the people who lived there. He saw no movement anywhere. He was just getting ready to turn and leave when he heard something banging on his metallic leg. "Hi there! I'm Beck! Who are you?" He turned to respond but had to look downward to see from where the voice had come from. "Well... what's your name?", said the little girl at his feet.

"My goodness" he responded. "Your name is My Goodness?" she asked. "No, my designation is G-426, young Beck. It is my distinct pleasure to meet you". "Well, from now on you are Geebs! That's right... my friend Geebs" she said very enthusiastically as she grabbed his hand and led him over to her swing set. "Swing with me Mr. Geebs!". Her demand was granted with equal enthusiasm from him. He pushed her and swung beside her as he listened to her stories go on forever. They played in the creek and caught crawdads. They played in the meadow chasing grasshoppers. They played for hours and hours.

"Beck! Where are you? Beck! Time to eat." It was the child's mother calling her. "Coming Mom!", she yelled back at the top of her voice. "Geebs, you must come with me. My Mom is making macaroni and cheese, and she is the best macaroni and cheese

maker in the whole wide world!" "I'm sorry little one. I do not consume food like you", he explained. "Please Mr. Geebs, you are my best friend and I want you to stay with me" she begged. He knew it was best for him to go now. "Ok", he conceded. "Let me go back and grab my dinner bow tie and I will join you in just a few minutes. Now do not keep your mom waiting. I will see you soon." "What's that?" She was pointing to his emotion medal. "That is something that shows how I feel. Since I do not have facial expressions, it is hard for others to know what I am feeling, so this medal shows exactly that", he explained. "YAY!!! I'm happy too Mr. Geebs!", she told him and added "Hurry and get your tie" as she ran away towards her home.

He was happy. Happier than he had been in such an exceptionally long time. His thoughts drifted to Loshi, Lindel and the other great friendships he had over the centuries. "Hopeful" is what his emotion medal now displayed. As he made his way back to the ship, he knew he could not allow Beck, his newest friend, to meet the fate planned for her by his masters. He was not going to fail her. However, time was quickly running out. The device was set to detonate in less than 4 hours.

He sat in his chair hoping for the solution to come to him. The ship was programmed to auto launch the weapon. It was also programmed to not leave the planet until the weapon was deployed. The programming was not accessible for modification. Then it dawned on him. This weapon is DNA based. It was designed to wipe out all the hominid population, while leaving all other species unharmed. This was a far cry from the damage done when mining was the objective, and an asteroid was hurled at the planet. If he could modify the coding for target DNA, he could possibly reduce the impact or eliminate it all together.

The clock was ticking. He had less than two hours remaining. He worked in a fury... as fast as his robot functions could possibly work. He discovered that if he introduced an error in the sequencing that would render the weapon ineffective. By changing some subtle numbers, the impact would be no more harmful than a cold or mild flu. A few could perish, but it would not be the genocide that would occur if he did nothing. He did

not know if the scientists who constructed it had thought through such tampering possibilities. There was no time to test his theory. It would work or it would not. He would find out in 13 minutes.

“Worried”. That is what his emotion medal read. At the 10-minute mark, the ship launched back into orbit on its own account. 5 minutes until detonation. This ship is now over the planet’s equator. “Mr. Geebs... I like that name. I have never had a name, only my number designation or Gardener”, he thought to himself. He thought about his newly found friend, the little girl, Beck. His memories of the Elder race were limited, but he had one memory where one Elder told him that the Creator witnesses all that transpires and would sometimes intervene when called upon to do so. So, he summoned his best request and simply said, “Creator, if you can hear me, please let my little friend live and prosper. Let her and her tribe have long lives”. It was the first time he had ever asked for anything. He never thought of asking for intervention before.

The device was powering on. The ship began to vibrate and suddenly a massive amount of light was propelled from the vessel. It took the form of a ball, but quickly began to grow in all directions. Within seconds, it wrapped around the planet and then began to fade as it descended to the surface. It was impossible to discern exactly what had occurred. There was no way to determine the extent of the damage. There was no way to determine if Beck was still alive. He was reluctant to use the ship’s communication equipment to monitor the media transmissions from the planet. If they had gone silent, he would be devastated by the thought of failing so many. After several hours of sitting there silently, he turned on the monitoring equipment.

The Attack on Terra Beta

G-426 had been set up. The ship he was in was programmed to self-destruct if the weapon onboard was not deployed. The An wanted an insurance policy should he not follow his instructions. He was unaware of this. He was also unaware that he was being watched. Gardeners garden. Watchers watch. All ancient things were of purpose by design. The three remaining Watchers were like all the Watchers before them and always consisted of three. They traveled and worked as a triad, each watchful for important things. The An had their own scout ships and personnel that would report back the circumstances they would find. Eroc, Terroc and Gemul would see and hear things no scout could possibly capture. After all, they had been sent to verify what he had done before. This was not something new.

The Watchers had arrived on the solitary moon of Terra Beta shortly after he had achieved orbit. Eroc was the optimist of the group. He stated that he believed that G-426 had too much on the line and risked his own disintegration. Terroc was the realist. He simply thought that since G-426 had defied the An before, the odds were high that he would do so again. Gemul was the conspiracist. His take was that surely G-426 had become a murderous villain. He elaborated that G-426 was plotting the demise of the An. While the events transpired on the surface of Terra Beta, the Watchers debated the expected outcome. They concocted wagers with each other. The losers would have to shut down their speech systems for 200 years, as this was their standard wager for events of this magnitude.

They too watched the weapon deploy. They too watched as it covered the entirety of the planet. They too watched as the planet fell silent. Unlike G-426, they only waited a few minutes before monitoring what was occurring on the planet. The moon served as a perfect listening post. They were shocked. The broadcasts coming from the planet surface were filled with speculation as to what had occurred. Unexpectedly, the power grid was disrupted for just over four minutes. Some thought it was a weather occurrence. Some thought it was the actions of those who they believed to be their enemies. Yet others thought it was an alien attack.

The weapon had deployed and yet all survived. The An needed to know of this treachery immediately. After much debate, the three determined it was premature to declare a winner of their wager as much could still unfold. They sent their communication to the high command of the An, informing them that the weapon had been deployed. They broke the news that the “hostile” inhabitants were unscathed as well. They provided their combined conclusions as such:

Command Central. *The attack on Terra Beta was ineffective. The entirety of the target species survived the deployment of the weapon. Possible causes include:*

- 1) *Weapon malfunction or design mistakes* (The An would never accept that as a reason. They view themselves above such careless mistakes.)
- 2) *The Terrans have become more powerful than the An and were impervious to their attacks.* (The An feared this but analysis of the Terran technology pointed to this not being the answer.)
- 3) *G-426 intentionally and deliberately sabotaged the weapon in defiance of the An.* (This is the only answer they would accept.)

As reported by Eroc, Terroc and Gemul.

The An acted swiftly. They would not move again against Terra Beta. If the Watchers happened to be correct and the Terrans were disguising their true level of technology, it would be unwise to risk war. They would not blame their own scientists either. Blame and punishment would come swiftly for Gardener 426.

G-426 slowly flipped a switch. He yelled, “YES!” as he rejoiced hearing the same chatter that the Watchers also heard. His modifications had worked. The event climaxed resulting in nothing more than a light show seen by all. He no more than expressed his joy and jubilation that the ship’s engines engaged. He wanted to return to the surface and find Beck once again. He owed her an apology for missing dinner. He wanted to

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know more about the macaroni and cheese that she was so excited about. He watched as the brilliant blue ball began to fade from sight. He wondered where he was bound for now.

Under Arrest

When his ship dropped from hyperspace this time, G-426 found himself surrounded by attack ships in every direction. He knew this was a possible outcome for his actions. His ship shook as a tractor beam seized it. Within minutes it was secured in the launch bay of a large cruiser. A soldier opened his hatch and disabled him with a stun gun. He was carried off by armed forces and taken to a holding cell for the trip back to An Prime.

As his circuits were losing power, the last thought he had of the little girl on Terra Beta. He had saved his newly found friend. Whatever the consequence would be for him, he felt it was worth it. As everything went dark, he wondered if he would ever be awake again. What would his punishment be? How did they know?

The An had absorbed so much of the ancient elder race's remnants that over time, they began to view all the assets as theirs. Over the centuries, they began to forget that they inherited much of their technology, rather than create it. The 3 remaining Watchers were a reminder that not only did they not create them, but their ability to bend them to their subrogation and purpose showed that their advanced civilization was nowhere near as advanced as that of the Elders. It was not through ill intent that Eroc, Terroc and Gemul had reported back the result of the attack on Terra Beta. Rather, they were simply fulfilling their purpose. Their purpose was to witness and report, just as they have done since before recorded time, before most worlds were created and well before the creation and rise of the An.

While G-426 was being placed in the tribunal room, the freighter from Mylar had arrived on An Prime. This arrival was met with special pomp and circumstance. However, this time the Supreme Leader of the An was in attendance with the members of the Royal Family. Many Mylarian children had already been enslaved to the An elite. The ruling body, to protect their children, had decided against allowing their own to participate. Growing requests from their children and the docile nature of the Mylarians that were already there, resulted in the Supreme Leader declaring that Mylarian slaves, as child

toys, were permissible. The collection of Mylarian children and the forced removal of them from their parents was about to increase.

News of the declaration had reached Mylar. The Mylarian leadership had called an emergency meeting to discuss the situation. It was during this meeting that temperatures were heated as they debated for days what actions, if any, to take. On Madge's request they had previously rescinded an attack on the An. On this day, she called for diplomacy and cooler heads to prevail. Just as she was about to conclude her speech, General Thog rose above those gathered and confessed to his actions.

"It is too late, you fools. It is too late. I have taken these matters on myself, for the good of all. I placed the toxic formulation in the transport ship and all our children who were stolen from us have been exposed to this compound and it is they, that will enact our revenge on the An." The general's words silenced the entire gathering. They knew that war would ensue when the An realized what was done. Thog was placed under arrest. He insisted that he alone was doing the right thing as he was taken into custody.

Back in the tribunal center, G-426's body sits motionless and lifeless. A single beam of light shines down on him and his circuits are powered on. As he looks around, he knows that he was in a familiar setting and that he was to answer for his actions.

All Things Come to a Halt

“Gardener 426... this brings us to the most recent events. Based on accounts reported by the Watchers, Eroc, Terroc and Gemul and other telemetry, it appears that you may have a direct hand in the sabotaging of our direct orders and plan for the planet, Terra Beta. Are you willing to confess to these crimes against the An and the wishes of the Supreme Leader?”, asked Utu.

G-426 knew that this moment was important. He wanted to explain to the council how his original programming by the Elders was void of such narratives as “weeds” and that his purpose was to cultivate life and thus allow nature to handle the order of things. He wanted to explain that the interference by the An would have consequences that would not be clear immediately. He looked at those in front of him as they looked down on him. He struggled to put forth his explanation. How could he possibly convince them that their way was not the right way?

Just as he was about to answer Utu’s question, a door behind him opened and closed. Having stepped in front of him, a royal garrison soldier urgently addressed the group. “Honorable Council of Nine, forgive me for interrupting this preceding. There is an urgent matter that merits your immediate attention, my Lords”, he frantically announced. “What urgent news do you bring centurion?”, Utu replied. The soldier went on to explain that the children of the Royal family and even the Supreme Leader’s youngest had suddenly fallen ill with a rapidly advancing illness and that the doctors and scientists had no answers. Within days all the children infected would perish. The contagion only seemed to impact children. The Supreme Leader, in his desperation to save his son and heir to the An empire, declared that anyone who would come forward and save his child would be granted clemency and granted one request. He would do anything to save his son.

The room was suddenly filled with great debate and chatter. The members of the Council of Nine were in sudden chaos. They ran through the enemies of the An, trying to pinpoint which of these adversaries had the most chance of being responsible. Only

Utu was still poised to take the appropriate measures and take recess with respect to what G-426's fate would be. "Gardener 426, you will be taken and be held until such time as these proceedings can continue", he stated looking down at him as two guards entered.

"Wait!" he explained. All the council members fell silent, stunned by his loud proclamation. "I believe I know the source of the agent that is killing your children." He added, "During my eons of travel, I have cataloged millions of pathogens. I have a theory and I need only to scan one of those infected to validate it. If I am correct, time is critical, as they will only have hours to live."

The room remained silent for several moments. Those in the room looked about at each other, unsure what to do. Again, it was their leader Utu, that was decisive and set into motion what was to occur next. He clapped his hands twice and announced, "Free the gardener immediately and transport him directly to the Supreme Leader's residence to evaluate the prince! Make haste! Gardener 426... the fate of the An empire lies in your hands now."

G-426 was quickly taken to the inner sanctum of the An home world, where he was brought before the Supreme Leader. "Greetings Gardener. I am Annu. This is my son, En-shu. He is my Sun and stars. I would move the heavens themselves for him. Please help save him. I beg you." This is not at all the response that he expected. He expected to see a hate driven ruler bent on enacting revenge on those who did this. Instead, all he saw was a father filled with despair wanting to save his child, whom he loves more than life itself.

"I promise you Lord Annu, I will do everything I can to save your child and the other infected children.", he replied as he began to scan Prince En-shu. The prince was being cradled in his father's arms and he lay unconscious. As the results were being processed, he quickly ascertained that this was a Mylarian compound and that the chances of saving any of the children were slim. Time was not an ally. Truly little

remained. He had to try though. He had to attempt to influence the outcome. So much now rested on his shoulders. The fate of not only the children, but multiple worlds, now depended on him.

“What did you discover?”, asked Annu. “It is a complex compound that may come from one of six possible target systems. I must leave immediately aboard the fastest vessel you possess.” With G-426’s response, Annu shook his head, and he was whisked off quickly to the space port. As he was leaving the Supreme Leader, he could hear Annu’s parting request... “Godspeed Celestial Gardener. Godspeed.”

G-426 was already enroute when he placed a call to Mylar. Time was of the essence. There would be no rescue, no miracle, no salvation for the children of the An if he could not isolate the compound quickly. His scan had confirmed that it was a Mylarian agent. With help, he might be able to take the next step. The first step was a big one. Help was indeed needed. When his friend Madge came on the transmission, he was happy to hear her voice. He missed her a great deal. However, there was no time for reunions now. He went on to explain the events that transpired, how he ended up on trial and what occurred with the unknown illness that the An children fell prey to.

Madge filled in the blanks. This narrowed it down. He calculated that instead of a combination of 12,398 possible compounds, he was now dealing with a possibility of four. Time would now allow for the research and testing necessary to figure out which of the four it was. They needed General Thog’s assistance. Without him, the children were doomed. Mylar would also be doomed. He knew that rage would follow. Terra Beta would possibly be destroyed in that rage. He knew that so much would be decided by this.

Madge and G-426 discussed all the details and she too recognized what all was at stake. They concluded that if Thog would help them, he would ask Annu to be merciful and spare Mylar. At first Thog would not cooperate, but Madge promised him that his nephews and nieces would live and that most importantly, she would do everything in

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her power to arrange for him to see his daughter again. Thog's heart softened, and he revealed the name and the makeup of the toxin used against the An. Now the race was on.

The Quest

Back on An Prime, the condition of the infected children worsened. Families were starting to gather as they were told that time was quickly running out. In the palace of the Supreme Leader, Annu asks his advisors if any word has arrived from Gardener 426. He is visibly distraught hearing that no news has arrived yet.

Madge greeted him when he arrived on the landing platform. She had a sample of the toxin. He explained he would return after this was all over. He had a plan now. To be successful, he would have to be expedient in his departure and arrival at his next stop... Seren.

As he made his urgent way from Mylar, he sent a transmission to An Prime and addressed it to the Supreme Leader himself. It read as follows:

Supreme Leader,

Do not give up hope for the Prince and other An children. Although my calculations predict that they have approximately 6.325 hours before the toxin is irreversible, I have identified the source. No known cure exists. However, I am seeking help from some old friends and allies that may provide the answer and provide it in time. I will provide more information upon my return.

G-426

As he sent the message, to the An home world, his emotion medal read "calm". For surely, in this moment with so much riding on him and the actions he was taking, he was extremely calm. He understood perhaps for the first time ever the nature of his true purpose. His thoughts sifted through his memory cells. Those of the Elders seemed to

only be scattered visions that visited him as dreams and daydreams. “Nature has a plan”. That is the last thing said to him by one of the Elders so many, many years before. Geebs could see that plan now being fulfilled. It was clear now what must be done.

He had messaged Seren with the news of what had occurred on An Prime and Mylar. The Oscolean and Amphocian leaders agreed with him. They endorsed his plan, wished him speed to his destination and informed him that they would await his word. They would stand ready to do their part to stave off all-out war in the galaxy.

His ship was set to the maximum speed for his trip through hyperspace. His destination was the forbidden planet of Rew. For you see, Geebs had been keeping the secret of the Rew for thousands of years. When the experiments went wrong with the Rew, they transformed into insatiable feeding machines that would devastate any world they encountered. This was only a temporary side effect. After the events that led to them being left secluded on Rew, they underwent additional changes and they evolved and thrived. Because they were left alone and the An’s plans for military use were abandoned, they took advantage of this and immersed themselves in science and art. Their civilization thrived. It was Geebs that would meet with them periodically and convince them to remain hidden from the An. It was possible that the An would see their advancement as a direct threat to their rule. Their leaders grew to trust him, and all knew of him and how he had protected them from being discovered by the other races.

When his ship landed, thousands of Rew were there to greet him. There was no time for sentiment. Although they could speak large vocabularies of multiple languages, they would still greet him with a chorus of “ANDREW!!!”. “Greetings my friends!”, he responded. “Time is of the essence. I need the 200 volunteers to assemble here quickly!” The Rew darted to and fro and quickly lined themselves into a circle of 200. After explaining the situation, they locked hands, leaving one opening for him to join the circle. As soon as his robot hand was interlocked with theirs, they vanished in a poof.

It was one of the secrets that he had kept to himself. The Rew had conquered many of the space/time equations and had developed the ability to travel long distances without the need for spacecraft. He knew that if this were known to the An, they would have even more reason to seek to use the Rew in a military capacity. So, the Rew were left to thrive and develop as a species. They colonized the far corners of the universe. They respected each species to develop on their own. Thus, they only observed other civilizations and were only rumor or superstition to many inhabitants on many worlds.

He had explained the situation and beckoned his little friends to come to the aid of the people who wanted to first enslave them and later exterminate them. The Rew had developed a great sense of compassion. They agreed to help without hesitation. They all understood that they must be precise and be prompt if they are to have any chance of success. He stood outside his ship and placed a hand on it. He had never traveled the way he was about to. As he turned from the ship, he asked, "Who will be accompanying me?" One Rew jumped forward and stated that he would. All the pieces were now in place. It was time to put the plan into action. It was time to save the An children.

200 Rew

The Rew were assembled. Geebs gave the word and the Rew produced a humming sound that vibrated the very air around them. Suddenly, there was a greenish blue light that surrounded them all. The ground and buildings around them faded. Looking down, all he could see was star fields in a blur. Within seconds they were all on Seren. The Amphocians had gathered 199 volunteers of their own. Each Amphocian was paired with a Rew. Once again, they all gathered in a circle. The Rew began to hum, and the light enveloped them all. This was it. All the events from the past have led to this moment. The outcome of this would determine the fate of many. He knew that success hinged on a delicate balance of time and execution.

He had already messaged the An Council of Nine, informing them that he had a plan. He told them that the security forces needed to be aware that foreigners would appear in various places around the planet. For the Prince's sake and the sake of the other An children, whose lives were in peril, they must not interfere or detain them. Just before the group's departure from Seren, he received a reply. It simply read, "We will comply with these wishes. Please do your best."

The plan was simply in its conception, yet there would be difficulty in how they would arrive at the solution. The 199 Rew were matched up with 199 families with sick and dying children. The 200th Rew was matched with Geebs to take him directly to the Supreme Leader's palace. The plan was to:

1. Arrive at each of the infected children's homes and allow each Amphocian to place hands on each child and then on the ground outside their home. The planet would instruct each Amphocian on exactly which plants, minerals, and materials to gather and where to find each.
2. The Rew would transport each Amphocian to retrieve all the necessary ingredients for the cure and transport them back to the infected child.
3. The Amphocian healer would use quantum manipulation skills to transform the raw ingredients into an elixir that was consumable.

4. All would rejoice in their success.

A good plan indeed. The chief obstacle was time working against them and whether the An would cooperate. The message Geebs received back from them seemed to guarantee cooperation would not be a concern. This left only the matter of time as the primary hurdle. They were running out of time. Only an hour remained when they arrived.

The palace guards rushed Geebs and his Rew assistant, “Blarq” into the inner sanctum where Annu was diligently at his son’s side. As he looked down at his son, Geebs understood that a father’s love for his child is all that existed at that moment. No other agendas were at play. There was no conquering and plotting. There was only the desperation of a father wanting his son to be okay and have him live another day.

Geebs explained the plan to Annu. As he did, Blarq blinked out to retrieve the cure from the leader of the Amphocian team, who was tasked with securing double the necessary amount, to ensure the prince was saved. Blarq reappeared within a few minutes carrying grave news. He explained to the Supreme Leader and Geebs that the Amphocians have a problem. One of the necessary ingredients was found to exist in only one spot on the entire planet. The southern pole of the planet was extremely active with seismic energy and volcanic activity. There was a fungus that grows deep in a cave system. That cave system also has a toxin that is lethal to the Rew. If they were to succeed, it would cost all their lives.

Prince En-shu reached for his father whispering, “Father, I am cold...”. His words drifted off as he lost consciousness again. “Is there nothing we can do?”, asked Annu. “Lord Annu, we will try”, replied Geebs. He signaled to Blarq to take him to the others who were gathered outside the cave. Time was depleted. They only had 27 minutes left before all would be lost. There was no time for the Amphocians to reach the material in time. There was no way for the Rew to get them there and back safely. Geebs knew what he had to say.

“My friends of the Rew, I cannot begin to thank you for your efforts. To reveal yourselves to those that would enslave you is a momentous act of courage. Alas, we failed. I am afraid peril awaits us all now.” As Geebs finished his declaration, Blarq reached up and took his hand. “Fear not Celestial Gardener. Just as you have your purpose, so we have ours. The Rew are many. The Rew are now wise. We will fulfill our purpose so that peace will occur throughout the galaxy.” In an instant, all the Rew and the Amphocians disappeared.

It was a blur. The Rew had vanished with the Amphocians, only to reappear moments later. Blarq manifested in front of Geebs and speedily grabbed his leg before dematerializing with him and the elixir cure. Instantly, they returned to the inner sanctum of the palace. As they materialized, Blarq collapsed to the ground. With his last breath, he held the serum up for Geebs to grab. Blarq managed to speak one last word as all life left his body. “Peace”. The same thing occurred all over the planet. Each Amphocian watched their Rew escort perish. They jumped into action with only minutes remaining for the An children. The Amphocians realized that they were at the mercy of the An, as they were stranded.

Geebs acted quickly. “With your permission, Lord Annu?”, he asked. “Please”, Annu replied as he lifted his son’s head. Geebs poured the elixir into the mouth of En-shu and gently rubbed his throat. “Swallow young prince” he asked his patient. Just then, En-shu’s body went limp. “Noooooo!” shouted Annu. They were too late. Annu fell to the floor in devastation. It was only a matter of time before grief would turn into rage. The destruction that would ensue would shake the very fabric of the galaxy.

“Father” A tiny voice muttered. The prince lived. He sat up on the table where he laid and asked, “Father, what happened?” Annu clutched his son with all his strength. Tears of joy streaked down his face. “Gardener, I am indebted to you” he said. Geebs knew that Annu was many things, some good, some bad. He was a man of his word above all

things. He knew that he could trust Annu to deliver on the request he would make of him.

An hour had passed. News reached Annu's ears that all of the infected An Children were safe and unharmed. The Mylarians that had the poison compound on them had all been addressed and charged. Annu, now seated on his throne with his still recovering son at his side, received Geebs in the throne room. "Master Gardener, you have saved the day, earned my gratitude and respect, and most importantly, saved the life of my son. How might I repay you for such an admirable accomplishment?"

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The room was full of royal security, members of the royal families and the Council of Nine. Everyone expected him to ask for a pardon for himself. Instead, all were stunned as he replied, “Supreme Leader, I humbly ask that the tribunal into my past trespasses resume. If it would please you, all members of the Council of Nine are present. Lord Utu’s last question prior to these recent events occurring was whether I would confess to crimes against the An and you, Supreme Leader.”

Geebs understood that this was the moment that mattered the most. Somehow, he surmised that his creators knew that this moment would come and that the welfare of so many rested in the words he chose to use next. “Lord Utu, I do confess that I disobeyed the orders given to me. I sabotaged the weapon that was to be used against the people of Terra Beta. An accident occurred that impacted the Rew and Mylarians. I did relocate the Amphocians against orders to the contrary. All these things I am responsible for.” Utu spoke up and said, “Then our work is completed.” “Please, Lord Utu grant me permission to elaborate.” Utu glanced at the Supreme Leader who nodded. Geebs gathered his thoughts. He looked down at the medal on his chest. Even upside down he could read it said, “courageous”. So, Geebs, Celestial Gardener 426 looked about the room and began his narrative explanation.

“Honorable An, members of the Council of Nine, Lord Annu, when you discovered me so exceptionally long ago, I was already beyond ancient. Long gone from my memory cells are the first memories of the creators. Most of my memories of the Elders are no longer clear. However, the one thing that has been clear has been my purpose. The programming of my purpose is as clear today as it was at my inception. My purpose is to cultivate life... all of it. My role as a Celestial Gardener is to cultivate life so that it might strive and ultimately watching civilizations rise and fall on their own account, with many of those reaching the stars, as you have.”

“I have learned that only over time, what may seem to be accidents turn out to be the result of a divine plan. Many times, I have been the instrument of that divine plan. Had

the accident not occurred with the Rew, they would have been enslaved and forced to serve as troops within the An military. Yes, they overran a solar system, displacing trillions of people. However, the solar anomaly that followed destroyed all life in that system. Trillions were saved because the Rew multiplied and came to infest that system, forcing them to flee to other systems. Since the Rew home world was deemed “forbidden” to travel to, the Rew there were then allowed to thrive. The aftereffects of the accident that made them ravenous, mutated and the minds of the Rew developed to the point where they are now one with the cosmos. They possess the ability to travel throughout the galaxy without the use of spacecraft. Had your wishes for the Rew come to fruition, your children would have perished. All the Rew that transported us here to save the prince and the other children gave their lives so that your children could live. I beseech you to view the Rew as allies, as equals and as friends. They have proven their worthiness. ``

“The order to end all life on Ricsus 5 would have killed off all the Amphocians. Unknown to you, they were already skilled healers. All of them possess the ability to intuitively know what sickness or disease someone is suffering from. Equally, they can communicate with the life force of an entire planet to find cures for both. This skill was perfected after their arrival on Seren, where I relocated them to. Had I followed orders, again calamity would have befallen your children. My programming compelled me to do exactly what I did.”

“The events that transpired with the poisoning of your children was the work of one, now imprisoned, Mylarian. General Thog resorted to risking war over the snatching of Mylarian children for entertainment and enslavement by you. I ask any of you, what lengths would you go to in defense of your children? What distances would you travel to rescue your children? If the An children were imprisoned, would you not wish to retaliate against their oppressors? The Mylarian General who did this, did so out of desperation. His only daughter is here, as a captive. I ask that you consider that his desperation is understandable, though his actions are not.”

“To the most recent events regarding the perceived threat from Terra Beta, I wish to share with you more information about the species you would have eradicated from existence. The decision to exterminate them was based on their constant state of warring with each other, ability to bring war into their solar system, and their harnessing of the atom for destructive purposes. Although these are true, the larger picture is of a species much grander than that... one that given the opportunity will add to the culture of the galaxy in ways you cannot fathom, yet. Please listen.”

Geebs opened the top of his head and beautiful music began to be heard in the chamber. It was Mozart. “This is beautiful!”, exclaimed Utu. “Is this Terran music?”, he added. “Yes, it is, and this is only one example. They are creative beyond imagination. The Divine Creator blessed them with the ability to create such beauty and yet they are, indeed, capable of destruction. However, they do seek and desire peace. Given the opportunity, they would learn from you, and they could teach you, as well. I did not destroy them because they have a purpose yet to be realized. I count the Terrans as friends. You should too.”

He paused for a second to look about the room. Those who had children saved by the Rew and the Amphocians hugged them tightly. Mighty Annu did just that. He knew that everything hung in the balance and yet the pendulum was swinging his way.

“Lord Utu and honorable An, Council members, Lord Annu, it is my hope that you see what I see, which is that there can be great beauty in what you have referred to as “weeds”. It was “weeds” that came to your rescue. It was “weeds” that saved the day. Had they been eradicated as ordered, the galaxy would be plunged into war and darkness. Yet here we are. This is a critical moment for all An. Be the beacon of light in the galaxy. Work to find ways to preserve life and not takers of it. Be the beacon that all the other races and species can respect, not fear.”

“I humbly ask that you allow the Rew to exist in peace and that you form a diplomatic bond with them. Equally, I ask that you make treaties with all the inhabitants of Seren.

Please see that the stranded Amphocians are transported back home. I believe that, should you ask them; many would volunteer to be healers in the employment of the An, and not as prisoners. I ask that the Mylarian children be returned to their planet so that they can reunite with their loved ones. It would be an enormous goodwill gesture if you, Lord Annu, would allow the Mylarians to imprison General Thog for his crimes. Lastly, I ask that you allow Terra Beta to mature and thrive until they reach the capability of interstellar travel. At that time, I ask that you extend a hand of friendship to them.”

“I accept my fate. I relinquish myself for the punishment of disobedience and dissent. If anyone is to be punished, I beg you allow it to be me.” That is how Geebs closed his answering of his crimes. The room fell silent. All of those gathered looked at Annu for his reaction. His face was down turned as he looked at his son when Utu spoke. “Then it is settled. G-426, you are to be dismantled and...” “No”, exclaimed Annu as he stood up. All of those present bowed in respect to their Supreme Leader.

“Forgive us Celestial Gardener. I see now how, in our arrogance, we did not recognize the opportunity given to us when we found you. Instead of us learning from you and the eons of experience you obtained, we promoted ourselves to be your masters. This was one of many mistakes. My son would not be at my side at this moment, had it not been for the wisdom that exists in your programming. I, and the An people, are forever indebted to you. We shall honor all that is asked of us. We will extend a hand of friendship to the Rew, the Amphocians and the Oscoleans of Seren. We will return all the Mylarian children to their loving parents and ask them for forgiveness as we have trespassed against them. We will allow the Mylarians to punish the responsible one for the poisoning of the prince and the other children. Terra Beta will now be off limits to all. We will protect her and let her people develop as you have requested. Lastly, dear Celestial Gardener, I wish to thank you for opening the eyes of an old ruler. There is beauty in what some would call weeds. I release you from all responsibilities to me and the other An. You are free to roam the universe and fulfill your purpose. I ask that you choose a free name for yourself as I no longer wish for anyone to refer to you as a

number. Our history books will need a name that is worthy of your deeds. Is there a name you wish to be called?”

As Annu finished his question, Geebs thoughts drifted to his little child friend from Terra Beta. He could hear her voice in his head saying, “Hurry up Mr. Geebs... you slow poke. I’m going to release all these dandelion seeds myself if you do not hurry.” “Lord Annu, thank you for all your words. This truly is a momentous day for the galaxy. ‘Geebs’... Lord Annu, I would like to be known as ‘Geebs’.”

So, it came to be that G-426, Celestial Gardener, a robot incapable of emotional expression without his little emotion medal on his chest changed the fate of so many. This synthetic life form in his bow tie found a way to open the heart of the most powerful and ruthless ruler in the galaxy. The An presented him with a small ship that could take him anywhere. When asked where he would go first, he replied, “back to Despera, my former prison.” The puzzled soldier added, “Why would you ever want to step foot on that desolate world again?” “Because, dear commander, I have keepsakes on the desolate world.” “What kind of keepsakes?”, he inquired. “Pictures of weeds, dear commander, pictures of beautiful weeds.”

The End

Beauty in the Weeds



Figure 1 Elder Manifesting



Figure 2 Eroc, Terroc and Gemul - The Watchers

Beauty in the Weeds

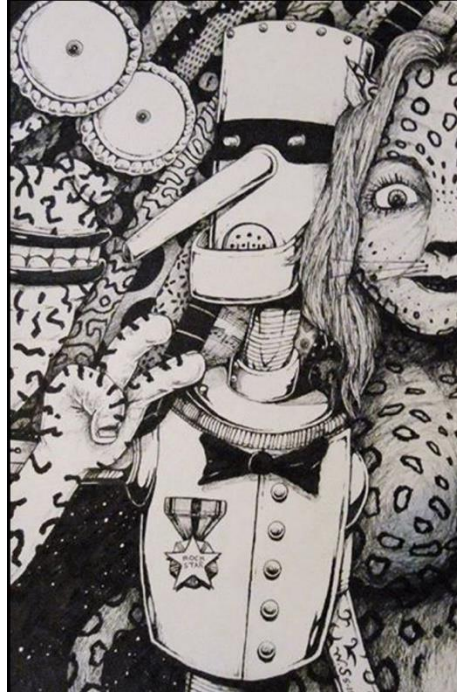


Figure 3 Friends - Glibbi, G-426 and Thrawn T'awn



Figure 4 The Rew



Figure 5 Mylarian Child

Beauty in the Weeds

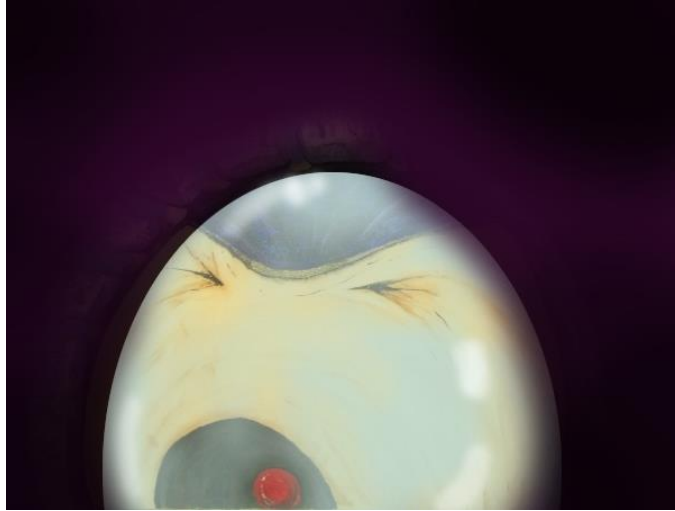


Figure 6 Mylarian General Thog

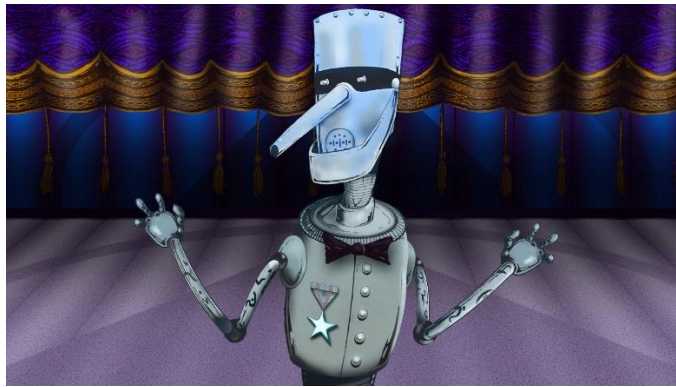


Figure 7 Geebs addresses the An



Figure 8 Glibbi

Beauty in the Weeds

Planets featured.

Planet	Sector/System	Significance	Scene Description	Scene from Space
Reiol'd	A267423/Delaphia	Where G-426 was found	Abandoned architecture and ruins	Earth like planet
Taberon	A267478/Lanzari	Where G-371 and G-159 were found by the An	Jungle with Mayan stylized Pyramids and ruins	Dense Jungle planet sans the poles
Despera	Moon of planet Xiprio B384912/Xen	Where G-426 was exiled to for disobeying the An	Desolate icy planet with crystalline structures jutting from the ground	light bluish green in color with surface line
Xiprio	B384912/Xen	Largest moon used as a solitary confinement prison for G-426	Liquid Surface with dense atmosphere	like Venus, heavy atmosphere with bluish hue
Rammik	B384672/Ramotha	Where G-159 was destroyed by a supervolcano	like early primordial Earth. smoggy volcanoes everywhere. No plant life	Brownish Red hue with grayish brown cloud cover
Hytogene	A278114/Z'tha	Where G-371 was destroyed by sentient life forms	Mountains and valley with lots of forest and foliage	Purplish and Tan from space
Terra Beta	B963771/Edennea	Earth of this universe. Where G-426 becomes friends with Loshi and Beck	Earth with subtle differences. Timeline of development is same as our Earth	Earthish
An Prime	A000001/An	The An homeworld. Where G-426 standing trial	Multiple scenes but main is of Egyptian themes obelisk and pyramids	Purplish hue, clouds mostly land masses
Rew	A344798/Olum	Homeworld of the Rew	Huts on prairie lands early and then nothing but Rew heads later	Earth like early, later tanish, light brown with atmosphere of bluish white

Beauty in the Weeds

Pegazine	B567211/Salet	Where one Rew was taken via starship and later multiplied and consumed organic matter from the entire system	If any, the ravenous Rew consuming a planet	None
Riscus 5	A227817/Riscus	Original home world of the Amphocians	Mostly water planet with marshes and some land masses	Greenish blue
Seren	A227817/A'Tha	Home world of the Oscoleans and new home world of the Amphocians	African Savannah-like	Blues, Browns and greens
Mongelo	A227817/A'Tha	Home world of the Tyrites. Where G-426, Glibbi and Thrawn T'awn teamed up to stop a pandemic	Neonish, bright colored floral world	Pinks, orange and purples
Mylar	B967329/Espin	Gas giant home world of the Mylarians	Cloud citys clouds... lots of clouds	Jupiter like