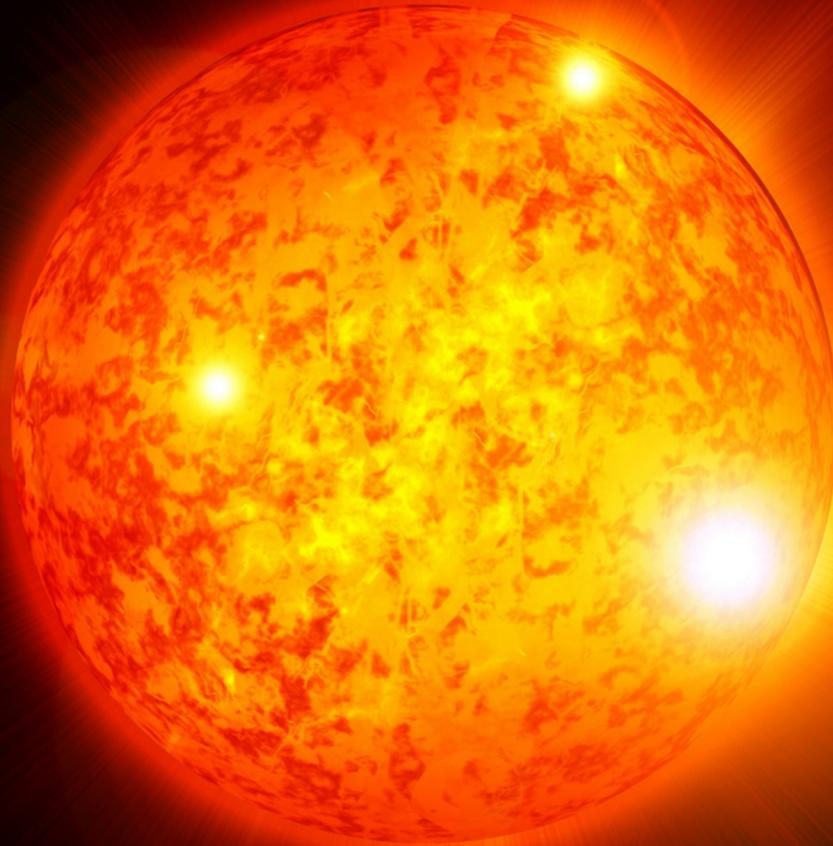


CATHARSIS

Legend of the Lemurians

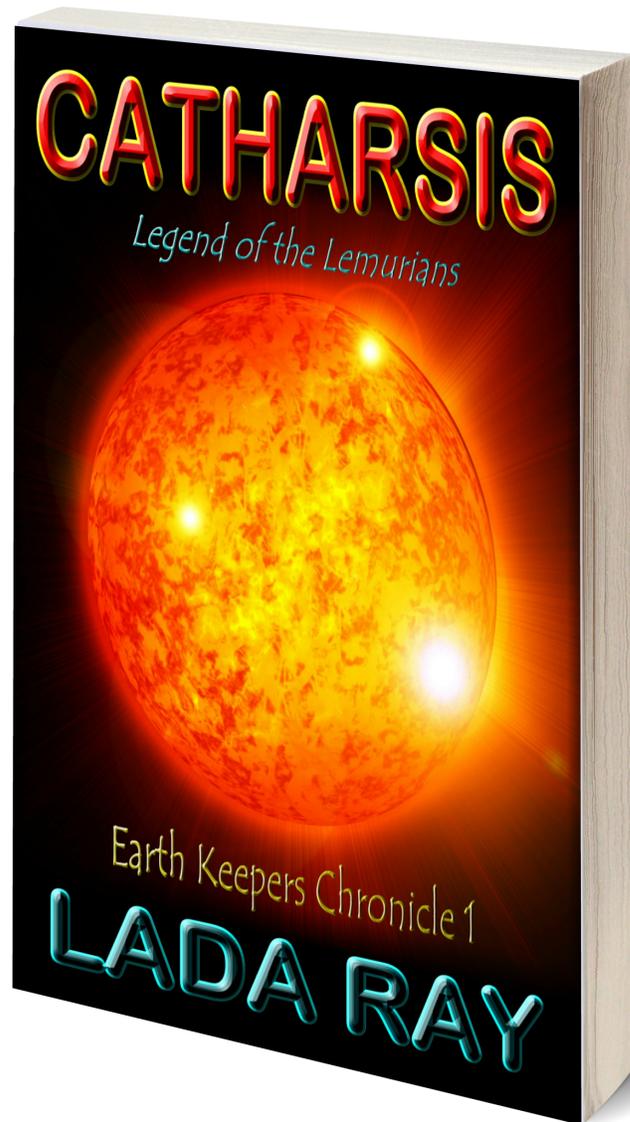


Earth Keepers Chronicle 1

LADA RAY

CATHARSIS

Legend of the Lemurians



CATHARSIS

Legend of the Lemurians

“Karma can be a beautiful maiden or a bitch”

~Lada Ray

Earth Keepers Chronicle 1

Lemuria... Atlantis... Forgotten Origins of Humanity

A companion-prequel to THE EARTH SHIFTER

Lada Ray



By Lada Ray

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CATHARSIS

Earth Keepers Chronicle 1

*Before recorded history, before Humanity, since times immemorial,
the Earth Keepers have been watching over our planet.*

*Marked at birth and endowed with supreme powers,
the nine chosen ones are the Earth's record keepers and moderators,
and when the time comes... ultimate decision makers.*

This is the first of their chronicles.



Legend of the Lemurians

Planet Catharsis was a beautiful red planet located on the outskirts of the Andromeda Galaxy. Everything on it was a lovely shade of red, orange, or fuchsia. Catharsis had two beautiful moons: the purple moon and the orange moon, which illuminated the nightly sky when its red sun was napping.

Just like the planet itself, its inhabitants were truly beautiful: gorgeous women clad in exquisite gowns and elaborate hairdos, stately men with dignified features, and adorably angelic children. Even the old people were beautiful: nice grannies knitting pretty hats or baking delicious cakes and cheerful grandpas taking lovely morning strolls to discuss the latest news at a nearby café.

Catharsians prided themselves on their large and beautiful houses. In fact, one house was more beautiful than the next. People of Catharsis treated beauty as an art form and a lifelong competition. On this planet, being a beautician was a high honor, but what was even better was to be a plastic surgeon.

Once, the planet of Catharsis possessed a rich animal kingdom, with animals of varying species living in the woods, fields, and waters. Catharsians also kept adorable pets. But at some point, they realized that all these pets were terribly messy, what with chewing on their owners' stylish shoes, scratching valuable sofas, and leaving fur everywhere—and that was unforgivably ugly. Soon, all the pets were gone, vanished, as if they never existed.

Initially that caused a stir in society, with children crying for their little furry friends and even some adults longing for them. But what wouldn't one sacrifice for beauty? So, eventually everyone in the Catharsian society adjusted to the absence of pets.

However, there was still the question of all those wild animals, which continued to bother the beauty-oriented Catharsians. One day, all the wild animals were gone, as well. That caused much less of a stir, although the group called Fair Catharsis tried to stage protests. The population at large hardly noticed the disappearance of all of the wild creatures. The truth was, the entire planet was now clean and sterile, and no one could argue that this wasn't much better.

Next, an ingenious company, called ELPET, introduced the new electronic pet. Catharsians were tripping all over themselves to purchase one for their household, because these pets never ate, never made a mess and were (you guessed it!) beautiful. Before long, every self-respecting Catharsian household had an Elpet, one model more

gorgeous than the next. ELPET stock went through the roof, and the population returned to its happy equilibrium. Harmony and beauty were restored.

The whole planet was clearly basking in the rays of its Golden Age, and it seemed nothing, absolutely nothing, could spoil it.

But wait, there *was* something of which Catharsians were both afraid and ashamed. Something they didn't even admit to themselves. The thing was, not every inhabitant of the planet was beautiful. Sure, there were degrees of beauty. Not everyone could be strikingly, impossibly beautiful. Some had to be plainer than others were. That was true. Although it was never admitted publicly, some Catharsians were less attractive than was socially acceptable. However, they would become more beautiful with the adept help of plastic surgeons and beauticians.

No, the people we are talking about were not beautiful by any stretch of imagination. In fact, they were truly and exceedingly ugly. As ugly as one could get! The truth was...the beautiful Catharsians had to share their planet with another race, which they called the Ugliers. Of course, the Ugliers themselves preferred to be called Lemurians. Alas, on beautiful planet Catharsis no one cared what the Ugliers preferred.

The Ugliers were as different from Catharsians as day was from night. While Catharsians cared very much how exquisite their gowns were, and how well their high-heeled shoes accentuated their meticulously groomed feet, the Ugliers ran around in simple, home-made outfits. And, oh horror of horrors, they often walked around barefoot! When asked why they did so, they smiled serenely, explaining that this is how they connected with Goddess Mu, the Sacred Mother of All.

Catharsians didn't mind the Ugliers worshipping their Mu, as long as it distracted them from any thoughts of rebellion, keeping them docile and submissive. Indeed, it had been noted that the Ugliers were especially meditative and quiet after they'd prayed to Mu. In fact it seemed, thanks to their prayers, they took their fate and abuse exceedingly well.

Another thing that really bothered Catharsians was the sheer openness of the Ugliers' smiles. They had these very large mouths, and when they smiled their plump lips would open wide to reveal their unnaturally white teeth. How exceedingly ugly! Everyone on Catharsis knew that one's mouth was supposed to be small, with thin lips, and teeth—a lovely shade of orange! Anything else was completely unacceptable, and the planet's plastic surgeons and dentists were hard at work to make sure everyone's mouths and teeth were in strict compliance with the universally accepted standard of beauty.

But that was not all, far from it. The Ugliers possessed very large, almond shaped eyes, which slanted upwards, while it was common knowledge that the most beautiful eyes should be round and small. Plastic surgeons had their job cut out for them, as Catharsian women lined up to make sure their eyes were that unattainable shape and size. One of the most irritating things about the Ugliers' faces were their noses. While Catharsians prided themselves in their long and sharp noses (the sharper the better), the Ugliers had these strange short noses, which made their faces look eternally young. That was the last straw for many Catharsians, who spent big chunks of their incomes on battling the relentless aging process.

And to add insult to injury, the Ugliers were significantly taller than natural, towering over Catharsians like big, sore thumbs.

Because Catharsians were ashamed that some of them could be so ugly, a long time ago they built a special reservation, called Camp Ugly. The camp was equipped with a lethal voltage electric fence and watchtowers with state-of-the-art monitoring equipment. All the Ugliers on the planet were herded into Camp Ugly, where they lived out their drudgery, generation after generation.

It wasn't an act of cruelty on part of the Catharsians, oh no! It was firmly believed in Catharsian society that being ugly was in fact a disease. Therefore, herding all the Ugliers into the camp where they could be carefully monitored and isolated from the rest of society was a fully justifiable measure.

However, it proved difficult to find guards for the camp. Not only was it an awful strain on the eye to look at the ugly people all day long, but what if ugliness was also contagious? Of course, the researchers were never able to prove conclusively that was the case, but what if it was? The camp guards were paid double salary, but even then they wouldn't stay for long. The turnover among the Camp Ugly guards was simply terrible.

Catharsians prided themselves on being fair and just, because, well, the alternative would not be beautiful. The truth was that once upon a time, the planet's administration tried to cull the population of Ugliers, but the Ugly Rights Groups were up in arms. Another time, a controversial bill was introduced proposing that all Ugliers be sterilized and denied mating rights, but it didn't pass the Senate. After much deliberation, the compromise was reached according to which, when an Ugly reached a mating age he or she would be allowed to take a mate and have one child, but no more than that. The hope was that slowly but surely the population of Ugliers on the planet would be reduced.

And so, Catharsians and Ugliers co-existed without much interaction, nor with much knowledge of each other. Catharsians went on living the high life, attending beautiful parties and having the time of their lives, while the Ugliers were left to fend for themselves behind electric fence built to prevent their escape and the spread of the much dreaded "ugly disease."



Camp Ugly occupied a large wasteland territory, just outside the capital city of Thar. It consisted of eight sectors divided into forty villages, each populated by one to two hundred Ugly families. The population of these villages used to be substantially larger, but now many huts stood deserted, as each new generation of Ugliers would get smaller and smaller. It was apparent that the one child policy, imposed on the Ugliers, was working.

The focal point of Camp Ugly was the Gathering Square, where the Ugliers sang, danced and worshiped Goddess Mu in their ancient Lemurian language. On the corner of the square stood the house of the Supreme Elder, as well as what the Ugliers proudly called the Temple of Mu. In fact, it was just a large and rather unattractive barrack.

But the Ugliers didn't notice its outward appearance because inside was the most important and valuable thing the Ugliers possessed. This ultimate treasure was the famous Lemurian Mother Crystal, which was guarded zealously day and night. The crystal was so huge that even a hundred Ugliers couldn't lift it. It consisted of a myriad of points growing like a gigantic flower out of the crystal's center, and it sparkled like a zillion stars when the light of the torches reflected from its thousands of facets. No one knew where the crystal came from, or how it appeared in Camp Ugly. But according to the Lemurian legends, the crystal was the ultimate protective shield and energy booster for the entire planet of Catharsis. The Ugliers called it the Crystalline Engine and considered themselves its keepers.

Truth be told, it was an incredible stroke of luck for the Ugliers that Catharsians saw no value or beauty in the Mother Crystal. If they did, they would have taken the sacred crystal away from the Ugliers, broken it into pieces and sold it off to the highest bidders. But since they thought that the pointy and heavy crystal was just an ugly rock, the Lemurian treasure was safe, at least for the moment.

Camp Ugly's eight sectors lay beyond the main square, spreading outward according to the compass directions like slices of a giant pie. Each sector was comprised of five villages, and beyond these villages were agricultural fields. Each village specialized in growing of one kind of produce, which they shared with the rest of the camp's population in an equitable and fair manner. If one village had a bad crop, which happened often due to substandard equipment and scarce water, others stepped in to fill the food shortage.

Despite such meager conditions, the Ugliers seemed not to fret. They lived in their simple little huts, growing crops and caring for their young. They had to work very hard to survive, and because of that, they didn't have much time to look after themselves. Their features and their bodies weren't perfect to begin with (at least according to Catharsians), plus they had no time at all to beautify them. Even if they did, there wasn't anything in the entire Camp Ugly with which to beautify themselves.

Instead of spending whatever little free time they had on vanity, the Ugliers usually got together to sing and dance as they prayed to Mu, the Mother of All, for the good of Ugliers and Catharsians alike. They sang beautiful songs about peace, love, and...beauty. Their singing was so entrancing that even the guards couldn't help but listen, and some even shed a tear or two. It seemed these songs came straight out of their souls, which stood wide open for the whole world to see. And if anyone cared to look inside those souls, which Catharsians certainly didn't, they'd see how truly beautiful the Ugliers were.



Catharsians and Ugliers alike dreaded the last day of each month. The thing was, there were certain needs the Ugliers had that could not be fulfilled inside Camp Ugly. For example, they had to get certain supplies they couldn't get otherwise. There were also

certain errands to run, like getting medicine for the old and ailing. A hundred of designated Uglies, called Runners, were allowed to leave the camp on that day to obtain supplies for everyone else, because Catharsians considered it below their dignity to run errands for the Uglies. It was bad enough that they had to maintain the electric fence and guard them day and night!

The Runners were chosen each month from the strongest and most courageous of the Uglies. As usual, the night before the trip, all able-bodied Uglies gathered around the campfire to sing their beautiful songs as a good luck wish for the chosen ones. That night, the Runners got the choicest pieces of food from the Uglies' scarce table and went to bed early, to preserve their strength before the arduous endeavor. The next morning, at the break of the red dawn, they said farewell to their tearful families, and left.

The entire population of Camp Ugly gathered to say a final goodbye as the camp's tall electric gate opened up, and promptly closed again behind them. As their eyes followed the departing Runners, their lips moved, as the Uglies whispered prayers to the Goddess Mu to keep their brave men safe, because it was well known (and even expected) that not all of them would be back.

The Runners were considered heroes among their own, and they proudly sacrificed themselves for the good of all.

Morf was sixteen when he first volunteered to become a Runner. His mother was against it, but his father who had been doing the Runner duty for a while, was in no condition to go. His right leg was badly damaged after the latest model Elpet attacked him during his last run. Morf's native village, located in Sector No. 5 of Camp Ugly and comprised of one hundred twenty households, had too many women and children, but not enough strong, young men. Most of the older men sustained injuries from past expeditions, but someone still had to procure supplies, clothes and medicine. Morf took after his father, growing tall and strong—stronger and taller than most Uglies. At sixteen, he towered over his mother, and at that point Morf knew, it was his turn to become a Runner.

At seventeen, this was already his sixth run. He kissed and hugged his weeping mother and his limping father goodbye, made sure he had his water bottle, and carefully examined his gear. The gear every Runner carried along consisted of two huge sacks, which they would load up with as much stuff as they could gather during their expedition, and two sturdy purses strapped to their waists, in which they would carry the most valuable items, like medicine. Morf also carried two backpacks, one upfront, and another in the back. Some Runners were so adept that they even strapped additional small bags to their legs and arms. Equipped this way, each of them looked like a walking, talking clothes hanger.

To Morf, the fully loaded Runner resembled what Catharsians called "a decorated New Year's tree." During one of his previous runs he had seen a real New Year's tree after it was thrown out into garbage. Even in the garbage the tree looked very beautiful. The Uglies didn't have any trees. The wasteland where their camp was located was dry and barren, with only one small river, which was hardly enough to water their crops. No water could be spared on luxuries like the trees, and even bathing was a problem.

Morf desperately wanted to pick up that New Year's tree and bring it back to the village so the children could enjoy it. But it was too big to haul all the way back. In the end, he had to sacrifice the tree for crucial necessities, like food, clothes and medicine.

The thing was, Runners had to carry everything they were able to gather on their person. They couldn't bring carts, because the carts would slow them down. It was very important to be fast on your feet. In fact, sometimes it could mean the difference between life and death.

Morf waited for his companion Dorf, a veteran Runner from his village. Three other Runners from the neighboring villages soon joined them, and all five disappeared behind the tall gate. Five men was the optimal size for the Runner team. Any more and it would be harder to find enough stuff for everyone. On the other hand, it was certainly not advisable to travel alone. Thar, the capital of Catharsis, was a very safe city, but not for the Ugliers.

Thar's stores and pharmacies carried signs:

NO UGLIES ALLOWED

So, it would normally take Runners all day and a lot of ingenuity to try and find a place where they could get necessary supplies. It certainly didn't help that they had to do all of their errands on foot, since they had no money to buy the beautiful motor carriages Catharsians drove. But the Ugliers were a resourceful bunch. If they couldn't buy what they needed, they'd dive into garbage disposal bins, where they'd usually find perfectly good food, almost new clothes, and even medicine well before its expiration date, thrown out by the demanding Catharsians. They'd never admit it, but Catharsians actually loved it when Ugliers picked up the unwanted food and clothes from their trash. Garbage wasn't beautiful at all, and the more of it the Ugliers removed, the better.

As Morf and his four companions walked around the city, the locals spit and cursed at them, and children threw stones. Some even sicked Elpets on them as they passed.

Morf knew: this was how his father became a cripple. The attack of an Elpet was especially hard to run away from when the Runner was already on his way back to the camp after an exhausting day, hungry and tired, and loaded with all the stuff he was able to carry. No Catharsian would give the tired Ugly a glass of water to quench his thirst or a bite to eat, while smells of delicious cooking from the nearby houses would make his stomach growl even worse.

That unfortunate day, his father was lucky enough to stumble upon a great stash of clothes and food thrown out by Catharsians, and he was loaded with more stuff than usual. When a Catharsian commanded his Elpet to attack him, he didn't have the strength to run. As a result, his leg was badly mauled.

His father's case wasn't an exception. More often than not, Runners would return home bleeding and bruised from all the stones thrown at them and injuries inflicted on them during the day. But they never responded to such abuse. They always smiled politely and never fought back.

Morf's run started without any problems. However, late in the afternoon, things got out of control as they encountered a particularly mean group of Catharsians. Several of them stood talking when the Ugliers passed by, loaded to the hilt with their sacks and backpacks.

The Ugliers politely greeted Catharsians. "Good day," they said with particularly broad smiles. The Runners simply couldn't help their smiles. The day had gone well, so

far no one had attacked them, and the haul was good. By all accounts, it was turning out to be a very successful run, and very soon they would be returning home.

But for some reason, this simple greeting infuriated the natives. One of them had an Elpet on a leash—a large and particularly vicious looking model. Its owner quickly released the leash and commanded through clenched teeth, “Attack.”

The Elpet immediately sprang into action, covering the distance separating it from the Ugliers in several giant leaps. Morf was first to notice the move.

“Run as fast as you can!” he yelled to his friends and nimbly sprinted off, hoping the other Runners would follow. Morf could run very fast and for a very long time, due to his long legs and strength and despite his heavy load. He ran like this for a few seconds and glanced back. Three of his friends managed to escape, but Dorf was in huge trouble. The first thing Morf noticed was that another Elpet joined the attack, and the two of them ganged up on the tired Dorf. He was helplessly sprawled on the ground, as both Elpets went for his leg and throat. Morf ran back as quickly as his legs would carry him, frantically waving his hands in the air in order to distract the Elpets from their victim.

“Here, I am here!” he kept yelling, jumping up and down. “Go after me, I have more flesh to bite into. Leave him alone, he is all skin and bones!”

The Elpets, either distracted by his yelling or his waving arms, detached their bloody faces from Dorf and instead, started after Morf.

Meanwhile, the other Runners were returning to help. “Help Dorf, I’ll distract them!” Morf yelled, running for his life. He ran as he’d never run before, and despite their best efforts, the Elpets were unable to catch him. After pursuing him for ten or fifteen blocks, the Elpets stopped, issuing disappointed squeals. They slowly turned around and returned to their owners. Breathing heavily, Morf stopped too and waited for his companions. They finally appeared, supporting the badly mauled Dorf. Morf loaded himself with Dorf’s stuff, and took some of the load off the other Runners’ backs, so they could carry their bleeding companion. Dorf’s breath was coming out in labored spasms. As he walked almost doubled over under his load, Morf knew his friend was in very bad shape. It seemed clear that without urgent treatment he might not reach the camp.

As they passed the square that Morf knew very well, he quickly said, “Wait here,” and dashed across the square, not even bothering to take the load off his shoulders. His destination was the local pharmacy, which he’d visited before. The owner of that pharmacy, an old Catharsian woman, was unlike other Catharsians. During his first run, she gave him a jar of ointment to treat his wound after he’d been bitten by an Elpet in front of her store. Another time, she gave him some food. He frantically knocked on the pharmacy door.

The door opened and the woman appeared. “You better leave,” she said, frowning. “I have nothing for you today.” Her head was nervously turning left and right, as if she was afraid someone might catch her talking to an Ugly.

“Please, I really need your help!” pleaded Morf.

“I can’t help you.”

“But you helped me before!”

“And as a result, I lost most of my customers,” responded the woman bitterly.

“Please,” said Morf, “don’t turn me down! I am very sorry you lost your customers. I am very sorry your act of kindness didn’t generate the kind of reward you deserved. I will pray for your happiness to Goddess Mu every day of my life. But, please, please help me

this one last time, and I promise, I'll never ask you again. This is a matter of life and death!"

"What's the matter?" asked the woman.

"See that man over there?" Morf pointed at the bleeding Dorf, supported by his friends, all of whom waited nervously on the other side of the square.

"What happened?"

"He was badly mauled by Elpets and is losing a lot of blood. He won't reach the camp, unless he gets treated immediately."

The woman contemplated Dorf for a moment, and then disappeared inside. A moment later she reappeared with a bag containing bandages, ointment and pain medicine.

"Here. Put ointment directly on the wounds. Bandage the wounds immediately. Apply pressure to stop the bleeding. Give him water and these pills. This is all I can do. Now leave—and quickly."

"Mu bless your kind heart!" said Morf with feeling, sprinting back to his friends.

They found a quiet hidden spot where Morf treated Dorf, carefully following the woman's instructions. After that, they resumed their trip back to Camp Ugly.

Once back inside the camp, Dorf was taken to the infirmary, and the others deposited everything they were able to collect in the center of the Gathering Square, so all could get what they needed. As women and children excitedly dug through the goodies, trying to find a new tunic to wear, or a piece of food to spruce up their simple dinner, the rest of the Runners were treated for their wounds. They never complained and stoically endured the painful procedures; they were heroes of the day, and their people's happiness was all they required in return.

The story of how Morf saved the day spread like fire around Camp Ugly. Everyone wanted to shake his hand and say how proud they were. As was usual on the night after the run, the Ugliers had a lavish (by their standards) community dinner in the Gathering Square. Along with the other Runners, Morf received the best morsels of food and biggest chunks of bread. After everyone was done, the Ugliers sang their amazing songs, which penetrated straight to one's heart, if anyone cared to listen. But Catharsians never listened to these songs, nor did they ever look beneath the surface, and because of that they never knew how beautiful the Ugliers really were.

And that's how the two very unlike races lived... Catharsians, whose beauty was all on the outside, and Lemurians, dubbed by their tormentors "the Ugliers," whose true beauty was within.



And so, as the Ugliers sang songs and humbly carried their load, the beautiful Catharsians slowly began rotting from the inside. For a while it was completely

unnoticeable, only sometimes a very strange and ugly smell could be sensed in the air. In cases like this Catharsians would usually hold their noses and say something like, “Stinks like an Ugly.”

What they absolutely failed to realize was that they themselves emanated that smell.

The situation deteriorated fast. First, enormous floods destroyed several of the Catharsian cities. As the floods arrived, Catharsians started experiencing strange sensations, unknown to them before. They began perspiring so profusely that often they’d have to change clothes ten times a day, because going around in sweaty clothes would be, well, ugly!

Then, droughts came. As the planet became scorched and wrinkled like an old and ugly shoe, many Catharsians noticed with great alarm that their flawless faces started developing premature wrinkles. The wrinkle problem became so pervasive that beauticians and plastic surgeons were making a killing. But none of the beauty treatments seemed to help, and even plastic surgery didn’t bring the desired results.

After that, it got worse. Powerful earthquakes shook the planet and Catharsians started feeling their bodies shaking uncontrollably. In order to stop the most severe instances of shaking, sometimes they would have to tie themselves to poles.

All chaos broke loose after the long-inactive volcanoes erupted around the entire planet. As soon as these eruptions started, the formerly beautiful Catharsians’ bodies erupted in huge boils. Both plastic surgeons and beauticians were operating well beyond capacity. But no beautician or plastic surgeon in the world was able to fix this new problem. It was evident that Catharsians were slowly but surely turning ugly, as their rotten insides began manifesting outwardly.

As miserable Catharsians pondered what could have caused their perfect world to fall apart so suddenly, the Camp Ugly guards started noticing something unusual. As the entire planet shook with earthquakes, as volcanoes erupted, as droughts and floods devastated the land, the Ugliers went on living as usual. They seemed completely insulated from the cataclysms, and immune to diseases.

They still humbly toiled every day, and they still sang their songs. That month, when the Runners had to go to Thar for supplies, they marveled at how quiet the city had become, as Catharsians hid in their beautiful houses, ashamed at how ugly they looked. The Ugliers could not believe that no one tried to bully them, and for the first time ever, they returned to the camp without bleeding wounds or even bruises.

What’s more, one night all of their guards were suddenly gone. Since then, no one was guarding the electric fence or the gate. For the first time in generations, the Ugliers were free to come and go as they pleased.

When Catharsians realized that the Ugliers were not suffering like they were, an angry mob made its way to Camp Ugly. It was the first time ever that the beautiful Catharsians and Ugliers met face to face. The mob stared at the Ugliers with utmost hatred, while the Ugliers calmly gazed back at the mob, both separated by the electric fence. As they looked at each other, a striking realization hit both sides. The Catharsians were now ugly as sin, what with all the wrinkles and boils all over their bodies. And the Ugliers now looked truly beautiful, as their inner beauty shone through, changing their outward appearance. Somehow this pacified the mob, like nothing else would.

Meanwhile, the Ugliers noticed that Catharsians needed their help and opened the gates to allow them in. Many felt it beneath their dignity to step inside Camp Ugly, and

went back home. But some stayed, as the Ugliers brought out of their homes some of their home remedies known to treat severe wounds often inflicted on their men at the hands of these same Catharsians.

However, the Ugliers never mentioned that, as their kind hearts forgave their tormentors. Their only desire was to help those in need. The whole night the Ugliers treated Catharsians. When the sun came back up, their patients looked and felt much better. The news of the Ugliers' success spread like fire. More and more Catharsians showed up at the camp to receive their dose of treatment.

The Ugliers worked day and night to help their former jailers. Meanwhile, the situation on the planet was rapidly worsening. More floods, earthquakes and volcano eruptions occurred every day; more and more Catharsians needed treatment. Some lost an arm or a leg in an earthquake or another disaster; some were burned by fires as volcanoes erupted. No one was afraid any more of catching the ugly disease. To the contrary, Camp Ugly was the only place unaffected by global disaster, and therefore, the place everyone wanted to be.

The Ugliers shared their scarce food and drink, and even their homes, with Catharsians. They welcomed them to stay at the empty huts they no longer filled, but at some point the camp became too small to fit all the newcomers. Catharsians started fighting with each other for space, and even lashing out at their rescuers, the Ugliers. The Ugliers didn't respond to all that angry energy, and quietly continued their work. But even the peaceful Ugliers saw that it was a losing battle. As the weather patterns got out of control with global disasters raging everywhere, Catharsians seemed to be taking over their camp—the only place on the entire planet which was at peace. As they did, earthquakes and other problems started shaking up the camp, too.



It was becoming increasingly clear to the Ugliers that the planet was dying and that even the Lemurian Mother Crystal was unable to change that. That evening, all of the inhabitants of Camp Ugly gathered around the sacred fire, singing one of their beautiful songs. Its beauty mesmerized Catharsians who came to listen, although they couldn't understand the words. In fact, the words were those of the ancient and very powerful Lemurian prayer. The Ugliers prayed to Mother Mu and Father Universe to show them the way to save the future.

Late at night, when both Ugliers and Catharsians were fast asleep, Morf still sat, staring into the dying embers of the sacred fire, thinking and thinking about the illusive solution to the planet's problem. He raised his eyes to the sky with the orange moon in the East and the purple one in the West, contemplating the winking stars splashed across the nightly vastness.

All of a sudden, he noticed one of the stars above detach from its fixed place in the sky and start growing. The star grew and grew until it became the size of his palm. Morf blinked incredulously and rubbed his eyes. It must be fatigue, he thought. When his eyes opened again, the star was already the size of his head, and its light was almost blinding. Morf blinked again and vigorously shook his head.

“This can’t be,” he whispered. “It’s impossible.”

But even as he was saying that, the star still kept growing, and at last it landed right next to him, like a small tornado of the divine light. Morf jumped to his feet and watched the star mesmerized as it turned into a divine creature, her beautiful face aglow, her shimmering long white hair teased by the breeze, and her flowing white gowns so transparent and light as if they were made out of stars.

“Good evening, Morf,” said the divine creature, gazing at the young Lemurian with a gentle smile.

Morf stared back, not knowing how to respond. He wanted to open his mouth, but his lips were soft and immobile. It occurred to him that he must have simply fallen asleep by the fire and this whole thing was just a dream. Relief flooded his mind as he pinched himself really hard in the arm. In a moment he’d be awake and the whole world would be the way it had always been.

He felt sharp pain and looked down at his arm, where a large bruise was spreading. Yet, the divine creature was still standing in front of him, just as before. Perhaps, I didn’t pinch myself hard enough, thought Morf. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, preparing to pinch himself as painfully as he could endure, but...

“There is no need to hurt yourself, Morf,” said the divine apparition. “I am not your dream, I am as real as I can be. And I came to you for a reason.”

“Who are you?” whispered Morf.

“I am Mu, your Goddess, and I am here to save the future.”

“But...” started Morf. He was about to say that this just sounded too fantastic.

Mu interrupted, “You pray to me every night to show you the way out of this impossible situation and now that I am here, you don’t believe?”

“No, no, that’s not it.” Morf shook his head vigorously. “I believe in you with all my heart, and you are even more beautiful than I imagined you to be. I just can’t understand why you came to me.”

“Ah, I see,” said Mu. “You feel you are unworthy.”

“Yes,” said Morf, “that’s it. And generally, we, your faithful Lemurian followers, always prayed to you and always believed in you, but you never helped us before. Why now?”

“I wanted to help,” whispered Mu, a lone tear of sorrow making its way down her beautiful face. “I’m your divine mother and I always felt your pain.”

“So, why didn’t you? You know how much we’d suffered.”

“I couldn’t.”

“I thought you were the Goddess.”

“I am,” said Mu. “But there is much more to the story. The Universe has a structure, and part of its structure is for every soul to learn its lesson. The lesson the Ugliers had to learn was to see the divine beauty in everything despite ugliness, and the lesson for the Catharsians was to feel compassion to the less fortunate. Yes, my son, Catharsians and Lemurians are not the same people. You are two different races, although you were born

of the same parentage. What seems ugly to Catharsians may be beautiful to others. Eventually, the time of Karma comes. It is when each would reap rewards and consequences, depending on how well each race learned its lesson. The time of Karma is now.”

Morf listened to these words, frowning. Of course, he understood the concept of Karma very well. Each Lemurian was taught the law of consequences from an early age. But it seemed to him Catharsians knew nothing about it.

“And...did we all learn our lessons?” he asked.

“*You* did,” said Mu with a sad smile.

Morf let out a big sigh of relief. “Then we all, both Catharsians and Lemurians, can be saved?”

“Yes...*you* will be saved,” echoed Mu with the same sad smile.

“Great!” Morf jumped to his feet, a relieved smile flooding his face. “I should wake up the Elders, and we should get the Council together so all the logistical details can be worked out. There are so many things to consider, so much to take care of. We need to tell Catharsians so they can get ready...”

“Catharsians can’t be saved,” said Mu.

“But you said...”

“I said *you*, the Lemurians, would be saved.”

“But what about...,” started Morf again, struck by the thought of the woman who gave him medicine and bandages to treat Dorf’s wounds.

Mu shook her head. “Catharsians chose their Karma—they cannot be helped. Sit down, my child, and listen!” As Mu touched his shoulder with her cool, shimmering hand, Morf felt a tingling sensation of happiness that made his heart pound. He obediently sat on the nearby rock, Mu next to him.

“I know you are wondering why I appeared to you, of all people.”

“Yes, the thought has crossed my mind,” admitted Morf. “There are so many worthier Lemurians out there, for example, the Elders. But then I thought that perhaps it was simply because I was the only one awake. You noticed me by the sacred fire and...”

“I didn’t appear to you by accident, Morf.”

“You didn’t?”

“No. That’s why I need you to listen to me. There will be a time when your people will need you. Although the Lemurians can be saved, they still need leadership. Whatever happens next, always remember that!”

Morf and Mu headed to the home of Alton, the Supreme Elder of the Lemurians, located on the Gathering Square. Alton’s dwelling was bigger than everyone’s because it included a spacious meeting room where the Elder Council convened for private discussions.

Alton was both amazed and relieved to see the Goddess Mu come to them. It meant that their prayers have been heard, after all. He touched his Elder Lemurian crystal, which was hanging around his neck, and sent a telepathic message to the Elder Council members.

Each Elder had a similar crystal hanging around his or her neck. Within minutes, the eight sleepy Council members joined Alton, Mu and Morf in the meeting room. After the initial shock of seeing the sacred Goddess Mu in their midst had passed, the Council members listened with reverence to what she had to say.

“Dear hearts,” started Mu. “I thank you for living according to my laws, and for making your lives so beautiful and pure. The time of reckoning has come. I came to tell you the bad news and the good news. The bad news is planet Catharsis is quickly moving toward its destruction; the good news—you can be saved.”

“This is such a relief,” said Alton. “Blessed Mu, we are most anxious to hear how we can save ourselves, and how we can help these unfortunate Catharsians!”

“Dear Elder,” responded Mu. “Bless your kind heart for still wanting to help the Catharsians after what they did to your people. But unfortunately, they inflicted this situation upon themselves and therefore, cannot be saved. My offer applies only to the Lemurians. I will take your people to the new blessed land with lush meadows and beautiful trees, with flowing rivers and bountiful harvest. In that land you’ll know no cruelty, and you’ll be able to raise your young without fear.”

“But Catharsians are in need of our help. Can we bring them along to this blessed land?”

In response, Mu just silently shook her head, her eyes soft and sorrowful. “You must make your decision soon, Elder. Bring your people to the southern field at this hour tomorrow, and I will take them to safety.” With these words, Mu slowly dissolved into the bright column of golden light, which kept diminishing until only a tiny spark remained. The spark flew up, up, up... Everyone in the room followed it upwards with the longing eyes...until it was gone.

“So be it,” said Alton, his eyes still lingering on the spot where the spark used to be. “I don’t need long to make my own decision. My wife and son will go, and I will stay behind to try to help the unfortunate Catharsians. Someone has to. And what say you, distinguished Elders?”

“I will stay, too,” said another Elder.

“And I.”

“And I.”

“Our people should go, especially the young. And we, the Elders, should stay,” agreed Ulan, the Elder from Morf’s native sector No. 5, who came from his neighboring village. Sector No. 5 was Ulan’s territory.

All nine Elders were in consensus. They should all stay and the rest of their people should go to the new promised land with Mu.

“Wait!” exclaimed Morf, who had been so quiet that everyone forgot he was still in the room. “You can’t all stay! We need you! Remember, you are still our Elders!”

“Don’t worry, my son. The new Elders will rise to the call when the time comes,” responded Alton. “This is our planet and we know no other; we must stay to try and prevent its destruction. Perhaps we can still spare many lives.”

“But Goddess Mu says they cannot be helped,” objected Morf. “We must all go together and know happiness in the new land. We’ll need your wisdom there.”

“The new happiness is for you and our other children, my son. We have known great happiness here, on Catharsis. And as to the wisdom, there is plenty of that to go around among our people.”

The Elders all nodded in agreement, as Morf tried to digest everything he just heard. Somehow, without anyone noticing, Morf had become the tenth member of the Council, and the Elders accepted him without any objection. Perhaps it happened because to them, he represented the point of view of the young generation, which in these extreme

circumstances, they were interested in hearing, or perhaps they already knew what was to come. In any event, Elders accepted him as one of their own.

The discussion continued for a few more minutes, after which each Elder went to his or her own sector to convey the news and to come to a consensus as to what to do next. Each family, each village and each sector was to make a decision as to who would go and who would stay. After that, the Elders were to reconvene at Alton's hut at dawn to develop a plan of action.

I'd better go; the Elders obviously have a lot on their plate, thought Morf, preparing to quietly leave.

"Morf!" Alton's voice caught him at the door. "You would be wise to stay with Ulan. And at dawn, come back here."

Morf nodded obediently, as the full meaning of what Alton had just said penetrated his mind. The Supreme Elder was asking him to become a member of the Elder Council!

He accompanied Elder Ulan to Sector No. 5, still not fully believing the turn of events. On the way, the Elder explained what was to be done. Like all other Elders, Ulan wore around his neck a piece of the Lemurian Crystalline Engine as the sign of his supreme power. The Elder Lemurian crystals were attuned to the same frequency and were used to send direct telepathic communications to each other. Each village Head in turn wore a smaller piece of the Lemurian crystal. These smaller pieces were chipped off the Elder crystals and were attuned to their energy. These were used by Elders for telepathic communication with village Heads.

When they reached Ulan's hut, the Elder touched his crystal and within minutes five village Heads appeared at the door.

"I have very important news, which will affect the future of our people," Ulan addressed the village Heads, adding in response to their curious glances, "Morf is here at the request of the Supreme Elder Alton. He will participate in our discussion."

After that, Ulan relayed the whole story of the appearance of the Sacred Goddess Mu, her offer to save them, and the Elders' decision to stay behind.

"I will stay too," said one of the village Heads.

"Me too."

"And I."

All five village Heads volunteered to stay behind to help Catharsians, while letting their people go to the new land of happiness.

Morf was starting to get really worried. If ALL of them stayed, who would be guiding the Lemurians in time of need?

"Wait," he said, "you can't all stay! You are leaving us without any leadership. Who will be guiding us in the new land?"

All five village Heads exchanged a glance with Ulan, comprehension dawning in their eyes.

"Don't worry, Morf," said Enana, who was the head of his native village, "it is time for new leadership, which will appear soon."

"New leadership? But who..."

"You'll see," murmured Ulan mysteriously.

All five village Heads dispersed to their respective villages to advise their people of the developments. It was decided that they would reconvene at Ulan's hut in two hours with a final decision from each village on who would stay and who would go. Morf had

an urge to run back home in order to be with his mother and father in this time of trial. He so wanted to hold his mother's hand, to reassure his parents, to tell them that they could lean on him, that they needn't worry about anything in the unknown world they'd be heading to, because he would provide for them.

But he couldn't. His orders were to stay with Ulan, and besides, he was really curious to see what the Elder would do next. Without realizing it, Morf became Ulan's apprentice, absorbing his moves, attitudes, even his thought process.

Ulan gave Morf an encouraging smile and sat down in the hut's corner to pray and meditate. Morf sat next to him, but his thoughts wouldn't let him concentrate on his prayer. Who was this mysterious new leader the Elders kept talking about? And where would he come from? Would Goddess Mu send them this new leader? After all, she promised them salvation. And she was the all-powerful Goddess. His thoughts began dissolving as he drifted off to sleep.

Morf awoke with a start as Ulan got up, murmuring under his breath, "Time to wake her up." He paused by the small room where his twelve-year-old daughter slept, and Morf noticed that his lip trembled. But he shook off the momentary weakness and proceeded to the bedroom to wake up his wife.

Morf sat, listening. First, he heard quiet murmurs, then sobs, followed by silence. Next, he heard what seemed like an argument between Ulan and his wife. This was odd. Normally, the peaceful Lemurians didn't argue, on the contrary, they always tried to understand another's point of view. Ulan's wife seemed to be saying something, while Ulan objected. The woman's voice disagreed again, and Ulan countered with yet another argument. Although Morf couldn't hear the words, the couple's voices were becoming more and more agitated. Then, the voices stopped and sobbing began anew.

Morf felt very uncomfortable—after all, he was intruding on someone's intensely private moment. He quietly got up, deciding to wait outside. A few minutes later, when Ulan emerged out of the bedroom together with his wife, Morf decided that it was safe to go back inside.

Ulan was holding his wife's hand, a smile of total incredulity and bliss on his face. His wife's face was tear-stained, but she was smiling, too.

"Teona decided to stay with me," Ulan said quietly.

"But what about your little daughter?" exclaimed Morf.

A shadow passed through Teona's face, as a tear started making its track down her cheek. "She will leave with the others. Mu will lead all of you to safety. But my decision is to stay by my husband. Maybe we can still save our planet. And maybe you, our children, will still be able to come back when it's safe again."

"We must try..." echoed Ulan, his eyes dry.

Soon, the village Heads started appearing at the door. When everyone was back, Ulan said, holding his wife's hand, "Teona and I decided that our daughter should go with Mu, but we both will stay to try and save the planet. What say you, esteemed village Heads?"

"Village No. 1 unanimously agreed that all adults would stay and all the young would leave."

"Village No. 2 unanimously agreed that adults would stay and the young would leave."

"Same for Village No. 3."

“Village No. 4 decided the same.”

“Village No. 5’s decision,” said Enana, the Head of Morf’s native village, “is that all adults will stay, and all the young will go!”

As Morf listened to this, a new thought hit him: his parents were staying! He had a desperate urge to jump to his feet and run as fast as he could to see them immediately...

“Very well,” said Ulan gravely, getting up to his feet. “I thank you for your service, esteemed Heads! I shall deliver the citizens’ decision to the Council. Morf and I shall be making our way back without delay.”

As the village Heads solemnly filed out of Ulan’s hut, Morf surreptitiously wiped a treacherous tear, which was about to make its way down his cheek. He couldn’t go to his parents now. He had to stick with Ulan—that was the Elders’ wish. Besides, he was extremely interested to know what the decision of the remaining seven sectors would be. He got up to his feet and followed Ulan. There would be time to hug his parents after the Council meeting.

The red dawn was upon them as they approached Alton’s hut. The other seven Elders were already there.

“Sector No. 1,” announced first Elder, “has unanimously decided that all adults should stay and help save our planet Catharsis, as well as alleviate the pain of the Catharsians, while all of our children should leave to safety.”

“Sector No. 2 decided the same.”

“Sector No. 3 made the same decision.”

“Sector No. 4—same.”

“Sector No. 5,” echoed Ulan, “fully agrees with this decision.”

“Sector No. 6 also agrees.”

“Sector No. 7 decided that adults would stay and the young would leave the planet.”

“Sector No. 8 agrees with the rest.”

Complete silence followed the eight announcements. After that, the Elders and Morf followed Alton to the Temple of Mu, where in the center of the Great Hall was the sacred Lemurian Mother Crystal. The Elders, together with the young Runner, sat around the crystal, holding hands, swaying and singing their prayer. They sang about the ancient race of the Lemurians, their struggles and their love for the red planet; about the impending disaster and having to say goodbye to their families; and about Goddess Mu who would keep their children from harm.

After the prayer was over, the Elders got up and went back to their respective sectors to offer comfort and organize things.

Morf followed Ulan to Sector No. 5, and having said goodbye to the Elder, finally headed back to his parents’ hut. He walked past other huts, where the final preparations for the young Lemurians’ departure were underway. Fathers and mothers were taking stock of the few things their children could take with them on the journey, here and there you could see families holding hands and crying together, or having their last breakfast at the modest family table.

As Morf reached his hut, his mother ran out the door to hug him tight, tears streaming down her face. Father limped up to them and joined the hug. They remained like this, in one tight embrace, for a long time. They finally broke apart and went inside, where they sat down holding hands for what would be their last family talk. After that, they started preparations for Morf’s departure.



In the afternoon, village Heads came by to announce that all parents were summoned for a meeting. Morf stayed behind, waiting, until his sleepless night got the best of him and he dozed off. He woke up when his parents returned from the meeting. He didn't ask what the meeting was about—they'd tell him if they could. But he noticed that the expressions on their faces were different. They looked serene and dignified, as if they saw the whole picture, as if the worry about their son had gone away, as if now they were confident he would be all right.

Morf wondered what caused such change, but didn't ask that either. He wanted to remember his parents like this, with these wonderful expressions on their faces. They sat down to the last family supper. Departure time was quickly approaching.

Meanwhile, the unusual activity and behavior of the Ugliers did not escape the Catharsians' attention. Sure, the Ugliers were warned to be as discrete with their preparations as possible, but how do you hide your emotions when your only child is about to leave to unknown lands and you'll probably never see him or her again? How do you hide your sorrow, your desire to protect and hold that child for as long as possible?

Since among themselves the Ugliers spoke their ancient Lemurian language, Catharsians couldn't understand what was going on, but they started suspecting that something was up.

It was late, and the final hour was fast approaching. Although most Catharsians were asleep, none of the Lemurians slept that night. When the time came, they began moving to the agreed upon field, just outside Sector No. 8. Families walked together holding hands, whispering the last words of love and encouragement to each other.

But what they didn't know was that some of the Catharsians didn't go to bed, and instead followed them to the gathering.

As Morf and his parents approached the field, they noticed the blinding light coming from the sky. They lifted their heads and watched mesmerized as a giant, saucer-like space ship, nebulously shimmering in the illusive light of the purple and orange moons, slowly descended to the fuchsia fields of grass. There was a collective gasp as the ship's door opened and Goddess Mu stepped out.

"Is everyone ready?" asked Mu.

"Yes," responded Alton for everyone. "Our decision is to save our young, our future. We, the adults, will all stay behind and try to prevent the catastrophe. Perhaps, if we work together, we'll manage to save the planet and our children will be able to return home."

Mu shook her head and issued a light sigh. "Very well... If this is your decision, I respect that. But we should hurry. Everyone who is going, please come forward."

All the children hugged their parents for the last time, preparing to step forward. And that's when the mystery of the parents' meeting was revealed.

"Children," said Supreme Elder Alton. "We, your parents, want to give you something special. Since we won't be able to protect you on your journey, we decided to give you each a piece of the Lemurian Mother Crystal. Each of you will get a crystal point from your parents. These points were carefully chosen and personally broken off the Mother Crystal by your parents earlier today. This is our farewell gift for you. The points are attuned to the frequency of our planet and imbued with ancient wisdom of our people. Also, each of them vibrates to the love frequency of your parents. Because of that, these Lemurian crystals will guard and protect you on your journey. And there is more. These crystals will allow you to communicate telepathically with each other and create a bond like no other."

With these words, Alton took out of his purse a small crystal point and hung it around his little son's neck. All other parents did the same. Morf gratefully received his own crystal, imbued with the tingling warmth of his parents' love.

Mu observed the whole ritual silently. Then she said quietly, "You do realize that this will weaken the Crystalline Engine's structure, and therefore it will further weaken the planet. After these points leave Catharsis, there will be even less chance of the planet's survival."

"But our children will be safe," responded Ulan simply.

After that, the nine Elders stepped forward, heading towards nine different teenagers, five boys and four girls. With great surprise, Morf noticed Alton heading to him.

"We, the Elders, pass our Elder Lemurian crystals, impregnated with ancient wisdom and spiritual power of our people, to these nine worthy teenagers chosen by the Elder Council, due to their outstanding gifts and achievements," announced Alton.

He took off his Elder crystal and hung it around Morf's neck.

"Morf, you have been chosen as the Supreme Elder of the young Lemurians. Serve and protect your people with love, dignity and devotion!"

"I will," responded Morf solemnly.

Morf noticed Ulan heading to the pretty sixteen-year-old girl from his neighboring village. "Loanna, you have been chosen as an Elder of the young Lemurians. Serve and protect your people with love, dignity and devotion," said Ulan, hanging his crystal around the girl's neck.

"I will," responded Loanna.

The ritual was repeated seven more times, as all nine teenagers received the blessing of the Elders. In groups, fifteen hundred young Lemurians started ascending into the shimmering space ship, some of the older children holding the youngest ones by the hand. The steps under their feet felt nebulous, as if they were walking on air, but with every step they solidified to support their weight. After the children passed, the steps turned nebulous again. As the ship passengers were making themselves comfortable inside, a commotion started.

A group of Catharsians apparently decided to make a break for it and ran as fast as they could toward the ship. No one prevented them from doing so, but when they reached the ship's base and tried to climb the stairs, the steps wouldn't support their weight, causing their feet to fall through every time they tried to mount them. They tried, and

tried, and tried... until a shocking realization struck everyone present that the steps that solidified to support the ascending Ugliers refused to do the same for Catharsians.

The Ugliers silently watched Catharsians' unsuccessful attempts to flee the dying planet.

"It won't work," said Mu, looking straight at Catharsians with her huge, mesmerizing eyes. "You need to return back to your homes."

Catharsians stared at Mu for a moment as if in a trance, and then obediently turned and went back to their huts.

"I will keep your children safe," said Mu to the sobbing parents. She was the last to step inside, and after her the shimmering door closed and the ship took off. The Ugliers watched the space vessel getting smaller and smaller, until it was just a tiny glittering star. And then, puff...it disappeared together with their children. The adults slowly turned away and went back to their orphaned homes.



Morf made himself comfortable in his seat, as one by one the children around him fell asleep. He struggled to stay awake. There were so many questions! How long would their trip last? How did this ship operate? How come it appeared so nebulous, yet was so solid? Where were they heading?

Mu materialized in front of him as if out of thin air. "Not long; this ship is a Divine inter-dimensional vessel, used in Universal rescue missions; it turns solid only for those who are worthy; we are heading to the hospitable planet Gaia. Now go to sleep."

"Thank you," whispered Morf gratefully, closing his eyes. He dreamed of the impossibly fast trip through space, of the blinding white light and of the new and beautiful planet. He woke up when the ship gently touched the ground and the nebulous door opened.

One by one the children filed out. They stood in silence staring at the unknown land, which was to become their new home. The bright yellow sun shone gently from the clear blue sky above, illuminating the green grass underfoot and the green forest not far away. In the distance ahead they noticed a big body of water. It seemed that they were near a giant sea or ocean.

The children saw small furry Elpets with very long ears, briskly hopping toward them. Used to the painful encounters with Elpets on their planet, the children immediately recoiled.

"Don't be afraid," said Mu. "They are called *rabbits*. They are very gentle and trusting."

"These Elpets seem different," remarked Morf. "Do they bite?"

"They are not electronic. They are real animals, and they don't bite. You can pet them."

“Real animals?” whispered a small boy in awe. “I want one as a friend.”

“Me too!”

“And me!”

“And me!”

Children started petting the little animals, laughing happily. These real animals they’d never seen before were so soft and so wonderful! More animals of larger sizes came out of the woods to greet the new arrivals.

“These are called *deer*,” commented Mu. “They are also very gentle. You can pet them, too.”

“Hello, deer,” said a little girl, petting a doe. “You are so beautiful.”

“Children,” said Mu, “welcome to your new home! This planet is called *Gaia*. The continent I brought you to is surrounded by big water and called the *Land of Zee*. It’s a place of bounty, where you’ll find everything you need—plenty of fruits and berries in the forest, and plenty of fish in the rivers and sea. I will leave you with knowledge on how to grow crops and build homes. I will teach you how to make fire, clothes and necessary utensils.”

With these words, Mu touched Morf’s Elder crystal. “Morf, I have just transferred to you all the knowledge necessary to survive and thrive on the Planet Gaia. Now, in addition to all the wisdom of your people, your crystal possesses the entire wisdom of this planet. Pass it on to others by touching their crystals.”

Morf went around, touching the crystals of the eight Elders. In turn, the Elders went around touching crystals of the rest of the children. Those, whose crystals received Gaia’s wisdom passed it on to others and soon all fifteen hundred children possessed all of the wisdom and knowledge of their new planet.

“Now you are ready to call this land your home,” said Mu. “I shall be leaving now, but I won’t be far. When you need me, all you have to do is call for me.”

“We thank you for all you’ve done for us, Goddess Mu!” said Morf.

“There is one thing,” said Mu. “I should mention that you have neighbors. It is a very powerful race called the Atlanteans who live in the West, on the continent of *Atlantis*. They are very intense, the Atlanteans, and I don’t want you to be surprised if they decide to stop for a visit.”

“We have neighbors—how wonderful!” exclaimed Loanna. “We won’t be alone in this new land of plenty!”

“Yes...wonderful,” said Goddess Mu pensively. “I do hope you get along with them.”

“Of course we will! We’ll be great friends!” exclaimed several children at once.

“In any event, call for me if you need my help. Best of luck, my children.” With these words, Mu touched the giant shimmering ship, and the ship dissolved into thin air as if it never existed. Mu’s form started diminishing, until she was just a tiny spark. And then—puff—she was gone.

The children’s eyes lingered for a moment on the spot where the spark disappeared. But soon, their attention was distracted by the smells, colors and sounds of their new home. Birds were singing and the gentle breeze was blowing from the sea. They raced each other to the nearby river to take a drink and have a refreshing bath—an impossible luxury in Camp Ugly. The blue waters of the small river were wonderfully clear and inviting. As the children lowered their faces towards the water, they saw their reflections

and gasped. They—all of them—were beautiful, unbelievably and strikingly beautiful. They started laughing and splashing each other with this magical water that made them look so good.

“What a great place,” said Loanna with a blissful smile. “I know we shall be happy here.”

“Yes,” responded Morf, gazing into Loanna’s beautiful eyes. “Very happy—for many years to come. And we shall call this land Lemuria!”



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