

an epic young-adult science fiction adventure ...

NEBADOR

screenplay

by J. Z. Colby

A young ship captain from the stars  
seeks his first crew on a medieval planet.  
He has no idea how many rules he must break to succeed.

writer's draft feature-length screenplay in 3 acts  
1/2015 version

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based on the novels:

NEBADOR Book One: The Test  
NEBADOR Book Two: Journey  
NEBADOR Book Three: Selection

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## ACT 1

EXT. GREEN HILL COUNTRY, MEDIEVAL FARM - SPRINGTIME, DAWN

A peasant FARMER struggles with his DONKEY and plow as a tiny golden sphere silently descends in the sky behind him, changes course, then disappears behind a hill.

EXT. MISTY SWAMP - DAWN

The mud bubbles and churns as the golden sphere, about 25 feet across, submerges and disappears.

ILIKA, early twenties, light hair, green eyes, wearing boots of some strange plastic-like material, struggles to pull one foot free of the sticky mud, then takes a step, causing water spiders to scatter.

Ilika glances behind him at the disappearing mound, nervously fingers a wide, dark, featureless metal bracelet on his left wrist, then relaxes and takes another step through the mud. He is dressed as if attempting to fit into a medieval setting, without complete success.

Coming to higher ground, Ilika slips off his shoulder bag and breathes deeply with a look of contentment, but his attention is quickly grabbed by a wild STALLION that moves toward him threateningly, protecting 3 agitated MARES in the background.

The stallion whinnies loudly, paws the air, and rears up several times, but eventually relaxes as he gets no reaction from Ilika, who stands calmly and hums a strange, mesmerizing tune.

After a moment of indecision, the stallion bolts away, the mares follow, and their hoof-beats fade.

Ilika, unfazed, looks around with curiosity at the plants, insects, and birds in flight as the morning light grows. After a thoughtful moment, he takes up his shoulder bag and walks toward the nearby green hills in the west, their tops already catching the rising sun.

EXT. SMALL LAKE - SUNRISE

ILIKA sits on a rock at the water's edge and rinses his muddy boots. Soon a wild RABBIT hops into view, eating while keeping an eye on Ilika.

ILIKA

(haltingly in a language clearly  
not his native)

Hello little ... rabbit. My name is  
Ilika, and I just ... arrived in your  
beautiful ... land from a place  
called Satamia, in the ... greater  
region of Nebador.

The rabbit turns its ears to listen, but continues nibbling.

ILIKA

You are my first ... contact in this land. Well ... I did meet someone earlier, but the ... situation was a bit ... emotional ... and we didn't get a chance to talk.

Suddenly the piercing cry of a BIRD OF PREY fills the sky, and the rabbit vanishes into a hole with one leap.

ILIKA

Be well, little one. I must continue my ... journey.

EXT. TRAIL ON GRASSY HILLTOP - MORNING

Taking deep breaths, ILIKA stands tall and surveys the valley below, seeing simple farms, little thatched cottages, and FARMERS beginning their work in gardens, fields, and animal pens.

Raising his eyes to the higher ground beyond the farms, Ilika beholds the medieval walled city, its gray stonework seeming to glow in the morning light.

EXT. STREETS OF MEDIEVAL CITY, POOR SECTION - MORNING

ILIKA wanders the muddy streets, unconcerned about his exact location. He respectfully gives way to all LOCAL PEOPLE, most of them carrying loads or herding ANIMALS.

Ilika is unsure what to do when he comes upon a flock of SHEEP completely blocking the street. Uniformed CITY GUARDS wearing swords approach from behind him.

Several YOUTH carrying baskets of bread and vegetables dash by and quickly veer into a tiny alleyway. The last one pauses and looks back at Ilika.

YOUTH

Git'y on, oh ye be a'slavin'!

After a moment of thought to decipher the youth's words, Ilika quickly follows them into the alleyway and emerges onto another muddy street.

Ilika continues to wander the streets, seeing symbols instead of written signs: a hammer over a wide door at a blacksmith (the sound of ringing metal coming from within), a sheaf of wheat dangling from a beam at a granary, etc.

EXT. MEDIEVAL MARKETPLACE - MID-MORNING

ILIKA eventually wanders into the marketplace, an open space with dozens of carts and wagons where hundreds of PEOPLE are

buying and selling. A pair of MUSICIANS plays a simple tune. Permanent businesses also surround the marketplace, including Tori's Bakery and Doko's Inn. In the background of the marketplace can be seen the modest palace behind a low stone wall, and off to one side, a wooden performing stage, currently unused.

After taking in the sights, sounds, and smells, Ilika walks toward the inn.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM AND KITCHEN - DAY

ILIKA follows large DOKO, glancing at things as the innkeeper speaks. The entire innkeeping family is medieval working middle-class in dress (knee-length tunics and aprons), manners, and speech, a noticeable notch up from the people in the poor section of the city.

DOKO

There's no fighting in the common room, meals at the usual times, but we can scrape the pot at odd hours. Basic board comes with your room, and ale or tea, but wine and desserts are extra.

Ilika follows Doko to the kitchen door. MOSA, a slightly-plump woman, DOKO'S SON, a timid boy about 15, and SATA, a bright-eyed stocky girl about 10, are all hard at work cutting meat and vegetables.

DOKO

The wife can make just about anything, and the young ones can fetch things from the marketplace ... for an extra copper, of course.

Mosa nods at Ilika, Doko's son avoids eye contact, and Sata smiles.

INT. DOKO'S INN, UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR AND SMALL ROOM - DAY

DOKO comes to a wooden door, unties the knot securing it, and ushers ILIKA in.

Ilika looks around the tiny room with cot, chair, and small table, peers out the little window that overlooks the marketplace, and nods. From a pocket he brings out a great silver piece and hands it to Doko, who grins.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - EVENING

The common room is crowded with MERCHANTS and other medieval middle-class PEOPLE eating meat, drinking ale, and smoking pipes.

ILIKA, wearing a set of nicer, clean clothes that he brought

with him, sits alone at a small table with his back to the wall, eating from a bowl of bean and vegetable stew while nonchalantly observing the people.

SATA, wearing a stained apron, weaves her way through the room toward Ilika, holding a mug high to keep people from bumping it.

SATA

(anxious to earn a coin)

I caught the fruit man just before he went home, sir, last press of the day!

ILIKA

(digging into a pocket)

Is a copper for the juice and a copper for you enough?

SATA

(grinning)

Oh, yes, sir!

Sata scampers away happily as Ilika sips his fruit juice.

EXT. MEDIEVAL CITY, POOR SECTION - DAY

Wearing his simplest, dirtiest clothes (the ones he arrived in), ILIKA wanders the narrow, muddy streets of the poor section of the city.

Ilika listens to the heavily-accented speech of the PEOPLE, then mumbles the words to himself until he is able to nod or smile with understanding.

Ilika samples the food available from a STREET VENDOR, finds it agreeable, and buys another.

At ANOTHER STREET VENDOR, the food quickly causes Ilika to retreat to a corner and hold onto something while his stomach rebels and he vomits. Passing people ignore him.

EXT. MEDIEVAL CITY, RICH SECTION - DAY

Wearing his set of nicer, clean clothes, ILIKA wanders the cobblestone streets of the rich section of the city. The buildings are sturdier, with real glass in the windows. SLAVES, supervised by GUARDS, clean up animal droppings and trash.

Ilika sees STREET MUSICIANS, JUGGLERS, and ACROBATS entertaining the RICH PEOPLE, including well-dressed children. He joins in tapping his feet, clapping, and tossing coins.

Ilika sees the shops of scribes, accountants, illustrators, jewelers, money changers, and healers. He smiles at colorful book pages in one window, and frowns at crude surgical

instruments in another.

While wandering along a street, Ilika hears a voice yelling somewhere up ahead, and notices people walking nonchalantly both toward and away from the sound. His curiosity piqued, he continues toward it.

EXT. SLAVE MARKET & STREET JUST OUTSIDE - DAY

ILIKA innocently enters the large open area of benches facing a platform, dozens of middle and upper-class PEOPLE watching the auction, and a few buying food and drink from VENDORS at the back.

Still just standing and trying to understand the nature of the place, Ilika sees a YOUNG WOMAN pushed onto the platform wearing a simple burlap tabard. Several MEN whistle in admiration. The AUCTIONEER steps to his podium.

AUCTIONEER

Young and sweet, lords and ladies.  
Lords, especially, of course ...

Most people laugh and the men whistle again.

AUCTIONEER

... so we'll start at five small gold  
pieces ... yes, I have five, do I  
hear six ...

Ilika realizes where he is and turns pale with nausea. He staggers out of the slave market, finds a lone bench, and nearly falls onto it, struggling to control his stomach. While trying to relax, he hears several other auctions.

AUCTIONEER (O.S.)

Look at those muscles! Do I hear two  
great gold pieces? ...

Ilika continues breathing deeply and slowly.

AUCTIONEER (O.S.)

This little boy just loves to pull  
weeds, and never cries. How about  
two copper pieces? ...

Ilika eventually stands, masters the shaking in his knees, and slowly makes his way back toward the inn.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - EVENING

ILIKA is thoughtfully picking at his bowl of stew when SATA arrives with a mug of juice. With a glum expression, he hands her 2 copper pieces.

Sata smiles, but notices his mood and departs without conversation.

Ilika continues to slowly eat and drink, but shudders when he sees blood oozing from a thick piece of meat when a MAN cuts it with a knife at another table.

EXT. MARKETPLACE, TORI'S BAKERY - EVENING

ILIKA ignores and wagons and carts as he wanders listlessly to the bakery. TORI is tending the counter.

TORI

Ili ... Lik ... Loki!

Ilika smiles at the baker's attempt at his name.

ILIKA

(setting down a copper piece)

A berry tart, please, Tori.

Tori stacks 3 tarts on a shingle. Ilika frowns.

TORI

(smiling)

A copper buys a lot at closing time.

ILIKA

Please, give the others to some children. I just ate dinner.

TORI

(after whistling loudly)

Bima! Sora!

Two young PEASANT GIRLS, helping to load a cart, come running over.

PEASANT GIRLS

Ye'sir? Ye'sir?

TORI

Take a tart each.

PEASANT GIRLS

Ye'sir, tank'u sir!

Ilika watches thoughtfully while nibbling on his tart. The girls quickly consume their tarts and hurry back to work. Suddenly he looks at Tori, busy brushing out his oven, and a sparkle of understanding comes to Ilika's eyes.

ILIKA

Tori, if I wanted to hire some ... smart people, where should I go?

TORI

Depends. Street smarts or book smarts?

ILIKA

(after a moment of thought)  
That's a very good question. Mostly street smarts, I think, but also the ability to ... um ... learn new things, and ... inner strength.

TORI

(after nodding thoughtfully)  
How old?

ILIKA

Fairly young and adaptable, maybe ... my age or younger.

Tori scrapes his kneading board in silence for a moment.

TORI

Hmm ... maybe ... no. Maybe the religious order. Probably not the college.

ILIKA

(with sudden curiosity)  
College?

TORI

There's a school for spoiled rich kids over by the Jeweler's Guild, but I don't think they're what you want.

ILIKA

(deflated)  
Oh. Thank you very much. I guess I should go talk to the religious order.

TORI

Good luck. That's a rare thing you're looking for.

ILIKA

Yes, I know.

Ilika leaves another copper piece on the counter.

EXT. RELIGIOUS ORDER, FRONT GATE, GARDEN - MORNING

ILIKA knocks upon the heavy wooden gate. A PRIEST wearing a short sword opens the gate a crack.

ILIKA

I wonder if I might be able to hire ...

PRIEST  
(opening the gate wider)  
Come.

The priest brusquely leads Ilika through a garden where MONKS can be seen kneeling at prayer before statues and altars.

INT. RELIGIOUS ORDER, TINY ROOM, CORRIDOR - DAY

The PRIEST leads ILIKA up a narrow stone stair, and into a tiny room that could be a jail cell if the door was closed.

PRIEST  
Wait here.

Ilika hesitantly settles himself onto the hard bench and glances around warily.

About a quarter hour later, a HIGH PRIEST, judging by his robes and bearing, fills the doorway.

HIGH PRIEST  
You wish to hire someone?

ILIKA  
(standing)  
Yes, am looking for companions for a journey ...

HIGH PRIEST  
(leading along a corridor)  
Where will you be going?

ILIKA  
To many different far-off lands, so the people I hire need to be adaptable and ...

HIGH PRIEST  
What will you be doing in these foreign lands?

ILIKA  
(frowning slightly)  
Um ... sometimes just visiting ... at other times bringing supplies ...

HIGH PRIEST  
Will these supplies ever include books, writings, or art works that have not been approved by the order?

Ilika, now frowning with full awareness that he is being interrogated, begins to slow his pace and look around, forcing the high priest to do the same.

ILIKA

Very nice mural. I would never dream  
of violating the rules of the order  
...

EXT. RELIGIOUS ORDER, YARD - DAY

ILIKA and the HIGH PRIEST, now sipping mugs of tea (that Ilika finds bitter), wander into an interior yard of the order.

ILIKA

What do the brothers do if they  
notice a ... violation of faith?

HIGH PRIEST

The usual. All copies of the work  
must be burned. If it arises from  
the words or actions of a person, he  
must be whipped and given the  
opportunity to repent before being  
stoned.

Ilika barely suppresses a shudder.

As Ilika and the high priest wander through the yard, a slapping sound begins to be heard, followed by occasional moans. Two MONKS with bare backs are flogging themselves with short whips and trying to deal with the pain silently, but not always succeeding.

HIGH PRIEST

As you can see, the monks practice  
self-discipline.

ILIKA

I ... I see.

Ilika, glimpsing the garden and front gate, begins to slowly walk in that direction.

EXT. RELIGIOUS ORDER, GARDEN, FRONT GATE, STREET - DAY

HIGH PRIEST

You must now declare the types and  
numbers of workers the order shall  
send.

ILIKA

(slight hesitation)

I shall consider your people for the  
work I have.

Ilika arrives at the front gate, bows slightly to the high priest, and faces the gate.

The high priest is silent for a moment as he glares with hostility at Ilika, then abruptly gestures for the armed

PRIEST to open the gate.

Ilika frowns as he walks away from the religious order without looking back. In the background, the high priest scowls as he stands in the street watching Ilika depart.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - MORNING

Alone at a small table, ILIKA thoughtfully takes a bite of porridge, then leans back and closes his eyes. After a moment, SATA sets a mug on his table and he opens his eyes.

SATA  
Sorry, sir. The fruit man was late getting to market.

ILIKA  
(getting out 2 copper pieces)  
Thank you, Sata.

SATA  
(pointing at his bracelet)  
Sir, what's that?

ILIKA  
(with a slight smile)  
Just some jewelry that comes with my profession.

Sata grins, then dashes off. Ilika, energized by her carefree attitude, quickly finishes his breakfast.

EXT. MEDIEVAL CITY STREET, RICH SECTION - DAY

ILIKA gazes around with a new attitude of openness to any possibilities that might appear.

INT. JEWELRY WORKSHOP - DAY

After pretending to look at the items for sale for a moment, ILIKA peers into the back room and sees AGING WORKERS with bent backs and shaking hands at their workbenches. Ilika frowns slightly.

INT. WOODCRAFT WORKSHOP - DAY

ILIKA sees several YOUTH, ages 8-20, happily working away at tables in the back room. He gestures toward them and speaks softly with the middle-aged CRAFTSMAN while the youth continue their work. The craftsman replies in a loud voice.

CRAFTSMAN  
Now don't get me wrong, my three sons and two daughters are not slaves, and if you ran into them on the road, made them an offer, and they decided  
(MORE)

CRAFTSMAN (CONT)

to go on this journey with you, well, that would be their choice. But seeing as they are at work right now, I would have to take offense. It would hurt the business for them to disappear right now ...

(pulling out a dagger and sharpening it)

... if you take my meaning.

ILIKA

(with wide eyes)

I do. Thank you for your time.

EXT. MEDIEVAL CITY STREETS, RICH SECTION - DAY

ILIKA is gazing around, wondering what to try next, when he notices he is being followed by a PRIEST.

Ilika begins to wander a zigzagging course through the city streets, but sees that the priest remains on his tail.

Finally, Ilika spots a tiny alleyway with several wooden boxes stacked up, slips through the narrow space while bumping the boxes just enough that they tumble down, blocking the way.

INT. DOKO'S INN, ILIKA'S ROOM - DAWN

ILIKA lies awake, hands behind his head, brow wrinkled in thought. Early morning sounds from the marketplace filter in through the window. After a long moment, he suddenly hops out of bed, quickly dresses, and heads for the door.

INT. DOKO'S INN, KITCHEN - DAWN

ILIKA steps into the kitchen where DOKO, MOSA, their SON, and SATA are all busy preparing breakfast. Ilika gestures for all of them to gather close.

ILIKA

(in a hushed voice)

I do not know exactly why, but the religious order is looking for me. I don't like them, and don't want them to find me.

(he pulls out some coins)

If I could finish my business in this city without them finding out where I am staying, it would be worth one of these for each of you, on top of my payments for your services.

All four members of the innkeeping family nod as they stare with large eyes at the gleaming small gold pieces.

## INT. MIDDLE-CLASS CLOTHING SHOP - DAY

While other PEOPLE browse, ILIKA looks at and selects items of clothing that will allow him to fit in with merchants and other middle-class people: tunic, pants, belt, money pouch.

## INT. HAIRDRESSER - DAY

With a well-dressed COIFFEUR attending, ILIKA (wearing his new clothes) points to the jet-black hair on a display of many hair color samples. Numerous wigs and bottles of chemicals line shelves in the background. The coiffeur nods and gestures for Ilika to take the comfortable chair. Two ASSISTANTS begin to cover him from the neck down with sheets.

## EXT. TORI'S BAKERY - DAY

ILIKA, now with new clothes and black hair, steps up to the counter.

ILIKA

A tart please, Tori, and some for the children.

Recognizing the voice, TORI gives his customer a second look, then bursts out laughing.

TORI

Master Loki! Your own mother would not know you!

ILIKA

Good. It was time for a change.

TORI

Plum tarts today, fresh out of the oven!

Ilika receives and takes a bite of the warm pastry.

ILIKA

Excellent, as always! May I ask you another question about the people of this city?

TORI

Of course! A good customer is welcome to what little knowledge I have.

ILIKA

This might be a question without an easy answer ... perhaps without any answer. But I'd value your opinion.

TORI

Ask away!

ILIKA

If there were some adventurous young people who were so smart they wouldn't like the strict policies of the religious order, couldn't stand the narrow structure of the guilds, refused to be hidden away in the back of a shop, and weren't rich enough to attend the college, where would they be found?

Tori thinks for a long moment of tense silence while kneading a ball of bread dough.

TORI

You are right, it is a hard question. But here's my answer, for what it's worth. People like that would easily get into trouble, and quickly wind up as slaves.

An expression of utter astonishment comes to Ilika for a moment, then he bursts out laughing. Tori, dividing the dough into loaves, speaks without looking up.

TORI

I knew my answer to your question wouldn't be worth much.

ILIKA

Actually ... I think you might be right, and I would not have realized it without your help. Thank you!

Ilika places a small silver piece on the counter.

TORI

That'll buy many tarts, Master Loki!

ILIKA

(already dashing away)  
For the children!

INT. DOKO'S INN, ENTRANCE - DAY

ILIKA is still in a carefree mood as he steps into the inn, but the look of warning on MOSA'S face, behind the reception counter, causes him to freeze. Beside her, DOKO is talking to a PRIEST with his back to the door.

PRIEST

... and it is very critical that we find him, as he left something of great value at the order.

Ilika frowns and shakes his head, and Mosa acknowledges with a slight nod but without looking at him. His right hand moves

toward the bracelet on his left wrist, then retreats. He takes a deep breath, then walks right past the priest and strides along the corridor toward the stairs.

The priest glances at the black-haired man walking away.

PRIEST

Please send word to the order at once if you should see this man. We would be most appreciative.

DOKO

We would be happy to help, but he doesn't sound like anyone we have seen.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - EVENING

ILIKA listens intently as DOKO speaks, answering questions Ilika puts to him, although the noise of others eating and drinking masks their conversation.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - EVENING

ILIKA listens intently as a CITY GUARD answers his questions, often pointing at some SLAVES busy cleaning up animal droppings and trash, although the noise of the marketplace masks their conversation.

EXT. TORI'S BAKERY - EVENING

TORI, while working, has already listened to ILIKA ask a question.

TORI

You are right, Master Loki, few of them are actually criminals. Just being poor is almost enough. Even a little clumsiness in the wrong situation might do the trick.

Ilika nods his thanks, places a small silver piece on the counter, and wanders away, tart in hand.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - MORNING

Carts and wagons are setting up, and roosters crowing, as ILIKA emerges from the inn and strides into a wide street of the rich section of the city.

EXT. SLAVE MARKET - MORNING

The auction is just getting started as ILIKA buys a pastry and mug of tea from a VENDOR. With discomfort and shame, he seats himself on a small bench at the very back of the audience area, off to one side.

An OLD MAN is pushed onto the block.

AUCTIONEER

He may look like moldy cheese, lords and ladies, but he's very good with horses, and doesn't eat much. Do I hear two silvers ... two silvers ... three silvers ... sold for three silvers!

ILIKA

(to himself)

Farewell.

Ilika sips his tea, but eventually pays attention again when a GIRL of about 8 years is pushed onto the block.

AUCTIONEER

I know you've always wanted someone who could wash those dirty dishes ...

Ilika looks at the GIRL intently, but sees only dullness in her eyes and expression.

Ilika nibbles his pastry, but looks up when a MUSCULAR LAD of about 16 is pushed onto the block. The lad appears strong, but twitches from some disease.

AUCTIONEER

Very strong, but obviously not for delicate work. Do I hear one small gold? One small gold. Do I hear two?

MAN

(seated near Ilika)

That one would be great in my copper mine.

(shouting and raising a hand)

Two!

Ilika again listens only half-heartedly until a SLENDER LAD of 12 or 13 years willingly steps onto the auction block. He stands with confidence and almost smiles while scanning the audience with gleaming eyes.

AUCTIONEER

This healthy lad might daydream a little, but gets a lot of light work done, and never runs off. Do I hear one small gold? ...

Ilika struggles to stop himself from jumping up and bidding. Several times his hand starts to rise, but he lowers it without saying anything. The lad is sold, and Ilika continues to squirm thoughtfully as the next slave is pushed onto the block.

INT. DOKO'S INN - MORNING

ILIKA quickly consumes his porridge, pays SATA for a mug of juice, and strides out the door.

EXT. SLAVE MARKET - MORNING

The auction has not yet begun. ILIKA strides up to the GUARD at the door to the slave master's office.

ILIKA

I have a profitable business deal to discuss with the slave master, and only the slave master.

The guard frowns but leads Ilika inside.

INT. SLAVE MASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Just as the GUARD escorts ILIKA to the office door, another MAN is backing out submissively.

MAN

I will do my best to get what you want at that price ...

SLAVE MASTER (O.S.)

Succeed, or do not return!

Ilika uses the opportunity to step into the office and seat himself in a comfortable chair facing the massive wooden desk.

The slave master, a large burly man with little hair, continues to look at some papers.

SLAVE MASTER

Profit is down, people just aren't bidding like they used to.

ILIKA

Profit ... is something I can provide.

SLAVE MASTER

Speak.

ILIKA

You have a certain type of slave that doesn't generate much interest, but I have a use for several of them. They are fairly young, say ... twelve to twenty. They might be smart, but not in ways that fit into orders or guilds, and maybe so smart they tend to get into trouble. They are often spindly and not strong workers.

(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

Sometimes they are daydreamers. Do you know the sort I mean?

SLAVE MASTER

I certainly do. Hardly worth taking up auction time.

ILIKA

I did not buy one such slave who was for sale yesterday morning, at about the eleventh hour, because I could not tell enough about him on the block. I need to interview and test as many as possible to find the ones I want, so I am coming to you as a middleman. You know where they have gone if they have been on your block in recent months. I am prepared to pay all your expenses to gather as many of this sort as you can. I will pay their owners for a day of their time, and then I will give their owners, and you, a handsome profit for the ones I select.

SLAVE MASTER

(rubbing his chin)

Rounding them up will be time-consuming. I will have to send agents to many different shops and farms. There will be travel time and expenses. Let's say ... a great silver, each, for expenses.

ILIKA

(after a slow breath)

I can handle that. About how many do you think you can gather?

SLAVE MASTER

Mmm ... twenty-five. No, thirty. And I'll need a week to do it. How many are you buying?

ILIKA

As long as you can find me ones like the lad who was sold yesterday, I'll be buying at least five ... maybe more.

SLAVE MASTER

(shuffling some papers)

About the eleventh hour? Okay, I see who you mean. How much profit can I promise the present owners?

ILIKA

I think a small gold over what they  
paid should motivate most people.

SLAVE MASTER

(making solid eye contact)  
And what about my profit, beyond  
expenses?

ILIKA

(after a pause)  
You tell me.

SLAVE MASTER

(rubbing his chin again)  
Two small gold.

ILIKA

(after a slow, deep breath)  
Done.

EXT. SLAVE MARKET - DAY

The auction has begun and a YOUNG BOY, crying softly, is on the block. ILIKA is exhausted and ashamed as he exits the slave master's office and quickly makes his way out to the street.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - LATE-MORNING

ILIKA staggers down for breakfast late. SATA sees him and dashed out to the marketplace. Ilika selects a small table in the darkest corner, slowly lowering himself as if hungover or sick. Sata returns with his juice and he hands her 2 copper pieces.

SATA

Sir?

ILIKA

Yes, Sata?

SATA

How many of these would I have to  
save to make a small gold piece, like  
the one you might give me?

ILIKA

(with effort)  
One thousand.

SATA

One ... what?

ILIKA

Do you know what a hundred is?

SATA  
Yes! Ten tens.

ILIKA  
A thousand is ten hundreds.

SATA  
(with happiness and awe)  
Wow!

Sata prances back to her chores as MOSA arrives with porridge, milk, and honey.

MOSA  
Last bowl in the pot!

ILIKA  
I would like to rent your common room for an entire day, and have you prepare all three meals for about ... forty people.

Mosa's eyes grow large, she gestures for DOKO to join them, and they seat themselves across from ILIKA.

ILIKA  
Also, I would like to move into your largest sleeping room, and probably rent it for several weeks.

DOKO  
It's free now, has eight beds, but we could bring in more.

Doko pulls paper and pencil from a pocket of his apron and he and MOSA begin figuring as Ilika eats his porridge.

EXT. RICH SECTION OF THE CITY - DAY

ILIKA wanders until he sees the storefront of a healer, crude surgical instruments and jars of chemicals in the window.

INT. HEALER'S SHOP - DAY

The HEALER, after listening to ILIKA, shakes his head firmly.

EXT. RICH SECTION OF THE CITY - DAY

ILIKA wanders until he sees the storefront of a another healer.

INT. ANOTHER HEALER'S SHOP - DAY

The HEALER, after listening to ILIKA, shakes her head firmly.

EXT. POOR SECTION OF THE CITY - DAY

ILIKA wanders the muddy streets, looking for the symbolic signs a healer might use. He sees a wooden tooth above a door, and hears a painful moan coming from within, but frowns and wanders on.

Ilika is following a narrow street when he notices a YOUNG MOTHER step out of an unmarked doorway carrying a small, weak CHILD.

YOUNG MOTHER  
(reassuring her child)  
Be right better soon, sweet.

ILIKA  
Good woman, is there a healer within?

YOUNG MOTHER  
(after looking him over)  
I ... don't know if this is the kind of healer you want. The witch who lives here will sit with you all night long while your only child fights with the Fever Demons, tossing magical herbs into hot water, or placing a drop of potion on the child's tongue, until finally at morning light your little one returns from the gates of Death with sparkling eyes and is ready to eat and drink again. And when you have nothing to give but two potatoes, the witch takes only one and sends you home with the other to make a good meal for your child. I don't think you are looking for this kind of healer.

The young mother bows slightly, then walks away down the street, holding her child close and muttering more soothing words and sounds.

Ilika, on the verge of tears, struggles with deep feelings.

ILIKA  
(to himself)  
Yes, I think I am looking for this kind of healer.

Ilika knocks on the unmarked door. DOTI, about 50, wearing a robe of many dark colors, opens and ushers him in with a subtle, knowing smile.

INT. ARTISTS GUILD - DAY

ILIKA sits still as a female artist, PICA, about 25, sketches

his face. A white-haired GUILD MASTER stands behind her, observing.

When the sketch is complete, she shows it to ILIKA, he smiles and shakes the guild master's hand.

INT. PAPER SHOP - DAY

ILIKA sits at a table of samples and makes a few strange symbols with a crude pencil on a sheet of thick, hand-made paper. The PAPER MAKER stands near.

ILIKA

I need forty of these pencils, twenty sheets of large paper, and two hundred sheets of small paper, and I need it all in four days.

The paper maker nods and smiles.

INT. CARPENTRY SHOP - DAY

ILIKA sits at a table and gestures to indicate a height about a foot above the table.

The JOURNEYMAN CARPENTER gets a board of that width and holds it in place. Ilika looks from several angles to try to see the table beyond, then nods.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - MORNING-EVENING

ILIKA enters the room (8 beds, long table and stools, fireplace) stirring his stone-ground porridge. After taking a bite, he sets the crude ceramic bowl on the rough wooden table where a sheet of the hand-made paper and a crude pencil already await. From his shoulder bag, he places onto the table a small rectangular knowledge processor with a glowing, moving 3D display and shimmering keys with strange symbols that change every few seconds.

Between bites of porridge, Ilika taps at the keys, studies the display, looks up in thought, and sometimes goes to the window to gaze out over the marketplace. Eventually he picks up the pencil and slowly writes a question in the local alphabet and language.

About noon, Ilika is interrupted with a knock upon his door, and he opens it to find DOKO'S SON bearing a tray of food. Ilika hands the boy 2 copper pieces, who departs without making eye contact.

Ilika continues the process of composing questions, sometimes adding a simple drawing beside the question.

At dinner time, a knock is again heard, and Ilika opens his door to find SATA holding a dinner tray.

ILIKA  
(handing her 2 copper pieces)  
Thank you, Sata.

SATA  
(hesitantly)  
Sir, are you going to consider girls  
for your traveling companions?

ILIKA  
Yes. Girls are just as welcome as  
boys.

SATA  
The people you are going to test ...  
are they all slaves?

ILIKA  
At the moment, yes.

SATA  
Is that for some reason, or just  
because they were handy?

ILIKA  
I tried the religious order, the  
guilds, the college, and many  
workshops. The people I want might  
be in those places, but the strict  
rules won't allow me to talk to them  
and test them, like I can with  
slaves.

SATA  
If you discovered someone who wanted  
to be tested, but they weren't a  
slave, would you let them?

ILIKA  
(setting down his tray)  
Is the person who might want to be  
tested named Sata?

SATA  
(timidly)  
Um ... yes.

ILIKA  
(after a slow, deep breath)  
Maybe. It would have to be okay with  
your parents, and I would have to  
tell them what I'm about to tell you.

SATA  
Okay.

ILIKA

The truth is, Sata, I am a ship captain, and I'm looking for a crew. It's a small ship that doesn't need big, strong men like most ships. It needs smart people who are willing to learn many, many new things.

SATA

I like learning new things. You taught me what a thousand is, and I taught my brother!

ILIKA

Good. But here's the part I want you to listen to very carefully. My ship and its crew will be leaving this kingdom and going far, far away. We might not be back for years, so you would have to say good-bye to your family and friends, your city, and your kingdom.

Sata lowers her eyes and remains silent. Ilika lets a few moments pass.

ILIKA

You still have three days to think about it. Good night, Sata.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

ILIKA works with his knowledge processor, paper, pencil, and partially-eaten meal to generate more questions and sketches.

EXT. TORI'S BAKERY - DAY

ILIKA

Tori, can you have forty tarts ready after dinner two days from now?

TORI

They will be fresh out of the oven! I hear Sata wants to be tested for the jobs on your ship.

ILIKA

(after a moment of surprise)  
Yes. What do you think of her?

TORI

Solid, reliable girl. Grown up beyond her years. She has moods, but never lets them affect her work.

Tori turns to help another customer, and Ilika wanders back toward the inn, pondering the baker's words.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - EVENING

ILIKA works with his knowledge processor, paper, pencil, and partially-eaten meal to generate more questions and sketches.

Finally, Ilika sets down his pencil and sighs with completeness. He takes a moment to look over the many sheets of paper covered with questions and drawings, then rises and heads for the door.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - EVENING

The dinner hour is past and only a few PEOPLE remain, drinking and eating desserts. ILIKA selects a small corner table. SATA enters, followed closely by MOSA.

MOSA

Well, see what the good Captain Liko would like to eat or drink!

SATA

(a bit shyly)

Hello, sir. I told them! What can I get you?

ILIKA

That custard looks good.

Sata dashes for the kitchen. Mosa comes near Ilika's table, but is reluctant to sit down. He gestures at the chair across from him.

ILIKA

Please, Mosa, sit and speak your mind.

MOSA

We are so very happy that you might let Sata be tested. We have long seen that she is too full of smarts and curiosity to stay cooped up in this little inn. Our son is probably going to take it over when we are old, but we have been at a loss to know what to do with Sata, other than marriage. For the life of me, I don't understand how a girl could work on a ship, but we are thrilled that she might be able to get some training and see the world.

While Mosa speaks, Ilika's expression changes from being steeled for a negative reaction, to relief and pride in the woman.

ILIKA

There are several jobs on my ship that Sata could possibly do. For example, there is a steward who takes care of the passengers, and a navigator who has to be good with numbers.

Sata arrives and sets down a dish of custard with shaking hands.

MOSA

Sata, you could be a steward or a navigator!

Sata acts shy for a moment, but can't conceal her excitement.

ILIKA

(after a spoon of custard)

Can I assume that Doko feels the same as you?

MOSA

Oh, yes. If anything, the parting will be harder for me.

ILIKA

Come, sit with us, Sata. You both must understand that I will have to be fair. If you score well on the tests, and have the right qualities, I will offer you a place on my crew. But I won't take you just because I've known you longer than the others.

SATA

(indignant)

I want to do all my own work, fair and square.

ILIKA

Good. I've already seen that you like learning. So ... I guess you have a seat in this room tomorrow.

SATA

(jumping up and dancing around in circles)

Hurray!

MOSA

Shush! There are other guests!

SATA

Sorry.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - DAWN

ILIKA awakes to sounds in the marketplace, hops up, and quickly dresses. He gathers up the piles of large and small sheets of paper he needs, and a wooden box of pencils, then heads downstairs.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - DAWN

The common room now has simple curtains covering the entrances from the corridor and kitchen. A small storeroom is open and contains only a chair and several flickering oil lamps. DOKO is busy building a fire in the fireplace.

ILIKA sets his papers and pencils on a small table on one side of the room away from the fireplace and window.

The artist PICA arrives with 2 easels under her arms, and her sketch box. She sets up the easels behind Ilika's table.

DOTI the healer arrives with bags of potions and tools over her shoulders and sets up her make-shift examination room in the small storeroom.

The CARPENTER and several APPRENTICES arrive carrying wooden partitions, which they set on the tables to prevent cheating. They soon depart.

SATA enters from the kitchen with a tray of mugs of tea. Ilika takes one and drinks deeply.

ILIKA

Thank you, Sata. It's time for you to take off your apron and sit down in here.

As the sky brightens toward sunrise, a GUARD enters leading the line of thirty SLAVES, most tied together with a long rope binding each one's wrist. Some of them glance at Ilika. The last slave, MATI, is not tied to the rope, but hobbles along as fast as she can on a crutch, avoiding weight on her right knee. She looks into Ilika's eyes hopefully. ANOTHER GUARD brings up the rear.

The guards untie the slaves, and Doti ushers the guards out into the corridor where a table, chairs, and breakfast await them.

Doti returns to the common room and gets the slaves seated so they can all see the easels. Handicapped Mati is seated at the table with Sata. Then Doti and Pica sit down on the fireplace hearth.

Ilika takes a slow, deep breath, then steps to the front of the room and sits on the edge of his table.

ILIKA

Good morning. My name is Ilika ...

Several slaves giggle and snicker.

ILIKA

That's right, my name sounds like a girl's name to you because it ends in an A. Truth is, I come from far, far away. In fact, the entire language in my ... kingdom ... is different from yours. My kingdom is known as Satamia, in a greater region called Nebador.

Ilika begins to stroll among the tables.

ILIKA

I am the captain of a small but very fast ship, and I'm looking for a crew of five special people. It's a new kind of ship that a slender lad like this could pilot ...

(he taps the shoulder of the slender boy he first saw on the auction block)

... or a girl ...

(he gestures at a head of tangled brown hair)

or maybe even someone who has trouble walking.

(he looks at Mati)

You are here because I believe some of you might be the sort of people I want for my crew. If I select you, I will give you your freedom. That means you would never again suffer any mistreatment you couldn't walk away from.

Murmurs of amazement spread throughout the room.

ILIKA

Also, I will give you an education in reading, mathematics, chemistry, logic, ethics, and many other subjects. I will give you the training you need to work on a ship like mine, and an honorable job doing skilled work on one of the most beautiful vessels in existence ...

BOY

(assertive but cringing)

Hell no! I don't wanna work on no damn boat!

ILIKA  
(softly)  
No problem.

Ilika gestures for the boy to follow him toward the front curtains, but a shaggy black-haired girl, KIBI, about 16, jumps up and hugs the boy.

KIBI  
Bye, Toki!

BOY  
Bye, Kibi. Watch your back.

Ilika opens the curtain and a guard rises to deal with the boy. Kibi is back in her seat when Ilika returns to the common room.

ILIKA  
Any questions?

A squirrely-faced girl, BUNA, about 14, waves her hand in the air while squirming in her seat.

BUNA  
Can I use the dump hole?

ILIKA  
(after frowning to figure out  
her meaning)  
Just poke your head through the back  
curtain, and the guard will let you  
through.

Ilika looks around the room and sees some excitement, some boredom, and lots of fear.

ILIKA  
Okay, let's have breakfast!

DOKO and MOSA enter with trays of mugs of tea and bowls of steaming porridge.

Sata starts to hop up to help, then catches herself and sits back down with an embarrassed smile.

Several slaves make sounds of amazement at the amount of porridge they receive.

BOY  
Honey! I haven't seen any in years!

Ilika, while he eats, observes the candidates from where he sits on his table, occasionally making a quick note on a sheet of paper.

Eventually DOKO'S SON clears the breakfast dishes and a hush

settles over the room. Doti and Pica silently pass out several sheets of paper and a pencil to each candidate.

ILIKA

You each have your own private space that no one else can see. Everyone has to find their own answers to the questions. Cheating will get you kicked out.

Ilika steps to an easel with a large blank sheet of paper.

ILIKA

This is what the number one looks like. Question one. What is your name? When I point to you, tell me your name and I'll write it. You remember which name is yours and copy it to your paper beside the number one. I'll go first.

Ilika points to himself, and the room explodes with laughter.

ILIKA

Ilika. I-L-I-K-A.  
(then he points to Mati)

MATI

(shyly)  
Mati.

ILIKA

M-A-T-I.

As the process continues, many noises of frustration reveal the effort that goes into printing their names for (in most cases) the first time.

Ilika continues his list of interesting candidates, on his table where no one else can see, which already includes Sata, Mati, and Kibi.

When all the slaves have given their names, Ilika nods to Doti, who calls the first slave into her examining room, and to Pica, who begins discretely doing sketches.

ILIKA

Okay, a little bit of number work. We'll pretend we have only five fingers, instead of the way people in this kingdom really do numbers. That way, the next few questions will be just as hard for those who already know their numbers.

Sata frowns with intense anger for a moment.

Ilika puts up a large sheet with many groups of dots and associated digits. For the next while, he points at various things on the sheet, and the slaves laboriously write down answers.

At one point, a BOY bursts into frustrated tears and tries to bolt, but is intercepted by a guard and taken away.

The remaining slaves continue trying to find answers, and the names Toli and Rini are added to Ilika's notes.

ILIKA

Now we'll do some questions that don't have right or wrong answers, but will help me know what kind of people you are. Question seven. When you are with your friends, with no masters or parents around, do you, A, mostly talk, or, B, mostly listen to others talk? Here's what an A looks like, for mostly talk, and here's a B, for mostly listen.

The personality questions continue and most slaves are thoughtful as they answer each question. The name Buna is added to Ilika's notes.

When those questions have run their course, Ilika puts up a new sheet with spatial relationship problems.

ILIKA

If I rotate the drawing at the top, which of the other four drawings will it become?

Different slaves are frustrated than earlier. Sata answers these quickly and easily, as well as BORO, a large, muscular boy of about 14, whose name is added to Ilika's notes.

As the slaves are working on the last question of this type, Ilika strolls around the room, checking with Doti and Pica who silently assure him that their work is going well. He returns to the easels.

ILIKA

Shall we eat lunch?

All the slaves throw down their pencils and cheer. Doko and Mosa bring in bowls of hearty stew, followed by fresh bread and sticks of cheese, then mugs of sweet tea.

While Ilika eats, he see that some of the slaves are in a very lighthearted mood because they have answered few questions and given up. Some others, including Sata, are very quiet because they started with high hopes, but are now rethinking their chances. And a few look surprised that they have been finding answers quickly and easily, including Mati, Boro, and Buna.

Eventually the lunch dishes are cleared by Doko's son, Doti calls another slave into the examining room, Pica starts another sketch, and Ilika steps to the easels.

ILIKA

You are in a room with some empty crates, doing your work. A little girl runs in, yells, 'Help me!' and hides in one of the crates. A moment later an ugly man runs in, holds up a big, bloody knife, and grumbles, 'Where is she?' What do you do?

Many slaves raise their hands, Ilika points to one at a time, listens, sometimes nods, sometimes frowns, then points at another. Each comment causes others to raise hands, yell at each other, or once (seated side by side) begin to fight. Those 2 are quickly hauled away by a guard. Ilika adds Neti to his notes.

After calm returns, Pica hides behind an easel and speaks in a little girl's voice.

PICA

Help me!

Everyone in the room laughs as Ilika puts up a simple drawing of a house, tree, and person. Many sounds of frustration reveal how difficult some of them find the task of copying it. Ilika adds Kodi to his notes.

Ilika puts up a simple drawing of a hand, glove, and foot.

ILIKA

This is a hand, and this is a glove.  
They have a relationship. A hand goes in a glove, and the glove protects the hand.  
(after scanning the room)  
This is a foot ...

Sata and most of the slaves thrust their hands into the air. Ilika smiles, then puts up a more difficult relationship problem, and the candidates return to their answer sheets, some with sounds and looks of frustration.

After strolling around the room, Ilika adds Miko to his notes.

After a snapping sound, muscular Boro, wearing a guilty expression, waves his hand in the air and holds up his broken pencil. Ilika tosses him a new one.

Eventually Ilika takes down those sheets from the easels.

ILIKA

This last part is about language.  
(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

You have all done the hard part - you have learned a spoken language. Even though you have not yet learned to read and write, we're going to play with some words by translating from one language to another.

Ilika puts up a large sheet of words paired with non-words, a few each of adjectives, nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Then he puts up another sheet with a simple sentence in the kingdom's language. The candidates struggle to form the words of the translation.

Ilika puts up a sheet containing a sentence of non-words, and the candidates again struggle. Several, at different times, laugh when they figure out the translation. He gives them plenty of time.

ILIKA

Long enough?

KIBI

(concentrating on her answer)

No!

Ilika strolls around the room for a moment.

ILIKA

How about now?

SATA

(scratching out a word)

Almost.

Ilika organizes the papers on his table.

ILIKA

Now?

ALL CANDIDATES

Okay!

Doko and Mosa burst through the curtains with trays of meat, bread, cheese, and greens. The candidates take the initiative to remove the partitions from the tables. Doti and Pica collect the papers and pencils. Doko's son enters with a tray of small cups of ale.

Soon TORI enters with a tray of fruit tarts and passes them out.

As soon as dinner winds down, the guards enter and start tying the slaves' wrists to the rope. Before being tied, Kibi stands before Ilika with hope in her eye. After a moment of eye contact, she hugs him, and he responds in kind. She releases him just as quickly, and goes to be tied to the rope.

None of the slaves look back. They file out, one guard at the front, another at the rear where Mati hobbles along with her crutch, trying desperately to keep up. Their feet pound on the wooden porch of the inn, then there is silence, save for the crackling of the fire.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - MORNING

ILIKA awakens to a knock on his door. Still in his clothes, he answers to find SATA, acting extremely anxious, with a breakfast tray. He hands her 2 copper pieces for the juice.

He sits at the large table, covered with answer sheets, sketches, and several lists he has already made. As he eats, he looks at list after list, crumpling some and tossing them into the fireplace, and making new ones. His frustration level grows as he tries repeatedly to narrow lists of 10 or 12 names to about 5, but is unable.

His breakfast eaten, he suddenly freezes, his mouth drops open, and he grins. He locates a list with 10 names and excitedly heads downstairs.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - DAY

The room is nearly empty as ILIKA sits down at a table. DOKO, MOSA, and SATA hurry out of the kitchen and sit near.

ILIKA

I thought I could choose my five crew members after all the tests yesterday. I was wrong. I cannot make my list any smaller than ten. I have decided to take the next several months, all during this summer and early fall, and give those ten a good education. I will then hopefully know them well enough to choose my five. The ones I do not choose will receive three great gold pieces each to help them get started in life.

Sata sits shaking like a frightened animal, barely holding in the burning question Ilika had not yet answered.

ILIKA

If this situation is okay with all three of you, Sata is invited to be one of those ten.

Sata squeals, claps, and bounces up and down on her stool.

INT. MIDDLE-CLASS CLOTHING SHOP - DAY

ILIKA selects simple, ready-made tunics in several sizes, handing them to SATA. She then stacks them on the CLERK'S table, who grins and begins to fold them as Ilika opens his

money pouch.

INT. SLAVE MASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

ILIKA hands the SLAVE MASTER a list of nine names (Sata excluded). His eyes grow wide at the length of the list, and he has trouble hiding his joy/greed. Ilika counts out five great gold pieces and several lesser gold and silver coins. Ilika takes no joy in shaking the slave master's hand.

EXT. SLAVE MARKET - DAY

Off to one side of the outdoor open space, a GUARD presents ILIKA with his roped line of purchases: BORO (boy, 14, large & muscular), KIBI (girl, 16, shaggy), MIKO (boy, 15, handsome), NETI (girl, 14, pretty), RINI (boy, 13, slender), TOLI (boy, 19, tall & clumsy), KODI (boy, 12, small & impish), BUNA (girl, 14, squirrely), and (not tied) MATI (girl, 13, on crutch). With a nod from Ilika, the guard departs. SATA stands near, grinning and holding the stack of tunics.

Ilika makes eye contact with each, seeing happiness but much insecurity, especially in Neti, Toli, Kodi, and Mati.

ILIKA

Follow me!

As Ilika and Sata head toward the street, the ex-slaves are confused until Boro, at the front, finds the courage to pick up the rope and lead the group along behind Ilika.

EXT. STREET IN POOR SECTION, ENTRANCE TO BATH HOUSE - DAY

The EX-SLAVES grin when they see DOTI the witch/healer, bag over her shoulder, waiting for them.

INT. BATH HOUSE, LARGE GROUP TUB - DAY

Several of the EX-SLAVES, especially Kibi, shed tears as ILIKA and DOTI untie the rope from their wrists. Rini is unfazed by the new situation. SATA is happy for them, but somewhat detached.

The ex-slaves and Sata all bounce and splash in the water, which rapidly turns gray. WORKERS bring more buckets of warm water and pour them in. Doti sits on the edge, pouring from a bottle onto each wet head as it is presented, working the soapy potion (lice shampoo) into their hair, then sending them off to rinse. Unlike the rest, Buna never dunks herself, but rinses her head by splashing water.

When they climb out, the ex-slaves take great joy in the simple pleasure of drying with a clean towel and putting on new tunics.

EXT. WIDE STREET TO THE MARKETPLACE - DAY

The EX-SLAVES begin the journey by all trying to follow someone else, resulting in complete confusion. SATA smiles. ILIKA demonstrates by offering his arm to Buna, who giggles and accepts. Sata pairs up with Mati. The rest get the idea and form pairs or trios.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - DAY

Lunchtime is past and the common room is nearly empty as ILIKA directs his 10 STUDENTS to a large table with short stools. The ex-slaves seat themselves timidly.

ILIKA

With our room rental, we get basic board. That means whatever's cooking, no dessert or anything else special without paying extra. Sometimes we can get goodies here, and sometimes we'll be out and about for dessert or a special meal.

DOKO

(bustling in from the kitchen)  
Well, well! My name is Doko. I know Ilika, and I think I know someone else here.  
(he winks at SATA)

SATA

(rolling her eyes)  
That's my father. He's being silly.

ILIKA

Doko, what would you like these young people to know about staying at an inn?

DOKO

Hmm. Don't bug the other guests. No running in the corridors or stairs. And upstairs is quiet from midnight to sunrise. There's some good stew in the pot. Ale?

ILIKA

(cringing)  
Maybe a little with dinner, but I have a million things to teach them today.

SATA

What's a million?

ILIKA

(laughing)

You'll have to wait for math lessons.

Doko laughs too, then shrugs as he turns and heads for the kitchen. As soon as MOSA places trays of bread and cheese on the table, the ex-slaves grab food like hungry vultures.

ILIKA

You guys act like you didn't have any breakfast.

TOLI

(mouth full of bread)

We didn't.

Ilika sighs.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

All 10 STUDENTS sit proudly on the (now 11) cots they have chosen. Miko and Neti are side by side. Kibi is by the door. ILIKA sits on the raised hearth of the unlit fireplace.

TOLI

Are we free now?

ILIKA

As far as I'm concerned, yes. You could walk out of here right now and I'd do nothing to stop you. But legally, no. I will see a scribe tomorrow, and it takes him a couple of days to get the bills of freedom prepared. I'll receive a copy, and give it to you if you ever choose to leave.

SATA

Do we have any work to do?

ILIKA

Mostly your work will be learning, and I assure you, I will keep you very busy with that. You will be learning in half a year what most people take five or ten years to learn. If you stick with it, by next fall you will be some of the most highly-educated people in this kingdom. You will read and write better than most scribes. You will know more mathematics than accountants. You will be better at logic and ethics than most philosophers.

## ALL STUDENTS

Wow!

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - EVENING

ILIKA and the 10 STUDENTS finish their dinner at a large table, their manners now much better without hunger so close. DOKO is in the room, collecting dirty dishes.

## SEVERAL STUDENTS

Thank you, Doko!

Doko bows to them. DOTI enters, potions bags over her shoulders. The students are excited to see her, quickly clean their plates, then bound up the stairs.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - LATE EVENING

Two tall candles are burning on the table. ILIKA tends the small fire in the fireplace. The 10 STUDENTS begin by sitting on their beds.

DOTI gestures to Kibi to join her at Kodi's bed, then shows Kibi how to apply an ointment from a corked jar to the rope burns on Kodi's wrists. Kibi smiles and takes over.

Doti goes to Boro's bed and coaxes him to remove his tunic and lie on his stomach. Then she gestures to Sata, and shows the girl how to apply a cleansing potion to an infected cut on Boro's back, which fizzes. Boro moans from the pain, and Doti comforts him with touches. Then she shows Sata how to apply an ointment, and Sata takes over.

Doti stands, looks down at Sata and Boro, and smiles.

Doti goes to Mati, and gestures for Rini to join them. Doti shows him how to apply an oil to Mati's (slightly swollen and misshapen) right knee and massage it. She applies more and more pressure until Mati grimaces with pain, then backs off a little. Rini nods that he understands and takes over.

Doti stands, looks down at Rini and Mati, and smiles.

Doti gestures to Toli, who is embarrassed and has trouble coming forward, but eventually arrives at Buna's bed. Buna grins with delight at the situation. Doti shows Toli how to apply one ointment to Buna's rope burns, and another to some rashes on her arms. Toli fumbles, but finally takes over.

Doti stands, looks down at Toli and Buna, but does not smile.

Miko and Neti are already applying ointment to each other's wrists. Doti looks down at them, and suddenly a frown flashes onto her face, but she hides it by turning to Ilika.

Doti gestures for Ilika to follow her to Kibi's bed and brings out a comb. She shows him how to carefully work through

Kibi's thick hair, then lets him take over.

Doti stands, looks down at Ilika and Kibi, smiles, then turns her attention to checking on the others.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - MORNING

Ilika is not present. The 10 STUDENTS sit at the large table working on a puzzle of a few hundred wooden pieces. Miko is trying to lead the project, but is frustrated. Sometimes moments of success bring smiles, embraces, or hands slapping. At other times, failures at fitting the pieces result in frowns, growls, threatening postures, even fists ready to strike (but Kibi always intervenes). Not far into the project, little Kodi ceases to help and sits on the hearth, pouting.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - AFTERNOON

ILIKA enters with the TAILOR, looks at the completed puzzle on the table, and smiles at his 10 STUDENTS as the tailor begins taking measurements.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

ILIKA holds up a sheet of paper with three dots.

ILIKA

Mati?

MATI

(very unsure of herself)

One, two, um ... um ...

TOLI

Three!

ILIKA

It wasn't your turn, Toli. That's showing off. We're not doing that. We're doing math, teamwork style, trust-building style. Okay?

TOLI

(dejected)

Okay.

ILIKA

Mati?

MATI

(hurt and approaching tears)

But ... someone already said the answer. Someone else always gets to do things instead of me, it's always been like that, all my life.

SATA puts her arm around Mati, and Ilika comes close to listen.

MATI

(nearly crying)

I guess I had parents once, but they just passed me around from one relative to another. The other kids had copper pieces to spend, but not me. The other kids got to learn how to cook, or garden, or keep animals, but not me. I think my parents eventually forgot who I was staying with, and the relatives forgot I was a relative ...

ILIKA

That's all in the past now. Are you ready to continue your education?

Mati slowly wipes her tears onto her sleeve and nods. Ilika holds up the sheet of paper again.

MATI

Um ... one, two, um ... three!

Most other students cheer, but Toli hangs his head.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - EVENING

As ILIKA and the 10 STUDENTS are finishing their dinner, faint medieval music begins to be heard from outside.

ILIKA

Shall we go out to the plaza, listen to the music?

All the students nod and quickly clean their plates.

EXT. MARKETPLACE PLAZA - EVENING

ILIKA and the 10 STUDENTS follow the music to the stage between the marketplace and the palace. Torches flicker, casting a mysterious glow over the CROWD. Two PIPERS create the melody, a DRUMMER sets the rhythm, and another MUSICIAN adds harmony with a four-stringed instrument. Hundreds of poor and middle-class people sit on benches or the ground.

Ilika spots a free patch of ground, and gestures for his students to sit close together.

A song ends and the people clap, cheer, or stomp. The musicians begin a slow ballad.

A MERCHANT and his SLAVE wandered through the area. The merchant stops to talk with someone and the slave sits down in the dirt to listen to the music.

CITY GUARD

Hey! No slaves allowed!

All of Ilika's ex-slaves jump to their feet (except Mati, no less frightened) and are ready to bolt.

ILIKA

(commanding but hushed)

Kibi, Rini, sit down! Buna, sit!

Ilika pulls Kodi down beside him. Sata tries to comfort Mati and Boro. Miko and Neti hold onto each other and stare with wide eyes.

Soon the ex-slaves are all back on the ground, but still looking around with fear.

ILIKA

Relax! Focus on the music!

MAN

(suspiciously)

They acted like the guard was talking to them!

ILIKA

They're new students of mine, not used to all the noise in the city.

The man chuckles, and other people nearby seem to also accept the explanation. Ilika lets out a deep sigh and continues trying to comfort his students.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

One candle burns as ILIKA and the 10 STUDENTS enter, most going directly to their beds. Rini stands before Ilika.

RINI

We're sorry.

ILIKA

No apologies necessary. The important thing is that you are not slaves, and your best strategy for staying free is to never act like slaves.

Ilika sits on the hearth as most of the students get comfortable in their beds. When all is quiet, he feels Kibi combing his hair from behind.

ILIKA

Hi, Kibi.

KIBI

Hi, Ilika.

ILIKA

Thanks.

KIBI

You're welcome.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

The 10 STUDENTS are at the table, with ILIKA at its head. He writes P, T, and K on a sheet of paper.

ILIKA

Puh ... Tuh ... Kuh

STUDENTS

Puh ... Tuh ... Kuh.

ILIKA

Can you feel the three places in your mouth? Lips, gums behind the teeth, and the roof of the mouth?

The students nod, still saying the sounds quietly.

ILIKA

Those were the unvoiced consonant stops, with no vocal cords making sound. When we add voice, we get three more letters.

(he writes B, D, and G)

This is your hard G. Buh ... Duh ...  
Guh.

A knock is heard at the door. Kibi jumps up to answer. She opens the door to find DOKO and a jolly BOOTMAKER with boots on his feet, a pair of sample boots tied over his shoulder, the outline of a boot on his tunic, and a measuring stick in hand.

KIBI

Ilika, I think the bootmaker is here.

Ilika and all the students smile or laugh. The jolly bootmaker enters, Boro provides him a stool, and he begins measuring Neti's feet.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - MORNING

Ilika is not present. MATI is sitting on the hearth and the other 9 STUDENTS are sitting on their beds.

MATI

Buna, the toes on Toli's right foot.

All the other students laugh as Buna dramatically counts Toli's toes. ILIKA enters at that moment with his shoulder bag.

BUNA

Five!

ILIKA

Buna, you'd better check the other foot.

BUNA

Five there too!

Everyone laughs as Mati takes up her crutch and goes to her bed.

ILIKA

I am happy to announce that you are officially not slaves anymore.

All the students, even Sata, clap and cheer as Ilika passes out the bills of freedom to all the ex-slaves: sheets of parchment with calligraphy, signatures, and official seals.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - AFTERNOON

ILIKA sits at the head of the table, the 10 STUDENTS sit all around.

ILIKA

Numbers wouldn't be very useful if we couldn't count anything greater than nine.

MATI

We couldn't even use both hands or both feet without getting to ten, and only Sata knows how to write a ten.

ILIKA

Yes, to make numbers that can express very large values, we have to break them into several different places. Each place has a digit in it, but the digit means something different in each place.

(he draws 7 boxes in a row)

The place on the far right is the ones place. The digit in that place means just what it says. If there's a three in it, it means three.

(he looks around)

The next place to the left is the number of bases in our value. Our base is ten, the number of fingers we have, so the digit we put in this box doesn't mean the digit itself, it means that many tens.

(he sees puzzled looks)

(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

Let's look at the place values using money. I need to teach you about it anyway.

(the students get excited as he opens his money pouch)

After you look at it, the copper piece goes in the ones place, and the small silver in the tens place.

The lesson continues with the ex-slaves eyes growing wider and their mouths opening with wonder at each larger coin: great silver, small gold, and great gold. Ilika passes each around, then Sata, the last to look at each coin, places it in the correct box.

Already knowing the money, Sata becomes confused when the great gold comes to her after the great silver. She looks at ILIKA. He takes in the situation, then looks around the table. Boro is seated at the far end of the table, followed by Kodi and Rini.

ILIKA

Boro, have you seen the small gold piece?

BORO

Yes. And passed it on.

ILIKA

(after a moment of thought)

Rini, have you seen it?

RINI

No. After the big silver came the big gold.

ILIKA

(seeing Kodi squirming)

Kodi, it seems the small gold piece disappeared somewhere around you.

Kodi is silent for a moment, but his face reveals his moral conflict.

KODI

Ohhhh ... here it is!

Kodi slams the coin onto the table, knocks over his stool, dashes to his bed, and quickly hides under the blankets.

The silence lingers, save for a few sounds from the marketplace, as Ilika slowly rises, finds Kodi's bill of freedom in his shoulder bag, and sits on the hearth.

ILIKA

Kodi, I paid five small gold to get you out of slavery. I have given you your freedom, and this bill is yours to keep.

KODI

(peeking out of his blankets)  
You're not going to beat me?

Ilika slowly shakes his head. Kodi gets up, warily crosses the room to Ilika, snatches his bill of freedom, dashes for the door, jerks it open, and the sound of his running feet echo throughout the inn.

Ilika closes his eyes for a long minute, and tears find their way out. When he opens his eyes, the students are all gone. With slumped shoulders, he goes to the window, but doesn't see them in the marketplace.

A minute later, the door bursts open and Kibi strides in with a tray of bowls and spoons. Boro bears a lidded cooking pot. Miko and Neti have bread and cheese. Rini carries a bowl of fresh greens. Buna has cups and Toli a pitcher of ale. Mati just brings her crutch. At the very end, Sata enters with a large wooden shingle stacked with tarts from the bakery.

ILIKA

What's ... going on?

KIBI

We're celebrating!

RINI

You see, we know a lot more about Kodi than you do.

BUNA

Kodi's been a thief all his life,  
Always stealing from his masters.

KIBI

We don't much care about that.

MIKO

But he's a snitch, too, always  
ratting on other slaves. If a master  
offered an extra potato to find out  
who'd been goofing off, Kodi was  
always right there, naming names and  
pointing fingers.

Ilika and the remaining 9 students gather around the table, spread out the food, and begin serving themselves.

EXT. POOR SECTION OF THE CITY - EVENING

KODI runs through the narrow, muddy streets. Eventually he collides with a LABORER carrying a large sack, is knocked to the ground, and loses hold of his bill of freedom. He tries to follow it, but the wind takes it.

EXT. POOR SECTION OF THE CITY - NIGHT

KODI tries to sleep behind some barrels, but is tossing and turning. A CITY GUARD hears him

CITY GUARD

Hey, lad. Don't you have somewhere to go?

KODI

No. Not anymore.

CITY GUARD

Do you have any money? A copper will get you bed and mush a few blocks from here.

KODI

No.

CITY GUARD

Come on. I can't let you stay there. I'll take you somewhere they'll give you something to eat, a place to sleep, and work to do.

KODI

Oh ... okay.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - MID-MORNING

KIBI opens the door to find the TAILOR and an APPRENTICE with a big stack of clothes.

The remaining 9 STUDENTS work happily to sort out the simple tunics, pants, shorts, socks, and cloth hats into piles on each person's bed.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - DAY

BORO and SATA wander through the stalls and wagons, then stop at a leather goods wagon and begin selecting belts for all the students. Boro is not as confident as Sata.

INT. LEATHER GOODS SHOP - DAY

MIKO and NETI, both nervous, look over the leather goods, then find the small money pouches. Neti picks out a slightly different design for each student.

## EXT. MONEY CHANGER OFFICE - AFTERNOON

ILIKA and the STUDENTS (less Buna) wait in the street. A GUARD stands at the door, arms crossed. BUNA emerges from the money changer, showing off her pouch jingling with many coins. Rini goes in.

## INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - MORNING

ILIKA is at the head of the table, holding up a sheet with 2 arithmetic problems,  $4+3=7$  and  $4\times 3=12$ . A plate of pastries sits in the middle of the table. The 9 STUDENTS, especially Buna, Toli, Neti, and Miko, keep glancing at the pastries and not paying attention.

ILIKA

Everyone see the difference?

(the students all nod)

Okay, let's talk about these pastries that Buna and Toli found in the marketplace. There are many ways to divide up something valuable. I'll propose a method, you tell me what you think.

(some students frown)

Method one. I get them all because I'm the captain.

KIBI

(frowning deeply)

That would make you like most of the masters we've had.

ILIKA

Ouch. Method two. We fight, and the winner gets all the pastries.

MATI

I'll never get any!

ILIKA

(smiling apologetically)

Method three. Boys get most of them, girls get the crumbs.

BUNA

That's stupid! Girls are just as good as boys.

ILIKA

(after nodding acceptance)

Method four. We share them equally.

ALL STUDENTS

Yes! Hooray! Yeah!

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - AFTERNOON

KIBI answers a knock at the door. The CLOAK MAKER and an APPRENTICE enter carrying stacks of full-length, hooded cloaks. The EX-SLAVES are giddy with happiness, determined to wear their new cloaks, with hoods up and hands deep in the pockets, even in the warm afternoon. SATA tries hers on, then lays it across the end of her bed. The ex-slaves notice and do likewise. ILIKA smiles.

ILIKA

I have to go find something, so I  
want ... Kibi to lead a review of all  
the letters and words we've studied.

Kibi goes to the table and begins selecting sheets of paper, from those already used for previous lessons, as Ilika departs.

INT. BOOKSTORE - AFTERNOON

The tiny bookstore has just a few shelves of hand-bound, hand-written books. The squirrely little CLERK rises from his stool when ILIKA enters, causing a bell above the door to jingle.

CLERK

Greetings to you, young master. What  
is your pleasure?

ILIKA

A good adventure story, something  
long and complex.

CLERK

(placing a book on the table)  
If you tear a page, you must buy it,  
or work it off in slavery.

Ilika opens the book, carefully turns the pages, smiles, and reaches for his money pouch.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - EVENING

Two tall candles are lit and MATI has the book in front of her on the table. The other STUDENTS are all crowded around her as close as they can get.

MATI

Tuh ... huh ... eh.

TOLI

(over Mati's shoulder)  
Tuh, huh, ee.

All the students, even Sata, look at each other with blank faces and shrug.

ILIKA

You are remembering the sounds of the individual letters, but have forgotten that sometimes two letters work together to represent a different sound ...

KIBI

(after laughing)  
Thththeeeee!

All the students clap and cheer. Ilika smiles. Toli squirms with jealousy.

Much later, the candles have burned very low. Buna now has the book in front of her, and reads, slowly and carefully, the words of the title they have already figured out.

BUNA

The Adventures of Godi and Tima.

All the students are exhausted as they slump onto stools or flop onto their beds.

INT. RELIGIOUS ORDER - NIGHT

Six PRIESTS enter in a solemn mood. When they are all present, the MONK at the door departs, closing the door behind him. The PRIESTS seat themselves in ornate, padded chairs. The HIGH PRIEST steps to the front.

HIGH PRIEST

Events that Almighty God set in motion long ago are coming to pass.  
(after a rumble of curiosity)  
The king has proven he is not going to cooperate with the Powers from On High. His most recent mistake was to deny our righteous request to not be taxed like peasants.

PRIEST 1

The king is standing in the way of the Church, we all know that. But he is very popular with the people, and has the complete loyalty of the city guards and the noblemen. It would be impossible to rise up against such a king.

HIGH PRIEST

Well spoken, my friend. As things are, we cannot make a move. We must first tarnish him in the eyes of the people. Many people are starting to grumble about the king's open

(MORE)

HIGH PRIEST (CONT)  
policies concerning the port, the  
roads, and the city gate.

PRIEST 2  
Surely, there are a few travelers and  
some strange goods entering the  
kingdom. They haven't caused any  
trouble, and I must say, some of  
those strange goods are quite tasty.

HIGH PRIEST  
(smiling as others chuckle)  
We don't need to wait for them to  
cause any trouble. We just need to  
make the people think they are going  
to be trouble.

PRIEST 3  
How do you propose to do that?

HIGH PRIEST  
A character has appeared in the city  
who pretends to be a captain even  
with no ship in the harbor. My  
agents have been tailing him for  
several days. He has purchased a  
number of slaves, freed them without  
so much as a day's work, and seems to  
be educating them!

A rumble of anger and righteous indignation courses through  
the room, making the high priest smile.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

KIBI opens the door and the jolly BOOTMAKER enters with 10  
pairs of boots slung over his shoulders. MIKO arranges two  
stools in front of the fireplace.

BOOTMAKER  
You all have socks, I hope!

The 9 STUDENTS all dash to their beds to pull on socks. The  
bootmaker reads the name burned into the leather on the first  
boot.

BOOTMAKER  
Let me see. Oh, yes, Mati.  
(she hobbles over and sits)  
One boot for your left foot, one  
moccasin to keep your right foot  
clean and dry.

Mati beams with pride as the bootmaker laces and ties the boot  
and moccasin.

BOOTMAKER  
(reading another boot)  
Let me see. Who is Kodi?

ILIKA  
(after a tense silence)  
He's no longer with us. I'll pay for  
his boots, but you can give them to  
someone his size who needs them.

BOOTMAKER  
Okay. Who is Boro?

After the bootmaker departs, Ilika looks over his 9 students,  
all sitting proudly on their beds in clean, new tunics, pants,  
belts, money pouches, and boots.

ILIKA  
Shall we take a walk in the rich part  
of town, maybe visit Pica at the  
Artists Guild?

The excited students hop up, and all the ex-slaves put on  
their hooded cloaks.

EXT. DOKO'S INN, RICH STREET - DAY

ILIKA and his 9 STUDENTS step out of the inn and he leads them  
into one of the nearby streets paved with cobblestones and  
lined with sturdy half-timber buildings. Sata, used to the  
rich section, walks at his side. The ex-slaves are unsure of  
themselves, glancing around warily.

EXT. RICH STREET, DOKO'S INN - EVENING

Emerging from the same street they entered hours before, ILIKA  
and the 9 STUDENTS are in carefree moods.

BORO  
Hard to believe she works on three  
paintings at once.

TOLI  
That's only because the paint takes  
so long to dry!

MATI  
I want to learn to paint.

Just as Ilika and the 9 students round the last corner, 8 CITY  
GUARDS and the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD are spread out in front of  
the inn. The HIGH PRIEST stands in the background.

CAPTAIN  
(stepping up to ILIKA)  
I hereby execute this warrant for  
(MORE)

CAPTAIN (CONT)

your arrest, as well as those with you.

Ilika breathes slowly as his right hands creeps toward the bracelet on his left wrist, but then retreats. The high priest is grinning in the background.

ILIKA

(loudly, slowly, firmly)

On ... what ... charge?

CAPTAIN

On the charge of subverting the established order by freeing and educating slaves who have not earned their freedom. These charges were made to the Magistrate of the Plaza yesterday, who issued this warrant.

The captain reaches out to take Ilika's arm, and the other city guards move to do the same with his students.

ILIKA

Wait a minute! The common law in this kingdom is that a man may treat his slaves any way he wants. The Slave Protection Decree was signed by the king's grandfather fifty-three years ago. It limited that right only in that a master may not kill or maim a slave. It set no limits on how nice a master could be to his slaves. The king affirmed all previous decrees at his coronation eight years ago.

The grin disappears from the high priest's face.

ILIKA

Therefore, I charge this priest with subverting the laws of the kingdom, and attempting to replace them with the doctrines of his religious order. Further, because there is a high probability he will take refuge behind his walls, which are not subject to warrant, I petition for the immediate arrest of this priest so that he may be required to answer this charge.

The high priest's blank expression becomes a frown.

CAPTAIN

(arms folded in thought)

As a city guard of command rank, I have the authority to hear and consider your petition for arrest. Do you understand that by making this counter-charge, the Magistrate will most likely show you no mercy if he rules against you?

ILIKA

(after a deep breath)

I understand. I know the laws and I believe the charge against me to be improper, and the charge I have made to be sound. My petition stands.

CAPTAIN

(rubbing his chin)

I find the charge that has been made by this man to be worthy of a hearing. I further find his grounds for immediate arrest to be sufficient. They shall all be arrested until the case can be heard by the Magistrate.

HIGH PRIEST

Wait!

CAPTAIN

(arms folded again)

What now? Having made my decision, I cannot unmake it.

HIGH PRIEST

Perhaps not. But you can receive the dropping of charges if a party discovers that ... new information has come to light and that he has been ... hasty in his accusations.

CAPTAIN

I can.

ILIKA

(looking at the high priest)

Perhaps we have both been ... hasty.

CAPTAIN

Do I understand correctly that both of you are willing to drop your charge if the other is also willing?

HIGH PRIEST

(angrily)

Yes!

ILIKA

(calmly)

Yes.

CAPTAIN

So be it. You are all free to go.

Men, you are off-duty.

The city guards surrounding the 9 students depart and allow Ilika to see them. They are clutching each other in twos and threes, faces pale, eyes showing fear.

ILIKA

Kibi, take them up to the room. I'll be right there.

The 9 students scurry into the inn as Ilika turns to the captain of the guard while digging into his money pouch.

ILIKA

Thank you.

CAPTAIN

(receiving a gold piece)

Just doing my job. Knowing the decrees saved you. The high priest couldn't get away fast enough. His mistake was going to a Magistrate, so the charge would have to be decided based on law.

ILIKA

What do you think he'll do now?

CAPTAIN

Well ... he might go home and consider himself lucky. Or he might go to the king and ask for a warrant by special favor. In that case, there would be no defense, I couldn't do anything to stop it, and no one else could either.

ILIKA

(thoughtful)

If he went directly to the king, how long would it take him to get back here with the warrant and a guard?

CAPTAIN

Hmm. His Majesty usually eats dinner late on nice days, so he might see

(MORE)

CAPTAIN (CONT)

someone of that status right away. The high priest could have his warrant in as little as ... an hour. You know, he's been making noise around the Court for more than a week, but it was only a couple of days ago we started hearing of some bratty little slave who was bad-mouthing you and telling everyone where you were staying.

ILIKA

(after cringing)

So ... right now my students and I could walk out the gate and no one would stop us?

CAPTAIN

True. And my lieutenant went that way, so the gate guards will know that the charge against you has been dropped. But ... if you leave by the gate, we'll know, and if another warrant comes out, we'll have to search the countryside.

Ilika nods understanding and the captain of the guard departs.

## ACT 2

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - LATE EVENING

ILIKA enters the room, ignores his 9 STUDENTS who still look frightened, and digs into his shoulder bag. From a plastic tube, he places 9 great gold pieces on the table.

ILIKA

Everyone, put one of these in your pouch, and keep it there unless need forces you to bring it out. Sata and I are going downstairs for a few minutes to talk to her family. The rest of you ... pack.

Sata takes a great gold piece, then hurries to catch up with Ilika, already striding out the door.

INT. DOKO'S INN, KITCHEN - LATE EVENING

As ILIKA and SATA enter, DOKO, MOSA, and their SON are busy cooking or cleaning, but their wide eyes show they know something of recent events.

DOKO

It wasn't any of us!

ILIKA

Relax, Doko, I know who it was. It was Kodi.

MOSA

Sata already told us what happened outside.

ILIKA

Good, so you know I'm not a criminal. We're leaving tonight, and will continue lessons ... somewhere safer. I think I'm caught up on my regular bills, but I want to give you those bonuses you earned for your confidence.

Ilika places 4 small gold pieces on the table.

DOKO

We shall make you a special feast!

ILIKA

Sorry. We must go now. Say your good-byes, Sata. You won't have another chance.

Sata hugs her mother, father, and embarrassed brother.

ILIKA

Okay ... we must go. We'll visit when we can.

INT. DOKO'S INN, LARGEST SLEEPING ROOM - LATE EVENING

ILIKA and SATA return to the room and Sata hurries to pack.

ILIKA

I am very sorry I didn't see this danger coming. I plan to be much more careful in the future, and do everything necessary to keep us all safe and free.

NETI

It's okay. You were wonderful out there, knowing all the laws.

ILIKA

I had to read them before I came. But we don't have much time, so I need to get right to the point. Do you all trust me enough to do exactly  
(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

as I say?

(the students all nod)

There must be no talking until we're safely at our destination, unless necessary to deal with something.

You all need to be like shadows, invisible, seen by no one.

(students look at each other)

Sata and Mati, go now, out the back door, through the plaza, and wait in the alleyway behind the bakery.

Sata finishes tying her own bundle of extra clothes and grabs Mati's. Mati stands up with her crutch and they depart.

ILIKA

Rini and Boro, you're next, out the front door, and wait silently in front of the woodworking shop.

BORO

I know where that is.

Rini and Boro quickly grab their bundles and slip out the door.

ILIKA

Toli and Buna, back door, then wait at the corner by the hatter's shop on Market Way.

TOLI

(whining)

But where are we ...

Toli's objection is cut off with an elbow from Buna, and a finger to her lips. After some additional fussing and fuming by Toli, they depart.

ILIKA

Neti and Miko, do you remember that seamstress a block from the bakery?

NETI

Um ... yes.

Neti and Miko depart silently.

Ilika looks around the room and tosses some used paper into the fireplace. Kibi blows out the candles. In the dim light, Ilika looks at her and she nods. They slip out the door together, Kibi pulling it closed behind them.

EXT. STREETS OF THE POOR SECTION - NIGHT

ILIKA and KIBI, with hoods up, pass by figures in an alleyway,

barely pausing but not speaking. SATA and MATI follow.

RINI and BORO join the procession in front of the dark and silent woodworking shop.

TOLI

I don't understand why ...

TOLI is whining some concern to BUNA when the troop silently passes the closed hatter's shop. He swallows his words and they follow.

NETI and MIKO silently fall into line when the troop passes the dark seamstress' shop.

Ilika leads the students deeper into the poor section of the city, stopping at an unmarked door, the same seen earlier as Doti the witch/healer's house. He knocks, and after a long moment, the door opens a crack and DOTI peeks out.

ILIKA

We request sanctuary.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

ILIKA and the 9 STUDENTS gather on stools or the floor of the large main room, which contains small tables, shelves of herbs and tools, and a tall candle burning. Several doors lead to other rooms, including a kitchen from which DOTI emerges with a tray of mismatched mugs of tea. The students look at each other with some fear, some excitement, and much sleepiness.

Doti brings out extra blankets and simple pillows, and between these, their cloaks with hoods up, and their clothing bundles, all the guests get comfortable for sleep.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - MORNING

ILIKA, the 9 STUDENTS, and DOTI eat from bowls of porridge as they sit around the work tables (now pushed together).

ILIKA

Do you know if there is any way out of this city ... that the guards don't know?

DOTI

(after a pause for thought)

I believe so. There are one or two old tunnels that go through the city walls. They haven't been used for a long time, and may take great courage.

RINI

We've got lots of that!

ILIKA

I want to get the best possible map of the kingdom before we go.

DOTI

I will do your shopping. You should not step outside my door until you have a path before your feet, and darkness to hide you.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - DAY

ILIKA and the 9 STUDENTS are studying addition and subtraction when DOTI enters from outside. She sets down 2 large carry bags bulging with her purchases before taking a seat that Boro vacates for her.

DOTI

There most certainly is a new warrant out for your arrest. I spent a little silver and learned that the high priest tried very hard to get it kingdom-wide, but the king just laughed. So the high priest has made it a standing rule that all priests and monks must inquire for news of you any time they are out in the countryside, which is often. If he gets word of you, he will ask the king to send soldiers.

ILIKA

If we don't stay in one place very long, then they'll always come too late. Hopefully the king will get tired of that.

Doti nods, pulls a map of the kingdom from one of her bags, and spreads it out on the table. The students are fascinated. Then she brings out several small canvas rucksacks, and the map is quickly forgotten as the students examine them.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - EVENING

The 9 STUDENTS are sounding out words from their reading book, with ILIKA'S help, when DOTI enters from outside with a box and a carry bag.

DOTI

The person who can get you into the old tunnels has to go on a journey in two days, so you're leaving tomorrow night, or you'll be stuck here for a long time.

TOLI

We've been studying the map!

DOTI

Good. I got oil lamps, a good knife,  
and flint.

(turning to Mati)

And I have something for you, Mati.  
About a mile down the western road,  
you will find a faint trail on the  
right just past a large oak tree.  
Down that trail is an old ruined  
shack and a little corral. Tomorrow  
night, a donkey I have purchased will  
be delivered to that corral.

MATI

(sparkling with excitement)

I don't know anything about donkeys,  
but I think I'm going to learn!

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - MORNING

DOTI arrives with more rucksacks, blankets, and a length of rope, which the STUDENTS receive excitedly.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - NOON

In a corner with a drain, behind a closed curtain, DOTI works a potion (lice shampoo) into KIBI'S hair.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

DOTI arrives with more blankets and wrapped travel cakes (dense like fruitcake), which she distributes to ILIKA and the STUDENTS, busy with final packing.

INT. DOTI'S HOUSE - EVENING

ILIKA, the STUDENTS, and DOTI are finishing soup and bread when a knock is heard. DOTI goes to the door and admits an elderly SAGE who hobbles with a walking stick.

Miko surrenders his stool. The Sage sits and looks deeply at Ilika and each student.

SAGE

I do not know if you can get the  
crippled girl through the tunnels.

ILIKA

We'll carry her if we need to. We  
will not go without her.

SAGE

So be it. I see much strength, and  
(MORE)

SAGE (CONT)

some fear.

(looking at Boro)

This one will lead. His courage will see you through.

Boro, with wide eyes of surprise, looks at Ilika, who nods his acceptance.

SAGE

He will come with me, as he can turn the key in the lock. My old fingers are no longer so strong. Come as silent shadows. When you arrive at the doorway, speak no word, make no sound, just enter quickly. These lanterns are your lives while in the tunnels. Think nothing of losing all your money, but lose your lanterns and you will surely die in there.

The Sage eats some soup as the other dinner dishes are quickly cleared.

Ilika hands Doti a great gold piece, and she bows to him as she receives it.

Doti lights and adjusts the oil lanterns, handing one to Boro, the other to Kibi. Ilika and the students (except Mati) put on their rucksacks. Miko puts the rope over his head.

The Sage and Boro depart, then every few moments, after (girls) hugging or (boys) bowing to Doti, pairs or trios slip out the door, Ilika and Kibi last.

With a deep breath and a subtle, knowing smile of contentment, Doti closes and locks her door.

EXT. POOR SECTION, DARK ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

The SAGE stands at a small, crude open doorway, no more than 2 feet high, at the base of a dark building. As each STUDENT arrives, he gestures for them to enter.

TOLI

But it's ...

Buna silences Toli with a jab and a dirty look.

Carrying a flickering lantern, Kibi is the last to arrive, gives the Sage a kiss on the cheek, and slips into the little doorway.

The Sage pushes the door closed, fumbles with the old padlock until it clicks, then uses his walking stick to push straw and leaves back against the door to hide it.

## INT. CRAWLWAY UNDER WOODEN BUILDING - NIGHT

In a space no more than 3 feet high, the 9 STUDENTS and ILIKA inch along, pushing their rucksacks ahead of them. Boro leads with a lantern. Mati scoots backwards, dragging her bad right leg, pain showing on her face. Ilika and Kibi bring up the rear.

## INT. HOLE IN CITY WALL - NIGHT

BORO squeezes himself through the roughly circular hole, about 2 feet across, in the thick stone wall, setting his lantern on a stone step inside the wall. RINI slips through easily. MATI cannot suppress tears and muffled cries of pain as she is pulled through.

## INT. STAIRWAY IN CITY WALL - NIGHT

Littered with broken mortar, rocks, and scraps of rotten wood, the stairway is treacherous as the 9 STUDENTS and ILIKA slowly ascend, step by step.

## INT. PASSAGEWAY IN CITY WALL - NIGHT

The 9 STUDENTS and ILIKA look at, nudge with their feet, or pick up and examine items littering the floor, from old crates and barrels, to bottles and crocks. All are decades old, unusable or inedible.

## INT. HOLE IN FLOOR - NIGHT

One at a time, the 9 STUDENTS inch along a timber laid across a gaping hole in the floor. Each wears a rope harness that ILIKA has fashioned, with others holding the ends of the rope on both sides of the hole.

## INT. STAIRWAY IN CITY WALL - NIGHT

Just like the stairway up, it is littered and treacherous, and the 9 STUDENTS and ILIKA often slip and fall as they descend.

## INT. ROOM AND POOL UNDER CITY WALL - NIGHT

The 9 STUDENTS and ILIKA enter and fan out in a plain stone room, about 20 feet square, the floor covered with sloping rubble. It appears to have no other door, but a pool of dark water covers about half the floor, going all the way to the far wall.

Sata helps Mati get comfortable, but the rubble makes it difficult for everyone. Whispers and moans, especially but not only from Toli, reveal that they are all tired and sore. Kibi slices and passes out pieces of travel cake and cheese.

Boro sits near Ilika, pondering the situation while eating, and looking at a trickle of water entering the pool from under the rubble.

BORO

If the water's coming into the pool all the time, and the pool isn't overflowing anywhere, then where's the water going out?

ILIKA

Could be just cracks in the walls.

BORO

I'm a good swimmer. I'm gonna find out.

Boro removes most of his clothes and wades into the water.

SATA

Be careful, Boro!

Boro smiles back at Sata, then dunks under the water.

Several minutes pass while Boro is gone, and the students begin to look at each other with worry, but eventually the water stirs and Boro surfaces.

SATA

(with admiration)

Wow! You sure can hold your breath a long time!

BORO

(climbing out of the water)

I wasn't holding my breath. I was in the next room over. Only problem is, it's pitch dark in there.

ILIKA

How far under is the opening?

BORO

Only about a foot. How can we get a lantern over there?

ILIKA

(after a long pause)

That's exactly what I was wondering. I can see how we can get everything else through without too much damage. But getting the lanterns through that pool while lit ... or in any condition to be relit ... doesn't seem possible.

BORO

Damn!

Boro dries off with a piece of cloth Sata hands him. All the students return to brooding, eating, and trying to get

comfortable on the rubble. Ilika's face shows he is struggling with a difficult decision.

Ilika suddenly stands up and begins removing most of his clothes.

ILIKA

I'll return within a quarter hour.

Ilika wades into the water, dunks down, and the water is soon still again.

Neti squeezes Miko's hand and gets up to go sit beside Kibi, who is obviously worrying.

NETI

Don't worry. Ilika is very strong and smart.

Kibi nods, but doesn't quit worrying.

About 10 minutes later, Boro is standing and taking deep breaths to prepare to go look for Ilika, but before he steps into the water, it stirs and Ilika emerges. A faint green light now comes from under the water through the submerged doorway.

ILIKA

There's light in the next room now, and the way out is not far. We have work to do. We need to repack our stuff so it will stay as dry as possible. Our goal right now is to get out of these tunnels.

Kibi notices that Ilika is no longer wearing his bracelet.

The students (except Buna), now animated again, work to put their food deep inside rucksacks. Ilika closes a waterproof zipper on this shoulder bag. Buna sits with her arms around her knees.

Boro swims through the submerged doorway, and Sata wades into the water and begins handing rucksacks and other gear to him.

The students (except Buna) line up to swim through.

SATA

You ready for this, Mati?

MATI

Sure. My knee works better in the water than anywhere else!

Kibi helps Mati into the water, and both Kibi and Sata help her get through.

Sata swims through.

Kibi looks back at Ilika, but he motions for her to go ahead, so she swims through.

Ilika goes and sits near Buna.

ILIKA

Hi.

BUNA

(snapping)

I can't put my head under the water!  
I'm sorry!

ILIKA

(after a thoughtful pause)

Any idea what stops you?

BUNA

(beginning to cry)

I had a master's wife try to drown me  
when I was about nine. I was  
coughing up water for a week. I  
think I almost died.

ILIKA

Well, I'm not going to leave anyone  
behind in these tunnels.

BUNA

(wiping her eyes)

You'd . . . stay in here with me?

ILIKA

If I had to.

BUNA

But . . . we don't have anything to eat  
. . . and there's no other way out.

ILIKA

That appears to be true.

Suddenly Boro surfaces in the pool.

BORO

We all talked about it, and thought  
of something that might help.

Boro goes to the lanterns and blows them out, then returns to the pool and submerges. Ilika smiles slightly.

BUNA

(crying softly)

Now we can't go back . . .

ILIKA

It would be very hard. We'd have to cross the timber over the pit by feel.

In the silence that follows, they hear the faint squeaking of some small animal. Buna shivers.

BUNA

How . . . long does it take?

ILIKA

About ten seconds, at the most, underwater. You can see now exactly where the opening is.

BUNA

(again wiping her tears)  
Yeah. It's not very far down.

ILIKA

No.

BUNA

And when you're through, you can go right up?

ILIKA

Yes.

In the silence, they hear a rustling sound under the rubble.

BUNA

When I go under, I want you to push me through that hole. I don't care what I'm doing, you have to push me through. Promise me.

ILIKA

I promise.

Buna stands and takes several tortured step until she arrives at the edge of the pool. Ilika stays right at her side.

BUNA

The water sure is a pretty color with that light coming through. Where's the light coming from?

ILIKA

My bracelet. It's sitting on a rock in the next room.

BUNA

Wow ... a magic bracelet!

ILIKA  
(with only a slight pause)  
Yes.

BUNA  
I'd like to see that.

Ilika takes Buna's hand and they walk together into the water until they are facing the wall with the submerged doorway.

ILIKA  
Just hold your breath, close your eyes, and let me do the rest.

Buna takes a huge breath and goes under with Ilika. He clamps her arms to her sides and pushes her through. She is almost through when panic sets in and her legs start thrashing. Ilika receives several hard kicks to his head before he is able to get clear.

Ilika tries to find the surface, but is dazed and confused. He starts to go toward the light, then stops himself, goes a different direction, and slams into a rock. Everything goes dark.

Boro's strong arm pulls Ilika to the surface. Ilika coughs and sputters for a minute.

BORO  
When you weren't right behind Buna,  
Kibi knew something was wrong and  
made me come back for you.

Ilika nods his thanks as he continues clearing his lungs and regaining his balance.

Eventually, Ilika swims through with Boro close behind.

INT. SECOND ROOM UNDER CITY WALL - NIGHT

Similar to the first room, the passageway out appears to be level. A bright beam of light, directed at the ceiling, is coming from Ilika's bracelet, sitting on a large rock.

BUNA is the first to embrace ILIKA when he climbs out.

BUNA  
Thank you so much! You could have  
just left me over there and I would  
have died in the dark ...

Buna's words fade into sobs. KIBI smiles. MIKO and NETI have arms around each other. BORO and SATA are holding hands. TOLI appears disgusted with Buna.

ILIKA

No one gets left behind, if there is  
any way to bring us all out safely.

All the students look at ILIKA with deepened respect.

Boro points to Miko, and Miko nods.

Dripping rucksacks are taken up, Ilika gets his shoulder bag  
and bracelet, and Miko grabs the rope.

INT. LEVEL PASSAGE UNDER CITY WALLS - NIGHT

MIKO leads the other STUDENTS along the level passage, and  
ILIKA provides light from the end of the line by shining his  
bracelet toward the ceiling ahead.

Miko and Boro clear a way through the thick vines over the  
exit doorway while Ilika taps his bracelet and it becomes  
dimmer and dimmer.

EXT. GRASSY HILLSIDE BELOW CITY WALLS - NIGHT

In the darkness before first light, MIKO leads the 10  
TRAVELERS a zigzagging course through the grass.

EXT. CLEARING, RUINED SHACK & CORRAL - EARLY SUMMER, MORNING

MATI hobbles to the corral and strokes the gray DONKEY head  
that thrusts through the rails.

MIKO explores the ruined shack and comes out with an old iron  
pot and a few usable dishes.

ILIKA ties the rope to some trees. He and BORO hang wet  
cloaks and other items.

KIBI slices a travel cake at the long-disused fire circle.

Ilika and all the students spread blankets on the grass and  
curl up to sleep as the sun rises.

EXT. FIRE CIRCLE - EVENING

ILIKA and several STUDENTS are working to build a fire, place  
sitting logs, bring in cups of berries, edible mushrooms, etc.  
MATI hobbles over from the corral.

ILIKA

Do you know what she thinks of the  
saddle yet?

MATI

No. Rini's going in with me tomorrow  
to brush her, then see if we can put  
on the saddle and bridle.

ILIKA

(after clearing his throat)  
A bridle controls an animal by  
inflicting discomfort, even pain.

MATI

(tormented)  
I don't want to do that! Tera's my  
friend!

ILIKA

In that case, you could ride her with  
just a halter and lead rope, but it  
will take more time and effort to  
develop a good working relationship.

MATI

I'll do whatever it takes. I was a  
slave, and I'm not going to make my  
new friend into one.

EXT. FIRE CIRCLE - NIGHT

The 10 TRAVELERS are eating stew and berries around the  
campfire.

BUNA

We're all wide awake. What are we  
going to learn tonight?

ILIKA

I was just wondering that. Something  
we can study just sitting around the  
fire and talking.

MATI

(gazing into the flames)  
How to ride a donkey ...

ILIKA

Sorry. You guys know more about that  
than I do. I had never seen a donkey  
until I entered your city. I can't  
help with wild foods either. But I  
think I should teach you basic  
chemistry.

TOLI

(excitedly)  
Oh! That's like healer stuff!

ILIKA

Healers work mostly with bio-  
chemicals, but don't know the  
underlying chemistry.  
(thoughtful pause)  
(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

It all starts with energy, the smallest and simplest particles that have any effect on our world. We studied this back at Doko's Inn, just before ...

TOLI

(proudly)  
Radio!

BORO

(calmly)  
Infrared.

NETI

(raising her hand)  
Light!

SATA

Ultra ... violet. That's why we use sun hats.

ILIKA

Very good. But energy isn't always flying around like the radiation we've studied. Sometimes it settles down, organizes itself into families, little groups called atoms.

TOLI

Can you show us some?

ILIKA

(smiling)  
There's no way I could keep you from seeing it! Everything around you is made of matter, lots and lots of little, tiny atoms. Rocks, water, even something you can't see, like the air.

All the student's faces are thoughtful, almost disbelieving.

ILIKA

The element with six particles at its center is carbon, the black charcoal in the fire.

Several students find a piece of cold charcoal to play with while mumbling the name.

ILIKA

The element with seven particles is very different. It's an invisible gas, called nitrogen, that makes up  
(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)  
most of the air. Element eight,  
oxygen, is the other gas in the air.

EXT. BEDROLLS NEAR FIRE CIRCLE - NIGHT

The fire is almost out as the 10 TRAVELERS get comfortable. A star-studded sky looms overhead.

RINI  
What are stars, Ilika?

TOLI  
Everyone knows what stars are! Even  
slaves know that!

NETI  
Aren't they holes in the sky?

TOLI  
(with complete certainty)  
Of course!

Ilika remains silent, but smiles as he drifts off to sleep.

EXT. CLEARING, RUINED SHACK & CORRAL - DAY

RINI, with MATI hobbling around to watch and supervise, tries to put a saddle blanket on the DONKEY, who just walks away from every attempt.

The donkey does the same when Rini tries the halter and lead rope.

Hours later, with Mati nearly in tears, they give up, leave the corral, and plop down onto logs at the fire circle.

BORO  
I think I see your problem.

MATI  
(snaps)  
What!

BORO  
You're treating the donkey like a  
person. You're saying 'please' and  
'thank you' like they would to a  
person, but I don't think that will  
work with a donkey.

MATI  
But Tera is a ...

ILIKA  
(finger to lips)  
Neti, you have an idea?

NETI

I don't think Tera is capable of working with you by her own choice, no matter how much you brush her. I think she's more like a three-year-old child, and you're her mother.

Mati looks thoughtful and Kibi starts passing out pieces of cheese.

EXT. CORRAL - AFTERNOON

MATI leans on her crutch just a few yards from the DONKEY in the corral.

MATI

Tera! We are not playing games any more, and I am going to put this halter on you, and you are going to let Rini saddle you, or we will leave you here for the wolves!

The donkey lowers her head. Mati hobbles forward.

MATI

You and me are going to be a team, and I will not put up with silly games when we need to get things done. This is a halter. It goes over your nose like this, then over your ears, then I hook it and it's all done. You may not love it, but it's a lot better than having a knee that doesn't work, believe me, and a lot better than being eaten by wolves.

With Mati holding the donkey, Rini saddles her.

Eventually Mati, with help from Rini, mounts, but immediately screams in pain. The donkey bolts across the corral and Mati barely stays mounted.

RINI

You okay?

MATI

I have to remember to keep my leg straight. It all happened so fast, I forgot!

Mati begins to learn to work with the donkey. When communication through voice, lead rope, and feet does not go well:

MATI

No, Tera, stop!

When the donkey does what Mati wants:

MATI  
Good girl, Tera!

Eventually Rini opens the corral gate wide. Mati and the donkey walk through.

EXT. BEDROLLS NEAR FIRE CIRCLE - NIGHT

The campfire is dying down as the 10 TRAVELERS get comfortable under their blankets.

KIBI  
(looking up at the stars)  
They're not holes in the sky, are they, Ilika?

ILIKA  
The universe is far bigger and far stranger than anyone in this kingdom knows. The little stories you've heard are attempts to make the universe seem small and simple. We will go into much more detail in daytime lessons, but right now I'll just paint a picture with words so you can begin to glimpse the structure of the universe ...

EXT. CLEARING, RUINED SHACK & CORRAL - MORNING

The 10 TRAVELERS prepare to depart, this time with Mati on her donkey, and Rini carrying her crutch. They take a last, fond look at the ruined shack and corral, then take to the trail that leads across the stream and into the open hills.

EXT. REMOTE FARM - DAY

MATI and her DONKEY are in the lead when they round a bend in the trail and meet FARMER KENI holding his crude pitchfork.

ILIKA comes forward, they talk, and farmer Keni leads them to his wood shed, nearly empty this time of year. A DAUGHTER, 12, and 2 younger SONS scurry about with curiosity while doing chores.

Rini helps Mati dismount. Ilika and the students begin opening their rucksacks and spreading out their blankets.

EXT. GOAT PEN - DAY

FARMER KENI and his WIFE arrive at a goat pen out of earshot of the travelers. They begin examining the goats while talking in worried tones.

WIFE

They're the ones those priests are looking for, aren't they?

FARMER KENI

I think so. The priest hinted they were criminals of some sort, but I see nothing in their eyes but innocence and kindness. Maybe too much of both for their own good. But the priest had fear in his eyes. You saw it.

WIFE

I did.

FARMER KENI

Do we welcome them, or send them on their way?

WIFE

(after a thoughtful pause)

We welcome them, as long as they pay for what they eat and use.

EXT. REMOTE FARM - EVENING

As the sun prepares to set, the farm WIFE and DAUGHTER serve a hearty dinner to the 10 TRAVELERS on an outdoor table. Sounds of amazement from the young SONS show that the dinner pot does not often contain a whole chicken.

EXT. REMOTE FARM - MORNING

As most of the TRAVELERS pack their rucksacks, KIBI and BUNA sit at the outdoor table receiving bread, sacks of dried foods, and a small bronze cooking pot from the farm WIFE. They pay her in copper and silver pieces.

EXT. LOWLAND TRAIL - MID-MORNING

MATI (on her DONKEY) and RINI are leading when ILIKA steps beside TOLI, whispers to him, and points to the grassy hills in the west.

Toli take the lead and leaves the trail to follow a creek into the hills. Most everyone else follows him. Mati and Rini are confused for a moment, but eventually shrug and follow.

EXT. HILLS - NOON

BORO takes the lead, guiding the TRAVELERS southwest along the top of the line of hills.

EXT. TREE-LINED STREAM - EARLY AFTERNOON

NETI is leading as the TRAVELERS stop to refresh themselves.

EXT. HILLSIDE AND HILLTOP - AFTERNOON

SATA leads the TRAVELERS up a long slope to a high hilltop from which they can see the walled city of the kingdom several miles away.

EXT. TREE-LINED STREAM, SANDY CAMPSITE - LATE AFTERNOON

KIBI leads the TRAVELERS down the stream to a sandy place on the bank. She looks at Ilika and he nods. Boro lifts Mati off the donkey and all the students begin opening rucksacks and building a fire.

Once the camp is all set up, Ilika passes out pieces of paper with math problems on them. Each problem is dependent on answers from others, resulting in frustration.

SATA

I have A!  $A$  equals  $B$  plus  $C$ .

NETI

Huh?

TOLI

We have to find  $B$  and  $C$ !

RINI

$B$  is  $D$  minus one.

MIKO

So who has  $D$ ?

TOLI

No! We should look for  $C$  first!

EXT. HILLS AND ROAD - MORNING

The 10 TRAVELERS are about to descend a hillside trail into a narrow ravine through which a dirt road winds.

Suddenly, Ilika's bracelet emits a strange warning tone, and he quickly gestures for everyone to take cover behind bushes.

TOLI

What's going on?

No one answers him, but he receives punches from Boro and Miko that effectively silence him.

After a moment of tense anticipation, four SOLDIERS on HORSES come riding along the road with serious purpose, but are unaware that anyone is around.

When the soldiers disappear around the next bend in the road, the travelers rise and continue their journey to and across the road.

EXT. HILLS - EVENING

The 10 TRAVELERS are crossing high, open, grassy hills, with Mati leading, when her donkey breaks into a run. Another DONKEY, pulling a shepherd's wagon, appears over the rise, follow by dozens of SHEEP. A large DOG brings up the rear.

The 2 donkeys greet each other with snorts and squeaking sounds. On the driver's seat of the wagon sits a young SHEPHERDESS with frizzy wild hair, smiling.

The other travelers catch up with Mati, gather around, and smile or wave at the shepherdess. Sheep flow around the wagon, then spread out to eat the fresh grass.

The entire group and wagon move to a sandy place and everyone begins to set up camp.

EXT. HILL CAMPSITE AND NEARBY GRASS- NIGHT

Against a background of cracking fire and soft bleating sounds, the 10 TRAVELERS and the SHEPHERDESS laugh and talk while eating soup and bread. Buna sits beside the shepherdess, and they often make sparkling eye contact.

Suddenly, a call of distress from an ewe changes the mood.

SHEPHERDESS

Did I say something about sheep having babies? I think one is about to, and might need help. Damn! I haven't lit my lamp, and now I don't have time. I have to go deliver a baby in the dark. Come on, Bo, let's go find her!

The DOG barks and dashes off. The shepherdess heads into the darkness, Buna at her side. Ilika, Boro, and Sata follow.

SHEPHERDESS

We're looking for an ewe laying down, probably the only one. Bo?

The dog barks from the darkness farther ahead.

BUNA

Ilika?

ILIKA

I'm thinking the same thing, Buna. Would light help, Noni?

SHEPHERDESS

I'd give anything for a little light right now. If she isn't calling, she might be in big trouble. I hate this! Why didn't I light my lamp?

Suddenly, a bright beam of light pierces the darkness and begins searching for the dog and ewe.

SHEPHERDESS  
(screaming with fright)  
What's that?

BUNA  
(calm and proud)  
Just a little magic bracelet Ilika  
picked up. We use it all the time.

ILIKA  
Over there!

The group arrives at the ewe and dog, Ilika dims the light, and the shepherdess goes to work with Buna assisting. They find a leg caught in the birth canal.

SHEPHERDESS  
Silly, lamb. That doesn't work very  
well.

After some nearly brute-force effort by the shepherdess, the LAMB is born, and all those present make sounds of amazement. The ewe bleats clearly and loudly.

EXT. HILL CAMPSITE - MORNING

The shepherdess' DONKEY is hitched to its wagon, and MATI is mounted on her DONKEY. ILIKA and most of the other STUDENTS have shouldered their rucksacks. BUNA stands beside the SHEPHERDESS, holding hands, smiling.

Many hugs and handshakes are exchanged.

Finally, Ilika and his remaining 8 students take to the trail southward.

Buna picks up the LAMB from beside the EWE. She and the shepherdess climb onto the wagon and begin their journey northward, with the many SHEEP following slowly. The DOG barks to help get his sheep moving.

EXT. HILLTOP OVERLOOKING LARGE VALLEY - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS gaze into a large valley where several white plumes from steam vents, geysers, or hot springs can be seen. The student's faces reveal both fascination and fear.

EXT. HOT-SPRING TERRACES & STEAM VENT - DAY

RINI helps MATI dismount, and others unshoulder their rucksacks in a grassy area below multi-colored hot spring terraces. A steam vent hisses not far away.

MIKO

I'm gonna look at the steam thing.

ILIKA

Steam is very hot!

MIKO

I know.

The other travelers begin to set up camp in the grassy area. Ilika looks up just in time to see Miko thrusting his hand into the steam.

ILIKA

No! Mik ...

Miko's blood-curdling scream cuts off all other sound. He falls to the ground and holds his right hand out as if it burns with fire.

NETI

(running toward Miko)

Miko!

Ilika dashes to Miko, and the other students come close behind.

ILIKA

Don't touch his hand! Don't let him hit it on anything!

Miko starts shaking his right hand to be free of it, but Neti grabs his arm. Blisters rapidly form on the palm.

ILIKA

Boro, help me carry him. Kibi, his bedroll, in the shade. Neti, keep that hand safe. Rini, the pot full of cold water, quickly.

Kibi and Rini dash away as Ilika and Boro lift and carry Miko to the campsite.

Rini arrives with the cold water, and Ilika plunges Miko's hand into it. The others continue helping as they are able.

EXT. HOT-SPRING CAMP - EVENING

SATA tends a pot of soup on the fire as ILIKA applies ointment from a small corked jar to MIKO'S burned hand.

KIBI crushes the juice from a bowl of berries with a stick, then hands it to MIKO, who drinks and puckers from the sourness.

SATA

Why sour, Ilika?

ILIKA

The biggest thing we have to worry about now is infection. Microbiology lesson tomorrow, but sour means acid. Remember the hydrogen ion? It kills, or at least slows down, the little bugs that cause infection. That's also why we have to keep those blisters from tearing. If they get torn, microbes would get in, and that kind of infection would be very hard to fight.

An anxious look appears on Neti's face as Sata hands her a cup of soup and Neti begins helping Miko to eat.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROPPING ABOVE HOT SPRINGS - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS are pleasantly tired after hiking up from the valley floor. Miko's hand is loosely wrapped in cloth.

SATA

(frowning)

Why are we staying here so long?

MIKO

(in a good mood)

One of us was stupid enough to burn himself.

NETI

And there's lots of wild food in the area!

SATA

(nearly whining)

Don't you guys feel something ... evil ... about this place? It smells weird, and look what it did to Miko!

ILIKA

I assure you, Sata, that everything here is completely natural. The world has many places that can make us uncomfortable. Calling them evil, or any other bad name, doesn't make them go away.

Sata looks at Boro, then back at Ilika, and sighs.

EXT. HOT SPRING TERRACES - MID-MORNING

The rucksacks are all packed and the DONKEY is saddled as the 9 TRAVELERS reluctantly emerge from a last dip in the hot

springs, towel off, shoulder their rucksacks, and take to the trail westward down the valley.

EXT. WIDE TRAIL THROUGH VALLEY - DAY

ILIKA'S bracelet again emits its warning sound, and all 9 TRAVELERS scurry behind bushes and trees.

After a moment of silence, 3 SOLDIERS on HORSES ride by.

EXT. HILL OVERLOOKING OCEAN - LATE AFTERNOON

The DONKEY grazes at a lower point on the hill. The 9 TRAVELERS climb the boulders (with Boro and Rini helping Mati) to the very top, then gaze over the open ocean a hundred or more feet below. Ilika is unfazed, but none of the students have seen it before and are awestruck and nearly dizzy.

INT. NATURAL CAVE NEAR THE BEACH - NIGHT W/MOONLIGHT

Part of the cave is high and dry, and a fire burns in an old campfire ring. Evidence of smuggling commerce is scattered about: old broken crates, jugs, barrels, rope, etc. Small waves breaking on the beach can be clearly heard. The 9 TRAVELERS are finishing a meal of soup and crackers.

Later, as several students begin laying out their blankets in dry, sandy places, Ilika looks around with a worried expression. Boro, tending the fire, notices his concern.

BORO

Sata? She's out looking at the ocean.

Ilika nods and wanders out of the cave.

EXT. BEACH WITH RISING TIDE - NIGHT W/MOONLIGHT

ILIKA sees SATA sitting on the sand just above the reach of the waves, and sits down near her, but is silent for a while.

ILIKA

The ocean is very powerful, has many dangers, and some funny smells. Different, but also similar to the hot springs and steam vent. How are you doing with places like this?

SATA

(after thought)

Slowly making peace with them. I've always had walls around me, and parents nearby. You do some of the things my parents did, but you know when to let me ... be grown up and take care of myself. It's scary sometimes.

They scoot farther up the beach to avoid a wave.

ILIKA

Personal power is the ability to stand on your own two feet, with a smile on your face, in the middle of a universe that contains a million ways to crush you.

SATA

(after reflection)

I'm working on the two feet. Maybe when they don't feel so shaky, I'll try the smile too.

ILIKA

(after some silence)

I'm going in. Good night.

SATA

Good night. I'll be in soon ... or else the ocean will push me in.

EXT. BEACH AT LOW TIDE, ROCKS AND MUSSELS EXPOSED - DAY

The 8 STUDENTS are all sitting on the sand (Mati with her right leg straight), forming letters of the alphabet in the wet sand with sticks. Noises of frustration repeatedly come from most of them. Only Sata and Kibi are having a fairly easy time. ILIKA walks back and forth, giving pointers.

ILIKA

Good, Miko, but make that tail a little longer so it doesn't get confused with another letter.

Boro's stick breaks, and he growls and throws the pieces into the ocean.

ILIKA

Okay, enough for today. Let's collect mussels and firewood ...

Most of the students toss their sticks and bolt away even before Ilika is finished speaking. He wanders over to where Kibi has sat down to pry mussels from a rock with a knife.

KIBI

Will writing get any easier?

ILIKA

Of course. It's a physical skill, and our bodies take time learning new things.

KIBI  
(looking far away)  
Is there a job on your ship I can  
learn to do?

ILIKA  
Oh, yes. I can already see which job  
each of you would do best.

KIBI  
I know it will be a hard decision.

ILIKA  
Actually, after the experiences we're  
having, I could almost pick my five  
right now. I'm sure I'll have no  
trouble by the end of summer.

In the silence that follows, Ilika kisses Kibi's neck. She  
shudders with happiness and smiles.

EXT. PORT TOWN MARKETPLACE ON THE WHARF - MORNING

The small fishing/trading village is little more than one  
street along the wharf beside a protected cove. One large  
wooden sailing ship is unloading. Small fishing boats come  
and go. Sea gulls squawk. A dozen or so wagons and carts are  
set up along the wharf. The 9 TRAVELERS are in small groups,  
each pretending to not know the others.

Boro and Sata buy grains and nuts from a wagon. Miko and Neti  
buy fresh vegetables at a cart. Toli and Kibi get bread and  
sweet biscuits at the bakery. Ilika, Rini, and Mati acquire  
salt and spices from a cart.

EXT. CROSSROAD NORTH OF PORT TOWN - DAY

The shopping GROUPS from the previous scene met, Ilika and  
Kibi rejoin and hold hands, and everyone takes to the smallest  
of the ways, a minor cart road that leads west, toward the  
ocean.

EXT. WIDE SPOT ON CART ROAD - DAY

The ocean can be heard not far ahead, when several MEN,  
dressed as deck hands or laborers, block the way. More MEN,  
wielding knives and clubs, appear on the sides and behind.  
The STUDENTS huddle together with fear. The DONKEY gives her  
two-tone call loudly and tried to run, but Mati holds the  
reins tightly.

MAN  
Looks what we gots here! The ones  
who've been spendin' money in town  
like it was beach sand!

ILIKA  
(firmly to Mati)  
Mati, dismount.

MATI  
But Tera ...

ILIKA  
Now!

Mati remains confused, but Boro lifts her off the donkey, who immediately bolts toward the ocean. The men make way for the frightened donkey and laugh.

MAN  
We figures if you got so much money  
to spend, you've probably got lots  
more. And even if you don't got that  
much, the pretty girls'll be fun to  
play with, right guys?

SEVERAL MEN  
(laughing and jeering)  
Yeah!

ILIKA  
(firm command)  
Boro, get Mati on the ground.

Boro lowers Mati to the sand firmly.

MAN  
Ways I figures it, you boys got two  
choices. Drop yer bags and take off  
them nice clothes and walk away, or  
the birds can pick yer bones when  
we're done with you.

ILIKA  
Everyone down on the ground!

Ilika taps a code into his bracelet and a strange high-pitched sound fills everyone's mind as Ilika turns a complete circle, aiming his bracelet at those standing. The men and Toli crumple to the ground, unconscious.

MIKO  
(fists of triumph in the air)  
Yes! But you got Toli, too.

ILIKA  
Don't worry, he's just asleep.

MATI  
Can I get up now?

ILIKA

Yes. Everyone can get up. Sata, walk with Mati. Boro, help me carry Toli. Everyone's going to wake up in about a quarter hour, and I want us ... let me see ... on that little hill by the beach.

MATI

What about Tera?

ILIKA

I'm glad she ran. She could have hurt someone as she fell.

RINI

Don't worry, Mati, we'll find Tera.

EXT. HILL NEAR BEACH - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS (with Toli still seated and rubbing his eyes) watch as the MEN awaken, look at each other, and run back toward town as fast as they can go.

EXT. BEACH WITH SAND SPIT - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS arrive at the beach and discover that the DONKEY has run onto a sand spit and is frozen with fear. With the tide rising, the spit is already an island, and will soon disappear entirely.

Ilika and Boro wade out to the spit and lead the frightened animal back to the beach. Mati hugs her precious donkey.

EXT. CAPE AND BAY - SUNSET

The 9 TRAVELERS come to a cape with a bay to their right and a village at the bay's innermost point.

EXT. ROAD ON HILL ABOVE BAY - MID-MORNING

Just before losing sight of the bay, the 9 TRAVELERS pause on the road and look back at the village, bay, and open ocean beyond.

EXT. ANCIENT FOREST - FULL SUMMER, DAY

As they walk northward along the dirt road through an old-growth forest of trees towering 100-200 feet above them, ILIKA seems at ease, but the STUDENTS all gaze upward in awe, sometimes turn circles, and occasionally become dizzy.

Ilika's bracelet chimes its warning, and the travelers scurry behind huge tree trunks before several SOLDIERS on HORSES come galloping by, heading the same direction, north.

When the soldiers are gone, the travelers gather beside the

road, Ilika points into the forest, several students nod, and they begin a cross-country journey.

EXT. CAMP IN ANCIENT FOREST - EVENING

While SATA and NETI cook, other STUDENTS follow ILIKA as he places rocks and pine cones to create a large compass rose on the forest floor.

Later, with all the students present, Ilika demonstrates a navigation problem by drawing with a stick in the dirt, first on the compass rose, then doing the math, such as:

$$330 + 60 \text{ MODULUS } 360 = 30$$

Rini, Toli, and Sata quickly nod with understanding. Mati nods more slowly. Kibi, Neti, Miko, and Boro frown.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The 9 TRAVELERS are sitting around the fire, eating berries from a cup being passed, and laughing about something that was said. Neti yawns, and for a moment everyone is silent.

RINI

We're being watched.

ILIKA

(softly, without any panic)  
Report.

RINI

It comes and goes, about dog size. Sometimes on one side, sometimes another. Never gets close enough to see more than gleaming eyes, about fifty feet away.

KIBI

I think I've seen it.

BORO

This is a forest. We're the visitors.

ILIKA

Yes. Looks like we need to set a watch. Wood supply?

Boro looks at the wood pile, and nods.

EXT. CAMP IN ANCIENT FOREST - EARLY MORNING

BORO wakes, ties his cloak tightly against the morning cold, and joins KIBI, still on watch. Together they walk to the edge of camp and look for tracks in the dirt, find what they are looking for, and speak the same word at once.

BORO and KIBI

Fox.

EXT. ANCIENT FOREST - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS are in a carefree mood, spread out loosely in a line as they walk along a track through the forest, laughing and chatting. Mati on her donkey is in the lead.

NETI

How tall was your tree, Miko?

MIKO

Two hundred and ten feet!

BORO

How do you know?

MIKO

Duh. Tangent of forty-five degrees,  
or else I flew, which do you think?

Ilika smiles and the students laugh.

Mati and her donkey, in the lead, crest a slight rise. Toli comes next.

The FOX, following the humans at a discrete distance, gives a slight whine and dashes away into the woods.

Rini notices Toli run back over the rise, gasping for breath as he hides behind a fallen log. Rini frowns, quickly slips out of his rucksack, rips a low branch from a nearby tree, and strides over the rise.

Rini finds Mati using all her strength and concentration to keep the donkey under control, who is nearly face-to-face with a huge TIMBER WOLF in their path. Rini dashes beside the donkey and thrusts the broken end of his branch forward.

Ilika, Kibi, Sata, Neti, and Boro begin to crest the rise and take in the situation.

The wolf leaps toward Mati. Rini's branch catches the wolf in the shoulder, knocking it to the side. Ilika's bracelet emits its strange high-pitched sound, and the wolf tumbles to the ground and lays still.

Rini leaps and stands over the unconscious wolf, branch poised to spear it. For a moment, there is no other sound than Rini's heavy breathing.

Boro, Sata, and Neti help Mati dismount, but Mati is focused on comforting her donkey with soothing words and touches.

Kibi goes to the sleeping wolf and examines it, noticing its protruding ribs and other signs of near-starvation.

KIBI  
He's asleep, Rini.

Rini waits a moment more, then relaxes and throws down his branch, revealing that his hands and arms are covered with bleeding scrapes from the rough bark.

Ilika stands back, surveying the entire situation and watching for any other dangers, bracelet poised.

With his good hand, Miko brings Rini's rucksack forward. Toli, head bowed, drags himself along at Miko's side.

TOLI  
I'm ... I'm so sorry, Mati.

Mati, still comforting her donkey, looks at Toli without expression and only nods.

ILIKA  
We've got a quarter hour, maybe a little more! Let's get moving!

KIBI  
(still beside the wolf)  
I want all the dried fish we have left!

Several students begin opening rucksacks.

EXT. ANCIENT FOREST, WOLF ATTACK LOCATION - DAY

The humans are gone and the FOX watches from a respectful distance as the WOLF sleeps. The only sounds are insects and birds until the wolf stirs and whines. He tries to stand, but some of his legs are still numb, and he can smell the pile of fish, so he drags himself in a circle while his legs regain feeling. Soon he settles down to his meal, but keeps his eyes on the forest around him.

Without letting herself be seen, the fox slips away.

EXT. BLUFF OVERLOOKING LUMBER TOWN - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS sit on a rock outcropping and observe the medieval mill town in the forested ravine below. A stream tumbles through the town, with numerous wooden bridges spanning it. Hand saws can be heard cutting lumber.

Ilika points to Kibi and Boro, and they nod.

INT. STABLE - LATE AFTERNOON

RINI unsaddles the DONKEY while MATI, leaning on her crutch, hands the STABLE MASTER several coins. His eyes open wide with surprise.

STABLE MASTER

This one gets grain! She's a fine animal. Not too stubborn?

MATI

She helped me fend off a timber wolf this morning.

The stable master's eyes open even wider with respect and awe.

INT. INN COMMON ROOM - EVENING

ILIKA, RINI, and MATI are at one table, KIBI, MIKO, and NETI at another, and BORO, SATA, and TOLI at a third. The 3 groups are pretending to not know each other as they eat fish, bread, and stewed greens.

The INNKEEPER putters through the common room, serving more fish to anyone interested directly from a frying pan. Not many are interested.

INNKEEPER

For a few extra coppers, if you tell me ahead of time, I can get good mutton!

Ilika shrivels his nose, but Miko, at another table, licks his lips.

INNKEEPER

You folks are quite lucky, you know.

ILIKA

How so?

INNKEEPER

There's talk of a band of sorcerers coming up the road from Port Town. People say they used a spell to put the whole town to sleep. Had a beast with them too, three times the size of a man. Dragon, maybe.

Ilika has a slight smile on his face. Rini is trying hard not to laugh. Mati's eyes are sparkling, and the other students are putting the pieces together also.

ILIKA

Lucky for us we didn't come up that road!

With a wrinkled brow, the innkeeper nods and returns to the kitchen.

As soon as the innkeeper is gone, all the students burst out snickering. Ilika just grins.

INT. ILIKA/RINI/MATI'S SLEEPING ROOM - LATE EVENING

All 8 STUDENTS are sitting on the 3 beds in that room. On the floor, ILIKA, by the light of a tall candle, draws a large circle on a sheet of paper, then adds latitude and longitude lines and begins to number them.

The students pay close attention.

INT. BORO/SATA/TOLI'S SLEEPING ROOM - DAWN

BORO awakes with a strange authoritative female voice echoing in his mind.

VOICE

Boro, go into the wind, even if it  
looks dangerous!

Boro lies in bed a moment longer, pondering what he thought he heard.

VOICE

Remember Boro, into the wind!

At the same moment, Boro smells smoke.

BORO

Sata! Toli! Wake up! Get your  
boots on!

INT. KIBI/MIKO/NETI'S SLEEPING ROOM - DAWN

KIBI is lying awake with her hands behind her head.

VOICE

Kibi, lead your people into the wind!

With a frown, Kibi hops up, then goes to the window and looks out. She smells smoke and sees the fire in the distance.

KIBI

Miko! Neti! We have to go!

INT. BORO/SATA/TOLI'S ROOM - DAWN

BORO is hurrying to close his rucksack. SATA has already packed her own rucksack, and is helping TOLI to finish packing his.

TOLI

(whining)  
But how do you know ...

SATA

Just put on your damn pack!

Boro shoulders his rucksack and leads Toli and Sata out the

door.

INT. ILIKA/RINI/MATI'S SLEEPING ROOM - DAWN

ILIKA and RINI both have their rucksacks packed and shouldered. ILIKA picks up MATI, her bad right knee is forced to bend, and she screams from the pain.

ILIKA

Sorry ...

Ilika carries Mati out the door, and Rini follows.

INT. INN CORRIDOR AND STAIRS - DAWN

Many PEOPLE are panicking as they bustle along the corridor and descend the stairs. Smoke is already in the air, and many are coughing.

ILIKA continues to carry MATI, who is crying from the pain. RINI follows calmly with the crutch.

BORO leads his group, and SATA pokes TOLI to keep moving.

MIKO looks around with frightened eyes, but NETI pulls him along and continues following KIBI.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE STABLE - DAWN

ILIKA, MATI, RINI, BORO, SATA, TOLI, a MAN, and a WOMAN all gather outside the stable just as a burning tree falls from the hillside above and ignites its back wall. The silhouettes of frightened animals can be seen as they fling themselves about in the stable, calling loudly and trying to get out.

MAN

My horse!

MATI

Tera!

Ilika sets Mati down and Rini hands her the crutch.

ILIKA

Stay here, all of you!

Ilika strides to the big stable door, pulls it open, and goes in. Suddenly the stable is filled with a blue light and the fire almost completely dies out. A moment later, a HORSE comes running out, followed by a COW, and finally the DONKEY led by Ilika. As he steps out of the building, the blue light disappears and the fire returns.

MAN

(holding his horse)

Sorcery!

WOMAN  
(holding her cow)  
Witchcraft!

Ilika takes in the situation quickly, grabs Mati and plants her on the donkey, and quickly leads 5 of his students westward at a fast walk, toward the worst of the smoke and fire, the direction everyone else is trying to flee.

EXT. SMOKE-FILLED WOODS - DAWN

KIBI is trying to lead her group, but can see little, and is coughing some. NETI is trying to follow, and pull MIKO along, but is coughing constantly.

MIKO  
I can't see a thing!

KIBI  
Just hold Neti's hand.

MIKO  
I am!

Kibi attempts to see which way to go, but the wind is gusting every which way.

VOICE  
Follow me, Kibi!

Kibi looks ahead and sees a floating GREEN BALL OF LIGHT dancing in the air, but not being blown by the wind. After coughing and swallowing once, Kibi follows it, pulling Neti and Miko along behind.

EXT. UNBURNED WOODS - MORNING

ILIKA is walking beside the DONKEY, both following a floating GREEN BALL OF LIGHT. MATI sits on the donkey but is doing little but rubbing her eyes. BORO, SATA, RINI, and TOLI come along behind, rubbing their eyes and coughing.

EXT. SMOLDERING BURNED SHACK - MORNING

The GREEN BALL OF LIGHT leads ILIKA'S GROUP to a the ruins of a shack on the edge of the burned area. They hear a whimpering sound in the unburned woods nearby and find a frightened barefoot girl, MISA, about 7. She hesitates, but soon responds to Sata's offer of embrace.

Boro lifts Misa onto the donkey in front of Mati.

EXT. UNBURNED WOODS NEAR SMOLDERING SHACK - MORNING

The FOX watches as Misa is found and comforted. When the humans depart, the fox turns to leave, but is suddenly face to face with a SMALL GREEN BALL OF LIGHT. She jerks to a halt,

but then can't resist the temptation to follow the light, which floats away into the woods.

EXT. ROAD IN UNBURNED WOODS - AFTERNOON

ILIKA'S GROUP (plus MISA) and KIBI'S GROUP meet, share embraces and friendly touches, and begin chatting.

TOLI

You should have seen the people's faces when Ilika put out the fire and rescued their animals ...

The (now) 10 travelers begin to follow the road northward and steeply uphill.

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

The FOX looks down on the group of 10 humans on the road. Several FOX CUBS, of different ages and conditions (some with singed fur) creep to the top of the ridge and line up beside the adult fox to see.

EXT. VILLAGE - MORNING

The 10 TRAVELERS enter a village crammed with REFUGEES from the fire, most poor and now homeless, many with burns and other injuries.

Ilika takes Misa by the hand and they wander among the people. In response to their (unheard) questions, some people shake their heads, others shrug, still others stare blankly.

Ilika and Misa return to the students. They get Mati mounted on the donkey, shoulder their rucksacks, and step onto the road. With tears in her eyes but determination on her face, Misa plants her bare feet beside theirs, pointed in the same direction.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW AND FARMSTEAD - LATE AFTERNOON

MISA is riding on TOLI'S shoulders as the 10 TRAVELERS approach the farmstead. A burley FARMER emerges with a threatening scythe held high.

FARMER

If you're homeless refugees looking for a handout, you just head right on back! There's nothing here for you! If you're goat thieves, I'll chase you back!

Mati, Miko, and Misa show fear. Kibi bristles with anger.

ILIKA

What if we're honorable travelers who can pay for supplies with good copper and silver?

FARMER

Well, that's more like it. Did you say silver? What might you be needing that would make you part with silver?

INT. FARMSTEAD - EVENING

The house is well-equipped with work tables, a great hearth and a smaller kitchen hearth, and ladders leading to lofts under the peaked roof. Several of the farmer's SONS and DAUGHTERS come and go with goat milk, vegetables, garden tools, etc.

The FARMER'S WIFE makes a pair of leather moccasins for MISA, trying them on the proud girl.

A DAUGHTER, 16, sews a simple sun hat for Misa.

The 10 TRAVELERS partake of a simple but filling meal with the farm family: goat stew, bread, vegetables, goat milk.

EXT. FARMSTEAD - LATE EVENING

After dinner, around an outdoor fire pit, the FARM FAMILY and TRAVELERS are telling stories and laughing.

NETI

Is keeping goats about the same as shepherding?

DAUGHTER, 9

Goats are smarter, and have minds of their own. Sheep wander off. Goats sneak off!

As everyone laughs, a DAUGHTER, 13, taps Boro on the shoulder, then walks away into the moonlit meadow. He follows.

Sata looks and sees them walking and talking. A tear rolls down her cheek.

EXT. FARMSTEAD - NIGHT

Most of the STUDENTS are asleep under their blankets. SATA is looking up at the stars and sniffing softly. BORO appears above her carrying his bedroll.

BORO

Can I sleep beside you?

SATA

If ... if you want to.

Boro gets comfortable under his blankets.

BORO

Josa asked me to stay here with her.  
I listened to everything she had to  
say, just ... to be kind, I guess.  
But I finally had to tell her, I have  
a road in front of me, and a girl I  
like already.

Sata's hand creeps out from under her blankets, and finds  
Boro's hand waiting for her.

EXT. MEADOW OUTSIDE FARMSTEAD - MORNING

The 10 TRAVELERS wave good-bye to the FARM FAMILY, get Mati  
mounted, and shoulder their rucksacks. They take to the trail  
that runs straight northward across the meadow.

EXT. MEADOW, FARTHER NORTH - MID-DAY

With ILIKA looking over their shoulders and pointing out  
mistakes, RINI is drawing a right triangle and noting down  
distances and angles, MIKO and NETI are using Ilika's  
knowledge processor to take an angle bearing, TOLI is pacing  
off a distance, and SATA is doing a multiplication on paper.

EXT. MEADOW, EVEN FARTHER NORTH - MID-AFTERNOON

MATI takes a bearing with the knowledge processor from atop  
the DONKEY, and BORO works on a division problem on paper.

EXT. MEADOW, AGAIN FARTHER NORTH - LATE AFTERNOON

KIBI

Sata, review for me the tangent  
function.

SATA

The far side divided by the near  
side.

KIBI

Neti, tangent of eight degrees,  
please.

NETI

(after shuffling some papers)  
Point one four zero five.

Kibi works on paper for a moment.

KIBI

Toli, Sata, Rini, check this step for me.

Toli, Sata, and Rini all nod.

KIBI

That mountain is ten thousand one hundred and thirty-five feet high!

ILIKA grins with pride and all the students clap, cheer, or dance with happiness.

MISA

(from under her new sun hat)  
Can we go now?

EXT. NORTH END OF MEADOW - MORNING

MIKO puts out their morning campfire as the 10 TRAVELERS break camp.

Boro in leading when they come to the very end of the huge alpine meadow where the trail begins to climb steeply into the mountains to the east. He looks back, glimpses the last farmstead they visited, and smiles slightly.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY

About a thousand feet higher, SATA is leading and the trees are rapidly thinning out as the other TRAVELERS and donkey pause. Misa looks out over the forest that was her home, sees the burned area still smoldering, and cringes.

Another thousand feet higher, Miko is leading when they again pause. Toli looks beyond the burned area, to the forest where the wolf lives, and his face reveals mixed feelings, including guilt.

Another thousand feet higher, Kibi is leading when they take another break. Sata looks to the southwest, sees the ocean, and grins with understanding.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - LATE AFTERNOON

The last thousand feet becomes difficult as a bitter wind tries to blow the 10 TRAVELERS off the mountain. All wear cloaks, except Boro, his lent to Misa. Ilika leads up to the pass, where snow lingers even in summer. He turns and looks at the lowlands, glimpses the medieval walled city far away, looks over his students and Misa, and smiles slightly.

MISA

I'm freezing!

KIBI

Let's get through the pass and down  
out of the wind!

People and donkey quickly file through the pass. The wind becomes a gentle breeze and they look down on a pristine alpine lake about a thousand feet below, to which the trail leads.

EXT. MEADOW OUTSIDE FARMSTEAD - MORNING

Two PRIESTS, one superior and proud, the other inferior and dutiful, walk from the farmstead to their HORSES.

SUPERIOR PRIEST

It's amazing how little silver it  
takes to loosen the tongues of  
peasants.

INFERIOR PRIEST

They're two days ahead of us ...

SUPERIOR PRIEST

Which means they could easily be deep  
in the mountains by now ... or to  
that blasted monastery. We'll have  
to ride hard.

The priests push their horses to a fast trot as they head north across the meadow.

EXT. TRAIL ABOVE ALPINE LAKE - LATE AFTERNOON

Both HORSES sweat and tremble as they staggered down the trail from the pass. The SUPERIOR PRIEST gestures for a halt. His horse coughs several times and starts shaking, but the priest ignores it as he pulls out a spyglass. He carefully scans the entire lake, but just when he is about to see the camp on the far side, a sudden flash of green light blinds him. He lowers the spyglass and rubs his eye.

INFERIOR PRIEST

You see something?

SUPERIOR PRIEST

No, just a reflection from the water.  
I want to get to that sorry excuse  
for a town by tonight. That's the  
best place to catch up with the  
filthy criminals.

INFERIOR PRIEST

But the horses ...

The superior priest turns and glares, and the inferior priest lowers his eyes. A moment later, both priests set spurs to their horses' flanks.

EXT. ALPINE CAMP - DUSK

The 10 TRAVELERS are huddled around a small campfire. The stack of firewood is very small. Cups of thin soup are passed around.

Ilika senses a change in the weather. He looks up at the dark sky, then opens the cover of his bracelet and taps at the tiny keys within.

ILIKA

The air pressure is falling.

TOLI

(irritated)

Isn't it a little late for lessons?

ILIKA

(as the first flakes fall)

Yes, too late for lessons, but a very good time to get ready for snow.

EXT. ALPINE CAMP - MORNING

The entire camp is covered with an inch of snow. The 10 TRAVELERS are awake, but still under their blankets.

They hear footsteps in the snow. Before anyone can respond, Ilika's blankets are pulled open and the weathered face of a middle-aged WOMAN peers down at him from deep inside her hood.

RINI finds himself looking into the eyes of a GIRL about 8. The same thing happens to each of the others.

All of the women and girls wear simple religious robes and moccasins. None of them speak.

EXT. MONASTERY MAIN HALL - DUSK

The WOMEN and GIRLS lead the 10 TRAVELERS to the monastery's large, multi-level log building that towers over the travelers as they approach.

A young PRIESTESS silently greets the travelers and gestures that she will take the donkey to a nearby shed. Mati is torn for a moment, but then dismounts with Rini's help. Sata hands her the crutch.

INT. MONASTERY MAIN HALL - DUSK

Rustic and simple but cozy, animal skin rugs, pillows, and stools surround the great hearth where a PRIESTESS gestures for the 10 TRAVELERS to leave their rucksacks. Many WOMEN and GIRLS silently move to and fro carrying baskets of bread, jugs, unlit torches, etc.

The priestess leads the travelers out the opposite side of the

main hall.

EXT. RITUAL FIELD - NIGHT

Torches burn in a circle about a hundred feet across, and an iron brazier sits in the middle, unlit. The 10 TRAVELERS follow the PRIESTESS along the outside of the circle.

Some of the students and Misa shuffle their feet nervously as many more WOMEN and GIRLS gather for the ritual.

A richly-dressed HIGH PRIESTESS raises her arms and begins a chant in a strange language. Dozens of priestesses join in.

Several initiates (women and girls) in plain robes enter the circle and kneel before the high priestess. She touches each and they join in the chanting and follow her around the circle.

The chanting reaches a fever pitch as several of the monastery's youngest girls come forward with torches, thrusting them into the brazier all at once. Purple flames leap into the sky.

The purple flames quickly die out, all other torches are snuffed, and the chanting ends.

In the darkness and silence the follows, the aurora lights begin to play in the sky: ghostly green curtains, rapidly-moving blue curtains, flashes of purple, and sometimes a stationary red glow.

With open mouths, the students and Misa watch, sometimes turning circles where they stand. Ilika appears enchanted but not surprised. Many of the priestesses drop to their knees.

After a time, the aurora lights fade.

INT. MONASTERY MAIN HALL - EARLY MORNING

The 10 TRAVELERS awaken under their blankets on soft animal skins near the big hearth.

WOMEN and GIRLS are already going about their morning chores with loaves of bread, pots of porridge, and buckets of goat milk. They work silently, except for some laughter and giggling by the girls.

A woman brings a tray of breakfast food to the hearth, and the travelers gather around to eat.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MINING TOWN - EARLY MORNING

A middle-aged PRIESTESS, breathing deeply from hours of hard walking, strides down a mountain trail into the flimsy mining town.

She ignores PEOPLE as she strides through town, and they give her a wide berth. She enters the simple inn.

INT. MINING TOWN INN - MORNING

The inn consists of a half dozen bunks, one big table, and a hearth, all in one room. The INNKEEPER stirs a pot of porridge. The 2 PRIESTS who have been following the travelers, and one MINER, sit at the table sipping mugs.

The PRIESTESS bursts into the room and plops down at the table.

PRIESTESS

Goat milk, Nori!

The INNKEEPER pours her a large cup of milk.

PRIESTESS

(to the innkeeper)

You wouldn't believe what that snow left on our doorstep. Group of ten, with a donkey. Gave 'em bread and sent 'em back west, where snow doesn't fall in mid-summer!

The innkeeper laughs deeply and the priestess joins him, never looking at the priests.

SUPERIOR PRIEST

Innkeeper, hurry up with that porridge!

(to the inferior priest)

Go out to the stable and get the horse saddled!

EXT. MOUNTAIN MINING TOWN - MORNING

The SUPERIOR PRIEST mounts their only HORSE (originally the inferior priest's horse). He spurs the HORSE hard. It whinnies with pain, and bolts westward.

The INFERIOR PRIEST cringes, sighs, and follows on foot.

EXT. TRAIL NEAR MONASTERY - MID-MORNING

A GIRL silently leads the 10 TRAVELERS (rucksacks now bulging with fresh supplies) to a fork in the trail. She points to the left branch, eastward, then smiles and waves as the travelers disappear down the trail.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS AND STEEP TRAIL DOWN - DAY

The 10 TRAVELERS ponder the very steep trail before them that winds through eroded badlands and piles of huge boulders. A sagebrush-covered high desert spreads out several thousand feet below.

Along the trail, the donkey proves that she is sure-footed on the rough, steep trail. Toli and Neti are much less so, but everyone is in good spirits.

EXT. BOULDERS ALONG STEEP TRAIL - AFTERNOON

MIKO see a series of boulders he can leap among, climbs the first, leaps to several more, then pauses and looks ahead.

MIKO

I'm king of the world! There's a short level stretch ahead, then a steep switchback.

Miko begins to leap boulders again, and is out of sight of the other travelers when he yells desperately, screams as he falls, and lands with a thud.

NETI

Miko, no!

NETI tries to run in that direction, but BORO holds her while ILIKA and KIBI make their way to the scene of the accident.

EXT. ROCKS BELOW LAST BIG BOULDER - LATE AFTERNOON

As MIKO twitches and struggles to breathe, ILIKA places his bracelet on Miko's arm. It emits a complex tone and Ilika cringes.

ILIKA

(calling out)

Get Neti down here!

BORO and SATA help NETI down to Miko's resting place.

ILIKA

Take his hand and talk to him, Neti.  
You don't have long.

NETI

Miko! Please be okay, Miko. Please

...

(her words became deep sobs)

Time passes and the sun disappears over the mountains as 2 or 3 of the others sit with Neti while she grieves, with others sitting alone in sorrow, poking around looking for a campsite, or half-heartedly collecting firewood.

EXT. CAMPSITE NEAR BOULDERS - MORNING

MIKO'S BODY lies between the small campfire and a large boulder, and NETI sits beside him, sleepless. RINI is on watch, tending the fire, as the other TRAVELERS begin to stir.

Breakfast is eaten in complete silence. Kibi spoons porridge

to Neti, who continues to sit in a daze beside the body.

EXT. CAMPSITE NEAR BOULDERS - NOON

The day is becoming warm, and several shriveled noses reveal that the body is starting to stink. ILIKA sits down beside NETI, still at her vigil.

NETI

What do I do now, Ilika?

ILIKA

We need to bury Miko, and have whatever ceremony you want.

NETI

I'll probably just cry.

EXT. CAMPSITE NEAR BOULDERS - EARLY AFTERNOON

The 9 remaining TRAVELERS work with sticks to dig into the hard dirt, or move rocks out of the hole, or to the site from other places.

EXT. CAMPSITE NEAR BOULDERS - LATE AFTERNOON

MIKO'S body is now in his shallow grave. The 9 TRAVELERS sit around the grave, tossing in pebbles, wild flowers, or words written on paper.

Later, Ilika and Boro work to fill the grave, with others handing them rocks.

The sun slips out of sight behind the mountains.

EXT. CAMPSITE NEAR BOULDERS - LATE EVENING

The 9 TRAVELERS are quietly eating soup when several of them notice that a glowing, shimmering multi-colored light has appeared over Miko's grave.

RINI

Ilika, why is there a little aurora right over Miko's grave? I thought you said his spirit left when he died.

ILIKA

It did. This is something else. This is a little gift from those who watch over us. They are very happy we have learned from Miko's mistakes and honored his memory, and also very happy we are now ready to move on.

SATA

But ... who is watching over us?

ILIKA

I can't name names, Sata, but I can tell you that you are all very important. It is not often that a group of slaves, and an innkeeper's daughter, aspire to learn the things I am teaching you, make a journey like we are making, and form bonds of trust like we are forming. It is very rare, and very important.

Neti is silent, but smiles slightly as she gazes up at the colorful dancing lights over Miko's grave.

EXT. CAMPSITE NEAR BOULDERS - MORNING

The TRAVELERS get Mati mounted on her donkey and shoulder their rucksacks. Misa now has Miko's rucksack, although lightly packed. Each of them takes a final look back at the grave, some waving farewell. Neti starts crying and nearly walks backwards, stumbling, as she follows the others onto the trail.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - NOON

The day has grown hot and the vegetation has changed to oaks and sagebrush as the 9 TRAVELERS continue trudging down the mountain. Neti is no longer crying, but neither does she smile as she walks with Kibi or Sata.

Ilika's bracelet chimes its warning tone and the travelers all scurry behind bushes.

Two hot, tired SOLDIERS on HORSES slowly walk up the steep trail, paying little attention to their surroundings.

EXT. BARREN HILLS - LATE AFTERNOON

The 9 TRAVELERS drag themselves along. Neti now walks beside Toli.

EXT. HIDDEN RAVINE NEAR CATTLE TOWN - EARLY FALL, MID-MORNING

Cattle can be heard in the distance as most of the TRAVELERS relax in the shade of some scrubby trees.

TOLI and SATA return to the hidden camp from the direction of the town.

Neti quickly goes and sits beside Toli, helping him unpack his rucksack full of food from the town. Sata begins to unpack hers.

TOLI

Can you believe it? There are actually rewards out for the capture  
(MORE)

TOLI (CONT)

of the so-called sorcerers and  
witches who set the fire at Lumber  
Town!

Ilika and several others laugh or smile.

SATA

It gets worse. You won't be laughing  
when you hear this. One of the  
things they're looking for is a young  
crippled witch who rides a donkey.

Mati frowns deeply, then cracks a little smile. Sata and Neti  
continue unpacking food.

TOLI

And it's got a slave market.

Everyone is completely silent for a long moment.

NETI

Couldn't we just ... use your  
bracelet, Ilika, to put the slave  
traders to sleep, then free all the  
slaves? Or at least the children?

Most everyone is immediately interested in the idea and looks  
at Ilika. He takes a moment to gather his thoughts.

ILIKA

It's very tempting, but has some  
tactical problems, and an ethical  
problem, at least for me.

(he looks around at them)

The tactical problem is that you  
might have to put the whole town to  
sleep. If you just did the people at  
the slave market, then what happens  
if someone across the street sees  
everyone on the ground? If you put  
him to sleep, what about someone a  
stone's throw down the street who  
sees him?

NETI

(deflated)

I see what you mean.

RINI

Please tell us about the ethical  
problem, too.

ILIKA

It's nothing terrible to help an  
individual now and then, but for me

(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

to try changing a society for an entire group of people, in most cases, would be crossing the line. In many countries, people live in terrible conditions for one reason or another. Slavery, famine, military rule, natural disaster, ecological imbalance, and many other things, can befall a land and its people. Your kingdom is pretty lucky. You have only one of those right now, slavery.

(he looks around at them)

My bracelet represents power, at least here in this kingdom. If I wanted to, I could put all the soldiers and guards to sleep, take their weapons, walk into every money changer and take all the money, kill the king and his court, take his symbols of power, and soon everyone, of those I let live, would be groveling at my feet, begging to serve me.

Dead silence stretches until Rini speaks.

RINI

But you'd never do that.

ILIKA

That's right. I come from a place where everyone has great power, by your standards, and they steadfastly refuse to use it for self-aggrandizement ... anywhere ... ever.

All the students and Misa are very thoughtful in the silence that follows. Neti drops her gaze and focuses on the supplies. Rini smiles slightly with understanding.

ILIKA

These are the ethical standards of the Transport Service that you would be subject to if you became members of my crew, so think about this carefully over the next few weeks.

Several students nod.

EXT. ROAD THROUGH SAGEBRUSH EAST OF CATTLE TOWN - AFTERNOON

The 9 TRAVELERS have left Cattle Town behind as they journey eastward under a hot sun. Neti and Toli hold hands as they walk.

EXT. HAMLET ON BLUFF OVERLOOKING DESERT - EVENING

At an outdoor table, the 9 TRAVELERS laugh and talk as they eat. WOMEN and GIRLS of the hamlet bring them food and drink. Neti and Toli sit side by side, and Neti sometimes smiles.

EXT. TRAIL ALONG HIGH BLUFF OVER DESERT - MID-MORNING

The 9 TRAVELERS are seated on rocks, taking a break from their journey.

TOLI

Wow, the gray rocks at the bottom  
have tiny bushes growing on them.

ILIKA

Alluvial fans can be hundreds of feet  
thick, and build up where dirt and  
rocks wash out of the canyons. Those  
bushes might be spiny cactus plants  
taller than people.

MATI

The white stuff in the low places, is  
that salt?

RINI

If it's sodium chloride, they could  
use it to salt meat at Cattle Town.

EXT. TRAIL ALONG HIGH BLUFF, FARTHER SOUTH - EVENING

ILIKA and KIBI are snuggling together as they watch the red  
glow of sunset light fade from the desert below.

KIBI

It calls to me, Ilika. It's where  
I'm gonna go if ... anything doesn't  
work out with your ship.

ILIKA

(smiles to himself)  
If you can wait a couple more weeks,  
you'll get both. We'll do some of  
our training down there.

KIBI

You mean ... before we get on the  
ship?

ILIKA

No, everything will be done on the  
ship after the three extras, and the  
donkey, go their ways.

KIBI

Ilika! How are you going to get a  
ship into the desert?

ILIKA

(grinning)  
You'll see.

EXT. TRAIL ON BLUFF AT CANYON - DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS pause when a canyon cuts into the bluff,  
forcing the trail back westward.

EXT. GRASSLAND CAMP - EARLY EVENING

Camp has been made early and most of the STUDENTS sit on their  
bedrolls with pencil and paper. NETI, however, is curled up  
beside Toli with her eyes closed. MISA is occupying herself  
by weaving grass stems. They finish answering a question,  
then look at ILIKA.

ILIKA

What is the fallacy that can arise  
when using the logic of Modus Ponens.

Most of the students begin writing.

EXT. GRASSLANDS HAMLET - AFTERNOON

The 9 TRAVELERS enter the tiny hamlet and dismount or  
unshoulder their rucksacks.

The LOCAL PEOPLE come out slowly, suspiciously. The men have  
axes and rakes held high.

Kibi ignores the men and steps confidently to the woman who  
appears to have highest status.

KIBI

A hearty, hot meal would be worth a  
silver piece to us.

The WOMAN'S eyes grow large. She shoves several MEN out of  
the way and begins pointing to women and girls.

WOMAN

Beta, clean a rabbit, quick quick.  
Kina and your little sisters, pot  
herbs. Kori, stoke up your oven.  
Sadi, berries for pies ...

The women and girls scurry away to find the ingredients. Kibi  
smiles and the travelers begin setting up camp on the edge of  
the hamlet.

## EXT. GRASSLAND TRAIL - NOON

The 9 TRAVELERS have paused for lunch and are spread out in the grass munching on cheese and bread.

Rini is sitting alone in deep grass, looking up at the passing clouds. He overhears Ilika and Mati walk by, and can hear Mati's crutch swishing through the grass. They are not aware of him.

ILIKA (O.S.)

I want to make sure you understand,  
Mati, that for me to consider you for  
my crew ... and I assure you I want  
to consider you ... there is  
something you must be willing to let  
go of ...

Ilika and Mati go too far away for Rini to hear any more words, but a moment later Mati bursts into tears. Rini frowns with sympathy.

A few moments after that, Mati starts cheering and clapping with glee. Rini is confused, but shrugs and smiles for his friend.

## EXT. GRASSLANDS NEAR SWAMP - MID-DAY

The 9 TRAVELERS trudge along the trail southward where the grasslands give way to the swamp, with the hills in the west where the story began.

## EXT. GRASSY MOUNDS IN SWAMP - AFTERNOON

MATI dismounts and the others set down their burdens. The 7 STUDENTS and MISA sit on the ground in a semi-circle facing ILIKA. Toli, Neti, and Misa are sitting together.

Ilika looks them over, smiles to himself, and sits down facing Toli, Neti, and Misa.

Ilika places 3 great gold pieces in front of Toli, which causes Toli's face to fall with disappointment. Neti takes his hand to comfort him.

Ilika places 3 great gold pieces in front of Neti, who smiles.

Ilika places one great gold piece in front of Misa, who bounces up and down with happiness.

## EXT. GRASSY MOUNDS IN SWAMP - LATE AFTERNOON

TOLI, NETI, and MISA secure their rucksacks onto the DONKEY, then wave to ILIKA and the 5 remaining STUDENTS, who wave back. Mati has tears in her eyes. Those departing disappear down the trail.

## ACT 3

EXT. GRASSY MOUNDS IN SWAMP - MORNING

BORO tends the campfire as ILIKA, KIBI, SATA, MATI, and RINI eat porridge or roll up their bedrolls.

Other tasks completed, they gather in a circle around the campfire.

ILIKA

Look around you. This is what I came here for. This is the new crew of a beautiful little ship of the Transport Service. These are the people you can count on to stand at your side, share the work, and watch your back.

MATI

I just wish I could have kept Tera until we got near the ship.

ILIKA

(smiling tenderly)

We are near the ship. It's about a five-minute walk from here.

Kibi squints and looks at Ilika askance.

SATA

A swamp ship?

ILIKA

Our ship can go just about anywhere it needs to go. You have all been picturing a wooden ship, with sails, floating on the ocean. It would have been impossible to tell you the truth without actually showing you, and I wasn't allowed to do that unless I planned to take you with me.

(pause for courage)

The truth is, the next hour is going to be extremely challenging because you will see and learn things completely outside your experience. You will have to trust me. I hope I have earned that trust. If not, you will run away, screaming.

BORO

Us? We'd follow you anywhere, Ilika!

EXT. EDGE OF SWAMP - MID-DAY

All 5 STUDENTS stand wide-eyed as ILIKA taps at his bracelet

and a muddy, vine-covered mound in the swamp begins to rise.

A shinny, golden form emerges from the swamp, covered with black muck and tangled plants. It changes shape several times as it frees itself from the sticky mud, globs of which fall back into the swamp. Finally, it takes to the air and hovers over the swamp, changing into a perfect sphere about 25 feet across, golden orange but still smeared with black goo.

Kibi, mouth agape, sees a dragon, the tangled vines suggesting scales and wings.

Mati, with mixed feelings, imagines a giant donkey.

Sata, squinting, perceives a devil or demon.

Rini, smiling, sees a culturally-unspecific angel.

Boro, trying to swallow, first sees the sailing ship he had assumed, then shakes his head and just sees the bare shape.

ILIKA

Kibi? You okay? Boro? It's just a little deep-space response ship of the Nebador Transport Service.

RINI

It's ... beautiful!

MATI

(inspired by Rini)

It's ... dirty. We need to wash it.

BORO

(pointing while staring)

Ilika, didn't you say there was a little lake up there in the hills?

EXT. TRAIL FROM SWAMP INTO HILLS - MID-DAY

MATI hobbles along on her crutch and the OTHER 5 carry their rucksacks and Mati's saddle bags. The students look back often, sometimes walking backwards, as the ship floats along behind them, just high enough to avoid the small trees.

EXT. SMALL LAKE - AFTERNOON

On the same small lake Ilika visited at the beginning of the story, the ship, now a very flat disc shape (without any other 'flying saucer' trappings), floats on the water. KIBI and SATA are on top, using spare articles of clothing to wash off the mud. BORO and ILIKA are ducking under water to clean the bottom. MATI, with RINI'S help, is rinsing the rags, which Rini tosses back to those on the ship.

KIBI

Top's clean!

With sounds of playful joy, Kibi and Sata slide off the ship into the water, then wade out. Boro and Ilika also wade out. Sata stands before Ilika.

SATA

I'm cold. Can we build a fire?

ILIKA

How about a nice, warm ship instead?

Ilika taps at his bracelet, the ship changes back into a sphere, floats above the lake to a grassy area, sprouts 3 landing struts, and settles onto the grass. A hatch appears about half-way up the side, and a ramp seems to come out of nowhere.

INT. SHIP WITH HATCH OPEN - AFTERNOON

With the only light still coming from the open hatch behind them, the 5 STUDENTS are all now wearing simple, clean, dry robes, standing in bare feet on a soft carpet, gazing around with wide eyes at the interior of the ship.

Directly ahead of them are about a dozen comfortable passenger seats facing, on the right, a control console with a crew seat and a large display screen overhead. Farther to the right, slightly lower and nearly dark at the moment, is the bridge with 4 crew seats at control consoles along the curving edge, and a commander's chair by itself in the middle. Straight across the ship, beyond the passenger area, is a small high-tech galley. At the rear of the passenger area is a small open area with a comfortable bench along the curving wall and doors to a toilet room on each side. On the near side of the passenger area, unseen at the moment, is a lift to the lower deck with no apparent floor or moving parts.

Everything is cozy and livable by human beings or similar creatures, with pleasant color harmonies and artistic curving lines, but nothing is culturally-specific, tacky, flimsy, or faddish. Although everything is clean, robust, and in perfect working order, it also has the feeling of great age and long use. It is truly a ship created and maintained by the Gods and those who work directly for the Gods.

ILIKA, also in a simple, clean robe, steps to the console at the front of the passenger area, touches a symbol, and soft, indirect lights come on throughout the ship. Sounds of amazement come from the students.

Ilika touches more symbols, the passenger seats start moving by themselves, and the students jump back in fright, colliding with each other. Ilika smiles.

A flat oval descends from the ceiling to table height and the

seats arrange themselves around it as Ilika steps into the galley, spreads 6 meal trays on the galley counter, and starts pulling packages of food from cupboards.

Kibi swallows to master her fear, goes to help, and receives the food packages from Ilika, along with a serving spoon. To her surprise, the food in the packages is hot or cold, as appropriate, even as she spoons it out. Ilika places cartons of beverages on the trays. Kibi carries the trays to the table, where the other students are timidly seating themselves.

ILIKA

(sitting and taking a bite)

I have bad news. We don't have enough packaged food for the entire training period. We'll have to stock up from the marketplace and cook.

KIBI

(with a smile)

I think we can handle that, Ilika.

INT. SHIP - EVENING

RINI is in the galley rinsing the meal trays with a stream of blue liquid. The OTHER 4 STUDENTS are poking around, gazing with wonder at control consoles, or touching walls and other surfaces.

ILIKA stands by the lift as Rini finishes the dishes.

ILIKA

I need to teach you how to use the lift. It's easy.

Ilika steps over the hole, about a yard across. The students gasp, expecting him to fall straight down, but instead he floats down slowly.

Kibi takes a deep breath, feels the hole with one foot, then steps in and floats down.

Sata jumps in, grinning.

Rini helps Mati in and they float down together.

INT. SHIP, LOWER DECK

Visible on the lower deck is a large central room, 2 or 3 small tables with short stools, and several large floor pillows scattered about. A robust hatch and 6 simple doors lead to an air lock, a toilet room, 3 cabins, a utility room, and the engineering ring.

ILIKA  
(calling up to Boro)  
Your cabin's down here!

BORO (O.S.)  
Is there any other way to get down  
there?

ILIKA  
There's an air lock to the outside!

BORO (O.S.)  
Can I use it?

ILIKA  
No!

SATA  
I'll get him.

Grinning, Sata rises in the lift.

ILIKA  
(pointing)  
Another toilet room that the  
passengers never use ...

Sata and Boro, his eyes tightly closed, appear in the lift.

ILIKA  
... and over here is the utility room  
with spare parts and supplies, and  
the laundry machine.

KIBI  
(eyes wide with joy)  
Did you say laundry machine?

Ilika smiles and nods.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA WITH HATCH OPEN - MORNING

Morning sun is streaming in through the open hatch as ILIKA  
and the 5 STUDENTS finish breakfast.

Suddenly the ship emits a complex warning tone and the hatch  
vanishes, becoming a solid wall. With curiosity but without  
concern, Ilika steps to the console in the passenger area.  
The students gather around.

ILIKA  
Well, well. Let's see what Manessa  
spotted.

Ilika touches several symbols, and a visual playback begins of  
the grass and lake outside the ship. A PRIEST approaches with  
fear but determination, peeks in the hatch, then runs away

when the hatch vanishes.

The 5 students look at each other with fear.

EXT. GRASS NEAR SHIP - MID-DAY

ILIKA remains unconcerned, but the 5 STUDENTS glance around warily as they all sit in a small circle on the grass, all wearing bracelets just like Ilika's on their left wrists.

Ilika demonstrates how to tap on the bracelet to cause a bright beam of light. The students practice. Boro looks into the light, is blinded for a moment, closes his eyes tightly, laughs, then blinks like an owl to recover.

A little later, Rini sits on the ground smiling, and Mati leans on her crutch, ready to tap a code into her bracelet, with her left arm pointed at Rini. The other students watch.

MATI

Is all our training going to be this gut-wrenching?

ILIKA

Some of it will be worse. But like using the lift, the first time is the hardest.

With a cringe, Mati taps the code into her bracelet and Rini wilts onto the grass, asleep.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - LATE EVENING

The 5 STUDENTS sit side by side in passenger seats watching a video on the large screen over the console. We hear appropriate ultra-modern music, but no dialog. The students' faces, laughter, moans, and other sounds reveal a variety of changing emotions as the video progresses. They experience the story as if physically present with the characters, almost getting up to dance at happy moments, nearly hiding behind their seats during tense moments and dangers.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - MORNING

KIBI is finishing the breakfast dishes as BORO, SATA, and RINI, dressed in their (freshly washed and dried) simple medieval clothing, put on their cloaks, lace their boots, and shoulder empty rucksacks. ILIKA snaps bracelets onto their left wrists.

Kibi and MATI wave as the 3 shoppers file out the hatch.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MORNING

With ILIKA'S help, MATI lowers herself into the pilot's seat, at the very front of the ship on the right side.

Ilika touches some symbols on the console, a flight control (joy stick) rises from the console, and a very simple 2D simulation begins on the pilot's display screen, with squares, circles, and triangles for the 'ship' and various obstacles.

Mati smiles up at Ilika, takes the flight control, and begins moving her ship around, with little success at first.

EXT. GRASS NEAR SHIP - MORNING

ILIKA and KIBI, both wearing bracelets, stroll between the ship and the lake.

ILIKA

The steward is responsible for the landing area, including geological stability, wildlife, concealment, and many other factors ...

INT. STEWARD'S CONSOLE IN PASSENGER AREA - MID-MORNING

KIBI is seated at the console and ILIKA is standing, pointing to various control symbols. MATI continues her piloting simulations in the background.

ILIKA

... temperature and humidity ...  
lighting controls ... hatch controls  
...

EXT. FARMING VALE NEAR MEDIEVAL WALLED CITY - MID-DAY

BORO, SATA, and RINI appear completely unremarkable as they walk along the road, waving to the local people out working in fields, gardens, and animal pens.

The 3 shoppers pass a group of PRIESTS, and wave greetings, but the priests act sullen and secretive, and eye the 3 shoppers with suspicion.

INT. DOKO'S INN, ENTRY AND COMMON ROOM - MID-AFTERNOON

DOKO, MOSA, and their SON come pouring out of the kitchen and surround SATA with affection. KIBI and BORO look on, smiling with happiness for their friend.

Doko ushers the group to a table in the common room, and a LAD brings food and drink from the kitchen.

INT. SHIP GALLEY - MID-AFTERNOON

ILIKA closes a cupboard that contains a few more packages of food, then touches a symbol on the stove. KIBI touches the stovetop and jerks her hand back, but is grinning.

KIBI

Wow! Cooking without flames or  
smoke!

EXT. MEDIEVAL MARKETPLACE - LATE AFTERNOON

The 3 SHOPPERS buy food staples, with Sata doing the talking, Rini handling the money, and Boro receiving the sacks and crocks.

INT. SHIP UTILITY ROOM

ILIKA and KIBI are looking up at several clear tanks containing water and a blue liquid, connected by an elegant array of tubing.

Ilika touches a yellow symbol on a small control panel. The symbol changes to blue-green, then green, then back to yellow. Kibi nods with understanding.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - EVENING

BORO, SATA, and RINI unshoulder heavy rucksacks with the help of ILIKA and KIBI, while MATI begins unpacking food at the large oval table.

A little later, Kibi works in the galley to serve home-cooked grains and vegetables from pots on the stove as Ilika carries meal trays to the table, where the other students are already seated.

RINI

Lots of priests on the roads ... too  
many if you ask me.

BORO

We didn't have to use the bracelets,  
but it sure felt good to have them!

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - NIGHT

The oval table has risen back to the ceiling and the 5 STUDENTS are again in passenger seats facing the big screen.

ILIKA

This is mainly about Kibi's job as  
steward, but I want all of you to  
have a good sense of what your  
companions will be doing.

A video begins with tense, dramatic, ultra-modern music, revealing that it is about some critical and dangerous situation.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - MORNING

A light rain is falling outside the hatch. KIBI, RINI, and

SATA wave as they pull up the hoods of their cloaks and depart.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MORNING

BORO sits in the engineer's seat on the right side of the bridge watching a demo. ILIKA stands behind him, and MATI is working on a piloting simulation to his left. The wall behind the engineering console is a constantly-changing diagram of fuel and energy flowing through complex pathways and devices. Boro's eyes are darting about, trying to keep up.

ILIKA

Several different fuel conversions are being simulated.

BORO

(pointing with both hands)  
That stuff used to go over there, but now it's going through that thing and winding up over here!

Ilika nods as the demo continues. Unexpectedly, Mati catches their attention.

MATI

Hurray! I just finished simulation two, and the next one has tunnels and bridges and things!

INT. SHIP ENGINEERING RING

BORO wanders, wide-eyed, through the curving room that almost completely encircles the lower deck. ILIKA follows. The walkway is narrow as the space is mostly filled with elegant futuristic machines and conduits, all without any hint of noise, pollution, friction, or danger.

Boro reaches toward a glowing machine with his hand, but looks at Ilika before touching it. Ilika nods, and Boro proceeds to explore, almost caress, the glowing machine.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - MID-AFTERNOON

KIBI, RINI, and SATA sit at a corner table eating. Their full rucksacks lean against a wall nearby. No other guests are in the common room.

RINI

Something feels really funny.

KIBI

People seem all tense, as if they're expecting something to happen, but I can't figure out what. Lots of whispering going on.

MOSA approaches from the kitchen.

MOSA

I just got in some good mutton. Can you stay for dinner?

Sata is torn, but Kibi speaks.

KIBI

We're expected back by dark, but thank you for the invitation.

SATA

Mom, do you know of any big events coming up?

MOSA

No ... the harvest festival is past ... no, nothing else for a while.

SATA

Thanks. Is there anything for dessert?

MOSA

There sure is! I've got some apple pie with cream!

KIBI

We have time for that!

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MID-AFTERNOON

ILIKA is again working with BORO at the engineering station.

MATI

(in mock distress)

Help!

ILIKA

What's up, pilot?

MATI

I just started simulation four. It's all funny wiggly lines.

ILIKA

That's a topographic map of land elevations. Each line is a constant elevation, as if you were walking around a hill or mountain without going up or down. You can add color-coding by elevation with your display mode selector.

MATI  
(after tapping the selector)  
Okay, this makes more sense.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - EVENING

KIBI, RINI, and SATA wear tense, troubled expressions as they unshoulder and open their rucksacks. ILIKA and BORO help.

RINI  
Twice, on the way back, we were asked  
where we were going, and both times,  
it was a priest.

MATI  
What did you say?

SATA  
Kibi was great. She told them our  
hamlet was too small to have a name,  
but they could come over for dinner  
if they wanted to see where it was.  
She never spoke a false word!

KIBI  
They were peering at us like they'd  
find forked tongues or furry tails if  
they looked close enough.

Boro and Mati laugh. The 3 shoppers remain troubled.

INT. PASSENGER AREA - NIGHT

The 5 STUDENTS are again watching videos, Boro most intently.

The videos end and ILIKA touches a symbol on the steward's console to brighten the room lights. The other students look at Boro, who is leaning back thoughtfully in his seat.

BORO  
It's funny that an ex-slave would be  
asked to handle so much power.

ILIKA  
No one is in a better position to  
handle power than someone who's felt  
the effects of its abuse.

Boro slowly nods.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - MORNING

KIBI, BORO, and SATA prepare to depart for another day of shopping. ILIKA and KIBI kiss lightly. The 3 shoppers wave as they file through the hatch.

## INT. SHIP ENGINEERING RING

ILIKA and RINI are squeezed into a tight space among the engines and conduits. RINI examines a complex blue crystal embedded in the ship's hull that ends in a fluid-filled tube that joins many other tubes in a neat and elegant array.

## EXT. TORI'S BAKERY IN MARKETPLACE - MID-DAY

TORI pulls half a dozen loaves out of the oven with his large wooden board, slides them onto the cooling table, and turns to see who is at the counter. SATA stands grinning, KIBI and BORO beside her.

TORI

Sata! Your mother told me you got that job you wanted. Did I hear right that you're gonna be a navigator?

SATA

(after nodding with pride)  
This is Boro, my dear friend and shipmate, and this is Kibi, the steward who looks after the passengers.

TORI

Happy to see you folks again! Were you some of those Captain Loki bought from the block?

Kibi barely suppresses laughter at the botched name. Boro smiles and nods.

SATA

Tori, we want to buy some bread and tarts a little later, but we came to you because you always know the talk of the town. We can feel something strange is going on. Something is bothering people, but we can't figure out what.

TORI

Oh, it's just the demon monster by the little lake in the hills to the east.

All 3 shoppers are stunned into absolute silence, but Tori doesn't notice and continues talking.

TORI

That high priest who has it out for Captain Loki, went to the king yesterday, asked him to send

(MORE)

TORI (CONT)

soldiers. Word out of the court is that the king asked if the beast had hurt anyone or anything, at which the high priest started making up vague bullshit. The king said no until he gets word that it's harming someone or burning crops. But, they say, he gave the religious order leave to do whatever it wanted with the beast ... if they could.

KIBI

Do you ... hear what they might do?

TORI

They're just going around stirring people up, taking up a special collection, that sort of nonsense. It's probably a sick wolf or something that ran out of the forest after the fire last summer.

EXT. MEDIEVAL MARKETPLACE - MID-DAY

Huddling away from other PEOPLE, the 3 SHOPPERS confer.

BORO

Do you think we should hurry back and tell Ilika?

KIBI

I think he knows. I think he wants us to get used to doing our jobs in places where people don't understand us. Right now our job is to stock up the galley for several months of training. Let's go do our job.

The 3 shoppers head toward the wagons and carts.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

At the watch station on the left side of the bridge, RINI sits and watches a demo in which a topographic map is quickly drawn on the display screen and color-coded by elevation. ILIKA stands behind him.

ILIKA

Your most important task when the ship is on or near the surface of a planet is to provide the rest of the crew with topographic information, the shapes and elevations of the land, water, or ice.

MATI, at the pilot's station doing another training simulation

with a topographic map on her display, looks over at Rini and smiles.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - AFTERNOON

The 3 SHOPPERS are finishing a meal when DOKO comes in wearing his apron.

DOKO

It's a good thing you're going west to Port Town! Some kind of nasty business to the east.

SATA

(pretending ignorance)  
Please, tell us about it, father.

DOKO

I don't know much. Some kind of beast hunt, or maybe a witch hunt, I couldn't quite tell. The religious order is trying to get the whole city stirred up.

BORO

(looking clueless)  
Doesn't sound like anything we should get mixed up in.

DOKO

(nodding)  
Your friend is smart, Sata.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

RINI and ILIKA are just finishing their study of topographic mapping when they hear a loud gasp from MATI at her station.

MATI

It's ... oh my god ... wow! ... I never dreamed ...

Rini and Ilika both go over to look, and see that Mati now has an actual 3D projection in front of her, instead of a 2D map. Smiling, they return to the watch station.

ILIKA

Now we turn to collecting and interpreting weather data. The ship's memory is useless because weather changes so quickly.

Ilika touches some symbols on the console, and Rini watches as a demo begins that creates several weather plots and charts on his display screen: barometric pressure, wind direction, temperature, humidity, precipitation, etc.

## INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - EVENING

ILIKA and RINI help KIBI, BORO, and SATA out of their rucksacks and sopping-wet cloaks. MATI receives items and stacks them on the big oval table.

BORO

We have serious news.

MATI

Did the baker know anything?

SATA

Oh, yes. Even my parents, who usually stay out of politics, are starting to hear things.

KIBI

(looking at Ilika askance)

It's us. But I'm sure you knew that, right Ilika?

ILIKA

(smiling)

Yes, I knew, or at least strongly suspected, ever since that priest paid us a visit.

BORO

Will we always put the ship in places that'll get us into trouble?

ILIKA

No. Very rarely. But we're getting some essential training done this way. You all need to understand that you're not here for the same reasons as most people.

The faces of all 5 students show emotions that move from puzzlement (especially Boro), to thoughtfulness, to understanding (especially Rini and Kibi).

## EXT. SHIP LANDING AREA - MORNING

With cloaks and empty rucksacks, KIBI, BORO, and RINI step out into a cool but sunny autumn day, wave to SATA and MATI at the hatch, and turn their feet toward the medieval city.

## INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MORNING

SATA sits in the navigator's chair, at the front of the bridge on the left side, watching a demo in which flight plans quickly form on her display screen, first for surface flight, then orbital insertion, and finally interplanetary travel. Her eyes are wide and she appears overwhelmed. ILIKA stands behind her, watching. The demo ends.

ILIKA

We'll only learn surface flight  
planning today.

Sata breathes a sigh of relief.

EXT. MEDIEVAL CITY, POOR SECTION - MID-MORNING

KIBI knocks on Doti's unmarked door. BORO and RINI stand behind her. All 3 shoppers have their hoods up.

DOTI the healer/witch peeks out, then opens the door wide and ushers them quickly in.

DOTI

I had a hunch I'd be seeing you  
folks, considering what the religious  
order is up to.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MID-DAY

SATA works at her console with a topographic map of the kingdom on her screen. ILIKA stands behind, and MATI is to her right. Sata moves her finger on a touch pad on her console to connect dots on the map.

SATA

Oops, I wasn't supposed to let that  
village see us.

Ilika smiles but remains silent as he watches Sata erase a leg of the flight plan and re-draw it differently.

Mati uses her flight control to guide a simulated dragonfly through a lush garden in 3D. She lands the dragonfly on a leaf, then touches a symbol that causes a copy of Sata's display to appear on her screen. A moment later she touches the symbol again to switch back to her dragonfly.

EXT. MEDIEVAL CITY, RICH SECTION - MID-DAY

DOTI guides the 3 SHOPPERS, now with hoods back, through the cobbled streets, into a dim corridor, up a stair, and to a door. Doti knocks.

A bright-eyed CRONE opens the door. The CRONE and DOTI look at each other and seem to communicate without words. The Crone opens her door wide for the visitors to enter.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

SATA'S flight plan appears complete.

ILIKA

Now let's turn it sideways and  
examine the third dimension,  
elevation.

Sata touches a symbol, and the topographic map and flight plan turns sideways, revealing several places where Sata's lines go right through hills or mountains. Sata starts giggling. MATI looks and joins in giggling. Ilika smiles.

EXT. FLAT ROOF & RELIGIOUS ORDER YARD - AFTERNOON

The CRONE leads DOTI, KIBI, BORO, and RINI through a little door onto a small rooftop patio, hunching over to stay hidden from below as she approaches the edge.

The grounds of the religious order can be seen below. Several hundred PEOPLE are crowded into an outdoor yard, many carrying lit torches even in broad daylight. The HIGH PRIEST is speaking to them from a platform. A few emphasized words are audible to those on the rooftop.

HIGH PRIEST  
... underworld ... demon ...  
criminals ... witches ... sorcerers  
... monster ... burn them!

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - LATE EVENING

SATA is in the galley, has finished cooking dinner but is just puttering around and keeping it hot, when KIBI, BORO, and RINI burst through the hatch in serious moods. All 3 shoppers fling their rucksacks off and head for the table, where Sata quickly sets out meal trays.

BORO  
We had to fight our way back!

All 3 shoppers begin inhaling their dinner. After taking the edge off his hunger, Rini elaborates.

RINI  
The road is being guarded by priests and farmers with pitchforks. Four times we tried to talk our way through, but they weren't budging, so Kibi put them to sleep. Luckily we got past the last ones, at the top of the hill, before it was too dark and we had to use a light.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - MORNING

KIBI, BORO, RINI, and SATA, all in their medieval clothing but not yet cloaks, are glum as they pick at their breakfast trays at the large table. MATI, in contrast, is excited about her upcoming day of training.

ILIKA  
This is the last trip. Our food stocks are looking very good. Relax,  
(MORE)

ILIKA (CONT)

enjoy the day, visit, pick up a few things that look good, and come back safely. You all made good decisions yesterday, and I have no doubt you will again today. Tomorrow we fly the Manessa Kwi.

The 4 shoppers try to put smiles on their faces as they finish their breakfast and pull on their cloaks and empty rucksacks.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MORNING

MATI sits at the pilot's station watching a demo in which beautiful red-rock canyon walls streak by on both sides. Next, the surface of an ocean, dotted with forested islands, zooms by beneath the ship. Finally, the scene pitches up and the sky darkens to star-studded velvet as the ship approaches a glistening orbital station, like a cluster of jewels floating in space. The demo fades. Mati looks at ILIKA, behind her, with a big grin.

MATI

Let me see ... from Boro I need engines ...

ILIKA

And Boro needs a little time to get those engines fueled and warmed-up.

MATI

From Rini I need topographics and weather ...

ILIKA

And he needs time to scan the terrain, update the ship's memory, and select the best format for the information.

MATI

From Sata I need charts and a flight plan ...

INT. MEDIEVAL ARTISTS GUILD - MID-MORNING

Several other ARTISTS are painting or drawing in the background. PICA is seated at a canvas, but has turned to visit with the 4 SHOPPERS, seated on the floor nearby.

PICA

I could have predicted you four would wind up on Ilika's crew. But I don't understand how poor crippled Mati could pilot a ship.

RINI  
(looking at Kibi)  
Shall we tell her?

Kibi thinks about it, then nods.

RINI  
In Ilika's ... country ... there are  
healers who can fix her knee so  
she'll be able to do everything!

PICA  
(clapping with happiness)  
Fantastic! But it's still a little  
hard to imagine Mati up there on the  
deck, in the wind and sun and spray,  
wrestling with the ship's wheel ...

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MID-DAY

MATI is at her station, with ILIKA behind.

ILIKA  
Today you're going to learn the same  
two engines Boro has studied,  
starting with the anti-mass drive.  
It lets you go up, hover at a  
constant altitude, or come down  
slowly and gently.

MATI  
(grinning)  
Boro! Anti-mass drive, power level  
one!

ILIKA  
(mimicking Boro's deep voice)  
Anti-mass drive, level one, warming  
up.

MATI  
(looking at her console)  
When that symbol turns green, my  
engine's ready, right?

Ilika smiles and nods.

INT. DOKO'S INN, COMMON ROOM - MID-AFTERNOON

The common room is otherwise empty, and the 4 SHOPPERS have  
seated themselves at a large table. Their full rucksacks lean  
against the wall nearby.

DOKO, MOSA, and their SON come bustling out of the kitchen  
carrying trays with greens, bread and cheese, and meat.

DOKO

No, no, no! This is all wrong! Sata is at the head of the table today, not me!

Sata grins and blushes as she moves over.

MOSA

Honey, your pack looks so heavy!

SATA

Not really. Mostly dried fruit and spices and things. And remember, I've been carrying a pack all summer. I can carry almost as much as Boro!

Mosa glances at Boro with motherly suspicion.

MOSA

We are so proud of you! We want you to journey far and see the whole world ... and ... maybe someday you'll settle down with some nice, sweet man.

Mosa glances, with acceptance, at Boro again.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - LATE AFTERNOON

MATI is at her station working with her flight control as a simulated landscape moves slowly by on her display. ILIKA is standing at Rini's watch station, touching some symbols on the console.

MATI

The atmospheric thrusters have more ... what do you call it when you can't get going, or you can't stop?

ILIKA

Inertia. That time lag makes it easy to over-control.

MATI

Yeah, but only when I'm not under-controlling!

As Mati continues to concentrate on her simulation, Ilika looks down at the watch station display and sees a topographic map of the nearby area that includes the little lake and the ship. He frowns when he sees 6 red dots moving around but not approaching the ship.

EXT. RELIGIOUS ORDER YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

The HIGH PRIEST stands on the speaking platform in stern silence until just the right amount of tension has built among

the many PRIESTS and MONKS gathered in the yard.

HIGH PRIEST

Silence!

(he waits for silence)

This is the Day of Reckoning to which we have all been called, the Final Battle when Evil has come to our very doorstep. Every trial, from the day you took your vows, has been in preparation for this day, the Ultimate Pruning of the Tree of Life. Your actions today, your ability to inspire and lead the Faithful in this Holy Cause, will go far in establishing your worth when you knock at the Gates of Paradise.

The assembled priests and monks break into a rumble of agreement and anxious excitement.

EXT. OUTSIDE CITY GATE - JUST BEFORE SUNSET

KIBI, BORO, RINI, and SATA walk through the city gate with their full rucksacks, but quickly find an inconspicuous place to contemplate the unusual scene before them. Many other PEOPLE are doing the same.

A large area surrounding the road eastward (to the farming vale, hills, and ship) resembles an armed encampment, with tents set up, PRIESTS strutting around giving orders, and MONKS chopping wood and filling buckets with thick oil from barrels.

A CRIER confers with a priest, then begins ringing his bell and moving among the people.

CRIER

Hear ye! Hear ye! The honor of carrying the first bundles of wood and buckets of oil to the Beast's Lair go to the Faithful who will support the Church with a great silver piece.

Many people grumble about the price.

CRIER

The second positions of honor go to those who will give a small silver piece. And finally, whatever's left over will go for a copper piece.

The people seem satisfied, and a few of the better-dressed line up at one of the tents for the first places of honor.

RINI

That's our ticket for the short way home. The bundles are small, not much extra weight.

SATA

We'd learn more about what they're up to, and could tell Ilika.

KIBI

It just makes me sick to give them money.

BORO

Ilika felt the same way when he had to buy us out of slavery.

Kibi nods. All 4 shoppers stand and head for the tent.

EXT. FARMING VALE - SUNSET

The 4 SHOPPERS, in a group of a dozen PEOPLE, each carrying a bundle of sticks or a little bucket of oil, follow a PRIEST carrying a torch along the road through the farming vale. The FARM FAMILIES, whose fruit trees and fences have been raided for firewood, peek out of their cottages with fear.

EXT. TRAIL INTO HILLS - DUSK

By pretending to be out of breath, and the other 3 SHOPPERS following her lead, KIBI causes them to work their way to the very end of their GROUP.

EXT. HILLTOP - TWILIGHT

The PRIEST with torch waits for his GROUP to gather at the top of the hill. Other GROUPS, each led by a torch-bearing PRIEST, can be seen on the trail behind, where some sunset light still lingers, and ahead, now pitch dark except for the torches.

EXT. TRAIL DOWN - NIGHT

In addition to other GROUPS ahead on the trail, the little lake can now be seen below with many torches around it, and a glimmer of the golden orange spherical hull of the ship.

When the other PEOPLE in the group are focused on the sight ahead, KIBI steps off the trail northward and disappears into the darkness and brush. RINI almost passes, then notices and follows. SATA and BORO follow Rini.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

In the darkness, the 4 SHOPPERS crouch in the brush and watch their PRIEST and the other PEOPLE disappear down the trail.

KIBI  
(whispering)  
Thanks for following my lead. Sorry  
I couldn't explain it sooner.

SATA  
We understand.

RINI  
Nice of them to burn torches around  
the lake so we can see our  
destination.

KIBI  
Sata, you're sure-footed. Want to  
lead us down the next ridge?

Sata nods, all 4 shoppers toss their sticks and oil buckets into the brush, and Sata begins to lead them northward to the next ridge.

EXT. LAKE AND GRASS AROUND SHIP - NIGHT

Many torches on poles illuminate the scene of one HIGH PRIEST in his tent, a few dozen PRIESTS strutting about, and a hundred or more MONKS and LAY PEOPLE. After delivering their bundles of sticks, or buckets of oil, the people are made to stay back in the shadows. The ship sits silently, showing no evidence of the ramp or hatch.

EXT. PATHLESS HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Step by step, steeply down through the grass and brush, SATA leads the SHOPPERS toward their besieged ship.

EXT. LAKE AND GRASS AROUND SHIP - NIGHT

Only PRIESTS are daring to go within 10 yards of the ship. They toss bundles of sticks under the ship, then run back in fear. The ship makes no response.

EXT. BUSHES NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

SATA leads the SHOPPERS behind a cluster of bushes, the last possible hiding place before the open ground around the lake and ship.

EXT. LAKE AND GRASS AROUND SHIP - NIGHT

The PRIESTS, running low on bundles of sticks, are starting to toss buckets of oil under the ship, which remains silent.

EXT. BUSHES NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

RINI notices KIBI trembling.

RINI

Remember, Kibi, Ilika could fly  
Manessa away any time he wanted.

KIBI

I know, but I can't stop worrying.  
This isn't right. Ilika's done  
nothing but be nice to people ever  
since he came here.

RINI

No, this isn't right. I don't think  
the people doing it know or care  
about right and wrong. This is all  
some kind of show, but I don't  
understand it either.

Kibi's face reveals an intense inner struggle.

KIBI

All I can think about is storming out  
there with my bracelet and putting  
them all to sleep. Boro, you're in  
command.

BORO

(nodding)

Ilika knows we're here. We wait.  
Keep your packs on.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA AND BRIDGE - NIGHT

MATI is pacing with worry, as best she can with her crutch,  
near the closed hatch. ILIKA wears a worried expression but  
is making himself breathe deeply. He steps to the watch  
station and touches some symbols.

On the watch station display, Ilika sees the plan of the  
immediate area, about 200 red dots where the priests and  
people are clustered, and 4 green dots close together not far  
from the ship.

EXT. GRASS NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

The HIGH PRIEST struts out of his tent and faces the ship with  
squinting eyes. A dozen PRIESTS with torches form a semi-  
circle around him.

HIGH PRIEST

In the name of the One, True, Holy  
Church, I, as Avatar of God Himself,  
command you to remove your Filthy  
Presence from our Sovereign Realm  
forthwith, or you shall be burned and  
sent back to the Underworld from  
whence you came!

A long moment of tension follows, during which the ship remains still and silent.

EXT. BUSHES NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

Behind the bushes, KIBI closes her eyes and clenches her fists. SATA grasps her shoulder for comfort.

EXT. GRASS NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

HIGH PRIEST

So be it!

The high priest grabs a torch from one of the PRIESTS, strides forward, and plunges it into the wood and oil under the ship.

Flames quickly spread around the entire circle of wood and oil, then rise up to engulf the ship.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA

MATI is able to see exterior scenes on several display screens, with flames coming from below. She is soon on the edge of an outburst of anger and frustration. But then she notices ILIKA smiling, and relaxes.

MATI

You're not worried about Manessa, are you?

ILIKA

No. Manessa can handle the surface of a star. I'm worried about the priests and people out there getting bored and taking it out on anyone they can find. I think ... a little demonstration is in order.

Ilika steps to the engineering station on the right side of the bridge and sits down. Mati hobbles over to watch. Ilika touches several symbols.

ILIKA

That ought to do the trick.

EXT. GRASS NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

Over the crackling of the flames, the PRIESTS and other PEOPLE begin to hear a new sound, a low rushing like a powerful wind blowing through a mountain pass. They look around with confusion and fear.

EXT. BUSHES NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

The 4 SHOPPERS hear the new sound. Boro frowns.

BORO  
Everybody duck down!

EXT. ENTIRE AREA OF GRASS AND LAKE NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

As soon as the new sound reaches an overwhelming volume, a tremendous blast of air suddenly shoots out in all directions from the base of the ship, sending wood, fire, ashes, oil buckets, torches, tents, PRIESTS, and PEOPLE flying backward away from the little lake.

The blast of air ends as quickly as it started, and the ship's hatch and ramp appear.

EXT. BUSHES NEAR SHIP - NIGHT

BORO barks a command even before all the debris has landed.

BORO  
Run!

Boro helps get SATA and RINI on their feet. KIBI, however, seems to be in a daze.

BORO  
I want you in that ship in five seconds, Kibi!

Kibi blinks a few times, responds to Boro's pull, and runs toward the ship with Boro right behind her.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - NIGHT

SATA and RINI dash through the hatch, quickly unshoulder their rucksacks, and collapse into passenger seats. KIBI runs into ILIKA'S waiting arms. BORO jumps through and MATI hits a symbol on the wall near the hatch. The hatch vanishes.

CLOSING MONTAGE:

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA

ILIKA comforts KIBI, who is shaking and trying not to cry. MATI hobbles to RINI, he stands shyly, and she embraces him clumsily, embarrassing him. BORO and SATA, who have been together all day, smile at each other and start unpacking rucksacks.

INT. SHIP PASSENGER AREA - MORNING

All 5 STUDENTS are rested and animated as they sit around the big table sipping beverage cartons from another planet and eating rough porridge from their medieval kingdom. ILIKA quietly finishes his breakfast, snaps a bracelet onto his left wrist, and steps through the hatch.

EXT. GRASS AND LAKE NEAR SHIP - MORNING

ILIKA scans the entire area for people or other dangers, but sees none. All evidence of the event the previous night is gone, except for the trampled condition of the grass. A RABBIT hops into view near the lake, nibbling on small plants. Ilika smiles, then turns back toward the ship.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - LATE MORNING

SATA works at her navigation station, with a map of the kingdom on her screen, to connect several dots (city, hot springs, Port Town, mountain monastery) to make a flight plan. ILIKA stands behind her. The other 4 STUDENTS look on from their stations.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MID-DAY

MATI grips her flight control with white knuckles. The view on her display shows that the ship is rising to the height of the hills and a bit higher. ILIKA stands behind her, smiling.

EXT. SHIP IN HOVER FLIGHT OVER SWAMP - MID-DAY

The ship is perfectly stationary in the air, and the upper half of the hatch is open. MATI leans on her crutch and grins with happiness as she looks at the land below. Beside her, BORO has a sour look on his face, then covers his mouth and quickly turns away to deal with his nausea.

EXT. SHIP IN SLOW FLIGHT ABOVE MEDIEVAL CITY - MID-DAY

The ship's hull has now changed to light blue.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MID-DAY

The interior hull in front of the commander's chair, between and above the navigator's and pilot's stations, is now revealed to be another large display screen. It currently shows an aerial view of the religious order in the medieval city. Some buildings are burning, PEOPLE are busy looting others, and more people are trying to get into the remaining buildings with logs and axes. All 5 STUDENTS stare with round eyes. ILIKA frowns with sadness, but doesn't show surprise.

EXT. SHIP IN FLIGHT AT HIGH ALTITUDE - MID-DAY

The ship, again golden orange, wobbles as it gains altitude high over the land.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - MID-DAY

All 6 CREW MEMBERS watch, on every display screen, aerial views of the land or clouds far below. Scattered clouds are sprinkled over the southern half of the kingdom, and a thick overcast layer surrounds the mountains in the north, with snowy peaks visible above the clouds.

EXT. OCEAN SURFACE - EARLY AFTERNOON

The ship approaches the ocean surface at a shallow angle, hesitates, dips in clumsily, rises again for a moment, and finally submerges.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - EARLY AFTERNOON

All 6 CREW MEMBERS watch, on every display screen, underwater scenes of seaweed, coral, FISH, etc.

EXT. HOT SPRING TERRACES AND STEAM VENT - AFTERNOON

The ship approaches the ground, starts to land without landing struts, rises again, extends landing struts, and finally lands near the hot spring terraces the students visited earlier in the story. The steam vent hisses in the background.

Later, with the hatch open and ramp extended, all 6 CREW MEMBERS sit in a circle on the grass passing loaves of bread, apple slices, etc., while laughing and talking.

EXT. SHIP ON OCEAN BEACH - AFTERNOON

The ship sits on the ocean beach with hatch open and ramp extended. ILIKA and MATI, on crutch, are looking at driftwood and shells when KIBI, BORO, SATA, and RINI return from a shopping trip. RINI carries a small crate of fruit.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

All 6 CREW MEMBERS watch, on every display screen, forested hills pass by beneath the SHIP. Soon a large burned area comes into view, and the ruins of Lumber Town.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MONASTERY - LATE AFTERNOON

The ritual field just below the monastery's main hall has several inches of snow. The ship lands with a moderate wobble. The hatch and ramp appear, and KIBI steps out.

Many WOMEN and GIRLS stand at the edge of the ritual field, most in fear. The HIGH PRIESTESS steps forward bravely. The other CREW MEMBERS emerge, Rini carrying the crate of fruit.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - EARLY EVENING

All 6 CREW MEMBERS watch, on every display screen, as the land below changes abruptly, at a steep escarpment, from the grasslands of the eastern part of the kingdom, to the nearly-barren low desert of salt flats and sand dunes.

EXT. SAND DUNES - SUNSET

The ship moves about slowly at low altitude, and eventually lands, with only a slight wobble, in a hidden low place among the highest dunes.

The hatch and ramp appear. KIBI, BORO, SATA, and RINI emerge, climb the nearest dune, and dance for joy in the last rays of the setting sun. MATI, on crutch, comes out more slowly, with ILIKA at her side, and waves to those on the sand dune above.

END

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