

CHAPTER 14: FIRST CONTACT

Log date: February 9, 10,000 of the Eternal Era

Location: The *Vaughn*

Log note: Seeing through a glass, darkly

AMY AND AMANDA STRYKER stepped across the universe and appeared on the bridge of the *Vaughn*. Velvet Dawn was extremely excited about the journey. The small purple wisp darted around the vessel at a high speed, trying to see everything at once.

"So this is a starship!" she exclaimed. "I love it. Are we really in outer space right now?"

"We certainly are," Amanda replied. "The nearest star is several light-years away. There's nothing around us but, well, nothingness."

"How far is a light-year?" Velvet asked.

Amy spoke up. "It's the distance that light can travel in a year. It's about six trillion miles."

"That's incredible! How can anyone understand a number that large? That's practically infinite!"

Amy laughed. "It's really not that far – not when you're talking about space travel, anyway. This ship is *billions* of light-years away from your home world. Try to imagine *that*."

"I can't. It's too big. The universe is unimaginably large, isn't it? Does it just go on and on forever?"

Amanda shook her head. "No, it does come to an end. But we think there might be another universe outside the boundaries of this one. We've found something called the U-16b anomaly. We think there might be other living beings there. In fact, it's possible that this ship came from there."

"But since we can't get there, we don't know," Amy added. "We haven't found a way to travel between this universe and that one."

"Does this ship know how to do that?" Velvet asked.

"We don't know," Amanda replied. "It might. But if it does, Monroe and Merlin weren't able to figure out how to do it."

"But it *does* travel between the stars, doesn't it? How long does it take to travel from one star to the next?"

"It depends. If the stars are close then this ship can make the journey in a few days. If the stars are far apart then it could take weeks, or even longer."

"But *you* can do it faster than that, can't you? I mean, we got all the way from my homeworld to this ship, and it didn't seem to take very long."

"That's right," Amy replied. "It only took a second. But only the Redeemed can do that. The other races have to use ships like this one to travel between the stars – or they can use the Gates that Noel built. No one else has the ability to travel the way we can."

"This ship is really very clever," Velvet commented as she zipped around the room. "I know how to build a room, but this room is actually made out of *metal* – and somehow they got it so high in the air that it left their world altogether! Then they found a way to make the room move at incredibly fast speeds. I have no idea how to do any of that. These beings are pretty smart, aren't they?"

"They certainly are," Amanda agreed. "And their cleverness goes even further. The walls of this

room actually *aren't* made of metal. They are made of a material that can change itself into other shapes."

"Really? How does it work?"

"That's something else that Monroe was able to find out," Amanda said. She looked at the floor for a moment, and then the floor suddenly moved. The floor rippled, and a shape grew out from the deck and solidified into a chair. Amanda sat down on it. "See?"

"How did you do that?" Velvet asked, astonished.

"I just told it what to do. I transmitted the proper sequence of commands to the polymorphic nanites, and they responded accordingly."

"But you didn't say anything! At least, if you did talk, I didn't hear you."

"They don't respond to *verbal* communication," Amanda explained. "They have to be sent a series of signals, so I just generated them."

"But how?"

Amy spoke up. "Inside our bodies are a whole bunch of really, really small machines called nanites. These nanites can do all sorts of things – like generate signals. Since they're connected to my mind, I can communicate with them through my thoughts."

"Oh. That's amazing! What else can you do?"

"Pretty much anything. Speaking of that, where do you think we should begin our research?"

"That's a good question," Amanda replied. "Merlin and Monroe did a pretty thorough job of analyzing those messages. They really could be anything; there's just not enough information in them to tell how they should be decoded. Now that I'm here I have to agree with Monroe: there just isn't much to see. I'm not sure that we can add anything to what they did."

"But maybe we can find a way to get this ship to work," Amy suggested. "If we can get it to open a portal to U-16b then that would prove our theory about the ship's origins."

"But Monroe and Merlin tried that. They did a *very* thorough job of mapping out the ship's drive system, and although it is a bit strange it doesn't appear to have any extraordinary capabilities."

Velvet spoke up. "Why not just ask the beings who built the ship? Wouldn't they know?"

Amy laughed. "I'm sure they would, but Velvet, that's the whole point of the mission! We don't know where they are or how to find them. We're hoping that this ship can lead us to them so we can meet them."

"What are you talking about?" Velvet asked. "There's one of them standing right over there. I think you got his attention when you asked the ship to build a chair."

"What are you talking about?" Amanda asked, puzzled. "I don't see anyone. We're the only beings here."

"No we're not. I can see one other being, and he's standing over there at that console. He was looking in our direction for a while, but now he's studying his screen again. Every now and then he pushes a button. Can't you see him?"

"I can't see anyone," Amanda said.

"I can't either," Amy agreed. She walked over to the spot Velvet had indicated and looked around. "See? There's nothing here!"

Velvet laughed. "Now you're standing on top of him! The two of you are in the same place. I don't think he can see you, though. Now you put your arm right through his console!"

"I don't get it. How can there be something here that we can't see?"

"Maybe Velvet is right," Amanda said thoughtfully. "Maybe we've been looking at this all

wrong. What if their universe is made of a different sort of material than ours? Perhaps they made the shell of this ship with polymorphs so it could interact with our reality, but the ship's *real* interior is made of their stuff, which we can't see. That would explain why so much of the ship appeared to be missing. It actually exists in their dimension – or whatever you want to call it. It's entirely possible that all the key pieces of the ship exist outside our perception."

"Which would explain the messages," Amy replied. "Only part of the communication system exists in our realm. The rest is outside it, in theirs."

"And just as we can't see them, they can't see us! At least, I *think* they can't see us. Velvet?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't think he can see you. After all, Amy is standing right on top of him and he doesn't seem to notice. The only thing that got his attention was when you made that chair."

"Can you talk to him?" Amanda asked.

"Let me see," Velvet Dawn replied. She zoomed over to a vacant spot on the floor and hovered in the air. "Hello there!" she said shouted. "How are you doing?"

"Any response?" Amy asked.

"Nope. Apparently I can see him but he can't see me."

"But why can you see him at all?"

"I have no idea. I just can, that's all."

"There's got to be *some* reason," Amanda said thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's something in her physiology? Maybe there's something unusual about her genetics? I mean, she is a wisp, after all."

"We can look into that later," Amy said. "The alien is *right there!* There has to be some way we can make contact with him. We just need to attract his attention. What if—"

Velvet interrupted her. "It's too late. He's gone now."

"Gone?" Amanda replied. "What do you mean, gone? Where did he go?"

"Beats me. He was there one moment, and then he turned off the console and just disappeared! I have no idea where he went."

"But that doesn't make sense! If they can travel through space the way we can then why do they need a starship?"

"To travel through the anomaly to our universe?" Amy suggested.

"Maybe so. But maybe he's still on the ship after all and just moved out of Velvet's vision. There is so much about this that we don't know."

"But we do know more than we did. Velvet, can you describe what he looked like?"

"He was short of shadowy," Velvet replied. "I really couldn't see him very well. He was kind of transparent – like he was barely there at all – and I couldn't make out very many details. But from what I could tell he kind of looked like the two of you – a tall figure with legs and arms and a head and all. It was all sort of indistinct, though."

"What about the console?" Amanda asked. "What can you tell us about it?"

"He turned it off. He pushed a button, and then he and the console both disappeared. It's not there anymore."

"Can you see anything else from that dimension?" Amy asked. "Any other shadowy things?"

Velvet shook her head. "Nope. That was it."

"So what do we do now?" Amanda asked.

"I think we need to do two things," Amy replied. "First, we need to have Velvet analyzed so we can figure out how she can see into this other dimension – or whatever it is. Second, we need to give

Velvet the ability to show us what she's seeing."

"Do you want me to draw a picture?" Velvet asked.

Amy laughed. "Not quite. Sister, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"The Sentinel?"

"Exactly! Velvet, are you ready to go on another trip?"

"Absolutely! I love trips. So where are we off to next?"

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In the tenth millennium of the Eternal era the Milky Way galaxy was home to hundreds of millions of inhabited star systems – including Earth, which was where the Most High God dwelt with His people. The Milky Way functioned as the heart of the Universe and was the capital of all the inhabited galaxies. It was a thriving place that was full of living creatures of all kinds.

Of all the inhabited systems in this galaxy, there was one system that was quite different from the others. In fact, it was the only star system in the entire universe that was inhabited not by people but by a single machine. This star system was not the home of men or aliens, but was the home of the Artilect – the largest and most advanced machine ever built.

The star in this system was a staggering 90 million miles wide. It was many times the size of the star that Earth and Mars orbited, and it released as much energy in six seconds as Sol did in a year. In orbit around this energetic star were 74 planets. At least, they used to be planets – before they were turned into nodes in the Artilect's machinery.

No one lived in that star system. The only people who ever visit it were the Administrators, and the rare guest that might accompany them. The privilege of setting foot on the Artilect's homeworld was a rare one indeed.

Velvet Dawn knew nothing of this – and yet she was still filled with awe and wonder as she looked out the window. She was inside the Administrative Tower, which rose a thousand feet above the surface of the mechanical world. The Artilect had constructed the Tower at the dawn of the Eternal Era in order to give the Administrators a chance to meet.

Below them, stretching from horizon to horizon, was the machinery that made up the Artilect.

"It's like nothing I've ever seen before!" Velvet exclaimed. "I don't even know how to describe what I'm seeing. I didn't know there was this much hardware in the entire universe! I see pipes, and cables, and big buildings, and little buildings, and boxes, and I don't know what else. And you say that the whole planet is like this?"

"Over the entire surface, and all the way down to the planet's core," Amanda replied. "And there are 73 other worlds that are just like this."

"I can't even comprehend that! Is the Artilect nice?"

"I try to be," a voice said. Velvet zipped around and saw an old man standing nearby. He had white hair and a neatly trimmed beard, and he was wearing bluejeans and a brown sweater. "Is there something I can help you with, young lady?"

"Hi there! I'm Velvet Dawn. Who are you?"

"I'm the Artilect. I am the machine that you see down below you."

"Really? I don't understand. You don't look like a machine to me!"

The Artilect smiled. "I'm just a projection, Velvet – an image. I'm not really here – well, not in the same way that you are. I created this image so that you could have a way to interact with me."

"Oh, ok. Just like the aliens on the ship! They project themselves into our space so they can interact with it, and then they return back to where they came from. But they're not *really* here at all."

Amanda spoke up. "That's an interesting theory. Amy, do you think that's what is going on?"

"Could be. We'll need more information to be sure."

"Is there something I can help you with?" the Artilect asked. "Do you need help tracking down the aliens who built the *Vaughn*?"

Amy shook her head. "We might need your help before all this is over, but right now we have a lead that we want to track down. Well, a couple leads, actually. We were wondering if Steve could analyze some DNA for us."

"Who is Steve?" Velvet asked.

Amanda groaned. "His real name is the Sentinel. He's the Artilect's son. I don't know why my sister insists on calling him Steve."

"Because that's his name!" Amy said.

"That's *not* the name the Artilect gave him," Amanda protested.

"Ok, then it's his nickname. Besides, it's not like he minds or anything. He's never complained about it."

"It is a fine name," the Sentinel commented. A figure had appeared beside the Artilect. He was a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman who wore a gray suit and hat.

Velvet Dawn gasped. "Is that how all of you people get around – you just pop in and out of space at will? Don't you find that kind of unsettling?"

"I apologize for startling you," the Sentinel replied. "This is how I have always traveled. One simply gets used to it. It is like stepping through a door."

"Except you're stepping across the stars instead," Velvet replied. "I wish I could do that!"

Amy ran over and hugged the Sentinel. "It's so good to see you! How have you been?"

"Quite well," he replied, as he greeted Amy and Amanda. "I have been working closely with Professor Grimes. He is a most unusual individual."

Amy laughed. "That's for sure! At least he doesn't set things on fire anymore. He used to burn cell phones, you know."

"So I heard – but he had his reasons. He lived in a difficult time of great darkness. In that era there were many things that were worthy of being destroyed, but those days have come to an end. How can I be of assistance? The Artilect tells me that you need my help."

Velvet spoke up. "Really? I didn't hear him say anything. Is this more of that nanite communication that you were telling me about earlier?"

The Sentinel shook his head. "My father and I are both machines. We communicate in a, well, mechanical manner."

"You're a machine too? You sure don't look like one! Well, I guess the Artilect doesn't look like one either, so why should you? Are you made up of a bunch of planets?"

"I'm afraid not. Unlike my father, I am self-contained. What you see standing before you is not a simple projection. I am actually a small metallic sphere that has created this figure of a man. When I move from place to place I actually physically move there. I am a mobile unit."

"Oh," Velvet said. "This is all kind of complicated. Are there more beings who look like people but who aren't actually people at all?"

The Sentinel shook his head. "My father and I are the only two artificial life forms in existence. All other beings are exactly who they appear to be."

The Artilect spoke up. "It is actually a bit more complicated than that, Velvet. There is more to us than machinery, but you are still young. We will explain it when you are older."

"So how can I assist you?" the Sentinel asked.

Amanda told the Sentinel what Velvet Dawn saw on the *Vaughn*, and explained their problem. He listened with interest. "So you would like for me to learn the secret of her amazing ability."

"Exactly! I mean, if you're not busy. I'm sure you have a lot of other things going on."

"I am never too busy to help you and your sister. After all, that is why I was created. I would be more than happy to help, but I do not know how long it will take. If what you say is correct then this will open up an entirely new field of science. It may take some time to understand the mechanics involved and learn how to reproduce it."

"Really?" Amy asked. "You mean you haven't done it yet?"

The Artilect smiled. "There are a great many things that need to be done, and even in eternity moments are precious. It simply never mattered before so it was not addressed. But I have no doubt that my son can settle this."

Velvet Dawn spoke up. "I'll do whatever I can to help! You can count on me. When do we start?"

Amy laughed. "You're already done! The Artilect already has a sample of wisp essence. That's all he needs. You don't actually have to do anything."

"You gave him what? I don't understand."

"It's kind of complicated," Amanda said. "You see, wisps—"

Amy interrupted. "Are made up of stuff. The Artilect has a sample of that stuff. He's going to study it to learn about how you work."

"Ok, I understand. Now, people are made up of different material than wisps, right?"

"Right. We are *very* different."

"And people have nanites, right?"

Amanda spoke up. "Not usually. Only a few people have nanites. Most don't need them. They can be helpful if you have a certain kind of technical job, but for the most part they aren't really necessary. They're just a tool, you know."

"A really super amazing tool! Where did you get them? Were you born with them?"

"Nope," Amy said. "Actually, the Sentinel gave them to us. But that's a long story."

"Can I have some? I really want to understand what you're doing. The two of you are living on a whole different level! I mean, I'm standing right here with you, but in some ways I'm not really with you at all. Kind of like the alien on the *Vaughn*."

"That's why we're here," Amanda replied. "We want the Sentinel to analyze your essence and understand how your body works. Once he's done that he'll be able to create nanites that are compatible with you. Then you can connect to the network, and once you're connected we can see what you're seeing. But before any of that is possible he's got to study you."

"Oh, I see. I guess I just need to wait, then."

"I'm afraid so."

"I will notify you as soon as I have the results," the Sentinel promised. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"That's all for now," Amy said. "And thank you so very much!"

"So what's next?" Velvet Dawn asked.

Amy grinned. "I think we've had a pretty busy morning, don't you? How would you like to have

lunch?"

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Amy, Amanda, and Velvet Dawn appeared just outside the great city of New Jerusalem. Amy and Amanda had been there many times before; the city was their home. Yet even to them the great city of God was an astonishing sight. It never failed to fill them with wonder.

To their left and right were the mighty golden walls of the city, which stretched more than 200 feet high and extended as far as the eye could see in either direction. Ahead of them was a giant gate that was made out of a single luminous pearl. There was some writing over the gate, and a giant angel stood beside it.

Velvet looked at the gate in awe. "That is amazing! I've never seen anything like it. It's completely different from our village back home."

Amy laughed. "You haven't even seen the city yet! That is just the wall that surrounds it. The actual city is inside."

"Why does the city have a wall?"

"It's for protection. That's also why the gate is guarded by an angel. Nothing that defiles, or works abominations, or makes a lie is allowed to enter the city. The New Jerusalem is a protected place – a safe haven."

"But none of those things exist anymore! You told me God destroyed them all at the final judgment. There aren't any bad people to keep out."

"I know. But the walls, the gate, and the angel are a reminder that things aren't the way they used to be. In the old universe the Redeemed were hated, persecuted, and even murdered for their faith. Here we are protected. None of those who wish us harm can ever reach us again. God will watch over us for all of eternity. The gate and the angel are reminders that we are safe now and have nothing to fear."

"What does the writing over the gate say?"

"It says 'Judah'", Amanda said. "The city has twelve gates, and the gates are named after the tribes of Israel. Judah is the tribe that the Lord Jesus Christ came from."

"Would you like to enter the city?" Amy asked.

"Am I allowed to? It looks very fancy, and I'm not one of the Redeemed. Are you sure I can enter? I mean, I'm not like you. This is your home, not mine."

"Of course you're allowed to! There's nothing evil about you. C'mon, let's go inside."

The trio walked past the angel, through the gate, and into the giant city. A street made of the purest gold, transparent as glass, stretched far into the distance. Velvet saw a beautiful river whose water was clear as crystal. On either side of the river were giant trees. Further down the road she saw buildings.

As they walked down the street they passed many people. The city was full of life, with people going about their business. There were even other races present – but Velvet Dawn was the only wisp.

"It's so beautiful here!" Velvet exclaimed. "This city is so full of light. It's like everything is glowing."

"This city is lit by the glory of God," Amanda explained. "God Himself lives here and His glory permeates everything. In fact, this city actually orbits the Earth. The light that shines from this city lights the Earth itself, and the nations of the Earth walk by its light."

"So it's like a moon," Velvet said.

"Yes and no. A moon simply reflects light from the sun. This city, however, is a *source* of light – and the light that it gives is much more glorious than mere sunlight. It makes the sun seem weak by comparison."

"But you do have a sun, don't you?"

"Sure we do," Amy said. "All of the planets in this system orbit around it. But the New Jerusalem doesn't need it because it's lit by the glory of God. We have a much greater source of light."

"The people here sure are friendly!" Velvet remarked. "Everyone is saying hello to me."

"Of course," Amanda replied. "Not many people have seen a wisp before. You are a very welcome visitor."

At the outskirts of the bustling city the three friends found an elegant building. Outside the building were several gleaming white tables that were surrounded by chairs. A few people were already there, enjoying a late lunch.

"Would you like to have lunch here?" Amy asked Velvet. "It's a fine restaurant – the cook does a brilliant job."

"Sounds fine to me," Velvet replied. "Only wisps don't eat. We don't have food on our homeworld. It's not something we need."

"Technically speaking, people don't need food either. We're immortals, you know. Now that God has abolished death it isn't possible for us to die. But we still eat because we enjoy the food and the fellowship."

"But I *can't* eat."

"But you can still join us anyway," Amanda said.

"That's true. I can do that."

The three friends took their places at an unoccupied table. A few moments later a tall man came over to them. "Amy and Amanda! It is so fine to see you again. It has been a while, has it not?"

"It's good to see you too, Jaden," Amy replied. "How have you been?"

"Oh, very well indeed! But how could I not be well in a place such as this? Is there anyone who cannot find perfect contentment and peace living in the presence of the Lord? Every day brings new blessings."

"It certainly does. It's not like the old world at all! I have felt so relaxed for the past ten thousand years."

"It has been ten millennium, hasn't it? And yet it does not seem long at all. The days are so full of joy that they hardly seem to take any time. Each day is full of wonder and anticipation at what the Lord will do next. But tell me – who is this point of light that you have brought to visit us? I don't believe we've met."

"This is Velvet Dawn," Amanda explained. "She is an Ayalan."

"It is a delight to meet you," Jaden replied. "What can I bring you?"

"It's nice to meet you too," Velvet said. "Um, well, I'm good, actually. I don't actually eat things."

"Ah, I understand. Each race is different. Amy, what about you?"

"Water sounds good to me," she replied.

"Same here," Amanda said.

"Very well. I shall return shortly. In the meantime, enjoy this wonderful day." Jaden then left.

"He seemed really nice," Velvet remarked.

"He is," Amanda agreed. "We never knew him in the old universe, though. He lived and died long before we were born."

"But he seemed to know you!"

Amy laughed. "We're the Redeemed, you know. Here, everyone knows everyone. We each have our place and our role in the Lord's kingdom. You might say that we're one big happy family."

"Well, we *are* one big happy family," Amanda replied. "After all, we're all descendents of Adam and Eve."

"Who is that?" Velvet asked.

"Our ancestors. When God created mankind, He made just two of them – one male and one female. Then they had children. All of the Redeemed are their descendents."

"He just made *two* of them?" Velvet asked, surprised. "But He made a lot of my kind! And didn't He make a lot of angels, too?"

Amy spoke up. "That's right. But that's not how He formed mankind."

"But why? I mean, I guess God can do whatever He wants. It just seems so strange."

"Well, it was important for technical reasons," Amanda said. "You see, when God created man He placed them in a garden He had created. In that garden He placed the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and He told Adam and Eve that they were not allowed to eat from it. That tree was forbidden to them."

"But they ate from it anyway, right? I think I've heard about this before."

"Right. That act had terrible consequences. Because of what they did, sin and disease and death entered the world. Before they ate of the tree Adam and Eve were immortals, but now they would grow old and die. Before they ate their world was perfect, but now it was broken and full of evil. Adam and Eve's children would inherit their sin nature and would grow old and die as well. The world became a terrible place that was full of all sorts of horrors – and it all came from that original sin."

"That's why Jesus came," Amy said. "Our sin made us guilty before God, and there was nothing we could do to fix our guilt. We could never become right with God no matter what we did. The only way we could be forgiven is if someone else took the punishment for our sins. So God sent His son Jesus Christ into the world. He lived a perfect life and then He died a terrible death on the cross. His death paid for our sins with His own blood. He purchased God's forgiveness for all who repented and believed in Him."

"Which gets us back to your original question," Amanda continued. "Since one man brought sin and death into the world and passed it on to all of his descendents, it was possible for one man to bring righteousness and life into the world. One man could undo what one other man had caused. The reason God could save mankind through Christ is because mankind was made sinners by Adam."

"Right," Amy said. "So it was *vital* that all of mankind be the descendents of Adam. That's also why Christ had to become a man: He could only suffer in our place if He was one of us."

"Isn't He still a man?" Velvet asked.

"The Lord Jesus is fully God and fully man. He did not give up His deity when He became one of us. But to answer your question, He is still in the same form that He assumed when He rose bodily from the grave. He is not a pure spirit, like the Holy Spirit."

Jaden came to the table, carrying their drinks. He set them on the table in front of them. "Do you ladies know what you would like to have for lunch?"

"You know, everything here is wonderful," Amy replied. "Why not just surprise me? I'm sure

the chef has something special. He always does.”

Amanda nodded. “I agree. I’ll have whatever she has.”

“Very well,” Jaden said, smiling. “I will return shortly.”

After he left, Velvet looked at Amy. “You don’t eat grass, right? I mean, I know that some races do.”

“Right. We do eat plants, though – there are a lot of vegetables and fruits that we enjoy. But we can’t digest grass.”

Amanda turned to her sister. “So how long do you think it will take the Sentinel to analyze Velvet’s essence?”

“Probably a few days. Even if it takes him longer, though, there’s no rush; we have plenty of time. The reunion isn’t until May 3. We’ve got three months until then. In the meantime, there’s all sorts of things we can do while we’re waiting! I want to show Velvet the Great Library.”

“But she can’t read,” Amanda pointed out.

“Oh, that’s right. I keep forgetting. Well, once she gets the nanites she’ll be able to do a whole lot more than read.”

“Really?” Velvet asked. “So the nanites will teach me?”

“The process is more direct than that,” Amanda explained. “You won’t have to learn how to read because that knowledge will be a part of you. The nanites were designed to extend a person’s abilities. You’ll be able to do all sorts of things you could never do before.”

“That’s right,” Amy agreed. “In fact, you’ll be able to do most of the things that we can do.”

“That will be amazing!” Velvet exclaimed. “I’m going to have so much fun.”

“You have no idea. It will open up entirely new worlds for you – and new possibilities. You’ll see things that you never even knew existed.”

“You mean *you’ll* see things,” Velvet replied. “After all, the whole reason you’re giving them to me is so that you can see what I see, right?”

“That’s right. But there’s still a lot we can do while we wait, though. We can show you downtown, and take you home. I’m sure you’d love to see where we live!”

“She also needs to see the Throne,” Amanda added. “There is no greater sight that she could ever see, nor any greater thing she could do than worship Him.”

“Can I do that?” Velvet asked. “Is it allowed?”

Amy laughed. “Yes, it’s allowed. Do you really think that He would refuse to see one of His own creations?”

“But I don’t have anything to give Him. I didn’t bring anything. My race doesn’t really have a lot of stuff, you know. We don’t live in a city of gold or anything like that. We’re kind of humble and small.”

“But you are giving Him something. You’re helping us find the race who created the *Vaughn*. You’re allowing us to use your senses to see things we’ve never seen before. You are playing a role in the advancement of His kingdom. That counts for something, you know.”

“I guess that’s true. I’m so excited! I can’t wait to see Him. Is He – is He scary?”

“He is good,” Amanda replied. “He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the great I Am. There is no one else like Him.”

Jaden came to their table, holding a tray. “And here we are, ladies! Amy and Amanda, I bring you the chef’s specialty of the day: a bowl of fresh, steaming vegetable soup.”

“Mmm, it smells wonderful,” Amy said. “Thank you!”

Jaden placed the food on the table in front of them. "Is there anything else that I can bring you?"

"I think we're set," Amanda replied.

"Very well! If there is, let me know. I will do whatever I can to get it – even if I have to travel to the end of the universe itself."

After Jaden left, Velvet looked at Amy. "Would he really do that?"

Amy laughed. "You know, he probably would. But there's no need. I think we have everything we need here."

"What is that, anyway?" Velvet asked, as she stared at the bowls on the table. "Did he call that soup?"

"You've never seen soup before? Well, of course you haven't. You don't eat. Right. Well, this is soup. It is an amazing collection of flavors, vegetables, and spices, all mixed together in a most delightful way."

"Ok then. I'll take your word for it."

Amy looked at her sister. "Would you thank the Lord for this meal before we begin?"

"I'd be happy to," she replied.

As the three bowed their heads, Amanda began to pray.