

A FABLE FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM
The Adventures of Flelix

Alan R. Drengson

©2019

Introduction

The following fable was inspired by the birth of my eldest daughter, Alice, and by a story Arne Naess tells about a flea he saw fall into some acid.

The day of Alice's arrival was a long one and the labor of her birth was intense. When she finally arrived I held her in my arms and greeted her with the words, "Welcome to Wonderland!" The evening following her birth the idea for a series of fables involving fleas as central characters came to me. I wrote the first draft of the Flelix story during the following week.

Several years later the story was revised and illustrated. Flelix is written from a philosophical background that is spelled out in more detail in several of my books beginning with, *Shifting Paradigms: From Technocrat to Planetary Person* (1983) and on through several titles ending with the co-edited (with Duncan Taylor) anthology, *Ecoforestry: The Art and Science of Sustainable Forest Use* (1997).

I write using a deep ecological approach, which assumes that the Modernist paradigms that have served our society over the last couple of centuries are in the process of being replaced by more expansive ecological paradigms. This is a shift from mechanistic to organic metaphors. The key element here in our relations to other beings is the recognition that consciousness is an integral process of existence. An expansive movement within ourselves to greater comprehensive awareness unites intuition and reason, feeling and cognition. This unity enables us to reach toward a total view (Naess) of diverse cultures and beings with respect for their own ways and values.

Ecological paradigms enable us to include all values as part of the larger comprehension that such unity of awareness makes possible. When we expand our sense of community to include other human cultures we are moving to a larger sense of Self and identification with universal human values. When we move beyond the human to include other sentient beings, we enlarge our sense of community to include all those who are members of our ecological community, upon whom we depend for ecological services and values. This more comprehensive embrace of values and other beings is also a spiritual undertaking which orients all of our relationships by means of compassion.

In the West our major approaches to the world are undergoing fundamental change related to the above themes: our conceptions of relations between male and

female, men and women, humans and other animals, humans and insects, humans and nature, as well as our models of development, progress, and technology are being expanded by ecological paradigms. The mechanical reductionist views of Modernism lent themselves to dividing the ecological community into good guys and bad guys, and justified waging war on some members of this larger community, such as insect “pests”. The story of Flelix is set in our current context and explores different ways to relate to the nonhuman world.

The flea fable is an old and noble literary form used for centuries to tell stories that only a flea could know, since they could ride along on their human hosts undetected. The fleas could hear what went on in the throne and bed rooms of society. The idea behind this Millennium Flea Fable is to explore the diverse forms of life and adaptations that characterize our ecological communities. I hope you find this fable and its illustrations entertaining and illuminating. May all beings flourish!

Chapter 1: Going to see the Wizard

Many fleons ago there lived in Fictoria a dog planet named Finda. On the dog planet Finda there were many flea tribes. Some were descendants of fleas who had long ago lived on coyote or wolf planets. These very tough fleas had long memories and rich traditions. Flelix belonged to a tribe of these wolf fleas. He was very reflective for a wolf flea, and yet he was also given at times to impulsive actions, which is why he set off to see the great flea wizard, Flant, when he did. Whenever Flelix had a flea moment to reflect, which was often, he would ponder some mystery, perhaps a strange old flea saying.

"Brave fleas are said to be fearless, but only other fleas can say this." This was one of the sayings of the Ancients that Flelix often wondered about. Of course brave fleas are fearless aren't all brave individuals fearless? Not necessarily, Flelix thought. Some creatures who are not fearful are aggressively brave, and so they might not really be brave at all. Some act brave because they are frightened; they act out of fear, not bravery. There are some who are totally fearless, but reckless. They are foolish, not brave. But then, maybe the Ancients were talking nonsense. Flelix knew *this* couldn't be true. Poor Flelix sometimes tied himself in mental knots with these twists of reasoning.

His sister Chalice and their cousin Sykle were not reflective like Flelix. They thought many of his intricate chains of reasoning were boring or silly. Flelix, contrarily, was convinced that he was in pursuit of a deeper understanding of fleahood, or life, or existence, or...something! Flelix thought that the world can be figured out. Sykle thought it can be related to only through practical action. Chalice thought they should be still and let "the flow" give them the world's feel.

One day when Flelix was pondering the wisdom of the Ancients, it dawned on him that many heroic and brave fleas, who he had once known, had disappeared. Many, he knew, had been captured when they tried to cross the Great Plain or Planet's Belly, during the day, and so were probably dead. The Great Plain or Belly was a large, open area free of the long trees that covered most of Finda. The fleas usually lived deep in the forest, among the tall, limbless trees of many colours, but sometimes they ventured out and even crossed the Great Plain.

As one neared the Great Plain the long trees gave way to short ones, and then to sparse growth, where it was very difficult for a flea to hide. If a flea was discovered on the Plain by the beings beyond, the Great Sky Beaks might descend. A flea could be captured and crushed in the giant pinchers. The best chance of escaping them could be to leap into deep space, but this risked being unable to return to Finda. A flea could spend days in a wasteland before being able to get

onto a new planet, and even then, it might be one that he or she could not in the long term survive on. At the least, one had to make a whole new circle of friends. It was hard to join a tribe if you had no family or relatives to support you. Knowing all of this, adult fleas usually stayed away from the Plain, except under cover of darkness. At night, many fleas would venture to the open Plain because the planet's surface was softer there, and feeding was easier. It was also a good place from which to take the Leap of Fleath, if that was one's intent. The leap of Fleath involved leaving the planet. To be down on the unmoving infinite ground.

Nevertheless, some bold and foolish fleas went there during the day, even though that was when the large thatchers scraped through the forests, followed by the Big Beaks. The thatchers flipped many fleas to the tops of the trees, where they were then devoured by mysterious beasts that fed on the fringes of the forest, but lived in outer space. Some of the rakers, it was thought, were somehow part of Finda, but no one understood very well how this could be.

For his part, Felix wondered if boldness and bravery were the same thing. He was uncertain. He decided he would like to discuss this with Chalice. For even though she was more given to poetry, she was very insightful. Her observations were often helpful. Chalice was constantly amazed by everything around her. She was always discovering new facets of things, subtleties that other fleas missed. Felix might not have figured out the difference between boldness and bravery, but he had noticed one thing: Bold fleas perished more frequently than the cautious ones who remained in the forest. The Forest Stayers, as they were called, had many techniques for staying alert so as to avoid the misfortunes that befell other fleas. But even they had no sure fire way of avoiding being swept away by the slimy, slippery, sticky stuff that sometimes flooded the forests. Water alone was easy to cope with, if a flea was in good condition and wide awake, but the slimy, slippery, sticky Goo Floods were disastrous. The fleas regarded these floods as "acts of Fod," for they had no idea of their source or significance.

Felix pondered these and other troubles as he hurried through the darkening forest. He was on his way to visit the great flea wizard, Flant. Flant, it was alleged, could remember having been something other than a flea in one of his past lives. It was widely believed that he had been amongst the Great Sky Beings, who provided warm haven for planets. It was also believed that the Sky Beings sometimes went on rampages and attempted to wipe out the flea populations of whole planets.

The planet Finda had a variety of stem plants with many shapes and colours. Finda moved in many unpredictable ways and also was warm. Felix thought that

Finda was surely a large living thing who provided the fleas with shelter and sustenance.

Felix was so deep in thought that he had lost his way. Without realizing it, he had run headlong into the opening of one of the deep windy caves near one of the pointed ends of the planet. He saw Chalice just inside.

"Chalice!" he exclaimed, "What are you doing here?"

"I came to listen to the winds blowing through these tunnels," she answered. "I thought if I listened hard enough, I could sense what they are. I think the planet is breathing."

The winds in the Tunnels of Nares blew all day and night. No flea had ever been there when the winds were not blowing. Sometimes they blew fast and hard and sometimes they blew soft and slow, but they were always blowing, first in one direction and then in the other. When the winds blew from within the planet, the air was very warm and moist, and sometimes carried strong odors. When they blew into the caves, the winds could be quite cold, but sometimes they were hot and dry.

The cave openings were usually glistening with moisture, and the ground was rich and black so rich that it was covered only in a dark, dense growth of low hedge-like plants. There were also strange growths and odd creatures--smaller than fleas-- in these tunnels. Only a few fleas had ventured deep into the caves and returned. The conditions deep within were not conducive to flea survival. Some fleas thought the planet had a molten core, since the deeper one went into the Nares Tunnels, the hotter it became. The tunnels were one of the many places on Finda that had never been completely explored.

To cope with the dangers of living on planets like Finda, the fleas had many defenses. They had very rigid, almost impenetrable exteriors. Their bodies were covered with stiff, black, spear-like hairs. They had extra thin bodies to make movement through the dense forests easier. They also had several forms of locomotion and other strategies for escaping the hazards that were part of their world. Some flea races, who lived on planets that were not Dog planets, had developed even more intricate forms of protection, and had very involved life cycles.

Felix had heard that there were many kinds of fleas, and that they varied widely in appearance and behaviour. He had also been told that all fleas were kin. Encounters with other flea races were rare, however. But there were fleas on Finda who, like the great wizard Flant, claimed to remember former lives on other types of planets. They told exotic stories of flea circuses, flea sales, and many other things almost too wonderful or fearful to imagine.

These stories were exchanged when the flea tribes gathered every year down at the base of the large planet extension that they called the flail. The flail was part of the planet, yet it often seemed to move independently. Movements at the extreme end of the flail could be quite rhythmic and violent. The powwow was held at the base of Finda's flail, where there was a large area ideal for setting up camp. The fleas gathered there each year to celebrate their ancestors' coming to the planet, which had been shortly after the planet's birth. Their celebrations, they hoped, would help maintain the planet's continuing good health. They knew, from the wisdom of the Ancients, that the flea population could become too large, and then vast areas of forests could thin and some areas would even become bare. The planet's surface could become pockmarked, filled with craters, scars, creases, and crevices. These were ideal places in which to hide, but they were also places in which other nonflea creatures could flourish. The planet's surface could then start to fester, turn red, exude sap, and smell bad. Its elixir would no longer be very tasty or nourishing. As long as the fleas renewed and practiced the teachings of the Ancients, their numbers would remain within safe limits.

Felix was one flea who took the sayings of the Ancients to heart. He thought about them a lot. He turned them over and over in his mind, trying to understand each one, even though he was never able to plumb their full depths. And this was one of the reasons he was on his way to see Flant. When he explained his mission to Chalice, she decided to join him, for she, too, had always wanted to meet Flant.

Felix wanted most of all to ask Flant what is of highest value, for he was confused about this. There were almost as many opinions on this as there were fleas. Some fleas believed that eating anything other than the planet's lava was taboo; others consumed fungi and other intoxicants in search of "higher" visions. Some believed that the sacredness of the planet was the highest value, but others said it should just be consumed, for the great Fod had made it for them to use. When it was all used up, they believed, a new planet would be provided.

Felix and Chalice had fallen into a deep silence and as they toiled up the steep slope that led to Flant's cave. It was a large cave, at the highest point on the planet when the planet was in normal daytime motion. There were two such caves, each at the base of a high, mountain peak. These twin peaks could be scaled by an energetic flea from their back sides. The forests were very stunted near the bases of the peaks. Felix had been to the top of one of them when he was younger. The view from the summit could be quite impressive, even if it was often a swaying one. If a twin peak was approached from the front side, as Felix and Chalice were now doing, one climbed a steadily increasing grade that steepened noticeably near the base of the mountain. He and Chalice had retraced their steps from the tunnel

of Nares back toward the main body of the planet. In bypassing the planet's glistening globe eyes, they had to descend a little, then climb back to the base of the twin peaks. They were certain that Flant lived in the cave at the base of the right peak. They finally reached this base, and stopped in a small grove of trees.

Because she had been up all night, Chalice had grown weary from the fast pace that Flelix had set, so they rested for a while and ate some planet lava, by chewing a hole in Finda's surface. Chalice was sleepy, for she had been up all night composing poems, while listening to the restless winds of Nares. Nevertheless, she was so excited by the prospect of meeting the wizard Flant that it was hard for her to fall asleep. She worried that if she did not snooze now she would be unable to stay awake throughout the visit. She had heard that the Cave of Silence, as Flant's cave was called, was moist and warm a perfect sleeping place, for a flea.

It was said that Flant had moved to the Cave of Silence when he had grown old and was cold all the time. It was said that living in the warm silence had rejuvenated him, and from the reports of fleas who had visited him, this certainly seemed to be true.

Despite her excitement, Chalice finally fell asleep in the bushes, as she pressed against the warm surface of the planet. While she slept, Flelix fell again into deep thought. He was pondering two sayings of the Ancients that he found particularly baffling. Some times they seemed to make perfect sense, but at others they seemed senseless, perhaps a joke of the Ancients on all Fleadom. Maybe, he mused, the Ancients had been trying to teach fleas to think for themselves. Or maybe they had not said these things at all, or the sayings had been twisted and changed through telling and retelling. The two sayings were: "Don't put off today what you can do tomorrow," and "Don't put all of your baskets on one leg."

Flelix's thoughts hopped to yet another saying, "Flunky see, Flunky do." He had never met a Flunky, and had no idea who they were. He had heard that Flunkies compulsively imitate others, and are not even aware that they do this. Flelix found this strange and hard to believe. The great Flant will know, he thought, whether this is an authentic saying of the Ancients, or just some old flea joke. He also wanted Flant to explain Fockem's razor. It was supposedly something so keen that it could even shave an imaginary beard. Flelix figured that an idea beard was probably very hard to cut, but he didn't know exactly what it was. It was more than he could fathom. The more he thought about these things, the more drowsy he became. The warmth and gentle pulse of the planet's surface lulled him, and soon he was snoring with Chalice.

When they awoke in the morning, they found to their delight that they were quite close to the entrance of Flant's cave, and, after a light breakfast, they walked

to it. Flant greeted them with quiet dignity, and gave them a special tea brewed from secret plants that he had harvested. "This tea," he said, "will help you to see more clearly."

Flelix and Chalice drank their tea with much ceremony. Then Flelix told Flant why they had come, telling him how confusing he found the sayings of the Ancients. He concluded by asking about conceptual beards and Fockem's razor.

As Flelix talked, Chalice carefully examined Flant's appearance. He was a very large, wrinkled, greying flea, and although he was stooped and moved slowly, he gave the impression of great strength. He also had clear, sharp eyes that seemed to look right into her. His presence immediately commanded serious respect.

Flant spoke: "When we think with words, or by means of pictures," he said, "we are engaged in conceptualizing. Concepts have no substance. They are only instruments. They have no value in themselves. Their worth comes in helping us to find the things of real value in our lives. Abiding value as wisdom can be found in many ways. One of these ways is the Leap of Fleath."

Flant then spoke at length about the Great Knowledge and the Leap of Fleath. Before we tell you what he said, we should mention that not long after Flelix and Chalice visited Flant, circumstances forced them to take the Leap of Fleath. It happened shortly after the snow of death, when a killing white powder fell upon the planet. The Great Plain and the forests were covered with it. There were some deep crevices and other places that the powder could not penetrate, and fleas in these places survived. The snow of death was very hard on infants and old fleas. There were a few fleas who seemed immune to the snow; they wallowed around in it with relative impunity. Flelix and his friends were at the Great Plain when the snow began to fall, and they knew that in their exposed positions they would surely die. They had no choice but to take the Leap of Fleath, and as they took it, they knew they might not be able to return to the planet Finda for many light and dark periods. They also knew that there was a chance that they might not be able to find their way back to Finda, and so might never see their friends and family ever again.

Their leap proved to be the beginning of a series of astounding and fantastic adventures. While trying to find their way home, Flelix and his friends visited many other types of planets, and saw many other kinds of beings in places quite unlike any planet they had ever seen. They travelled to the Great Ground, which was alleged to be infinite, and there they encountered many strange beings, such as living hot bottles, whom they used for heat, and strange crawling creatures who tended large herds of green critters that fed on the lava of stationary green planets. They also encountered lots of beings far smaller than fleas.

As Flant had said, the Leap of Fleath was risky, but it was also a doorway to other worlds. We'll tell you about these adventures later. Right now, we must return to our account of what the great Flant said to Chalice and Flelix.

Chapter 2. Flant the Wizard

Flant rarely spoke, since he quit talking to himself many flears ago. He loved silence. Silence was no longer empty for him. It was pulsating with possibilities, pregnant with meaning, full of wonder and mystery. As he became silent, Flant heard other beings beyond the normal range of his senses.

Flant lived in silent continuous contact with Finda. He knew that it was living. He could sense its breathing and heartbeat. When he was especially quiet and receptive, he could harmonize his own rhythms and breathing with the planet's. In this way he entered a larger world than known by most fleas. His spontaneous experience expanded outwardly, as he settled into his center. Flant became aware of the whole planet and the world beyond. Flant knew the language of silence. This enabled him to commune with others. They would consciously tune in, since a part of each of us them is folded into the *Way of Silence*.

Flant would speak when a seeker such as Flelix came to see him. Matter of fact, the code of silence demands that he respond to the seeker's request with guidance. Flant's response was tailored to each seeker's situation, as he always attuned himself to the seeker. He would speak spontaneously with a deep, resonant understanding of that individual's problems and feelings. The Way of Silence includes speech. There is what must be said, and there is what can be conveyed only by being unsaid. The larger world of silence is entered through the center gate. Words alone cannot bring a change in perspective that sees through words to the real world. These things flashed through Flant's mind before he spoke to Flelix and Chalice. Stories and examples always came to him as he spoke.

"The Ancients knew many things that we have lost because we are more dependent on instruments. The Ancients were pioneers they had to discover things for themselves. They colonized new types of planets, and learned from their own experience. They paid close attention to what actually happens. What happens in a planet is not fully revealed to our tiny senses. Planets are vast living beings that we cannot usually see as a whole with our normal vision. No matter, for we can become deeply aware with them, and can sense their rhythms. We can sense the planet's health, and discover how to keep it from deteriorating as a result of our own mistakes.

"When you do not have a tradition of wisdom, you must pay close attention in order to use your innate knowledge and intuition. You must be fully open. Don't try to figure things out with formulas and rules. This can help with some details, but doesn't work well for the whole. Formulas can prevent us from coping with

difficulties. Nature and Fod provide us with all we need for survival, and we must not interfere with these powers.

"One problem lies in our confusions about our self nature. We learn from the Way of Silence there is both a small and large Self. Most fleas are tangled up with their small self. The little self is also called the Fego. The Fego has many sizes, from narrow personality to an expanded tribal identity. The large Self has no fixed boundaries in space and time. It is beyond history, beyond the moment, beyond surface changes. Its nature is emptiness, so it is filled with everything. Almost everything we say of it demands that we say the opposite. Since this is very obscure to you, I will tell you a story about the planet Rover, where I lived as a young flea. The planet was young and its forests were lush. They were unspoiled by overpopulation. Its red lava was free of poisons. I lived there with a group of wild fleas, who devoted part of their time to removing parasites that damaged the planet's surface.

"They were a fierce tribe of warrior fleas. They were gentle with each other, but fierce with anyone who damaged the planet. In this band there was a flea who was 100 flears old. Since I was a newcomer, he took me under his wing. I had never known my grandparents, so he became a grandfather to me. He initiated me into the way of the Natural Fwords, as the warriors were called. He taught me about silence and the small and large selves. His teachings changed my whole life.

"After I had been there for several flears, Grandfather said that I should become an official member of the Natural Fwords. He said I had to go into the wilderness by myself for several days, fast, chant, and purify myself. He said I would receive a vision from my spirit helpers, and only then could I return to my band. I would then tell of my vision and take part in ceremonial dances. I would be initiated and receive a new name. He added that I did not have to do any of these things. I could remain with the warriors for as long as I wanted, keeping my own name. I was free to come and go as I wished. The tribe accepted me as I was. As a guest, I was not expected to adhere to all of their ways. Only if I became a member of the Natural Fwords would I have to fully adopt their ways. I told Grandfather that I was eager and ready to become a member of the tribe.

"I will not go into detail about the trials, tribulations, and rituals of my initiation. I went through them in an acceptable way, and then became a member of the Natural Fwords. I lived their way of life, learned their martial arts, married, and had lots of fildren. I held a position of honour with them. My martial skills were advanced, and I was one of the three best 'artists' in my band. My prowess led me to be smug and lacking in humility. Grandfather, who was having difficulty getting around, took me aside one day and said we should go to the Deep Forest

together. At this time, the tribe was camped on the edge of the Great Plain of Rover.

"We got to the Deep Forest and were walking along together in the twilight and tranquility, when all of a sudden Grandfather whirled around and stared me straight in the eyes, with a very intense, sharp look. 'Who are you?' he asked. I was struck totally dumb, and for the longest time could say nothing. My mind was absolutely blank it had stopped dead. Oh, I could have given him my current name, 'Strongheart,' or my past name, 'Fannon,' but neither answer seemed right. Grandfather just kept waiting for my response, until I thought that forever was short by comparison. And then he spoke. 'Unless you see that you are this,' he said, pointing at the forest, 'and that you are that,' pointing back toward the plain, 'and that you are the ground and the sky, you will not recover from the illness of pride. I have tried to show you this along with everything else I've taught you. But this is something that you must experience in order to know. Don't try to figure this out; if you let go of your narrow self you'll know it. And remember that our ignorance is great and our wisdom small.' Then Grandpa was silent.

"For once in my life, I had no questions. My mind was still dead in the forest. It wasn't that I was unaware, or unconscious, it was just that my thinking mind had stopped. Into this silence there came a deep insight into the unity of all things, and a sense of my oneness with them. The planet's movements, its breath and very life, were all my own, and mine were its. I could see that as we protected it, we were protecting our Self, for our small self is actually part of a larger Self that outlives it. The small selves are like the skins of snakes, that we shed from time to time as we grow.

"Since my flears with the Natural Fwords, I have lived on many other planets and on the Great Ground that is surrounded by the Great Space. In these different places, I have had many identities, many selves. Throughout these many lives I have had an abiding sense of being at home, at peace and in harmony. The sayings of the Ancients embody this living wisdom that Grandfather helped me to realize. Once you let go of your illusions of separation and isolation, you will discover that there are many ways of knowing, seeing, and understanding.

"The living wisdom is beyond rules, but isn't lawlessness. It is both freedom and responsibility. This living wisdom comes from direct awareness of how the world is. We need rules and regulations only because we get out of touch with this wisdom and so get out of harmony. The rules replace intelligence and compassion.

"Open living wisdom dissolves feelings of isolation that is the Fego's primary problem. With living wisdom our actions and words are always suitable. They are in harmony with the way of nature. There are three ways to realize this living

wisdom. They are the Way of Silence, the Way of Action, and the Way of Feeling. Each of these has advantages and pitfalls, which I'll not go into. If you tell fleas to live without rules, they think that they should live by shallow desires and whims, like outlaws. This is not true!

"The world is alive in patterns, in order and form, but it is not governed by a central director. There is great diversity. There is also a Great Freedom that comes in knowing the larger Self. Symbolic descriptions of these patterns has some value, but if treated as destiny it can be dangerous to our creative freedom. It is our creative capacity for original and spontaneous action that characterizes Fleahood at Its Best. There are certain necessities in life that seem at first to run counter to this, such as the necessity to learn a lot very fast so as to survive.

"A young flea has an enormous task. To make this easier we use two ways of teaching. One involves imitation of actions. The other involves using rules of thumb as summaries of many observations and experiences. Their use increases our chances of getting things right.

"Consider the saying, 'Flunky see, flunky do.' You have heard this saying and puzzled over it. 'Flunky' refers to a type of planet that lives in the Great Beyond, up in the large Green Expanse. Flunky planets congregate together. They look alike and act in the same ways. When Flunkies see other Flunkies doing something, they almost can't help doing the same thing themselves.

"Fleas have this imitative ability. I have seen Flunkies act in these ways. This is one interpretation of the saying. But, there is another meaning to this saying, and it is that imitation has limitations. Here, 'flunky' refers to a lower order of action.

"A flunky is one who only imitates others, and seems incapable of original, creative thought or action. Because flunkies always follow others, they feel that their lives lack authenticity. They want to be their own fleas, but they think they can only act like others. This is not true. Each of us can act freely and creatively. Every flea is capable of making the Leap of Fleath.

"Some so called sayings of the Ancients are not authentic. Such sayings come from the Ancients, but not in the original form. The sayings are passed on through stories. Over time languages change, old words get new meanings, new words come into use, and other words pass into oblivion. When we inscribe something on the planet's skin, it stays intact, more or less as we wrote it, for a long time. When we pass something on by telling stories, it can get subtly altered very soon, just as genes do. If the tellers do not fully understand the sayings, they can make changes not in keeping with the changes in language and experience. Tellers make mistakes. Some have good memories for the exact words, but cannot explain what the stories and sayings mean. To them, the sayings and stories are just like chants

and formulas they learn them by rote. They do not understand the spirit of the inner teachings.

“As a result of these things, many sayings attributed to the Ancients are not accurate, for the words don't mean what they used to. Few fleas recover their deeper memories, so very few can unravel these mysteries. We have no records for the earliest forms of the stories and sayings, as these predate this and all other planets now living. Their origins go back to the beginnings of fleadom.

"We do not have a complete account of all of the sayings. The story telling traditions are not uniform amongst different tribes, even when there are regular meetings and exchanges. When there are written symbols, the stories, sayings, laws, rules, and orders can be written down by the scrifes, to be checked by anyone who can read. It seems that such a practice would make things stable, since there is a permanent record. But it doesn't because the texts must be interpreted.

Writing brings some continuity over time and space, but it also makes more rapid change over a large area possible. This is especially true if you emphasize educating the young away from the family. You can then change practices in a generation. A generation can be uniformly trained in the new ways. Fortunately, our tribe has remained faithful to the old traditions and our young are educated by parents with guidance from elders.

"The things I have been describing are important to know, as they help us understand the sayings and stories of the Ancients. Once you understand these things, you will see why some sayings and stories are nonsense; it is because the words do not mean what they used to. But you have to unravel this for yourself to gain wisdom. Without your own struggle, the meaning of the sayings and stories is nothing. A saying or story could seem paradoxical to you, but this paradox might be part of its secret meaning. The Ancients put paradoxes into many sayings so as to jolt us to higher awareness. With such a shift, the saying makes perfect sense. Such paradoxes reflect the richness of the world itself, beyond language, beyond words.

"Some sayings, said to be from the Ancients, were created by people who wanted to cloud fleas' minds so as to mislead them. They wanted their own words to have the same authority and credibility as those traditions. Most fleas are so busy with their own struggles that they have little time or inclination to consider these matters deeply, so they are misled. Alas, in some flea nations there is little conversation anymore, and conversation is a source of common wisdom. It broadens our horizons and helps us to detect clever deceptions. The pointers I've given you, will help to understand the sayings and stories of the Ancients.

"Finally, let me tell you about the Leap of Fleath, and then you can ask any questions you have. The Leap of Fleath is not an ordinary flea jump. As you know, we normally amble along through the forests, and we rarely jump. Sometimes we have jumping contests at our gatherings. And some fleas, particularly circus fleas, have developed truly amazing jumping abilities. They are able to leap hundreds of times their own height. This kind of leaping has nothing to do with the Leap of Fleath. The Leap of Fleath is something even physically weak fleas can do. Any flea who has will and passion can make the Leap of the Fleath.

"The leap does not depend on strength or agility. Nor on equipment or training. The leap is a matter of heart, courage, and determination. You must be able to embrace the unknown, and accept even the unknowable. The leap is usually done alone, but sometimes two or three fleas make it together. The Leap takes you off the planet, and you might never be able to return. If you stay here and accept all the risks and hazards of Finda, you can enjoy the security of the familiar, and company of relatives and friends. Here, at least, we know how to feed and where. Of course, our planet could die all of a sudden and then we all would be forced to leave in search of a new one. Sometimes we leave Finda at nest spots to bury our eggs so as to ensure the birth of new fleas. All of these actions are different from the leap. They are surrounded by the comfort and safety of numbers and tradition. With the Leap of Fleath you leave the planet when it is away from the nest spots, so you jump into the unknown. This is a terrifying prospect for most fleas, and yet it is one of the ways to attain the wisdom of the Ancients. I do not have to explain to you how to actually make the leap. You know that, I'm sure. And now you both have questions that we need to discuss."

There was a long silence. Chalice and Flelix were as puzzled by many things that Flant said, as they were spellbound by his voice and words. After a while, Chalice asked, "Is there any rule for telling genuine sayings and stories from false ones? Like, maybe the false ones are unpoetic?"

"There is something to what you say," Flant replied. "In my experience, fake sayings can be catchy, but are not genuinely poetic. They lack the elegance that authentic sayings have. Be warned, though, that they can be well spoken in the jaws of a skilled flea. Eloquence is dangerous in the wrong jaws. Unfortunately, there is really no simple way. There is no single test that will separate true from false. Also, the sayings always have several levels of meaning."

Flelix asked, "If three fleas take the Leap together, is there any way they can get back together again, once they are on the Great Ground?" Because the Leap was always performed when the planet was in motion, Flelix knew that three fleas

might end up in different locations even if they jumped at the same time. If he, Chalice, and Sykle were to make the leap together, could they get back together again? This was a problem he had long pondered, for the three of them had made a pact many flears ago to take the Leap together. There were stories of fleas leaping together, but according to most accounts, they rarely remained together, for they usually landed in different places. But there were stories of duos and even trios remaining together.

Flant tugged on his beard, then answered, "The multiple leap is a tricky affair, if you want to join at a common place on the Great Ground. We know almost nothing about the Great Ground. It is vast, and the planet is always going to new places on it. If this weren't bad enough, fleas sometimes leap off their planet and land immediately on another planet going in an entirely different direction. Because of these difficulties, there is no way to fix the location where multiple leapers can meet. But there is a strategy you can use to increase your chances. I will explain it to you, but before I do, I must emphasize that to make it work you will have to use your uncultivated capacities for being of one mind. If you can be of one mind, you can then sense where each other is. Some fleas call this sixth sense intuition. I prefer to say that we can sense certain things, or become aware of them by following the Way of Silence. This is the best way I know of, as a flea, to be of one mind. I'll tell you more about the Way of Silence in a moment, but first I'll describe a strategy that can help you with the problem you raise."

All during Flant's long talk, Flelix and Chalice were very alert, giving him every word the utmost attention. Such uninterrupted attention was rare for them. But Flant's manner of speaking and commanding presence demanded attention. They knew Flant was telling them things of the greatest importance.

"The strategy you should follow to increase your chances of being together on the Great Ground," Flant continued, "is this. When you decide to leap, wait at your predetermined spot and link your minds. Then, when you sense that the planet is on a straight course at a constant speed, jump in quick succession, one after the other, according to an agreed upon rhythmic pattern. You can keep a steady beat by reciting one of the Ancient chants we use at the yearly festivals. Do not jump all at once, for then you will have no idea of the line of travel. Jump in close but timed intervals by counting one, two, three. Once on the Great Ground the fleas who jumped second and third should stay put for a prearranged time. The first flea should follow the planet's line of travel according to the timed interval, and search for the second jumper. When they make contact, they will then follow the same line to the third flea. You can practice this by jumping onto the Great Plain from the trees that line the edge. It is vital to pay attention to the intervals between the

jumps, and how this relates to the speed and direction of the planet. We know from tradition that the planet travels at different speeds from slow to very fast. If it changes its speed and direction during your leap, your chances of meeting on the Great Ground are slim, unless you fall back on your ability to sense one another's direction and location. When using the sixth sense, it is still better for the last two to stay put and the first to search."

"From what you've said, venerable Flant," Felix put in, "our best hope for a successful trio leap is to train together before we leap."

"That's not entirely true," Flant responded, "for sometimes triades without training have succeeded by relying entirely on the sixth sense. But they were fleas used to living entirely by their wits. They had already had many adventures together and so were of one mind. If this is true of you three, this would be a good approach. Make your minds one before the Leap, then find one another after the leap by using the special sense. With this approach there is no thinking or calculation you just trust the sixth sense."

"Here the Way of Silence comes in. It is the best means I know to use the powers of the special sense. In ancient times, fleas had little use for spoken language, for they all lived in one mind. Bees and ants have done this for millions of generations. They're strange critters distantly related to one another, although the bees are winged all the time and the ants are only winged during mating and migration. Both can live on either the Great Ground, or up high in the large green worlds that grow out of the Ground. Bees can coordinate the activities of 30,000 or more individuals. They always have the optimum number of bees doing the many chores that need doing in a busy hive during the height of the honey season. Some workers collect honey, some pollen, and some tend the combs, making and sealing them. Some cure honey, some cool the hive by rubbing water on empty combs, some aid the cooling by fanning their wings. Some tend the queen, some tend the young, some guard the entrance of the hive, and so on. Fleas are always astounded to learn how complex these organized bee activities are. Some think that bees achieve these feats through language. But those who have lived among bees and ants know that their language and organization comes from their ability to be of one mind. There can be complete silence about the business at hand, and yet the whole hive will move as if it were one organism. Fleas do not live in such tight communities, so we rarely develop our capacity for being of one mind. But we have it, just the same. All living beings have this capacity, and the Way of Silence is one of the means by which we become of one mind."

"The heart of the Way of Silence is simplicity itself. But silence is endlessly deep. Remember when in doubt, cease acting. Sit. Steady yourself. Allow your

mind to settle. Steady your breathing. Find your center. After a while regulate your breath so that it is slow and rhythmic. Concentrate only on your breath. If thoughts and images appear, just let them go by, don't follow them. After a while your mind will become clear and receptive. Your awareness will grow more acute. Your senses will expand, and your conscious world will include more and more. When this happens, you will become aware of things that are very far away. They will be part of your field of awareness. Even a simple exercise like sitting and stilling your mind by closely following your breath in a rhythmic way can, if practiced regularly, deepen into the Way of Silence."

Flant then lapsed into a profound silence. After a while, Flelix and Chalice noticed that Flant was breathing very deeply and rhythmically. He was not in a trance, or asleep, but in the fathomless silence. He was showing them the Way, so they tuned into him with all of their attention. And suddenly, they were of one mind with Flant.

The three of them stayed together in one mind for some time. Finally, Flant broke the union and stood up. "It's getting late," he said, "and I'm tired. You two must go back home before nightfall. Take the Great Back route. You'll find Sykle on this route, when you get about halfway home. But before you go, let's share some tea and bread."

Chapter 3: Returning Home

They were sitting just inside Flant's cave, when Flant went further inside to fetch the tea and bread. Chalice looked at Flelix with a radiant smile. "Oh Flelix!" she explained. "I'm so excited! Now that we have clear directions, I can hardly wait to get started."

"Me too," Flelix agreed. "But," he added, "we need some time to think things over. We need to think about what Flant's said before we take the Leap. We'll have to tell Sykle everything right away, so we don't forget anything."

Flant then returned, carrying refreshments. While they ate and drank, Flant asked Flelix and Chalice about their parents, whom he had known for flears. They told him about their families.

When they had finished their tea, Flelix and Chalice reluctantly stood up and said goodbye to Flant, realizing they might never see him again. For the first time during their visit, Flant's genuine concern and compassion for them was obvious. During his long talk, he gave an air of impartial authority; he had spoken with dignity and power. Now he was a loving grandparent, concerned for their safety. He walked with them to the back side of the twin peaks and saw that they were safely off on the Great Back route before returning to his cave.

Once Flant was out of sight, Chalice and Flelix quickened their pace. Neither of them spoke as they hurried along. They were both deep in thought and feelings.

They were far from Flant's cave, rounding a bend in the path, when they heard a loud blowing noise. It was rhythmic, coming in bursts of 10 puffs, and sounded almost like the winds of Nares. Startled, Flelix and Chalice leapt off the trail, their anxiety growing as the sound got louder.

Hidden behind some trees, they held their breath and waited, ready to run for deeper cover if there was any danger. The puffing got still louder and closer, and they became more fearful. Then all of a sudden, the puffing stopped, and they heard someone chanting "Go, legs, go. Go, legs, go. Go, legs, go...." It was Sykle, they realized.

They bided their time, and when Sykle had come alongside the trees they were hiding behind, Flelix and Chalice leapt out at him and shouted. Sykle, startled, jumped several fleas to the right. Flelix and Chalice burst into laughter. When he realized what had happened, he laughed with them. Then he grew stern.

"Where have you two been?" he asked anxiously. "Everyone's been looking for you. The Great Pinchers came through the forest today, and many fleas were lost. We were worried that you two were among them."

Flelix and Chalice were sorry to hear of the troubles. They then excitedly recounted their recent adventures. When they told Sykle that they had met with the great Flant, he too, got excited, and asked them to tell him everything that Flant had said. So, as they walked toward home, Flelix and Chalice did their best, although they could not explain everything that Flant had told them. Sykle was most taken with the parts about leaping and action. He had little patience for pondering the stories and sayings of the Ancients, even though he knew they were important. He was most alive when he was doing things he was a flea of action, an action flea.

Flelix and Chalice were so intent on telling Sykle of their adventure that it didn't occur to them to ask why he had been puffing and chanting. Only when they had finished telling about Flant and his instructions, and they had all fallen silent, did Chalice bring up Sykle's strange puffing behaviour.

Sykle explained that he had read some old inscriptions on the surface of the planet down near the annual campsite. "They're hidden in a deep crevice off to the right, as you're facing the planet's tail," he told them. "They said that a flea's power and strength can be increased by exhaling in a set rhythm in harmony with your walking pace. They were just fragments, and I wasn't sure they made sense to me. That's when I decided to experiment by making up my own chants. So I was puffing my breath out explosively and letting the inhale take care of itself. I was puffing, and chanting, 'Go, legs, go.' to help keep a steady rhythm. I was just getting the hang of it when you jumped out at me. It seemed like I could have walked uphill forever. The hill seemed to flatten, and my body felt as light as my breath. I was practicing while I looked for you. That's why I came up the long grade of the backside path."

"Mmm," said Chalice. "The inscriptions seem to agree with what Flant told us about being of one mind and attuning ourselves to the planet. Let's practice together as we walk. We'll chant together and walk at the same pace. Let's chant a pace that our legs will follow down the hill." And that's what they did, to the sound of "Onward to home, Onward to home."

As they neared their camp, they heard strains of music, and through the darkening forest they caught sight of a glowing light, cast by some fungus plants that the fleas had gathered. The tribe was celebrating the birthday of its eldest members, twin grandmother fleas. The music was coming from a band made up of a fleatar, a fleaute, a florn, and a frumb, which together produced highpitched, resonant sounds accented by the thumps of the muffled frumb. The fleas were singing, dancing, eating, and drinking. A group of elders sat near the edge of the forest, talking and laughing. Flelix, Chalice, and Sykle, still involved in their

chant, broke into the clearing in the midst of a pause in the music. All of the fleas heard their chant and looked curiously at them. Embarrassed at being noticed, the trio walked shyly and quietly the rest of the way to their own campsite.

"Chalice, Flelix, Sykle," they heard their granny calling. She beckoned them to where she and other family members were in the midst of feasting, and soon they were telling their brothers, sisters, and cousins about their adventure and plans. They talked bravely about making the Leap of Fleath. Some of the younger fleas got very excited about the leap and asked if they could come, too. Flelix, Sykle, and Chalice said they would have to think about it, knowing the parents would never allow the young ones to go along. They were beginning to get apprehensive about taking the Leap themselves because in telling the others about it, they were starting to feel committed it seemed more certain that they would actually do it.

We will soon hear more about their leap, but before we do, we must jump to the human world. In anticipation of this, it must be stressed that most of the fleas on Finda no longer followed the ways of the Ancients. Instead, they had allowed their numbers to multiply beyond sustainable levels, and Finda was starting to show the effects of their overgrazing and other depredations. In many areas the forests had thinned; in some the forest was completely gone, and only a pock marked, scarred, and scabby surface remained.

Several times during Flelix's life, Finda had been visited by the snows of death and floods of horrifying goo. For a time there had been a wall of death between Finda's front upper part, where Flant lived, and the rest of the planet. Flelix had wanted to visit Flant for some time, but the wall of death had prevented him from doing so until that very week. Flant had survived his proximity to the wall of death by going deeper into his cave. The wall had been removed so recently that one could still see where it had once been, and fleas were advised to leap over this line, holding their breath as they did so. Many fleas had died trying to cross the wall, and from the goo floods and snows of death. Old, sick, and very young fleas were especially hard hit by these catastrophes. Flelix and his tribe had survived without many casualties, but only because they had stayed in the deepest forests, where there were fewer fleas.

The events you are about to hear of took place in the much larger, human world of Bergsania, during the time before the first floods and the trio's Leap of Fleath. These events were the result of two main things: first, the flea population explosion, and its effects on the human world; and second, the arrival of Growling Peep in the world of Bergsania. We turn now to this human part of our story.

Chapter 4: Flea Wars from the Human Side

In Bergsania, a human world too large to be clearly seen by the fleas, the effects of the exploding flea population were obvious. Goat Lady and Dancing Elk noticed that their big part wolf and part German Shepherd dog named Linda, was doing a lot of scratching and digging at herself with her claws and teeth. She constantly raked through her fur with her front teeth, pulling out chunks of hair, opening bleeding wounds in her hide.

Goat Lady and Dancing Elk would awaken at night to hear Linda chewing, scratching, and moving about. Her coat was in terrible shape. It was dull and patchy. Her hair was falling out. She looked rundown. She was also becoming high strung and nervous as the exploding population of fleas harassed her. As the summer wore on, she developed secondary infections in the wounds caused by constant chewing at the flea bites. She smelled bad.

The Bergsaniens took Linda to a vet. He said her problems were the result of her allergic reaction to flea bites. He said they should rid her of fleas, and treat the secondary infections with antibiotics, or germ killers. He prescribed weekly flea baths in a powerful insecticide, or insect killer, followed a few days later with a soothing shampoo to eliminate built up scales and ease the inflammation. A collar impregnated with substances toxic to fleas and ticks was prescribed. Flea powder was to be shaken into her bedding and in areas where she spent most of her time lying down. Linda was walked away from other dogs, to avoid getting new fleas. Daily vacuuming of the whole house was necessary. If these measures did not work, then the house would have to be vacated for a day and bombed with aerosol insecticides, and then vacuumed. Flea eggs and larvae were in the carpets, the vet explained. The insecticides and vacuuming would kill and remove them.

The Bergsaniens reluctantly followed the vet's advice. Linda was bathed several times a month with anti-flea shampoos and soothing potions, and fitted with a flea collar. The house was vacuumed daily, and flea powder was used.

At first, these actions made quite an impact. The flea baths yielded many dead or dying fleas. The vacuuming also reduced the flea population. The soothing shampoos seemed good for Linda's skin. She scratched less and smelled better. Alas, these improvements were only temporary. Things seemed to get much better, but then they took a turn for the worse. For a while, Linda did not scratch very much, but soon she was digging at herself again. And then she started to have bad reactions to the flea collar and insecticides. Dancing Elk, too, began to be adversely affected by the insecticides. The flea wars seesawed back and forth, with no decisive winner.

The Bergsaniens were expecting the arrival of a new family member, who was first called Growling Peep, but was later known as Coyote. Goat Lady and Dancing Elk had been preparing for his arrival. Goat Lady read that babies are susceptible to flea bites. Peeps can catch diseases from fleas, and dog fleas are especially attracted to newborns. Goat Lady had bad dreams in which the new baby was attacked by fleas infected with disease causing parasites. In these nightmares, she would go into the nursery and find the baby covered with hideous, biting, jumping, infected fleas. She would wake up in a sweat. She finally decreed that the whole house be fumigated with insecticide bombs to rid it of fleas before Growling Peep arrived. Linda was to be professionally defleaed, and the whole house cleaned by professional carpet cleaners.

And so, when Goat Lady went off to have Growling Peep, Dancing Elk had these things done. When Goat Lady and Growling Peep came home, there were no signs of fleas. Linda had stopped chewing and scratching herself. Her skin was healing nicely, and hair was coming back on many of her bare spots. The house no longer smelled like dog kennel number 9.

Alas, a short time after Growling Peep arrived, Goat Lady noticed a red bump on his leg. "Flea bite!" she cried. Linda and Dancing Elk came running to see what the fuss was all about. "Look!" said Goat Lady, "There's a flea bite on Peep's leg. What are we going to do?"

Neither Linda nor Dancing Elk was sure it was a flea bite, but it looked like it could be. Dancing Elk took Linda outside and gave her a thorough inspection. He saw no flea spoor, no telltale bite marks. He was about to conclude that the fleas were all gone when he spied one gliding through the long hairs on Linda's back.

Linda was either picking up fleas in the yard, on her daily walks, or was harboring survivors of the chemical warfare. Some consultants had suggested that the yard be sprayed, but that advice had not been followed. "You can't spray the whole world!" Dancing Elk had exclaimed. "And we can't wrap Linda in plastic!" Goat Lady added.

When Growling Peep was brought home, the flea collar was thrown out, since the vet said it should not be used around babies. The insecticides also had to be kept out of the house. This restricted the anti-flea campaign to flea baths, which after a while seemed to have little effect. The flea population began to climb once more. The soothing shampoos were no longer soothing; in fact, they seemed to be drying out poor Linda's hide. The insecticides irritated her skin, and sometimes caused intestinal distress. She soon was beginning to smell bad again. Her coat was back to looking shabby. Her hair was falling out. Dancing Elk continued to vacuum daily, to suck up eggs and larvae, but eventually the Bergsaniens realized

they were not going to have a dog and house completely free of fleas no matter what they did. The fleas were winning the war, even though the Bergsanians had won a few battles in its early days.

We can now see the results of the fleas' departure from the way of their Ancients. The snows of sickness, the floods of goo, the killing rains, the deforestation and erosion of Finda's surface, the flaying rakes, the large combers, the descending pinchers, the wall of death...these were all brought on by their exploding population.

To be sure, the Bergsanian's assault had had a powerful effect on the fleas, killing them off in large numbers. But these assaults had also worsened conditions on Linda. They helped to create a population of fleas more resistant to the chemicals used. In a relatively short time, the fleas developed new forms of evasion, new survival strategies. They redoubled their reproduction efforts. Some of the new crevices opened on Linda were good places in which to lay eggs, and the accumulating surface debris, caused by drying and scaling, provided excellent feed for the larvae. The fleas did not know the source of the depredations, so they reacted to them in the ways they knew best: by honing their defensive skills, and by increasing their breeding efforts. If they had harked back to the ways of the Ancients, they would have reestablished a better balance between their numbers and Linda's sustainable carrying capacity. Instead, they did the opposite.

It must be said that neither Dancing Elk nor Goat Lady was happy with the regime prescribed by the vet. They knew a little about pesticides and their effects, and were suspicious of artificial chemicals. But the impending arrival of Growling Peep, Linda's unpleasant smell and suffering, and the advice of the vet, all helped to override their usual caution in these matters.

When it became obvious that the war was being won by the fleas and that everyone directly involved was being poisoned by toxic chemicals, they decided to try natural methods to curb flea populations. The Bergsanians thought this through very carefully. They knew that under natural conditions, diseases are usually self limiting. Nature heals itself. There had to be a way, they thought, to control Linda's fleas without poisoning everything. Thus, they made a record of all they learned that could be useful in solving these problems.

They knew that the war on fleas approach violated their own beliefs in nonviolence. They had been aggressive and violent, killing many organisms other than fleas. They had polluted their home and caused many secondary problems. And the war had failed in its aims. So, they looked for other ways to keep the flea population within natural bounds, without the adverse effects on Linda or themselves. It took many experiments to find what worked best. Their aim was to

reestablish balance and then keep conditions optimum for this balance, rather than trying to get rid of all the fleas. Their goal was to reestablish natural patterns: to get the fleas to return to their proper ways, while restoring the health and lustre of Linda's skin and coat. To do this, they would have to attend to Linda as a whole dog.

The first thing the Bergsaniens did was to note what they knew from organic gardening. Their organic garden had few pest problems. The insects and other life forms stayed within their natural limits. The Bergsaniens had tried using chemicals in their garden a long time ago. But as time went by, they had to use more and more of them, because the pests developed resistance to them. Then the plants suffered all sorts of ailments. The garden had fewer pest insects, but it also had fewer beneficial ones, like spiders. The soil got harder with each passing year. It soon became apparent that with this costly chemical approach, gardening would be a never ending spiral of costs, problems, and hazards.

The more the Bergsaniens had learned about the pollution associated with chemical farming and gardening, and the health problems resulting from the toxic residues left in animals and humans, the more concerned they had become about such practices. They knew that many cultures had farmed using natural methods for centuries, without loss of soil fertility and the health hazards caused by toxic chemicals. When the Bergsaniens adopted these methods in their garden, they had far fewer problems. The problems "solved" by pesticides, herbicides, and artificial fertilizers, they realized, had created additional problems. Many of the problems they had, in fact, were the result of their practices and methods, and did not reflect inherent flaws in the natural systems. They concluded that Linda's problems could also be solved by an organic approach. They were only too aware of the negative effects of chemicals from their war against the fleas.

Next, the Bergsaniens learned more about fleas from science and other books. They learned that there are more than 200 genera of fleas, and more than 1,800 species. Most flea species are adapted to a particular host species. *Ctenocephalides canis*, for example, is specific to dogs; *Ctenocephalides felis* is specific to cats. If a cat flea gets onto a dog and bites him, it will not establish permanent colonies on him. *Pulex irritans* is specific to humans. Because it is a large flea, it is the preferred choice for flea circuses.

Many fleas harbour bacteria and other organisms that can be passed on to humans. The rat flea, or *Xenopsylla cheops*, transfers bubonic plague via the bacteria *Pasteurella pestis*. We know how the Black Death ravaged the social and economic fabric of European society only a few centuries ago. The disease is always present in some wild rodents. The human outbreaks of bubonic plague in

Europe might have been caused by soaring rat populations, brought on by humans killing large numbers of cats. The cat killing was a result of superstition. It was believed that cats were connected with witchcraft, and human "witches" were being persecuted during this time. It was wrongly claimed that the witches were in league with the Devil. Killing cats, which were rats' main predators in the cities, along with lack of sanitation and improper disposal of edible garbage, caused urban rat populations to soar, and they moved in increasing numbers into human dwellings. Although rat fleas generally stay away from humans, they will hop off a dead rat and then take a ride and a meal on a human if given the chance. This is how the germ that causes bubonic plague is transferred to people.

Fleas can also carry tapeworm eggs, nonepidemic typhus, and murine typhus, as well as other germs and microorganisms. This world of microorganisms is too small for even fleas to see.

From their research, the Bergsianians discovered that fleas are global. They live everywhere except in the cold far north and south. The flea larvae are also photosensitive, and are harmed by bright sunlight. The dog flea, *Ctenocephalides canis*, has a normal cycle of about three weeks under optimum conditions. The fleas lay eggs on the dog and in dark places near where the dog sleeps. The eggs hatch into wormlike larvae that feed on organic debris. They eventually pupate, go into a long sleep, and finally emerge from the pupal case as completely developed fleas. Emergence is triggered by animal vibrations, such as a dog or human walking by. When awakened by a dog, they will hop onto it and continue their adult life by feeding on its blood. The female cannot lay eggs until she has had a blood meal.

The dog flea is an important link in the perpetuation of the dog tapeworm. The flea ingests the worm's eggs by feeding around the anal area of an infected dog. The dog then ingests the tapeworm eggs by swallowing the flea, when it chews in response to a flea bite. A dog that doesn't have a tapeworm can pick up infected fleas from a dog that does, thus infecting itself by chewing on and ingesting the infected fleas. Tapeworms can grow to great lengths, and an infected dog can develop a voracious appetite, for it loses nutrients to the worm. It can lose weight and become weakened and vulnerable to other diseases.

Once off a dog, an adult flea can lay quiet for long periods of time, waiting for a host to come along. Some fleas can survive for as long as a year without feeding.

The dog flea egg is about the size of a grain of salt. A female flea can lay several hundred eggs in a year. The more debris there is for the larvae to eat, the higher their chances of surviving and becoming adult fleas. The eggs hatch after 2 to 12 days, and take from 9 to 200 days to develop into adults. In a house with

heated, moist air, a dog and human companion might come home after a trip and get covered with fleas upon walking in the door. The vibrations of walking around the house awaken large numbers of newly matured fleas, who then hop onto the people and the dog as they pass by.

These are a few of the things that the Bergsaniens learned about fleas. On the basis of their expanded knowledge they searched for an approach that would keep a natural balance.

Chapter 5: In Pursuit of Natural Patterns

The Bergsaniens knew that humans actions to reduce local populations of mammal species usually began with trapping and removing breeding females and their offspring. Mature females in their prime are the first targets. Once their numbers were reduced population pressures begin to abate. The Bergsaniens thought that if all of the original predator and plant populations were intact, natural patterns would reassert themselves, provided that humans did not interfere. They believed this should apply to Linda's flea problem too.

They knew that animal health is adversely affected by nutritional deficiencies and lack of sanitation, leaving the animal vulnerable to bacterial infections. Such infections can be treated with antibiotics, the medical counterpart of insecticides. Taken in quantity over time, these chemicals can produce resistant strains of bacteria. Most infecting bacteria are part of the normal ecological diversity of plants and animals. Humans are in the biosphere, and they are also miniature biospheres. So even when antibiotics *are* successful against a particular bacteria, they can disrupt the normal population balances of flora and fauna inside the body. An "alien" bacteria can cause problems, but these are curbed by other organisms and healthy immune systems. Some chemicals and drugs can disrupt normal population dynamics and immune system function.

On the other hand, rats raised in germfree conditions tend to be disease prone and sickly. Rats fed a diet of refined and overly processed foods also become sickly, as do those fed too much food. They knew of parallels to improper diet and living conditions in wildlife populations, in farm and pet animals and plants, and in humans. Humans can cause the very conditions that lead to disease and pest problems. Then they overreact by using biocides, which in turn lead to even more problems. Restoring dynamic natural balances, the Bergsaniens reasoned, was the key, and doing so would require following the ways of nature. Establishing healthy balances in humans after such disruptions is sometimes a long process. The Bergsaniens knew all of these things, when they embarked upon their balanced approach to flea problems. Their adventures led them to many new skills.

The first skill they acquired was flea picking. They had watched primates of all kinds groom one another. Monkeys and apes spend hours at it, methodically inspecting one another's fur for organic debris and insects, then picking these things out and disposing of them. The Bergsaniens decided to remove as many fleas from Linda as they could by picking them off by hand. They learned how to brush the fleas to the ends of the hairs, where they could be easily picked off and dropped into a cup of sudsy water. The suds prevent the fleas from jumping out.

They cleaned Linda with a mixture of alcohol, lemon extract and water, which was sprayed on and worked into her skin. She was then wiped down with towels. The small amount of alcohol helped to remove excess oil, and the lemon extract acted as a flea repellent. Her bedding was frequently cleaned. The house was vacuumed twice a week. They added zinc and brewer's yeast to Linda's meals, to improve the texture and integrity of her skin. They gently brushed her coat twice a day to remove organic debris such as dead hair and skin. They believed that since adding organic debris in a garden increases biological activity, decreasing organic debris on Linda's back would discourage good conditions for the fleas. They exercised Linda more regularly and cut the fats in her diet, since fats can build up the secretions in the skin, producing more scales for flea larvae to feed on. They wormed Linda to ensure that she was not perpetuating a tapeworm cycle. They fed her garlic extract to make her skin and blood unpleasant to the fleas, much as garlic is planted in a garden to act as a barrier to various insects. They kept the grass in their yard short and free of debris so that the sun could penetrate it more thoroughly, thus killing flea eggs and larvae. They kept Linda away from other dogs and the areas frequented by them.

At first, they found it hard to catch fleas by hand or with tweezers. Fleas take all kinds of evasive action, and their hard shells are difficult to grasp. Even when captured, the fleas easily got away. The Bergsmanians learned how to bring the fleas to the surface of Linda's coat by pulling a coarse wire brush through her hair with an outward sweeping motion involving a twist of the wrist. The wrist action was important. If it was too great, the fleas were flipped into the air, where they disappeared, or to the ground, where they were able to immediately leap back onto Linda. If the brushing action wasn't strong enough, the fleas were not brought to the surface. Merely sifting through the fur with their fingers was not a very effective way to catch fleas. If the brush was wielded correctly, the fleas got entangled on the ends of Linda's hairs, where they could be plucked off and dropped into sudsy water. A pair of tweezers was helpful for pursuing fleas through the long hairs on her back.

The Bergsmanians found that it was best to brush Linda's back first, starting near her head, working down her tail, and then through it. Finally, they brushed down her flanks and sides. By brushing downward on one side and then having Linda lie on her back, they could force the fleeing fleas to run *en masse* across her bare belly, where several fleas could be picked off in a few moments. Of course, some fleas always escaped to the thick fur on Linda's other side. But then that other side was done in the same way and the belly again picked free. A couple of times around this head to belly circuit could net a large number of fleas.

When their skills were honed, and at the height of Linda's infection, the Bergsaniens were able to catch hundreds of fleas in a single picking. One week, they caught 240 fleas the first day, 203 the next, then 160, 138, 125, 100 and by the end of the week, 86. The next week it was 112, 96, 95, 46, 33, 19, and 8. They continued picking for several weeks, all the while using the other measures they had learned. As the weeks went by, fewer and fewer fleas were netted in the pickings. Eventually, it was difficult to find a single flea, although they knew that there were some left. Linda's coat was black, interspersed with light hairs. The Bergsaniens discovered that the fleas were much easier to see and capture in the light fur. Fleas that hid in crevices in Linda's skin escaped, since they couldn't be swept out by the brush.

Linda, the Bergsaniens discovered, had had a flea population numbering in the hundreds, and their heated, moist house, with its deep carpets, held lots of organic debris from Linda's coat and hide, providing food and habitat for the incubation and raising of fleas.

The natural approach adopted by the Bergsaniens involved no instant, magic solution. There was gradual improvement, followed by occasional setbacks, and then more improvements. Dancing Elk and Goat Lady came to appreciate the wisdom of older traditions, which teach that the world is the result of the actions and ways of life of myriads of beings, from the smallest to the biggest. If each being follows its natural ways and respects the ways of others, all things work in harmony, and there is abundant life, peace, tranquility, increasing richness and wisdom. When one being, group of beings, or type of beings tries to dominate and control other forms of life, the results are pathological. This applies at the social, family, biological, and every other level of the world. It applies to every being in the great web of life. In the great web there is a multitude of diverse beings, with many forms of awareness. The principles of natural balance apply not only to different kinds of beings, but also within the human self. Thus if one's rational, calculative reason becomes dominant over appreciative, intuitive and emotional capacities, one's life is in disharmony. Understanding the wisdom in the web of life in this way helps us appreciate the dependencies, interdependencies, and interrelated nature of all patterns and beings in their natural state.

The Bergsaniens found that Linda could sleep peacefully through the night if she got enough exercise to tire her out during the day. Giving her more attention and affection, with lots of petting, calmed her. Given this extra attention, she was less prone to scratch and chew on herself, which reduced the injuries that had led opportunistic fleas to stray from their ancient natural patterns.

The Bergsanians rediscovered something else in their new approach to natural patterns: the language of silence, which is related to the Way of Silence taught by the great flea wizard Flant. The language of silence can be learned by anyone who just lets his or her mind be still; when mental objects and thoughts are not held onto, awareness becomes open.

The language of silence enabled the Bergsanians to see the fleas in a more positive light, to sympathize with them, and to marvel at their way of life. As they learned more about flea habits, they realized that fleas and dogs (including wild Canines such as wolves, coyotes and African wild dogs) have a very long association, going far back before humans domesticated the dog. Through the language of silence, the Bergsanians entered a spacious awareness without boundaries, an open receptiveness with deep respect for all beings. The language of silence allows us to learn from all beings. Once they entered silent awareness, they found a universal intelligence. The Bergsanians were able to sense the natural rhythms of flea and dog life. The flea world, the Bergsanians realized, is not an alien "other" world. It follows the same intelligent principles as does the human world. Its wise ways have symbiosis, cooperation and nonviolence as values and practices.

As the Bergsanians followed the nonviolent practices of the natural way, the flea and other "problems" went away. The Bergsanians came to see how foolish it is to use broad spectrum biocides and other destructive methods. As they got more in harmony with natural patterns, they gave up trying to control the fleas. They let Nature take its course. There are many more stories to tell of this human world.

But now let us return to Flelix and his friends. The campaigns that we have been describing were waged when they were preparing to take the Leap of Fleath. Their Leap was the beginning of a whole series of adventures in the mysterious Great Ground.

Chapter 6: A Leap into the Unknown

Flelix's earliest flears were spent as a larva in Finda's nest and then on her. He was a kid flea when the great plagues began. They were a constant threat while he was growing up. He and his friends, Chalice and Sykle, were trained in the arts of survival by an old flea named Tuff, who was a descendant of the same warrior wolf tribe that Flant had once lived amongst.

Tuff was a crusty, cursing, witty, old flea, with a mischievous streak. He loved harmless practical jokes. He knew the arts of combat and survival better than anyone in Flelix's tribe. He taught Flelix and his friends how to evade the great jaws, escape the terrible rake, survive the floods of goo, find shelter from the snows of sickness, and avoid the wall of death. He taught them how to protect themselves against attacks by fleas from hostile tribes, how to stalk other fleas, and how to follow obscure trails. Flelix and his friends had survived because of the skills Tuff had taught them.

It was rumored that Flant and Tuff were blood brothers, although neither ever mentioned the other. You could say that Tuff taught the wisdom of physical skills, which are counterparts to the mind and heart wisdom taught by Flant. Flelix, Chalice, and Sykle had learned from both elders, the Way of Silence. The spoken stories had been told in the form of Flease, but silence is all dialects and none.

As the wars waged on the fleas of Finda increased in intensity, Sykle, Chalice, and Flelix redoubled their training for the Leap of Fleath. Each day they practised jumping with control, timing their jumps, chanting, and joining their minds as one. They practised locating each other by the merged mind technique, and by timing and calculated jumps, using orientation based on a set pace. Through this rigorous training, they were becoming a team that could act with one heart and mind. But there were still days when they could not get it together, when their chanting and pace were irregular. Flelix and Sykle thought this was because they had practised too little, while Chalice thought it was because they practised too much. "We don't need to think about the Leap of Fleath," she told them. "We should just let the lessons of practice ripen in us until they become a second nature."

One day, as they were practising in the forest near the Great Plain, the planet went through several severe lurches. It was a forewarning that the snow of sickness and death and the great rake were coming, and soon they heard and then saw fleas running toward the open plain. Flelix, Chalice, and Sykle were at the tops of three of the tallest trees near the plain, preparing for another leap onto the plain. They were just counting down, when the tremors started. And just as they leapt from their trees, Finda shifted violently. Their leaps were timed, but the shifts threw

them off. Each was hurtled into space and off the planet, instead of onto its plain. They ended up on the Great Ground, with Finda nowhere in sight.

They landed in different places. Luckily, Chalice and Sykle landed atop tall stalks of grass, high above the surrounding ground cover. Sykle soon spied Chalice on a stalk of grass some distance from where he was perched. After much concentration and waving of his legs, he got her attention and she saw him. He signaled by swaying the grass stem that he would come to her perch, so she stayed where she was.

Sykle took a fix on the direction of Chalice's grass, then climbed down the grass stalk to the ground.

Sykle started off in the direction of Chalice's perch. He was almost immediately confronted by a thick thatch of grass which was almost impenetrable. He thus had to detour from the straight line of sight he was going to follow. This led him into an area covered with bushes. As he walked under the first of these bushes, two jumping spiders leapt at him. The three of them struggled in a circle. The two spiders got in each other's way, and Sykle was able to leap to the side. They chased him, but he got away by slipping into a dense clump of moss.

He waited until the spiders left, and then travelled without leaping until he reached Chalice's perch, which took an additional 60 flinits. When he finally reached Chalice's stalk he laboriously climbed its stem and perched on a leaf. Chalice joined him there and asked, "What took you so long? I thought you would be here in about 30 flinits." Sykle then told her about his difficulties and his encounter with the spiders.

When they compared notes, they realized that they had no idea where Felix was. They knew that he, too, had left Finda, but they didn't know in which direction to set off looking for him. They decided that one of them would stay up high on the grass, in case Felix climbed a high stalk to look for them, and the other would search in an ever widening circle. However, several methodical searches turned up nothing. They tried to contact Felix with a one mind effort, but this only confirmed that he had survived and was somewhere on the Great Ground.

They discussed what they should do next. They decided that they would search higher up for Felix, thinking he might have gone into the tall, green planets that surrounded the plain they were on. Chalice said, "If he has not gone into the higher world, then surely from there we should be able to spot some signs of where he has gone, for we'll be able to see over this whole plain." Sykle agreed with Chalice, and so they set off for the high green world.

Felix, meanwhile, was also having problems. When he had jumped, the tree that he had been on was uprooted, and he had been thrown completely off balance and

sent spiraling out of control. He landed on his head, on a hard rock. If he had been an insect like a bee, he might have been killed, but because he was a flea, with a hard shell, he was still intact. But he was disoriented; the impact of the fall had made him groggy. He had enough sense to stay put for a few days, but when he saw no one, he set off to search for his companions. Although he could remember practicing the Leap, he forgot to try for a union of minds with his friends. Since he had no idea in which direction to look for them, he decided to walk in the one that just felt best. He left some inscriptions where he had been camped, telling them which way he was going to go. He climbed a tall dandelion and tried to spot them, and he might have seen them from this high perch, if they hadn't been behind a large bush.

Thus, Flelix set off to find his friends, and his friends set off to find him. Flelix followed a dim trail that soon became a groove in the ground, hoping that it would lead him to an open area where he could signal to Chalice and Sykle. He did not know, as he followed this path, that it would take him into the strange land of the subterranean, where he would encounter new dangers and also make new friends.

As luck would have it, Chalice and Sykle ended up going away from the ground, up into the region of the higher beings. There they had many adventures. Our three adventurers will be ultimately reunited, to continue their journey together. However, an account of their other adventures must be left for another day, for this part of our story has reached its logical conclusion.