

The 10 Principles of Lieth  
From Webdancer Hannik's training notes

1. Focus – prerequisite mental alertness for all the other skills
2. Attunement – sensing the resonance of planet, people, nature. Sometimes just called the 'wave'
3. Entrancement – attune with the animal and weave a hypnosis, for example, to prevent a predator from attacking
4. *Tal* - knowing the way, using attunement for navigation
5. Summoning – imitating sound or rhythm of animals to call them in (hornets are useful)
6. Quiescence – slowing your metabolism to survive an injury or other disaster like being buried in an avalanche, while waiting for rescue
7. Scan – sensing someone's feelings. Some people see them as faint rainbow-hues
8. *Lietan*, the mind touch
9. Healing, whether of yourself or others.
10. Wholeness, the truthseer

# 1

My seventh day of advanced wildside training.

The *tal* becomes faint and elusive ahead of me, twisting and turning as it stretches higher into the mountains. The lush tropical forest of Karesh gives way to scattered trees and low juniper scrub as I climb. I look back into the setting sun, watching the red-gold light shimmering across the deep green leaves of the tree-canopy. It feels almost as if a strange, green-gold ocean is lapping at my feet.

*Dammit.* I won't reach the source of the dissonance before nightfall unless I stop to re-focus on the *tal*. That will almost certainly mean another overnight out here. Perfectly comfortable at lower altitudes, even with only my thin silk tunic and leggings against the night cool.

Up here, it will prove decidedly chilly.

The three Webdancers shadowing me will want some detailed feedback on my fifth pause since I started out at dawn. Never mind, if this is my final reassessment before dark it will be an improvement on the previous few days.

I find a patch of level ground, standing still and silent as the Ten Principles slowly unfold in my mind—with my own personal feelings and applications a mischievous echo in the background.

*First Principle of lieth. Focus. (The prerequisite for all the other skills that give Pangaeans the freedom to roam the wilderness and not only survive, but feel totally alive!)*

The dynamic of the forest comes into glorious sharp detail. The ripple and hum of water flowing upward through swaying tree trunks to the leaf canopy, the rustle of animals through the undergrowth in the endless cycle of foraging, predator, prey.

*Second Principle; Attunement. (Becoming aware of my extended self as part of the forest. The first achievement for every Pangaeon child, so they can explore wild areas without parental protection. I haven't yet come to terms with why I now need a support team once more, even though I recently turned eighteen...)*

As I move my focus outward, air and water flow in harmony, within my body and beyond. I pick up the presence of my support team, all three of them also paused, waiting for me to complete the attunement and move on.

*Third Principle; Entrancement. (No dangerous predators near enough with ideas that I would make their next meal, so I won't need to deploy this skill just now.)*

Time to focus once more on the tal.

*Fourth Principle: Tal. Finding the Way. (Stretching out my awareness, reaching for the source. That elusive dissonance in the frequency...)*

And there it is!

The tal is stronger now, a clear line snaking upward, forged by animal tracks, a path I can use to get closer to my goal. Maybe I'll make it all the way there without having to recalibrate again. I break into a run, sensing the other three moving off once more, shadowing my path, close enough to reach me if I run into trouble.

The source is closer than I anticipated. A jarring, rasping disturbance in the resonant frequency of this place, a disruption in the smooth flow of the wave, scratching at my mind like steel scraping on rock. I stop dead and then edge forward cautiously, trying to work out why the intensity seems to have increased so abruptly. The tal forges straight ahead but caution tells me to divert off to the side, so I can look down on the source from slightly higher ground.

Within minutes, the answer lies below. Two armed men are hauling a large crate out of a cave, the dark entrance a black shadow on the grey rock of the low cliff. If humans and equipment had been lying quietly inside until a few minutes ago, that would explain why the dissonance has suddenly increased in intensity.

I need to back off and confer with my Webdancer team. We don't use weapons or any other tec if we can possibly help it, as it interferes with the finely-attuned senses we rely on for wilderness investigations. Now we have located the source of the disturbance, we need to report the problem to the security services and leave them to deal with it.

And then we can help them discover if this is an isolated incident or part of a wider network—

A shrill alarm echoes through the trees and one of the men looks up, angling a device strapped to his wrist in a full arc. If it's a proximity sensor it has picked up my presence even at this distance, where I had thought I was safe and undetectable. Even as I throw myself flat on the ground, bullets start rattling through the trees, shredding leaves and twigs in their deadly passage.

I have no weapons to fight back, and that damn sensor will have a better chance of locating me if I try to run. Webdancer defenses are not a great deal of use against guns—

and when we set out on this tracking journey there had been no suspicion that we would run into anything like this. I frantically run my thoughts through the best way to deal with it.

*Fifth Principle; Summoning. (If I could call in a swarm of vicious zither hornets, they would do the job very nicely, but they don't make their nests at this altitude.)*

A Kareshi mountain bear would be a good distraction, but not for long. The thug would simply shoot it dead.

Time to move on to the next idea.

*Sixth Principle; Quiescence. (If I can get out of sight and slow my metabolism to almost nothing, the sensor won't find me.)*

If I'm lucky, the scan-operator will be relying on tec and so will be unable to locate me through his own attunement. Meanwhile, the rest of my team can escape through the forest, reach the nearest transmission node back in the city, and call in reinforcements from the Qat security services...

*But that is going to take a hell of a long time!*

How long will I have to lie here, covered over with damp dead leaves and moss, hardly breathing?

My vision is starting to go dark around the edges as my breath and heartbeat slow and the rapid drift into quiescence takes hold.

And then the two men slowly crumple to the ground.

The shock and surprise sends a rush of adrenaline through my body, saving me the time and trouble of following the protocol for slowly coming out of quiescence again.

*Mind you, slow is definitely more comfortable than this jolt of alertness!*

I struggle to my feet, one hand pressed against a nearby tree, steadying my wobbly balance as I hastily brush damp leaves off my tunic and leggings.

The small reconnaissance shuttle makes a tight descending circle as it comes in to land, sensors flashing cool green light across the clearing and penetrating deep into the cave.

Balance regained, I run down the slope toward it, hoping that distinctive scratch along the roof means the pilot is who I think it is...

The tall, lean figure emerging from the small craft with the ease and grace of a cat... is unmistakable.

“Severin!”

He looks up, pushing back ruffled blond hair.

“Hannik? Are you all right? I didn’t think they would throw you into conflict situations as part of your training! I couldn’t be sure I would get here in time...”

I can see how worried he looks. There is a serious chunk of information missing here. My gestalt vision kicks in, frantically trying to complete the mental hologram of events that would make sense of all this.

“This *was* my first week of advanced training. We were tracking down a point of dissonance I picked up on my last long-distance patrol. This time I was on point, with my backup team in support. What led you here?”

He glances over his shoulder. “We haven’t much time. How long till your team catch up?”

“They won’t. They would have heard the shots and then felt my moves into quiescence. So they would head straight out to raise the alarm and bring in armed reinforcements from Qat. So either you’re telepathic and can instantly teleport, or you must have been following up your own clues!”

He grins. “Much as I’d love to claim superhero skills, you’re absolutely right. I’ll fill you in on the Qat side of it as we

fly.” He hesitates. “Unless you’re scheduled for more intensive attunements and have to avoid rapid air travel?”

I brush off the last of the soggy leaves clinging to the dark green silk of my tunic. No way am I passing up the chance for some unscheduled time with Severin again.

“I’m supposed to have another week of this before reporting back, so yes, that means avoiding all potential disruptions—but I think flying bullets are a good enough reason to get out of here by the fastest means possible!”

“Good.” He hands me a set of zip ties. “Can you sense anyone else inside that cave?”

I pause to focus for a moment. “No. It’s empty.”

“Also good. Give me a hand with attaching our prisoners to a decent sized tree before the tranc darts wear off, and we’ll be gone in minutes.”

## 2

It doesn't take long before the prisoners are duly strapped in place with a suitable fence of ferin twigs around them to keep the predators off. We scramble into the recon and Severin takes the craft up to glide above the scattered trees in the gathering dusk.

"Hannik, can you detect your support crew from up here?"

The soft hum of the recon isn't too distracting, but it is moving too fast for my location senses to be accurate.

"How much can you slow down before this thing falls out of the sky?"

"I can put it into static hover, unless there are too many moving trees below that might encourage it to roll."

There is a mischievous glint in his eye as he takes delight in reminding me of the first flight we made together. I was somewhat uncomplimentary about his pilot skills after the unexpected double-roll.

"I'll be ready for it this time." I tighten the safety straps and push the door open, the cool evening wind brushing my face. Still not the best vantage for picking up the faint signature of humans on the ground, but my familiarity with the three experienced Webdancers makes it easier.

"Over there."



Severin follows the direction of my pointing finger and brings the craft slowly into land on a not-very-flat patch of ground. I hop out and call the all-clear.

My three mentors move out of the shadows, their dark green Kareshi silks rendering them almost invisible against the forest backdrop. Janna steps forward, making no attempt to disguise her concern.

“Hannik? What happened? And where did Severin suddenly appear from?”

Severin cuts in before I have a chance to answer.

“You’ll get the details from the Qat station chief in Kar when you make it back there. By then she will have received my report and sent a service shuttle to pick up our two prisoners and look for clues, as well as any forensic evidence they can find. Is it all right if Hannik comes back to Merkaan with me? We could use her skills and previous experience on this one.”

Janna groans. “Don’t tell me. Talaya is back, sooner than we expected?”

“Unfortunately it looks that way.”

“In that case, of course. Hannik’s role is to liaise between the Webdancers and security services. We’ll make a wide sweep across this part of the foothills, see if we can detect any other base-points for these conspirators.”

“Stay well clear if you do find anything. They will almost certainly be armed.”

“Of course.” Janna turns back to her companions and they resume their interrupted task of preparing to spend the night in the branches of an evergreen oak. The circle of fern twigs around the base of the trunk is not yet substantial enough to deter a hungry mountain bear and will take a few more minutes to complete.

Severin takes off again and sets the coordinates north, toward the capital.

“You’ll need to grab some sleep before we get there...”

“I won’t be able to sleep until you fill in some of the uncomfortable gaps in what’s been happening!”

He laughs. “Webdancer training hasn’t changed you at all, has it?”

“So far, it has been quite different from what I expected. Six months of going through all the basics again, but in much wilder areas than I’ve explored before. Then they accepted me straight into the Order, much sooner than the usual three years of basics.”

He hesitates, knowing this part is still a sensitive issue for me. “But the standard three years prepares a new adept for solo ranging without getting themselves killed. That isn’t going to be your role, so it does make sense for you to have a different training program.” He glances anxiously across at me and I hasten to reassure him that I haven’t been offended.

“They’re having to make it up as they go along. There hasn’t been anyone with my level of advantages and... disadvantages in the Order before now. Janna has both resonance sensitivity *and* gestalt calculation, but seeing as she didn’t go and burn out too many synapses with ayan-powder, her focus was reliable enough to go through the normal training regime.”

“Hey. Don’t forget, you’re still ten times sharper on attunements than I am. Using too much tec as a ranger and trainee Qat agent makes quite a difference.” He reaches across and squeezes my arm, sending a shiver of desire through my whole body. Now I don’t really want to think about either sleeping or debriefing, but if as he says time is short, duty comes first.

“So are you going to tell me how you managed to turn up just in time to save me an unhappy couple of days in quiescence, buried in a pile of damp leaves?”

“Janna guessed right. Talaya is back. Only six months after grabbing a space-shuttle to Arcturus. She came well prepared and was very careful, but a couple of the security-cams picked up her image as she exited the same private spaceport she used to make her escape six months ago.”

“Because you and Alis took the precaution of installing a few more cams without telling anyone else?”

“See? You have Qat thinking as well as Webdancer sensitivity. Janna says that level of it is really unusual.”

I know he’s trying to make me feel better.

“Thanks for the compliment, but you do need to get on with your part of the story.”

“Well, yes. The head of Qat decided to trust us enough to run some of our own ops without reporting all the details, in case of leaks. It might even help us detect where the leaks are coming from if we get more evidence like this.”

“You mean you’re mapping the cams Talaya was able to avoid, against the ones she didn’t know about?”

“Yes. Then I followed her, guessing she was intending to meet up with associates we hadn’t managed to track down six months ago. I only identified one so far, but I did intercept a message that mentioned a connection in the Ishtar mountains. So, obviously, my first thought was to contact the Webdancer base in Karesh.”

“And they told you where all their patrols were, out on wildside reconnaissance. Several dozen, scattered across the whole of that huge area. So why choose mine?”

His face says it all, even before he speaks.

“Because I was worried about you!”

“You mean, there were no other clues?”

“Well, who needs clues when there’s someone significant to worry about?” He covers his anxiety with another grin. And a bit more flattery. “Hannik, when you’re on good form, you have outstanding sensitivity. It made sense that you would be the most likely one to detect a disturbance somewhere remote the conspirators figured would be distant enough for them to stay out of sight.”

His words finally ease the sense of failure that has haunted me since I discovered that my lapses in focus prevented me from going solo in the wilderness. Full Webdancer deployment is never going to be part of my career. But my connection with Qat, and especially with Severin, means that I do have something valuable to offer in the protection of my country. Just not quite in the way I had imagined.

By the time the tall white spires of Merkaan come into view, I have managed an hour of sleep plus an hour of readjusting my attunement to the very different resonance of this northern city. Well, it isn’t perfect, but it should keep my senses accurate enough to warn of approaching threats.

Severin glides the recon smoothly through the tight entrance to Delta-three, the private mini-hangar above Alis’ apartment. The tiny wasp-jet is stuck onto the back wall like a camouflaged limpet, leaving just enough space for the recon to park on the floor.

I decide it’s time for a compliment of my own.

“It looks like you perfected your parking technique and Alis has finally accepted your ideas about squeezing two vehicles in here? I noticed the original scrape across the roof of the recon hasn’t had any more damage added to it. I’m glad, because that’s how I guessed it was probably you piloting this thing when you landed on the mountainside.”

He gives a wry laugh. “Alis still enjoys complaining about the overcrowding in here! Still, she accepts that we can cover more ground with a vehicle each, but she also enjoys reminding me that I’m still due for that repainting job she threatened me with when I first scraped off that stripe of camo-paint.”

The hidden message in the apparently careless comment is all too clear.

“But you’ve both been too busy trying to round up the last of the conspirators to have time for redecorating?”

“You guessed.” He jumps down from the recon. “I expect she’ll want to finish the debrief before we can finish the night with a bit of sleep.”

Sleep is not my first priority right now, and I can tell from Severin’s mischievous grin and the passionate kiss he plants on my lips that his thoughts on the subject echo my own.

### 3

I open my eyes and gaze out of the wide window at the expanse of dawn sky and grey-blue sea beyond. Severin's hover-bed is way more comfortable than a shallow burrow of damp leaves on a mountainside, but mere comfort is nothing compared to the joy of spending the night with him.

I ease across to press against his warm body and feel him stir to waking. He turns, encircling me with a sleepy hug, pressing his face into my neck. All I want is to stay here for the rest of the day, catching up on the time we have spent apart.

Inevitably, Alis' voice interrupts, her footsteps passing the door on her way from the kitchen.

"Severin! I've done breakfast, and we need to move fast on this. You'll have to catch up on *sleep* later." The soft pad of feet fades as she heads for the front of the apartment.

Severin grins as he slides out of bed. "I guess I'm going to get teased about that for a while. But I guess she's right. We do have to move."

By the time we join Severin's support-mother turned Qat mentor in the white and blue main room, she has thermo-cups of pinkleaf ready for us. I'm grateful that they have both avoided their own preferred wake-up brew of ayan just in case the delicious aroma of it sets off my craving for the alluring stimulation of it once more.

She lays her holo on the table.

“I arrested Talaya while you were in Karesh.”

Severin sounds seriously disappointed. “*What?* I thought we were supposed to be following her to identify the rest of her network?”

“It’s more complicated than that.” Alis projects a couple of holo images, hovering in the middle of the room. These are the only people in our records who have made it back here from Arcturus. What do you notice?”

One of them is Talaya, her pretty face and immaculate hair and makeup unmistakable. I have never seen the other one before, but the man is scrawny and clearly in poor health.

“I remember you saying something about outsiders being treated as second-class citizens on Arcturus. They generally get relegated to the indentured workforce on the asteroid mines. My guess would be that whoever that unfortunate character is, he really did escape a miserable fate like that. But Talaya would not have been able to simply cover up that kind of degeneration with cosmetics.”

“My thoughts exactly. She must have had help from the Arcturian government for reasons I hope we’ll eventually discover. I took over surveillance from Severin when he shot off to Karesh, and by the next day Talaya had changed everything she was doing. She deliberately made herself look as pale and unhealthy as she could. The she went shopping in the city, buying the cheapest food items she could find and acting like she was desperately hungry.”

“And not avoiding the cameras?” Severin is following Alis’ train of thought just as I am.

“Exactly. I think she was sent here as a spy and her job was done. She had passed a message to her contact and I’m guessing she also delivered a few small items of advanced off-world tec like that sensor Hannik mentioned last night.”

“And now she wants to present herself as a genuine fugitive from Arcturus before spending the rest of her life in a Pangaeian rehab-jail for murder”

“That fate may not sound particularly thrilling, but is no doubt infinitely preferable to the asteroid mines. Assuming that was the choice she was given.”

“Have you had time to interrogate her in the presence of a truthseer?”

“Saroyan spent an hour with both of us yesterday. But I didn’t expect her to get much. The hospital scan showed laser-marks in Talaya’s brain, which might explain why she only has memories of her ‘escape’ from Arcturus with the help of her mother who was telling her she must deliver a message to save Pangaea from an invasion.”

This alarming new development brings a cold shiver across my back. “Invasion? I thought their plan was civil war so their faction could take over control of the planet and its resources for themselves?”

Alis sighs, pragmatic rather than comforting.

“The fact that the Arcturian government gave her family landing clearance when they escaped from here, suggests that they may have already been working together. Even if it were not the case back then, I would say there is definitely a collaboration now.”

Severin frowns. “Did Talaya have any memory of being told *where* the invasion would come from?”

“Yes. From Earth. But I don’t believe that for a minute.”

“Neither do I.” I notice Alis watching me intently. “I’m sorry, Alis, that was just instinct. I’ll give it more thought and try to identify the bits of information my gestalt might have pulled together before I was really aware of it. All I can think of right now is that the original home of the colonists on all the



inhabited planets would not consider a military invasion. I've always felt there was a long-standing loyalty there, even though the distances are so great."

"Keep working on that—"

Alis frowns as she picks up an alert from her holo-com. She listens for a moment, and then looks up, her face grim.

"Talaya is dead. In her cell. Apparently heart failure. And before you say anything, I don't believe that either. The police are rounding up everyone who had contact with her but I suspect it was something implanted in her body before she left Arcturus. Something our scanners missed when she was brought in."

"Surely her parents wouldn't..."

"They most likely didn't know. With time, we might have recovered more of Talaya's memories. The brain has great capacity to heal, given a chance. Whoever is behind this plot is taking no chances that their long terms plans are kept secret."

Severin reaches for my hand. "So it turns out that our mission to counter the conspirators is a much longer project than we first thought."

I look into his deep blue eyes. His determination and enthusiasm helps me to see the pattern and purpose of my unusual career, relationship, value to my country, stretching out ahead of me.

And although it will be complicated and dangerous, it feels good.

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Author's note

Thank you for reading Spyhunter! If you enjoyed it, do take a look at the rest of the series;

This adventure with Hannik, Severin and Alis is a sequel to the novel **Sharksinger**, where Hannik meets Severin and becomes entangled in the schemes of the heartless Talaya.

It is also the prequel to the *Stormweaver* series, set sixty years later when Hannik's most talented student Alissa meets a mysterious stranger in the vast deserts of Irithen.

A band of Webdancer warriors is facing a desperate battle and uncovering a sinister plot that threatens the future of their planet.

**Book 1, Duneflyer, is free on Amazon**, and all stores worldwide—and if you love to read the whole series together, you can download **Stormweaver Trilogy 1** & **Stormweaver Trilogy 2**

You can read a preview of Duneflyer next!

Maps and other details on [www.jayaspen.com](http://www.jayaspen.com)

## Duneflyer

Stormweaver, book 1,

Preview

The sun is rising over the dunes, painting the horizon red-gold and throwing deep curving shadows across the desert. Arin snorts and tosses his long mane, impatient for a gallop in the cool morning air, but I have to wait for my brother to catch up with us before we can move on. I step in front of the restless stallion, stroking his silky neck, calming him.

*Shh, Arin. It won't be long now and you can run free...*

I look back. Jaken is leading his horse down the steep trail, twisting between the rock pinnacles, his footsteps muffled in the soft white sand underfoot. The rock walls shadow his outline, curving above him to almost create a tunnel that weaves a zigzag descent through the great russet cliff. This is the only horse-trail down the vertical barrier that separates the vast deserts of Irithen from the tropical forests of Karesh.

“Jaki! Hurry! We’re ready to go.”

He laughs. The sound echoes hollow and strange in the steep cleft.

“Alissa, can’t you just hold on a few more minutes? You always want to be on the move... and this place is too weird and amazing to rush through it the way you did.”

I let out a long breath of resignation. I really should try harder to understand what it must be like for a fifteen year old on his first trip to another province. Everything is so different from the desert city where we were raised, from landscape to lifestyle to social rules. I try to recall those feelings of excitement in myself, at his age four years ago, on my first journey to my application interview at Kar university.

And yes, it had felt every bit as fascinating and interesting for me as well... but that rush of excitement soon became swallowed up in the challenge of adapting to my new life as a student in tropical Karesh. I quickly discovered why so few Irithenis choose to submit to the rules and expectations of university discipline.

This is my first visit home since I broke off my relationship with Tigan. Five months ago now, and I still feel adrift. But in a way that was the heart of the problem. I had to finally admit to myself I had been too influenced by his steady predictability at a time when I felt new and uncertain, an outsider in sophisticated Karesh. Maybe I can use this short

break to build a different kind of confidence, find my own way of conforming while still having freedom to roam the vast wild expanse of the dune sea. In any case, everything will be different again once I graduate...

Jaken's sunbleached blond hair finally catches the red of the rising sun as he emerges from the shadowed trail.

"Hey! Ready when you are!" His excitement flares white-gold against the russet cliff.

I gather my reins and make the leap onto Arin's bare back. Pangaeon horses are a deal taller and stronger than the animals of the early colonists' homeworld they were named after—if the history vids are accurate. It means that anyone who wants to ride has to stay fit enough to get up there without outside help.

I draw my sand-robe around my shoulders. A quick glance behind to check that Jaken is as ready as his challenge suggests and then I can give Arin free rein for a wild gallop along the shield.

The broad band of flat gravel runs south to the five oasis cities, lying between the foot of the mountains and the shifting sand sea of the Meshkenet erg. The horse trail is worn straight and smooth from the passage of generations of Irithenis making the long journey between Kar and the five cities strung along the buried water pipeline like beads on a chain. The journey to spend the spring break with my family in Samar Makhan will take us almost two days.

Capturing a giant sand lizard to cross the dunes would take only a day and a half and is the way I have made this journey each time until now. But lizards are cold blooded and can only run in daylight, so crossing the erg means baking in the blistering heat. This journey along the shield is luxury by comparison. If we make it to the water-canyon before the sun

gets too high we can rest in the shade and continue in the cool of the evening. Knowing Jaken, he will probably want to keep going all night, by moonlight.

Air-shuttle would be far faster—but we only use aircraft in emergencies and in any case the Iritheni clan chieftains have forbidden them to even overfly our airspace. It's their way of maintaining our semi-independence from the administration in the capital. I have never visited Merkaan but it is by all accounts extremely efficient, clean and tidy with every citizen provided with a house, job, and medical care as a basic right. Which must surely mean long lists of rules and expectations, something the warlords here regard as totally unacceptable.

The other reason for the veto is more practical. The short but vicious daily sandstorm has proved well able to blast sand into any form of transport, whether air-shuttle or landcar. Even if the filters manage to stop the sand, they soon become terminally clogged with the stuff. At least, that is what the Iritheni warlords say and nobody really wants to argue with them.

Prima IV is not your average remote planet on the outer rim, the furthest edge of navigable space. Its resonance, far more powerful than the mere 7.83 hz of the colonists' homeworld, interferes with coms transmission over any distance longer than five miles. In turn, resource extraction and use of machines disrupts the resonance, damaging everything from food-crops to human health, so we have to keep all our tec to a sophisticated minimum.

I run my hand over the outline of the rolled holo-vis in its sleeve on the side of my pack. The five-mile coms limit means that these visits home are my only chance to message the friends I left behind in Samar Makhan. Yet in a sense, I feel caught between two worlds. Just as the other university students

find Irithen difficult to understand, my old friends who are now in full warrior-training find it impossible to imagine why anyone would want to live in either of the soft, pampered northern provinces.

Many of my student friends in Karesh are aiming for a career designing new tec that can beat the demanding standards of wavelength-compatibility. I am far more interested in training for the advanced levels of resonance skills, using the powerful frequency to enhance my natural abilities.

*That* is the kind of power that gives me the freedom to roam the wilderness on my own terms.

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My guess about Jaken's choice to ride all night proves accurate. The trail gleams white and straight in the silver glaze of both moons and the horses respond to the cool night air, arching their necks as their powerful legs pound the smooth crushed gravel of the dry riverbed. We ride hard into the night, the crisp desert wind stirring my hair and the soft thud of hooves on the desert shield pulsing in my ears.

I have so longed for this moment of freedom in the months of study and training, bound by the constraints of university rules. Irithen may be harsh and dangerous—but it is home and it feels like space to breathe. In the two northern provinces, the elegant twin cities of Merkaan and Kar are linked by underground coms cable, air shuttle route, and maglev bullet train—but beyond that urban bubble the rest of the Pangaeon continent is as wild and unpredictable as it has always been.

*Alive. Primeval. Pristine. Challenging!*

Through the generations, Pangaeon colonists learned to compensate for the restrictions on tec by adapting to the

powerful resonance and using it for navigation, summoning, entrancement and a whole range of other skills that now serve to let us survive the harsh conditions outside the cities. As someone born and raised to train in these skills, I sometimes wonder how humans managed to stay alive, before they fled their ancient third planet of a distant sun.

Dawn shifts the dune-shadows from black into blue-beige. I rein in to watch the sun break over the skyline, pouring golden rays across the flowing curves of the dunes as the landscape fades into the far distance. The horses take their turn once more to walk and regain their wind.

“So, Jaki, are you going to tell me the real reason you brought Arin all the way to Kar to meet me?”

“What? You mean you can’t believe it was just for the pleasure of riding back home with my beloved sister? How could you even think such a thing?”

“Fine. I’m more than happy to believe that was *some* of it. But confess, you did insist that I took you all around the university, plus every street in Kar city we could cover before the two days’ stabling fees ran out. Not to mention every student bar and entertainment venue you could persuade me to sneak you into.”

“It was fun though, wasn’t it?”

He flashes me the impish grin that has been his signature ever since he spent his days following me around as an accident-prone four year old. I grin fondly at him.

“The degree of fun is not currently in dispute—providing I can erase my fear regarding precisely what form the parental displeasure will take if they discover how badly I have been corrupting my innocent little brother.”

My attempt to sound like one of my university tutors produces a brotherly snort of amusement and derision. Jaken’s

reputation for disorder is easily as notorious as mine. Except for one significant difference...

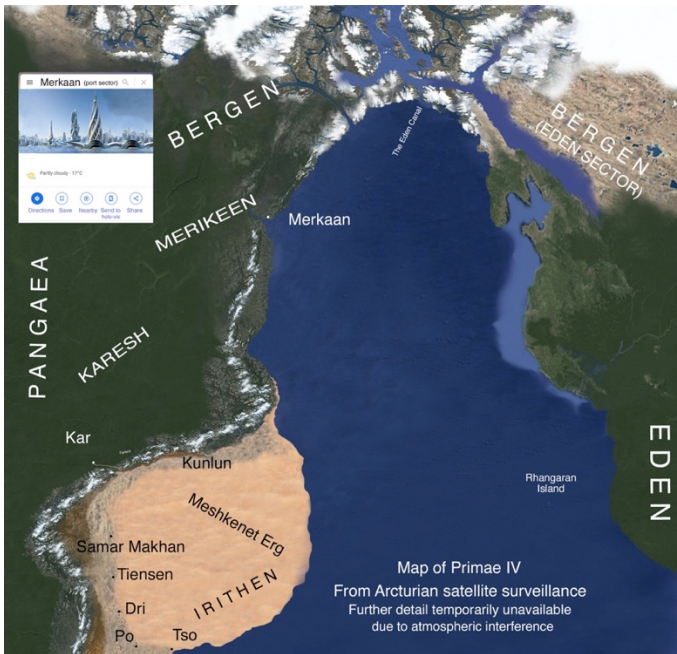
*No. Don't think about that. Not now.*

\*\*\*

End of Preview

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*Map of Primae IV from Arcturian satellite.  
Detail unavailable due to atmospheric interference*



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Spyhunter is a work of fiction.

Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

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