

## Contact

### Part I: Genesis

by Rudolph Najjar

An alien and a priest went for a walk along the Methane Lake, appropriately protected against the super cool helium atmosphere. The walk had become a ritual, the first thing they did every morning after breakfast and before beginning the day's work.

"I learned that you are a specialist on matters of the afterlife." The priest could hear the alien's clicks and clacks as a background to the universal translator. He wondered if the alien could hear his sibilants and plosives. The remark surprised him.

"We know nothing of the afterlife. We do believe there is one." The priest replied.

"Interesting," the alien remarked. "Tell me more."

The priest hesitated before responding. The concept of the afterlife involved so many other ideas that it was difficult to know where to begin.

"To explain our belief in the afterlife, I must explain other beliefs."

"Fine. Go ahead."

"Most of us believe in the existence of a god," the priest began.

"Most? Not all? One god?" The alien was surprised.

"Yes. Most of us believe in the existence of one god. Some believe in multiple gods. I belong to a group called Christians who believe in the existence of one God."

There was a long pause before the alien answered. "We, all of us, believe in the existence of three gods. There is no difference in belief among the people in our world. We all believe the same and have believed the same for hundreds of thousands of our years. I don't know how long that is in your time scale."

Nor will you ever thought the priest. Time scales just as the location of earth were secrets withheld from the aliens. And reciprocally.

"Our race does not have the longevity yours does. But for the last two thousand of our years, the Roman Catholic Church, the belief group I belong to has believed in one god."

"You confuse me. Your belief situation appears very complicated. From your few short comments, I want to ask you many questions. Tell me about the god you believe in."

"Certainly. We, I, believe in a god who made the universe, maintains its existence, and is incomparably, unimaginatively superior to all beings. It is a loving god who takes care of his creation."

"Interesting. Interesting." The alien made as if to scratch his head.

"What about you? What do you believe in?"

"We believe in three gods."

"Three?"

"Yes, three!"

"And they're equal? Equal in power? Equal in

supremacy?"

"Yes! They are equal in power and superior to all other beings. One is the creator who made the universe from nothing. The second is the man maker who created sentient beings to populate the universe. In particular, he created us the Alenibatti. The third is the ruler of (the translator failed) where all men continue life after death, their afterlife."

"I cannot imagine three gods, each superior to all other beings. We believe in one god. He is three persons, co-equal and co-acting, yet distinct."

"That is confusing. If I remember the meaning of the word person correctly, one god and three persons is incomprehensible."

"You're right. It is incomprehensible, but everything about god is incomprehensible. God is not completely subject to rational analysis. Only to belief. Tell me. Did your man maker also make us humans?"

"We have no answer. We do not know. Our best thinkers have debated and discussed the matter since we met you humans five years ago." Local years, neither alien nor human.

"The answer must be important to you."

"Yes. And to you. If the man maker made you, you are equal to us and are to be treated with the dignity and care with which we treat each other."

"And if not?"

"If the creator made you, you are not our equals. We have no obligations to you. We can do with you what we wish."

"What? What? What do you mean?" the priest sputtered. The conversation had taken a turn he did not relish.

"It's simple," the alien said. "If the man maker did not make you, then the creator did. You have no afterlife. You are no different, no better than this rock." He stooped to pick up a rock, threw it into the Methane Lake

and watched the ripples fade away.

The priest was appalled. "But we believe in an after life. We have one. We're rational beings, made in the image of god." The priest was almost screaming, suddenly desperate. He felt like he was pleading for his life, for the life of his race.

"Rationality tells us nothing. We believe that both the creator and the man maker make rational beings."

"That's only a belief. How does it compare with reality? Have you ever met rational beings made by the creator?" The priest knew that question was treading on dangerous ground. Neither the aliens nor the humans had ever mentioned contact with another sentient race.

"Actually, we have. A very long time ago, we encountered a rational race. They universally did not believe in an afterlife. We took them at their word and decided that the creator fashioned them."

"Where are they now?"

"They ceased to exist many years ago."

"Your doing?"

"No. They declined numerically and vanished. Some of our historians wonder if we accidentally contributed to their decline."

"Accidentally!" The priest snorted in disgust. "How about the man maker? Ever meet a rational race created by the man maker?"

"Yes. Actually we met two. They all believed in an afterlife."

"And in three gods?" the priest interjected.

"No. Neither did. One believed in one god as you do. The other believed in two gods, one a creator and man maker; the other, ruler of the afterlife."

"Where are they now?"

"One is on the verge of discovering steam power. The other destroyed itself. They were on the brink of interstellar travel when their biological research went awry. They regressed to savagery and vanished."

"What made you believe the man maker created them?"

"I will not answer that."

The priest gnashed his teeth in frustration. There went one way to make an impression. "When will you decide about us?"

"There is no hurry. I came here specifically to learn more about your god beliefs."

"You'll decide?"

"No. I will collect information and impressions about you people and carry it back to our philosophers. They'll decide."

"How soon?"

"No one knows. Could be tomorrow, next year, a thousand years. In such an important decision, we are in no hurry."

Maybe there's time for us to influence this decision thought the priest. "What can I do to help?"

"We'll have these morning walks many times. I will speak to others. Can you suggest people I should see?"

The priest paused to think. Station personnel numbered less than fifty. Who among them would give an impression conducive to a positive decision? He chose three; Neftali Zuckerman, Jew, Abdullah al-Saga, Moslem, and Agate Kleinfeld, Lutheran, all good god fearing people.

The alien was thankful but ended on a disquieting note. "I'll never fully understand you humans."

Nor we you thought the priest.

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