

Alkidrus

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Heavens' heritage

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Third translated edition

First translated edition published © August 29, 2023

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Translated from Dutch by J. Spoor

Original title ‘Alkidrus: Nalatenschap uit de Hemel’

Original publication © 2022, Brave New Books

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Cover design by C. J. Hopwood and J. Spoor

Published and printed by Brave New Books

ISBN: 9789464921151

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Prologue

Billions of rotations ago, from the very first moment the universe offered a chance for the emergence of civilizations, stories were already being told about gods and their creations, which, in hindsight, turned out to be not just a translation of the past but also a prediction of the cyclical futures that would follow thereafter...

The mapped universe of the Alkidri consisted of four planetary systems. There was the Nour-system, mainly governed by the Followers of Ama. On the other side of the universe was the Ur-system, where experimentation with life often took place. And in the third corner of the cosmos, there was Malbolk, a lonely planet used for gathering resources. The Alkidri themselves resided on Alkidrus, a planet situated amidst these three planetary systems, which had gradually moved closer to the sun in the last rotations. Thanks to their advanced space travel technology, traveling between these planetary systems was relatively effortless for the Alkidri. Additionally, travel time posed no issue for them due to their extendable lifespan, facilitated by Brozia, a cultivated fruit. The reaction Brozia induced in an Alkid's silicon-based body halted the aging process. As a result of this silicon foundation, each Alkid had a dark greenish-grey body that was nearly as sturdy as metal. The Alkidri could thus live for thousands of rotations. Additionally, each Alkid had a square-shaped

crystal on their back that grew alongside their body from birth.

Some Alkidri even underwent Endymiosis, enabling them to skip many rotations and awaken in better suited times. Endymiosis was a prolonged state of sleep where an Alkid was frozen to pass the time. This way, time consuming processes, such as scientific experiments, could be carried out more efficiently. However, Endymiosis was not without danger. Once in this state, an Alkid could not awaken earlier than originally planned. In Endymiosis, Alkidri were vulnerable, yet it was also the greatest strength of their race.

However, the history of the Alkidri is not all about prosperity. The exile their entire civilization endures has separated them from the Universal Unity, also known as the U.U. Although prosperity seems to abound on Alkidrus, it is merely a shadow of what it could have been. The Universal Unity is an intergalactic power that oversees the actions of highly developed civilizations throughout the universe. Newly discovered civilizations that were technologically advanced were immediately admitted to the U.U. From that point on, such a civilization would be guided to further development. However, cooperation between a new civilization and the U.U. requires certain conditions. It is not allowed to drastically alter the ecosystem of another planet by means of artificially created life. It remains unclear why a certain Alkid violated this rule, but the reality is that the Alkidri now live in exile as a consequence of breaking it.

The Alkidri lived during a time when Earth was still known as Ur-3. It was a period when Ur-3 had vast ice caps and when gigantic creatures roamed the planet's surface.

Apart from the Alkidri, there were no other intelligent life forms present. The Alkidri themselves had long grown accustomed to their exile by then. In fact, many no longer hoped for a reunion with the U.U., not out of despair, but rather due to indifference. After all, life on Alkidrus was not so bad after all, thanks to their advanced technology. The two main issues were cosmic loneliness and the impending threat of the sun drawing nearer.

Each Alkid was educated in certain teachings that taught reaching for unattainable goals meant becoming a slave to oneself, and setbacks had to be accepted at all times. Binding oneself to the impossible was considered a foolish mistake. They were not allowed to be guided by their emotions. Moreover, associating negative emotions with specific circumstances was always seen as a choice. Wisdom, self-control, courage, and justice were the main pillars on which the Alkidri had to focus. However, it seemed that more and more Alkidri preferred to pursue pleasure instead. They believed their civilization was doomed from the moment of exile. Some even believed that the Alkidri, as a race, were so wicked that they deserved to perish. And if they were to perish, those last rotations of their existence should be used for as much short-lived pleasure as possible. Although the old austere teachings were imparted to everyone, only a few remained faithful to them.

Some Alkidri were hundreds of thousands of rotations old, while others only a couple of thousands. However, their age said nothing about their mental youthfulness. After all, Alkidri could enter Endymiosis at any given moment, skipping many rotations without undergoing mental

development. The number of lived rotations was all that mattered. These long periods that filled an Alkid's life felt like brief moments to them. Time progressed linearly, but their perception of it was different. During lively activities, time seemed to pass slowly for the Alkidri, while during other tasks, it appeared to fly by. Thanks to the Brozia that extended their lives, time was not a precious resource. This might have been one of the reasons for abandoning the old teachings. However, that teaching always resurfaced at the end of an Alkid's life. Since Alkidri did not die naturally, and Alkidrus was made so safe that they did not feel victim to fatal accidents, they usually decided to depart from the material reality after a few thousand rotations.

The Alkidri were a peaceful civilization, and one of the reasons for this was that every Alkid was born into a family without biological parents. Each child came from unknown donors. This way, all Alkidri recognized something of themselves, no matter where they ended up. No one was a stranger because everyone was a stranger, making everyone familiar. Moreover, a potential war would mean that an Alkid might have to fight against blood relatives. While disagreements or long-lasting disputes existed, they never led to absolute hostility. Additionally, no sensible Alkid would harm their own family. Because of that, the differences among the Alkidri were not significant. They shared the same culture, laws, religion, and economy.

After countless rotations on Alkidrus, a strong secularization also led to the existence of merely one religious group: the Followers of Ama. On each island of Alkidrus, there was a House of the Followers of Ama, and Alkidri who

felt drawn to the group could join them. Only initiates gained access to all the secrets of the Followers of Ama. Because of this, besides the prevailing cynical attitude towards religion, the organization remained mysterious. Nevertheless, almost every Alkidri held respect for the Followers of Ama. While the intangible aspects of their beliefs were seen as irrational, the Alkidri refrained from interfering in their worldview. Moreover, it was known that many philosophical insights originated from the House of the Followers of Ama. When it came to cosmic wisdom, the Followers of Ama were never disregarded. However, a critical attitude toward such wisdom always persisted, although attempts to silence the religious institution were never made.

For most Alkidri, the reason why their race had to make way for a new civilization remained unclear. However, during the time when indifference towards reunification with the U.U. became widespread, the end of the Alkidri seemed imminent. A certain Prophecy spoke of a rebirth, which some interpreted as the destruction of Alkidrus. Naturally, such a prophecy came from a Follower of Ama. Such prophecies were hardly taken seriously, yet the Alkidri could not ignore the reputation that the House of the Followers of Ama had held throughout the years.

Therefore, discussions about the Prophecy often remained inconclusive. On the one hand, there were moderate perspectives, where some Followers of Ama acknowledged the Prophecy without claiming certainty, while some scientists viewed it as an example of irrationality. On the other hand, there were extreme viewpoints, with certain Followers of Ama proclaiming the end, and some dismissing

it entirely. Nevertheless, the Prophecy was expected to surpass the expectations of every Alkid. History had only just begun.

Book 1: Prehistory of Ur-3

I: Ter Bolon, city of science

More than 300,000 rotations ago, in the city of Ter Bolon, on the planet Alkidrus...

“The six chosen candidates will be assigned as follows: Nisus for the planet Nour-b. Oan for the planet Nour-c. Idiah for the planet Ur-1. Freia for the planet Ur-2. Áno for the planet Ur-3.” But before the sixth candidate was named, loud laughter erupted from the audience. Most of those present already knew what Master Rugel’s next words would be, “And Mulius for the planet Malbolk.” Mulius slumped in his chair, resting his head on his fingers, while being surrounded by laughter.

He heard some call out sarcastically, “Better luck next time!”

Mulius, who had a very pale complexion for an Alkid, accentuated by two light gray locks of hair beside his cheeks, then stood up from his chair. Though his cloak covered his tall stature and face, many could now see his uniform, adorned with dozens of crystal-shaped symbols. These elongated badges indicated how many successful explorations an Alkid had undertaken. Mulius was evidently very experienced. He walked with heavy steps and his head down, leaving the Hall of Exploration. At the exit, some could faintly hear him cursing.

Master Rugel tried to ignore the commotion, but for a brief moment, a smirk appeared on his face. He called for order and continued his speech, “As all of you know, in this

era, the purpose of our existence is not solely focused on our development but also on that of other potential intelligent life. After all, it is only by discovering intelligent life that our exile will be lifted. But despite our exile, let us not forget the developments our civilization has achieved thanks to technology and protocols. Let us continue on this path.”

The speech was over, and the tall windows around the hall opened automatically. The room was then filled with late afternoon sunlight, accompanied by a pleasant summer breeze. Everyone stood up and began leaving the hall or stayed for some chatter. The chairs automatically disappeared into the white marble floor.

Many attendees lingered in the hall. Áno stood in the center, now accompanied only by his cloak, which he did not cover his head with, unlike Mulius. He wanted to approach the other chosen candidates to congratulate them. He saw Freia and Idíah on the other side of the room. They already bonded the first time Áno met them and were probably very fond of each other. Freia had long dark hair and wore a neat, long skirt. She was not tall and exuded modesty in her body language. Idíah had blond hair, was taller, and had a braid over her shoulder. Over her metal uniform, which exposed a bare part of her midriff, she wore a broad necklace. Their enthusiastic postures clearly showed their happiness with their new positions. Idíah remained relatively composed, but then again, for her, this was already the twelfth time receiving this position. Áno had met Freia during his training, a mere four rotations ago, an extremely short period for an Alkid.

Áno and Freia must have been the youngest and most inexperienced among the chosen candidates. Áno could not help but desire to work alongside Freia. She was the most caring and beautiful Alkid he had ever met.

“How remarkable,” Áno thought, “that an Alkid can be so selfless.” Unconsciously, he began softly talking to

himself, “Anyone should be grateful. Without Alkidri like her, our world wouldn’t be such a beautiful place.”

Áno reflected back on his training. Becoming a Scout was a solitary journey. The training focused on letting go, not just of material possessions but also of social connections. Social skills were not a priority for Scouts since they would be alone on the planets they explored. After all, it was essential to prevent the Scouts from suffering too much from loneliness on a planet without intelligent life. Áno had always struggled with this and preferred to focus on other aspects of his training. However, giving up was not an option for him, as the training gave Áno a sense of purpose. Lacking purpose had become a widespread problem among Alkidri, who tried to solve that by seeking individual pleasure rather than meaningful belonging. Áno lamented this but could not come up with a much better solution than to try to balance between those extremes: working on himself to become a better Scout and seeking belonging by making a difference for all Alkidri as a Scout.

“Did you say anything?” Áno suddenly heard from behind him.

Áno was startled, realizing he had been drifting away in his own thoughts. He turned around and noticed two members of the Followers of Ama standing there. Áno recognized them by their distinctive attire: long red and black robes with a short cloak over their shoulders. Not every Follower of Ama wore such clothing. It was reserved for the most devout and influential members of their organization. While most Alkidri were open to the Followers, they still kept their distance. Everyone had their own ideas about Ama, but the Followers of Ama had established a true cult in her honor. Her existence was not disputed by them. In fact, some Followers claimed to have had direct contact with her. It was even said that the first

two Protocols of Exploration were derived from the reasoning of the Followers of Ama:

1. Primitive intelligent life forms with self-reflective abilities should not be approached to prevent idolization.
2. The first Protocol becomes void if it hinders the survival of the Alkidrian race, and a covenant must be formed with said life forms to preserve it at any cost.

Without waiting for Áno to speak, they started the conversation themselves, “Congratulations, dear Áno. You have not only received the blessing of the Alkidri but also that of Ama. The Prophecy will come true. But prepare yourself, for you are about to change everything.”

Áno remained skeptical about the Followers of Ama, but he tried to keep an open mind to their ideas. Usually, he let them say what they wanted and then simply ignored it. They always proclaimed that the so-called Prophecy of the rebirth of Alkidrus would come true. But this message was highly personal, so Áno could not resist to oppose them, “What do you mean, the blessing of Ama? None of you even know who she is. No, in fact, nobody does.”

The two cult members smiled and said, “All in due time,” before walking away.

Áno watched them go and noticed they asked Oan to join them. He apparently was a member of the Followers. This was not really surprising, as Oan had already given the impression of an older Alkid. The cult was full of elderly Alkidri. Although Oan appeared physically fit, like most Alkidri, he moved slowly and spoke in a low-pitched and slow-paced tone. He also had messy gray hair, covered by his

cloak. Metal accessories adorned his face, from his belt to his hip and even his right eye. These were common signs of advanced Alkidrian age.

Now Áno wanted to find Freia and congratulate her and her sister, but they were nowhere to be found. Perhaps it was for the best, as Áno already found his new position quite daunting. A few silly remarks due to his inexperience in the presence of Idíah would not do him any good. On his way outside, Áno received several more congratulations. He wanted to go home, but across from the building's exit, he saw Mulius sitting on a bench by the street. Mulius looked unhappy, staring blankly ahead. Áno decided to approach him, but he was not sure what to say. He did know that the planet for which Mulius had been chosen was not a pleasant place to work. The planet Malbolk was a dreadful place, as almost its entire surface was a swampy marshland. The toxic air and limited sunlight certainly did not make it pleasant nor inviting. Finding intelligent life was not the primary goal there. Instead, the intention was to strip the planet of its gold.

Áno approached Mulius and sat down beside him, but not too close. It was only when Áno and Mulius were in such close proximity that the difference in Alkidrian age became apparent. Mulius' hair, though still full and thick, had a dull color, while Áno had dark blond hair falling to the left side of his forehead. Both remained silent. "A beautiful summer day, isn't it?" Áno finally said, trying to keep it light-hearted.

"Every day here is more beautiful than the finest day on Malbolk," Mulius said irritably.

"I'm sorry," Áno began, "I-..."

Mulius interrupted him, "I've suffered too many times on that wretched planet. How is it possible that I get reelected by that stupid system every time?!"

Áno did not see any way to comfort Mulius. “I’m sorry,” he started again, “I should have known better before bringing up the weather. But you should know that everyone admires you. Every Alkid has great appreciation for your-...”

Mulius burst into laughter. His laughter turned into such a boisterous fit that it could be heard throughout the street.

Áno did not understand and tried to put his hand on Mulius’ shoulder. But just as he was about to ask if Mulius was okay, he noticed his hand pass through Mulius’ shoulder. It immediately became clear to Áno what was going on. “Nisus!” Áno called out sternly.

While laughing, Nisus appeared from behind a tree next to where Áno was sitting. Compared to all the Alkidri Áno knew, Nisus was a stout-postured Alkid. Perhaps Nisus’ belly was twice the size of Áno’s, and unlike other Alkidri, a pair of magnetic eyeglasses hovered before Nisus’ face, meant to enhance his vision.

“Please turn that thing off,” Áno said with a sigh.

Still in Mulius’ voice, Nisus replied, “Talo, he’s onto us. Come back now.”

Mulius’ body then vanished like a hologram being turned off, leaving an egg-shaped sphere in place of where Mulius’ hologram had been.

“Talo?” Áno asked Nisus.

“Named after his big brother, TALO-12,” Nisus said cheerfully. As Nisus sat down next to Áno, Talo flew to Nisus’ shoulder.

“This thing is the little brother of our defense system in space?” Áno asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Well, yes, they do share the same creator,” Nisus said with a proud smile. “Let me make it up to you,” he said, “by taking you out for dinner tonight.”

Áno looked at Nisus with a smile and agreed. Nisus’ gentle demeanor, which had been present since Áno first met him, always created a pleasant atmosphere.

“See you tonight, Mister Appreciation!” Nisus joked as he stood up.

Áno needed to go home first. He walked out of the street and descended to the city. There it was again, that reminder of their exile. Áno walked past a gigantic statue standing between the scientific center and the city center. It was meant to symbolize interplanetary collaboration and consisted of various rings and spheres. At the foot of the statue was an inscription: “Banished, but not forgotten. We will return.” A small crowd had gathered around the statue. They were listening to a member of the Followers of Ama.

The Follower exclaimed, “Listen, fellow Alkidri! Our time is quickly approaching! Our exile has gone on for too long. We will all be annihilated! We must no longer have faith in the Universal Unity, for they only seek to destroy us! We must submit ourselves to Ama!”

Áno continued walking, and some other Alkidri followed suit. Behind him, he could hear the faint sounds of a heated discussion taking place.

The city was a pleasant place to live. On the hilly eastern side stood the scientific center, towering over the rest of the city. Directly west of it, sheltered by the hills, the commercial center was situated to the south. Most Alkidri lived in the northern part of the city. To the west, the city overlooked a large lake. Every important facility was nearby and easily accessible, thanks to not only an efficient grid structure but also to the network of self-driving vehicles. Traffic problems