

## Chapter 4

### Soyál

During the ceremonial ritual of Soyál, the uninitiated had to wait outside the temple. The brown dome served as a temple for the Hopi as well as the Oraibi Brotherhood. Most Hopi ceremonies were open to the uninitiated, often done outside beneath the stars. While most Oraibi did not actively participate, the rituals fascinated them. The costumes, the props, and the dances were all quite bizarre to their eyes. The singing was peculiar as well. The Hopi language was unlike any other language spoken on Gaia. Hearing it spoken was one thing, but hearing it sung in the ritual dances was an experience unto itself. Some watched them with a quiet curiosity while a few merely endured the pagan rituals, waiting for them to conclude. Miguel Moleiro was one of the latter.

He tried to be patient waiting for the ceremony to conclude, but it was difficult. Not only did important Oraibi business need attended to, he was never comfortable around pagan rituals. Part of him was glad that this one was being done inside the temple and beyond his view. Being open-minded of foreign cultures and beliefs was a requirement to be Oraibi, but that didn't mean he had to enjoy them. He was glad he was not alone. Among those waiting outside were Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Gnostics. All were members of the Oraibi Brotherhood, but none were initiates into the Hopi Tribe. Kayah made clear the distinction early on. It was the prophecy that united them. Brothers and sisters of the mind and heart, not blood.

He often marveled at the uniqueness of the Oraibi. It was a fraternal order built on multiple faiths, with the smallest one forming the core. Of the several hundred Oraibi on Gaia, only six were Hopi. Yet it was a Hopi myth that came to unify a disparate collection of political, philosophical, and religious sects. To Miguel, that achievement alone was deserving of respect and deference ... even if they were pagans.

Miguel was Roman Catholic, one of the few in the Oraibi. He saw the Ark, the rebellion, and the destruction of the *Prophet* as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Revelation. The seals were broken, the horns sounded. They slew the beast and his servants in the rebellion. His devout faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was affirmed with the destruction of the antichrist and the building of

the new holy city. Gaia was the new holy city. The 144,000 bearing the mark of the Father were his to protect. The tyranny and oppression of the Federation was a mortal sin against God and had to be dealt with. As Terra burned, Gaia would harbinge in a new era of peace.

At least that is what he believed before. Things had changed. The beast endured. He now would send thousands of his warriors to destroy the new holy city and take back the new world. Hence, the prophecy had not been fulfilled. Not yet. If that were true, then they must still be in the midst of final judgment. The battle of Armageddon had not yet been fought. Miguel tried to understand what it meant but struggled. If he was right, the holy city had not yet been built, the beast lived, and a great period of war and agony remained ahead of them.

Miguel looked up at the alien sky, amazed at the enormous number of stars visible. On Terra, air pollutants and an abundance of artificial light concealed most of the stars. It was as if heaven was slowly vanishing. The Gaian sky had no air pollution of any kind. After fifteen Gaian years, the new stars, new moons, and other celestial bodies were imprinting themselves on his memory. In one corner of the sky, a dense cloud of tightly packed stars slashed across the south, surrounded by the familiar scatter of white dots. Near the cloud hovered Coeus, the larger of the two Gaian moons. It was a full Coeus that night. The light from its face made the horizon visible along with the surrounding terrain. The nearby mesas and deep-cut valleys were like nothing Miguel had ever seen on Terra. He always believed it was what the Grand Canyon of Arizona looked like, though he had never seen it with his own eyes.

His eyes fell from the horizon onto the Oraibi Temple complex around him. It'd been three years since he'd last seen it. It was much larger than he remembered. There were now several dark domes on top of the mesa, along with large desert gardens, red stone walkways, and a large freshwater reservoir. At the far end of the complex sat a new algae farm, a biohydrogen energy source that would provide enough surplus energy for the complex to expand further.

Miguel was in the middle of studying the new additions to the complex when a robed figure emerged from the temple. His flowing red-and-white robe covered his tall, thin frame. Miguel could not see his face. The figure raised his hands and gestured for those waiting outside to enter.

"Come," the robed man said.

Along with the thirty or so other people waiting outside, Miguel lined up to enter the Oraibi Temple. He noticed that a new symbol adorned the top of the entrance: the nakwach.



No one spoke as they filed into the temple and took their seats. Some of the seats were nothing more than large cushions on the floor. Some were more elaborate, to give back support to the older members. The seats all faced the fire pit in the middle of the room. On each side were wide walkways dividing the seating areas into two groups. The smaller one led to a spiral staircase in the far corner. It led to the kiva—an underground altar room of some kind. Miguel wasn't sure exactly what happened down there.

Two bizarre and monstrous figures emerged from the staircase. They were tall, human-like

figures with darkened faces. One wore a turquoise-green mask in the shape of a bird. His thick white robe stretched down to his feet and dragged along the floor. The second man was painted black, with white hand marks all over his body. His mask was a human face but all black with spikes protruding from the sides of the temple. The black man carried a long staff with five white rings that glowed brightly. Miguel remembered Kayah explaining that these monstrous figures were kachinas, powerful spirits. He couldn't remember the rest, but he figured they were their equivalent of angels. Outside of the Fifth World prophecy, Miguel's knowledge of Hopi mythology was pretty limited.

As more light filled the room, Miguel noticed the interior walls of the temple were different as well. There were murals painted on every surface. Behind the masked, robed men was a large eagle with black eyes clutching a bow in one claw and arrows in the other. On another wall was a bear, and on another, a glowing red flame emanating from an opening in the ground. The stone tablets displayed along the outer wall were rimmed with gold-and-white trim. Despite its pagan symbolism, Miguel found the frescoes impressive. The holographic projectors and smart materials provided a unique combination of the primitive and the modern.

His eyes adjusted slowly to the increasing light. He realized he was seated next to Rickard Silva de Reyes, one his lieutenants during the rebellion. After a few moments, the rest of the faces became clear. To his left sat Lao Chun and Juvi Madia. Immediately in front of him was Dr. Charles Jedik, the senior-most member aside from Kayah herself. As his eyes moved from face to face, he realized he had not seen most of them in a long time. His work with the Gaian Security Forces dominated his time. Aside from Madia, it had been years since he had seen the others.

Kayah emerged from the staircase next, not long after the two kachinas. She wore a long, dark-green robe matching the others in length. On her head sat some sort of strange crown with feathers and pale, bone-like spikes. The two masked men joined the red-and-white robed man from before and sat in front of Kayah's place. She then slowly walked and took her own place near the fire pit.

After several moments of silence, Kayah spoke: "A new stage has begun. A new year begins and with it a turn in our path. Evil has returned. At the Soyál, a darkness covers our land and desires to pull us back into the portal and return us to the ruins of the Fourth World. And so it is, our emergence is not complete. We are not settled, and thus the Creator has sent this darkness to challenge us. We must prove our strength and throw off the evil, casting it back to the old world. Our error in following the path has brought us this challenge."

"Error?" Madia asked.

"We have failed to continue on the path. Some of us have embraced the Fifth World, but some struggle to let go of the world they knew. We must begin the migrations and spread across this world. The stars are clear, yet we have failed to leave the point of emergence."

Miguel rolled his eyes. *Migrations brought the Federation?* he thought. *She is right about one thing: evil has returned.*

"We must face this challenge and expel the evil," Kayah said.

“So it is war,” Dr. Jedik said.

Kayah nodded.

“It is certain,” said Lao Chun. “They bring war.”

“I agree,” Madia added. “There is no doubt we must fight, but are we to endure invasion after invasion? Suppose we defeat them. What is to stop them from trying again in another few years? Then try again, and again after that. What kind of paradise is this if we are to endure a lifetime of war? All we did was destroy a servant evil. Its master persists. The new world cannot begin until the evil is destroyed. A victory in battle on Gaia will not end it.”

Miguel nodded. *At last someone has said it. Let us see what the Great Mother has to say to that.*

To Miguel’s disappointment, Kayah did not speak up. Instead it was Dr. Jedik: “War requires a clear political objective and a will to fight. Neither are easy to come by in an alliance. We assume Terra seeks revenge for the destruction of the *Prophet* and to retake their colony. For now, they have the will and the desire to invade and conquer. But that will not always be so. To the people of Terra, we are a distant place, both in space and memory. The White Storm was nearly four decades ago. The *Prophet* was five years ago. Every mission that has entered the Gaia System has met with disaster. Should it happen again, the Federation could topple and fall from perceived weakness and ineptitude.”

“*It could?* We are to fight because the enemy *could* fall apart from within?” Madia asked rhetorically. “Are we to design a strategy around hope?”

“Hope has gotten us pretty far,” Jedik replied. “Don’t forget what dire odds we faced in defeating the Consortium here, or infiltrating the Ark Project before that. I understand your concern, but we should not ignore that it took them five years to come back—and only one ship, which tells me that they were not committed to a full mission, so they remain cautious and indecisive. If it were a matter of taking back what is theirs, they would’ve sent an armada to begin with, not a scout ship. I tell you, there is doubt and growing dissent within the Federation. We know that from the interrogations of the *Prophet* survivors. We know from the data collected from the debris. Should we succeed in defeating a Federation attack, that dissent will grow.”

“How do you know?” Madia asked.

“We did not defeat the oppressor as we’d hoped, but that does not mean the prophecy was wrong,” Jedik said. “It is clear we are still in the midst of the great struggle against him and must continue to fight. I still believe the Terran Federation will fall, and so I must continue to fight. It has been the fate of every colonial empire. The mother country is inevitably surpassed when the colonies grow to their full size and strength.”

Miguel knew history. He knew most colonial empires lasted centuries before their colonies were free. The rest was pure speculation. Jedik had no idea what was going on back on Terra. No strategy could ever be devised on an old man’s guesses. It wasn’t logic that was driving Jedik; it was faith. For Miguel, this was admirable, but he knew some of the others might need more. The people of Gaia might also need more than just the faith of a committed few.

Discussion between Jedik and Madia continued on for a while. While they discussed

theology, Miguel wondered about more practical matters. Most understood the why; very few understood the how. His patience started to wear thin.

Suddenly Kayah interrupted: "If we are at war, we should seek the counsel of a general. Don't you think?"

Everyone turned to Miguel. He was, after all, the only general in the room.

Miguel smiled. *The old woman is thinking practical, same as me.*

"I think you all underestimate the challenge before us," he began. "The enemy has knowledge of our strength and our weaknesses. We have lost the element of surprise, which would've been the decisive factor. Now the enemy can design a plan tailored perfectly to the nature of the threat and then destroy us. They will bring sufficient firepower, sufficient force, and will likely defeat our defenses before we get a chance to slow them. Our current orbital defenses are woefully inadequate to defend against a well-armed and well-prepared attack."

The room went silent, as Miguel expected. He decided to stop and let everything sink in for a while.

"Are you saying we cannot win?" Madia asked.

"No. I am saying we need to start over. All our plans must be scrapped and a new defense plan devised. I am saying the cost of this war will be extremely high, much higher than we all hoped. We were naïve. This will not be like the rebellion. These will be fully armed and equipped soldiers prepared to fire on anyone that stands in their way. They will bring orbital artillery, attack drones, armored vehicles, and perhaps a few newly invented war machines we haven't seen yet. This is no longer a sacrifice for a small professional security force. We must now ask every Gaian to sacrifice if we are to be victorious."

Miguel could see Madia had another question but could not get it to pass his lips. There was whispering and murmuring. Most knew what he meant. He heard fear in many of their voices, reluctance in others. It was the first time in years Miguel had seen such weakness among his Oraibi brethren. It was also troubling that neither Kayah nor any of the others in the leadership said anything. He wasn't sure what it meant.

In military terms, the problem was much clearer. The Gaian Parliament was already supporting a growing professional security force. Prime Minister Newman and his Fifth World Coalition unofficially declared war but had seen their popular support fade in the last few years. To defend Gaia, they would need to go further, asking more from the people at a time when their political power was tenuous at best. Many in the coalition were committed. Others were just politicians, riding the anti-Terra fervor. In the face of such a grave threat, there was no way to know if the fervor would be enough.

The temple came alive with open debate. Several people spoke at once, some talking to each other, others talking past each other. It seemed obvious there was no consensus on anything. Nearly thirty minutes passed before Dr. Jedik called for calm.

"It was indeed naïve of us to think we could avoid a full-scale war with the oppressors," Jedik said. "General Moleiro is right: we will need the full power of Gaia to defeat the enemy. We cannot win this with clever deception or tactical ingenuity. We need more soldiers, but more

importantly, we need the people united behind the cause.”

“There is another problem,” Miguel said. “The spy. Any attempt to change our strategy will likely be observed and reported to the oppressors. The larger our recruitment efforts, the more likely spies will infiltrate our defense forces.”

“The Federation spy must be dealt with before the oppressors return,” Madia said coldly.

Several nodded in agreement.

*It is not so easy, Miguel thought. But at least they agree it is something that needs to be dealt with immediately.*

Miguel said nothing for the rest of the session. It seemed as if they were coming around and facing reality. The despair that permeated the room seemed to dissipate a little toward the end, giving him hope. Miguel was especially impressed with Brother Juví Madia. He was clearly shaken upon realizing the gravity of the situation, yet he seemed to recover his fortitude in minutes. As usual, Dr. Jedik was several steps ahead. He didn’t need the blunt assessment. He knew the reality of the situation.

Miguel noticed that Kayah remained silent for a long time before finally raising her hands at the end, calling for adjournment. The kachinas, the robed men at her side, held up their hands as well, signaling the desire for silence. The old woman rose slowly and looked across the faces in the temple.

“In the old world, Soyál was a ritual held at the Winter Solstice. It was the shortest day of the year, a time when life was at its lowest point. The cycle reached a state of dormancy. It signals the time of beginning of rebirth for all life. On this new world, the cycles are different. The days are different, the seasons are different. Time is different. We have been slow to adopt Gaia, our new mother, slow to adopt the path we set the people on. And so we are challenged to prove our strength to the spirits. The people must awaken. As Brother Charles would say, it is time for Gaia to grow up. This is the time for the rebirth of life, but life must be paid for with life. The seed must cease being a seed so that its new form may rise. Our life must die to give birth to its successor, the one that will have the strength to destroy the evil that lurks among the stars. If we are not reborn, we will die.”

As Kayah spoke her final words, Miguel’s mind wandered to distant memories. They made for a very simple story. His life was one of a warrior, in a constant state of readiness. The hypervigilance could be exhausting to many, but he had never tired. He had been a soldier and guardian of his people for over forty years. The first twenty years were nothing but conflict, while the last twenty had been peaceful.

*But peace is never eternal, he thought. Twenty years is long enough.*

Miguel remembered the first time he’d been in combat. As a man of twenty-two years, he’d fought in the Brazilian jungle against the Amazônidas. It was a little-known rebellion, obscured from the world by the remoteness of the conflict. The central government also did not want it known they couldn’t control their own territory. In reality, over a third of Brazil was beyond their control. The strong, resilient people of the rain forest survived decades of attacks, occupation, and pursuit. The central government tried to annihilate them and maintain control of

the interior but failed. It wasn't for a lack of military power. Brazil had a modern military force capable of repelling any foreign threat. Internal threats were a different matter. The Amazônidas presented a unique challenge. They were an enemy whose very identity centered on its conflict. Everything they did was to further their cause. There was no compromise, no appeasement, and no fear. Everything from their social structure to their most core beliefs changed. The conflict became their identity. To exist was to fight the oppressors. To some, war was a transaction or perhaps a political ploy, something to help with negotiations. When war seeped into the very identity of man, it was different. There was no home front, no civilians. All men existed to fight.

*Children, Miguel thought. The new life, the Gaia-born, they are the new life that rose from the seed. They must become something different for us to survive. A seed does not give life to another seed. Our people broke free, but most did not fight. They resisted, they disobeyed, but did not fight. I fought. The Oraibi fought. Most Gaians did not. Twenty years. Twenty years used to be the age when children became adults. When boys became men. They reach majority at eighteen, the right to vote at twenty-one, and for many, university studies were finished by twenty-three. But not our children. They will fight at eighteen, perhaps younger. They are not us. Gaia-born must become a different kind of people ... a new race.*

Miguel left the temple with the others when Kayah had finished. The old woman returned to the kiva beneath the main room. After speaking to a few of the others, Miguel noticed on the far edge of the mesa a purple flame reaching up into sky. A small fire pit near the cliff sprouted up a vivid purple flame with small flashes of blue and yellow at the edges. Miguel approached it and found several of Kayah's Hopi brethren there smoking from a pipe. Along with them was Lao Chun.

Lao had spoken little during the discussions, but Miguel got a sense he was always thinking. His eyes followed the thoughts and feelings of the room. Always listening, always meditating, he commanded a tremendous respect and reverence. Among the Gaians, he was a hero of the revolution; among the Oraibi, he was one of the seven that formed the High Council of the Brotherhood.

Miguel took a seat next to him on the dusty ground. He leaned back and watched as the flame changed color to green, then a strong bloodred. One of the Hopis fed some sort of powder into the flame, causing it to change colors at his command. Above the fire hung a clear sky with Coeus looking down on them. A few others walked by and joined the circle around the fire, but they left not long after. Miguel was glad. He did not feel like speaking anymore. A few moments later, he heard two shuttles take off and speed northward back to New Eden. The third shuttle would take him, Lao, and a few others back to New Eden later.

Lao and the others passed around the pipe. They knew better than to offer it to Miguel. He believed any dulling of the senses or altered consciousness to be a vice. Since his youth, he insisted on experiencing as much of the world as possible as it was. Nothing more than champagne at celebrations and coffee in the morning entered his system. Combat enhancers were a different matter. They served a unique purpose. When it was done, he stopped taking them. The fire calmed but continued to shift colors every few minutes. Lao remained silent, only nodded in

gratitude at being handed the pipe. After one final inhalation, Lao broke the silence.

“Are you troubled general?” he asked.

Miguel turned and realized the elderly Chinese man was staring right at him. His bald head had some grayish whiskers here and there. His eyes were small with many wrinkles. Lao was shorter and usually maintained a neutral expression on his face. Miguel found it impossible to get a read on what he was thinking or whether he was angry, sad, happy, optimistic, pessimistic, tired, or excited. He wasn't even sure if Lao felt such things.

“Everyone is troubled,” Miguel replied. “War is not to be taken lightly.”

“Indeed,” Lao said calmly. “I am curious: is it death you fear or defeat?”

“There is no difference. I will die before we are defeated.”

“But of the two, which weighs on you?”

Miguel was about to repeat his answer, then stopped. Lao looked back toward the fire as if expecting him to take his time in responding. Deciding to take a few more moments, Miguel put more thought into his answer. Somewhere behind the question was a purpose. Lao never engaged in idle conversation.

“Defeat,” Miguel finally answered. “I would gladly trade my life for victory.”

As usual, Lao didn't change his expression and didn't say anything to indicate his thoughts on the answer. Miguel waited.

“A great enemy is coming,” Lao uttered. “Yet greatness in strength does not ensure victory. If their army does not compose itself and follow the Tao, it will be defeated.”

“Strength doesn't guarantee victory ... but it helps,” Miguel replied.

“You an experienced commander. I am curious: you fought a small enemy before, yes?” Lao turned back toward him.

Miguel knew immediately what he was referring to. “Yes, in the Amazon, a small separatist group that hid in a vast rain forest.”

“Did you defeat them?”

Miguel hesitated. “No, but we contained them ... oppressed them.”

It wasn't something he liked to remember or talk about with others. Before joining the Oraibi Brotherhood, a young Miguel Moleiro fought in the Brazilian Army against people seeking freedom and self-determination. For nearly twenty years, he was an oppressor. Flying copters into remote Amazon villages, imposing martial law in the cities, all to secure sovereign territory with little strategic or economic value. After the White Storm, the mission changed from preventing secession to suppressing all dissent. Miguel never made excuses and would never let himself forget what he did in his time as a servant of the devil. That is what his government became: the right hand of the Dragon.

“Why did you not defeat them?” Lao asked.

“My country decided it was not worth the trouble and the cost of rooting out and annihilating them. After the uprisings in the cities were put down, they were nothing more than an irritant in the deep interior of the country. It was far from the cities. Our mission was only to keep them in the rain forest.”



Lao nodded. "Then they were victorious?"

"No," Miguel said. "They wanted their own country. They did not get one."

"Did your country interfere in their affairs?"

"No. As long as they stayed in the jungle, we left them alone. A raid here and there, but nothing like an occupation."

"Why not?"

"I said, it was too expensive," Miguel said. He didn't like being interrogated and was starting to get irritated.

"Why was it expensive to occupy and govern the Amazon?"

"It was a vast jungle. The Amazônidas and their Tikuna allies were scattered in small villages and towns spread over thousands of square kilometers. Their soldiers were always moving, difficult to locate. Most of the time, we did not know where they were. To monitor or occupy a territory of that size would have taken hundreds of thousands of soldiers."

Lao smiled. "They had a jungle; we have a world."

"Yes, but there were also millions of them. We are less than two hundred thousand."

"Indeed. Will the oppressors send hundreds of thousands of soldiers?"

"No. There will be a larger expeditionary force at first to defeat the insurgents, then they'll leave a small occupation force behind. For an occupation, a good ratio is one soldier for every twenty-five civilians. So that's around seven thousand soldiers, perhaps a few extra to cover the margin of error. There will be maybe ten thousand."

Lao nodded again. He seemed satisfied with the answer. Miguel sat back and thought about it some more: *Yes, ten thousand soldiers to occupy a whole planet.*

"Are you calm because you believe we will win?" Miguel asked.

"Yes, I believe we will."

"How are you so certain?"

"Because our enemy has deviated from the Tao, they now lack knowledge. They know nothing of this world or its people. What they are trying to do cannot be done. What they gain, they cannot hold. They believe in strength and design. Contrivance and hard power don't bring victory. Their rule will be weak, brittle. In time, their rule will break and fall away."

"What of our strength and design?"

Lao nodded, but Miguel could tell it was in acknowledgement, not agreement. "We will not prevail through strength. You know this. Our design is exposed. You also know this. To prevail, we must have neither."

Miguel cocked his head to the side. "No strength? No plan?"

"You have seen it. In the jungle, they did not live freely through strength or defeat Brazil in a match of hard power. The warriors you fought, were they carrying out a design? Did they organize and move in strict organization, hierarchies, centrally commanded and deployed? Were they carrying out a grand strategy?"

"No, they were decentralized, with limited organization and a loose chain of command. It made it harder to defeat them. Every victory was against a piece, never the whole."

Lao nodded again. Miguel wondered how he managed to guess all the details of the Amazon War. *Perhaps the old man knows more than he lets on to others.*

“I thought Taoists were pacifists,” Miguel muttered.

“Have you never heard of kung fu?”

“Well, yes ... but I thought most Chinese philosophy opposed the use of force.”

Lao faced the flames. “No opposition to the use of force. Our concentration is on how force is used.”

“What if they offer a cease-fire, terms of peace? Would Shaolin monks reject such an offer?” Miguel asked. He tried to demonstrate he knew a little about Lao’s country.

“They will bring an army, not peace. Only words, deception. This is our world. If we ask them to leave, they must leave, but they will not. No terms, no peace, only invasion. If they invade, we defend ourselves ...”—Lao turned to face him—“... with force.”

The sound of footprints interrupted Miguel’s train of thought. Standing near the fire were the two men in costumes and body paint. They took seats on the opposite side of the fire, saying nothing. Behind them was the Great Mother Kayah. Miguel rose in respect, but Kayah gestured for him to sit back down. She took a seat next to Lao and let out a long exhale. One of the others passed the pipe to her. She inhaled deeply and passed it back. Miguel was surprised she partook. Any habits or vices of normal people seemed beneath her. He wondered if she even aged, as her appearance didn’t seem to change, yet he knew she did not use cosmetic enhancements.

Miguel studied the old woman. She looked calm, almost relaxed. The news of the day did not seem to weigh on her. Lao was calm as well. Of the people sitting around the fire, only the costumed men looked stern. He noticed none of them were offered the pipe.

*They don’t recognize them as men in costumes. They’re spirits ... kachinas.* Miguel realized they never broke character. It was very clear they took their role in the ceremonies seriously. This was no regular pageantry with costumes used to help act out important events. A long silence passed among the Oraibi sitting in front of the small flame. Miguel was lost in thoughts, mostly of war. Lao was not only silent but motionless, his breath so shallow Miguel wondered if he had fallen asleep. Kayah stared into the flame but seemed to nod her head every so often as if agreeing or acknowledging the fire.

After watching the strange pseudo-conversation take place, Miguel looked into the flame, smiling at himself at the thought that the fire would talk to him.

*I’ll never understand pagans. Fortunately I do not have to.*