

The Year AD 5023

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"Long ago, as it still is today, it was the custom for a boy who reached a certain age to go into the forest and wait for a dream. He would build a small lodge and go without food for many days in the hope he would be visited by some animal or spirit of the forest that would take pity on him and give guidance and power."

~ [Ojibwe traditional story](#)

Hort was a man. He knew that he was a man because he had completed his vision quest two summers ago. As every member of his tribe had done for all the generations known to the wise ones, Hort had spent a week in the wilderness, fasting the first three days, praying, exercising, eating only what he gathered, tending his own fire, boiling drinking water from the streams and ponds. He was fifteen years old when he went on his vision quest.

The vision he had was of a passageway, a place nearby. The place in his vision felt as though he had been there before, it felt familiar to him. Yet its appearance was unlike any place he had ever been.

Hort's tribe lived in a cavern that was toward the high end of a canyon. The wise ones, Eli and Eleana, had told him the stories of their past. How the world had been created along with the sky and all the universe. How mankind had risen to greatness, become depraved, been cast down into suffering, clawed their way back again and again and again. Or, as Eli would often say, how mankind had been chained to the wheel of history.

When Hort had become a man, Eli and to some extent Eleana, became more forthcoming with answers to his questions. He had asked about the passageway in his vision.

Eli had nodded and had said, "Yes, that is a place that is familiar to me. I know this passageway. Where it would lead you, I don't know. But I know that to approach it, you need more knowledge than you have. If you seek that knowledge, I can share with you techniques that will aid you. Since your vision tells you that you are familiar with that passageway, it is a choice you face, whether to seek the knowledge to gain entrance, or to eschew that knowledge and stay away."

Hort had nodded in his own way, slowly but thoughtfully. He had said, "It seems like my destiny is along that passageway, and that what you are saying is that I have the choice to go there, to pursue my destiny as shown in this vision, or to remain in ignorance."

Eli's nod this time had been very brief, a simple down and up motion of his chin. "We live well here, and in peace. We have knowledge of the foods and the paths through the forests. We have connexions to the other tribes nearby and through them trade and commerce with peoples and lands all around us and many places far from us. Living is easy. The path to greater knowledge represented by the passageway is difficult. It is fraught with intellectual challenges, spiritual challenges, emotional challenges, and physical challenges."

Hort had said, "Yet there are rewards. There was a feeling of fulfilment that came to me as I walked along that passageway in my vision. Nor am I able to put away the vision's key lesson: there is information that I do not know, the seeking of which opens more knowledge. Choosing to turn away from that knowledge cannot ever be satisfying, because I know it is there. When I was a child and knew not, there was nothing missing for me. But now, knowing that there is knowledge to be gained, I cannot stop knowing it is there, even were I to choose not to look for it."

Eli had smiled. "Yes," he'd said, "that is a great truth. Not knowing what you do not know, you do not perceive a lack. Knowing that there are things you do not know causes you to seek to know more, and, while that way is an endless struggle against the boundaries of ignorance, it satisfies the craving to know some of what you do not know, and to learn more about the extent to which there is even more knowledge to be learned. The choices before you represent infinite possibilities no matter what you choose. The choices relating to remaining ignorant are as diverse and as infinite as those leading toward greater knowledge, but they are attached to a feeling of longing and dissatisfaction. Your vision has shown you the joys of the path of knowledge."

Hort had turned his head aside, thinking of the choice before him. Then he had looked back at Eli's face. He said, "You've spoken about the past greatnesses, the times of accomplishment, of mastery. Tell me, have we ever gotten past the wheel of history? Were we ever worthy of greater things?"

Eli had smiled, then grinned, then laughed. He had said, "Yes, we are. We are very worthy."

Those words still troubled Hort, but knowing the ways of the wise ones, he would need to return to this topic another time. Hort had again asked if his people were past the wheel of history or not, but Eli had only smiled. Then Hort had asked about the way forward.

Eli had responded, "In order to gain entry to the passageway, you must answer questions. These are not my questions, so it does no good to ask my why these are the questions. But, since I have been within the outer foyer, I know the answers to gain entry there. Part of the work Eleana and I do here is to share the questions with you and help you learn the answers. The first question is: what shapes are the Earth, the Sun, and the Moon?"

Hort had thought only a moment before answering. He had said, "The Sun appears to be a circle in the sky and the Moon does, as well."

Again, Eli had smiled. "Yes, I am aware of their appearances. But the question is not what they appear to be, but what they are. That is a more difficult question, isn't it?"

Hort had nodded. He had thought back on his fifteen years. What had he seen that would help him answer this question?

Hort had said, "You drew attention to the eclipses of the Sun and of the Moon whenever these could be

seen in our sky. So, if I conceive of a shape for each of these bodies, one way to test that conception is to consider what shadows are cast by each object upon the others. When the Moon is seen against the Sun, it hides an arc. When Earth's shadow is seen on the surface of the Moon, it is always shaped as some part of a circle. For that to be true, it ought to be spherical in overall shape, but it could be open to the sky as long as light cannot pass through the entire shell in the direction of the Moon during an eclipse. I cannot imagine another shape that would match what I've seen."

Eli had nodded. He'd said, "You may come to see what happens if you choose to answer as you've spoken just now. The next question you'll be asked is: how large is Earth?"

That question involved a great deal more discussion, just to get a sense of how to go about finding the answer. In completing a journey of hundreds of miles, Hort had come to a greater understanding of his part of the world. Walking, driving around in wagons, and riding horseback were important skills in his culture. His people insisted that all sons and daughters, before their fifteenth year, knew how to ride, how to swim, and how to shoot. It was regarded as a matter of essential understanding to craft a bow and to make arrows.

The discussion of methods led Hort to make a rod eight feet long and to measure the shadow it cast at noon on the autumnal equinox at two locations separated by over eight hundred miles distance. He also had to develop a tool to reliably measure that distance accurately during the journey. All these activities took Hort many months.

Learning the trigonometry to calculate the circumference of the Earth was less physically rigorous, but also took many weeks of tutelage from Eleana, who was their teacher of mathematics, sciences, and healing arts. Understanding how very large the planet was and how little of it he had seen was one of the great aspects to this work, a humbling experience, but also thrilling.

There were, of course, many other questions that needed to be answered. Which planets have satellites? How far away is Venus? Why does Venus have phases, and why doesn't Mars? How far is the Moon? How far is the Sun? How long does it take Jupiter to complete an orbit of the Sun?

In order to see the major satellites of Jupiter, Hort had been shown how to make a mirror, how to silver it, and how to shape it. With Eli's help he had constructed a Newtonian reflector. Eli was all about the practical arts, buildings and gardens, plumbing, furniture, looms, and the harnesses they used for horses and cows. In another era, Eli would have been known as the village blacksmith.

Finally, Hort had been invited to come into the home of Eli and Eleana. As part of his coming of age ceremony, Hort would take a meal and talk with the wise ones. Since his vision had revealed him in the passageway, there had been two years of preparation. So, although Hort knew that he was a man and had been for two years, it was on his seventeenth birthday that he was to take his ceremonial supper with the wise ones and be fully embraced as an adult member of his tribe.

That day was today! Hort woke up early and filled with energy. He jumped out of his furs and blankets, pulled on his clothes, and left his hut. Having status as a man had meant building his own hut within the great cavern. Hort had chosen a location near the cave mouth, but inside one of the inner tunnels.

Children lived communally in the main cavern, where up to eighty of them would run around, build their own toys, play hide and seek, hold races, or head out into the nearby canyons and forests with

their families or in groups. There were always many things to see, many things to gather, and as children grew and learned to swim, fish to catch, or as they made their first bows and fletched their first arrows, game to hunt. Families had individual huts within and outside the cavern system, some well outside it in the forest. Some huts were at ground level, others high in trees.

All kinds of foods were cultivated, including mushrooms, vegetables, livestock. There were silver lodes which members of the tribe would work from time to time. Eli would help in the work of refining, and they had craftspeople who would make jewellery or furnishings out of silver. Selling these craftworks was part of the trade network in the region, which made it possible for Hort to travel by wagon and horse to distant places.

The Vestibule

The day of his seventeenth birthday was a whirlwind for Hort. He spent much of the time with his girlfriend Joelle. She had been his constant companion since they were both thirteen. They would walk in the woods, gather foods and flowers, make crafts together, study their lessons together. As they had grown older, they had become lovers.

Celebrations of birthdays and other festivals were a part of the joy of living in their tribe. Families would craft gifts for the people with birthdays, often for weeks in advance. Joelle had a very soft pelt from a puma she had killed two years earlier when it had threatened one of the youngsters. Joelle had sent three arrows into its face within seconds, the second arrow penetrating the cat's left eye and killing it before the third had entered its mouth.

So the occasion at that time was celebration, of course, to honour Joelle for protecting the children. For weeks after she would give lessons in how to hold arrows for fast shooting, and would tutor others in the tribe in making the shots fast and accurate. Also during those weeks, she learned to tan and treat the fur to make the skin soft, supple, and the fur soft.

Today she presented Hort with a jacket made from the fur. It was a wonderful gift, sized to fit him, with a full lining made from silk that had been brought from far to the South. There were pockets inside the jacket, including one for a slide rule that Eli and Hort had crafted to make his calculations go faster.

That evening, as the Sun was setting, Hort found Eli at his forge. Eli smiled at his young friend, whose fur jacket looked resplendent in the evening light. It was early October, and evenings were beginning to get cooler, so the jacket was just the thing to keep warm.

Eli doused the fires in his forge, arranged his tools, and walked with Hort to the hut that Eli shared with Eleana. Inside, there was a feast laid out on tables. The three of them filled fired clay plates and sat comfortably by a small fireplace eating with silver utensils.

After their meal, Eli looked at Eleana, who smiled. She said, "Hort, it is not every youngster who has the vision of the passageway. It has been seven years since the last time we have come to this point in the coming of age ceremony with anyone else. You won't remember Siena, though, I don't think, as she has not been back since setting forth along the passageway."

Hort thought back in his memory. He had a vague recollection of the name Siena, but nothing about the woman nor the time of her presence with the tribe. These thoughts mixed with some concerns, though.

With trepidation in his voice, Hort asked, "Will I be coming back after many years?"

Eleana shook her head slowly. "If you are to take companions with you, as Siena did, then you may go for a long time. Often, though, there is not such a lengthy journey involved. People come and go as they are led, and as they choose. Remember, we are free. We are the tribe of the free, the Ama-gi. Whatever we do, we always live free. No one will ever make you do anything against your will."

Hort nodded. These were very basic facts. He understood.

Eleana asked, "Are you ready to begin your journey, or do you have more questions?"

Hort thought for a moment, and said, "I don't really know what else to ask. You've said that you don't know where the passageway is going to take me. I'm not really sure that I understand, though. Eli said he has been in the outer foyer. I gather from what you've each said, there is a sort of vestibule somewhere, a place where the passageway begins. How is it possible that there is a cavern here that has not been fully explored?"

Eleana glanced at Eli who was busy with his dessert. He looked up and shook his head slightly, not wanting her to pass him the speaking stick, as it were. She smiled.

She said, "Hort, the passageway is different for each of us. It is not like the caverns which were formed long ago by natural processes, mostly. Oh, we've expanded some tight places, we've improved ventilation here and there, but for the most part this cavern and all of its twists and turns are the legacy of our people. We've lived here since before the great war three thousand years ago. The passageway is a made thing, it is an artefact. It provides access through a great many dimensions to a vast number of places. Much of the passageway is akin to a labyrinth, not in the sense that you get lost, but in the sense that it goes far beyond anywhere you could reach by ordinary means. When you have spent a few hours inside, you will come to know where you are going. If it is a distant destination, you'll be asked to come back here to invite friends to accompany you. If it is nearby, you'll make frequent visits when you need to do so. The simplest way to say it is, the passageway will guide you."

Hort shook his head in confusion. He said, "I don't understand. You say it is a made thing. Has it been here all these thousands of years?"

Eli nodded. Eleana smiled at him, waved her hand gently, then attended to her own dessert.

Eli said, "Yes. In a sense, we made it. We brought it about, anyway. Some of the elements of the passageway relate to work done here, at this location, on experimental portals. Much of the guidance systems, the guides within the passageway that show you why you were summoned and which help you understand the choices in front of you, those were designed and built, and have been kept current by people like Eleana and myself."

Hort said, "But this is fantastic, incredible. We hunt, we gather, we ride, we swim, we go about in wagons and on horses. Yet we have access to this miraculous passageway, this gift from ancient times. Why do we live as we do, then?"

Eli replied, "We like it better this way. Long ago we chose to live here and be free. We live very long lives now. There are no wars here any longer. No one is required to stay, no one is prevented from

inventing new things nor hampered in their wanderings. Anyone who wants to live another way is free to do so. One of the reasons people pass through to other realms along the passageway is to go live elsewhere. The only question that remains is, do you wish to visit the vestibule."

Hort was nodding his head as the question was being asked. He said, "Yes, I do! Thank you!"

Eleana looked up and said, "Thank you, too, Hort. It is a great honour to have one of our students chosen to begin this journey."

Eli nodded and looking Hort in the eye said, "Yes, Hort. Thank you. It is a joy to have a very apt pupil such as yourself." Then Eli reached over and held Eleana's hand.

Hort reached his hands across to each of them. They formed a circle together, each clasping a hand of each of the others. They bowed their heads in their traditional way. Then they looked up, smiled at each other, and let go their hands.

Eli stood up and walked over to a wall hanging. The purple velvet had been brought from far away, and it stood between two windows. On it was an intricate geometric design embroidered in soft colours.

Pulling it to one side, Eli took up a velvet tassel that was just the right size and tied the wall hanging so that it hung across the opening it had concealed. He said, "Here is the vestibule. Inside you'll be asked the questions and given the opportunity to answer them."

Eleana had lit a small oil lantern. It was made of silver which framed small coloured glass plates. Most of these were a pale yellow, orange, or green, so the overall effect was a soft lighting. Gesturing Hort to rise, she handed him the lantern when he was on his feet.

Walking up to the wall hanging and casting the light from the lamp into the chamber beyond, Hort found a small white marble seat facing a large black frame. Within the frame was a dark mirror.

Eli walked up to the frame and placed his hand atop a small gem that seemed to glow with its own internal light. With this one touch, the screen lit up with a pattern of lights and colours. It then displayed the word, "Welcome."

Hort's eyes were big and round and his eyebrows were as high as they would go. He had never seen anything like this panel before.

Eli came out and brought Hort to the seat. He said, "The screen will show you questions and give you information. It will show you how to enter answers by touching the screen. It's easy to learn and a great deal of fun. When you are ready, the screen will tell you what to do next. Good luck, and go with God."

Hort sat and smiled. He looked at the screen, then at Eli, then turned to smile at Eleana.

She said, "Good luck, Hort. Go with God. We'll be here when you return."

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Eli undid the tassel, letting the wall hanging conceal the vestibule. He and his wife went outside together.

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When I was young, on a course I did steer
To change all the world with no sense of fear.
To help solve problems that all people face,
I invested my skills for the fate of the race.

Working with friends and working alone,
Learning new facts that had to be known,
Trying new methods, daring to dream
The work was quite endless, or so it did seem.

Failures and victories came by the score;
Whatever I did to open the door
Others would challenge until it was late.
Will the bet pay off? What is our fate?

Who can say what the future may bring,
Will it cause us to weep or cause us to sing?
I don't believe in predestined fate,
The future will be what we choose to create.

Each of us working and earning his property;
Keeping it private with total autonomy.
Having such love for each of these folk
Who yearn to live free and shed the yoke

Of oppression that binds with coercion and fear.
Holding a gun or arrow or spear,
Taking up arms for defense of our selves so
No one is master or owner or slave, no

Nobody owns you or me or another.
Nobody plays our father or mother.
We live together or we live far apart
Each choosing his path be it silly or smart.

We are the tribe of freedom you see.
In cuneiform writing they say "Ama-Gi"
The most ancient way of writing we're free,
In wedges of clay before 2000 BC.

For four thousand years now people have known

That freedom is greatest when each is left alone.
No central planners, no central plan
Can make as much difference as one single man

Or woman or child, it matters not which:
The individual holds the key, turns the switch,
Unlocks the door to the future we seek
Next century, next year, or even next week.

Destiny is what we choose to create,
It never has been a matter of fate.
We are not robots to follow in line,
Shuffling along without reason or sign.

I am just me, this guy that you know,
You are just you with your knowledge in tow.
No numbers, no license, no permissions, no crime,
Autonomous factors with reason and rhyme.

True there are those who can't or won't see
That initiating force is wrong as can be.
They act in great haste, they do such a wrong,
We must protect the rest who belong,

Not to each other but each to herself and
Coercing none to gain wealth or land.
The things that we want come best in exchange
For things that we have or produce in a range

Of quality and value that each of us can
Make or devise by some personal plan.
Respecting you while you respect me
Guiding each other and others to see

That all of the future is unwritten as yet
And if we work smart we may still win that bet.
Laying the base on foundation of rock
So that battered by time it will take every shock.

From bottom to top, we build to the stars,
Knowing that what awaits us on Mars
Is another world of possibility, and more
Beyond Mars to a far galaxy's shore.

We travel through space, we travel through time.
There is no mountain that we cannot climb.

We face the future both together and apart,
A journey of miles with but one step to start.

The best thing is taking each seriously.
Respecting the fact of the autonomy
Of each person in order to give them the space
To develop and grow just at their own pace.

We are the Tribe of the Free: Ama-Gi,
Whatever we do, we always live free.

— [Anthem for the Ama-gi](#), 2000

[End book one]

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