

CHAPTER ONE

You must understand that peace is an internal matter. It has to be a self-discipline for an individual or for an entire civilization. It must come from within. If you set up an outside power to enforce peace, this outside power will grow stronger and stronger. It has no alternative. The inevitable outcome will be an explosion, cataclysmic and chaotic. That is the way of our universe. When you create paired opposites, one will overwhelm the other unless they are in delicate balance.

—The writings of Diana Bullone

To become a god, a living creature must transcend the physical. The three steps of this transcendent path are known. First, he must come upon the awareness of secret aggression. Second, he must come upon the discernment of purpose within the animal shape. Third, he must experience death.

When this is done, the nascent god must find his own rebirth in a unique ordeal by which he discovers the one who summoned him.

—“The Making of a God,” *The Amel Handbook*

Lewis Orne could not remember a time when he had been free of a peculiar, repetitive dream, when he had been able to go to sleep in the sure knowledge that the dream's wild sense of reality would not clutch at his psyche. The dream began with music, this really hokey unseen choir, syrup in sound, a celestial joke. Vaporous figures would come out of the music adding a visual dimension of the same quality.

Finally, a voice would override the whole silly thing with disturbing pronouncements: "Gods are made, not born!"

Or: "To say you are neutral is another way of saying you accept the necessities of war!"

To look at him, you wouldn't think him the kind of person to be plagued by such a dream. He was a blocky human with the thick muscles of a heavy planet native—Chargon of Gemma was his birthplace. He possessed a face reminiscent of a full-jowled bulldog and a steady gaze, which often made people uncomfortable.

Despite his peculiar dream, or perhaps because of it, Orne made regular obeisance to Amel, "the planet where all godness dwells." Because of the dream's pronouncements, which remained with him all through his waking life, he enlisted on the morning of his nineteenth birthday in the Rediscovery and Reeducation Service, thereby seeking to reknit the galactic empire shattered by the Rim Wars. After training him in the great Peace School on Marak, R&R set Orne down one cloudy morning on the meridian longitude, fortieth parallel, of the newly rediscovered planet of Hamal, terra type to eight decimal places, the occupants sufficiently close to the homo-S genetic drift for interbreeding with natives of the Heart Worlds. Ten Hamal weeks later, as he stood at the edge of a dusty little village in the planet's North Central Uplands, Orne pushed the panic button of the little green signal unit in his right-hand jacket pocket. At the moment, he was intensely aware that he was the lone representative on Hamal of a service which often lost agents to "causes unknown."

What had sent his hand thrusting for the signal unit was the sight of about thirty Hamalites continuing to stare with brooding gloom at a companion who had just executed a harmless accidental pratfall into a mound of soft fruit. No laughter, no discernible change of emotion.

Added to all the other items Orne had cataloged, the incident of the pratfall-in-the-fruit compounded Hamal's aura of doom.

Orne sighed. It was done. He had sent a signal out into space, set a chain of events into motion, which could result in the destruction of Hamal, of himself, or both.

As he was to discover later, he had also rid himself of his repetitive dream, replacing it with a sequence of waking events which would in time make him suspect he had walked into his mysterious night world.

CHAPTER TWO

A religion requires numerous dichotomic relationships. It needs believers and unbelievers. It needs those who know the mysteries and those who only fear them. It needs the insider and the outsider. It needs both a god and a devil. It needs absolutes and relativity. It needs that which is formless (though in the process of forming) and that which is formed.

—Religious Engineering, “Secret Writings of Amel”



“We are about to make a god,” Abbod Halmyrach said.

He was a short, dark-skinned man in a pale-orange robe that fell to his ankles in soft folds. His face, narrow and smooth, was dominated by a long nose that hung like a precipice over a wide, thin-lipped mouth. His head was polished brown baldness. “We do not know from what creature or thing the god will be born,” the Abbod said. “It could be one of you.”

He gestured to the room full of acolytes seated on the bare floor of an austere room illuminated by the flat rays of Amel’s midmorning sun. The room was a Psi fortress buttressed by instruments and spells. It measured twenty meters to the side, three meters floor to ceiling. Eleven windows, five on one side and six on the other, looked out across the park rooftops of Amel’s central warren complex. The wall behind the Abbod and the one he faced gave the appearance of white stone laced with