

*Khactu's dream ...*

Two birds—an Owl and a Heron—burst side-by-side from the elevator like sprinters out of the blocks. Even before the sliding doors had glided closed behind them, they had spotted Xhactu, whose tiny alien body lay prostrate on the floor. He was surrounded by a clump of shocked and gawking partiers. Pressing gently but assertively into the crowd, Owl and Heron knelt down next to Xhactu, like battlefield medics. All they lacked was a stretcher, medical arm-bands, and morphine

Xhactu's dream must have been "frightful" indeed, to agitate the Queen to the extent that it did, not to mention knocking Xhactu flat on his back. And obviously, it had gotten the attention of everyone at the *cèilidh*, even Arthur Compton. As for Fex, he was hanging back, uncharacteristically silent. What was going on with Fex? Was he still getting his "London sea-legs? Or was he undergoing 'Big-H withdrawal'?" Or was he just jealous?

But highest on the list at the moment was Xhactu.

The Heron knew that the Owl possessed far more medical knowledge than he did, for which the Heron was grateful. Thus, the latter yielded to the former.

"What do you think, Owl?" asked the Heron.

"Let me have a look," said the Owl, and he took Xhactu's hands in his own—hand-to-hand contact being perhaps part of the primordial, medical armamentarium of the universe. Owl Man would probably know.

Xhactu's hands were shaking with cold, his eyelids fluttered, and he was mumbling. But, without the benefit of the *universal translator*, which for some reason he had not been able to activate, no one in the room could understand a word he mumbled. How in the world had he managed to tell his dream? wondered Heron Man. Or did the dream ... ?

"His hands are cold," said Owl Man, who then said to Xhactu, "Are you awake, my man? How do you feel?"

Xhactu's head rolled back and forth, his eyelids stopped fluttering, his froggish eyes opened wide, and he stared vacantly at Owl Man.

"Is that you, Owl Man? Where am I?" He must have bumped the activator on the *universal translator*, because it began to crackle once again.

Owl Man's warm grip closed gently over Xhactu's cold hands.

"You're on planet Earth, Xhactu. In London, one of the financial capitals of this planet. London was formerly the capital of a global empire."

"What happened to me?"

"You had a 'frightful' dream."

"What was the dream?" said Xhactu.

"Well, we don't exactly know, Xhactu. Perhaps you could repeat your dream account, only this time to us directly."

With this prompt, Xhactu drew himself upright, shook his head, and took a deep breath.

"The dream—" he said. Then he paused, shivered, and looked around in confusion, even in fear. "I can't," he said. Now he was almost croaking like a frog. And he slumped back to the floor in an alien, extra-planetary collapse.

"*Oh, I'm sure you can!*" said the Queen encouragingly, employing her Tone of Utmost Royal Concern for All Her Loyal Subjects. "Please do go on, my dear Mr. Xhactu." She too had pressed gently into the crowd, and stood directly behind Xhactu and the two bird-men.

"My dream was ..." Xhactu began, then he emitted a deep gurgling cry. "Oh, it's too terrible!"

At this point, Owl Man *shifted gears*, performing an obscure shamanic ritual that shifted the valence of Xhactu's moody disposition from "No, I can't possibly" to "Yes, I

certainly can.” That was a kind of “gear-change” in itself. The Owl had actually learned this healing ritual in a series of shamanic dreams, presented to him as a kind of “lesson from the beyond.” It consisted in a dazzling combination of complex hand and eye gestures, and foreign-sounding vocal patterns. The hand and eye gestures resembled a stage-magician’s use of patter and fussing with props, all to distract the audience, while it was the *voice* that conveyed the magic effects on different subtle levels.

But who was Owl Man’s “teacher”? Present identity and whereabouts unknown.

While Owl Man was working his archaic magic in an effort to restore Xhactu’s inter-galactic balance or equanimity, Heron Man sensed someone leaning over his shoulder from behind. Then he heard Sally’s quiet voice—always lovely—whispering in Heron Man’s ear: “Psst! What’s he doing, Heron Man?”

The Heron glanced up and, just as quietly, returned Sally’s whisper, saying in a kind of stage-crafty *sotto voce* delivery: “*Earthling bird-man heals inter-galactic alien with archaic earthly shaman techniques.*”

This simple declarative sentence seemed to satisfy Sally, and she whispered, “Thanks, Heron,” and quietly backed away.

Once Owl Man had concluded what he would later call his “treatment” of the stricken Xhactu, there was an expectant pause. Xhactu’s face had changed color—from iridescent green to ice-pop orange—then he let out a shrill, squealing laughter, as if he had found something gloriously funny, or had inhaled some laughing gas at a dentist’s office.

“Will he be all right, Owlie?” asked Queensie.

Owl Man stood up, looking down at Xhactu judiciously, then said, “Yes, he’ll be fine now. That was just a fluttering sputter of the *amygdala*, subject to shamanic manipulations—it’s a rare phenomenon but not unheard of, especially on the part of aliens unaccustomed to exoplanetary dream-fields and the dedicated quantum effects that animate them.

“Dedicated?” said the Queen.

“Yes, like dedicated electrical circuits, in a manner of speaking.”

“But why is he laughing?” asked the Queen.

“Well, only Xhactu can say for sure. But, as you well know, I always carry the *Space-Farmer’s Almanac Pocket Field Guide to Color Symbolism* with me; and it tells me that, in this galaxy at least, the color orange indicates ... well here, let me just read this to you. On page 293 it says:

“**Orange** is made by combining red and yellow—red being associated with *energy* and yellow with *happiness*. When you think of orange, think of joy, sunshine, and heat; enthusiasm, creativity, happiness; fun, enjoyment, and balance; sexuality, freedom, and fascination.”

“My goodness, Owl Man,” said the Queen. “Why, that’s marvelous. I don’t know how you do it.”

“It’s called *cosmic curiosity*, Your Majesty. And lifelong searching is required to satisfy that curiosity. The *Pocket Field Guide* is a big help, of course.”

Suddenly, Xhactu interrupted, almost shouting, “Yes! I feel so much better! Now I remember the dream. It was wonderful!”

All eyes and ears turned toward the revived, *ice-pop orange*-tinted alien, wondering what would happen next.

Having lost all traces of trepidation, thanks to Owl Man’s shamanic massage, Xhactu immediately and boldly re-recounted the dream. Happily, the *universal translator* had cast off its propensity for glitches, now flawlessly and fluently rendering Xhactu’s home-planet space-lingo into Earth-slang lingo. (He felt that the use of slang would make the dream-account more accessible to his bated-breath, Earthling listeners.)

“Boy,” he said, “I tell ya, it was one hell of a dream! At first it scared my pants off”—everybody looked for confirmation of Xhactu’s “pants,” but no one could differentiate

between “fabric” and “skin.” In fact, no one had really noticed if he wore any “pants” at all.

But no matter. Xhactu continued:

*“I was flying through space,”* began Xhactu, when someone interrupted him.

*“Excuse me!”* It was Sally again. *“Do you mean flying your space-ship?”*

*“No, Sally. I was flying on my own through space—no space-ship—just me.”*

*“Did you have wings?”*

*“Oh, no. My propulsion system is located in what Earthings would call my “abdomen.” Strange word. In galac-speak it’s nxthgrck, which makes much more sense. So, the propulsion is really simple. It’s called ‘legacy flight.’ Anyone can do it.*

*“Anyway, all of a sudden, I entered what looked like an asteroid field. First, I tried to dodge them and continue my flight, but there were more and more asteroids— space-rocks. Some of them were fresh from the quarry, so to speak, all rough and irregular. Undeveloped. But others had been worked on by some celestial craftsmen. Those were all carved and decorated with ancient letters and geometric designs. Then I noticed they weren’t rocks at all. They were space-words! They just looked like rocks. Think of it: Words hurtling through space-time, looking like asteroids, hard as granite, or maybe your ancestors’ 17<sup>th</sup>-century cannonballs.”*

*“What happens if one of them runs into you?”* Sally again.

*“If one of them runs into you”—Xhactu again—“or vice-versa, then, bingo! That’s who you are. Or who you could be. But Your Word has to come alive before you can become, or find out, what the word means. It gets pretty complicated. Besides, even Earth-babies who die young carry their destiny with them when they go. Once you’ve got it, it’s forever. By the way, it takes longer to tell this dream than it took to dream it.”*

“Keep going, Xhactu!” It was one of the kitchen staff who wondered what was going on, and was eavesdropping.

*“Well, I realized that I had flown into an uncharted space-word nursery—a place where new words are always being incubated, like stars—born, sometimes hatched; then “nursed” along, like your Earth-kittens, Earth-puppies or Earth-chicks. I understood in the dream that I too was a space-word! I was ‘inside’ that space-word, or encompassed by it, or consisted of it, or whatever. And my name means something!”*

“What does it mean?” someone yelled out from the rear.

*“In galac-speak, Xhactu means ‘eaten by wolves.’ Don’t you see? I had flown right into the space-nursery where my destiny had been “spun” long ago by the three sisters. And that was before I was a Basque shepherd, in that last past life. This is common mythic knowledge throughout the universe. There are always three of them, because three is one of the basic building blocks of everything. The Spinners of Fate are always female. And they have names! You wouldn’t understand their galac-speak names, but we can use your old Greek names: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. The names may vary from planet to planet, but it’s always the same. The first one “spins,” the second one parcels out “lots,” and the third one represents “inevitability.” She’s the one that carries what you call “scissors” (ancient technology), and she snips the thread of your life when she decides you’ve had your share.”*

At this point Xhactu had finished. He was also spent, from the length, depth and heights of his dream recounting. He walked to the nearest beanbag chair, hopped up on it and fell back. In minutes, Xhactu was asleep. Soon after, he was snoring.

It would be a shallow pretense to say that all Earthlings present were “deeply moved.” It was far more than that. The entire gathering was in a kind of ecstasy, or as if bewitched, enthralled, transported. Yes, definitely *transported*. We might even say, *transformed* or *transfigured*. Thanks to Xhactu, this was the deepest interactive, psychic contact ever,

between aliens and humans; and the humans—despite their legendary *pride*—were better off for it.

*Owl Man the Healer liberates Xhactu the Healer.*

As if to affirm that fact, the group—after a long period of silence—slowly began to murmur, then whisper, then talk comfortably. Before too long, after a slow rise in volume and tempo, the entire room was bouncing once again with rollicking music, dance, and the crucial single-malt ritual, which acted like the blessing of a benevolent god of ecstasy.

The Queen insisted that Owl Man partner her in one of the dances, and he did so gracefully, as befitting an Owl—the silent, stealthy night-flier. Heron complimented Arthur Compton on his excellent cart service. “Think nothing of it!” growled Compton, and he slammed a brotherly bearhug on Heron Man, before going off for another shot of single-malt.

Xhactu woke up and soon had inflated the bag, and his plethora of fingers fluttered again, up and down the slender pipe of the chanter. Heron Man retrieved his notes of the Recording of the Log and began editing for length and clarity.

Hours would pass before the *cèilidh* energy settled down. Finally, all agreed that it had been a tremendously successful and satisfying venture. At that point, Owl Man stood before the group to make some closing remarks. Heron Man did the honors of handing him a glass and a spoon, for the purpose of “calling kin to task,” as the Owl-Poet might say.

[Author’s note: Was Xhactu’s dream important? Of course it was, insofar as any dream provides a potential “gut-check.” We can briefly summarize these main points: The reality of his status as a *fictional alien* was validated in a *fictional dream* that addressed his *fictional destiny*, and was witnessed by both his *fictional co-characters* and his *fictional co-creators*—who themselves were *fictional characters*, and who in reality are ... *authors of fiction!*

As Xhactu correctly noted, it takes longer to *tell* such a dream than it does to *dream it*. In this regard, dreams may reveal some of their “organic functionality.” For example, the Three Universal Fates of Xhactu’s dream recall the *spooling* process that DNA molecules undergo. Dreams themselves are also intensely coiled, like DNA. Maybe even as tightly coiled as our spiral galaxy, forever subject to the forces of cohering and scattering. What Xhactu experienced in his dream was a form of *unspooling* something very precious, something that ends up being a *model of itself*. If we wished to generate some Earth-speak terms for that, we might start with *autonomy*, *autarchy*, *authorship*, and go from there.]



### *Owl Man and Heron Man in Deep Discussion*

After the merriment had reached a high pitch the *cèilidh* began to wind down. The Queen had left, offering her thanks to all for a most unusual and extraordinary party. She said she had been royally entertained. Others were taking their leave as the cleanup was completed. Xhactu was marching about playing the pipes. He seemed galaxies away.

Owl Man and Heron Man were sitting together in a corner. They were facing one another, and their posture and obvious deep conversation did not brook any intrusions.

“Owl, I’m concerned that we have lost control of the narrative.” Heron Man was gripping his laptop as if someone was about to snatch it away.

“We never had control.” Owl Man had set his laptop down resting against the wall.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, whatever came to us as we wrote was not under our control. It presented itself, as if in an offering, for us to use or not. We were not the source. We were scribes, scribes with a certain adeptness to be sure, but scribes none the less.”

“Yes. I see that, and I agree that is a fair picture of what we had been doing. But Owl. Something new came into the process, some new source as it were, different in some way. Not the same as we had been scribing. I would say it came into the narrative without our scribing at all. This is what I mean when I say we have lost control. *Now the story may go anywhere at all.* No matter what we do. Do you see what I mean?”

“Of course, Heron Man. But why be concerned? Why not welcome this new authorial presence, perhaps let it *use* us for voicing it’s intention whatever that may be?” Owl Man gestured with hands out, palms up, as if supplicating to some unseen entity.

“You are serious about this. Yes?”

“To be sure. We not only never had control, recognizing that fact and the new element is something like squaring a number ... so much more now to consider, as if the narrative

fabric had an unknown number of layers. Remember too, we are being authored, and they are claiming scribe status just as we have. They will have to open their arms as well to this new thing, whatever it is.”

“Yes, I see that. How does all this relate to dreams?” Heron Man’s intuition was kicking into high gear.

“A crucial question, my good man, crucial indeed. Let me leap into the void with a possibility. You know how a parent will rush to the bedside of a child who has screamed out in terror at a nightmare. And when the child tells them he is being chased by monsters, they burst out in unison, saying, ‘It’s not real. It’s not real. It’s *only* a dream.’ What they mean, of course, is that the monster is not real in the child’s ordinary, real, everyday life. But you can see the devaluation of the dream and what reality *it* might be. I think we are looking at seeing the dream as not just a simulacrum of the daily world, but as a *different* world altogether. Heron, this too is the *purpose* of fiction, to allow us to experience different worlds, sometimes different in only minor ways and sometimes in more important ways. So, dreams have a *fictive* purpose. And what we have learned here at the cèilidh, is that there is never just one author, but many authors. And readers too as authors, though we never know about that. Heron, we have much to learn about this”

“Yes, I see that. My intuition is clamoring for us to speak about these things with Xhactu. Let’s do it.”