

The Kaleidoscope Effect is short novel that spans 6000 years to flesh out an extraordinary phenomenon in the few short moments of first contact. From the Iceman of the Alps to our journey to the stars, stay spellbound.

The Kaleidoscope Effect

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The Kaleidoscope Effect

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ISBN 978-1-60145-627-4

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2008

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The Kaleidoscope Effect
First Contact

A Novel

Ronald W. Hull

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Chapter 1

Copper Age Hunter

The Alps: 3362 BC

Albere was *old*. Older than anyone he knew. He would carve a 38th notch in his life tree when he reached the river in the spring. When he was a small boy his father had shown it to him, marking the spot where he was born. His mother was young and strong. Being born when food was abundant again, after such a hard winter, ensured that he would survive. Albere more than survived his birth, he *thrived*. When Albere was seven notches, his father had shown him how to carve the notches with a flint blade, and Albere had done it himself every spring since then. He was always drawn back there. It was a source of life for him. Now Albere felt his age and the arrowhead in his back. His muscles ached more and more with every step. The fever grew and blurred his mind. Snow had been falling since early afternoon. Albere trudged on into it. It was too late to head

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back and too dangerous. Before dusk, he would make it to one of the many shelters he knew on the mountain.

The years had taught Albere well. He was provisioned with dried fruit of sloe and nuts. He carried all his tools with him. He had a long bow of yew, arrows made straight from the wood of the wayfaring tree, a dagger with ash handle, a rabbit skin bag for water--chewed soft by the women--fire making flints, moss tinder, bone hooks for fishing, and various strings and cords woven from skin, hair, and reeds. His medicine bag contained medicines and the hair of his family. Most importantly, his copper ax, which was mounted on a yew handle, had been built with his own hands with the help of the people who lived close to the fiery river. And his great coat, sewn of many skins, lined with grass that had the fur turned in to keep him warm. His head was topped with a bearskin cap. In his white birch pack, nestled in wet leaves, he carried firewood and the morning fire's embers. Albere traveled alone.

Albere had a lot of time to think on the mountain. He drifted often into thought at times like this to ease the pain of his wound and aching muscles. He had many memories to think about. He wondered why life was so cruel. Why everyone he ever cared about was dead, and why he was still alive. What was the purpose in it? This life? The world was beautiful. Filled with sights and sounds and smells for youth to enjoy. But it was dangerous too; a place of darkness and cold, hunger and thirst and men so cruel they would kill you for anything you had. That was why he was alone and wounded.

In Albere's youth, he and his extended family had traveled from the valley of the sunny slopes where they spent the winter to the wooded highlands in the spring--a journey of twenty suns walking in the tradition of the elders. The ritual

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afforded the family ample game and fish and the berries, roots and nuts to survive in their time honored way. Albere had spent his younger years with the women, gathering and preparing food and medicine, and with the elders, where he had learned the old ways. Each wood had a purpose and could be found and carved to that purpose. Every part of every animal could be used. Blood, fat, intestines, meat, bone, skin, scales, feathers and hair were eaten, made into medicines, or used as tools.

In the family, Albere prospered. He grew strong faster than the other children and amazed the elders with his mastery of the old ways. But, the urge to hunt in him was strong, so he led the other children in hunting games until he, too, was allowed to hunt with his father and the other men. Albere remembered seeing his first great bear killed when he was just eight notches. He remembered watching as the men used an array of spears to kill it in its den while it slept. The bear was fat and provided food for many cold suns. The two babies inside were seen as a good omen by the elders and were sacrificed to the gods. The elders told of many bears like this, but they were few now. By the time Albere was fifteen notches, he was the best hunter. With bow or spear, Albere's eye was true, and he could bring down a deer with a single arrow. With the others, he caught fish, snared birds and small animals, ran down the wild pig and challenged the great bear. The elders prized bear claws and teeth, and Albere became the one to find bears for the kill.

The family traded with other families. Albere joined his father on journeys of many suns to trade. Most prized was the shiny stone of pure color like the autumn leaves. When rubbed, Albere could see his face in it, like on the surface of calm water. But the stone would turn dull and green if it weren't rubbed. Albere rubbed his ax daily so that it shone

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like the sun it reflected. The elders said the stone was magic. He wondered about that and how it could be. With all of his knowledge of the world around him, Albere had never seen anything like the stone. Still, he did not believe it was magic. He knew the secret of the people by the fiery river.

It was colder now, and the wind was picking up. His world was obscured by white, blinding snow and his fever. Still, Albere pushed on. He knew the way so well, he could follow it without seeing. The agony between his shoulder blades and in his joints was relentless. He had to stop every few steps, leaning into the wind to recover his strength. This always happened to him on the high mountains, but as he grew older it became more pronounced. All his tattoos, meant to ease the pain, failed him now. Albere blocked it out with thoughts of her.

Albere remembered the first time he saw her. In the valley where the grapes grew, there was a family with hair as white as snow and eyes of piercing blue. They had a secret for making the grapes into a powerful potion that made you lose your senses when you drank it. Albere liked the potion's sour taste, but he didn't like how it made him act foolish and get sleepy. Always on their guard on the trading journeys, he and his father couldn't afford to lose their senses, or someone would rob them. The white haired people were happy and prosperous because they could trade their potion for the things they needed.

Nona had been playing with the other children. Nona stood out because she seemed to be the happiest and loudest—and, because she was so *beautiful*. It was summer and hot, even at night. Like the other children, Nona wore only a doeskin loincloth. Her fair skin was a golden brown from the sun, except for her lips, turned pink from the same sun, and the tips of her budding breasts, so pink against her

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brownness. Albere was excited by the sound and sight of her, like when he waited for a magnificent animal to come within kill range. But this was different. He felt a swelling in his loincloth that he had never felt before. Albere had seen the other men with it and had observed them in sex with the women, but he had not experienced it himself, before. Albere knew it was a sign that he was no longer a child, but he did not want his father and the others to see. That first hot night with the white haired people, he could not sleep. He dreamed of Nona and his peeing tool, once again, grew large and painful. Albere had to loosen his loincloth to free it. He kept thinking of her laughing and playing. Albere liked his sisters and admired the beauty and manner of some of the women in his family, and those he had seen on his journeys, but Nona was *different*. Albere wanted to make her his mate.

This fact was not lost on the elders of the white hairs. The old women, with flat breasts, scraggly, gray white hair, deeply wrinkled and toothless from chewing skins, knew right away. Before long, so did his father. For a prize copper stone and a copper knife, his father traded with the elders for the girl. For the next few suns, Albere was allowed to take her with him on hunts. They fished on the river and bathed with each other. They were allowed to sleep together, apart from the others.

Their languages were so similar, it was easy to talk. Albere soon learned that Nona had noticed him too, the first day he arrived, and that her chest had pounded with excitement at what she perceived as a strange but most handsome hunter. Nona admitted that she had, in her own way, tried to get his attention, so that Albere would notice her. Nona was amused at how his peeing tool got big in her presence. The first hot night Albere and Nona slept together;

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she began to play with it. Albere still remembered how soft Nona was to his touch.

After the moon changed, they had to leave. It was hard for Nona to leave the only family she'd ever known. For two suns, Nona cried and wouldn't eat. Finally, she helped Albere with his cooking fires, and settled into the routine of the journey. After two moons, they arrived in Albere's valley. The elders there were pleased and held a great celebration. They saw Nona as a strong addition to the family. The young hunters without mates were envious of Albere's find. But they knew not to challenge him for her. His sisters and the younger women were both envious and enamored by her beauty. Nona was not only beautiful, but also wise in the ways of family living and soon became a valued member. Still, she often longed to see her own family again. Albere promised to take her to them again on a trading journey. The fates ruled that that was not to happen.

Albere knew the rocky outcropping was just ahead, further up the mountain. It was exposed, but would block the north wind enough to allow him the burrow into the snow and escape the savage cold the wind brought with it. Maybe he could make a fire? With each step, Albere sank knee deep in soft, new snow, and more was coming down all the time. His pain was unbearable. Albere summoned strength deep within him, the strength of his youth, to overcome the pain and cold and move on. If he could *only* just move forward, he could make it.

Nona was fertile, and bore him five children. The first one came too soon, and was born *dead*. The elders cast their spells and incantations, but to no avail. Albere did not know if it was a boy or a girl. The second was a son, born in the spring like Albere had been, and strong. Jan had the white hair and bright blue eyes of his mother, but the strength and

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savvy of his father. Albere looked to him to carry on the rituals of the elders for the family. Another boy was born dead, and a girl, born in winter, caught the fever and died in Nona's arms while only four cold suns old. Nila, the youngest, was also born in winter, but showed the strength to live that reminded Albere of her mother, Nona. Life was hard. The same fever that took his first daughter also took his mother and half the family. The medicine of the elders did nothing as Albere helplessly watched the fever kill everyone sick around him. His father was never the same. By nineteen notches, Albere had become leader of the family. He enjoyed evenings by the fire, watching Nona play with the braids in Nila's hair, and Jan playing hunting games at the edge of the camp.

It was a good hunt. After two suns of stalking, they had run down and killed two pigs. The five of them were joyous as they carried the heavy animals back to the family. Before they got there, Albere could smell smoke and the stench of death. First, he found Nona, her head cut off and her body mutilated with knives and spears, and then Jan, with his little head bashed in and one arm cut off. Albere's father, no longer able to hunt, had stayed behind and fought to his death, too, a spear broke off in his back as he lay face down.

The bodies of two of the invaders, heavily armed and protected by deerskin, but emaciated men, lay by him. *Thals*--the name given to outcast males who banded together and raided families for food and items they could trade. No one survived the attack. All of the copper his father had traded for was gone. Everything else was burned. They hung the two invaders from the trees so that the ravens would pluck their eyes out. Albere gathered all the sacred potions he could find in the destruction. After incantations were said and he had gathered locks of hair from Nona and Jan, they burned the

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dead together in a funeral pyre so that wild animals wouldn't violate their bones. A great rage rose up in Albere. He challenged the others to help him take revenge for their loss. They followed him to a man. They ate the pigs to find strength for the fight, and then, with Albere in the lead, they set off.

It wasn't hard to follow the track of the Thals. They left a path of destruction and death. After five suns walking, Albere and his hunters caught up. They waited until the sun was long in the trees, and the Thals were drunk from the grape potion they'd stolen a sun's walk away. The Thals were asleep. It was only then that they struck. Albere carefully slipped up to a large man with red hair, his mouth open and snoring and slit his throat with a flint knife from ear-to-ear. The man woke up wide-eyed, and tried to rise and yell, but blood shot from his neck like from a bled pig and he only blubbered as his yell drowned in his own blood. The others were stirring as his comrades woke them up trying to kill. A small skinny man laying not a foot's reach away opened his eyes and started to get up. Albere thrust his copper tipped spear with both hands into the man's neck just above his deerskin shirt. The spearhead glanced off the man's collarbone and stunned him for a moment. It was just enough time for Albere to jerk the spear from the ground where it stopped and a ram it squarely into the man's midsection, through his deerskin shirt, skin and bone and guts, skewering him to the ground while dark red blood welled up from his wound. The skinny man, still full of life, squealed and struggled to free himself from this outrageous bond, while Albere took his flint knife to the guy's neck, severing the carotid artery without near as much blood as the big one.

There were grunts and cries of pain and yelling all around--the *din of war*. But Albere did not hear it. The

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adrenaline in his bloodstream was too strong. Albere felt a sharp pain in his back and spun around with his flint knife in his right hand. The blade caught his attacker in the left arm and cut a deep slice of muscle. The man, another big one, recoiled in pain, and, having lost his spear in Albere's back was defenseless. As he backed up and Albere threatened with his knife, his balance weak from the heavy spear in his back, Seth hit the man hard in the back of the head with his copper ax and brought the man down so that Albere could slit his throat too. Seth quickly pulled the spear from Albere's back and they both joined in the fight to the death. It was close now, man-to-man, cutting and stabbing until blades broke off in bone and Albere found himself strangling a man who was also trying to strangle him. Fortunately, Albere won. But, exhausted and bleeding, he crawled away. He fell asleep. When Albere awoke, the yelling had finally stopped and all that could be heard were the moans of the wounded dying.

All of the hunters, Seth and the rest of his family, were dead or dying. Albere rose to his feet in pain, found a bloody spear, and made sure that all the Thals were dead, too. Dragging himself off to the woods, where Albere had left the medicines in his bag with his long bow in the woods before the battle, Albere treated his wounds. Somehow, he managed to pull his dead companions together into a funeral pyre. It took him two suns, but Albere said the incantations and burned them. The rest, Albere left to the wolves and vultures, circling and getting bolder as he struggled to send the last of his family to the afterlife. Albere could hear the wolves snapping and growling over the dead as he dragged himself up, over the ridge to the next valley beyond.

With his numb hands, Albere could feel the bare rock of the overhang only from his elbows. He couldn't feel

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anything below his knees in his grass filled doeskin boots. It was dark now, Albere couldn't remember how long, as he'd willed himself to that spot. The wind was howling and the snow had already filled the place he'd hoped to shelter in. Albere pushed and burrowed, and managed to get as much out of the wind as he could, and the snow came in over him in layers, gradually covering him up.

The embers in his basket were probably out. Even with his flints and tinder, he couldn't make a fire. Albere just sat there, rubbing his ax blade with his numb right hand and holding the bag with his family's hair with his left, listening to the wind. No feeling was a good feeling. As the snow filled in around him, Albere felt *warm*. On those warm nights, Albere would lay on some ridge or high ground and dream of Nona, so long dead. The sky would be heavy with light, a multitude of points of light that closed the sky down on him like overhanging trees or the roof of a cave. In those times Albere imagined that each one was a spirit of those who had died, countless in their number. Albere loved this land with its incredible beauty and peace. *But why, too, the cruelty and harshness?* The elders with their rituals, incantations, tattoos and medicines couldn't cure what was wrong with the world. And then, there was this one time, as he crossed a frozen lake in the middle of the night trying to reach the safety of shore, when Albere stopped, looked up, and realized that he was utterly alone. This great hunter, warrior, and medicine man was merely a snowflake compared to the vastness before him. Albere knew there was something beyond this cruel life. He just didn't know what it was.

Albere remembered the secret of the shiny copper stone. Though he traded with many families, and was welcome in the white haired family of his Nona, the sight of children playing brought back dark thoughts. Albere

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preferred to live alone. He traveled the seasons in the ways of his ancestors and became known for his skills in medicine and potions.

Seeking the *secret of the shining stone*, Albere lived for a while with the people by the fiery river. His legend had preceded him, so they welcomed him as a great warrior and medicine man. After Albere treated their open sores with a tree bark and moss potion he'd learned from the elders, they let him see the secret. When green stones that were common in the area were heated on special fires that were very hot, the shiny copper melted and flowed from the stone. It could then be pounded with hard stones into many shapes. There were no elders in the fiery river family. The women lived to an old age and died after losing their teeth. The men who melted the copper died at an early age when they still had their teeth and dark hair. Before they died, they would lose their senses, and complain of great pain in their hands and feet. Albere tried his medicines on some of the sufferers to no avail. Legend said that early death was the price they paid for knowing the secret of making copper. Albere wondered if he would *suffer the same fate* for knowing it?

When Albere polished his ax with a rough leaf that brought out the metal's luster, he marveled at the metal's strange properties. How it reflected his image. How it could be pounded very thin, or into many shapes. How it held a smooth, sharp edge for cutting. Even how it curved. Albere wondered how many other properties it had. Was it a *bridge* to a life without pain and suffering? Why had they done this? Why had they shot him in the back before he could escape to higher altitude and the storm? Albere didn't know and he wouldn't find out. He *suffered* his old wounds no more. Albere was *entombed* in the snow.

Chapter 3

First Contact

Universal Explorer in the Milky Way Galaxy: 1939 AD, Earth Time

Don was content with his *mission*. As the rotations passed, his resolve grew stronger. There was no greater purpose for existence than the relief of intelligent beings. Before his relief, he had been driven by another purpose—the perpetuation of his species. But that seemed far away now. He still enjoyed the pleasurable parts of it, though. Explorer had pierced this average galaxy for some time now. The Senses activity was much more intense than it had been in deep space. In that forbidding place, the Senses had provided the Collective with a constant stream of simulated stimulus to overcome the eternal void of a place where even hydrogen atoms were parsecs apart and time dragged like an anchor on the soul. *Hibernation* was always an option, but Don had not taken it, always hopeful that the

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Senses would find something new about their destination that he didn't want to miss by sleeping through it.

The Collective was small, numbering 956,677, allowing Dom to know everyone without overburdening his enhanced brain cells. He had ample time to get to know every one of them. Foremost was Seala, his mate before *their relief*. The primordial drive that was in them before the relief was still strong, only now it was redirected into a self-renewal force so powerful that Dom and Seala felt more alive with each rotation. There was no need to procreate. Their number had not changed since the launching. Without shame, but with high purpose, they met in secret rooms of their own devising.

Seala was more *beautiful* than when he first saw her, coming out of the water thousands of cycles ago, but, for all her renewal, she remained unique and true to herself. Evolution proved to be a great diviner of beauty, and Seala was no exception. It was hard to improve on *perfection*.

In an atmosphere, they could still communicate by sound waves, but they rarely did. It was much more intimate and direct to communicate by *thoughts*. "Seala, what would you like to do?" Dom thought.

From a distant part of the Explorer, Seala answered. "Why don't we take the Tour of the Fourteen Planets? And then, we could feast by the falling water, and watch Tome and Kea making Love." Tome and Kea were legendary for their love making among the Collective. Although Dom knew them, he wasn't sure whether they were real or just a figment of the Universal Intelligence's imagination, provided by the Senses for their entertainment. Real and imagined had become part of the journey of many cycles.

They met in the middle. The Senses created the scene to their liking. Weightless lovemaking was unique, and

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they never tired of it, but sometimes they preferred their native gravity, the weight of their bodies on each other as they entwined. Kea was so beautiful and her skin so transparent, she fairly glowed. Dom never tired of watching her. "Look at that!" Seala exclaimed as she sipped sweet nectar, so close by his side that he nearly melted into her warmth. "Tome's sure is *long!* ... And I should know, because I've felt its full *length!*" Dom laughed.

Although Seala could have used her imagination to intensify the feeling, Dom knew she was just teasing him. Teasing always got his blood up. It was part of Seala's style. What she said was true. While love was monogamous in the Collective, the primal urge was not. On the Explorer, the combinations were endless. It was all part of the Universal Intelligence's way of allowing the primal order of creation to continue in a nondestructive way while relieving the boredom of the journey.

"Yes," Dom said, feeling Seala's hand tighten around him and that familiar squeeze that he always responded to, "I have too, and a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." His hand was nestled in the softness of Seala's pubic hair, petting her like a kitten. Dom was thinking of the stark beauty of Kea's breasts as they heaved in orgasm. He was sure Seala could feel his thinking of another one but it was all part of the ecstasy of their love. A freedom from guilt that was so refreshing and new that it never grew old. Soon, deep inside her, Dom abandoned himself to orgasm. Seala was in orgasm *too*, as was the Collective.

Seala and Dom, and others in the Collective were growing more excited with each passing rotation. The galaxy was alive with activity, and the Senses were filling their minds with images of stars being born, dying, exploding, and collapsing. The parade of planets in one, two, three, and four

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star systems was as endless in their variety as in their number. And, there was *life*, mostly very primitive, but of great *variety* and *abundance*.

As the Collective traveled through clouds of dense gas, matter, and energy, they could feel the gravitational pull and critical mass that coalesced the gases into a star or group of stars, matter flung off or in between also coalesced into planets trapped in the superior gravitational pull of the stars, fired by their own fusion when they reached critical mass. Stars were as varied as their composition and mass, but they invariably radiated heat, light, and other radiation to the colder bodies around them. Life began as a parasite on these cold bodies, feeding off the radiant warmth of nearby star or internal heat from molten core. Given enough time and stability, life became intelligent, intelligent life developed technology, and intelligence with technology, always sought to leave the planet of its birth.

The Senses drew Dom and Seala close to these evolving scenarios. Even the imagination of the Universal Intelligence could not prepare them for the beauty and emotion they felt in this fertile place. While the Explorer skirted stars at a safe distance, the Senses drew on their systems and fed it to the visual cortex of the Collective. Dom and Seala found themselves on many a rocky shore, by a green ocean, sipping nectar in the hazy purple sunset of three suns, surrounded by thousands of creatures, so docile you could touch each one. Distance had its advantages. Some planets were swarming with creatures so violent that fragile bodies, unprotected like theirs, would be killed in seconds and devoured in minutes.

Strangely, intelligent life evolved more quickly in such *violent* places. Probably, this was true because it took more intelligence to survive predatory nature. The evolution

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of stars and planets demanded distance. Immense gravity, radiation, heat, and collisions were most inhospitable to life. Even the Universal Intelligence could not protect them from these forces. Red giants, while seductive subjects of study, expanded so rapidly that there was great danger in getting close. Exploding stars were more predictable, but impossible to approach within a parsec. Their gamma bursts could fry the Explorer and had to be avoided at all cost. The most dangerous of all were the black holes. The black holes were stars so dense that not even light could escape them. Like eddies in the fabric of the galaxy, they drew the surrounding matter and energy into their blackness like the Explorer gathered space dust. Even the Universal Intelligence had no guidelines on how close to get. The Explorer steered a wide berth of all black holes it encountered.

Dom and Seala were dining, watching the lava flow create a never ending painting of hot orange on black on the surface of an emerging planet, when the word came. The Senses directed it to the Collective as it was received: "*Tap, tap... tap. Tap... tap. Tap... tap, tap.*"

The tapping was a simple code, easily deciphered by the Senses: "Mr. Marconi ... *stop*. Do you read my message ... *stop*." A *shudder* of wonder ran through the Collective, followed closely by a sigh of discovery. Finally, after so long, a *sign of intelligent life*. The celebration lasted for nearly a cycle, and ended with a mutual orgasm.

From then on, the mission *changed*. The Senses continued to provide information on passing stars and planets, but it paled in comparison to the meager words coming from the blue planet. Starting with that first simple code, a trickle of words flowed to the Collective. Each word was savored, tossed about and analyzed. A disturbing pattern emerged from the messages. The creatures that sent them were often in

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distress. "*May Day, ...May Day!*" was picked up often, clearly a sign of great peril. Too many times, this message was the last one heard. It was hard, for all he knew of life, for Dom to think of it ending, especially like that. There were joyous messages of hope too, like, "*Will arrive at 11:00am on Thursday, ... stop. Love, ... stop. Carl, ... stop.*"

Most disturbing were the cryptic messages of war. They were coded, but the simple codes were easily deciphered by the Senses. It was so sad, listening to intelligent creatures plotting to kill each other for nothing other than a small piece of the planet or an idea so primitive and weak that was clearly ridiculous. Most ridiculous of all was the fact that, with all their intelligence and knowledge, the Collective could do nothing about it. Time and space prevented their swooping down and saving this blue planet before its inhabitants destroyed themselves. The Universal Intelligence warned, with many scenarios, how primitive intelligence was predatory. Predatory behavior rose from the need for species to survive. The most intelligent species find ways to survive above all others. When intelligent predators develop technologies, they begin to endanger themselves. A common scenario was to make contact with intelligent life, then rush to the scene, only to find the planet devastated, with no intelligent life remaining. Dom knew that there was *no time to waste*. With the Explorer locked on to this fragile bit of life on its fragile planet, they could only listen to and watch the drama unfolding until the Explorer got there.

Chapter 10

The Relief

In the Solar System: Present Day

Dom could not contain himself. His excitement was contagious throughout the Collective. The Explorer had slowed and was closing rapidly on its destination--the backside of the sub planet called the Moon of the planet called Earth.

Dom now knew everything about Earth and its inhabitants, much more than the inhabitants knew themselves. He was pleased that these warlike people had not annihilated each other, but had become more peaceful and concerned about their planet. *But* there was still great danger in the blue planet's burgeoning population, consumption and unbridled industrialization. Dom was pleased at how well humans had predicted global warming. He was, however, disturbed by the lack of understanding of the catastrophic effects of global warming to come. Or the profound effect that overpopulation would have on the land and water, with the release of as yet

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unknown poisons and new diseases running rampant without cure. The people of Earth did not know how close they were coming to the end. It was though they were riding in a plane, but oblivious that the plane had been hijacked and was about to crash. A fiery end with a huge meteor hit was far less likely than a collapse of the world economy, followed by a slow, strangling death, with no food, no clean water, and no pure air to breathe.

The backside of the Moon was chosen because Earth's inhabitants were so prone to panic when faced with the unknown. Dom and the Collective wanted to give no forewarning from which these warlike creatures could mount some sort of response that would hamper or slow the speed of the Relief. Parking there, behind the Moon, unseen or sensed, would allow them to deploy the relief mechanism. It was simple. Humans were hunters and gatherers. Their brains were directly connected through the visual cortex to their eyes. Humans learned almost everything through seeing. The auditory sense was important too. So the plan was to use the auditory sense to help bring people into the visual sense. The Senses had developed a way to reach all six billion inhabitants of Earth nearly at once.

In the great room, the model of Earth had grown. It was now a nearly perfect one ten thousandth scale model. Around Earth, in fixed orbit, were three glowing pearlescent balls, each one a thousand kilometers in scale diameter. Placed in geosynchronous orbit, 18,000 miles from the surface, the Sense Projectors were not very large; they only appeared that way. However, there was a need for them to be easily seen from Earth's surface.

The Sense Projectors had been in preparation for rotations. Within, they contained the knowledge of both the Collective and Universal Intelligences, and the power of the

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Senses. Fully maneuverable, they contained asteroid dust fuel and a miniature drive similar to the Explorer for their short journey to their destinations. The surface of each spherical Projector was an energy projector that turned off and on from the Senses inside. For the journey, the surface would be turned off, giving no visual or other indication of each small Sense Projector's approach. The Earth's defense, weather, and astronomical systems were well known and easily thwarted with Sensor designed nullifying information. The Explorer had been blocking detection since entering the solar system of Earth by sending false images and information to the Earth's observatories and military sensing equipment—the ultimate stealth approach.

The Sense Projectors would be invisible as they moved into place. Even the Senses could not control the spheres from the backside of the Moon or Earth. The three Sense Projectors had synchronized their Senses so that, although their journeys would be of different length, all would arrive at the same time and effect the relief at the same time, the Earth over.

There was no timetable. Relief would commence when the Sense Projectors were in position. Time was imperative. Thousands were dying daily unnecessarily. The Collective was prepared for its task and executed it effortlessly.

Washington D.C.: A Mid Winter Night

After the flurry of publicity over his connection with the storied Ice Man, Otzi, Albert had settled into relative anonymity. He dated some of his fellow faculty members, and some of the career women that D.C. is known for, but he could not find one who measured up to his beloved Esther.

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Albert's semi-continental existence, shuttling from his full time teaching in D.C. to his dedicated little wilderness, left little time to establish a relationship.

As was his department's custom, Albert had one night class. He had arrived home after his 3pm class, checked his mail, and then his e-mail. Albert paid some bills from his computer and settled into correcting experiment reports from Microbiology 301. There were 43 reports from two classes, so it took him some time. When he finished, it was already 5:15. He flipped on the early news and watched from the kitchen. He broiled a couple of venison steaks he'd left out to thaw in the morning, microwaved an Idaho potato, and some beans he'd harvested from his garden in the UP. Albert stood at the counter, eating and watching the news; washing it down with some current wine he'd made the summer before. Nothing special on the news that evening. Soon it was 6:30 and time to go.

Albert put the papers he'd corrected into his pack, bundled up against the cold, and headed out into the street. He loved the six-block walk to the University in any season, but these winter trips were invigorating. It was 17 degrees that evening, so he pulled his hood up and wore his fur-lined gloves. Albert walked quickly. His breath puffing clouds as he walked. The streets were well lit and white from a recent snow, but were otherwise virtually deserted.

Albert's night class, Biology 420, was well attended. The cold and the fact that most of his students had full-time jobs did not deter them from coming and earning their degrees part-time. He admired their perseverance. Albert had gone to school full time, in a different era and culture. By 9:15, the lab had cleared out. He packed his backpack again and headed out onto the deserted campus. Just Albert and his thoughts, walking home on a cold city night. He could hear

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each step as the heels of his boots hit the sidewalk. His cell phone rang in his pack, forcing him to stop the cadence he was keeping. "*Damn!*" he thought, "Who could be calling me now." He enjoyed these solitary walks and rarely talked to anyone on the cell phone while he was walking. "A good habit to keep," he told himself.

Albert dropped his pack on a snow bank and pulled out the phone. An unfamiliar, but very pleasant, female voice said, "Continue to the intersection with L Street and look left, you won't be disappointed." Before he could say anything, the line went dead. That's strange, Albert thought. Well, I'm going that way anyway. Guess it won't hurt to have a look. As he started that way again, people were already pouring into the street.

The Galaxy Explorer on the Back Side of the Moon

Approaching at a fraction of the speed of light, the Explorer had slipped into the Earth's Solar System without detection. The Explorer was nearly as big as the Moon, but hid nicely behind it, the ship's drive maintaining a constant five thousand kilometer distance from the Moon's surface, letting Earth's gravity do the work, locked into the same orbit as the Moon rotating around the Earth. The Moon's meager gravity and slow rotation made this holding position easy for the Senses to maintain. The Explorer would not remain there long, for its mass added to that of the Moon would have dire consequences for the Earth, beginning with high tides, and possibly earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Dom and the others watched as the portal opened and the three Sense Projectors deployed. It was as though the Explorer, finally, had given birth. They watched as the Projectors accelerated around the Moon, and then they

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watched with neutrino penetrators through the mass of the Moon as the Projectors danced in a simultaneous ballet of great beauty and anticipation. For the moment, normal communication was lost. The Projectors were on their own.

Back on Earth

The street was alive with activity. Cars were stopping and their occupants spilling out, leaving their car doors open and engines running. People were running, walking, limping, in wheelchairs, and even being carried on stretchers from a nearby hospital. This strange parade was in various states of dress, but most had thrown on heavy coats against the night cold but left the doors to their houses and apartments open. The exhaust from the stopped cars and breath from the moving mass filled the air with a quickly evaporating fog, made even more strange because the night had become almost as bright as the day, a moonlight far brighter than any he had ever seen. Albert felt like he was in some strange Marathon, only he didn't have far to run. Up the block, people were running toward him. Everyone was turning the corner at L Street. Albert, running fast now, was one of the first to turn the corner.

What Albert saw was not in the street, quickly filling wall-to-wall with everyone from the half block on either side, but in the sky. To the southwest, about at a forty-five degree angle from where he was running, was a Moon-like object in the sky. It appeared more than twice the size of the Moon or Sun and glowed with a pearl-like light that lit the street and cast dark shadows. Transfixed, he stopped running, and stared at it. And then *he heard it*, the others were singing a strange, yet very beautiful, song. It was in his ears. He knew the song.

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The Moon before Albert grew and changed colors until it filled the sky. He focused on the center, from hence the colors burst forth. A psychedelic wave of colorful thoughts flowed into him like a river. But he felt good, *relieved*, and warm. He was in a *dream of the ages*. Albert was *singing*.

And then it was over. The huge moon was still in the sky, but Albert no longer saw the vision. He didn't need to. He understood. He was relieved. But Albert's work was not over. He stood for a moment, observing others as they stood or fell to their knees. Multicolored beams flowed from the moon directly into the pupils of each person's eyes as they stood, paralyzed by the sight, eyes wide open and singing. The chorus of human voices, acapella, was the most beautiful sound he'd ever heard. And Albert knew what they were singing. He bolted and ran.

Albert headed up the block from which he'd come. He ran like he had as a child--joyfully, with abandon. Until now, he had forgotten what it was like to run without pain. The abandoned cars were still there, engines running, but the street was now empty. Almost. Quickly, he reached a walk down to a basement apartment in a brick building. One set of old tracks marked the two inches of new snow on the steps. Through the single window, it was dark inside. Albert had never been a burglar, but he quickly swung his bag down, reached in for his Swiss Army knife, selected the right tool, and picked the lock.

When the door opened, a tepid warmth greeted him, but also the unmistakable smell of near death. He pushed the door open and found a light switch. What greeted him was a dirty little living room with worn furniture. A kitchen off the living room was empty. When he turned on the light to the back bedroom, smelling strongly of urine and worse, he

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made out the form of a man lying on the bed, near comatose, his tongue out, drooling, and his eyes open, fixed on some imaginary spot on the ceiling.

There was a tack board next to the bed with some notes tacked to it, and, what appeared to be a nursing schedule. There was no time to wait for a nurse. Albert found a robe and pulled off the covers. The man, who appeared to be in his nineties—suffering from the effects of a stroke or Alzheimer's—tried to resist, but Albert spoke softly and calmed him. He was tall, close to six feet, but he was skin and bones and weighed little more than a hundred pounds. He and the sheets were dirty, but Albert didn't bother with that. He just rolled the man over enough to get the robe on. And then, back in the living room, he found a dusty, unused folding wheelchair and brought it into the bedroom.

Albert gathered the frail old man in his arms and gently lifted him to the chair. The guy had stockings on his feet. Albert found some slippers and put them on him, and then he took two of the cleanest blankets and tucked them in around him. The old man just stared straight ahead and drooled, a slight smile on his face. Albert had left the front door open, and it was getting very cold in the bedroom. He wheeled the man out and closed the door behind him. Albert's feet were sure as he pulled the chair up, step by step, to the street, still empty. When he again arrived at the corner, the throngs were gone, but there were a few people in wheelchairs, hospital beds, and stretchers, attended by others like Albert on L Street, in the light of the new moon, getting their relief.

The old man seemed to recognize the bright object in the sky, and stared at it. Soon the multicolored beam, like a benign lightning bolt, struck the man in the eyes. Albert was now observing, close-up, what had happened to him. The

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beam curiously split, just before the eyes, and entered both, simultaneously. Soon, the man was singing in a deep, but beautiful voice. The song was in a strange language, but Albert understood it. He understood everything now.

It took fifteen minutes, but the old man changed. His eyes became clear and bright, and his pallid cheeks became rosy with new vitality against the cold. The beam evaporated as quickly as it came. He turned to Albert and spoke: "Hello Albert. Thanks for saving me. My name is George, George Lockett. (Albert knew his name before George spoke it, but it was wonderful to hear him *speak it.*) I feel so relieved... Well, we'd better be heading back."

With that, George Lockett rose from his wheelchair, retied his robe and wrapped the blankets around himself in a makeshift, but adequate coat, and turned the chair around to begin pushing it toward home. "Looks like we've got work to do," he said. Albert knew, but the idea of work had already changed. He walked back to his apartment with George by his side, listening to wonderful tales from George's long life. Winter was wonderful, too. Child like and *wonderful*.

The Kaleidoscope Effect is short novel that spans 6000 years to flesh out an extraordinary phenomenon in the few short moments of first contact. From the Iceman of the Alps to our journey to the stars, stay spellbound.

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