

“The Star-Seeker”  
By: Benjamin Ashley

This is another night of remembering empty promises and hollow dreams on the voyage of The Periol Deather. The ship summoned me with the dirge of Apollo’s young son Linus, whose death was represented by the seasonal deaths of plants. I never worried about the plants of the world until the horrific day that will be embedded in my skull until my dying breath. The world was conquered by the alien race of the Giokuians, and the humans were lured aboard two separate ships by the dirge of Linus. When the Giokuians arrived on earth, the plants of our world wilted and decayed into nothing. The shriveled plants represented the arrival of the Giokuians to earth. They were here to amass the stars of the sky. I was lured onto The Periol Deather by the dirge of Linus, and before I was pulled onto the ship, I observed the shriveled plants of our world. I was never concerned with the plants of our world, but I actually experienced pity for the decayed plants. According to Zyklon, the leader of the Giokuians, all plants on earth needed to die, but before I stepped aboard The Periol Deather, I clenched a piece of hemlock in my hand. This piece of hemlock was the only living plant on earth, but I knew that without the other plants of the earth, all life would eventually perish. We were instructed to dispose of all plant life because plants were dangerous, but I still carried the hemlock aboard the ship. The ship set sail and was propelled through the menacing current of the ocean by the Giokuians. We were headed to a star across the ocean, and we were commanded to capture the distant star. I was selected to be the captain of the ship because according to Zyklon, I had once been employed by the Giokuians. I had once collected stars for the Giokuians by tossing a rubber band with limitless expansion over the stars and pulling the stars to the ground. I had once pulled stars to the earth and stored them inside a burlap sack, but that was another life. According to Zyklon, I had once been The Star-Seeker. Looking for my shooting star, I had once been The Rubber Band Shooter who lassoed and pulled stars to the ground. But that was in another life with another face in a different place.

I remembered my childhood while sitting on the deck of The Periol Deather. In my life before arriving aboard this ship, I had been a Zectonian named Polijin Dioger. But that life was over. We were slaves in a war between the Giokuians and the plants. And everyday, we were forced to thank the God Linus for allowing the plants of our world to perish. Our ship traveled through a time warp, and each day, the crew of my ship witnessed images of Julius Caesar’s Rome and Alexander the Great’s conquests. Every time I observed the great achievements of the human race, I became increasingly tormented by the irrefutable truth that the human race would never regain its status. And everyday, we were forced to thank Linus for allowing the plants of our world to perish. We sought to escape from our imprisonment, and we were informed that by closing our eyes, we would experience adventures of the people who we were in previous lives. By opening our eyes, we would return to our current lives aboard the ship. As I sat alone on the deck of the ship, I decided to close my eyes, and I became Aristotle, the teacher of Alexander the Great. Aristotle was a great philosopher who wrote Poetics, a book that explained the role of the tragic hero in our world. I despised Linus for allowing the demise of all plant life and decided to recompose the book of Poetics. I penned the book and included Linus in a new list of tragic heroes in our world. I understood that the tragic hero and his allies would eventually succumb to the curse of the tragic hero. I cursed Linus as a tragic hero and closed my eyes to experience the occurrences of another previous life. I closed my eyes and experienced my adventures as The Star-Seeker, an employee of the Giokuians. I carried my burlap sack, which contained stars of

nearly fifty constellations. I held one of the burning stars in my hand and experienced the sensation of the star's rays when they entered my eyes. My eyes became enflamed as I became enthralled by the combustion of hydrogen and helium in my possession. The fire of the stars reflected into my eyes and entered my soul. My eyes glowed with the same light that was emitted from the star. I opened my eyes and returned to the lower deck of The Periol Deather. My life was a plant thread that emerged from the soil to reach the stars.

I extended my ceaseless rubber band, grasped one side of the band, and hurled my rubber lasso over the stars of the seven sisters of Pleione. These seven sisters had been forced to commit suicide by the Giokuians, and the souls of the sisters transformed into stars that illuminated the sky. The Giokuians needed stars and forced the sisters to commit suicide so that the sisters would transform into stars. I was infuriated that the Giokuians forced the innocent young sisters to commit suicide. I opened my eyes after pulling the seven stars to the ground, and I was once again aboard The Periol Deather. I waited for the imprecation of Linus as a tragic hero to afflict him. Apollo, the father of Linus, suddenly became ill and expired within a week of announcing his malady. I smiled as I peered out over the icy Atlantic Ocean and gazed into the night sky. I was a collector of stars, and because stars were composed of the souls of important deceased figures in our world, I was truly the collector of souls. I was still forced to thank Linus but smiled because the imprecation was tormenting Linus' family and friends. I wondered why I cared so much for the plants of our world, but I cared little about justifying my despicable actions. I once again closed my eyes and became The Star-Seeker. My rubber band pierced the sky as I dragged the star of Orion to the ground and placed it in my burlap sack. I clenched the star and watched as it smoldered in my hand. I sailed my finger across the sharp edge of the star and examined the blood that dripped from the laceration produced. Orion had once loved Merope, one of the seven sisters who committed suicide. He had been blinded for his lack of maturity, but he continued to lust after Merope. He regained his sight when the rays of the sun entered his eyes, and he became a star shortly after the suicides of the seven sisters. I finally understood that the stars had the power to restore sight to the blind. I continued my work as The Star-Seeker and dragged the constellations of Crater, Dorado, and Lacerta to the earth with relative ease. The Giokuians provided me with an alien camera that would reveal the future of my soul after death. Would my soul transform into a star or become a life-sucking black hole? I stood in front of a mirror and snapped a photograph of my reflection as it stared beyond me. I examined the snapshot and was enraged by a photograph of a black hole. I smashed the mirror because I became disgusted by the reflection that gawked at me. My soul was never destined to join the stars of the constellations that I captured. I was to become a black hole because I only completed one action in my life. I breathed the same air as the rest of the human race, but I did nothing more than steal the oxygen of these beings. I snapped a photograph of a crewmate aboard the ship, and my rage was further intensified by the fact that his photograph revealed a luminous star. My life was a plant thread that continued its struggle to grow and reach the stars, and Linus was the "star" who was attempting to eradicate my plant thread and the rest of the plants.

My mind continued to tumble through the tunnels of time aboard The Periol Deather. I examined images of Julius Caesar's conquests, and I wondered if Caesar's soul were contained in the burlap sack among the stars of the sky. I opened the burning sack and called for the soul of Caesar, but he did not answer. I was speaking to the cluster of stars and was going absolutely mad. I was slipping through the streams of insanity as The Star-Seeker with a rubber band and a burlap sack. I sauntered to the upper deck and leaned over the edge of the ship with the burlap

sack. I emptied the sack of burning stars into the Atlantic Ocean and watched as the smoke rose through the air. My soul boiled with the ocean when I realized that my entire life was devoted to serving another race. I would never escape from the bondage of the Giokuians because there were always more stars to capture. I was The Star-Seeker, but my soul would never join the stars that I pursued in my other life. I continued to wonder why I cared about the plants when Linus announced that he was no longer able to kill the plants because of the imprecation. Linus' imprecation as a tragic hero had caused him to become a sickly man. I descended to the lower deck of The Periol Deather and observed the hemlock that I had smuggled aboard the ship. Why did I care so much for this small plant? Why did I care so greatly for the human race? And I still questioned my decision to curse Linus. I meandered to the deck of the ship and glared at the reflection that returned my examination with a fiery gaze. During the day, my shadow was projected onto the ship's deck by the rays of the sun, and I realized that my shadow was deceiving me. The shadow formed the contour of a human being, but I was no longer a human being. I was a monster who was enslaved by the Giokuians, and my shadow was a liar. The only ally who remained by my side despite my revolting actions was a repulsive liar, but the lies of my shadow were not convincing. I observed the poisonous hemlock for several hours when the hemlock suddenly sprouted hundreds of branches that extended across the entire ship. The massive branches wrapped themselves around my throat and nearly strangled me to death. I finally understood the dangers of plant life as the branches began to squeeze the life from my body. As I gagged and struggled for another breath, I closed my eyes to experience the adventures of another life. I became the great Greek philosopher Socrates as he prepared to ingest the poisonous hemlock that would end his life. Socrates became guilty of opposing the Greek government when he questioned the government's ability to "Know thyself." I attempted to open my eyes to escape from this experience, but I was unable to complete this task. I ingested the poisonous hemlock and accepted my destiny to die. I finally understood why I cared so much for the hemlock plant because it had killed me in another life. The people in power were the stars that I wanted to become, and although I pursued stars my entire life, I never became a star. I understood that I would have been able to open my eyes to escape from the experiences of Socrates if I had a star in my possession. The star would have opened my eyes and allowed me to return to the ship. I silently thanked Asclepius, the God of medicine, for my painless death. The plant thread of my life was no longer able to subsist in this austere ambience under the hegemony of the Giokuians, so the plant thread began to exhibit shades of brown. Stars allow individuals to open their eyes, and the Giokuians were using the stars to open their own eyes. The people of the human race needed to open their own eyes to understand the truth about life. All human life ends in the same way when one is lowered into the ground under the roots of the plants.

After I died, I did not join the stars that extended across the sky. I became a fertilizer for the plants that caused my demise. I would hope that people open their eyes to realize the truth. We must reach for the stars and understand that every short life ends the same way. Every man, woman, and child becomes fertilizer for the plants. We must reach for the stars and understand that no one truly lives. Every individual begins to die from the moment that he or she is born. The length of an individual's life is measured by the sands of an hourglass. We must reach for the stars that pierce the sky. Clotho was the Fate who used the deadly plants to spin the thread of my life. Lachesis was the Fate who assigned my destiny to become The Star-Seeker. Atrophos was the Fate who cut the thread of my life when the poison of the hemlock contaminated my blood. The same plants that ended my life also constructed the thread of my life. The plant

thread of my life was a pendulum that swung between the stars and the black holes across the darkness of space. My soul sought to escape from the merciless black hole but returned to the darkness when my rubber band bounced the soul back to its destiny. I was once The Star-Seeker with a rubber band and a burlap sack. After my death, I became a black hole, and I now consume the stars that I once pursued. The dilapidated plant thread of my life was absorbed by the black hole. The “star” named Linus had succeeded in his attempt to demolish all sources of plant life.

Years and years have passed since my death, and the Giokuians have owed me checks that I have longed to cash. The checks that the Giokuians owe me have bounced from one side of the Milky Way Galaxy to the other, and I have realized the true purposes of the stars. For many years, I was a vacuum that purified the galaxy for the Giokuians. A chessboard exists between the world of the living and the world of the deceased. The Giokuians were converting humans into stars to succeed in a chess match against an opposing alien race. The stars transformed into the Kings, Queens, Bishops, Rooks, and Knights that the Giokuians would be able to manipulate in the chess match against this race. The positions of the humans in this chess match were determined by the statuses of the humans before their deaths. The humans who did not become stars transformed into the Pawns that the Giokuians would manipulate in this chess match. The Russians were successful chess players because of their Communist government in which all citizens were “Pawns” controlled by the “stars.” The Communist government truly understood that there were “stars” and “Pawns” in the social stratosphere of society. My contributions as The Star-Seeker caused me to become a Knight who rode across the sixty-four squares of the chessboard. The Giokuians shackled my soul during my existence on earth and during my existence in the afterlife. After my death, I plunged through a vortex and collapsed onto the wooden chessboard that existed in the world of the afterlife. I became a Knight piece of the Giokuians, but my horse Taranis allowed me to become the only chess piece that was able to move freely across the board. The mammoth hand of a Giokuian clasped a Pawn and performed the “En Passant” maneuver in an attempt to defeat the opposing alien race known as the Diovidians. A Diovidian hand countered with the “Castling” maneuver in an attempt to protect its King and Rook, and I quickly realized that the Giokuians would easily subjugate their competition. My throat ached as I struggled to swallow the irony of the fact that the humans were literally “Pawns” of the Giokuians. The Giokuian moved its Bishop in a diagonal direction to capture the Knight of the Diovidians, and I realized that the Bishop was actually the human who transformed into the star of Orion. I recognized that all these chess pieces were the stars that I had once captured with a rubber band and a burlap sack. But that life was over. I was now a Knight chess piece to be controlled by the Giokuians on a rotating chessboard. The game of chess was based on the ancient Indian game of “Chaturanga.” The pieces used in the board game were based on the elephants, cavalry, chariots, and infantry that constructed the four arms of an Indian army. I rode in the direction of the opposing chess pieces and realized one thing. I was now an infant being crushed by an elephant.

A bolt of lightning struck the Rook of the Giokuians, and the piece transformed into a second Queen for the alien race. The Giokuians used bolts of lightning to elevate the positions of the chess pieces. The appearance of a lightning bolt had once signified the elevation of a poor beggar from a bum into a successful star in Hollywood or a star among the lights of Las Vegas. But that was another life before the arrival of the Giokuians. I commanded Taranis to travel toward the lightning bolts that jostled into the board. I felt responsible for collecting the stars that transformed into these chess pieces, so I declared that I would liberate the human race from

its imprisonment. Linus, the young imprecated son of the late Apollo, appeared on the side of the Diovidians and began to play his kithara lyre. This was a momentous occasion in history, and Linus played his lyre to commiserate the chess pieces that perished during this epic match. The Giokuian hand reached out to snatch me away from the fray, but I refused to be manipulated as I traveled toward the bolts of lightning. Taranis galloped in the direction of the Diovidian chess pieces, and I pushed my way through any opposition as the Diovidians attempted to capture me with their Bishops. I continued to travel up two positions, to the left, up two positions, and to the right as the bolts of lightning caused the chessboard to ignite in flames. I saw that the second Knight piece of the Giokuians was Alexander the Great, who rode his brown horse Bucephalas in the direction of a Rook, but Alexander was suddenly captured by the malicious Queen piece of the Diovidians. The flames swept over the Rooks and Pawns of the Diovidians as I continued my voyage across the chessboard. The lightning bolts of red sprites, blue jets, and green Elves gleamed above the chessboard when Taranis finally reached a square that was pelted by a bolt of green lightning. The lightning bolt carried me over the chessboard, pulled me through the clouds, and whirled down from the sky. Taranis whimpered as he galloped along the edge of the lightning bolt. The lightning bolt that carried me flashed across the sky and jumped from the tops of the clouds into the stratosphere. I tumbled across a cone of blue jet lightning that formed at the center of the thunderstorm as the lightning bolt traveled at the speed of light. The lightning bolt entered the atmosphere with such intensity that the stars began to fall from the sky. The lightning bolt collided into the terrain as each star housed in the sky plunged in the same direction. The lightning bolt released me from its bondage upon striking the earth, and I realized that I had liberated all the stars from the Giokuians. The stars collided into the earth below the sky, and the earth became a tremendous ball of flames. I watched as the stars of Napoleon Bonaparte, Elizabeth I, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin plunged from the sky, and the human race was liberated from the sky. The beings of the human race were now free to live and to die without being imprisoned by the Giokuians. Linus vigorously scraped his kithara lyre, and a tranquil melody chased the flames that engulfed the earth. One of the shooting stars appeared at the corner of my eye, and I wished that the human race had the opportunity to start over. The flames spread across the earth, but they had nothing to consume without the plant life that the Giokuians had ravished. The luminous colors that pervaded through the sky resembled that painting by Van Gogh. Linus continued to play his lyre, and his music caused several plants to sprout from the dirt. Several human babies emerged from the plants that burgeoned from the soil, and the human race was prepared to start over. The same plants that constructed the thread of my life were used to create new life. The Star-Seeker became The Lightning Rider when he traveled along the edge of a lightning bolt that pushed the stars from the sky. The Giokuian employee with a flaming burlap sack and a rubber band became The Lightning Rider who unshackled the Kings, Queens, Bishops, Rooks, Knights, and Pawns from the enslavement of the Giokuians. I realized that I was not merely fertilizer intended for the nourishment of the plants. I had truly reached for the stars and opened my eyes to understand the true source of contentment.

Linus, the imprecated son of Apollo, was a tragic hero who emerged from the darkness in order to confront me. Linus indicated that there was one remaining star stored in the sky, and this star was my soul, which was still in the possession of the Giokuians. Linus declared that the “tragedy” would finally be realized as he hurled the plectrum of his lyre toward the star. The plectrum pounded into the star, and this collision caused the anger of my soul to be unshackled from the star. The emotions stored in my soul were projected into reality. The delighted face of a child appeared in the sky in order to represent the source of my greatest happiness. A shadowy

figure, which represented my greatest anger, emerged from the star and unraveled a monstrous contour that conquered the sky. The figure swept over my body and strangled me to death. My anger was one of many emotions that constructed the compartments of my soul, and when my soul transformed into a luminous star, my anger was a deceased entity that longed to be resurrected. Linus simply scuttled away from my lifeless body and waited for the other half of the “tragedy” to be completed. The “Star-Seeker’s Tragedy” was triggered by the irrefutable fact that the plant threads of the human race would never reach the stars in the sky. We are all dots...waiting to be connected. We live; we die. We’re all sitting in the waiting rooms of death, eagerly waiting for our names to be called. We meet each other in the afterlife. Our souls are connected to people whom we don’t even know. If someone does not write down our names, we are forgotten. Life goes on, and the world keeps on spinning. Keep on spinning, world. Stars, keep on shining because the human race will keep on smiling.

The End