

Neverness

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Chapter 1 - Journeymen die

On Old Earth, the ancients often wondered at the origin of life, and they created many myths to explain the mystery of mysteries. There was Mumu the mother goddess who swallowed a great snake which multiplied inside of her and whose nine billion children ate their way through her belly into the light of day and so became the animals of the land and the fishes of the sea. There was a father god, Yahweh, who created Earth and the heavens in six days and who called forth the birds and the beasts on days five and six. There was a fertility goddess and a goddess of chance named Random Mutation. And so on. And so on. The truth is, life throughout the galaxy was everywhere seeded by a race known as the Ieldra. Of course the origin of the Ieldra is unknown and perhaps unknowable: the ultimate mystery remains.

-from A Requiem for Homo Sapiens by Horthy Hosthoh, Timekeeper and Lord Horologe of the Order of Mystic Mathematicians and Other Seekers of the Ineffable Flame

There Is infinite hope, but not for Man.

-Franz Kafka, Holocaust Century Fabulist

Long before we knew that the price of the wisdom and immortality we sought would be almost beyond our means to pay, when man-what was left of man-was still like a child playing with pebbles and shells by the seashore, in the time of the quest for the mystery known as the Elder Eddas, I heard the call of the stars and prepared to leave the city of my birth and death.

I call her Neverness. The founders of our Order, so the Timekeeper once told me, having discovered a neighborhood of space where the pathways through the manifold twist and loop together like a hard knot of string, decided to build our city on a nearby planet named Icefall. Because such knots of space were once thought to be rare or nonexistent-the cantors now call them thickspace-our first Timekeeper declared that we could fall through the galaxy until the universe collapsed inward upon itself and never find a denser thickspace.

How many billions of pathways converge around our cool yellow star no