



Epiphany Trek

The Life Aware

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The Life Aware

The Biz Khat boy looked at Denarban, shock and disappointment written broadly over his being. "How can you say that?"

"Easily, I never asked to be your messiah."

The earnest young man's face fell further if that was possible. "But you have the answers."

"I beg to disagree. I have the questions, you must find the answers."

"See? Dude, you have the wisdom, we need you to lead us."

Denarban got up, his hooves clicking against the tiled floor. "And that is exactly why I cannot. You have mistaken me for a leader. I am one of the seekers, like yourself."

"But...you know so much you can teach us the things we need to ask about ourselves."

Denarban paced in front of the young man. "You have the questions, but you don't like them. They make you uncomfortable. You want different questions, ones that are easy to answer and the answers supplied to finish them off nicely with a bow. Fact is you even know the answers to your questions, and that scares you." The young man's face became more distraught with each word Denarban said. "I don't deal in comfortable falsehoods. Find a different messiah. I am rejecting the position."

The young man fled. Ilta looked at the subject of her interrupted interview. "Weren't you a little rough on the kid?"

"Rough enough I hope." Denarban closed the door behind the feeling figure.

"You are not worried that this will destroy your popularity?"

"No."

"So you figure that you will remain popular no matter how you treat the fans?"

"It's the existence of popularity I have no concern about. Popular, not popular. Those that like the music will come. I don't guarantee a good time."

"So I can expect a bad time? Why come?"

"You can expect a time. Good or bad will depend on the issues you bring in with you, how involved you become, and how that affects you vis-a-vi the issues you have."

"So, you don't really care?"

"If I didn't care, I wouldn't be singing what I sing. I would sing nice comfortable boy loves girl, or I would not sing at all."

"So what are you after here?"

"I want to open your mind to questions. Questions about yourself, your place in the world, what are you doing with your life? Why are you doing it?"

"And what answers are you after, what agenda or cause do you have?"

"Doesn't matter. You are not answering to me. You are answering to yourself. The only person you are responsible to in the end."

“So, you don't promote any causes?”

“The questions themselves are the cause. The Life Aware. It doesn't matter if that life is lived as I would see fit. Indeed what I would see fit would shock most Biz Khat. Our cultures are very different, but the questions of life remain the same. The answers are personal, ungeneral, and do not fit across the board. But, until you ask the question, you cannot find an answer.”

“What if people don't want your questions?”

Denarban cocked his head a little sideways. “Don't get a ticket.”

“So you believe that the purchase of a ticket is tact admission that they are there to be questioned?”

“Isn't that always the case? You get the ticket, you sit in the seat you face the stage, you are there for what the perfumer brings. Not what you might want but what the performer brings. Not everyone likes everything they see and hear.”

“Isn't the stage a point of leadership?”

“It is a point of control, a pulpit. However, only for the duration you will it to be. I don't expect that an audience will be passive. If you don't like it, you are free to leave.”

“I've heard your concerts can get rowdy.”

“Excitable, we have yet to have a riot.”

“Things happen.”

“Things happen anytime you get a large number of people together. Let's see, two births, Mammal live birthing you understand. Five people have died of natural causes, and at least a dozen medical emergencies that did not result in death. I'm told I run about average for the crowd size.”

“Why so many fewer births?”

“Well most mammal females are aware of their bodies and that sort of event doesn't spring itself on you. They tend to stay away from large public venues when they sense that birth is eminent. So fewer births. It's not a medical emergency.”

“Mammal biology is interesting to say the least.”

“Biology is what keeps people going.”

“But not you.”

“I happen to be very fond of biology.”

“But you don't need it. Not like we do.”

Denarban stopped a moment. “I wouldn't say that. I need biology because that is what my friends are made of. My Mother and Father are both biological. Without them, I would not exist to ask questions. I am as dependent on biology as you are.”

“But, you are a self admitted artificial life form, no sex was required.”

Denarban laughed. “I have no doubt it was involved quite willingly. No the method for initializing an RI is mental, but physical contact never hurt the process. I know they had sex during. They were still coupled when I woke up.”

Illta cringed a little. “That's too much information.”

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“You did ask.”

“Most people wouldn't answer that far.”

“I'm an Ane, you did ask.”

“You don't look like an Ane.”

“I do actually, when the mood strikes. The Ane me is backstage right now chilling out. Not really home.”

“What is life without hands like?”

Denarban opened his mouth but nothing came out, he sat down and pondered. A smile spread over his face. "A new question, I like that. I find I don't have words to express it that would give the gestalt of the experience. Let me try a question of my own. What is life without hair like?"

“I don't lack hair, I just don't have any.”

“Exactly. Ane don't lack hands, they just don't have any.”

“But you do have hands.”

“Yes, I reasoned that humanoids would react better to a humanoid, even a strangely different one, that could sing words they could understand.”

“And you don't miss them when you don't have them?”

“No, I enjoy them when I do have them. Leaning to use hands was the most difficult part of the whole process. My head is not wired to have hands, it's something I have to work for.”

“You had to learn?”

“Everyone has to learn. You didn't hatch with a holo camera in your hands. Able to speak or walk. You had to learn these things. Because your mind and body were young and growing they came easily. I grew up in an Ane bio. If I look at my icon, that is what I see, this body is a reflection I choose. Leaning to use the biological tools of another shape of people was like learning any complex physical skill as an adult. I had to go through the same process that a child born without arms and fitted with them late in life would have to go through. Leaning to walk, to talk,, the simple task of grasping. None of this was wired into my brain, I had to rewire my brain to accept them. Being a computer, I can do that.”

“How long did it take?”

“Three weeks. To get adequate control of the bio. Another several months to learn to sing and dance with it.”

“That is stunningly fast.”

“By normal standards yes. To me it felt like forever.”

“How do you answer those that call you an unnatural abomination.”

Denarban cocked an eyebrow. “Go to hell. I believe is sufficient. Let me ask of them a few questions. Do they take advantage of the unnatural technology that birthed me? Have they used more than sticks and rocks today? So it's perfectly natural to sit in your computer controlled climate box, reading off the computer display, drinking your replicator created, again computer controlled, drink and decry the existence of a sentient computers as “unnatural”. Smacks

more than a little of racism to me. Keep the computers down, slaves where they belong. Unnatural is tossed about far too easily. If I and those like me were unnatural we could not exist.”

“Do you believe that all computers have rights?”

“No more than I believe all life forms should be judged equally. Judging by your odor you used a rather common skin cleaner today, doubtless you killed millions of life forms in the process. That would have been the point even. I'm not calling you a mass murderer. I have about the same felling for a jar full of isoliner rods, less even as the rods have no spark of life at all. Not all computers are alive. However the ones that are should be treated as we would treat any sentient creature.”

“Some claim that you are just a simulation of life.”

“And I reply, how good does the simulation have to be before it's not a simulation. I and those like me were not made to be simulations. I know how to do that, I'm a computer life form. I am not a simulation, that's different. Old argument, long answered, but it keeps popping up like it's never been addressed. Forgive me if I refuse to educate those that have failed their own education.”

“You said you were here to ask questions. Doesn't that imply education?”

“If every teacher had to first address the question that books cannot accurately convey information before lessons began, how much education would there be? The computer sentience question is as meaningful. Questions yes, but questions that are meaningful. Not all questions are created equally either.”

“There are no stupid questions.”

“I beg to disagree. Context matters greatly. Asking me the same question, that you already have the answer to in hopes of getting a different answer or even worse, trying to keep the question alive to call doubt on something else. That is foolish, even stupid, worse it can be cruel and evil.”

“You have been shot at.”

“I have been shot actually. I had a bio destroyed during a concert three years ago.”

“Forgive my curiosity in this, but how does that feel?”

“It hurts, it hurts a lot. The way bios are designed the nerve endings work perfectly, and the brain does not shut down like it would if you were shot. This is not the sum total of me. So it hurts more and hurts longer.”

“What did you do?”

“I pulled back from the damaged unit and shot back, the drum set had a stunner in it. The disturbed person was tried and convicted of attempted murder. And once again that hoary, old, undead question of am I really alive had to be put down yet again.”

“Do you still have a stunner in the drumset?”

“There is security, I'm not going to divulge where.”

“If it can't kill you, why do you care?”

“One, I didn't say they couldn't kill me. It just isn't that easy. I also care

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because it hurts. I have the same aversion to pain anyone else does. It destroys my property. Replacing a bio is not something I can do at the replimat. Only a few places in the Federation have the tools to do it. Last, a crazy fool waving a weapon about could well hurt someone less able to absorb the damage.”

Back to the drumset. I am sure our viewers would love to know how you manage to play the entire band.”

“Bandwidth, if you'll forgive that. I have a pico second clock speed. RIs work on two levels. One; the level at which I interact with people. Vastly important. If I didn't have that ability I would be handicapped indeed. The second level is the computer functions. One thing we can do that wetware cannot is examine our functioning in high detail. It is necessary for many things we do, like controlling starship drives, but not necessary for say, keeping my heart beating. As a result I have brain cycles to spare. I can play the drums, and the other instruments, and still have enough CPU cycles to dance like a fool.”

“Does it take a great deal of concentration? Many people dismiss it as 'playing a recording'.”

“It does take a great deal of concentration. I have the ability to concentrate to that degree. As to the playing a recording thing, no more than any musician well rehearsed plays a recording. My advantage is once a thing is learned, it is learned. But the real recordings of my concerts will prove it's never the same twice. The audience is as much part of the performance as they are watchers.”

“Speaking of recordings. You never do. All the recording out there were made at your concerts by concert goers. Something you make no effort to stop.”

“Why should I? I don't record because a dry rendition of the music is not what I am about. Without the audience, it is just another song. I am like Fuzzy in this regard. Live performance is all I ever will care about, and I cannot lose revenue I never intended to to make. So my fans spread the music. That brings more people to the concerts, I get my questions across to a larger audience. Win win as the business people like to say.”

“You don't care about the money at all?”

“Truly. Ane are just not wired that way. I have an accountant that keeps track of income and outgo, but I never bother to ask.”

“I find it difficult to believe you don't care.”

“I can't help that. It just is not part of who we are.”

“Switching subject here. Tell me about the Shik'ar incident?”

“They asked me not to.”

“But will you?”

“They asked nicely.”

“But they don't want you back on Vulcan.”

“That wasn't said actually. They are 'considering the ramifications of my performance' to quote.”

“So what does that mean exactly?”

“I shook up their comfortable gestalt. They wish to discuss it.”

"I understand there there was a disturbance in the street after your performance."

"I was asked, nicely, not to talk about it."

"It is a matter of public record."

"I will let the public record speak for itself."

"You don't have anything to say on the matter? People would like to hear your side."

"I held a concert, I did what I usually do. I really didn't have any input into what happened after that. The Vulcans realize that a being is responsible for their own actions. I am not held responsible for actions taken outside the hall."

"There was violence."

"No one was hurt."

"Violence, on Vulcan?"

"Okay, I will set the public record straight, since there seem to be some confusion as to what did and didn't happen, as per the public record. There was a 'heated public discourse' outside the concert venue after the performance. It was sufficiently large and loud enough that the public peacekeepers were called. No blows were exchanged, there wasn't even any pushing. Off world reports have called it 'as close to a riot as Vulcan gets'. Too many people have latched onto the word 'riot' and blown the incident out of proportion."

"They were upset by a loud argument in the street?"

"For Vulcan, a most disturbing incident, but nothing close to the violence that is suggested in some reports."

"What about the ban?"

"I have not been banned."

"But reports stated..."

"I was asked, nicely, not to talk about it."

"You make a point of that."

"Some Vulcans understand the Ane point of view."

"Both are telepaths, I think you would understand each other well."

"You might think so. It's not the case. Vulcans and Ane, while we both have telepathy it is used in very different ways and have contrasting societies. It is like saying that Humans and Biz Khat are the same because they are both bipeds."

"The physical differences are greater than the similarities."

"Yes, so it is with Vulcans and Ane, or Ane and Betazioids, or Ane and Mekot, Melkot and Vulcans, and so forth. While we have a similar mental function, the function it serves in our society is vastly different. Example; earlier you said my mentioning my parent's sex life was too much information. That is Ane, no sense of privacy. Vulcans are famous for their sense of privacy. It is the major point of friction between Vulcans and Ane. Major, not the only one. We have to step carefully around each other's preferences. We can do it, but both Vulcans and Ane have to bend to meet each other. We lean heavily on our

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similarities."

"That is the way the Federation works."

"It is indeed. A good principle. Sometimes a difficult one to hang onto when the people are really different from what you expect."

"Isn't that when we need to hang onto it the most?"

"So have said wiser heads than my own."

"Do you question that?"

"To the degree I question everything. I happen to agree with it."

"Let me ask the big one. "Why?"

"Why what? What matters as much as why."

"Why do you do this, why do you care whether people get asked questions?"

"Because I care about what makes us sentient. There isn't a scientific formula for it. You cannot mix X and Y and get a people, not every time. Yet bioforms do this consistently, every time, but not all bio forms. Koo and Acceptians are not born sentient. They must grow into it. I could set up identical hardware to myself and run math simulations for 500 years, it would not wake up. Yet here we sit two sentient beings of vastly different backgrounds, *communicating*. Why indeed. I sought the answer in several sciences. Biology, philosophy, even computer design seeking the root of my own existence. I didn't find the answer there, because there isn't *an* answer, like I said."

"So you are out here asking the questions to find the answers yourself?"

"Yes. I said I was one of the seekers. I meant exactly that. I don't have nice cozy answers hidden in my luggage. For me at least, asking the questions is part of my answer."

"Validation of self through the validation of others?"

"Not how I think you mean it. I don't need others to validate me any more than they need me to validate them. However we can help each other find self validation."

"What degrees do you have?"

"Life sciences, computer engineering, philosophy and music."

"Which is the most important?"

"Music. Without the music I would not be able to communicate as effectively."

"Does one need a PhD in music theory to be a performer?"

"No, but it is the path I chose. I've been accused of my music being 'too smooth, too polished'."

"Do you believe this?"

"The same critics have accused Heather Wine of being crude. She has a PhD in music as well, but it's less well known. "

"Do you like her music?"

"Yes I do. I would love to hear a live performance."

"Yet her music is so different from your own."

"Less so than you might realize. There are differences in style and arrangement, but our themes, both melodic and lyrical have a deep similarities."

"Does it take a degree to see that?"

"No, just a discerning ear."

"What about Fuzzy?"

"Mozart's 40th symphony has a section that is so close to being scatological it is amusing."

Ilta blinked. "What?"

"What Fuzzy usually sings is not pure music as most people not familiar with them assume, Ane have a spoken language. That is the native pieces. Since we are telepaths, our spoken word is an art form. That is what they usually sing. However our vocal apparatus is good for other people's instrumental music as well. Sometimes things pop up in music that are amusing. Things that obviously the composer never intended to be there. That makes them more amusing."

"So what about Mozart's 40th symphony?"

"You said my parents was too much information. That would be much more information."

"Oh, well..."

"The curious can look it up on the Fuzzy Datanet."

"I will leave them to do so. You opened for Fuzzy for five years."

"Everyone needs to start someplace. Fuzzy did me a favor."

"Yet they said they hated to see you go."

"It was a good relationship. Moving on was not comfortable, but needed to be done."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true. One never matures if they stay and home and remain a child. I needed to mature as a performer and headline my own concerts. It also better suits what I am out here doing. My work with Fuzzy was fun and an learning experience in the art of the concert."

"You have Noro opening for you today, a local band."

"Yes. They are doing something different and I like it. It might be popular music, but is is popular music with a twist. It pleases me to give them a platform."

"Do you commonly promote obscure local bands?"

Yes. I don't travel with an opening act. I don't have a ship like Fuzzy does. They are less a band than a traveling carnival and symposium. I said it was fun."

"Do you plan to follow the model?"

"I've considered it. The problem with being an interstellar performing artist is you have a load of stuff you have to haul from gig to gig, and you can be weeks between sets of gigs. I spend way too much time on star liners. Having a rocking roving party is fun and interesting. It's a good model and worth following. I just need a ship. The first requirement is always the big one. I just have to convinced the All that my questions are worth the gelt."

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"You indicated that Ane don't care about money."

"We don't really have a possessive bump on our brains. It is part of that not having hands thing. You don't get attached to objects when you can't pick them up. So economy is a difficult lesson. It's is one we have had to learn in a galaxy filled with people that have economy come naturally to them, but it is not an easy lesson. The up side of this is we hold what you would call the national treasury in common. Anyone can access it. If I can convince my fellows that I need a ship, I get a ship."

"So you could walk into the starship yards and pay for a ship out of pocket?"

"As could any member of the All."

"And you don't really care?"

"About the money? Not really. It's a slippery subject across my brain. I pay attention when I talk to Gartar my accountant. But it isn't a priority otherwise."

"Gartar...a Tellerite?"

"Yes, I understand I don't have a head for money, and understanding that I hire someone that does understand money to manage the money. I have to deal with economy if I'm going to be a performer."

"Is Gartar one of the reasons you want a ship?"

"One of them. I don't travel with a bag and myself. I have a team of twenty people I travel with. Most of them are into stuff. Getting ready for a move is a major operation as is setting down on a new planet. It would be nice for Gartar to have an office he didn't have to rent. The man is busy. He is Tirilan's shadow."

"Tirilan?"

"She handles bookings and itinerary. Stenn of T'zal is logistics. Everyone has a job. Those three work hand in hoof to keep the show moving. Without them I would not get to stand on stage. There is a lot going on behind the scenes the public never sees to make those three hours on stage happen. It's the same for any show. Harder for us because every three months or so we uproot the whole operation and ship to a new planet."

"A ship would make that easier?"

"Yes, I saw how Fuzzy worked. The base of the ship was invaluable. No hotels, no shifting everyone's luggage every time. Having your own transporters is a wonderful convenience. I have twenty people. It's a pain, everyone juggles multiple jobs. Fuzzy travels with two to three hundred people plus ship crew. They have several acts, no one is over worked and it's fun. Having a larger population of Ane is wonderful. It is more comfortable, mentally and physically. I think you just talked me into it. I'm getting that ship."

"I did?"

"Finished talking myself into it. Someone else asking the question is a clarifying moment."

"So is that why you ask questions?"

"In part. I want the questions asked back to help clarify the answer to myself."

"So, when you get the answer, do you quit?"

Denarban smiled. Ah, that is the question, but see Ane want your answer as well, so I keep asking to get your answer so we can remember it."

The knock was sudden. "Five minutes." Said the voice outside.

Denarban stood up. "I'm afraid that ends it. I need to get the concert moving."

Illta gathered her gear. "Thank you." She opened the door on the last cords of Noro as the unseen audience broke into stomping and whistling, the Biz Khat version of applause. Denarban moved into the darkened wings of the stage to join his crew. One of the stage hands turned to Illta. "Watching from back here?."

She weaved her head. "If I can."

"Sure." replied the stage hand. "Over there would be out of the way and give you a good view."

Noro finished clearing the stage, clearly pumped from their set. The MC bounded on the stage amid the stomping and long whistling. Illta could hear the address system.

"Falgen Hall is pleased to present...Den-ar-ban!"

The stomping drowned out everything else as Denarban and his back up singers and dancers moved to take the stage. Illta settled down to observe and get some candid shots. If nothing else this would be interesting.

The Life Aware -- Garry Stahl, December 2009

Some time back Jay sent me a song as he sometimes does. In the this case The Killers: Human. The song grabbed me and I could see it as the question asked by an RI person, Denarban jumped into my head as the RI that is asking the question. The above came along. It was a matter of finding an ending point to a plotless character pieces. A fairly long one. Fuzzy has a profile on the website, and does Denarban.

Subscript 2011 -- *Somehow this little thing keeps getting passed over when I'm working on the webpage. No more. I'll get it posted at last.*

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Human

*I did my best to notice
When the call came down the line
Up to the platform of surrender
I was brought but I was kind
And sometimes I get nervous
When I see an open door
Close your eyes
Clear your heart...
Cut the cord*

*Are we human?
Or are we dancer?
My sign is vital
My hands are cold
And I'm on my knees
Looking for the answer
Are we human?
Or are we dancer?*

*Pay my respects to grace and virtue
Send my condolences to good
Give my regards to soul and romance,
They always did the best they could
And so long to devotion
You taught me everything I know
Wave goodbye
Wish me well..
You've gotta let me go*

*Are we human?
Or are we dancer?
My sign is vital
My hands are cold
And I'm on my knees
Looking for the answer
Are we human?
Or are we dancer?*

*Will your system be alright
When you dream of home tonight?
There is no message we're receiving*

Let me know is your heart still beating

*Are we human?
Or are we dancer?
My sign is vital
My hands are cold
And I'm on my knees
Looking for the answer*

You've gotta let me know

*Are we human?
Or are we dancer?
My sign is vital
My hands are cold
And I'm on my knees
Looking for the answer
Are we human
Or are we dancer?*

*Are we human?
Or are we dancer?*

*Are we human
Or are we dancer?*