

Memories

From Dan Amenta's Journal

We had the perfect life in the French-Swiss countryside until that mysterious windstorm in February. No one realized anything unusual has happened, but the next morning, while driving Annah, my daughter, to school, I discovered that vehicles littered the highway, with their dead occupants still inside.

Returning home, no one answered the phone at any of the emergency departments nor could I or my wife, Mary, reach our relatives and friends. Checking on the neighbors, I found them dead.

We soon realized we might be the only survivors of a global catastrophe. We stocked up on emergency supplies, turned the house into a stronghold, and collected food and medicines. The Internet still worked so I launched a large, online campaign to find other survivors with the hope of learning more about what we were facing. While waiting for any response at all, I managed to befriend some neighborhood dogs and we armed ourselves with survival gear.

At first, it felt weird and disturbing to go into stores and take things without paying but, of course, there was no one to pay. The whole world had become a ghost town.

At home, to keep a sense of normalcy, we went by the calendar and home-schooled Annah. After lessons and on weekends, we trained the dogs, practiced shooting with the arsenal I had gathered, and patrolled the surrounding area to nurture the hope of finding others alive.

More changes came as the months went by and our lives took some turns we couldn't have predicted in our wildest dreams. Yet, now, it became a case of survival and adapting to what would come our way.

Finally, we discovered others had also survived and that some strange entities were behind the human extermination.

We met Laura, and her presence made us question what was right and wrong in our new existence. Mary chose to support Laura's infatuation with me rather than chasing her away and possibly condemning Annah to an isolated life, waiting alone for her own death. We became a multi-partner family and Laura became pregnant to give birth to our daughter, Hope.

Those behind the extermination of humans manifested themselves to me, and my family experienced the horror of the first encounter. I learned from the aliens—the Moîrai Alaston, Mênis, and Algea—what the extermination entailed: the genetic transformation of a small group of people, the Selected, and a planned process for the creation of a new race with others survivors spared in the culling.

Through the Palladium, an alien artifact that modified us genetically and provided the Selected with a means of direct communication, I recovered the lost memory of the frightening history of mankind; a disturbing revelation I could've never envisioned.

Yes, I'm one of the Selected on the planet and I'm charged with the reconstruction of the race of man. Mary became the mother of my first transgenic baby and, together with Laura, we settled with the first survivors we met beside Laura: Jean-Claude and Liliana, Camille and Sarah, and others who joined us in the medieval city of Civita, Italy.

The communities of spared ones, each led by at least one of us Selected, grew under the benevolent eyes of the Moîrai. The aliens instructed the survivors thanks to the Palladiums and we all developed technical skills that were crucial in the initial months and years.

The final events brought some closure about the catastrophe to everyone... but also laid a heavy burden and responsibility on the Selected and myself.



We kept in touch with other communities and the Moîrai, the humanoid glowing aliens who culled the race of men with their twisted salvation plan. They became a constant presence although they tried not to become an intrusive one.

Early during the first year, another Selected, Marina, and her rescued people joined us in Civita; other spared ones found our community, too. They said they followed the Palladium's beams, visible from afar. People still feared the future, the uncertainty, and the way the Selected had been changed scared many of the spared ones. We knew people thought of us as aliens—the same as the Moîrai—and suspicion took hold in the minds of those who refused to join us. They were suspicious...we are different...though, in many respects, we are all still the same.

We couldn't verify the actual number of survivors and we had no way to tell whether only ten million spared ones lived on Eridu, as we called Earth. Communities founded by the Selected received support from the Moîrai and they allowed each community to become self-sufficient. Things looked promising and were moving along, so why did I have the impression the Moîrai pursued other goals than just helping us to settle in only a few years? At times, they showed urgency in their manners I couldn't explain.

Questions and No Answers

Our house in Civita was silent soon after dawn. Civita, the little medieval town in Italy that provided us with a shelter, fostered our hope for a brighter future.

From our terrace, we could see the lights from the houses occupied by the survivors who joined us, the spared ones, the human beings the Moîrai hand-picked to allow the Selected to give birth to a new race.

One of those houses, the one my eyes searched for—with fondness—each evening, was the nest my daughter Annah and her husband, Federico, chose to start their life together, as a couple.

I turned to look back at our own shelter, where Mary, and Laura, with our kids, Samuel and Hope, slept already.

Samuel was my first transgenic son, and Hope my last human daughter. A profound sadness always assailed me when I thought of my kids, and how different will be Hope's future from her brother's.

In a sense, Hope too was a spared one, a frail human being destined to die in a few tens of years while us Selected, with the new generations, would sail through the centuries thanks to the Moîrai's genes in our bodies.

We had to swear to the Moîrai to look after the spared ones, an oath each Selected had no difficulty honoring with every action and every thought; a legacy, and a burden, too. The Moîrai had told us the spared ones were there to make our task easier and expedite the rebuilding process; their spaceships hovered over the planet watching us, to help and to control.

The prophet Jeremiah once wrote in his Letters, "Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters," but only the Selected seed could germinate in our wives, the Moîrai made it so the spared men were sterile. Women who wanted to bear a child got pregnant artificially from the gene pool of the Selected. The communities with most pregnant women received most of the support from the aliens.

No wonder we now faced insurgence, and incidents and unexplained failures. I knew well we faced acts of sabotage, and in growing numbers all over the planet.

I had a Bible at home, and I shivered each time I read Jeremiah: "Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

I wasn't sure there was a Lord, but sure there were the Moîrai, who carried the same message to us.

A rustling noise woke me up from those reveries. Even without turning, I recognized Mary approaching in the twilight. I smelled her fragrance, and that made the air more soothing for my lungs. She wore a silk nightgown that revealed the soft skin roundness of her shoulders. The moon glittered on her skin, almost as if she was a Moîrai, too.

"It's late; why aren't you sleeping, hon?" Mary said when she reached me. Her eyes gazed the terracotta Civita's roofs, and stone houses; only a few with lights still on, now.

Our terrace, perched atop the hill where the Etruscans founded Civita thousands of years before, was a refuge for us. Surrounded by vegetation, and delimited by an ancient stonewall, it was the

alcove where we shared our thoughts, fears... and more.

“Oh, Mary.” I searched for her hand, brought it up to my lips and sighed. “You know, my mind cannot rest with the burden that is on us...” I turned before she could say anything to add, “us Selected.”

She frowned. “Dan, you’re not guilty of anything. Look around you; look at what you’ve done.” Her eyes wandered, caressing each house, and each street of Civita. I followed her gaze.

“You take care of everyone,” she went on, “you and Marina. What you have done together, for everyone... how can you feel guilt?”

I took a deep breath. “And yet, Mary, people committed suicide; not long ago even here in our community. I feel responsible for every single life of every human being under my watch,” I said, and realized I hissed those words through tightened lips.

Mary turned to raise one hand and caress me. “Don’t torture yourself. It’s hard for everyone, and some just can’t make it, no matter what you will do or say. And Marina, she’s a Selected, too; does she feel the same way?”

“It doesn’t matter what Marina feels.”

“I didn’t want to—”

“I know,” I interrupted her, and placed a kiss on those beautiful lips to prevent her from saying more. She abandoned herself in my arms.

“Is everyone asleep?” I said after a while, more to change the subject than to verify with Mary something I sensed myself.

“Yes. With Laura; we put the children to sleep, then she went to her room. She’s tired, you know?”

“I do, but you know her. I think it’s her way to make do with the situation. Did she tell you she wants to move out as soon as Hope is a bit older?”

“She mentioned it to me, but I told her it’s not necessary, after all these years... She still loves you, Dan.”

“She’s the mother of my daughter, too. I don’t want to see my daughter live anywhere else than in my house.”

“That’s why Laura kills herself with work.”

I looked at Mary in search of an answer, but I hadn’t any; and I thought maybe a ghost from its tomb could help me find the answer, if the girl who committed suicide only a few days before had found one in the last moments of her jump to meet the rocks.



The graveyard occupied a secluded area of the town. A breeze had the cypress whisper in an unknown, primeval language.

Old tombs never reply to the questions from the living ones; the cemetery was quiet and peaceful, as it was meant to be, indifferent to my struggles. My eyes stared at the name casted on the new tombstone: Camille.

I heard the steps and recognized Annah and her husband, Federico, well before they’d see me.

Federico, a tall young man; the slender Italian who won Annah's heart with kindness and a romantic soul. I heard their voices, too.

"I know he's a good man, but sometimes he scares me," Federico said.

"How could you say that?" Annah asked.

"You should be able to tell better than anyone else."

"He *is* my father."

"Annah...they're not like us."

The steps quickened and I felt my daughter's heartbeat accelerate. Before turning to look at the entrance, I caressed the tombstone over Camille's grave.

"Annah. You knew where to find me," I turned, smiled, and opened my arms to greet her. She was no more the shy teenager who found her first love on the ancient ramparts of Civita. In seven years, she grew into a beautiful young lady. Her blond hair and blue eyes came from Mary, and I marveled at how much she resembled her, now.

Annah ran to cover the remaining distance between us as she used to do when she was only a child. Federico wasn't entirely wrong; my heart hadn't changed. I loved my family with an intensity that no words, in any human language, could properly describe. But I became different.

Federico walked up to the cemetery, his eyes fixed on the gravels of the pathway that ran among the tombs, old and new alike. He was always shy in my presence; he stopped and waited at the gate.

Annah hugged me and, for a moment, the whole world and everything that had happened vanished from memory. I raised her chin and kissed her between the eyebrows.

"Dad, you come here so often. It's not your fault and you know it."

"Even I didn't see it coming." My eyes went back to the tomb. Camille had not been the only suicide but, thank the Lord, the only one in our community. We found her at the bottom of a ravine. A rail surrounded it to prevent accidental falls; she had to climb over, face the void, and decide to leave everything behind, taking one last step. Nobody saw or suspected anything, not even her closest friend, Sarah, who was usually with her at all times. When we reached Camille, her lifeless body was at peace, her rapt and upturned face smiling.

Annah brought me back to the present. "Dad, it happened again."

I sighed. Our life flowed like a river, changing constantly as water surges over the rocks, sometimes soothing and sometimes exploding, spraying all around. A river never stays still. I put my hand on her shoulder, sensing her, and feeling her vitality. I nodded up to Federico, waiting at the gate, respectful of the privacy of my conversation with Annah. As usual, he couldn't stand my gaze; he nodded back and lowered his eyes.

"Annah, I've got to talk to Marina." I squeezed her arm and left. I sensed Annah's eyes on me, a pressure in my back.

I was too far away for a normal person to perceive their words when Federico reached Annah.

"What did he say?"

Annah did not reply.



“Please, leave us alone.” I waited until the Council secretary left and closed the heavy wooden doors behind him.

“I was waiting for you,” Marina said.

“I know.”

She sat at the massive oak table, the centerpiece of the large Council Room and played with a sheet of paper, tearing pieces apart and making little balls that she placed in front of her. The balls formed an octagonal shape. “We cannot ignore it any longer.”

“I know,” I repeated and sat next to her. Her brown hair combed in a bun with two braids encircled the perfect oval of her face.

“The Moîrai have asked if we want *them* to intervene,” Marina said, and ripped another piece of paper.

“That is out of the question. We already discussed this. Did you change your mind?”

“No, not at all.” She looked straight into my eyes.

My eyes held hers, captured. “I am glad your words match what I sense from you.”

“You know where I stand, Dan.” A smile rose to her face, and her hazel eyes, if possible, smiled even more than her full lips.

“How many are involved?”

Marina carefully placed a new ball on the table. She sighed. “They don’t leave many traces behind. They’re careful, very careful.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less. Did they leave the same sign?”

With a quick gesture, Marina gathered all the tiny balls and threw them into the garbage bin.

“The same.”



While seated next to Laura, I remembered other times and other rides. Not too distant memories either, but how our world had changed in only a few years.

Now in her thirties, Laura was even more fascinating than when I met her the first time, in Geneva. Her blue eyes were still a striking contrast with her pitch black hair, and she was fit as a soldier in combat duty.

The three-car convoy reached the plain, down from our safe haven and stronghold of Civita and toward our destination, the site of the most recent incident.

People were nervous and Laura kept her eyes fixed on the bumpy country road. Pavements had collapsed and we had filled with slabs of rocks and cement only the largest holes and cracks. But it wasn’t a high priority task.

Our daughter, Hope, already attended classes at the institute Mary had started, developed, and now directed in town. Children went to school much younger than before, another trait of the new generation; children like Samuel, the son Mary gave me after I received the Palladium.

In our community, Laura had resumed doing what she loved best: looking for other survivors, encouraging newcomers, and showing them all they could share with us the burden of living...that it was too painful to live alone and in constant fear of the end.

Laura considered the territory around Civita to be *hers*. She managed to create a group of dedicated *Wanderers*, as she liked to refer to them, ensuring we achieved “situational awareness,” she often said.

We had large hydroponic and aeroponic installations across the valley. A few small farms bred sheep, goats and cattle in the plains below Civita that were attended to by those spared ones—like Camille and Sarah—who had found this as a way to return to the origins, in times when all origins seemed to be lost. The feeling of hope didn’t have much place in the world for those deprived of time and future so it had to be nurtured at all costs. Safety and peaceful living were practically all that counted among our people. I couldn’t risk having that shattered.

We covered the last mile to the site in silence. After turning off the engine, Laura reached for my hand and managed a forced smile before getting out of the car. The other SUVs parked next to ours and two young guards waited for us at the farm. I nodded at Laura to lead the way.

Someone had smashed the compound doors and Laura pointed to faint tire tracks. “They arrived by small trucks. See? They jumped out right in front of the entrance.”

So far, our installations had never required any permanent surveillance but we faced a clear escalation of sabotage activity. Inside, all the equipment had been hammered with a fury that lingered among the aisles. Plants had been torn and shredded to ensure nothing could be recovered. I sensed everybody’s tension, the flood of their unspoken questions, and their sense of insecurity.

It would have been easy to set up an impassable perimeter with Moîrai technology but doing so amounted to declaring defeat and I scorned that solution. This was a human problem, and I wanted to address the matter as humans.

“Show me the nearby farm, too.”

A more gruesome scene greeted me. The dogs had been slaughtered. Not a quick death either...no pity or mercy for their suffering. They did not waste a bullet for our companions; a large machete-like blade had slashed through their bodies. The guts of the male left a trace as he tried to drag himself away from the killing rage. A barbaric act, and probably a message for us. I looked at Laura with a muted question.

“I wanted you to see the place as we found it,” Laura said. “I left the two guys here, as a precaution, but instructed them not to touch anything.”

Laura gestured to our escort and the group scattered around the perimeter.

The barn was open and many animals were missing. Those still there—and their entrails—covered the floor. The walls were splattered, giving the impression concrete bled, too. A stench of gas and death assailed me.

“They poured gasoline on the carcasses,” I said.

Humans can be such experts in delivering pain. The words the Moîrai told me the first time we met found more confirmation; pity and magnanimity were virtues appreciated only by those who lacked the courage to hurt and were afraid of suffering themselves. The ones who confronted us, instead, didn’t lack this special kind of courage.

“Where’s the sign?”

Without answering, Laura took me deep inside the barn, forcing us to go through the massacre and move past the animals’ remains. Then, I saw it.

Nailed to the far end wall, almost invisible in the faint light, a drape or a banner of some sort defied me again. The sign bore a yellow-brown symbol. Before I could say anything, Laura added, “They use a tinted clay, probably ochre.”

A human left hand, missing the last phalange of the little finger, camped in the middle. A mutilated hand dyed in an earth pigment on a cotton fabric.



I looked around the table, first at Marina to my right, then at the rest of the Selected in our regions. I also nodded in the direction of Algea, one of the Moîrai and in support of many of the communities represented that day.

“We are all present.”

We didn’t need any preamble among us so I started. “We all know about the recent facts and we have all witnessed the escalation of the last months in the number of incidents,” I let my eyes meet with everyone’s in the room, “and for the territory extension now covered.” I took note of their agreement before continuing. “It is clear we face a growing, organized group.” My gaze paused at the two Selected who had previously dismissed the events as unrelated cases caused by wild predators.

Perceiving their unease, I added, “True, at first, only isolated animals had been targeted so I praise the initial caution. But it’s always better to prepare in advance for the improbable scenario before being dragged into a worse one by force.” I stared at Algea for a split second, long enough for her to understand my position. She froze—a statue with a subdued glitter—not showing any emotions, or more likely hiding them all.

“I am confident, today, we can say awareness is replacing caution.” Everyone agreed.

“Dan, if you will allow me,” started Manfred, whose community dwelt a few miles north of Civita. A Selected from Germany, Manfred had a face with sharp edges and a squared jaw, as if a divine sculptor only used dull tools to bring him to life. He never wasted words. “Shall we ensure surveillance and security during nighttime? So far, they have targeted unattended facilities only and this might prevent further attacks. Besides,” he turned toward Algea, “nothing cannot be readily restored.”

Marina interjected. “It’s a required step but, while facilities can be recovered, the lives of animals are lost forever.” Her comment caused more nodding among those present.

I continued. “Of course, time’s naturally on our side but this is no reason to take up a passive attitude. I believe we need to find these people.”

Algea stood, the look and aspect of a glimmering marble statue. We turned to look at her with a sense of surprise.

“We cherish the Humans and we proved it beyond doubt.” She paused. “Everyone in Eridu, Moîrai included, is under scrutiny. I know I do not need to remind anyone here how much your race can be dangerous, and is perceived as such. You are the ones who remember and cannot forget.”

A grave veil descended upon us as everyone was painfully aware of the tragedies of our own history. Some lowered their eyes under the burden of the emotions those words evoked.

“We, Moîrai—and other races—are not yet certain about your fate. The fear that the son of man