





104.7.14 The first time I placed my hand on Serenia's linking panel I remember thinking, "This Age will be unlike any I have journeyed to so far." And it was.

The sky was crisp and clear. The rivers and waterfalls sparkled like diamonds. Even the worn paths threading through canopies of stone took my breath away. I met a group of women who told me they had been expecting me, and as we talked late into the evening they did seem to know a

lot about me. Yet the more they explained why, the more impossible their stories seemed.

Of course, Catherine's Ages have always struck me as impossible.

Why should this one have been any different?



One of the stories the Protectors told me (for

that is what they called themselves) moves me to this day. Many (ifetimes ago, a child from the village contracted a fever and died. His parents -- who had loved him very much -- decided to bury him under a waterfall, and built a balloon to take him there. The parents' grief was so strong,



however, that when they landed their balloon, they could only carry the child a short way. So they set him down beside a giant flower and slept.

All night the mother's tears never stopped flowing. Eventually they sank through the ground and bathed the flower's roots.

Moved by the tears, the flower told the parents to carry their child

into her pistil. She would preserve his memories so they could visit him whenever they wished. Then the flower passed one of the tears back through her roots, turning it into a container to hold memories, and the father dove underwater to collect it.

And that is how the Memory Chamber first displayed her power to the Serenians.



Having read Catherine's descriptive Book, I realize that the plant the Protectors called the "Memory Chamber" is but the fruiting body of a massive fungus. Like any fungus, it recycles dead organic material into nutrients -- in this case, "filled" memory globes. Since Yeesha has recently asked to see Serenia, I will share this explanation with her -- as I did with her brothers when they were her age. Yet I cannot help thinking that my

scientific understanding of Serenia pales in comparison to the Protectors' simple tale.

104.7.15 I had not fully realized how many years have passed since I visited this Age, so when I stepped out of the linking cave with Yeesha I was pleased to see only a little has changed. A new group of women have replaced the Protectors I knew, but they seem to be as friendly as the first.

Yeesha took an immediate liking to one called Anga, and as we made plans to spend more time here in the future, I felt confident our relationship with these women would be mutually beneficial.

104.9.11 After an absence of several weeks, we returned to Serenia last night. Catherine agreed to accompany us, so we will stay for a week or more.

This morning, I took advan-

tage of Catherine's presence to re-explore alone. My route soon took me beyond Serenia's current Memory Chamber to the old abandoned flower which had served the village centuries ago.



The man-made edifice surrounding the chamber looked much the same as I remembered, although the flower itself was in a far worse state of decay. I tried opening the door to explore inside but found it locked. Just as well. Thirty years ago, the Protectors told me how the delicate inner heart of the Chamber emits a strong fragrance as part of its reproductive cycle. The closer the Chamber gets to maturation, the more toxic this gas

becomes -- forcing the Protectors
to find a new flower for their use.
No doubt the collected
fumes inside the
original Chamber
would have made
it impossible
for me to
survive there
very long.



1053.10 Catherine says I
should have seen it coming, but this

morning Yeesha asked permission to
meet Serenia's "Ancestors" I
tried to explain that the place the
Protectors call Dream is not real
(how can it be!), but she insists
on finding out for herself. So what
am I to do?

I suppose it will do no harm
to let her try. From what Anya
told me, it should take several
months for Yeesha to learn how to
dream. And it has certainly been
awhile since I have had enough

free time to concentrate on the crystal viewer's attachment. Keeping my inquisitive daughter occupied may end up being beneficial for us all.

105.6.10 I cannot believe how quickly time has flown -- today we attended a ceremony on Serenia celebrating Yeesha's mastery of their customs. I must admit, although my doubts about the Dream Realm remain, seeing my daughter's

pride as she received the Protector's necklace made it all seem worthwhile.



105.7.2 Yeesha said something strange during our writing lesson today. She thought it was sad that Catherine rarely writes anymore.

and asked if we should explain that just because someone dies after visiting an Age, it doesn't mean the Age's writer is responsible.

I knew immediately she was talking about my grandmother. Yet Catherine and I have never fully described Anna's death - so how she knew this information is a mystery. When I asked, she said her necklace had "said something" while she was holding Anna's picture.

The answer was completely

unsatisfactory, yet I must admit Yeesha has displayed an uncanny knowledge of things she never witnessed ever since receiving the Protector's gift. I would like to examine this necklace more closely. But at the moment, the situation with Sirrus and Achenar takes precedence.

Perhaps after my friend leaves us tomorrow...



