

BOOK ONE

TAKING POSSESSION

I.

Beyond the orbits of Uranus and Neptune, higher than the region of the sky where Sirius blazes, menaced by the sword of Orion, fix your gaze on the line which runs from Polaris to Andromeda on the starred vault; transport your imagination to distances greater than several million times the distance from Sirius to the Sun—equal to an unlimited, almost infinite, number of times the distance from the Sun to the Earth—and, once that particle of the immensity of the Heavens has been glimpsed even imperfectly by your mind, go farther, farther still, ascend, ascend forever!... Perhaps then you will be able to reach in thought, in the depths of the constellation of Cassiopeia, a point perceptible through a telescope only on clear and calm nights. That point, that particle of light, is the star of the constellation which astronomers designate by the Greek letter Ψ and which, up there, the beings who think and speak call *Star*.

II.

In that vault of stars, in that sea of fires, which seems like so many candles destined to light our gaze as it plunges into the fields of infinity, *Star* is only a spark strong enough to send us a filament of light; but, up there, in the vast cluster where it displays its resplendence, that faint glimmer is a harmonious system of planets and satellites, the least of which is equal to ours in size and splendor.

III.

It was toward that point in space that I directed my thoughts, and, completely permeated by the reading and study of my *Starian* books, I crossed the Heavens faster than the speed of light; no longer did anything Terrestrial occupy my thoughts: I believed that I really was on a planet in the solar system of *Star*.

Frightened at first by the audacity of my project and by the immense void, the limitless solitude, which perhaps awaited me there, I anxiously searched for signs of the passage of some intelligent and sociable beings. I was soon reassured by the newly-acquired certitude that Nature, this sumptuous universe, would be neither rational nor complete if it was not inhabited by individuals capable of feeling and appreciating its poetic beauties; so I zestfully surrendered myself to the hope of admiring and living, in spirit at least, on that marvelous sphere.

IV.

It is done! In one leap, you have joined me in this new universe.

Yet, if, in that ethereal voyage we have just made across the incommensurable ocean of space, our thoughts, grazing in their flight the stars strewn along the way like so many luminous islands, could have stopped for a moment on a sun neighboring *Star*, they would have been struck

by a singular fact. Among the millions of worlds the night shows us, hanging at various degrees in the sky, the planetary system of Star would appear as a graceful pleiad of multicolored suns and worlds and would still have been chosen from afar, for the exploration of those globes would seem to be supremely seductive and compelling.

V.

Now, we have descended onto one sphere in this system of globes; we are on an world warmed by its suns. Their heat is penetrating and inexpressible and their light soft and nuanced. And so, we propose to observe with pleasure, for here day—and even night—have a magnificence unknown to our eyes.

The region where we have set foot is rich and fertile, covered with close, vigorous, and exuberant vegetation. And it is on this dazzling life that we rest our eyes, when they are forced, though with regret, to turn to the sky, where four suns of diverse size and coloration, four bowers of celestial light, enamel the sky and sparkle from different points on the horizon.

VI.

Would that I could borrow the image-filled and sonorous expressions of the Starian language to describe the sky illuminated by its stars just as, in our Terran festivals, flashing jets of fireworks disperse in the air—the difference being that, on Star, each spark is a whole ball of fire!

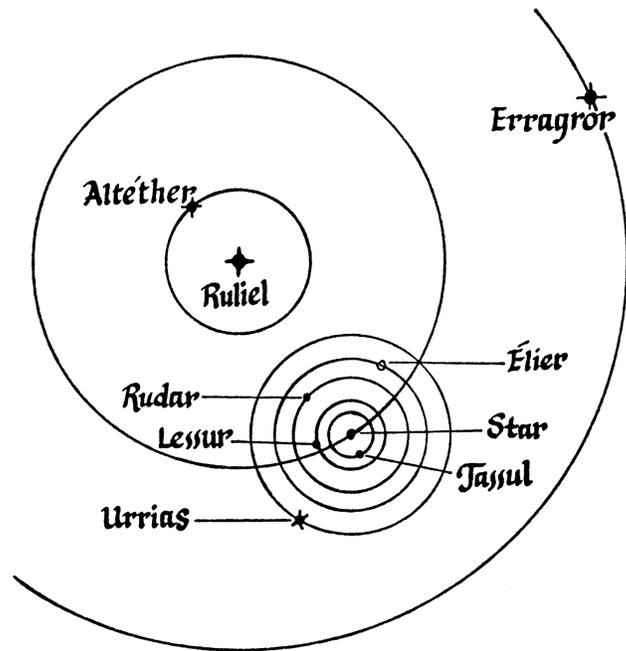
VII.

The largest disc, the central pivot, the true sun of the Starian system, is named Ruliel. Its immense sphere, whiter than a trail of lightning, radiates a light so intense and so diffuse that the clouds cannot mask it entirely and its presence on the horizon attenuates the brightness of the other three suns.

At some distance from Ruliel, rises Altéther, with a surface and corona of transparent green. Altéther is the fine green sun which often accompanies Ruliel. It precedes it like a splendid, gentle dawn and, for some time thereafter, still pours its soft rays on the earth when the great star has already drowned its huge disc in the misty limbo of the west.

To the east, rises Urrias, the blazing red sun, the light of which, tampered by the fires of Ruliel, throws out a web of pale rose rays, which redden toward the far horizon. Urrias is the sun closest to the planet called Star and, as we shall see later, is one of its satellites.

Finally, we hasten to admire the last bright star of this magnificent firmament, for Erragror, the sun with a pure blue disc, is already preparing to set and bathes that part of the sky with its soft and melancholy light.



The Starian system

VIII.

We now lower our eyes to the earth, which the fires of its stars inundate with thousands of reflections, thousands of nuances of white and colored light. Another spectacle awaits us—a spectacle wonderful and sublime as a whole, but also admirably surprising in its details.

IX.

Vast forests are before us. Some birds hovering in the air first reveal the existence of living beings. Life and motion are already around us; we are no longer alone; but, above all, we want to find thinking beings... A curious eagerness makes us hurry irresistibly in search of humanity. What are the human beings of this world? What form, what bearing, what intelligence will they disclose to us? And our imaginations, traveling with us, have already endowed them with monstrous organs and fantastic powers.

X.

Advancing, we are surprised at the enormous variations presented by the planet's vegetation. Indeed, trees of terrific vigor rise like mountains, like superb peaks; and under their canopies, shading a circumference of more than a thousand feet, delicate plants of a glazed transparency and microscopic tenuousness spread out their filiform roots.

The tallest species of tree, which dominates the distant faces of forests and sinks deep, winding channels in them, is the *syphus*, an immense plant with a thousand boughs incessantly diverging and its highest branches lost in the clouds. There is nothing on this world comparable in

size to the *slyphus*, except a marine tree called the *tarrios*, which suspends vast forests over the liquid plains of the oceans.

XI.

The foliage of the *slyphus* is of an orange color, softened by the velvet texture of the tips of its leaves; its flowers are clusters of delicate green. A generic uniformity of color is not found on this flourishing soil, either in the foliage of the trees or in the stems of the plants which cover it. Gray, blue, green and orange are the colors which most frequently clothe the leaves of plants; while the large and showy bowers are always in hues, contrasting with the foliage they accompany.

We say *contrasting* irrespective of the daylight that illuminates them, for we must not forget that, after the setting of Ruliel, the colors of the objects in the Starian world change from moment to moment, depending upon the blending or predominance of light radiated by the colored suns on the horizon.

XII.

We cross mysterious woods, where copses of trees, similar to green and yellow madrepores or other corals, raise to a man's height stone boughs covered with lovely blue flowers, as hard and unyielding as plates of ivory. This sort of forest coral seems to be a singular species of monocotyledonous tree, with an epidermis secreting a cuticle of very dense lime, which, drying in the air, envelops the trunk and branches like a sheath and gives the flowers the consistency, gleam and hardness of porcelain.

The wind claying through the branches of these trees produces metallic vibrations in chords following us with an aeolian and vaporous harmony.

XIII.

Our unforeseen arrival at the edge of a stream causes a strange tumult there. A multitude of shrubby trees with green, glossy leaves, surging up like birds, escape into the air, moving their branches and leaves in the manner of wings, and go to set themselves down on the banks, some distance away.

These bird-plants, named *bramiles*, are singular beings, which, with the structure of a plant, have the sensitivity of an animal and the ability to move by flexing branches jointed at the trunk. *Bramiles* fix themselves along the margins of streams by means of single tuberculate feet equipped with roots or claw-shaped suckers that they sink into the moist earth. Their gathering and the movement of their branches give a melancholy animation to the banks of the rivers where they live.

XIV.

Wishing to orient ourselves on this world unknown to us until now, we have climbed up the side of a high hill. Its summit is a promontory overlooking an immense sea. There, along its shores, are the *tarrios*, spreading out their crowns at water level and forming so many green islands lulled by the waves.

How many ideas of strength, majesty, and life rose up in us at the sight of these colossal trees, which, plunging their roots to the bottom of shallow seas or along its beaches, raise

powerful limbs above the waves by means of enormous trunks capable of resisting the stress of tides and storms!

XV.

Imperceptibly, the suns have moved. Erragrör has disappeared from the horizon, and Ruliel has followed it a short time afterward. Altéther itself shows its enlarged, green disc in the fluffy haze of the west. We have the privilege of seeing one of the incomplete nights of Star: while the multitude of far-away stars, eclipsed by the light of Ruliel, now become visible in the dark-blue sky, the five moons—or satellites—of Star appear, escorted by stars of the first magnitude.

But such nights, which have so many mysterious charms along the water, or in the forests that surround us, bring out splendors in the sky, and our fatigued eyes can no longer watch without resting for a moment.

XVI.

Star is the terrestrial globe, the inhabited and living sphere, the name of which has served us to designate generally the cluster of stars which we have entered.

Star is a planetary mass of ample volume, and its orbit occupies the intermediate position of the system, almost equidistant between Altéther, the green sun, and Erragrör, the blue sun. Star, like these two suns, gravitates around Ruliel, immobile at the center of the system.

Around Star, or the earth, move five small globes, of which the farthest and most voluminous is Urrias, one of the four suns streaking across the sky. The other four satellites, destitute of their own light, appear as so many moons upon which to rest the eyes in a firmament full of blinding brilliance.

The first of these moons is named Tassul, the second is called Lessur, the third Rudar, and the fourth Elier. Such are, including the glittering strings of fiery stars, the riches of the night in this marvelous world.

XVII.

Star's twilights have a captivating magic. Despite the presence of Urrias and Altéther on the plane of the horizon, the disc of Tassul, illuminated in totality by the rays of Ruliel, rises clear and silver in the east. Lessur presents a strange phenomenon; half its surface, receiving the white light of Ruliel, is the pale yellow color of Tassul, touched with a nuance of blue, while the other half, reflecting only the rays of Erragrör, presents a dim shade of blue. Rudar, on the other hand, lost amidst the red and green fires of Urrias and Altéther over our heads, suspends its crescent gleaming with chameleon colors.

XVIII.

The blue sun is already lost behind the western mountains. The red sun is also inclining toward that quarter, the tomb of all heavenly lights. For this earth, for these places always streaming with light, it is almost night—but a soft, tropical, and shimmering night.

At this moment, a singular star is rising in the blue of the opulent sky. Among the Starians, it is always contemplated with wonder. The people call it Elier. This satellite of Star is a diaphanous globe, solid and compact as an earth of crystal, but transparent as breathable air. Within the compass of the sky, where so many carbuncles shine as in a great casket, Elier is the diamond in

which all the fires of suns, moons and stars play, cross each other and are reflected. As it advances, we see it project, in distinct, blazing rays, the colors of the rainbow. All the light of the suns, penetrating it together or one by one, spread out the blazing phantasmagoria of the refractible colors of the solar spectrum, or make warmly colored rings which ripple from the center of the star toward its circumference.

XIX.

What brush could render the different phases of the physiognomy of day or night under the enchanted sky of Star, wrought by the revolution of its suns and the unexpected changes taking place each moment in their respective positions? Who could describe, above all, the phantasmagoria of changing lusters these stars display in the waves of the sea, when they plunge into the water, trembling on its surface, or mirrored in the opal shimmer of its spume?

No, I tell you, nothing is lacking in the harmonious series of light effects which tint this world and its enchanting skies, not even antithesis, not even profound darkness—for, though it is true that dark nights are rare for the Starians, they nevertheless do come occasionally, when some lingering moon, or even some pale sun in its decline, appears alone, veiled by an atmosphere of heavy clouds.

Star, then, also has its shadows.

XX.

Oh, the brilliant and gentle night! A breath of warm wind brings us the roaring of the sea beating on the marble cliffs; then, at intervals, other, more distinct, sounds coming from the neighboring forests throw our souls—already amazed by such a beautiful spectacle—into an abyss of dreamy contemplation.

On the world of Star, melody comes from every side, almost as widespread as the air skimming over the ground and rustling in the grass. Not only has Nature given birth to multitudes of birds, almost all with musical voices, but even mammiferous animals are heard—their passionate cries being songs the traveler hears at a distance with delight.

If there are humans in this harmonious world, they must stop sometimes to listen to the chords produced by a sort of tree-gourd, swinging to and fro in the breeze. The fruit of this forest tree, called the *lartimor*, is suspended on long, flexible stalks, or peduncles, and consists of a nut with a shell of unusual hardness and elasticity. At maturity, the top of the nut turns toward the ground and opens, or, rather, uncovers itself and allows the liquid that fills it to run out. The empty shell remains thus for several years without alteration, and the sounds produced by groups of these shells of various diameters knocking against each other are harmonious notes which the wind makes sigh or roar according to whether it is calm or tempestuous.

Ah, yes, if there are humans on this world, the *lartimors* must have more than once revealed to them the harmonies of Nature.

XXI.

Let us leave our somnolent and contemplative reverie, for Rueliel is rising to chase the penumbra from the sky; the white sun appears, and soon our eyes, aided by its brilliance, have encompassed the final limits of the horizon to the east.

As the light delineates objects more distinctly, we experience vague thrills of hope and fear. Finally, we cannot doubt it: it is indeed the distant prospect of a great city that we see at the very extremity of the visible horizon. Quick! forward, oh! hurry—for we long to meet and question the prince of creation on this splendid planet.