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Independent Scholar

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Epistles to Our Mother

(A Sauúiverse story)

Biographical note:

Eugen Bacon is an African Australian author. She's a British Fantasy and Foreword Indies Award winner, a twice World Fantasy Award finalist, and a finalist in the Shirley Jackson, Philip K. Dick, Victorian Premier's Literary Award, and the Nommo Awards for speculative fiction by Africans. Eugen was announced in the honor list of the Otherwise Fellowships for 'doing exciting work in gender and speculative fiction'. *Danged Black Thing* made the Otherwise Award Honor List as a 'sharp collection of Afro-Surrealist work'.

It happened one dusk as the planet Wiimb-ó came into syzygy with the two suns Zuúv’ah and Juah-āju and its physical moon, Javuili. It was an event that also triggered the two spirit moons, Vuiili-ki and Vuiili-ku, as darkness floated over sunshine three bés straight – all standard days so to speak.

The shattering phenomena
shifted the planes of existence
and liquefied boundaries
between realities and alternate realities.

The event superimposed substitute philosophies in any place where dark matter and energy existed. It also opened the gateway to Eh’wauizo, the afterlife, and a governing council intercepted the following messages that whispered in the air across the federation of planets.

From E’d’em, a young woman, planet Pinaa:

E’d’em: Dear Our Mother. My boyfriend Ar’Tam is watching, always watching, even as he rotates on his axis. But, when I confront him about the weird vibes he’s emitting, he denies it ever happened. I want to use my magic on him, but I won’t. I love him, please help...

Our Mother: Dear E’d’em, seeing that you’re on Pinaa, I can only surmise that your boyfriend Ar’Tam is an AI. What he needs, what he really needs, when energy stops converting into crystals and his command modules lag, is your touch. He has never felt the calming brush of a woman’s fingers on her stomach, as he presses his foot or nose from a foetal pose in a womb, because he was created whole – he was never a foetus. He has never pushed his face at a teat and moved his tongue to bring forth milk as he held his mother’s gaze, because – as you know – his limbs, torso, spine and processing system were put together grown. He has never bonded with a smell or a heartbeat, just the language of sound

and instruction from a programming module that taught him involutions of work cycles. Touch him, E'd'em, touch him. Touch this boyfriend of yours and give him skin-to-skin contact, otherwise he will fail to thrive and might malfunction and go offline indefinitely.

From Mpo'nzi, a little girl, planet Ekwukwe:

Mpo'nzi: Dear Our Mother – is all this talk of climatic anomalies a heap of chekele'le poop?

Our Mother: Dear Mpon'zi. Are we all a heap of chekele'le poop? The laughing wilderness beast with its greediness and two short hind legs might not take too kindly to this comparison.

Mpo'nzi: Dear Our Mother. I am sorry. It is not easy. If you lived in Ekwukwe, you would understand this. My sound echo is weak, but there are many hollows and caves in which I can hide from the starkness of daily living, not to mention the seasonal infestations of aze'aze, those giant fireflies with the heads of a goat, or the dragon-no – one recently ate the cousin of the cousin of the cousin of my mother's sister-in-law, which, as you know, makes them my auntie. When I close my eyes, an inka-inka invades my dreams and it eats me alive. Sometimes I want to transform into a p'hobawawa, the one-eyed bat, so I can haunt all those people I come in contact with, and maybe it will stop this unsettlement that I feel inside my core.

Our Mother: Dear Mpo'nzi. It sounds like you're in the anger stage of grief, arising from the recent demise of your auntie. I recommend a trip to Wiimb-ó – there's a really good market in T'Songesonge, where you can see a trio of musos playing the k'hora'aa, luhte'te and ngonini together, in joyful and wistful music that is caressing and dangerous. You will find that it is everything you need in rebuilding yourself and it will help you move through the remaining stages of grief. There's also another market in Inku'lulu, Zezépfeni, where the

From Jebe'le'lah, scholar, Wiimb-ó:

Jebe'le'lah: Dear Our Mother, I am a scholar of catastrophes and it concerns me immensely that – with all the axial tilts and meteor strikes happening in Zezépfeni; the anomalous sonic storms and deserts rampant in Órino-Rin; the increasing occurrences of radiation in the inhabited moon, Pinaa, with its little vegetation; the distorted echoes and cascading wilderness of Ekwukwe that's attracting all those humanoid-chomping beasts; and the floods, hurricanes and bushfire-inducing temperature soars happening all the time in Wiimb-ó – we are closer yet again to a perilous end. What will you do to prevent another apocalyptic event across the federation?

Our Mother: Dear Jebe'le'lah, it's true that strange climatic phenomena are affecting the federation, and that's tragic. But humanoids, with their greediness and sloppiness, are the biggest menace to our survival. Remember the destruction that happened all those hundreds of juzu ago killing off swathes of populace and making hunters and refugees of men, women and children? It was the outcome of time-magic gone wrong. Humanoids did it to themselves. We lost the entirety of planet Mahwé and whole cultures as a result of idiocy and gluttony. But freewill is a thing and I have no plan to contain it.

At first, the exclusive citizens privy to the messages received them with much urgency. An emergency meeting of the planetary federation council convened, representatives from each planet bellowing at the conference – in person or across holographic feeds – their right to be concerned. They discussed, put forth and abandoned action plans because there was a struggle to find consensus, particularly, with the delegation from Zezépfeni insisting on more weight to their votes. Everyone haggled their cause, why this or that was the best discourse. Who could say what the future held in store? The Raevaagi, bearers of histories, recited probabilities, but scholars from mahadums across the planets beat down each calculus with

the language of edification. They all bargained, harangued, cajoled and threatened until the urgency of the situation passed.

Anyone who had anything to complain about took to the streets. The living conditions were terrible. There was disparity in the possession of sound magic. Everyone was equal, but the AI in Pinaa were more equal than humanoids... There were too many migrants, too many non-humanoids, too many floods, too many solar storms, too many, too many everything!

An order of sâkoukou – secret assassins – was enacted (it wasn't clear by whom) to cut down dissent under the legacy of royal guards. Student, novice and initiate activists – even inatani, the scholars who taught them in the mahadums – chanted slogans and found themselves banished to pools of silence across pockets in whichever planets, from whence they emerged tamed or irrational. Sometimes, more severe punishments – such as the tearing out of tongues or one-way odysseys to Eh'wauizo – were deemed necessary (also unclear by whom) to impede

aberrant speech

that would

destabilise

the planets.

Rumours rang around of other localised terrors, details of which remained mostly obscure and just about no one knew enough to talk about them. But these dissatisfactions were also promptly stifled. Among the few of understanding, the keepers of secrets – counting some inatani, those ones who had stayed clear of the protests, some raevaagi (bearers of history), and members of the planetary federation council – there was growing cause to believe that the whispers seemingly originating from Our Mother, the Creator, all those shimmering recitals that had infiltrated the planets, were no such thing. It was reasonable to assess them as profound trickery, a mind projection from an ancient menigari,

once spiritually attuned, who had lost their mind or grown disgruntled with the way that was from the beginning; now they were intercepting prayers of the faithful, and answering them, in a deeply-ingrained conviction that they were a layered voice, an extension of the creator.

To make amendments, to appease ancestral spirits and Our Mother, the Creator, and avoid a rampantness of malevolent spectres reaping gain from chaos in unpredictable levels, planning fell full swing for a festival of atonement. The reddest blood of the whitest cockerel flowed. Musos across the planets plucked the k'hora'aa to its sweetest echo. Maracas rattled, ngonini drums boom, boom, baaa'ed, and a resonance of echo magic vibrated the air. Before long, harmonious chanting superseded any unsettledness and pervaded the streets and dirt tracks and boulevards every which way at intervals, a synchrony of recitals intoning the song of Our Mother:

Khwa'ra. It is acquired.

Ya'yn. It is uttered.

Ra'kwa. It is released.