**A free sample from the novel The Next Birth**

*I always thought that the brain was the most important organ in the body.*
*But then I realised who was telling me this.*
*Pavel Kantorek*

The story *The Next Birth* is (just seemingly) about the Lemurians, an ancient race said to have developed their civilisation about 70,000 years ago, somewhere in the south-west Pacific, between Indo-China and Australia.

Lemurians were living through alternating periods of peace and prosperity, conflicts and crises over the millennia. During this time, they made considerable advances in culture, politics, sciences and technology, causing only minor ecological catastrophes. At the peak of their civilisation, the Lemurian people were both technically advanced and very spiritual. However, they were unaware that the indifferent Nature was leading their world towards an ultimate cataclysm. Fortunately, alongside the Lemurians and several neighbouring nations that worked hard to enslave one another, another civilisation (if one is to believe the fragments that appear in certain legends and myths), much older and hence somewhat more mature, was witnessing this course of events.

In continuation, the plot is expanded beyond the boundaries of planet Earth by projecting the trajectory of the evolution of living species. New forms of living entities have evolved over a period of four billion years from common ancestors through hereditary variation and natural selection, resulting in myriads of distinct species. This evolution is characterised by the development of attributes such as the capacity for growth, reaction to stimuli, metabolism, and reproduction. This process brought forward mutations equipped with ever-better sensing abilities and ultimately led to the rise of the breed with the brains, arguably occupying the highest position on the evolutionary ladder. The new Homo Telepathic has further developed powerful technical means such as AI and deep space communication technology. This, in turn, has contributed to the mind evolving into a higher stage, capable of imagination experienced by visionaries such as Leonardo da Vinci, Pascal, Newton, Galilei, Mendeleev, Einstein, Gauss, Lagrange, and Tesla, to mention only a few in arbitrary order.

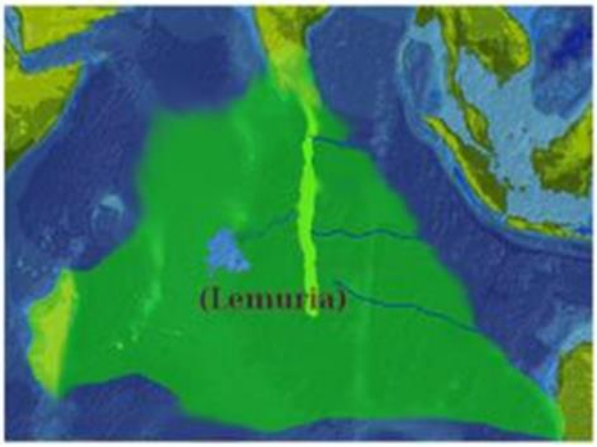
Much like the blue-coloured hyperlinks in this preface, the hidden hyperlinks dispersed within the story can be found by hovering the cursor over the text. This approach is based on the belief that satisfying the reader's curiosity when coming across certain terms is of great importance. "Curiosity may put the brain in a state that allows it to learn and retain any kind of information, like a vortex that sucks in what you are motivated to learn, and also everything around it", wrote A. Durayappah. Furthermore, "when curiosity is stimulated, there is an increased activity in the reward centre in the brain... The investigators at the University of California found increased activity in the hippocampus during curiosity-motivated learning... They also found that engaging curiosity learning increased interactions between the hippocampus and the reward circuit."

# Part 1 - THE 4th BIRTH

## Prelude

*All gods were immortal.* (*Stanislaw J Lec*)

Some Tamil writers, such as Devaneya Pavanar, associate Lemuria with Kumari Kandam, a legendary sunken landmass mentioned in Tamil literature, and claim that it was the cradle of civilisation. While the existence of this ancient race is not scientifically proven, a number of intriguing archaeological and geological finds exist in the south-west Pacific region. For example, the scientific evidence confirms that the ancestors of the peoples of New Guinea and Australia might have arrived in that region more than 60,000 years ago.




Others believe that Lemuria stretched as far as Madagascar. The biogeographic origins of Madagascar's fauna remains one of the greatest mysteries, as eighty percent of the island's species are endemic, meaning they are found nowhere else on Earth. This island is home to a bewildering array of wildlife, from sideways-jumping lemurs to picturesquely colourful chameleons. The name "lemur" comes from the Latin word "lemures", meaning "ghosts" or "spirits". Even the etymology of some ancient words, such as amor, mare, and l'amor, points to very old linguistic roots underlying the most ancient myths about the sea and man's yearnings for ethereal sentience.

These controversial myths about the existence of Lemuria are complemented by fairly argued hypotheses regarding the causes of its disappearance. There is also geological evidence of large-scale changes in temperature and sea levels, as well as the rise of new oceans and landmasses. The sinking of Lemuria may well be linked to the raising of the Himalayas and the emergence of the Amur river system. It appears that a cataclysm of enormous magnitude took place in that region some 70,000 years ago, as is confirmed by recent research into the genesis of the Earth's crust. During that time, the sea level was much lower than today, and much of Maritime Southeast Asia was a single landmass known as the lost continent of Sunda.

About that time, the Visitors, who belonged to an entirely different phylogeny – a highly developed race from some system of an evolution in the infinitely distant past – became aware of signs of the rarest phenomenon in the Universe: Intelligence. For many years, the Visitors acted as invisible observers, not intervening, nor becoming involved with their subjects of study. However, when the course of the planet Earth turned towards catastrophe, they decided to step in.

## The First Birth

*Real birthdays are not annual affairs.*
*Real birthdays are the days when we have a new birth.*
*Ralph Parlette*

The first birth, the most familiar wonder known to the Lemurians—as it is to our own civilisation—has been experienced by all mammals and many other branches of fauna over the innumerable millennia of evolution. The survival of mankind would be unthinkable without conception, pregnancy, and birth. Some even believe that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them; life obliges them, over and over again, to give birth to themselves.

— No-Ja, I had that strange dream again, — said A-Eg-Le as they walked down the alley of junipers and cypresses. Birds were fluttering through the trees and bushes, their twitter mingling with the ceaseless splash and gurgle of the nearby fountain, the voices of passers-by, and the murmur of the distant city. — We were sitting on the beach and the sand was white, not like the sand on Toba lakeshore or any seaside I have ever seen...
No-Ja looked at her with his dark, smiling eyes — I was on such beaches while camping with my parents last year...
— But I've never seen such a seashore! — objected A-Eg-Le haltingly.
— Maybe you saw a photo or a painting, — said No-Ja gently, pulling her to avoid an excited group of schoolies dressed in blue-and-white uniforms.
— The water was so clear and quiet, and I can still picture that clean, balmy sand. But then...

— No-Ja! I hope this is just a nightmare! — A mighty bass drowned out her voice and caused a minor earthquake, the centre of which was detected by the birds that escaped in sphero-radial directions. The powerful slam on No-Ja's shoulders meant that his teammate Su-Mo had spotted them despite the large crowd cheerfully roaming all over the place.
— Are you out of your mind? — Su-Mo's tone was now lowered by fifty decibels. — The game starts in less than two hours, and the crowd is already taking the best seats...
A-Eg-Le gave them both a grim look before turning to inspect the fish in the nearby pond.

— Look, Su-Mo, leave my ticket with me and you go ahead. Nobody will notice if you take two seats anyway, — whispered No-Ja, earning another blow to his abdomen. However, at least A-Eg-Le was facing in another direction, and he had time to hide the ticket in his sleeve.

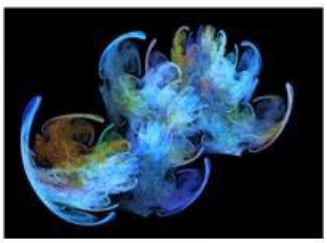
The red, yellow, and blue fish wriggled around A-Eg-Le's fingers, immersed in the pond. No-Ja gently grasped her wet hand, and the wishing fish escaped between the wishing coins, blinking below the surface.

— Shall we go camping again this weekend while your rents are still on holiday? — he said as they continued walking. She didn't answer, she just followed him, musing on the sensation that had sparkled in her fingers from the touch of his hand. As they made their way back towards the bus station, she decided not to continue with her story about the eruption in a lagoon she had dreamt about…

When thinking about how life itself was born, the time span becomes elusive because *that* birth could not happen over the period of one year or even a thousand years. Perhaps a more appropriate timeframe should cover the phenomena antecedent to the appearance of protocells, the possible predecessors of life.

Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and their refinements such as Genetics and Astrobiology provide plausible descriptions for the developments in the matter-forms that led to the existence of organic compounds. As the mutations of the self-replicating organic compounds persisted in favourable environments, the first RNAs came into existence by means of combining free-floating nucleotides that emerged in a primordial soup of molecules. Organic building blocks such as nucleotides can form under a wide range of conditions. These units bonded together to make strands of RNA that weren't very stable and degraded quickly. Some RNA-based forms eventually switched to DNA, which shows a much higher stability. Following this avenue led to considering protocells as the possible predecessors of life. A number of theories consider single-celled forms (prokaryotes) to be on the boundary between the living and non-living forms. The eukaryotes (plants, animals, fungi and protists) separated from the prokaryotes (bacteria and archaea) more than a billion years ago (some say four billion). Present-day cells evolved from a common prokaryotic ancestor. In summary, evolution on the Earth has permuted the clusters of molecules for millions of years, until favourable combinations have enabled oxygenic photosynthesis and aerobic cellular respiration and the subsequent development of living organisms.

Yet, a more thorough understanding of life boundaries might unravel still different trajectories.



The Lemurians achieved a competent understanding of childbirth, at the sunset of their civilisation. They not only learned how to increase the success rate of natural delivery, conception, and pregnancy, but also how to induce semi-artificial pregnancy with excellent acceptance rates. They realised that delivery was not the beginning, but merely a developmental transition. They devoted meticulous care to all stages of pregnancy, including the moment of conception, which required both rational hope and sincere intention to create a healthy and happy child.

— My dear girl, you are right, you conceived at least one month ago, — the Health Adviser pronounced in her benevolently modulated voice. — You'll be pleased to hear that your medical check-ups confirm that your health is in perfect order to...

A-Eg-Le was not sure whether that confirmation had stirred her fears or raised her spirits. Her heart trembled as she remembered No-Ja's words of comfort and his determination to have their baby. She and No-Ja had already used the pregnancy probe kit and were almost certain that she had conceived.

— …have you already thought about a session with the antenatal counsellor? This would help you to prepare yourself for what comes next.
— Oh yes, I'd like to make an appointment. Could we schedule it before the end of the month — A-Eg-Le rushed to answer, as if afraid that the counsellor might sense the turmoil in her mind.

A-Eg-Le left the Health Suite overwhelmed by mixed emotions, the intensity of which surprised her. The atmosphere of being directed as to what to do, and the Health Advisor implying that she had already decided to keep the baby, sparked an unfamiliar feeling of being trapped. The sense of being forced into something that that would fundamentally change her life filled her with such strong emotion she was ready to burst into tears. She didn't want to use the elevator, and by the time she reached the ground floor, she was nearly running.

Shapeless corridors, faceless bystanders, and colourless walls streamed past her until she almost ran into No-Ja, who grasped her shoulders. The familiar smile lines around his eyes were still there. He folded her into his arms and held her until her own smile, fragile at first, finally surfaced. Then they walked the old walkways, down to the river and uphill along winding paths, until the gardens and fountains replaced the noisy streets beginning their evening shimmer. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, a feeling of happiness welled up within her, and a quiet glee took hold. It felt as if it would stay forever, or at least for this timeless while.

They stayed longer than usual, until daylight waned, twilight faded, and it started to become cold. Walking downhill was easy for them as they had visited the gardens so many times. A-Eg-Le stopped to look at the stars before they reached the streetlights.
— Look, the star is falling! — she was about to shout, when what she thought was a comet reversed its course and started climbing in the dark sky with increasing speed. No-Ja, who turned to look at her, now stared in amazement in the same direction.
— This must be one of those inventions the Army is coming up with nowadays, — he said later, when they reached the cross-section near her home. — Whenever the quarrels at the northern borders escalate, they get approved budget for some new war toys.

Over time, issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, postnatal depression, and unwanted pregnancies became rare. One of the unintended but significant consequences was a sexual revolution, liberating young Lemurians—and those who felt young enough—from the fear of unwanted pregnancy. Lovers were free to enjoy their love. Thus, the path to happiness was paved—however, some wanted more.

Despite the advanced technology of Lemuria and the immense wealth of the Federation, the gap between the wealthiest 3% and the rest of the population widened significantly. Lemurian sociologists attributed this disparity to the political disempowerment of goods producers and the rising dominance of financial administrators. They argued that the wealthy had established a monopoly over media and other vital sources of information. However, these theories found little favour with the Federation's decision-makers—the politicians and top industrial managers. Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority of these administrators and authorities were counted among the affluent 3%.

No one in all of Lemuria—least of all Mo-Ne-Ve herself—could have guessed that in that moment, she would one day be known to the world because of an oil painting on a wooden panel. Everyone was busy washing the blood from the tiny, slippery body, cutting the umbilical cord, and comforting A-Eg-Le as she fought to remain conscious. She still could not believe the contractions had stopped. Summoning the last of her strength, she lifted her head to look at her baby. Mo-Ne-Ve was fighting for her breath, her legs kicking, and as soon as she took her first gulping gasp of air, she used all of it to cry out.

A-Eg-Le could not see No-Ja; the health adviser had decided to keep him away the moment his challenges and questions began to disrupt the delivery. But she was certain he was just as anxious as she was, wishing with great intensity to help their fragile little being cross the thin line between life and death. As though she could hear their thoughts, the adviser grasped No-Ja's arm and said,— The child is well. She's breathing. Everything is good...
— And the mother? How is A-Eg-Le? Why can't I see her? — No-Ja kept asking, his panic barely concealed.
'*Oh my gosh, another first-timer*,' thought the adviser, a calming smile fixed on her face. '*Can't they see this is just another delivery?... One cute baby tonight, another one tomorrow...'*

But when she spoke, her voice was all reassurance and empathy. — White coat time. There's nothing to worry about. Everything on the Earth is just in perfect order.

The advisor was rightly optimistic about the outcomes in the maternity ward, where every delivery was handled with meticulous care and expertise. Yet, she was mistaken about the state of the Earth, particularly the continent of Asia.

Hundreds of kilometres below, immense forces had—at that very moment—fractured the tectonic plate, unleashing magma from its thousand-year entombment. The earth muffled the underground roar as it flexed its titanic ligaments, building a pressure capable of levelling mountain ranges. Reluctantly and slowly, millions of tons of lava receded into the depths of the mantle. It would return, very soon and very swiftly.

Hundreds of kilometres above, sensors on a satellite in low Earth orbit recorded their data. The signals, sent to an unknown destination, were detected by a Lemurian astronomical observatory. But all efforts to locate the emitter failed, just as every attempt to decode the captured transmission yielded nothing but silence and static.

To the Lemurian scientists, it was inconceivable that Mother Nature could have exhausted all the lures that motivated the leaders in the evolutionary race to reproduce their own kind. Despite their education, sophistication, civilisation, and gentleness, the best of young Lemurians seemed to be losing interest in having children as they learned to enjoy their social lives, art, science, sex, and love.

Moreover, the paradox of exponentially increasing birth rates in the neighbouring underdeveloped nations, set against the stagnant natality in the highly developed Lemurian Federation, sparked heated debates. The most straightforward explanation was that the less developed societies were guided by a natural instinct to compensate for high mortality rates due to poor medical, nutritional, and other factors that shortened their lifespan. This reality stood in stark contrast to the prosperous welfare and comfort enjoyed by the Lemurians. Seemingly, this very inequality fostered a highly inflammable friction along the Federation's northern borders with the impoverished regions.

Was this a sign that the tribal nations to the north were more vital? Had the Lemurians overlooked fundamental biological truths in their race for technological advancement? It was not long before more serious dilemmas surfaced in the search for answers to these questions.

As education and living standards rose, Lemurians grew increasingly preoccupied with a long-deferred question: why was each individual sentenced to a merciless process of ageing? Their youth stood at the threshold of adulthood without any solution to this distressing enigma. In a childlike hope of deferring this terminal indignity, many refused to accept responsible roles in adult society, believing that to do so would invite an accelerated physio-psychical decline.

Were they lost in desperation, or were they intuitively avoiding futile paths in search of a hidden passage?

Meanwhile, the rulers of the Lemurian Federation struggled to revitalise the workforce and, more pressingly, the supply of cadets for their military crews. Although the Lemurians possessed the region's most advanced technology, the rapidly growing populations of neighbouring nations—plagued by chronic instability across all socioeconomic structures, from food shortages to epidemics—proved a continuous source of threat along the Federation's borders.

The Lemurians began experiments with cloning relatively late in their history. In the last fifty years, scientists have conducted experiments in gene and reproductive cloning. A revolutionary work in therapeutic cloning was just beginning when ethical dilemmas over embryonic erupted on an unprecedented scale. The Lemurian public would not accept cloning that involved the destruction of human embryos in the test tube. As public aversion grew, lawmakers were forced to ban even animal cloning. However, the Lemurian military, along with certain scientists and scholars in bioengineering and cybernetics, never ceased their theoretical and laboratory research. While all laboratory evidence indicated that cloning technology was converging on the successful reproduction of a human body, the cloning of memory—or consciousness—remained a completely different puzzle.

Memory engrams are unique, built from the personal experiences of each human. A memory is encoded in the specific pattern of neurons that fire when given a stimulus. Consciousness, therefore, is much like a pathway through the brain: when the beginning of the path is triggered, neurons fire electromagnetic impulses along a paved chain of synapses. This includes the interconnection of nearly 100 billion neurons, each possessing a unique architecture of neurotransmitters and receptors shaped by individual experience. For the most enthusiastic theorists, replicating such a system was a dream for a thousand years hence.