Prodigal

*** Chapter 2 (second half), appendix (v. v2.7.8)\textsuperscript{1}

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Drew McDermott

May 6, 2016

\textsuperscript{1}This is a draft, obviously. Please send comments to airfoyle@gmail.com.
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Chapter 2

Ambassadors

Note: This is the last third of the chapter. For the complete current draft, see http://cs-www.cs.yale.edu/homes/dvm/nhwg/current

Fortunately, Allaň smiled on them and they came down safely, right where they aimed, Rocket Landing Area B of city #1’s airport, whose actual designation was the “Airoporto Entercontinentaal dje Saonwpow–lu.”

As soon as the landing thrusters shut off, the hatches opened automatically, stairs unfolded, and Tralf and Sangh got out. Or so they intended, but all their reflexes were off. They had forgotten that gravity made it necessary to stand up, not just push off, and they struggled like a drunk with an overcoat. Sangh stood wobbily in the hatchway, then tried turning around and coming down the short stairway as if descending a ladder, as they had
trained to do. He missed the first stair and slid bumpily down, landing on his knees. He rolled out of Tralf’s way. Tralf started laughing hysterically, but Sangh had ripped his helmet off and could barely hear the guffaws coming through the fishbowl still on Tralf’s head. He lay looking up at the smoking thrusters, rolled over, and managed to stand up before inhaling. By then Tralf was at the bottom of the stairlet, on his ass rather than his knees, taking his helmet off.

Standard procedure for landing on unfamiliar planets required that they run chemical-assay kits and remain within 10 meters of the landing craft before removing anything, but how could Erth be unfamiliar? They were so greedy for lungfuls of native air, they didn’t mind the lingering fumes. Under the chemical stink of their escape pod, the air tasted like home. The day was overcast, but it seemed like the most beautiful day since the Creation. Sangh and Tralf blinked back the dimmed sunshine and started to laugh with delight. For a couple of minutes they could do little else but laugh or babble helplessly.

“Wow, look at those trees!”

“Was the sky this big back on Prezghod?”

“Lord, if I die now, I will die happy!”

They didn’t hear a golf-cart-sized vehicle until it was right behind them.
They turned unsteadily, ready to greet whoever was driving it, their first Ertîling, but there was no driver.

“It’s remotely controlled,” said Tralf, cautiously approaching it.

“No, sirs,” said the vehicle, “I am a robot; no remote control is normally required.”

“Jhesus,” said Tralf, crossing himself.

Sangh was a bit forewarned by his experience with Sheessay Dezeenauvee. “The local term is Blocku,” he said. “I believe Allah will protect us from its mischief for the duration of a ride to the terminal.”

“It’s a robot, and I remember the Bible stories about robots from school.”

“Yes, Lieutenant Ghiller, you are correct. I am a robot, not a Bloco. All I do is give people rides. Do you want a ride to the main terminal? Or somewhere else? My instructions are to bring you to the main terminal, where President Travers awaits you.”

“Oh come on, Tralf, let’s have faith in Allah and go for a ride.”

“Help me out of this suit first. I want to look like a diplomat.”

As they struggled to get out of their gear, Sangh had time to think about the tiny prison he had escaped, and the huge exercise yard they were both now in. The space they could move freely in seemed so vast that it hardly seemed possible that Vhatta Limhoon could ever reach down and pluck them.
They tossed the suits into the escape pod, and climbed, steadier now, into the golf cart. It toodled off. How weird to see the pod from a distance and then have it vanish as they rounded the corner of the nearest building. They would have no reason Sangh could think of to see it again.

It took only two minutes to drive around the tarmac of the airport to the main terminal, one wing of which was decorated with bunting and balloons. In the front a reviewing stand had been set up as if a parade were expected and, sure enough, just as Sangh and Tralf motored up, a short column of Prezghod marines came marching past, headed by Lieutenant Commander Kolfhaj and one of the academics in his group, Bewinda Wharbut, the historian. There was a small brass band, dominated by a virtuosic tuba player. They were playing the national anthem of Prezghod, which warmed Sangh’s heart for two seconds, before the warmth was short-circuited by a chill.

“How the hell do they know the national anthem?” said Tralf.

“Just what I was wondering.”

“Right? I don’t grab.”

Soon enough the band switched to another bland march, which one might infer was the national anthem of Erth. Sangh and Tralf trudged up the steps to the platform upon which stood a small group of Erthlings. They
had to use the railing to pull themselves up, and were struggling by the
time they had gone five steps, even though they didn’t have to deal with the
clumsy spacesuits any more. The welcoming committee at the top started to
applaud, and Sangh realized that the crowd had been applauding all along,
but the tuba music had obliterated the sound. Sangh and Tralf waved at
their fans, got their second wind, and went on up.

The group on the reviewing stand was dominated by a tall, slightly pudgy,
but rather handsome man, whose age was hard to determine. Sangh decided
to assume this was President Traavayrs. He wondered for a second what
was going to happen next, then realized that as ambassador he should do
more than pant and wave.

He stepped up to the tall man. The band cut off abruptly, as if every
member wanted to hear what Sangh had to say. What he had practiced,
with Tralf’s help, was a sentence in Tayhanu: “We come in peace, seeking
our ancestors,” He hoped they had gotten it right. A roar of applause arose
from the spectators as they realized what he was trying to say; there was
a bit of good-natured laughter, too, at what he had said, whatever it was.
Sangh continued in Glish: “We are sorry for the delay in establishing rela-
tions, but we were waiting for an official ambassadorial appointment to come
through.” He presented the president with the scroll that Vhatta Limhoon
and Commander Dhluzio had prepared, which purported to be direct from Poph Philippine 6, and which appointed Sangh and Tralf ambassadors extraordinaire to Tayha, a planet “we might come to love as a mother.” It had a large, full-color paphal seal.

Sangh bowed to President Traavayrs, then to LtCdr. Kolfhaj, who took this as a sign to come forward and join him on the reviewing stand. Sangh extended his hand to the President and smiled broadly. Shouldn’t there be TV cameras rolling? Where were they?

“I’m not likely to be your ancestor,” the handsome man said. “But I might be related to one of them. Hi! My name is Ronaldo Travers, President of the Solar System. They say I’m the Decider, but” (and he winked) “I think they’re humoring me.”

The whole conversation would have been mutually unintelligible, but there was a slight, unassuming man standing at the president’s elbow, who was just as fluent in Glish as Šheessay Dezeenauvee. He translated Sangh’s words into Tayhanu, and translated the president’s words into Glish, as they were spoken. Sangh’s smile dimmed momentarily. Not a Molyu, couldn’t be.

President Traavayrs’s handshake lasted a long time, which would have allowed a multitude of photographers to take many shots apiece of the historic meeting, if there had been any present. Maybe the cameras were just
hard to spot. The President’s smiles seemed to be directed toward one group of spectators, who had their own roped-off area, closer than the main crowd. These must be the press.

It was hard not to like President Traavayrs. His firm grip and chiseled face went well with the grin he kept flashing. His skin was the color of autumn leaves, after they’ve lain on the ground for a week or two. He introduced the “man” next to him as his chief of staff, Fràhnk Pauwers. Sangh made no attempt to shake hands with Fràhnk. “I believe, Mr. President, that this man is a robot,” said Sangh in Glish, not thinking until Fràhnk repeated the sentence in Tayhanu that he would have to be trusted to vilify himself with his translation. Sangh remembered from his catechism that robots were prime tools of Sathan, “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). He was embarrassed all over again that he had fallen for Šheess’s tricks, which Vhatta Limhoon had suspected from the start.

But Pauwers apparently translated Sangh’s accusation faithfully, because Travers just said, “Fràhnk a robot? Oh no, he’s a Bloco.” Again this sharp distinction — *Robots are machines powered by demons; what the size or shape of the demon is doesn’t matter, they’re all the same.* Some of the terrifying sizes and disgusting shapes he could still remember from theology classes, along with plenty of terrifying stories involving machines brought to life by
demons. Robot or Blocku, he would not shake the thing’s hand.

His attention could not stay on the Blockus or the Molyus in his vicinity for long when there was so much else to see. The main attractions were the simultaneously huge and spindly towers rising from the south side of the airport (they had landed in the north). Sangh and Tralf noticed them at about the same time, and both their jaws dropped. They were presumably the termini of launch loops. The nearer tower was used for hurling vehicles up, the further for bringing them down. Each rose into the sky like a thread, vanishing at a height where it was too thin to be perceptible. Vehicles were rising on the near tower at a rate of one every ten seconds or so, accelerating faster than seemed possible. The vehicles must have been reaching supersonic speeds at a high altitude, because no audible thunder from them was reaching the ground. The background noise at an airport on Prezghod would have been the constant rumble of jets taking off, and the occasional rocket. When a jet did finally take off, with a roar, the contrast was startling.

“Not many of those,” said Tralf. “Right?”

“So most of their orbital and suborbital traffic must be carried by the . . . vehicles going up the . . . towers? At least from this place.”

“Right? Really!”

“I’m guessing that just as many vehicles come down Tower B as go up
“Unless vehicles are piling up somewhere. Those aren’t the only two towers, either, but the buildings are blocking our view.”

Sangh was dying to see the inside of the airport from which all this traffic departed, but it was not to be. A fleet of black limousines came rolling up. They looked about the same as official cars looked back on Prezghod, except for the absence of visible drivers, of course. The cars were roofless, to allow the crowds to get a view of their dignitaries. President Travers beckoned to Sangh and Tralf and waved them toward the lead limousine.

The group of diplomats, officials, and soldiers oozed toward the cars, waving to the spectators and press. Sangh and Tralf got tantalizing glimpses of the bases of launch towers, and started to point them out to Bewinda, but they were soon enough hustled into the lead car. The Tayhans seemed to want to get the two ambassadors alone, but Kolfhaj vetoed that.

“Lieutenant Fharha! Lieutenant Ghiller! Ambassadors or not, you’re still under my command, and I have orders to stay with you at all times.”

“That will not be a problem, Commander,” said Fränk Pauwers smoothly, signaling to the major-domo on the other side of the car to open the door for Kolfhaj. Or perhaps he was a member of the brass band who had exchanged his instrument for door duty. He certainly was no soldier: not with a bright-
green uniform dripping with gold braid, no weapon in sight. Whether he was a Blocku or a Molyu Sangh could not judge. Kolfhaj, a tall man, folded himself into the car, and, to Sangh’s surprise, Bewinda came scampering after him. Perhaps she thought he was most likely to keep her safe.

The interior of the limo was incredibly luxurious. It was really a sort of drawing room on wheels, with eight comfortable seats in a cozy circular pattern. In the front semicircle, facing backward, were Pauwers, the President, Kolfhaj, and a Presidential aide. In the back semicircle, facing the first group, were Sangh, Tralf, a Prezghod marine, and Bewinda. Good — a marine cushion between us and her.

Dr. Bewinda Wharbut was a slender woman with skin the grayish color of old soyba bark and a round flat face that Sangh had grown used to in their months together. She did not look too happy. Her eyes kept going to the point where the driver of the car should be, as if willing one to appear. She said in too loud a voice, “So, Lieutenant Fharha, was your arrest all a misunderstanding, or have both you and Lieutenant Ghiller gone over to the side of the Devil?”

Sangh was taken aback. “Bewinda, I can explain. But not now. We have a robot on board who can hear everything we say.”

“Plus, sir, we have reason to believe the vehicle itself is some kind of
“Jhesus, Sylvia, Glenn, protect me,” moaned Bewinda.

“Don’t worry, ma’am,” said President Travers, “I’ve never been attacked by a Bloco or a robot yet.” He laughed, making a sound that might have been a giggle if it weren’t so deep and mellow. “In fact, the idea is a little farfetched.” These words were translated by Frânk, as if the fact that he was a Blocku was irrelevant. Perhaps they were used to being spoken of as if they weren’t there. Bewinda made a “grump” sound but said no more. The car started moving, with none of a gasoline engine’s sound or vibration.

“Electric,” said Tralf, to no one in particular.

Their limousine was followed by two or three smaller cars, presumably carrying members of the press. Once out of the airport, the little caravan passed through quiet, rural terrain. Actually, it looked more like a park, with open grasslands, no scrub, and more of the tall trees with branches and leaves high above the ground. There were no species like these on Prezghod, either native or imported.

“We’re celebrities, right?” said Tralf. “Really, we’re going to be famous, I bet.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Bewinda, “Better to be a celebrity in Hell.”

“Mr. President,” said Sangh, anxious not to give offense, “We don’t have
those trees on Prezghod. As you know, the colonists could take only so many species on our little Ark, and those weren’t selected.”

“Aren’t they beautiful? They’re called ayuucalipto. They’re not just pretty, but they play a vital role in the economy of this region.”

“What’s that, sir?”

The President paused and turned to his aide. “Me ažhujde, Frâhnk.”

Pauwers begrudged them a smile and said, “We could begin with the wood, sir. But there are many medically and industrially important oils derived from the leaves. For instance, ...”

“That’s all right, Frâhnk! Let’s not bore our ambassadors to death and cause an international incident. Not when we’ve got so much pretty scenery to look at.”

“Yes,” said Sangh, “You have no idea how overwhelming it is to see so much open space after being cooped up in a tin can for a few ... for a while. And this park is so beautiful — and so huge! Is it irrigated somehow?”

“No,” said Pauwers, “it just grows that way.”

“There are places in this great nation of ours that are arid as can be,” said the president. “Fortunately, the Federal District is not one of them. But you don’t have to go very far north before it’s just dust and some scrub brush as far as the eye can see. Fortunately, we’re taking steps to .... Tell
him what steps we’re taking, Frâhnk.”

Frâhnk paused. “These things take time, of course. We’re planting trees and irrigating around the edges of the Amazon desert, pushing its borders inward a bit, if you get my drift.”

Under ordinary circumstances Sangh would have liked to hear more about this project, having grown up around farms and farming, but there was too much to look at and think about. The park abruptly ended, and they were in the city. The line of robot vehicles slowed. The marine at Sangh’s side gripped his weapon tighter, but it soon became clear that they were going slow to allow crowds of citizens to gawk at them, cheering and waving. Some had little flags, which resembled the insignia painted on the vehicles. Presumably that was the flag of Tayha. Assuming all of Tayha was one country. Which, Sangh recalled, it was — President Traavayrs claimed kingship over the entire star system.

He was relieved that he had managed to squelch Bewinda’s hissy fit, but he quickly forgot all about it in his childlike excitement that all this should be taking place, for real, in a planet so far from home. He tried to focus on observations of military significance, but there weren’t any. He smiled and waved.

Then he noticed a small toy-sized helicopter hovering just outside his
door, just out of reach of anyone who might try to grab it. It didn’t take long to spot others, arranged in a sparse swarm around the limo. They were too small to be carrying anything but some kind of camera. *Boy, would the National Investigator love to have some of those,* he thought. He burst out laughing when he realized what kind of TV-news helicopter Kolfhaj had shot down, but quickly suppressed it and tried to act dignified.

“You’re going to have to explain *that* joke,” said Tralf.

“Later.”

At some point the buildings began to get taller, and confetti began to rain upon their motorcade. The tiny helicopters blew the confetti down and around in complex eddies. Sangh waved at the people, and they all cheered. He waved some more, until his arm grew tired.

He would have loved at this point to have had a nice shower. It didn’t even need to be hot; just falling water would do. His second priority was to analyze the tactical situation with LtCdr. Kolfhaj. They were surrounded, both here on the surface and up in orbit, but no shots had been fired. The Tayhans seemed to love them. Everyone on the planet had, Sangh imagined, been alerted to the presence of “aliens” in their midst by the news-and-indoctrination channels, but nothing was being done about them. This was astounding. It fit no wargaming situation he had ever participated in.
One could conclude either that the Tayhans were totally defenseless and possibly even as trusting as they seemed; or that they had ways of defending themselves that were beyond the Prezghodlings’ comprehension. Both possibilities were unnerving.

The parade went on for a few blocks, through the downtown area of the city, and into another well-groomed park, which turned out to be the grounds of an imposing building in a sleek but alien style. They drove around the plaza in front of the building, a plaza surrounded by fountains. Even though Traavayrs had told him water was abundant around here, the display of so much of it flowing so prodigally seemed to Sangh like an incredible luxury. There was nothing comparable on Prezghod outside the Paphal Palatso in Nurhome.

The motorcade stopped and President Travers stepped out, as did Sangh and his colleagues. They had time to wave to the cheering crowd, which was held back by barricades and police. The press contingent was inside the barriers, and many of them held up their hands — perhaps there were cameras surgically implanted in them?

Sang looked up in the blue-gray sky, as if he could see Cross far overhead. His way home led through that keyhole, beside which Vhatta Limhoon crouched. *I’m in the biggest prison cell in the universe, and I’ve dragged my 2 Ambassadors*
best friend in with me. He stopped waving and joined Tralf and President Traavayrs as they led their entourage up the broad steps of what must be the Presidential Palace.
Appendix A

The Sounds of Glish Words
and Names

Throughout the translation, an anonymous human is referred to using third-person plural pronouns as in: “There may be someone who doesn’t like this convention; if so, they are free to write their own translation themselves.”

This device of avoiding “he or she,” “his or hers,” “him or her,” and “himself or herself” by using “they” and its possessive, objective, and reflexive variants (the last in either the form “themselves” or “themself,” whichever seems appropriate) is called singular they; see the entry of that title in Wikipedia.

***
The translation from Glish to English is straightforward most of the time, but tricky issues arise when speakers of Glish and speakers of the language of Earth, Terrano, compare notes. When fragments of Terrano are expressed as sounds familiar to speakers of Glish in the alphabet of English, one gets written phrases full of “pseudo-words” that would look and sound weird to speakers of all three languages. We resort to this device only when focusing tightly on how the Terrano words sound to the Glish speakers. It should be kept in mind that the Glish phonological system may be incapable of expressing Terrano sounds exactly. So the Prezghodlings pronounce the name of the language of Terra thus: “Tayhanu.” But the Terranos have similar difficulties; they pronounce the name “Prezghod” thus: Prezgarrod. (The double r is an h-ish sound; rs are not rolled in Terrano the way they would be in Spanish.) The first time or two that a novel phrase in a foreign tongue is heard or spoken, it is rendered in a sans-serif font: Tayhanu or Prezgarrod.

All names and phrases expressed using the the Terrano alphabet and phonology are written in italics.1 The occasional word in a “savage” language such as “Glockish” are rendered with a slanted but non-italic font (e.g., neeg).

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1Italics are used for emphasis, of course, for poems, prayers, and Sangh’s internal dialogue, and for the names of ships.
Glish names are written using an upright font. The net effect is that we’re pretending Glish is English.

The remainder of this appendix is a list of the conventions used to express Glish sounds in the English alphabet. However, unless you are an abject pedant, the sort of person tempted to learn Klingon, feel free to pronounce Glish words in whatever way you find comfortable.

The letter corresponding to our ‘h’ is quite prominent in the orthography of Glish. It denotes a sound consisting of an aspirated glottal stop (IPA 𝑝ʰ). It is never pronounced otherwise unless accompanied by an accent.

A circumflex above the h makes it silent: ū

A grave accent (¯) on the letter preceding the h means its pronunciation depends on that letter, which must yield one of the combinations shown in table A.1.

A few more observations:

- Few words start with a vowel in Glish, and its speakers find it hard to pronounce words in other languages that start with vowels. The exceptions are words in which the vowel is followed immediately by

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2In the classic Connecticut accent, from, say, Waterbury, this is the sound of the second “t” in “tighten.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>SAMPA³</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ãh</td>
<td>αː</td>
<td>ah</td>
<td>water</td>
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<tr>
<td>çh</td>
<td>tʃ</td>
<td>tS</td>
<td>chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ĝh</td>
<td>ɡ</td>
<td>ɡ</td>
<td>ghost</td>
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<tr>
<td>ōh</td>
<td>əʊ</td>
<td>@U</td>
<td>pole</td>
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<td>ĕh</td>
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<td>think</td>
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<td>ðh</td>
<td>ʍ</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>źh</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>azure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.1: Special $xh$ pairs, with IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) and SAMPA equivalents, and an example of a similar sound in English
a liquid (‘l’ or ‘r’), such as “Allah” and “Erth”, or by a glottal ‘h’ (“OhMahan”). Otherwise, when a Prezghodling tries to say the word they insert the sounds “ṭḥ” before the vowel.

• The letter ‘u’ is always pronounced short and unstressed, unless it is doubled: ‘uu’. Exception: At the end of a word, a single ‘u’ is long and unstressed.

• The letter ‘o’ is similar, but ‘oo’ is pronounced as a long ‘u’ while holding the lips in an ‘o’ position: ɣ (IPA symbol).

• The sequence ‘nw’ is a crude attempt to render the letter whose name is pronounced ‘unh’, which somewhat resembles a Latin ‘n’ and ‘w’ mashed together. It indicates that the previous vowel or vowel group is to be nasalized. It is not otherwise pronounced, and does not sound like an ‘n’ or a ‘w’.

• All other letters sound pretty much as in English. In particular, an ‘e’ at the end of a word is often silent, and used purely to lengthen the sound of the vowel in the last syllable.

\(^3\)Speech Assessment Methods Phonetic Alphabet, a subset of IPA using only ASCII characters.

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A Glossary of Glish and Terrano words
Appendix B

Glossary of Glish and Terrano words

B.1 Glish

brosya: Porridge, flavored with spice native to Prezghod.

harmonica: A row of tubes of semisolid space rations.

khobok: Clown. Peasant.

kippen: A native plant on Prezghod; the stalk of this plant, especially dried.

nucky: Dicey

phook: Fuck, but only in some metaphorical sense, not literally copulate
P-hours: One twenty-fourth of a day on Prezghod. Days aboard ship are calibrated to the home planet, for want of any other standard.

shizzle: Thin diarrhea (vulgar)

sinjing na krue: From some conquered tribe in Bigwun, a phrase whose meaning may be triangulated somewhere in the region “singing the blues,” “blowing smoke,” “improvising.”

vhatta: Title for commander of ship who also serves as priest, spiritual advisor, and confessor for the crew.

virchee: Word coined by translator as translation of Terrnao *novirtual*

**B.2 Terrano**

*novirtual*: (Portmanteau word from *NOVela vIRTUAL*. Plural: *novirtuais*. Glish equivalent: *virchee*.) Story told in virtual reality, meaning viewers can move to new vantage points within a scene.

*Bloco*: (Glish speakers’ pronunciation: *Blocku*.) A robotic person, intelligent and conscious, and required by law to be humanoid. (The word for “robot” is offensive if applied to a *Bloco*.) Literal meaning: block (as of cheese, or of the supersemiconductor material used inside Blockus for high-density v2.7.8
computing).

Molho: (Glish speakers’ pronunciation: Molyu.) A biological person. Literal meaning: sauce, after all the wet stuff inside a Molyu.