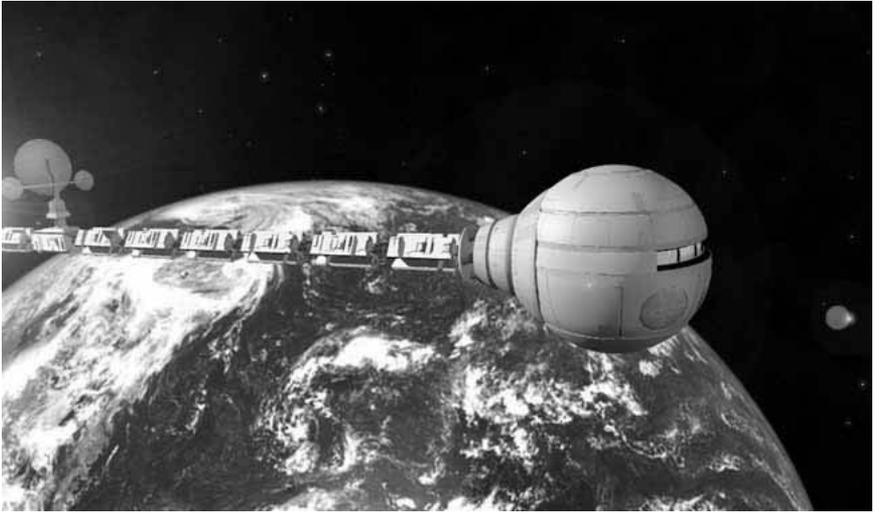


# A Kind Remembrance



## A Short Story by Art Kenne

“It’s too fast. I’m breathing too fast. It’s almost time for the talk and I feel as I’ve always felt, no matter the audience.” Her farewell speech three weeks ago as outgoing Administrator of the Space Odyssey Project was no different. Finally colonizing Io, from Mars, was more than a little challenging, but the excitement of space travel, and the constant attention given to the program never brought a hint of anxiety. But talking, speaking intelligently, that was a different matter.

“It won’t be so bad this time,” she reassured herself. “These are my most cherished friends.” But uncontrollable memory of the accomplishments of her friends weighed heavier with each slowing breath. To her left sat the Minister of Antiquities of a leading world government. To her right, a Nobel Laureate in cyber-physics whose latest meta-science novel sold over 30 million copies. Among the Assembly were physicians, botanists, intra-stellar pilots, poets, and professors. What could she say to them they didn’t already know better than she?

Well, wasn't that always the problem? Fifteen billion people on several worlds knew her name. Too often she heard people say they wanted to be like her, and that they took great comfort in her metered, caring expression. But what could she say, now that she sat again on the Caretaker's Bench? With another slowing breath she forced her eyes to the speech on the monitor, and couldn't recall writing it.

The pause had been too long, and she sensed that people had begun to glance her way. Maybe it was the space-lag, the return to the world of blues and greens. It just didn't seem real. If only there was a white-bearded anthropomorphic being orbiting the planet that she could beg for relief, but she had never glimpsed one from any of the Orbiter Stations. With one last deep breath, she began to read the words aloud as they scrolled before her.

“My friends: On last week's flight back from Mars, I had plenty of time for thought. I recalled each of you and imagined our joyful reunion. I thought of autumn's color and the sound of ocean waves. As I drifted back toward earth in my mind, I slipped into a deep reverie. I came to a place not far from where we sit today, but about 350 years ago. There was an old-fashioned lodge room populated by a fellowship of initiates of what they called the Western Mystery Tradition. I suspect they were the benefactors of our own Assembly, or at least I would like to believe that. They had gathered to conduct a rite; a ceremony they performed with such earnest devotion that I felt the warmth of their work as it spiraled out into their world.”

“You recall from history books the world our fraternal ancestors had to live in at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By all accounts it was violent, chaotic, and often self-destructive. But it was an exciting time to be an initiate. All the great hidden arcane texts were being recovered, translated and published, and the world was being introduced to broader and broader concepts and possibilities. It was a time of great hope and desire. More and more of the old ways were being perfected and updated, and added into the traditions' treasuries of knowledge. The many competing esoteric factions had begun to cooperate and share their knowledge and wisdom. They had begun to work together for the common good of humanity, yet even in that day, often in secret. Much of what we enjoy today, we owe to their efforts. Today, it's hard to image anyone not familiar with the alchemical elements, or with the idea that there is one source behind this great universe.”



“I felt at home in their little lodge of brick and wood reposing on the earth, so firmly grounded. Here, inside the Assembly, floating as we do thousands of meters above the clouds, we can feel as if we are part of the stars to which we have begun to ascend. But I wonder if we lost something in the final analysis. Or perhaps I am just over-sensitive to touching the earth having been away these past few years.”

“It must be obvious that I have some trepidation about speaking before you today. You are such accomplished people that I fear I have little to offer you. So, I will leave you with this thought that the ancient Adept of the temple I visited in my meditation once offered to her lodge. We are part of a great tradition whose source is lost in antiquity but whose message is timeless. Let us each do our part to raise ourselves up so that humanity may follow in our footsteps, as we follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us.”

She didn't know how her talk had been received but returned instinctively to the slow, deep breathing she relied on in moments like this. She wouldn't glance about for verification, but reached for the once familiar scepter, and paused to look up at the stars through the clear, airtight, open roof of the Assembly. It looks so small she thought, glimpsing the bright red wanderer that had been her home, and a smile echoed from her heart to her face, as she tasted the honest salt of an unprovoked tear.

