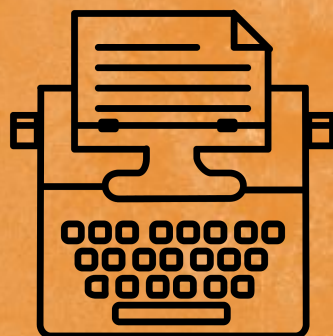


# Title: Latina 2201 - The Maga Circe project

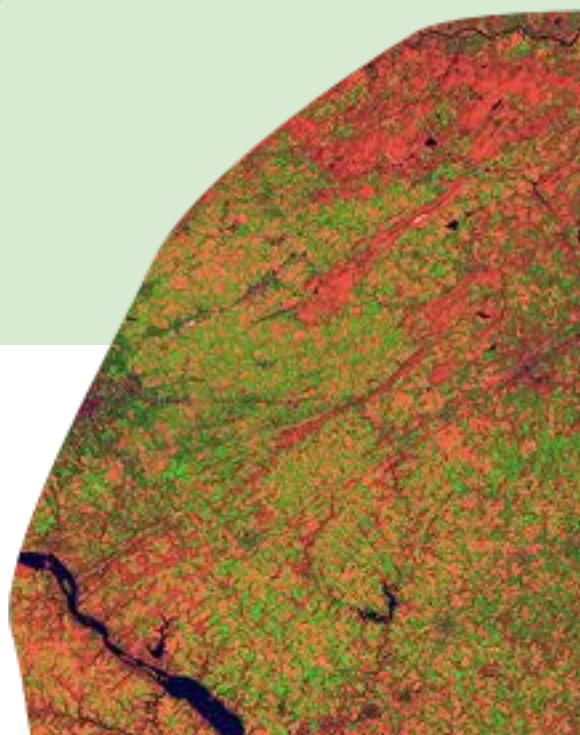
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## **Latina 2201 - The Maga Circe project**

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### **1- The arrival**

When the Malinowsky23 shuttle landed on the sand, there was a collective sigh of relief. Although most humans had been suspended in space for almost a century, returning to the Earth's surface still provided a kind of unconscious comfort, the reassuring feeling of coming home.



*Broad view of Strada Interrotta beach (Sabaudia, LT - Italy), photo by the author*

From the portholes arranged in a line along the length of the vessel, those present scrutinized the landscape carefully: the peak resembling the face of the magician, the long expanse of white sand, the remains of a medieval tower to the west, the dome of the ancient nuclear power plant further inland.

The sea was calm, and the sky clear on November 15, 2201.

"Colleagues, we've arrived. Let's proceed with the request for authorization to disembark"

Commander Apo's words caused a bit of commotion, immediately dissolved by the soothing voice of Lucy-84, the humanoid robot provided by the University of Mizar to the expedition for communication and data collection purposes:

"Searching for contact...

Searching for contact...

Malinowsky23 calling Central...

Awaiting confirmation signal..."

The response came after a few moments:

"Central here, message received.

Confirming correct position of Malinowsky23.

Authorization for disembarkation granted.

Be cautious, good work."

Slowly, the research team organized their descent. They put on their suits and protective helmets, packed food supplies into Lucy-84's metal belly, and gathered for a final briefing before disembarking. It was Apo once again who spoke up:

"The ground expedition is about to begin. I urge you all to stay vigilant. Our mission is of utmost importance; let's not jeopardize it unnecessarily."

Lucy-84 pulled the opening lever and pressed the green button that transformed the door into a ramp, while the team made their way towards the exit in a single file. After Lucy-84, as stipulated by the safety protocol, the commander descended, followed by all the others: Meme (the biologist), Astrid (the philosopher of history), Paulo (the ethnographer of terrestrial cultures), and Duna (the neuroscientist). Commander Apo led them as an experienced explorer, adventurer, and great dreamer. His presentation at the "Cosmo Future" summit the previous year had made him quite famous, earning him numerous invitations to underground debates on the topic of human return to planet Earth, of which he had become one of the leading experts.

When the University of Mizar contacted him to offer him the leadership of the expedition, he agreed under one condition: to personally select the members of the research team. Pressed by the importance of the matter, the academic community consented, and he immediately set out to search for the most unconventional scientists and intellectuals in the Antro-sky, the space area colonized by humans in the 22nd century.

The selection proved to be no easy task in a "world" where people lived as if anesthetized by the rhetoric that there was no other way to live but this. For years, hopes of returning to live on Earth had faded thanks to Goomazon's propaganda efforts, which, in addition to being the only company capable of developing and ensuring survival possibilities in the Antro-sky, had over time transformed into a political entity whose power was now impossible to oppose.

But Apo used all his energy in a vigorous recruitment effort that, in the end, culminated in a team composed of some of the most brilliant and nonconformist minds of the time. After all, that mission required rather specific characteristics: cross-disciplinary knowledge, a spirit of adventure, and a touch of recklessness.

## **2 - The project**

The project "Maga Circe" was conceived by the University of Mizar with the aim of conducting multidisciplinary research to assist scholars in the Department of Past Sciences in understanding how it was possible for certain human groups to continue living on planet Earth after the Great Change of the 2130s in the 22nd century. The project was part of a broader twenty-year program for repopulating the planet, but to avoid the mistakes of the past, it was necessary to first investigate the methods and strategies of those who had never abandoned Earth.

The years of the Great Change had indeed led to a drastic reduction in human presence on the planet. Drought, a shortage of drinking water, and difficulties in food production were just some of the problems that humans had to face in the last two centuries. These problems became so complex in the early 2130s that they caused governments and political boundaries to collapse, ultimately placing the question of the survival of the species in the hands of the planet's largest transnational corporation. Goomazon had already been populating space for decades, constructing suspended cities where an increasing number of people relocated: first the extremely wealthy, then the affluent, then those who were not doing so badly, and finally those who, having no more strength or hope, swore unconditional loyalty to the company, offering free labor in exchange for a place to live in the Antro-sky.

Over time, the new way of life in space became structured, attracting a growing number of people willing to provide their labor to Goomazon for the construction of the "new" world, depicted as the only possible world thanks to increasingly aggressive and shocking advertising campaigns.

Once again, humans migrated.

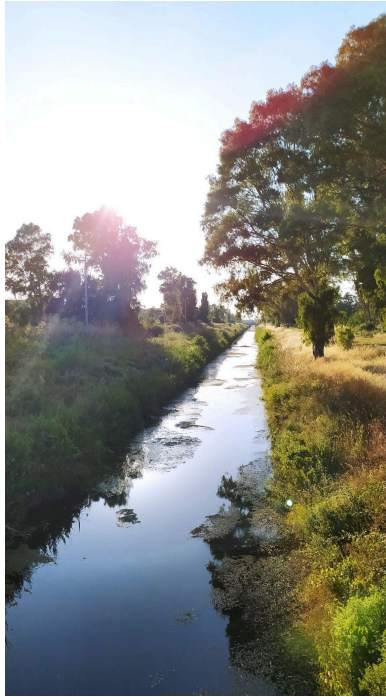
The day when the number of terrestrial arrivals on the Mother Platform, Goomazon's headquarters, was for the first time lower than the inhabitants of the Antro-sky was called the "Great Change." It was May 2, 2132, about seventy years before the day when the Malinowsky<sup>23</sup> shuttle landed on the beach of Rio Martino in search of forms of resistance to draw inspiration from for a potential return of humans to Earth.

### **3 - Along the river**

The members of the research team, perfectly equipped, cautiously walked on the warm sand. Among them, only Apo had already experienced a beach, thanks to the many trips that had brought him to the planet as a pilot of Goomazon's Migratory Shuttles, an activity he had carried out for more than ten years.

Walking on the beach was pleasant, they all agreed. Despite the dark blue color of the sea and the ebb and flow of the waves on the shore having a mysterious quality, the epic charm of the landscape seemed to have suffered no injustice from the passage of time. The mage reclining on the profile of Mount Circeo still dozed, enchanting the eyes of all, as she had done for hundreds of years. At her feet, the remains of the city of Sabaudia were clearly visible, once a prestigious tourist destination, now trapped in a sort of eternal November: abandoned and melancholic.

Turning their gaze towards the plain, the view was remarkable: golden dunes framed the coastal lakes, and from these, the largest Mediterranean forest of what was once known as Europe stretched eastward. In the background, the gentle hills of the Lepini Mountains, dominated by the Semprevisa, the highest mountain, loomed over the landscape with stern air.



*Rio Martino river (Borgo Grappa, LT, Italy), photo by the author*

The dreamy gazes of the humans were suddenly brought back to reality by Lucy-84's unwavering voice:

"Searching for contact...  
Searching for contact...  
Malinowsky23 calling Central."

The response was prompt:

"Central here, contact received. How can we assist you, Lucy?"

"We request confirmation to begin the ascent of the river."

"The conditions of the river are excellent; our satellite images show no anomalies. Proceed with the embarkation."

"Good! Let's proceed immediately with launching the boat. Over and out."

Lucy-84 entered the beached shuttle and emerged after a moment, carrying a small red box that, in the blink of an eye, transformed into an eight-seater inflatable boat. The members of

the team put on their life jackets and took their seats, while Lucy-84 started the ignition maneuvers. The boat began to sail on the calm waters of the Martino River, leaving the beach behind and quickly entering the Mediterranean forest. Without any hitches, the journey along the river was expected to last a couple of hours, and it did. During those couple of hours, the attentive gazes of the research team couldn't help but notice the beauty of Earth: the green of the trees, birds in flight, the colors of the flowers, and the silence interrupted only by their exclamations of astonishment. The same beauty that Goomazon sought to conceal through an exhausting pro-Antro-sky propaganda campaign, but which thanks to that research project, could finally be told again.

They ascended the Martino River towards its source, and according to their calculations, their destination was about halfway between the old city and the ruins of the ancient Gardens of Ninfa. "They would recognize the designated landing point by a distinctive detail: a large sign advertising a once-well-known supermarket, now impaled in the ground and surrounded by the remains of buildings overrun by vegetation. That visual signal would inform them that they had arrived in Latina, a city of the twentieth century that had long been transformed into a Livable Community through a novel collaboration between species.

#### **4 - The Livable Communities**

Starting from the first half of the 21st century, things on planet Earth began to take a turn for the worse. The widespread adoption of an economic system based on rampant extraction soon showed its inevitable consequences: pollution, injustices, the spread of unknown diseases, and extreme weather events. While the Earth system struggled to withstand these new (negative) conditions, a significant portion of humanity began to feel increasingly disconnected from it, viewing it as an inert platform useful solely for resource extraction to advance economic and technological progress.

Thanks to enormous technological advancements and the deteriorating livability conditions of many places (especially cities, where most people lived), space colonization transitioned from being material for science fiction tales to becoming a reality. However, as people migrated elsewhere, the planet embarked on a path toward a new balance. Abandoned metropolises ceased producing waste, CO2 emissions from fossil fuel usage rapidly declined, and the pouring of concrete onto the world came to a halt, allowing both new and old ecosystems to slowly emerge and thrive. Certainly, damage had been done.

The imprint of that extractive mindset had tread upon the Earth's soil for too many decades not to leave an indelible mark. But, much like a healing body, Earth gradually began to breathe again.

While emigrants in the Antro-sky led mostly virtual existences (only the impoverished had to work for the construction and maintenance of space platforms, while others lived in a sort of meta-digital environment), life on planet Earth began to flourish once again. Although Antro-sky propaganda had convinced millions to take off for the new world, the persuasion

campaign did not work on everyone. Up in the sky, they were called the rebels, entire communities scattered around the globe who, through specific strategies, had managed to find new ways to live on the planet. Goomazon did everything it could to discredit them through an incessant narrative based on news, films, and advertisements portraying Livable Communities as miserable and unhappy.

It was Commander Apo who first questioned this hegemonic narrative. During his numerous travels on the planet, he encountered these "rebel" communities several times and came to understand how and why they had chosen to continue living on Earth, despite the seemingly more attractive prospects offered by the Antro-sky.

In recent years, Apo had been engaged in a clandestine dissemination of these experiences, culminating in his famous intervention at the "Cosmo Future" summit, which significantly expanded his audience. A few days later, he was contacted by the University of Mizar, who asked him which community would be most suitable for the project they had conceived. He had no doubts and replied:

"There exists a small Livable Community in the center of the Italian peninsula, just a few tens of kilometers south of Rome. I have never been there, but I believe it to be the ideal place for your research. I am ready to offer my support; contact me if needed."

The rest is the story of a group of scholars who, on November 15, 2201, landed on a beach to explore a small community of people who, through collaboration with bees, had managed to organize their existence on the planet according to an unprecedented conception of peace and prosperity.

## **5 - The meeting**

The distant sound of drums filled the team with excitement, surprise, and a touch of apprehension: all they had to do was follow that hypnotic rhythm to reach their destination. They didn't know how they would be received, nor the risks they were facing.

They disembarked from the inflatable boat in silence, with Lucy-84 leading the way and the towering sign of the supermarket to their left. They climbed the bank and walked along the path parallel to the riverbed, continuing in the same direction from which they had arrived. As they moved forward, Lucy-84 gathered and transmitted data about the vegetation to Central, where the on-duty researchers couldn't help but respond with expressions of astonishment. Everything was incredibly lush, and even the air quality readings left everyone in awe.

The same wonder struck Meme, the biologist, who after years of theoretical studies could confirm that life on planet Earth was still possible if based on mutual support. His theses had led to his exile from the scientific community of Antro-sky, all engaged in demonstrating that living on Earth was no longer convenient and that humans could only prosper by severing all ties with it. This journey was Meme's long-awaited opportunity for redemption, after years of isolation and oppression.



As they approached the music, the landscape took on a different form. It was Paulo, the ethnographer of terrestrial cultures, who first pointed out the initial signs of human presence:

"Look over there, those must be their houses!"

Neatly arranged side by side, the bamboo houses formed concentric circles that extended across the plain, while the remnants of the old concrete buildings on the other side of the river seemed to be disappearing under dense blankets of ivy and shrubs. Beyond the settlement, the network of paths delineated a mosaic of crops that marked its border. The colors of the various cultivations alternated harmoniously, creating an enchanting landscape, surrounded by the Mediterranean forest.

After a few hundred meters, the team arrived at the entrance of the settlement, marked by a gigantic wooden sign on which was written:

Welcome in Latina, Livable Community no 32

Here we walk with a light step

The friendly tone of that message put them at ease. They crossed the threshold slowly, like aliens landing on an unknown planet, and perhaps it was a bit like that. Meanwhile, the rhythm of the drums became clearer, and they began to hear chants and voices getting closer. There was no doubt: something was being celebrated there.

The encounter with Giulia took them by surprise as they looked around with curiosity in their eyes.

"Good morning! Welcome to Latina!"

That cheerful voice preceded the sight of a lively teenager accompanied by a large brown dog. All the team members - except for Lucy-84, who immediately began scanning their biometric data - responded to the greeting with stammering and hand gestures.

"Sorry if I'm the only one welcoming you, but you've arrived right in the middle of the annual assembly. The adults are gathered in the Grand Dojo, and the other kids have gone for a swim in the river. Anyway, nice to meet you: I'm Giulia, and this is my dog Paco."

This time it was Astrid who spoke first:

"Pleasure to meet you, Giulia. I'm Astrid, and these are my colleagues: Apo, Meme, Paulo, and Duna. And this is Lucy-84, our all-purpose robot."

Lucy-84 lit up with colored lights and performed a quick mid-air twirl as a greeting gesture, which elicited a hearty laugh from Giulia.

"Well, now that we've introduced ourselves... what are you doing here? And why are you dressed like that?"

Indeed, the image of those five people bundled up in orange suits must have seemed rather strange to her. Duna replied:

"We're on a mission for the University of Mizar. We want to spend some time here with you and ask you some questions, if you're willing."

The girl's gaze darkened:

"You'll never convince us to follow you to the Antro-sky! Go away!"

"No, no, wait. We didn't come for that! Our mission is about gaining knowledge. We're researchers studying Earth's dynamics, and we'd like to understand more about your way of life", Apo intervened.

Giulia relaxed:

"Okay, you don't seem threatening. But please put away those suits; they're unsettling. I'll take you to the Grand Dojo, where you'll meet someone who can help you with your investigation."

They quickly changed into long pants and sky-blue shirts with the University's emblem. Paco stood up on all fours, looked at them curiously, and then turned toward the road that cut through the circle of houses. They instantly understood that the dog was inviting them to follow, so they did.

During the journey, Giulia provided some explanations about what they were encountering:

"This is our village, founded in 2133. Today, we are 300 people, but in the beginning, there were very few who believed in it. My grandfather Joseph is one of them; he migrated here from Naples after the old city was occupied by the army due to the water wars. He didn't know where to go, but he was certain of one thing: he wouldn't migrate to Antro-sky, as most of his fellow citizens did. But probably he'll be the one to explain everything to you; we're almost there!"

Guided by that strange dog-girl duo, the team members arrived at a massive circular building with no walls; a series of wooden poles supported a gigantic canopy made of intertwined reeds. Paulo had already seen something similar in an old ethnography manual, and the sight of the Grand Dojo left him awestruck. Not even his colleagues could help but notice the

tremendous technical prowess of those who had designed and built that structure. Inside, they saw about a hundred people sitting in a circle. The drum music suddenly ceased, and the silent atmosphere heralded something magical.

Giulia stopped the team at the entrance:

"Wait! You've arrived at the right moment; look..."

In the center of the building, under the incredulous gazes of the team members and the enthusiastic looks of the seated audience, a large swarm of bees gradually gathered and began to create figures in the air, as in a dance. The assembled bees gracefully hovered up and down, following a gentle hum. They sped up and slowed down with skill, separating into groups and reuniting within seconds.

"Incredible," whispered the philosopher Astrid, "these people have trained the bees!"

"I don't think it's quite like that," replied Meme, "I believe it's more a case of interspecies communication: they're listening to a message from the bees."

The definitive answer to their doubts came swiftly. The swarm suddenly dispersed, and after a few moments of collective jubilation, a woman climbed onto a small stage in the center of the Grand Dojo and began to speak:

"My dearest, I believe the message is clear to all. It seems that things are getting better and better. The bees have managed to colonize much of the old city, and 100 new hives have been born in the last two months alone. We couldn't hope for better news: let the celebration begin!"

## **6 - Joseph's tale**

While the inhabitants of the Livable Community gathered for the celebrations, Giulia went in search of her grandfather Joseph, and the team members began to get accustomed to the place, which still seemed like something out of the pages of an old fantasy novel. The girl returned after a few minutes, accompanied by this small man with a thin face and deep black eyes.

"Hello everyone, I'm Joseph. My granddaughter has already mentioned your mission here, and on behalf of the community, I accept to help you."

That friendly old man put everyone at ease.

"Follow me to the river; that's where we can have a quiet chat. Later, we'll join the festivities, and you'll be my guests" he said, walking along the path that connected the dojo to the river, without saying anything else.

The walk was short, and after passing by some vineyards, they found themselves seated on the banks of the Martino River. Joseph stood in front of them, waited for everyone to pay attention, and began his story:

"I'll tell you the story as we experienced it, the first inhabitants of this community. The old city fell into ruin in the early 22nd century, much like most cities around the world. I lived in Naples, where, as I imagine you know, the shortage of drinking water had sparked a struggle among the poor that went on for years. By the late '20s, the situation had become unbearable; it was dangerous to even step outside, and food had become scarce. I saw my loved ones and friends die or board those cursed shuttles bound for the Antro-sky: I don't know which of the two alternatives is better. So, I decided to head north, following the coast. It was a long and arduous journey; it took a lot of stubbornness; I can't deny that. But during this journey, I met people who shared my ideals, and together, we managed to realize the dream of the Livable Community we find ourselves in. In those years, there was already talk of these realities, but it was hard to learn more because Goomazon was becoming more and more powerful, and we know well what it did from the beginning to hide the truth..."

Joseph paused in his storytelling to check if the audience was paying attention. He hadn't realized that this audience was much larger than those five eccentric people sitting in front of him. Lucy-84 had, in fact, switched to Director Mode from the beginning of the story, broadcasting the video live to Central, where gradually, a crowd of increasingly numerous students gathered to listen to the words of that old Earthling, and the University opened the doors of the grand lecture hall, which filled up in a few minutes. A group of computer science students managed to breach Goomazon's operating system, and suddenly, the live video of old Joseph entered all the screens of the Antro-sky, so millions of unwitting viewers found themselves watching the event live.

Joseph continued without interruptions:

"Within a few months, about twenty people joined me in my wandering. We weren't sure where to stop; we traveled into the unknown. But we knew well that we could never go back to living in that concrete that had created so many problems for us. The temperatures from March to November were unbearable, and the cities were all perilous... For our new life, we needed new solutions. After a few months, we reached the foot of Mount Circeo, which, coming from the south, concealed the plain. None of us had ever seen a map or an atlas: geography had been abolished from schools for over a century now. We couldn't imagine what was behind that mountain that abruptly blocked the passage, but we decided to attempt the climb, and when we reached the top, the view of the landscape left us astonished. Unlike the scenarios we had traversed during the journey, that territory had something unusual about it: it was alive! We had found the perfect place to establish our community!"

As the enchanted audience listened in silence to Joseph's words, the executives of Goomazon gathered in an extraordinary meeting prepared to organize the repression of the protests that would surely erupt shortly. Troops of robots trained to act with varying degrees of ferocity based on the analysis of pheromones in the air were deployed on the platforms to the north

and south of the Antro-sky. On the east and west, human mercenary troops took their positions, less precise but more determined to instantly quell any action that would jeopardize the privileged position they enjoyed in exchange for absolute loyalty to Goomazon.

Meanwhile, Joseph's story continued:

"We followed the course of the Martino River, and in a few days, we arrived at the source, near the ancient ruins of the Gardens of Ninfa, where we found the answers to our questions: how had it been possible to preserve life in that territory, while much of the world was literally falling apart? The encounter with Atma was decisive for what we would achieve in the future. That woman, a botanist who had lived in solitude in the ancient village of the Caetani for almost thirty years, welcomed us gladly, and during that long stay, we learned a lot from her and her extraordinary relationship with the bees. Over the decades, she had slowly managed to restore the Gardens of Ninfa to their ancient splendor, caring for every surviving plant in the face of climate change. Small shrubs, a few flowers, some bamboo plants. So, thanks to her dedication, the bees returned one day. It was November 15, 2121, and today we celebrate the eightieth anniversary! From that day on, Atma began to study their behavior, but she soon realized that observation alone wouldn't be enough: she had to learn to communicate with them, to help them and be helped by them. When we arrived in 2131, they had already developed an effective communication model that we soon learned to use, convinced that it was the key to the birth of a new way of living on this Earth. And so it was. Over time, that small garden grew, expanding across the ancient plain and becoming the forest you see today. In 2133, we built the first bamboo houses, halfway between the old city and the village of Ninfa, continuing to refine the communication system with the bees. Over the years, dissidents came from all over the Mediterranean, so the community grew into what it is today. Here, there is no private property; we live by taking care of the land in an ongoing exchange between species. There is no accumulation; there is no hierarchy... the only possible way to continue living on this planet."

## **7 - Epilogue**

The repression of the protests was severe. As soon as Joseph's story ended, demonstrations multiplied on all the platforms of the Antro-sky, and riots erupted, immediately suppressed by armed troops. A militia of mercenaries forced their way into the University of Mizar and brutally beat the dissidents. Many of them were taken prisoner, and communication channels with the research team were permanently silenced within a few hours, destroyed by Goomazon's soldiers' laser truncheons.

In a matter of days, people resigned themselves to returning to their previous lives, and Joseph's story and Livable Community No. 32 quickly became a memory best left unspoken, as surveillance over people's speech tightened, and punishments became more severe.

Goomazon perfected its dominion over the "world," leaving no possibility of contact with planet Earth. The space shuttle launch stations were converted into prisons, work shifts for the expansion of the Antro-sky doubled, and people were forced to pledge unconditional

allegiance to the regime, under the penalty of deportation to the construction sites or, in the worst cases, expulsion into cosmic void. In 2201, history repeated itself in its darkest form, this time, however, far from planet Earth.

For days, Lucy-84 tried to re-establish contact with Central, but when the last whisper ceased, she decided to make the long-awaited announcement:

"Colleagues, communication channels with Central have been permanently disabled. Without their help, it's impossible to restart Malinowsky23 or find the route back to the Antro-sky. Our mission is interrupted, and I believe we'll have to resign ourselves to staying here on Earth for quite some time."

Years of great change followed for Latina. Joseph died on a crisp autumn morning at the age of 101, leaving behind a single wish: the creation of a university where students from all over the planet could intertwine knowledge and practices for multispecies revival. All the inhabitants, including the old research team members now officially integrated into the community, worked hard to realize the old Joseph's dream.

Thus, on October 7, 2204, the Free University of Gaia was inaugurated. The campus was born on the ruins of the old city across the river, reusing the old buildings of the historic center, and within a few years, it was populated by young people from nearby and distant livable communities. New knowledge spread rapidly, universities multiplied, and new communities flourished based on what had been the founding thought of Livable Community No. 32: here we walk with a light step.

The shuttle Malinowsky23 still lies on the beach of Rio Martino. Over time, it has become a home for birds, a shelter for crabs, a refuge for turtles, and a haven for foxes, while bees buzz around it. Every year, on November 15, the research team members descend the river to the beach, sit near the shuttle, and silently gaze at the horizon. It's their way of remembering their loved ones, never seen again, left to their fate in the Antro-sky, their way of reminding themselves that they were fortunate.

Lucy-84 twirls around them, perhaps knowing that she, too, has been fortunate.