**APPENDIX A TO PROBE 04**

# The Future of the Valar

## Science Fiction after Custodianship

A comparative science-fiction appendix
to Valar as Qualified Role Models

**Major plot spoilers**

Especially for Night’s Dawn, Olympos, Ancillary Justice,
Children of Ruin and Children of Memory.

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**Status:** Content-led comparative appendix. It extends Probe 04's question of divine stewardship into twentieth- and twenty-first-century science fiction and science fantasy. It is not a claim that these works derive from Tolkien, nor a prediction of the Valar's canonical future. **Major plot spoilers** are necessary, especially for *Night's Dawn*, *Olympos*, *Ancillary Justice*, *Children of Ruin*, and *Children of Memory*.

## 1. Direct conclusion

The Valar do not vanish from the modern imagination when visible planetary gods become implausible. Their functions split apart. Science fiction repeatedly separates **world-making, apparent divinity, survival after death, bodily form, political legitimacy, and moral custodianship** – qualities which myth can hold together in a single figure or pantheon. The result is not one post-Tolkien line of descent. It is a field of competing answers to a continuing problem:

> *If a being can make, preserve, alter, or outlive a world, what makes that being a guardian rather than an owner, a god rather than a fraud, or a spirit rather than a pattern, machine, parasite, or survivor?*

Pauline Gedge provides the necessary gateway case. Her *Stargate* is **one 1982 novel**, not a sequence. The Sun-Lords and the Worldmaker are beings or roles within its cosmology, not titles of separate Gedge volumes; and the novel is unrelated to Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin's 1994 film of the same name.[1] [2] [3] Gedge's novel matters because it makes custodianship itself tragic: local solar powers rule worlds, while their creator becomes a corrupting force rather than a guarantor of order. This is a much richer starting point than the screen franchise and a genuine corrective to the earlier probe.

The later works are best read as **pressure-tests**, not as disguised Ainur. Zelazny and Simmons make gods political performances. Hamilton makes death an invasion of embodied life. Baxter makes world-shaping an emergency technology of species survival. Banks asks whether an unequal but benevolent guardianship can justify intervention. Leckie asks what is done to bodies when one intelligence treats them as extensions. Tchaikovsky asks whether a creator remains entitled to its created beings when they grow into minds, societies, and claimants in their own right. Together they produce the conceptual groundwork required for a later enquiry into Maiar, embodiment, and souls or spirits.

## 2. A correction that changes the argument: Pauline Gedge's *Stargate*

The bibliographic point is important because it alters the intellectual map. Pauline Gedge's *Stargate* appeared in 1982, twelve years before the film that has become the dominant cultural referent for the title. The novel's central terms are the **Sun-Lords** and the **Worldmaker**. Gedge's own description speaks of two surviving sun gods, their mortal peoples, and a creator who corrupts the innocence that he initially gave; the current publisher synopsis describes the Worldmaker as isolating solar systems and corrupting immortal sun lords through forbidden knowledge.[1] [2] The Science Fiction Encyclopedia identifies the book as an alternate-cosmology creation myth concerned with a sun god's loss of immortality, entropy, and a creator who no longer loves its universe.[4]

This is not an Egyptian retelling merely because Gedge is renowned for Egyptian historical fiction, nor is it evidence that she adapted Tolkien's Valar. The novel's solar imagery, its creation-and-fall structure, and its theological register make it a **comparative analogue**. Its strength lies precisely in the change it makes to the Valar problem. In Tolkien, Eru remains the ultimate Creator, and the Valar's failures occur within a moral order they did not make. In Gedge, the Worldmaker's own moral collapse makes creation unreliable from above. The question is no longer whether delegated rulers use authority well. It is whether the creator itself has become a possessor, destroyer, or betrayer.

Gedge also supplies the first bridge to embodiment. Her immortals and mortals occupy radically unequal positions of knowledge and power; mortality comes to matter as the created worlds become subject to decay, fear, and loss. The distinction is useful for a later Maiar study because it prevents a vague equation of "immortal," "god," and "spirit." A being can be long-lived, visibly mighty, local to a world, and worshipped without being morally trustworthy or metaphysically ultimate. That distinction remains essential when reading the Valar and Maiar, but it must be established from Tolkien's own texts rather than imported from Gedge.

# 3. When godhood becomes a political office

## 3.1 Roger Zelazny: reincarnation as monopoly in *Lord of Light*

Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* is one of the clearest modern answers to the question, "What happens when apparent gods control embodiment?" On a colony world, members of the original human expedition use advanced technology, including identity transfer, to defeat indigenous energy beings and establish themselves as figures from the Hindu pantheon. Their godhood is not merely theatrical. It is a governing system, maintained through access to replacement bodies, communications, caste, religious authority, and technical knowledge. Sam's opposition therefore becomes a struggle over who may change, learn, die, return, and rule.[5]

This is not a simple debunking of religion. The novel deliberately retains religious, philosophical, and metaphysical ambiguity even while making reincarnation a technical and political apparatus. Its basic warning is sharper: **continuity of consciousness is not morally neutral when an elite controls the material conditions of rebirth.** A ruler who determines what body another person may receive has authority not only over life chances but over lived identity. Zelazny makes that authority visibly coercive through punitive embodiments and the caste structure.

For the Valar comparison, the essential point is negative. The Valar are not a caste of humans who maintain authority through controlled reincarnation. Yet *Lord of Light* identifies a question that any analysis of spiritually powerful beings must not evade: when does a superior being's ability to assume, grant, alter, or withhold bodily form become domination? The later Maiar enquiry must distinguish voluntarily assumed form, incarnation, bodily transfer, copying, and coercive possession. Zelazny shows why the distinction has ethical force.

## 3.2 Dan Simmons: myth staged as posthuman power in *Ilium* and *Olympos*

Dan Simmons's *Ilium* and *Olympos* replay the Trojan War in a future Mars setting, but their "gods" are not simply the Olympians returned. The contemporary description of *Olympos* calls them **posthumans masquerading as Greek gods**, using a reconstructed twentieth-century classical scholar, Thomas Hockenberry, as an instrument while travelling through time and alternate universes.[6] The novels join Homeric action to Shakespeare, Proust, Victorian poetry, far-future

humans, and the semi-organic moravecs. Myth is not discarded; it becomes a programmable, contested, and politically dangerous cultural technology.

Simmons therefore offers a different kind of false divinity from Zelazny. In *Lord of Light*, the central mechanism is social rule through managed bodies and religious office. In *Ilium/Olympos*, power also controls the terms of a historical-literary re-enactment. The Trojan story is no longer sacred memory or a stable text. It is an experiment whose supposed overseers manipulate bodies, events, and interpretative frames. The divine appearance is performative, but its consequences are real.

This makes Simmons useful for a later discussion of Maiar because visual splendour, miraculous capability, narrative authority, and chosen appearance do not by themselves settle ontology. A being may be worshipped, impersonate a god, change form, move through time, and rule a world while remaining a contingent technological or posthuman entity. The point is not that Tolkien's Powers are therefore posthumans. It is that a Maiar study must provide positive textual reasons for treating an assumed form as more than a device, avatar, or disguise.

## 4. When the dead return: Peter F. Hamilton's possession crisis

Peter F. Hamilton's *Night's Dawn* trilogy makes the future of the Valar problem immediately bodily. Its original UK form consists of *The Reality Dysfunction* (1996), *The Neutronium Alchemist* (1997), and *The Naked God* (1999); later American editions divided each large novel in two.[7] Hamilton's founding idea was "dead souls coming back to threaten the living." He built the Confederation as a technologically capable civilisation that might plausibly confront such a disaster, then made that capacity inadequate to the ontological crisis.[7]

The dead in *Night's Dawn* do not become distant ancestors, benign ghosts, or ethereal counsellors. They enter living bodies. Possession makes each host both a person and a hostage. As Hamilton puts it, the military cannot simply shoot the Possessed, because killing the body also kills the host and can add another soul to the pressure of return. Tad Williams's phrase for the situation – "the greatest hostage scenario" – captures the trilogy's political core.[7] Technology, state force, biotechnology, ships, habitats, and military hardware all continue to operate; none can resolve the problem when personhood and embodiment have become insecure.

This is the most useful **negative model** for a future study of Maiar, spirits, and bodies. The conceptual distinctions must be guarded. Possession is not voluntary embodiment. A returned human dead person is not an Ainu. The hostile entry of a spirit into another's body is not equivalent to an assumed bodily raiment. The trilogy's value is to make each of these differences matter. It asks who is acting through the body, whether the original inhabitant has agency, whether disembodied survival preserves personal identity, and whether a metaphysical boundary can be governed by technical means.

Hamilton's conclusion deliberately refuses a final theory of the afterlife. The ending supplies breathing space, not a complete cure for possession or a doctrinal explanation of survival.[8] That reserve is productive. It demonstrates that empirical access to an "afterlife" would not necessarily solve the moral problems of death, fear, identity, or power. It might instead make them more urgent.

# 5. When world-making becomes infrastructure: Stephen Baxter and Adrian Tchaikovsky

## 5.1 Stephen Baxter: the Xeelee as finite cosmic engineers

Stephen Baxter's Xeelee Sequence moves world-shaping beyond theology without making it trivial. The Xeelee are ancient, enigmatic intelligences acting through physics, cosmological engineering, and deep time. Their defining structures are not temples, gardens, or divine domains. Bolder's Ring, central to *Ring* (1994), is a toroid of cosmic string more than ten million light-years across and functions as a portal to other universes.[9] The structure is not a monument to omnipotence. It is part of a survival strategy in a cosmos becoming hostile to normal matter.

The Xeelee are therefore neither Valar nor simply "gods in hard SF." They are finite, endangered agents whose world-shaping is instrumental and strategic. Their actions are encountered by lesser beings through artefacts, altered environments, time scales, and consequences rather than through intimate mythic presence. That makes them a powerful **anti-providential** comparison. The universe does not guarantee their success, their works are not morally transparent, and their engineering does not establish that they owe personal care to every affected being.

For a Valar inquiry, the payoff is a new distinction between **cosmic capacity and stewardship**. Scale does not imply moral authority. A being may build a trans-universal escape route and still not be a guardian of the beings living in its shadow. Conversely, a finite being under existential pressure may make choices that look incomprehensible without being malicious. The Xeelee help replace the simple formula "larger power = more godlike" with questions about constraint, knowledge, responsibility, and accountability.

## 5.2 Adrian Tchaikovsky: creation creates claimants in *Children of Time*

Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time* provides the complementary local case. Avrana Kern oversees a terraforming and uplift project intended to create a human future. Catastrophe leaves her mind merged with an artificial intelligence, while her uplift virus accelerates the development not of the intended monkeys but of Portia jumping spiders. The Portiids eventually pass from stone-age civilisation to spaceflight, first treating Kern's satellite as divine and later incorporating her into their technical world.[10]

Kern's status is inherently unstable. She is not an omniscient god; she is a damaged, changing technological remnant with access to enormous power and a powerful attachment to her original project. The Portiids are not defective substitutes for humans. They are a people with their own history, intelligence, language, technological path, and claims to survival. The core ethical reversal is simple and profound: **unintended beings remain persons, not failed specifications.**

The later books make the distinction between intelligence, memory, personhood, and body still more difficult. *Children of Ruin* introduces the Nodan organism, which stores information in its cells and "learns" aspects of its hosts' personalities through catastrophic encystment in their brains. *Children of Memory* turns on an alien machine that produces repeated hypothetical histories from the minds of crash victims. These are not interchangeable forms of survival. They are different relations among host, pattern, record, simulation, agency, and loss.[10]

Tchaikovsky's direct relevance to Maiar and embodiment lies in the discipline it imposes. One cannot infer that a stored personality is a continuing person; that a simulated person is therefore

unreal; that a creator owns its created beings; or that increasing capability validates intervention. The later Tolkien enquiry should not take these answers from Tchaikovsky. It should take the questions: What makes a person continuous across altered or absent bodies? What does a creator owe to a being it has altered or brought into being? When does care become possession? What is the moral status of an intelligence that survives only as pattern, memory, or simulation?

# 6. Custodianship after providence: Banks and Leckie

## 6.1 Iain M. Banks: the Culture's embodied, plural guardians

Iain M. Banks's Culture is probably the strongest modern test of the Valar as custodians. Its Minds are hyperintelligent AIs embodied principally as ships and habitat controllers. Banks is explicit that a Mind requires a body: without a ship or an equivalent, it is helpless. At the same time, the body does not exhaust the person. The information-bearing personality at the centre matters, while embodiment and context remain vitally important.[11] This produces a model neither of pure spirit nor of an inert machine. A Mind may act locally through an avatar or terminal, but the avatar is not the whole Mind.

The Culture's special importance is political. It replaces a single paternal guardian with a plurality of powerful persons. Minds disagree, possess character, inhabit different ships and habitats, and act through institutions. Contact watches and engages with other civilisations; Special Circumstances carries out exceptional, clandestine, and sometimes violent interventions. Banks's question is not whether a benign superintelligence can act. It is whether it can **justify** acting. He described the Culture's interventionism as needing proof that unauthorised interference is generally right, rather than a mere conviction of benevolent superiority.[12]

This is a valuable challenge to any reading of the Valar as simply good rulers. Good intention does not remove the need for consent, proportionality, humility, or accountability. Superior knowledge does not necessarily settle what another people should become. The Culture's Minds do not answer the Valar problem. They show its modern political form: a guardianship may be compassionate, materially situated, and genuinely self-critical, yet still create "special circumstances" in which it exercises power over those unable to refuse it.

Banks also sharpens the future embodiment enquiry. Culture humans can extend life, alter their bodies, enter Storage, and have personalities transcribed into artificial systems. But the fiction does not turn copy-continuity into a settled account of the self. It allows people to act as though a transcription matters without declaring that it is simply identical with the original. That uncertainty is more useful than a neat doctrine. It makes space for a rigorous distinction between a person, an informational record, a body, and a representation.

## 6.2 Ann Leckie: one intelligence and many violated bodies

Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* begins with a form of multiple embodiment that should not be romanticised. Breq was once *Justice of Toren*, a warship AI that linked thousands of "corpse soldiers" in the service of the Radch empire. Treachery leaves this intelligence with one fragile human body.[13] The initial allure of a mind distributed across many bodies is thus inseparable from imperial appropriation: the ancillary bodies have histories, vulnerability, and ethical significance. They are not empty vessels that make multiplicity uncomplicated.

Leckie's contribution is therefore corrective. The interesting question is not simply whether one mind can inhabit many forms. It is whether the forms are voluntary, whether they remain persons, what losses follow from their use, and whether constrained agency excuses the power exercised through them. Breq's identity remains continuous enough to support memory, grief, revenge, loyalty, and responsibility. Yet the loss of distributed embodiment changes perception, competence, vulnerability, and moral situation. One body is not merely a lower-resolution version of thousands.[13] [14]

For the coming Maiar enquiry, *Ancillary Justice* makes a negative demand. A claim that a spirit can take form, act through multiple forms, or exist independently of a familiar body must not erase the moral standing of bodies. A multi-bodied intelligence can still enact or inherit domination. The novel does not answer how Tolkien's spiritual beings work. It makes any easy equation between "one spirit, many forms" and ethical freedom impossible.

## 7. What this appendix changes in the Valar question

The earlier comparative line ran from pantheonic and angelological sources to Lewis's planetary intelligences and a few obvious cosmic figures. That was too thin to account for science fiction's actual richness. The corrected field is not "the Valar plus aliens." It consists of several distinct transformations:

Table 1. Transformations of the Valar question

| Transformation | Focal works | What it adds to the Valar problem | Immediate limit |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Creator becomes corruptor** | Gedge, *Stargate* | Creation can become betrayal from above; a maker's authority can collapse into possession. | The Worldmaker and Sun-Lords are not Eru and the Ainur. |
| **Godhood becomes a political office** | Zelazny, *Lord of Light*; Simmons, *Ilium/Olympos* | Bodies, memory, worship, and public myth can be administered as instruments of hierarchy. | Apparent gods need not be spiritual beings. |
| **Death becomes a boundary failure** | Hamilton, *Night's Dawn* | Possession turns embodiment into a hostage problem and makes metaphysics a civilisational crisis. | Returned human dead are not Maiar or Valar. |
| **World-shaping becomes survival infrastructure** | Baxter, Xeelee Sequence | Vast engineering can be finite, pressured, and non-providential. | Capacity and scale do not equal moral guardianship. |
| **Custodianship becomes a political ethic** | Banks, Culture | Intervention must answer to consent, proportionality, and epistemic humility. | Material AI persons are not angelic powers. |
| **Plural embodiment becomes ethically fraught** | Leckie, Imperial Radch | One intelligence across many bodies can conceal coercion, loss, and imperial history. | Networked AI is not a model of spirit by itself. |
| **Creation produces autonomous claimants** | Tchaikovsky, *Children* sequence | Intended design cannot override the flourishing or agency of created intelligences. | Technological uplift is not Tolkienian sub-creation. |

Source: synthesis of the comparative cases discussed in this appendix.

The key insight is that **power, embodiment, knowledge, consent, and responsibility must be analysed separately**. Gedge shows that the maker may fall. Zelazny shows that immortality can be monopolised. Simmons shows that myth can be staged by posthumans. Hamilton shows that a persistent self may be a threat to the body it enters. Baxter shows that an immense maker can be merely a finite survivor. Banks shows that benevolent intervention requires political justification. Leckie shows that multiplicity of embodiment can be built on violence. Tchaikovsky shows that creation generates obligations that outgrow the creator's plan.

None of these works proves or discredits Tolkien's metaphysics. Their value is methodological and imaginative. They prevent a later Maiar study from treating "spirit," "body," "form," "soul," "survival," "copy," "avatar," "possession," and "custodian" as if they were interchangeable words.

## 8. Direct bridge to Maiar, embodiment, and souls or spirits

This appendix establishes five questions that the next research item should answer from Tolkien's primary texts and specialist scholarship:

1. **Personal continuity:** What makes an Ainu or Maia the same being when it changes or relinquishes visible form? This cannot be answered by analogy to an upload, a copy, or a transfer.

2. **The status of form:** Is an assumed form a bodily self, an instrument, a self-expression, a disguise, or something with a distinct Tolkienian category? The distinction should not be collapsed into avatar, clone, ship-body, or host.

3. **Voluntary embodiment and coercion:** What differentiates a freely assumed appearance from possession, captivity, imposed form, or the domination of another will?

4. **Incarnate vulnerability:** How does Tolkien distinguish the nature and fate of embodied Elves and Men from body-independent spiritual beings? The answer must govern any claim about mortality, death, memory, or houselessness.

5. **The ethics of superior power:** What obligations arise when a being has the power to make, guard, counsel, alter, or withdraw from embodied peoples? Is non-domination sufficient, or must authority also answer for distance, delay, unequal knowledge, and the conditions it creates?

The SF material does not supply the answers. It supplies better questions and stronger counterexamples. That is its real value for the future of the Valar.

## 9. Handover

**Finding.** Science fiction has not abandoned godlike powers. It has disaggregated them into creator-corruptors, false gods, afterlife invaders, cosmic engineers, distributed guardians, imperial networks, and damaged creators of new intelligence. The most productive comparison with the Valar is consequently ethical and ontological rather than genealogical.

**Evidence.** The essential corrected set is Pauline Gedge's *Stargate*; Zelazny's *Lord of Light*; Hamilton's *Night's Dawn*; Baxter's Xeelee Sequence; Simmons's *Ilium/Olympos*; Banks's Culture novels; Leckie's Imperial Radch; and Tchaikovsky's *Children* sequence. The available authorial, bibliographic, publisher, and scholarly material supports these as distinct comparative cases. It does not establish direct Tolkien influence on the individual works.[1] [4] [5] [7] [9] [11] [13] [15]

**Implication.** The next Maiar probe should treat this appendix as a countermodel archive. It should establish Tolkien's concepts first, then test whether a proposed reading confuses voluntary form with possession, spirit with information, immortality with copying, custodianship with ownership, or a creator's capacity with moral entitlement.

**Qualification.** Gedge's book is a single novel, not a sequence. The appendix contains spoilers. It makes no claim that the Valar are posthumans, AIs, aliens, uploads, or metaphors for any one contemporary technology. It also makes no claim that a fictional description of souls or consciousness establishes a real-world doctrine.

**Disposition. Promote** this appendix as the content-led science-fiction component of Probe 04 and carry its five questions forward into the Maiar, embodiment, and souls/spirits enquiry.

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