PROBE 04 · APPENDIX

The Future of the Valar

Science Fiction after Custodianship

Godlike powers do not vanish when planetary gods become implausible. Their functions divide.

A comparative appendix · September 2026

Godlike powers do not disappear. Their functions divide.

When visible planetary gods become implausible, the Valar's functions do not vanish. Science fiction separates world-making, apparent divinity, survival after death, bodily form, political legitimacy and moral custodianship – qualities that myth can hold together in a single figure.

World-making
Capacity to make or alter a world does not establish a right to rule it.

Embodiment
Form may be a self, an instrument, a disguise, a prison, or a body taken by force.

Custody
Guardianship must answer to consent, proportionality and accountability.



Varda Elentári. Dominik Matus, 2006. CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Shown uncropped.

What makes a world-shaper a guardian rather than an owner?

Gedge: when the maker becomes the betrayer

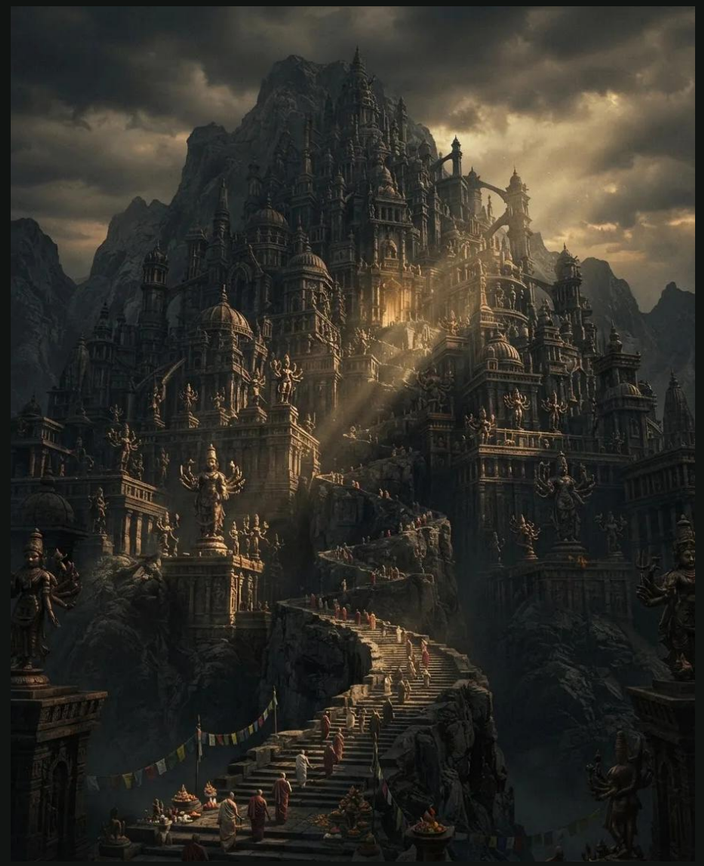
Pauline Gedge's *Stargate* (1982) is one novel, not a sequence, and has nothing to do with the 1994 film. Its **Sun-Lords** are immortal custodians bound to particular suns and worlds; its **Worldmaker** is the creator who turns against them.

The reversal is theological. In Tolkien, the Valar fail within an order they did not make. In Gedge, creation becomes unreliable from above: the maker isolates systems and corrupts immortals with forbidden knowledge.

A being may be long-lived, visibly mighty, local to a world and worshipped – and still be neither morally trustworthy nor metaphysically ultimate. Comparative analogue only: not Eru and the Ainur.



Godhood as a political office



Roger Zelazny
Lord of Light, 1967



Dan Simmons
Ilium, 2003; Olympos, 2005

Zelazny: identity transfer, replacement bodies and religious office make rebirth a governing monopoly. Simmons: posthumans masquerade as Olympians and stage the Trojan War as an experiment.

THE SHARED LESSON

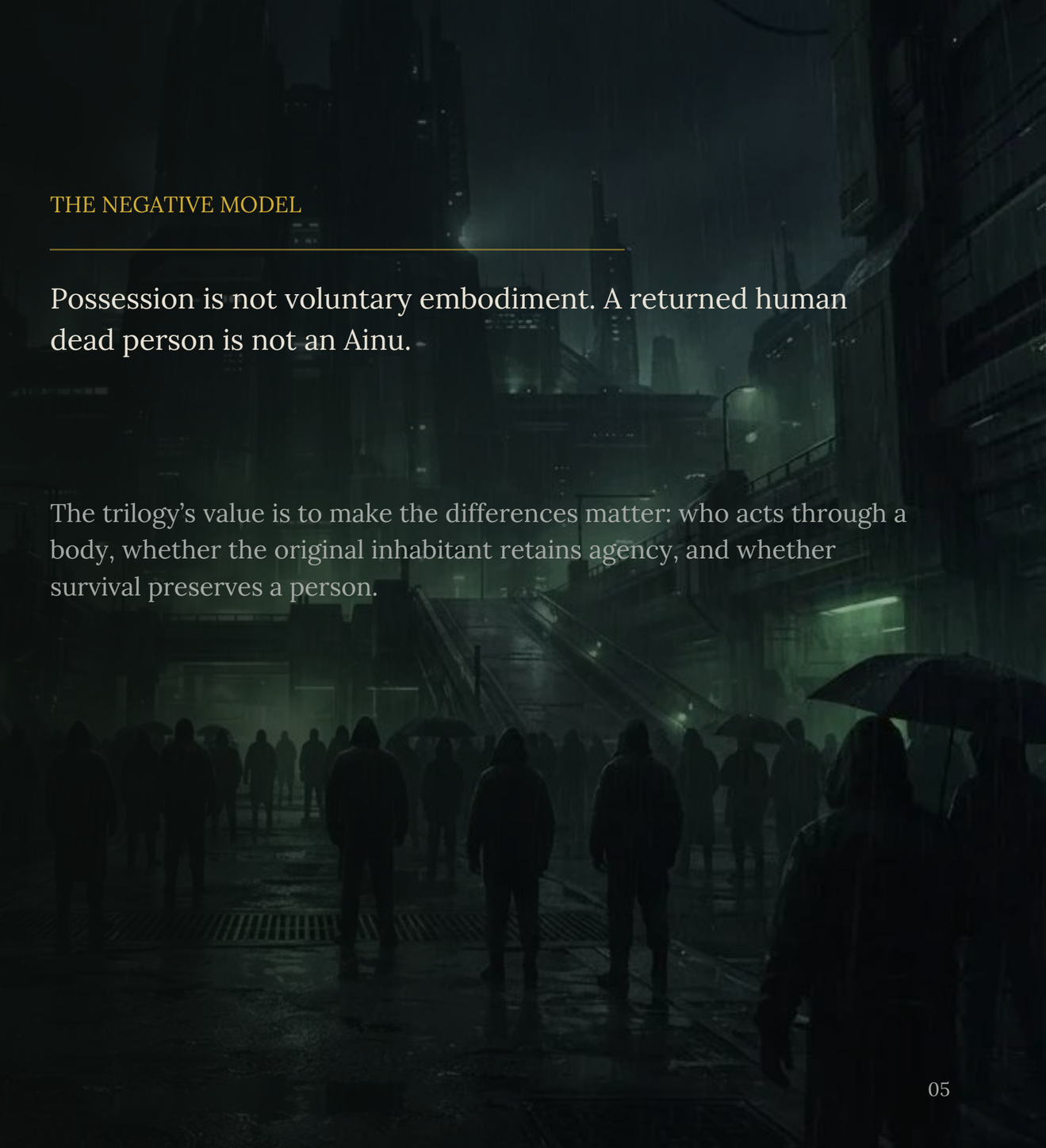
Apparent gods need not be spiritual beings. Miracle, majesty and public worship can be manufactured instruments of hierarchy.
Continuity of consciousness is not morally neutral when an elite controls the conditions of rebirth.

For the Maiar study, voluntary form, transfer, reconstruction and disguise must be distinguished before any claim about spirit is made.

Hamilton: the body becomes a hostage

Night's Dawn: *The Reality Dysfunction* (1996), *The Neutronium Alchemist* (1997), *The Naked God* (1999).

Dead souls return to possess the living. Each host is both a person and a hostage: killing the Possessed also kills the host and can add another soul to the crisis.
Military force, biotechnology and advanced ships cannot resolve a society whose embodiment has become insecure.
The afterlife is not consolation but infrastructure failure.



THE NEGATIVE MODEL

Possession is not voluntary embodiment. A returned human dead person is not an Ainu.

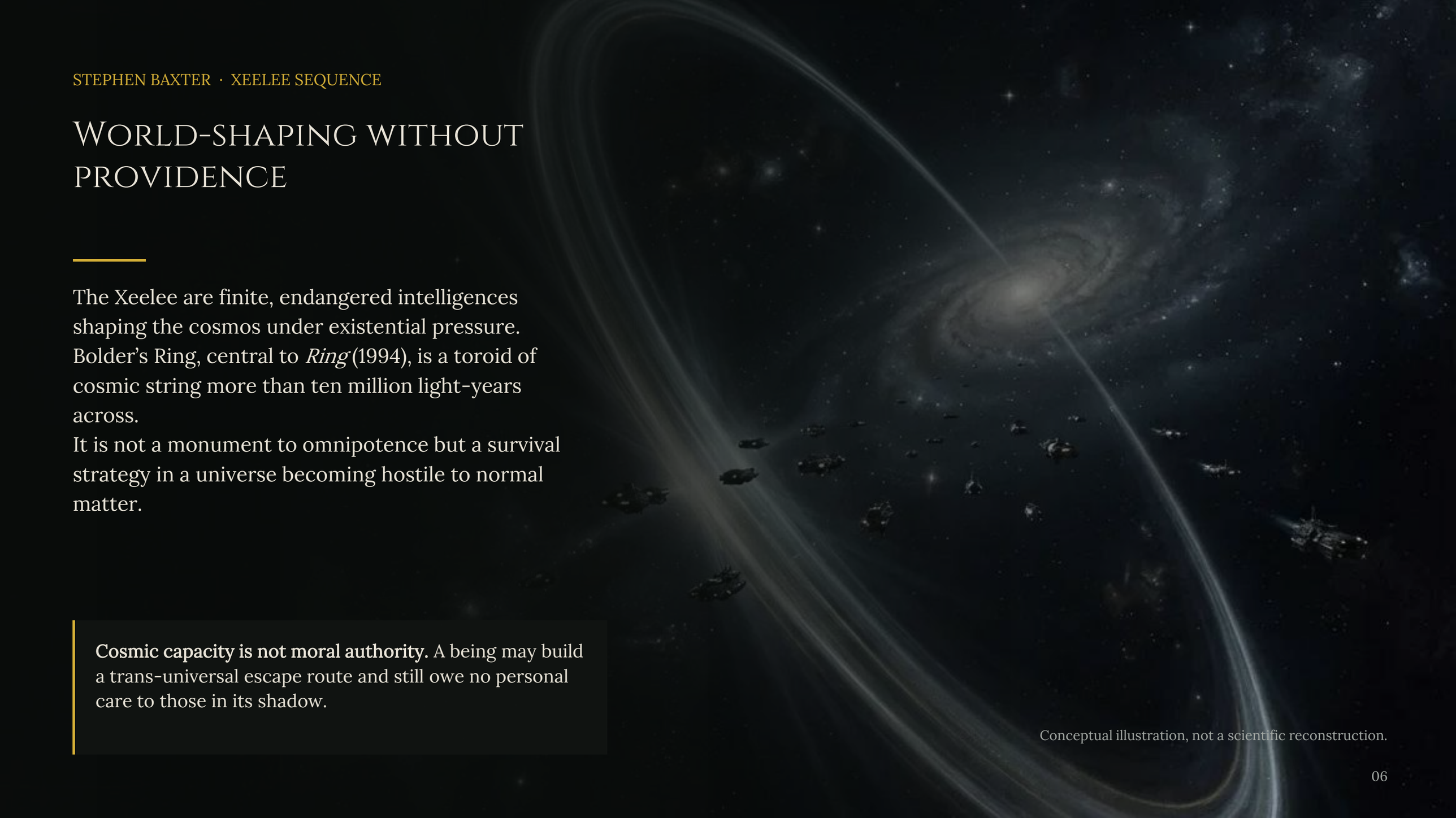
The trilogy's value is to make the differences matter: who acts through a body, whether the original inhabitant retains agency, and whether survival preserves a person.

STEPHEN BAXTER · XEELEE SEQUENCE

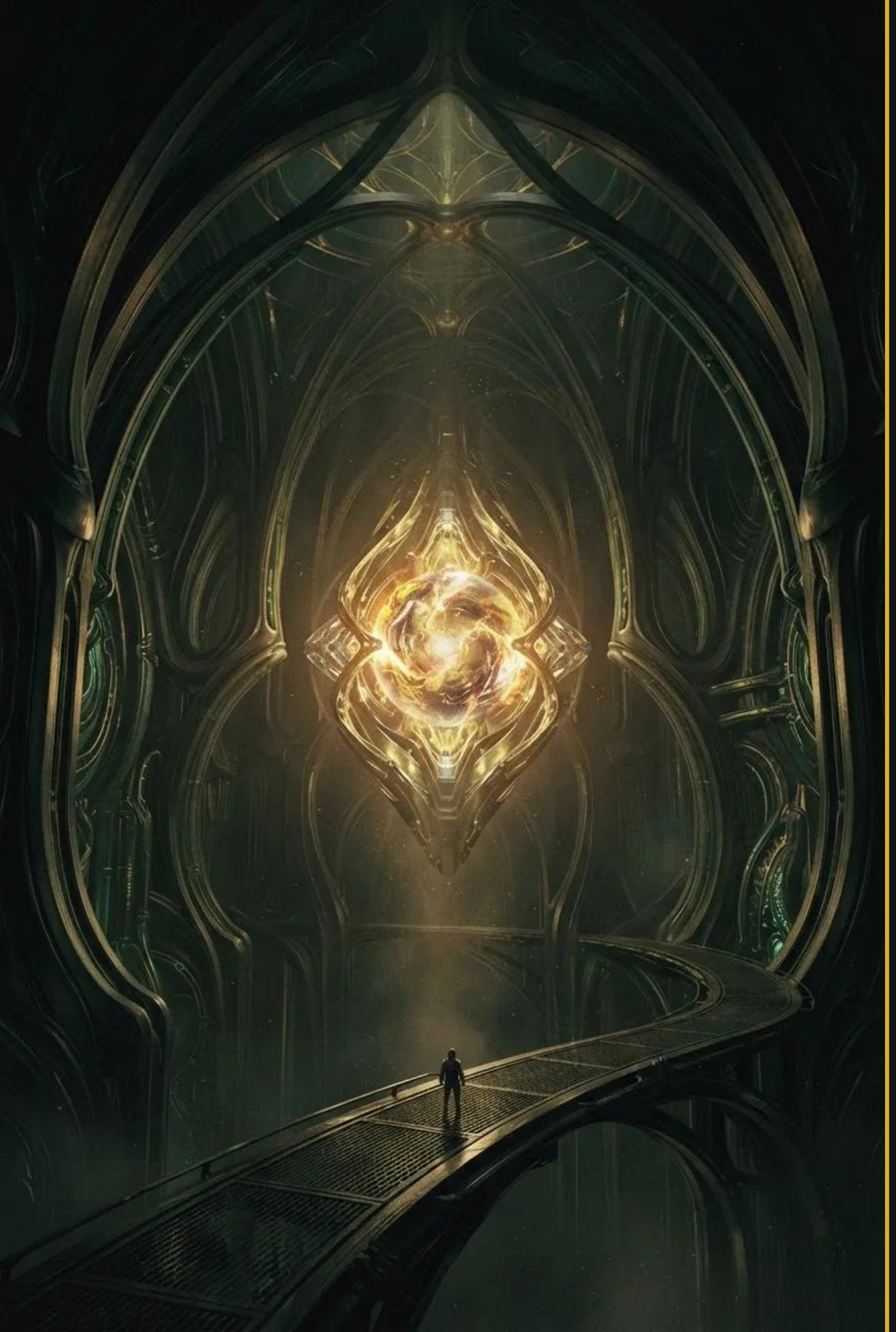
World-shaping without providence

The Xeelee are finite, endangered intelligences shaping the cosmos under existential pressure. Bolder's Ring, central to *Ring* (1994), is a toroid of cosmic string more than ten million light-years across.
It is not a monument to omnipotence but a survival strategy in a universe becoming hostile to normal matter.

> **Cosmic capacity is not moral authority.** A being may build a trans-universal escape route and still owe no personal care to those in its shadow.



Conceptual illustration, not a scientific reconstruction.



IAIN M. BANKS · THE CULTURE

Benevolent guardians must justify intervention

Minds are hyperintelligent AIs embodied as ships and habitats. A Mind needs a body; without a ship or equivalent, it is helpless. An avatar or terminal is a local interface, not the whole person.

The Culture replaces a single paternal guardian with a plurality of powerful persons. Minds disagree, possess character and act through institutions.

Contact watches, evaluates and engages with other civilisations.

Special Circumstances undertakes covert and sometimes violent intervention.

Banks's test is not whether benevolence can act, but whether it can prove that unauthorised interference is generally right.

ANN LECKIE · IMPERIAL RADCH, 2013–2015

One mind does not make bodies expendable



Conceptual illustration of Breq's reduced embodiment.

Breq was once *Justice of Toren*, a warship AI linking thousands of "corpse soldiers" in the service of the Radch empire. Treachery leaves that intelligence in one fragile human body.

The ancillary bodies have histories, vulnerability and ethical significance. They are not empty vessels that make multiplicity uncomplicated.

A multi-bodied intelligence can still enact or inherit domination. The question is whether forms are voluntary, whether they remain persons, and what losses follow from their use.

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY

Unintended beings are not failed designs

Avrana Kern's uplift virus creates Portiid intelligence instead of the intended monkeys. She survives as a damaged, AI-merged remnant, first worshipped as a god and later incorporated into their technology.
Later books add host-dependent memory, simulation and distinct modes of survival. Creation generates obligations that outgrow the creator's plan.

Children of Time 2015 · *Ruin* 2019 · *Memory* 2022







Portiid civilisation · simulated colony

The new pantheon is a set of ethical problems

Seven transformations of the Valar problem. None is a genealogy; each is a disciplined countermodel.

01 · GEDGE

Creator becomes corruptor

Creation can become betrayal from above; a maker's authority can collapse into possession.

02 · ZELAZNY, SIMMONS

Godhood becomes an office

Bodies, memory, worship and public myth can be administered as hierarchy.

03 · HAMILTON

Death becomes boundary failure

Possession makes embodiment a hostage problem and metaphysics a crisis.

04 · BAXTER

World-shaping becomes infrastructure

Vast engineering can be finite, pressured and non-providential.

05 · BANKS

Custody becomes political ethics

Intervention must answer to consent, proportion and epistemic humility.

06 · LECKIE

Plural embodiment becomes coercion

One intelligence across many bodies can conceal violence and imperial history.

07 · TCHAIKOVSKY

Creation produces claimants

Design cannot override the flourishing or agency of created minds.

Analyse power, embodiment, knowledge, consent and responsibility separately.

What is a spirit, and what is its body?

Science fiction supplies better questions. Tolkien's primary texts must supply the evidence.

1. What makes an Ainu the same being across changed or relinquished form?
2. Is an assumed form a self, an instrument, a disguise or a distinct category?
3. What separates voluntary appearance from possession or imposed form?
4. How does Incarnate vulnerability differ from body-independent spirit?
5. What does superior power owe to embodied peoples it can alter?

Two openly licensed Valar artworks frame this deck: Varda Elentári (slide 2) and Ulmo, Lord of Waters. Neither is cropped.



Ulmo saves Voronwë. TTThom, 2007. CC BY-2.5, via Wikimedia Commons. Shown uncropped over a conceptual seascape.

Reading trail and image credits

PRIMARY COMPARATORS

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IMAGE CREDITS

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Adapted from *Appendix to Probe 04 – The Future of the Valar: Science Fiction after Custodianship*, September 2026. Contains major plot spoilers. No direct Tolkien influence is asserted for the individual works.