

an epic young-adult  
science fiction adventure

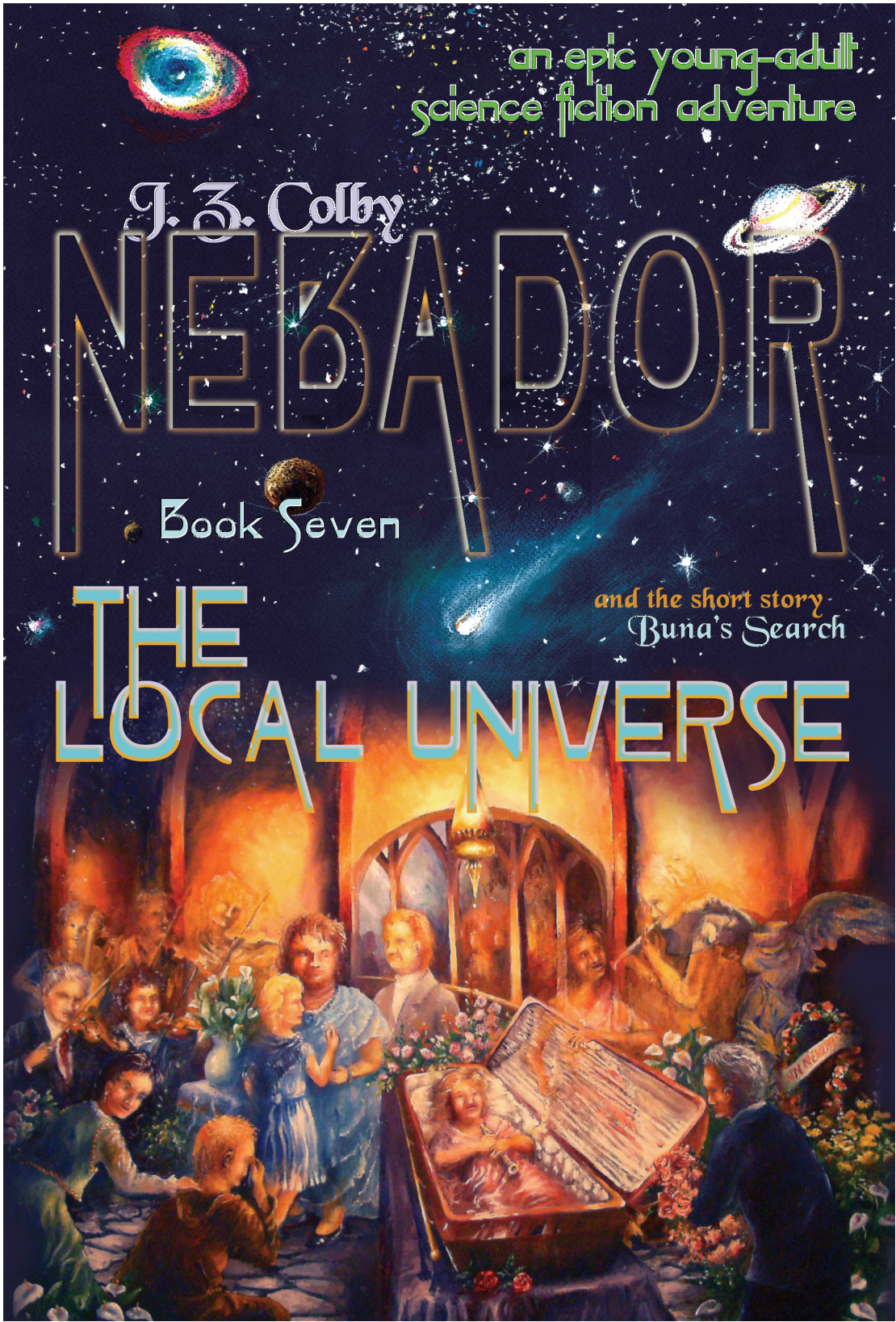
J. Z. Colby

# NEBADOR

Book Seven

## THE LOCAL UNIVERSE

and the short story  
Buna's Search



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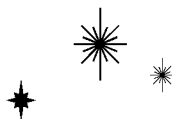
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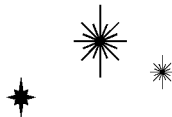
**THE LOCAL UNIVERSE**

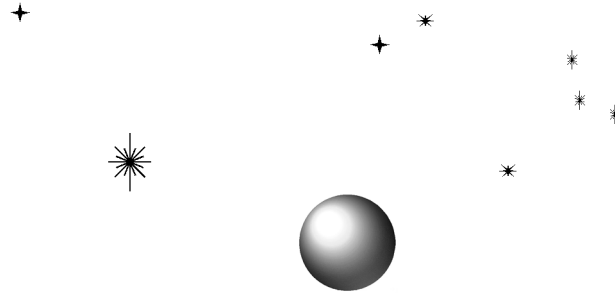
**an epic young-adult science fiction adventure**

**by  
J. Z. Colby**

**and the short story**

**Buna's Search  
by Shadow Buffalo-walker**





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## **Greetings, young people of planet Earth,**

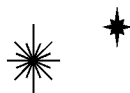
The previous book of the series, *NEBADOR Book Six: Star Station*, finally answered most questions about Ilika's civilization, both for the five crew members from a backward medieval world, and for us. By *Book Six*, the new crew of the deep-space response ship *Manessa Kwi* has been tested in many ways, gone on long journeys by land, air, and space, looked Death in the face, and come home to *Satamia Star Station* to heal their wounds and, of course, be tested some more. *Book Six* concluded *Trilogy Two*, and is the final book of the essential NEBADOR saga.

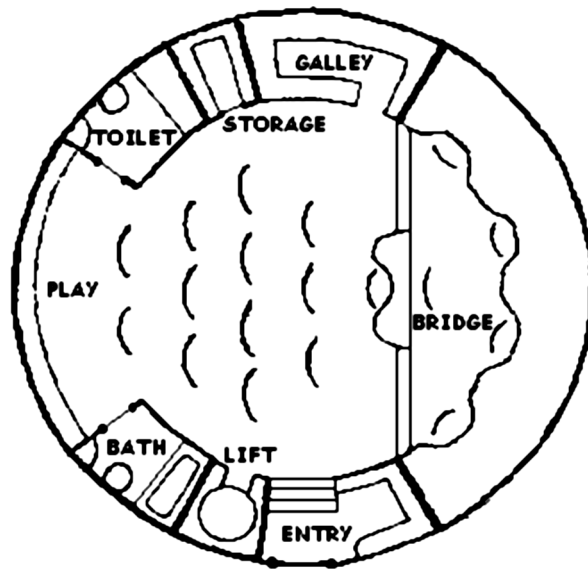
The book in your hands takes the story to a new level as the crew begins advanced training and real missions. No longer will they be making little supply runs here and there. Now they must work with highly-trained Nebador citizens to solve serious universe problems that involve the fates of entire civilizations.

Although our friends must continue to wrestle with physical and mental challenges, more and more they find they must understand spiritual matters. Indeed, they receive a training supervisor who is only visible when she chooses to be, and knows when to let the monkey mammals of the *Manessa Kwi* discover solutions for themselves.

Most people agree that *our* spiritual helpers, by whatever names we call them, also know when to leave us alone with our problems and predicaments so that we will most deeply feel the joy of standing on our own two feet.

**J. Z. Colby**  
**2013**





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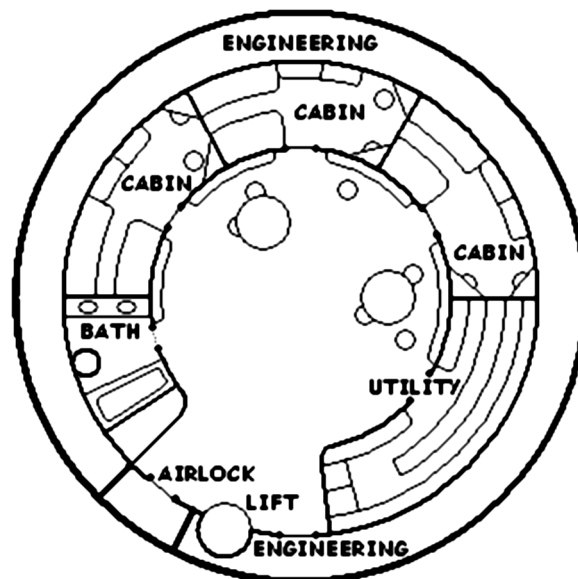
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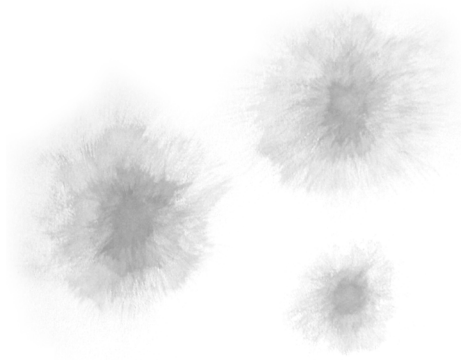
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Cecelia Harper





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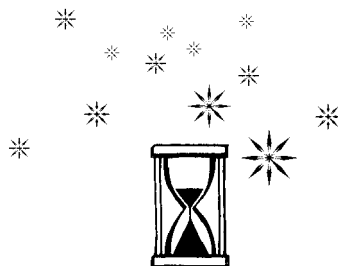
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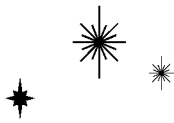
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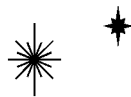
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“I have decreed it, and I will bring it to pass. My word will not return to me empty.”

— Yahweh



## Part 1: The Edge

### Chapter 1: Deep-Space Mission

Melorania, a barely-seen blue mist, hovered near the ceiling of Satamia Star Station's main hall. People of all shapes and sizes went about their business far below, or swooped through the air in transit from balconies to corridors.

A green mist formed near her.

*I want you to meet someone,* Melorania said.

A small purple mist appeared nearby.

The green and purple mists touched. *Welcome, Arantiloría, to Satamia Star Station,* Kerloran said. *You have journeyed far.*

*It will be an honor to supervise a response-ship crew beginning advanced training and serious missions. I applied nearly a century ago, and have been observing fully-trained crews while I awaited an assignment. These . . . humans . . . are unique to Nebador, I believe. We do not have any in Kalidor.*

*And that is best,* Kerloran said, turning a slightly softer green. *They have . . . many challenges.*



Arantiloría decided to wander around the star station, to see what she could learn, before beginning her assignment. Many of the creature shapes were strange to her, so she remained invisible to all mortal eyes and floated

down toward the activity in the main hall.

The flying creatures delighted her the most, and she quickly realized why — in Kalidor, no one had evolved feathers. Here, feathers were everywhere, sometimes floating in the air when a winged creature would shake itself, or take off from the floor with powerful strokes.

The floor . . . something about the floor of the main hall called to her, so Arantiloria floated down and opened herself to its memories.

She smiled as she saw Kibi, with bucket and scrub brush, crying and trembling as the young human steeled herself to be mocked and abused, based solely on memories from her home planet. *Yes, Arantiloria silently agreed with Kerloran, these humans have challenges.*

The low-gravity pathways remembered Mati well, and a dishwashing room had a fond memory of Boro, struggling to get his priorities straight.

Arantiloria let herself wander, following her instincts, getting used to the mortals of Nebador, and listening to any stories that came to her. Before long, her intuition led her up to the third balcony. A little bubbling fountain in the middle of a small patio nearly reached out and grabbed her, so she went close and listened carefully.

It knew all six members of the human crew, five very recently, and the captain a few years before. Ilika had whispered his loneliness to the trickling water, sending out his hope that someday he would have a companion. It also knew of Kibi's sexual desire for another mammal, and then her shame. Sata's prayers for Boro to find his passion were clearly recorded, and Rini's joy when Mati began to walk.

After wandering for several more days and listening to countless plants, stones, tables, and the great station tree itself, Arantiloria decided it was time to meet her new charges.



When the call came, a day later, for the crew of the *Manessa Kwi* to attend a meeting in a small chamber near the Mission Assignment Room, Ilika knew no more about it than anyone else. The dimly-lit room was silent and somber as they entered and beheld three large insects studying a star chart that glowed on a low table. The crew quietly settled themselves onto benches along the outer walls.

After another minute of silence, the mantis drew himself up to full height, towering over the others. “I don’t like it one bit. The numbers don’t add up to the usual interstellar-probe situation. It smells of desperation. T’shlix, you have more experience with such matters.”

The large, dark beetle shimmered with many iridescent colors as he twitched his mandibles. “I thought I did, but there’s something way-wrong here, as you also sense. Never before, in all the records of Nebador, have ships of this size been seen. What think you, M’palta?”

The large, furry arachnid shuddered for a moment. “My food pouch is tight with worry, and I counsel against any assumptions we might be tempted to make.”

A smaller insect, that the crew hadn’t yet noticed, suddenly unfurled wings that moved faster than sight, leapt into the air, and hovered over the glowing chart. “It’s exciting! Definitely not a routine assignment. We shall learn much, and make many new dances and songs, although some may be sad.” As she bobbed in the air over the table, her delicate arms stretched out to the sides and her two tails hung down, sometimes touching the chart. “This is truly deeper than deep space. But, M’palta, I believe our ship’s crew has arrived.”

The spider stretched up taller on eight legs and tucked her head to look under and behind her. Her many eyes met Kibi’s two. “Greetings, monkey mammals. This might be a long mission. Please consider our dietary needs.”

Kibi looked around, then remembered who the steward was. “We will.”

M’palta raised her head and looked back at her fellow insects. “Four days?”

The beetle shook his head. “Could take that long just to find and examine the lead ship, and there are three of them. We’d better be ready for six or eight days. Thoughts, Filia?”

The little hovering insect hopped to another part of the chart. “I feel . . . we will not *understand* until we have embraced all three ships . . . and danced upon their home planet.”

The green mandibles of the tall mantis twitched nervously. “That could take . . . twenty days. I will have to find a substitute for some classes I was supposed to teach.”

T'shlix nodded his iridescent head. "I, also."

M'palta ducked and looked at Kibi again. "You'd better stock for twenty days."

Kibi's mouth was dry, but she managed to speak. "Do you mean . . . twenty *Satamia* days?"

The spider's many eyes darkened slightly. "Is there another kind in use on *Satamia* Star Station?"



Half an hour later, Ilika, Kibi, and Boro all had lists of extra supplies they had to stock for a mission that would push the limits of even a deep-space response ship. The four insects had gone back to discussing the glowing star chart on the table, when suddenly the smallest of them started gazing up toward one corner of the ceiling. Her wings flashed and she floated upward, an intense look of curiosity on her tiny face.

"Someone is here," she shared. "Greetings, spirit. You need not remain hidden. We welcome any wisdom you have about this difficult mission."

Arantioria quickly made the decision to let herself be seen, and chose to take monkey-mammal shape since the crew of the *Manessa Kwi* were her primary charges.

To the mortal eyes in the room, a purple mist appeared, settled toward the floor, and swirled into a girl with purple hair and bright eyes. All six crew members were quickly on their feet, most gazing at her with surprise.

"You are very perceptive, little one," she said to the insect, still hovering near, as she touched it gently with one finger. "I am Arantioria, an advanced training specialist from the local universe of Kalidor. I have the great honor of being assigned to the *Manessa Kwi*, and have spoken at length with the ship, but have not, until now, revealed myself to the crew. I was wondering when the right moment might be. You decided for me, little one."

The hovering insect bowed. "I am Timorafilia, linguist and mission language specialist."

"T'shlix, technology specialist," the iridescent beetle shared.

"K'storpo, mission leader," the tall mantis said, bowing low.

"M'palta, biologist and mission steward," the arachnid revealed.

Ilika was about to speak when Arantioria put a finger to her lips. "I will

speak with the crew more as time allows, but right now I do not wish to interrupt your planning session any further. I'm sorry, but I have no special knowledge concerning this mission."

K'storpo took a deep breath. "I think we would accomplish little by staring at the chart any longer today. Let us all do the research we need to do, let the crew prepare their ship, enjoy the evening party that approaches, and depart after a good sleep."

The other three mission specialists nodded their agreement, and all four left the room.

Arantioria became purple mist, then vanished.

The six humans looked at each other, shrugged or smiled, and headed for their ship to figure out where they were going to put enough supplies for twenty long Satamia days.

\* \* \*

## Chapter 2: Departure

After playing a slow, haunting ballad on her keyboard, which she knew was colored by her nervousness about the upcoming mission, M'palta closed her instrument case as some avians struck up a lively dance tune. She spotted T'shlix two balconies lower, and seeing that the ramps were crowded, climbed onto the railing, attached a thread, and lowered herself down.

The beetle clicked his four wings in greeting. "Lots of feeling in that piece you just played."

"Thanks. I'm worried about the mission. I keep trying to imagine it, but see lots of darkness and not much else."

"It is deep space!"

The spider looked at her friend with many eyes for a moment, then wiggled her mandibles with laughter. "Okay, you got me. Do you think the inexperienced monkey-mammal crew will be any trouble?"

"No. Next time you're at a knowledge processor, read what happened to them on Sonmatia Seven. And that high-level spirit, Aran-something, will be along. We'll be okay."

Spider and beetle listened to the music, shoulder to shoulder, until M'palta's mate arrived. The couple made their way down to the dance floor, leaving T'shlix to ponder his own worries about the upcoming mission.



The next morning, station time, when the mantis K'storpo ducked his head and stepped from the boarding tunnel into the assigned deep-space response



ship, he beheld the black-haired steward and the short, stocky navigator working together in the galley. All the cupboards, currently open, appeared to be full, but the two monkey mammals seemed determined to cram in more. Open boxes of food packets lined the galley counter.

To K'storpo's right, the large, muscular engineer was on the floor, reaching under the engineering console with the flexible probe of a test instrument. Boro noticed the mantis enter, and waved with his free hand.

K'storpo bowed slightly.

The small, long-haired pilot spun around in her chair, bounced up to her feet, and smiled at the tall mantis.

K'storpo quickly suppressed his fear-reaction as he remembered that such a showing of teeth was a gesture of friendship in mammals.

"Welcome to the Manessa Kwi," Mati said. "I'm supposed to take over in the galley now so Kibi can get you guys settled."

Kibi, stuffing more packets into the highest cupboard, turned her head. "Oh, yeah. Hi! I'll be right down."

Hearing sounds behind him, K'storpo stepped aside to allow T'shlix and his mate to enter the ship, followed closely by M'palta and her mate, each carrying a travel bag. At the same time, Rini appeared in the lift, Ilika came up a moment later, and for a few seconds everyone was bumping into everyone else. Kibi quickly stepped into the middle of the chaos and began pointing at passenger seats or toward the bridge. Soon, order was restored, and the new passengers immediately gained a healthy respect for the no-nonsense steward of the little ship.

Out in the boarding tunnel, the last group of passengers approached by air.

"Do they know . . . there are six of us?" Timoratamia asked shyly.

Timoradalia giggled. "We're on the passenger list!"

"They're nice," Timorafilia informed. "I've met them."

"Do little ships like this have bath tubs?" Timoradalia asked.

"Of course, silly!" Timorasimia asserted.

Last of all, Tizoromulia, feeling a bit embarrassed by the silly questions of his five mates, remained silent as they all fluttered into the ship.

Kibi spotted them, smiled, and pointed toward a passenger seat in the front row, big enough for all six with room to spare.

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