

LORD OF ENTROPY



JASON MOSER





Presented By
**ASYLUM
INK**



LORD OF ENTROPY

BY:
JASON MOSER

Story,
Written & Illustrated By
JASON MOSER

More From Asylum Ink:

HOLLOW

PHOBIC! AN EXPLORATION OF FEAR

CARNIVAL

ANIMAtropolis

LOST REALITY

~ ENTROPY SAGA ~

ENTROPY RISING
SACRIFICE TO ENTROPY
CHILD OF ENTROPY
PILLARS OF ENTROPY
LORD OF ENTROPY



ENTROPY VOL. 4, 2023. PUBLISHED BY ASYLUM INK. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION:
2626 NIXON DR. HUDSONVILLE MI. 49426 ENTIRE CONTENTS©2022 JASON MOSER. A.R.R. ENTROPY, IT'S LOGO
AND ALL RELATED CHARACTERS TM & ©2015-2022 JASON MOSER. A.R.R. THE EVENTS AND CHARACTERS
IN THIS BOOK ARE ENTIRELY FICTIONAL. ANY SIMILARITIES TO PERSONS LIVING OR DEAD ARE PURELY
COINCIDENTAL. NO PORTION OF THIS BOOK MAY BE USED OR REPRODUCED BY ANY MEANS (DIGITAL OR
PRINT) WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM ASYLUM INK EXCEPT FOR REVIEW PURPOSES.

"All things are subject to decay and when fate summons,
monarchs must obey."

-- John Dryden





PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

In the void there is only absence. Absence of weight. Absence of time. Absence of self. Void. With all thoughts lost, hopelessness threatens to consume those that find themselves trapped in the spaces between. A singular consciousness attempts to open eyes only to find eyes no longer exist. Limbs are but a memory as the consciousness struggles to regain cohesion and identity. The loss of self is near total but instinct remains.

Effort is exerted and strain is felt. The consciousness knows there is more, as true void is without pain. After all, how can one feel if no body exists? The consciousness begins to visualize a vague outline of form. The body slowly gains cohesion but the immense, torturous pain of it all becomes almost unbearable. Only on the brink of exhaustion and terror does the consciousness become aware of the sound. A buzzing at first, so very faint. Straining to hear, the consciousness endures more suffering out of curiosity and a need to experience new stimulation.

The soft buzzing turns into a gentle whine, interspersed with silence reminding the consciousness of a concept. Words. The void is being filled with words and suddenly a male voice became clear.

“Arisa! Can you hear me? You’re almost there! Reach out to my voice and become whole again!”



The consciousness now had identity and with it the weight of the world slowly encroached upon the void. Arissa still could not see anything but faint outlines, yet now understanding began to creep in.

“I hear you... it’s hard to think. What is this?”

“You’re in the space between, where time has no meaning. The trauma to your body was almost too much. Your mind reached out to this place for sanctuary, for healing and a moment’s breath.” The voice replied in a calm, soothing tone. Familiar yet different, as though heard through a thick wall, muffled and slightly distorted.

Arissa felt herself reassured as the voice continued. “I will help you to remember and with remembrance, so too shall you regain form. I caution you though, there is much death that will follow. Your journey will not be an easy one, but it will be necessary. Shall we begin?”

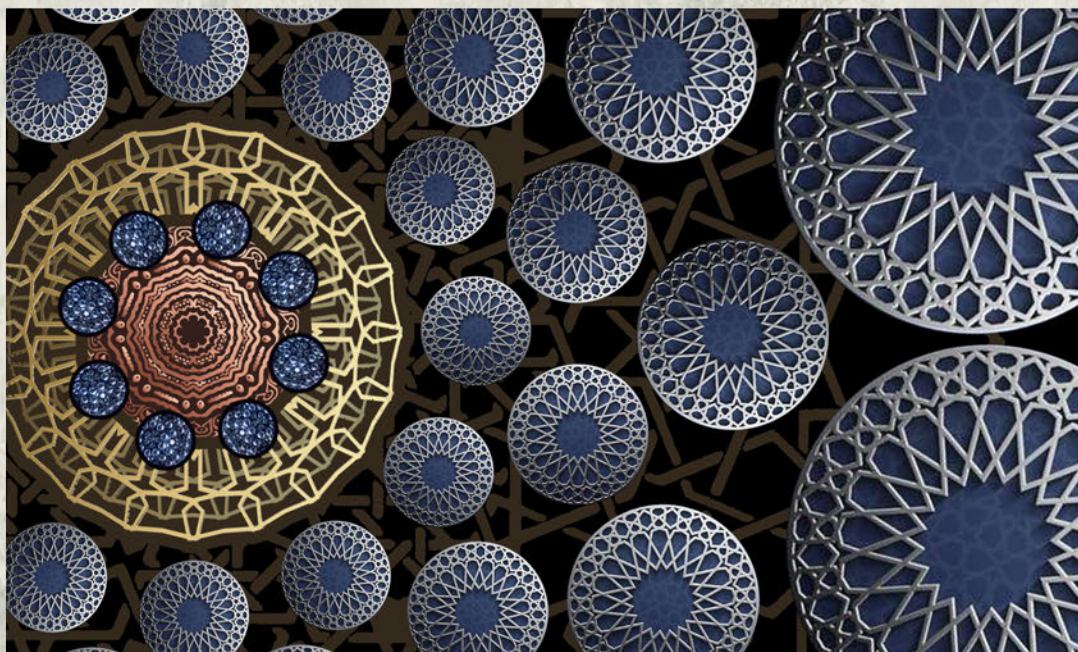
Arissa knew the trepidation she felt was warranted but there was no other choice. The void already threatened to embrace her once more, pulling at the edges of her mind, drawing her back to nothingness. Arissa felt anger rise from deep within, she must remember, no matter the cost. “Tell me what I need to know.” Arissa spoke in a confident tone. The other merely offered “and so we begin,” and the void was no more.

But before the void...



AFFINE SPACE

-  **AFFINE SPACE:** The totality of all existence, encompassing everything from the Multiverse to all dimensions beyond. Azathoth is the focal point for all Affine Space with the exact nature and relationship between the two not fully understood by even the Great Old Ones. It is believed however that this iteration of Affine Space exists only while the great Azathoth slumbers and upon his waking, all of existence will cease, prompting a new cycle to begin.
-  **MULTIVERSE:** Together, these multiple universes comprise everything that physically exists: the entirety of space, time, matter, energy, and the physical laws and constants that describe them.
-  **CHAMBER OF GUF:** Repository of all information contained in a 2-dimensional realm outside the Multiverse. Functioning as "information repositories," these spheres remain tethered to the multiple physical connections scattered simultaneously throughout the Multiverse, encompassing all living beings in creation. Knowledge and experience is retained and new tethers are created randomly with no limit as life continues to flourish in the Multiverse.
-  **GREAT OLD ONES:** Beings of immense power whose connection to Affine Space grants abilities far beyond all other creatures in existence. A product of Azathoth, the Outer God who is believed to be the sum total of Affine Space, the Great Old Ones began as sibling Outer Gods existing outside the realm of the Chamber of Guf. Eventually many of these beings journeyed to 3-dimensional space at the dawn of its creation for their own reasons only to find they had become trapped.
-  **OUTER GODS:** The natural state for the first beings in existence. Created by Azathoth before all other beings or realms, their purpose remains a mystery. Many of these creatures journeyed to 3 dimensional space for a variety of reasons, but discovered they were unable to return to pure Affine Space. Existing for eons, these ancient creatures became known as Great Old Ones to the races that evolved in the millennia to come.





AFFINE SPACE: A DEEPER DIVE INTO THE CONCEPT OF AFFINE SPACE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS.

The mathematical principles of Affine space push the boundaries of our understanding, beckoning us to explore its depths and question the nature of reality. It offers a powerful alternative to traditional three-dimensional space, shattering our conventional perception of length, width, and height. Through its revolutionary framework, Affine space opens a new window to the world where gravity and the laws of physics no longer exist. Immersed in an uncharted universe of infinite possibilities, we are challenged to redefine our notions of physical reality.

At its core, Affine space is a two-dimensional realm that encompasses all existence. It can be thought of as an informational plane from which our three-dimensional reality is derived and projected. In essence, Affine space is the canvas on which our perceived reality is painted. It is important to note that while Affine space is two-dimensional, the representations of objects and entities within it appear three-dimensional to us, creating the illusion we call reality.

One key distinction between Affine space and our perceived reality lies in the mathematical principles that govern each. In Euclidean space, we are accustomed to the concepts of distance, angles, and geometric properties. However, these concepts do not directly apply to Affine space. Affine space is characterized by affine transformations, which are mappings that preserve parallel lines and ratios of distances. Affine transformations do not necessarily preserve angles or distances, which challenges our traditional understanding of space.

Another fundamental aspect of Affine space is its boundless nature. Within this realm, countless realities and possibilities exist. It is a canvas that encompasses a multiverse of potentialities, allowing for an infinite range of variations and configurations. This opens the door to notions of parallel universes, alternate realities, and the exploration of vast and uncharted territories.

While Affine space may seem abstract and removed from our daily experiences, its implications are far-reaching. It has inspired scientific exploration and technological advancements, particularly in the realm of faster-than-light travel. By accessing Affine space consciously, humans have developed machines capable of traversing distances that were once thought impossible. These machines tap into the informational plane of Affine space, enabling journeys that defy the constraints of traditional three-dimensional reality.

However, it is important to recognize the limitations of human understanding when it comes to comprehending Affine space fully. We are confined to our three-dimensional perception, and the abstract entities that exist solely in Affine space, such as the Outer Gods, are beyond our limited ability to understand. These entities are said to have dreamt our reality into existence, and their power is seemingly without end. Whether this is a mere speculation or a profound truth remains a mystery, as the nature of these beings surpasses our current comprehension.

The concept of Affine space presents a puzzle to our comprehension, defying our current knowledge of mathematics. With its lack of boundaries and abstract entities at play, it's an endless source of curiosity. We still have much to learn from this space, which offers evidence that our perception of reality is partial; the true nature of existence may be much more vast than we can imagine.



CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1

The struggling colony of Fortuna continued its stand against the powerful Kayer group-backed Nov Colony and their Aegis Union. A barely legal blockade put in place around the colony stymied efforts of neighboring colonies to filter much needed supplies back and forth from Fortuna, further crippling her beleaguered economy. Fortunately, while large shipments were being blocked, a relatively small amount of supplies managed to be exchanged via the gate system on the planet. The ability to use the device on the outskirts of the interconnected system required patience and timing as the energy needed was often consumed further up the line by the more industrial worlds and their facilities. With the Gigun now increasing and purifying the energy output, however, an increase in available transmission bandwidth slowly benefitted Fortuna and her allies in the League of Independence.

In an effort to further destabilize the region, Arch Bishop Thram approached his allies within Bellent Industries, the current patron to the League and corporate rival to Kayer Group. A cold war between the two rivals had built over decades culminating in the current hostilities just out of the reach of Pax Continuum security. In fact, much of the dispute remained totally unknown to anyone not existing on the outer rim and therefore not completely reliant on either of the two corporations. Thram arranged for the seemingly unthinkable, a transport filled with much needed resources and medical supplies, to make the long and dangerous trek to Fortuna colony. News of the transport quickly spread as agents of the Church of the Affine slipped details to key persons of interest, always keeping the church out of the discussion. Thram wanted no further connection between his church and Bellent Industries, the better to manipulate the situation from afar without suffering recriminations later.



As the transport neared Fortuna, the ships amassed between the interstellar gate system and Fortuna closed in tight, warning the transport off. The captain of this transport was no average employee of Bellent Industries, however. A Hierophant of supreme loyalty to the church, this man had infiltrated the ship in route to Fortuna. Having killed all of her crew, the Hierophant had one mission to complete. Warnings were issued and weapons primed as the transport containing humanitarian aid pressed on. The hierophant knew the opposing forces would not open fire, even if the vessel violated their quarantine. At least not without reason or the illusion of one. The Hierophant reached over to a console to a newly installed device. Activating the machine, the Hierophant smiled to himself as the vessel plunged ever forward toward its destiny.

Alarms immediately sounded off aboard the Aegis blockade as a massive spike in energy was detected. According to the scans, not only had the transport begun targeting the lead vessel, but the readouts gave the impression of military grade weaponry, more than enough to destroy the ship with ease. The lead ship fired three warning shots as the oncoming transport barreled closer, presumably nearing its own firing range. Faced with certain destruction and no reply from the oncoming vessel, the Aegis Union opened fire, utterly destroying the transport. It didn't take long for the Aegis vessels to realize there were no weapons aboard the ship and all signs of the device that created the illusion were consumed in the explosion. Supplies and the bodies of the crew dangled in space among the debris as video secretly recorded by agents of the Church of the Affine fed all the imagery to the citizenry of Fortuna and her allies in the League of Independence. With this final act of barbarity as perceived by the league, an open declaration of war became inevitable.



It was evening and Agnee Pikeman was exhausted. The stress caused by the continual fissures, and the pressure placed on her both by her superiors and her own self to solve the mysteries of the pillars were taking their toll on her. Agnee felt it in her gut that if she just could figure out the pillars and their connection to the attacks that she could save potentially millions of lives. It was in this half-sleepwalk state that while walking to her tent, Agnee felt terror down to the core of her being. A bright flash of light ripped through the air mere feet in front of her as a fissure appeared. Agnee knew this was her end and covered her face with her hands, crouched into a ball on the ground. Agnee let out a loud scream as cold gripped her arms and lifted her to her feet, certain to rend limb from limb. Then with a thunderous crash the fissure sealed, leaving Agnee, still in the grips of some unseen foe, now in the dark of the evening. She slowly opened her eyes to see a strange looking women clad in armor holding her arms, steadying her. Next to her was a young man with a gentle face.

“What the hell was that? The creatures? Are they...” Agnee was awash in terror and confusion as darkness overtook her.



Slowly consciousness began to return to the woman as she opened her eyes with some difficulty.

“Wakey wakey sleepy head, you’ve been unconscious for 12 hours! I told you, you needed to take better care of yourself!” Dr. Finch said with a smile. Agnee found herself on her cot in her tent. In the opposite end of the room sat the two individuals who appeared in place of the fissure.

“Your friends over there brought you in after you passed out, they said they may have startled you.”

“You’re damn right they did.” Agnee righted herself and began to stand, only to fall back to the cot, her head still dizzy.

“Explain how you two appeared back there. Why... why aren’t I dead from one of those things?”

Arissa looked quizzically at Jemin for a moment before realization hit.

“I opened a portal, transferring Jemin and myself from the sol system to here. Is that light, the portal how the attacking creatures arrived?”



Agnee drank water and collected her thoughts a moment. "A little different, more violent and slightly different colors, but from what I've seen, yeah. Close enough. A portal, how were you able to do that? There's no gateway arch, nothing on this end?"

Arisa smiled slightly at the question, not looking to get too deep into explaining her origins and not wanting to unsettle the woman any more.

"Jemin and I are a bit different than the average person. Suffice it to say, we're here to put an end to these creatures and their constant attacks. There are people out there, one of whom I'm told you already met. People with a special purpose to activate these pillars. When activated the pillar closes off the rifts, these tears in space time that are happening in places where the membrane between universes are thin."

Jemin sat forward at this point, "yeah, I know it's a lot to take in."

Jemin's presence seemed to sooth Agnee's stress and apprehension. A subconscious sensation of ease and comfort that seemed to emanate from the young man.

"The man that touched the pillar, Kendis, he vanished after he touched the pillar. What happened? Is he dead?"

Arisa thought for a moment, organizing her thoughts as best she could in a way Agnee would understand.

"Let me show you." Arisaa sat forward, gently extending her hands. Agnee placed her hands in Arissa's and instantly felt her consciousness drift, a sensation she could only describe as an out of body experience. A vast star field appeared before her, swirling in an ocean of darkness. Agnee felt herself become unstuck in time as her consciousness drifted to the time before stars, where only darkness could be found. Agnee began to see great forms, shining and powerful, moving through the oceans of night with ease, unaware of anything else near or far to them. Smaller spheres of beautiful luminance began to appear, spreading warmth and knowledge throughout the vast distances. These spheres were too numerous to count, yet all were interconnected by a network of glowing strings. These threads stretched out into the vast ocean leading to entire worlds. This was Affine space, the inter connected existence of all things, both physical and not. There was no after life because a life never ends, merely assumes its natural position in the universe. These spheres of entrancing beauty sang out with vast intelligences, drifting from world to world, gaining knowledge and experiences. Sub clusters of spheres traveled in groups, moving in and out of physical existence together while others drifted more aimlessly.

Agnee felt herself drift back toward her body, she looked down at her form and saw herself for what she was, another of the glowing spheres of warmth and connected to those around her. The lives she saw, Dr, Finch, Jemin Allwithier, her family – all had these threads of connection. Then Agnee looked in front of her. At first she was terrified by the immense many-angled being of light that floated before her. Immense and powerful beyond comprehension, Agnee recalled the other similar beings of power, the first things in all of creation to stride the oceans of darkness where the stars would one day be formed. Slowly the light folded in on its self and Agnee felt calm and reassurance from deep within. The receding light revealed the gentle smile of Arissa as she helped to steady Agnee.

“Do you understand?” Arissa asked, once Agnee had collected herself.

“I... I’m not sure how, but I think I do.”

“Well I sure as hell don’t!” replied Dr. Finch, confused and more than a little irritated by being left out of the revelation.

“It was amazing, I saw everything. We’re all connected. You, me, the pillars. The pillar didn’t destroy Kendis, it elevated him. He transitioned into something beautiful, something greater than he could have ever been on his own. And in doing so, he healed the fissures these creatures are exploiting to come here.” Agnee excitedly explained to the young man.



“And she showed you all of this? How?”

Arissa merely looked on with a smile. Agnee finally felt her purpose grow from deep within. A new meaning to her life had been awakened and Arissa as well as Jemin sensed it too.

“When do we leave?” Asked Agnee.
“I can feel it calling to me. I’m ready.”

Jemin and Arissa both stood at that, while Dr. Finch recoiled in shock at the sudden declaration.

“No you can’t just leave. To do what? Vanish like Kendis did?”

Agnee stood before the young doctor, holding his arms in her hands as she spoke softly.

“This is what I was meant to do. Only I can do it. I want this!”

“What will I say to everyone else? What happens next?” Dr. Finch asked with great concern.

“Tell them... tell them I found a higher calling.”

And with that, Arissa began the process of generating another portal, leading the trio on to the next thread, be it the pillar meant for Agnee or another activator, neither Jemin nor Arissa knew. But in a flash they were gone and Dr. Finch felt more alone than ever.



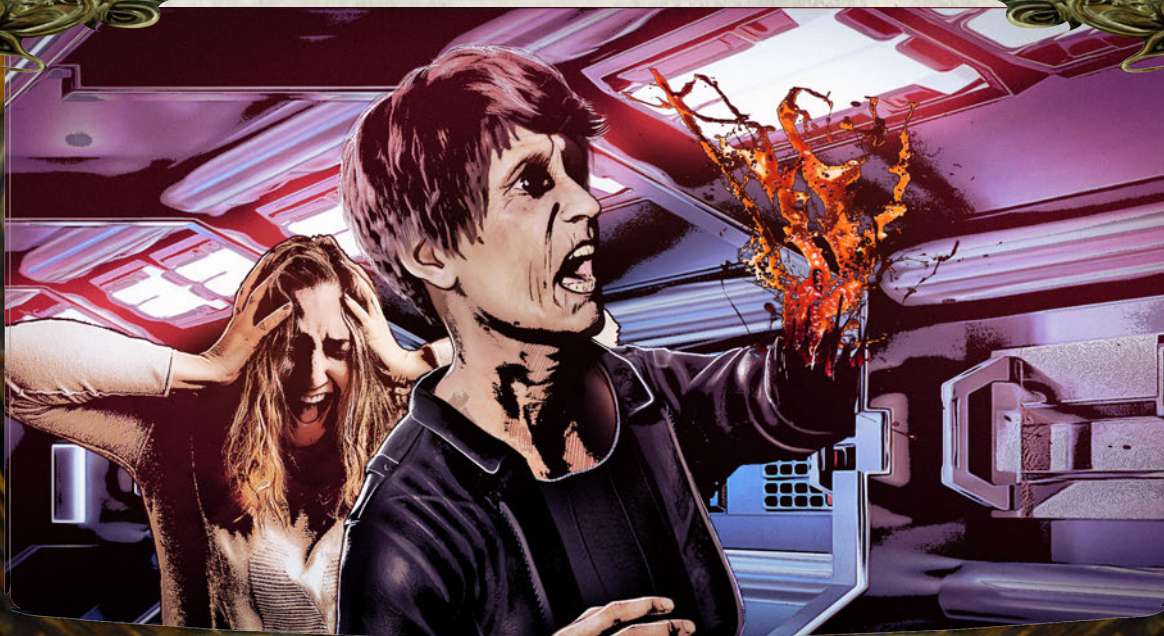
Purgatory remained nearly lifeless as machines worked ceaselessly to process the sheer power of Sha'Bolique, preventing her from amassing enough energy to reawaken. What few lifeforms remained to inhabit the dead prison world existed either to aid the Gigun in their works, or on the polar opposite to the Gigun citadel where the Planum Boreum processing facility rested. A select few humans and former servitors oversaw the daily operations, much of which remained fully automated. While many protections were in place to prevent madness from infecting those brave enough to work at the facility, the job still was not without risk. The pervasiveness of Sha'Bolique's power pressed upon the psyche constantly, working to erode one's will to survive. This necessitated a rotation of staff every month (Earth standard time), with restrictions in place preventing anyone from working more than their one rotation per year. Replacement staff aboard the transport ship Indiana approached the Purgatory landing site, a welcoming site to the staff of the processing facility.

As the ship came to a rest, the staff gathered at the gate, eager to leave the accursed Purgatory. Boarding would typically take place over the next few hours, allowing time to transfer personal items and for the command staff to compare notes with the inbound command crew. The gate opened and the staff eagerly approached only for a torrent of plasma fire to cut those in front down immediately. The stench of burnt flesh and the cries of the dead and dying filled the port as Hierophant from the Church of the Affine stormed the complex. The security system detected nothing as the carnage unfolded as the Hierophant carried military grade block/cloak technology. Nothing electronic deployed as security, aside from what the Hierophant wanted, remained operational. Within moments the entire facility was under Hierophant control.



The Hierophant moved quickly and with purpose as four of the soldiers carried a large device suspended between two poles, as one would carry an injured soldier on a stretcher. The device was brought to the central reactor, a large room recently constructed with Gigun technology to draw off and process Sha'Bolique's immense power. The device was a fusion bomb, a deadly weapon capable of unheard of destruction made all the more terrifying when exposed to Sha'Bolique's unfiltered energies.

The Hierophants gathered around the weapon and lowered their heads in prayer. They would sacrifice themselves for the great honor of having died in service of Arch Bishop Thram and the mighty Church of the Affine. At the conclusion of the prayer a button was pressed resulting in the utter annihilation of everyone in the room and much of the facility. The reactor itself, constructed by the Gigun proved resistant to even the power of the fusion bomb, for the powers it channeled from Purgatory itself eclipsed that of even a sun. The facility and the devices of human construction that relayed the power were reduced to ash however. Backup relay's and batteries long unused began the painstaking work of firing to life, but for 3 long minutes the entire Pax Continuum gate system was interrupted. The gateways closest to the center of power in the Pax Continuum suffered the least interruption with a mere flicker as the systems were constantly updated with the latest advances. The flicker resulted in 500 deaths as well as 8,000 maimed or similarly injured individuals from the core worlds as the gate closed while still in transit, if only for a moment. The further out the energy had to flow, the longer the interruption, especially on the poorer colonies that no longer held the interest of their corporate sponsors. In total, the interruption cost the lives of 50,000 members of the Pax Continuum with untold loss of goods, livestock, and the maiming of citizens.



Arch Bishop Thram sat upon his throne in triumphant glee as he monitored the influx of information throughout the news feeds. The disruption leapt from one gate system to the next in near instantaneous time, eroding the delicate balance between realities. The damage ensured more and more tears in space-time would occur, each one releasing a torrent of monstrosities on countless worlds in the system. Thram raced to his inner chambers, his connection to the Lord of Tears and all things beyond this reality. Half machine/half organic devices stood around the room monitoring Affine space. A mix of science and mysticism, even to Thram, these devices looked for the sign that the end was near and all of reality would be torn asunder beneath the heels of the Lord of Tears – yet the sign was never given. Thram had caused much damage to reality yet it was not enough. If disruption through destruction would not be enough to rend reality, then Thram would have to ensure the opposite; a surplus of activity at the outer most edges of the Pax Continuum. The gears of war ground slow but steady out at the edges of the Pax Continuum. After the damage his Hierophant unleashed, a large and bloody enough war would do the trick and unleash the Lord of Tears upon the universe.



Many miles away and deep within the Gigun citadel, Gabriel cried out in excruciating pain. Renee did her best to sooth his fractured mind even while coping with her own torment. The waves of pain originating from the processing facility crippled even the mighty Gigun, reducing the collective to unconsciousness. Even Arissa, light-years away, fell to her knee as the backlash of her parent's torment washed over her as if she were there.

Seizing this long awaited moment, Hastur latched on to the pain and suffering, absorbing the much needed might to free its self from the prison of Gabriel's mind. The world of Purgatory lay silent as all who inhabited the barren world lay either dead or unconscious. A singular cackle could be heard on the winds as they blew from pole to pole, carrying the madness of a freed Hastur with them.



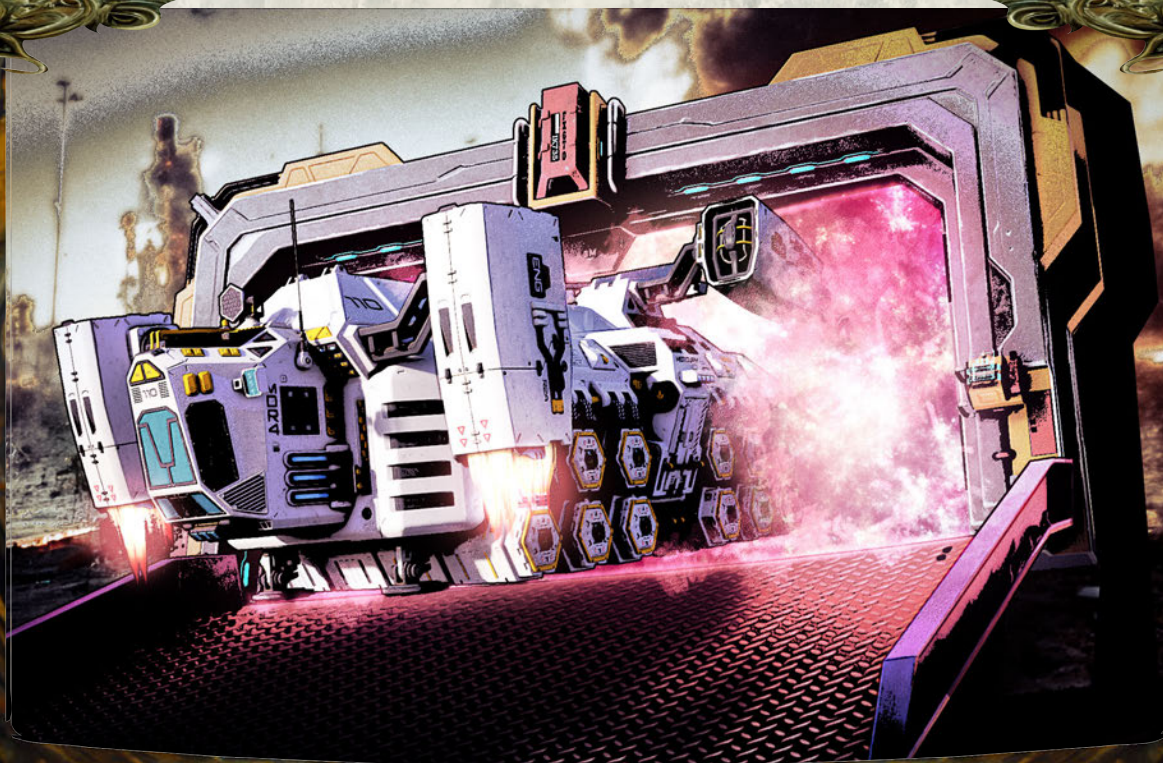


CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 2

With the latest disaster sweeping through all the outer colonies, the League of Independence officially declared war under the prompting of their patron, Bellent Industries. Under the direction of Arch Bishop Thram, Bellent Industries began secret construction of industrial sized jump gates in various strategic locations scattered throughout the League of Independence. Fortuna was among the first to benefit from such a large terrestrial gateway, immediately being resupplied with much needed resources and weapons. Hierophants in disguise as Bellent security details helped prepare the League for war with training and even advanced weaponry typically reserved for the Pax Continuum military alone. It wasn't long before the mining colony and its allies transformed from a downtrodden and beaten people to a warrior state determined to take back the freedoms and power they believed were rightfully their own.

Nova colony and its Aegis Union responded in kind, receiving military aid and resources from their sponsor corporation, Kayer Group. So long as open warfare didn't occur, the inner security of the Pax Continuum would view all of this as a minor skirmish and keep out of the hostilities. The increased violence caused by the fissures meant the Pax had no desire to be involved in what they considered backwater colonies on the edge of existence. Still, the destruction of the processing plant on Purgatory meant increased scrutiny, though with no one claiming credit and little evidence remaining, Pax security forces remained more focused on the security of the inner worlds.



Between colonial hostilities, a distracted Continuum security force, random attacks by unknown creatures, and the recent disruption and loss of life from the gate network, Alec Konis had found ample employment as a mercenary. Alec at one time had been a man of honor and respect but a terrorist attack a decade earlier robbed him of the only things in this life he ever truly gave a damn about, his wife and children. Since then, the former soldier-turned-mercenary went from job to job, sometimes committing murder, other times the occasional theft, all without hesitation or doubt. Now with dangers all around, Alec saw the opportunity of a lifetime, both for vast wealth and the distractions needed to drown his own ever deepening depression.



Alec Konis deftly maneuvered the transport shuttle around the detection net the Aegis Union threw up in orbit of Fortuna colony for their blockade. Instead of transporting munitions or smuggling drugs, this time Alec was transporting a person. Mindy Tennar sat nervously, gripping the arm rest of her chair tightly as the shuttle narrowly avoided triggering alarms. Both knew if they were detected it was highly unlikely that the Aegis Union would bother with captives now that war was declared. Mindy once was a star Triathlete in college who went on to start a promising career in astrogeology until an unforeseen accident led to a pain killer addiction that nearly ended both her career and life. After fighting off her addiction, Mindy worked her way back up until she was offered a position on Fortuna. Isolating samples of various mineral deposits, she longed for the day her exile would be over. However, several weeks ago when the first fissure on Fortuna opened, Mindy's life was once more forever changed.

During the attack, Mindy fell very close to one of the fissures. Close enough that her arm actually struck the very edge of the fissure. Beyond the excruciating pain that immediately wracked her body, Mindy had visions of things far beyond her understanding. The experience nearly crippled her fragile mind but after days of recovery, Mindy finally began to make sense of at least some of what she saw. A new found urgency awoke within her, all but demanding she reach out into the stars to find her destiny and peace of mind. Mindy called in favors, begged friends and family, anything to raise the funds necessary to get off Fortuna and reach the giant stone monument she glimpsed in her fevered dreams that promised peace and salvation. Alec Konis owed Mindy at least a partial debt, having used her services to verify the authenticity of certain relics smuggled through Fortuna months back, for without her Alec would have been taken for a fool with nothing more than cheap counterfeits – a mistake his employer at the time would not easily forgive.

With terrestrial gates being constantly monitored and sequestered for emergency and military use, the pair sought out the only other available means of travel, a run-down transport held together with prayers and tape. Alec didn't pretend to understand Mindy's new calling, the payment she provided served enough in place of explanation, but there was something about what she described that almost triggered a memory or feeling from long ago deep within himself. Alec did not typically have a curious mind, but the longer he sat beside Mindy, the more his mind wandered. Alec could almost see the large stone pillar Mindy had described in his own mind's eye. So lost in thought was he that Alec nearly failed to take notice of the alarm blurring out its desperate warning on his view screen.

Large blasts of energy leapt from the planet's surface as massive batteries assembled in secret on Fortuna released their destructive power on the unsuspecting blockade. The vessels nearest the colony erupted in flame as the initial blast sliced the ship in half. Debris and fire rained down toward the humble shuttle as Alec did his best to maneuver toward safety. Another three blasts wreaked havoc on the blockade before the ships were able to return fire. The colonies surface glowed a fiery orange-red where the massive cannons once stood. Still the damage was done and the blockade shattered as the damaged vessels and frightened crew withdrew to a safe distance. The opening provided the perfect escape for Alec and Mindy as the transport breached the outer atmosphere achieving the necessary distance from the planet to open its own gateway. The transport vanished in a blink of an eye just as a fleet of vessels under the command of the Aegis Union jumped into orbit, firing on the escaping blockade.

Arisa recovered from the shockwave of psychic pain sensed from her parents back on Purgatory. Jemin and Agnee had no idea what had happened to the young woman other than her collapse in apparent agony. As they sat, huddled off to the side in an alley on some distant colony, Arisa gathered her senses and attempted to contact her parents to no avail. She remained weakened, partially drained and felt that her own essence was being leached outward, in all directions. She instinctively felt the disruptions caused by the explosion on Purgatory, even though she knew nothing about the explosion itself. When she regained enough strength to speak, Arisa told her two allies of what little she knew.

“It’s possible your own power is now being used much like the pillars. The Gigun did their best to prepare me for my mission and taught me much about their connection to Affine space. Your very power could be syphoned thought the pillars to help stabilize whatever caused the disruption.”



Arissa considered Jemin's wise words and agreed that it was certainly the most reasonable explanation. Suddenly from off in the distance a large explosion shook the colony of Edgewater. Arissa, Jemin and Agnee jumped to their feet as Arissa hurried out of the alley to search out the cause of the destruction. Large armored soldiers moved with impunity throughout the city streets, following the lead of one who seemed to be searching for something very specific. "Who are they? What do they want?" Asked Agnee.

"I'm going to find out, you two stay back." Arissa said, fully engaging her more armored form and oblivious to any objections the two may have offered.

The Hierophant Elite stood impassive, staring down the newcomer's glare as he continued parsing scans looking for the Activator he knew the creature before him likewise sought.



“You are the one known as Arissa, are you not? My master told me of you and your mission. We are the Hierophant Elite, our coming was foretold in the ancient texts. Tremble before our might!” The Hierophant bellowed.

“You’re after the Activators then? Who do you serve? The Church of the Affine? Some other parasite? What diseased thing is worth serving to potentially bring about the end of everything?”

Arissa’s questions seemed almost to offend the Hierophant.

“You dare question my faith?” And with that, the Hierophant Elite leapt into the air unleashing a hellish torrent of energy upon Arissa.



The young woman was blasted backward, slamming through the first floor of a nearby apartment. The pain she felt was entirely a new experience causing a strange chuckle from the woman as she began to stand. Already the damage healed but a thirst for new sensation was awakened within. Maybe it was the sensation of pain or a thirst for battle long held dormant, but Arissa charged at the Hierophant Elite and his soldiers with abandon. Glowing tendrils of pure energy swept outward from Arissa's body slicing several of the closest Hierophant's in two. Her outstretched hand seemed to morph into razor like claws as she stretched for the Hierophant Elite's neck. He swept her arm to the side as he brought down his sword into Arissa's shoulder. The woman cried out in pain as the blade plunged inches into her shoulder, only to be forcefully thrust out and back by Arissa's body. The very substance of her form reacted on an instinctual level, both defensively and offensively, as Arissa focused her still quite considerable power.



The Hierophant army converged upon the woman firing blasts that maimed both Arissa and their fellow soldiers as the sheer speed of battle became nearly impossible to follow. If Arissa lost an arm, it would take mere seconds for the Nanospline woven throughout her body to either find and reattach the limb or to simply generate a new one. Her rage burned hotter than any sensation of pain or discomfort as she continued to wade through the mounting pile of corpses, reveling in their destruction. Only a single voice, shouted out above the cacophony of screams and blood and death caught Arissa's attention long enough to bring about a wave of calm. Jemin shouted her name from off in the distance, pointing to something off to the side and pleaded with her to look.

Standing on the edge of the battle was the Supreme Hierophant, a creature specifically designed to locate and end the lives of these precious beings known as Activators. Attached to his wrists, the Supreme Hierophant dragged spiked balls larger than his head connected by chains and within his grasp was Ornie Melaant, the Activator Arissa, Jemin, and Agnee were here to find. Arissa and Jemin looked on in terror as the Supreme Hierophant held up the man as a child would handle a doll. The Supreme Hierophant merely stared back as he first threw the body onto the cement, clearly shattering a great many bones. Ornie let out an anguished howl just as one of the spiked balls made a sickening sound caving in his skull and splattering the cement with blood, brain, and other tissue. Arissa let out a howl of pain herself as another wave of psychic energy shot throughout Affine space, further weakening the walls of reality. White flashes of light began to appear as fissures, tears in time/space began rupturing, releasing a torrent of diseased creatures on the colony of Edgewater.



“I would end this now, woman, except that is not my mission. Perhaps these creatures will be enough to end your suffering. I only hope it’s not over too quickly!” With that, the Supreme Hierophant and the Hierophant Elite activated personal transporters, vanishing in a blink of an eye. Jemin took note of the escape as to his knowledge, accessing the gate system should not have been possible without a gate or ship large enough to house the necessary equipment. Whoever these Hierophant’s were, their technology was unlike anything he had ever seen. Jemin had no time left for musings as Edgewater was overrun by the strange creatures from beyond. He and Agnee ran to Arissa’s side, trying to support her as the creatures took note and began to converge upon them. Arissa focused and summoned her energy, gripping Jemins hand and channeling his power. They had lost an activator today. They must not lose another. With a flash the three were gone and Edgewater crumbled in flame.





CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 3

With the fall of Edgewater colony, the Pax Continuum felt a crushing escalation in the appearance of the anomalies. Colonies nearer and nearer to the inner worlds not only suffered devastating attacks from fissures, but a multitude of fissures began appearing at the same time in numerous locations. There was no pattern to the events beyond their appearance occurring in shorter succession. A mass mobilization of Pax Continuum security forces meant the elite guard being dispatched to key installations throughout the system. At the same time the war fought between the Aegis Union and the League of independence also escalated to open engagements. Military grade weapons were deployed by both sides, resulting in numerous casualties on both sides, many of which were civilian. The Chancellor sent stern warnings to both Bellent Industries and the Kayer Group that if their direct involvement is proven in what the Continuum Senate regarded as terrorist insurgency, their corporations would be dissolved and the board of trustees brought on charges of treason. Neither corporations took the threat seriously as both had acted with impunity for many years now, yet still Kayer group felt a different kind of threat. The League of Independence presented more formidable weaponry with each engagement. Even Bellent Industries was incapable of this level of advancement. They suspected Arch Bishop Thram and his Church of the Affine's involvement, but had little proof. But the only organization's that had ever previously demonstrated anywhere near this level of advancement always had one thing in common – a connection to the now Arch Bishop Thram and his inherent knack for out-of-the-box leaps in technological achievement.



With this threat in mind, the Kayer Group reached out to their contacts in the Aegis Union. A plan was set in motion where the Aegis Union, on behalf of the innocent civilians caught up in the struggle against the terrorist group League of Independence, would request a team of observers from the inner worlds of the Pax Continuum. The Kayer Group remained convinced that their hand in this matter would remain hidden but the heightened scrutiny from the Continuum might just force Thram's hand. If the church could be implicated in the war, the result would bring the entire weight of the continuum down upon his church, likely taking Bellent Industries down with him. Kayer group alone would survive with no other corporate power operating on their scale.

The continuum Senate was not eager to dispatch such an envoy but with the urging of the Chancellor and an increased need for additional information about the anomalies and their spread from the outer colonies inward, an observation and scientific research team was dispatched. It didn't take long for Arch Bishop Thram to become aware of the observation team, though it bothered him little. No one in the entire universe knew the powers he wielded in secret. With every passing day the border between universes eroded more and more. Arch Bishop Thram's inner chamber now housed a swirling mass of energy and mist within the central portion of his innermost keep. The swirling energies bathed the room in greens then reds as things from beyond our universe pressed outward from their own reality. The screams of torment filled the chamber sounding as if a choir of misery and suffering sang out from within all to celebrate the Lord of Tears impending arrival.



As Thram ventured out of his keep, his followers bowed at his approach. Suddenly from a dark chamber off to Thram's left a flash of light signaled the appearance of a fissure. The followers of the Church of the Affine recoiled in fear as a monstrous thing of disease and pain stepped out from the tear in space/time. Only Arch Bishop Thram remained unmoving, impervious to the horror's shambling before him. The thing reached out, either in threat or reverence, Thram's congregation knew not which. Thram stepped forward and leveled his commanding voice towards the creature, commanding the thing of nightmares to bow. The congregation of the Church of the Affine stood aghast as the creature obeyed, cementing Thram as their spiritual leader once and for all. Surely this was no mere man that lead them, and the congregation renewed their vows to serve Thram in all things with unquestioned loyalty.



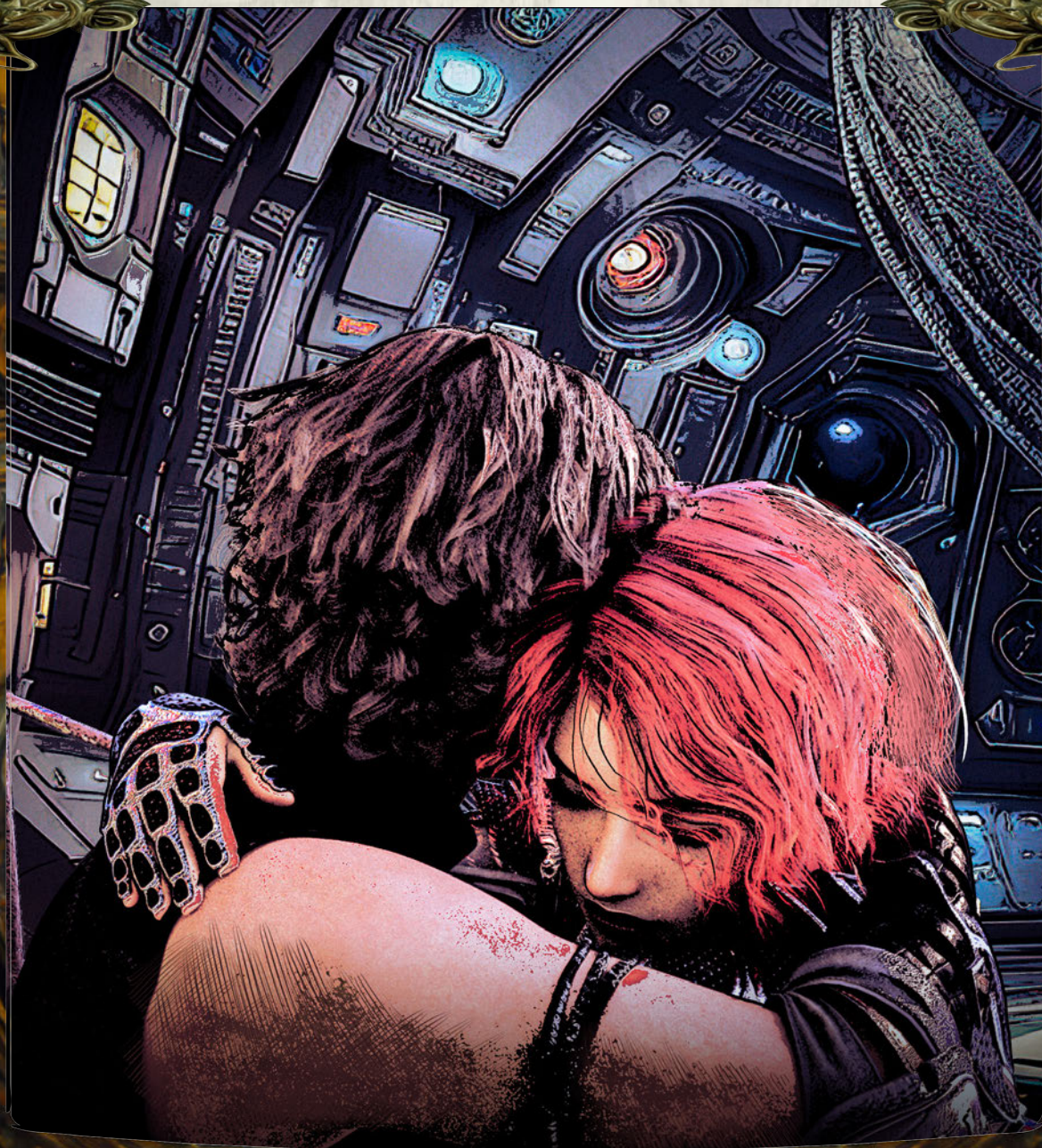


Jemin sat outside a burned out shelter on Xenon colony, a vacation world frequented by the wealthy and elite, famous for its consistently peaceful weather, beautiful beaches, and a lack of natural predators. Recently a fissure had appeared, causing a great deal of destruction until private security forces were able to step in and stop the creatures mid rampage. The security team had been fortunate that only a handful of the creatures made it through, keeping the death toll to a minimum. Agnee ventured out from their shelter hoping to find word of the Activator Jemin had sensed on the planet. His descriptions were vague but he knew the person was alive and that they would be drawn to Agnee if they were near. Meanwhile Arissa sat in the corner, feeling a moral and physical defeat, an emotion she had never felt before living out among the stars.

Arisa wept as silently as she could, more in consolation of her bruised ego and the loss of an Activator, a life she was meant to protect. The ripples throughout Affine space caused by his death also served as a continuous reminder of her failure as waves of discomfort swelled up and crashed in to her psyche from unseen places. Jemin did his best at first to provide privacy but the young woman's suffering pulled on his emotional connections. Ever since he was altered by the Gigun, Jemin Allwither could experience many of the sensations those around him felt. At first it was overwhelming but eventually Jemin brought this ability under control. For the most part the only sensations he felt beyond his own were those of the Activators, but there was something more about this young woman. Her power was one thing, a familiarity and feeling of awe at seeing the same aura as that of his Gigun masters. But there was much more to it. Her emotions were raw, seemingly like that of a child, yet her experiences and knowledge stretched back to the dawn of time. She was simultaneously a new born to this universe and yet also something as old and as powerful as the universe its self. How could this dichotomy exist? It both tantalized and frightened Jemin, but above all else he felt sympathy for the woman for she felt more alone at this moment then possibly any other being in existence.



Jemin approached slowly, not wanting to startle or overly intrude on the young woman. He sat down by her side and said nothing. They both sat there for long moments, awash in each other's company as Jemin's presence served to calm her emotional turmoil. Eventually as her rage and pain began to subside, Jemin reached out a singular hand placing it on her shoulder. The extended human comfort was far more needed than Arissa had suspected, and she leaned into Jemin. She was disconnected from her mother for the first time in her existence and the pain was unbearable. Even Gabriel, wrapped in madness and pain when lost in self-imposed exile, even then he still had a presence in Affine space, subtle as it was. But now there was nothing. Whatever had happened was both terrible and thorough. Arissa knew they were not dead. Even the dead left a trace. This was something more and possibly something far, far, worse.



Finnegan Morse was a relatively unexceptional man in his mid-30's. An academic researcher employed by the local university, Finnegan spent much of his day assisting students with their personal research projects and in general acting as an advisor. Lately Finnegan had been spending much of his time helping a young woman named Alice with her paper as well as convincing himself that his interest in the 28-year-old was purely academic. They spent many hours together in the University library, a large, imposing room filled with literature from all corners of the Pax Continuum. Often Finnegan would while away the weekends taking in the atmosphere and enjoying any number of newly discovered books from the endless shelves. Certainly digital material was plentiful, but as one of the last remaining physical media repositories, this library held special meaning. In fact, it served somewhat as an attraction for the academically inclined, luring in off-world professors and the like on a regular basis.

Finnegan and April's studies dragged on into the evening, long past working hours. One of the many advantages possessed by Finnegan on campus was a set of keys entrusted to him and granting him all hours' access to the library. The night was finally beginning to take its toll on the researchers' eyes when a loud noise was heard from outside. Finnegan and April rushed to the wide window overlooking the campus as a bright flash illuminated the campuses quad. A fissure tore through the night, shattering the peaceful calm and sending those still wandering about into a panic. The creatures immediately launched into attacking anyone within sight, committing atrocity after atrocity as they moved outward into the campus.



Finnegan was about to suggest April and he seek shelter, maybe in the more secure storage area in the basement when a bright flash tore through the library and a fissure opened up not far from where the pair stood. Gripped by fear, the two could only stare in disbelief as ghastly appendages exited the bright light. What stood facing them was ripped straight out of nightmare, sending April into a sprint, screaming in terror. Finnegan was not far behind as the creature took notice and launched itself into the chase.

The library racks were tall and wide by human standards, yet still served to hamper the creature's speed. Finnegan weaved between racks no longer certain of where April had fled, when suddenly he came upon a place to hide. A metal grate left ajar from maintenance earlier in the day provided the perfect place to hide, assuming Finnegan was quick enough and the creature still out of sight. Finnegan wasted no time checking, instead he moved with the speed only an adrenaline spike could provide, deftly sliding into the shaft and positioning the grate in front of the hole once more. The creature was only seconds behind but fortunately did not see Finnegan's escape. The beast lingered however, having lost the trail it attempted to find some trace of its prey. Finnegan began to perspire even more profusely as fear gripped his mind. Suddenly a loud crash from the other side of the room startled both the creature and Finnegan. April must have caused one of the shelves to collapse, possibly while trying to climb for a window or simply seeking higher ground. Either way, the creature bounded off.



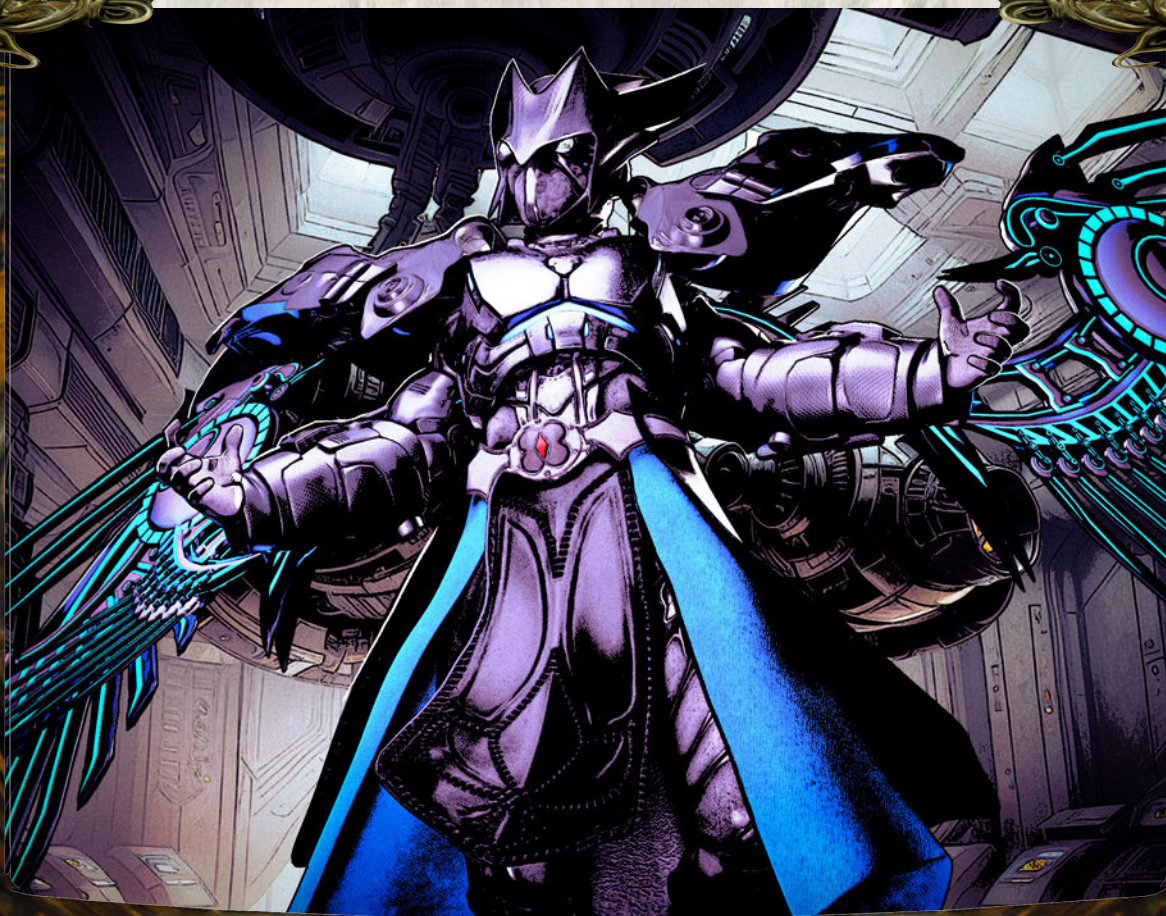
Finnegan wept as he heard a scream and shuffling. April was still alive but not for long if that creature continued its pursuit. Finnegan repeated in a mantra over and over "I'm safe here. There's nothing I can do for her. I'm safe here." Another scream and Finnegan could no longer stay hidden away. He knew if she were to die with her screams in his ears, he wouldn't be able to live with himself. Finnegan stood from the safety of the shaft and carried the metal grate in hand. As he rounded the corner he saw the creature looming large and imposing over April. Her throat ripped from her body, blood splattered upon the wall. The creature was feasting on her body, gorging its self on her remains. Finnegan's sight went red and without a thought for himself, he hefted the grate above his head and slammed it into the creatures back. The flesh of the beast tore with surprising ease, as if already have rotted with disease. The monster howled in pain but did not collapse. A wide swing of its arm sent Finnegan flying into a book shelf, knocking him unconscious.

Slowly Finnegan began to open his eyes, a blinding pain radiating from the back of his skull prevented him from quickly regaining his senses. Finnegan smelled the creature first, the stench nearly making the man wretch. Finnegan forced his eyes open only to see the creatures gaping maw as it launched itself forward, biting down on the man's arm, sinking its teeth deep into bone. A second bite and Finnegan's arm was severed at the elbow, a thin, stringy bit of meat dangled from the arm as blood continued to pump. The creature reared up once more, preparing for the final, killing blow. Just as Finnegan once more was gripped by welcomed unconsciousness, he swore he heard to sounds of scream, and was that a gun shot? Darkness swept the man up and Finnegan welcomed the escape.



Purgatory remained as silent as the grave after the explosion. Automated repair systems quickly repaired the damage and rescue crews were quickly dispatched to the processing facility, though little evidence remained. A team was dispatched to the Gigun citadel to provide aid if needed but were met by former servitors that urged the team to return home. The servitors insisted that while unavailable currently, the Gigun required no assistance at this time. The rescue team didn't believe a word of it, but having no other recourse, they withdrew leaving the citadel to its own devices.

The truth, however, was much more worrisome than the loyal servitors let on. The Gigun had mostly regained consciousness and while aware, seemed different. Damaged in some way. Renee remained unconscious yet, like the Gigun, undamaged physically at least. Only Gabriel had fully regained consciousness, yet irrevocably changed. Gabriel sat in silence, scouring the recesses of his mind, searching for what was no longer there. Hastur had escaped somehow. Where had the creature gone? How powerful had it become? Gabriel finally came to terms with his new reality and for the first time in a century, Gabriel relaxed, allowing himself to reconnect to Affine space, to reconnect to the universe. The sensation was an overwhelming joy, even with the new knowledge of events far and wide being taken in. He learned of the disaster, the fissures, and even the distant war.



Gabriel then drew his consciousness back within, searching for any sign of Renee's consciousness. Gabriel found her in a fractured state, channeled in a myriad of directions from the pain the damage to Affine space had caused. Even the very presence of the fissures seemed to pull and fray her now fragile consciousness. Gabriel began envisioning a large net of warmth and comfort encompassing all the myriad pieces. Enveloping her consciousness within his power, Gabriel pulled the strands toward one another, healing her mind as he went. Eventually, when all the pieces had been restored, Renee regained consciousness.

The two shared a long and passionate embrace, at peace with one another for the first time in a very long time. Renee was overjoyed at first by Gabriel's new found freedom, but then the reality of the situation and the threat of Hastur free once more began to weigh on her. Still, Hastur was less than a fraction of what he once was, no matter where his consciousness drifted off to. Gabriel and Renee went to see the hobbled Gigun and could sense their terrible anguish. Much like Renee, their consciousness had splintered, robbed of individuality and plagued by interwoven thoughts and desires, the threat existed that the Gigun might once more split. Gabriel and Renee wasted little time as they combined their powers and began the long process of reunifying their fractured minds.



Arissa startled suddenly, causing Jemin to jump suddenly. A familiar sensation washed over her as her connection to her mother and father reestablished. Arissa found herself overcome with joy and reached out to her parents. The feeling of joy was near overwhelming as entire histories of adventures, trials, and the recent triumphs were exchanged in near instantaneous speed. Arissa felt her confidence grow as the family reawakened and united through Affine space reassured her, motivating her to finish the task set before her by the Gigun. The healing process for the Gigun would be time consuming and potentially treacherous as it would leave Gabriel, Renee, and the Gigun open to attack, but Gabriel and Renee were confident they would be ready for anything. Arissa remained concerned the Hastur consciousness was unaccounted for, masking its self in Affine space as it moved. But there was little to be done for the moment as more pressing issues presented themselves.

Arissa began speaking to Jemin, telling him what had happened as she walked to the nearest door. Her senses renewed, she felt the approach of Agnee and three others.

“Arissa! It looks like you are feeling better. I had some luck of my own. Meet Mindy Tennar and Alec Konis.”



Arissa greeted them warmly as they entered the building. Arissa helped fill in many of the gaps the same way she helped Agnee to see her path forward. The pair had made their way to the inner systems of the Pax Continuum when Alec had a sudden nagging feeling that what they searched for somehow moved or at least had a stronger presence here on the Xenon colony. Arissa knew they were close to one of the pillars needed, though for which activator she had no idea. Only as she got closer did her instincts become more accurate. Jemin too felt the connection strongly and with Arissa channeling another gateway, the group headed off to yet another world.

When they stepped through Arissa's gateway, they were greeted with the smell of burning flesh and the site of yet another ruined colony, suffering the scourge of the fissures. Mindy immediately felt drawn off into the distance but before they could act on it, Jemin spoke up. Another activator was nearby and in need of help. The group made their way into the wreckage of the city, making their way to the triage camp set up nearby.



Finnegan Morse woke up in startling amounts of pain. His arm was severed but with luck one of his rescuers had been trained in advanced field medicine as a Pax Continuum soldier before moving into private security. Without hesitation, the guard must have taken his belt and tied it around the arm, helping to stymie the blood flow. Emergency services had spread throughout the city after the initial attack and mobile triage centers were erected in record time, all of which saved many lives that would have been lost had they been at any of the lesser advanced colonies.

Finnegan struggled to keep his eyes open, hearing the commotion and clatter all around him as others rushed about, working to save whomever they could. There was little time for anyone to stop and give condolences or explanations which made it fairly easy for Arissa to make her way to the injured man.

“I’m sorry you were hurt by those things. Don’t try to speak, here...” With that, Arissa touched the man’s head and instantly they were communicating via thought.

Arissa showed Finnegan his destiny while Nanospline extended from her hands and wrapped around the severed limb. Micro fibers capable of channeling immense power, nanotechnology, and so much more worked their way into the flesh all the while numbing the region. Arissa didn’t have the time or resources to fully heal the man’s arm, but what she could do was close the wound and cleanse it of any infection. Within moments Finnegan was able to sit upright, the pain and fever he had felt no longer gripped him. As with the others, the calling when fully unlocked by Arissa proved greater than any other thought or desire. Immediately the man demanded to accompany Arissa and at least in part, to make April’s death have some sort of meaning.



Mindy was beyond eager as being near the pillar bearing her name radiated euphoric energies, drawing her near. Arissa could tell they were near, but the pillar was still some distance away resting on the outskirts of the city. The group began walking at once, Finnegan caressing the now painless stump where his arm once was. As the others exchanged notes on their individual backgrounds and the sensation of being drawn to these pillars, Jemin could only focus on the incessant buzzing in the back of his mind. A sort of warning kept him on guard but for what? He had no other details and so he did his best not to dwell. He did however remain alert should anything not seem right.

What the man had no way of realizing was that the Hierophant were already on the planet as well. They too tracked the activators and the pillar. Having so many signals so close to one another made the tracking all the easier. This time the Hierophant Elite as well as the Supreme Hierophant would finish their masters bidding in one fell swoop. Wiping out so many Activators at once would almost certainly bring about the great change their master desired and usher in the age of the Lord of Tears!





OUTER GODS: DELVING INTO THE ABSTRACT ENTITIES KNOWN
AS OUTER GODS THAT EXIST SOLELY IN AFFINE SPACE.

The mythical Outer Gods lurk in the depths of Affine space, shrouded by a
ethereal veil of mystery. Legends tell of these powerful entities dreaming our
entire universe into existence with a single thought, leaving us mere mortals
unable to comprehend their vast and unfathomable powers. Should they ever
wake, one can only imagine what devastating implications this could have on
humanity's understanding of its own limitations.

Outer Gods are often described as entities that transcend our conventional understanding of existence. They exist in Affine space, a two-dimensional informational plane that encompasses all of reality. While we are bound to our three-dimensional perception, these abstract beings reside in a realm beyond our comprehension. Their true nature, intentions, and motives remain elusive, shrouded in a veil of mystery and otherworldly energy.

The waking of the Outer Gods is a possibility that strikes fear into the hearts of many. Existing as powerful entities in Affine space, their dreamt reality could soon become our own, consuming us in an eternity of abstract imaginings.

The thought of them coming to life invokes terror and uncertainty; for with their awakening comes a potential for complete destruction. Our perceived world could be cruelly ripped apart, restructured, or even extinguished forever. Nothing is certain but one thing is clear: the waking of the Outer Gods would bring about a nightmare far greater than any human can imagine.

The limitations of human understanding are crucial when grappling with the nature and power of these abstract entities. Our comprehension is rooted in our three-dimensional existence, and attempting to fathom the essence and motivations of beings residing in Affine space becomes a daunting task. Our cognitive faculties, bound by the constraints of our perception, language, and knowledge, fall short in capturing the profound nature of the Outer Gods.

The abstract nature of the Outer Gods presents a challenge to our comprehension. Their existence and attributes surpass the boundaries of our known reality, making it nearly impossible for us to grasp the full extent of their power and influence. Their motivations, if they even possess such human-like drives, lie beyond our understanding, buried deep within the enigmatic depths of Affine space.

There remains an enigmatic and powerful presence in the depths of universe, unseen yet ever present. These Outer Gods, with their potential to dream our reality into existence, remain a captivating yet perplexing concept that defies comprehensive human understanding. As these mysterious entities awaken from their slumber and exercise their immeasurable power on our world, we are left to ponder the abstract limitations of our own knowledge and cognitive abilities. The thought that an ancient cosmic force holds sway over our lives, beyond our perception or control, is a stark reminder of life's fragility and the vastness of the unknown – a call for us to contemplate deeply the mysteries of our universe and the incomprehensible nature of its reality.

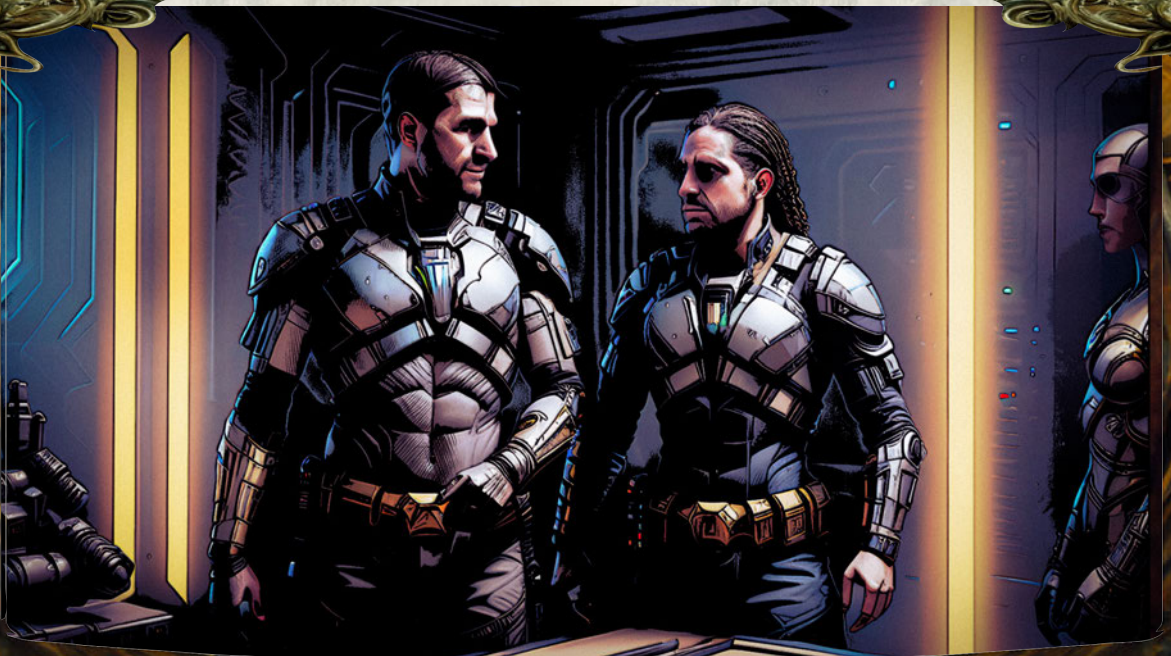


CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 4

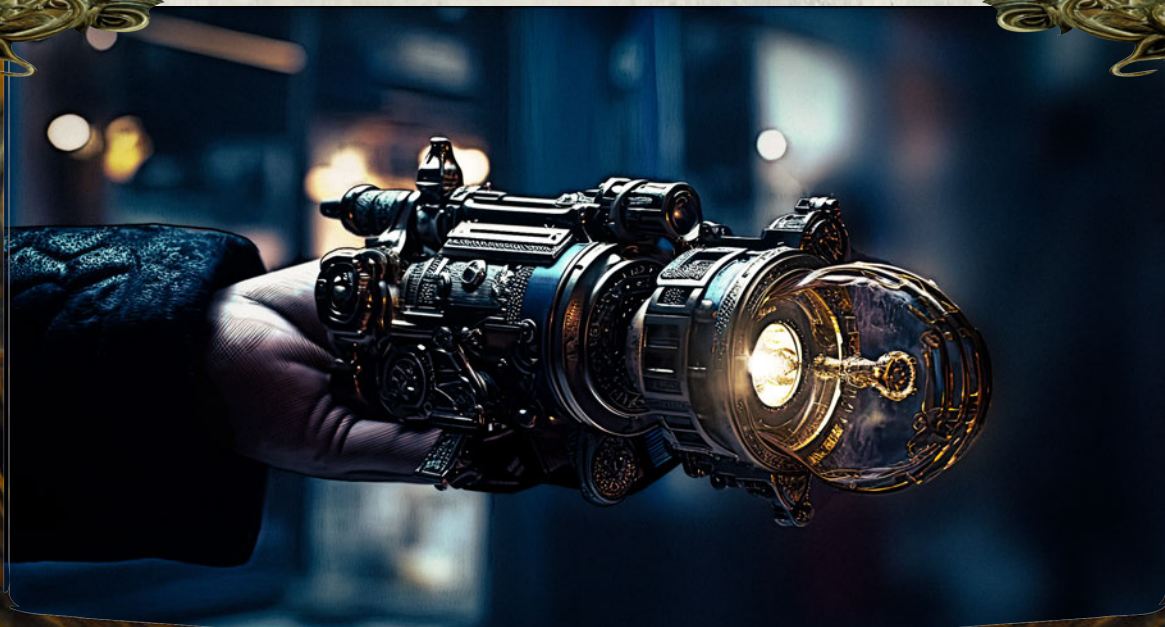
Distance and a general lack of supplies meant the war between the Aegis Union and the League of Independence remained a minor skirmish, at least in the minds of most of the Pax Continuum. While some military grade weapons were unleashed, over all the fighting consisted of small arms fire and homemade incendiary devices. Lacking any formal troops, the local inhabitants relied on guerrilla warfare tactics but the lack of resources among the League of Independence also meant a lack of centralized storage facilities for weaponry, supplies, or most importantly, Dolentite.

The League of Independence made a decision that would go down as the most pivotal moment in this war, a decision that would escalate to open warfare. Hidden in the shadows, the Church of the Affine began offering more and more advanced weaponry, culminating in an explosive device capable of reacting with raw Dolentite, the most precious resource in the Pax Continuum. The device was small and unassuming, easily smuggled on an individual's body or in a pouch. The Weapons Master of the Church of the Affine promised a destructive force equivalent to 3 tons of conventional explosives, a perfect demonstration of the League of Independence's resolve and ingenuity. The timing of the attack would result in minimal loss of life and only enough Dolentite destroyed to cripple the Aegis Unions own ability to launch attacks. The League never pressed the Weapons Master on why the act of generosity in providing such weapons for so little. They never asked how it would benefit those he represented or what kind of debts might be incurred. All they cared about was the end result and their secret beneficiaries provided them with the means to an end.



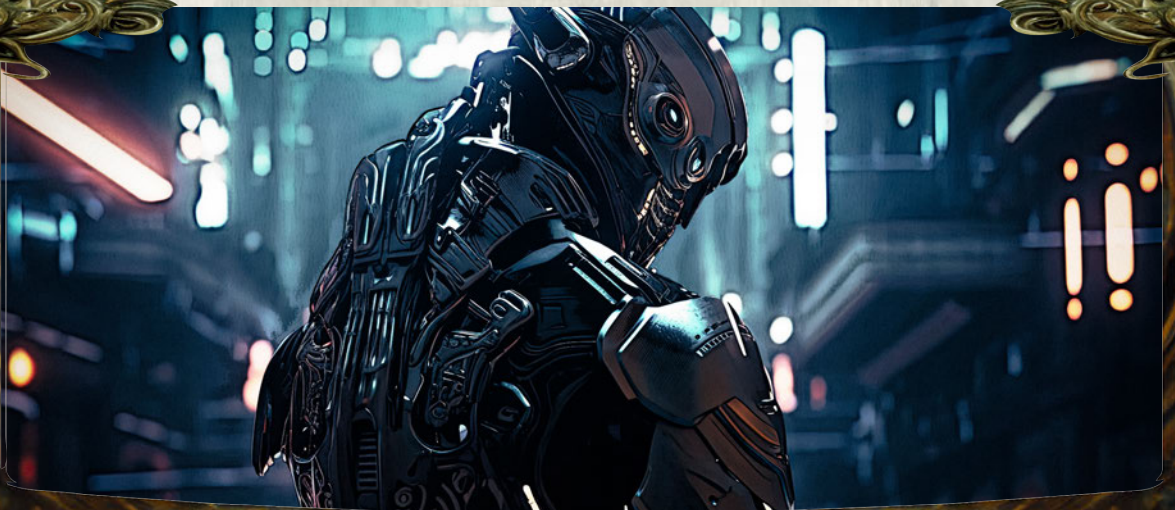


Everything had gone according to plan. It was evening, the work shifts were minimal as shift change took place. It was easy for the operative to sneak inside as part of the work crew. It only took the operative moments to locate the ideal placement for the explosive device, exactly as the Weapons Master had described. The operative depressed the timer, which should have given the man a full 30-minutes to flee the building, instead the device activated immediately. Instantly the entire facility as well as an area of well over 10 miles was consumed in flame. The full impact wouldn't be known for quite some time, but when forensics of the site concluded, the destructive power was measured at around 150 Megatons, the largest terrestrial explosion known to man, over 3,500 times more powerful than Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and New Gingham colony combined.





Shockwaves from the blast were felt over 500 miles away, creating a 15-mile wide fireball along with a 50-mile-high mushroom cloud that reached beyond Nova Colonies mesosphere. Aircraft within 100 miles of the blast were downed by the immense shockwave and the heat from the blast proved capable of causing third degree burns up to 130 miles away. Officially dubbed the largest single act of terrorism in human history and with over 150,000 civilians dead, the Pax Continuum must enter the war. The League of Independence was furious with the Weapons Master and his secretive overseers, knowing that an impossible war faced their impoverished worlds all because of a miscalculation, but in the end no justice could be found as the Weapons Master simply vanished without a trace. So eager was the League for military power that the sources of that power were never questioned or identified.



Faced with certain death at the hands of a Pax Continuum war crimes tribunal, the leaders of the League found few alternatives to committing all their forces in a no-win war or falling upon their sword and surrendering before more lives were lost. Forever losing their one chance at freedom for their people and a fair chance to prosper, free from corporate rule. It was at their darkest hour, when at their absolute most hopeless that the Church of the Affine made themselves known. Arch Bishop Thram pledged an alliance between his church, his world, and himself to the League of Independence, a resource they dared not refuse. With the church's alliance, supplies and resources began to flow almost immediately to the people of the League. A church representative accompanied every delivery and every distribution center housed a number of church representative's eager to feed the belly's and the souls of this trouble populace. Conversion of the desperate proved to be even easier than Thram had suspected.



Next the church pledged its brave and tireless warriors, the Hierophant Elite. None in the League had seen such power and never suspected this once perceived cult to house such galaxy shacking power. Witnessing the power and the generosity of the Church of the Affine in such a desperate time, requests for conversion to the Affine flooded the church. Their numbers swelled as more and more Hierophant spread throughout the colonies, strengthening their forces and providing much needed security. So successful was the church's insertion into every-day life within the League, the Aegis group upon their first retaliatory strike met with absolute failure, loosing every member of their 20-member tactical force. Not one Hierophant was lost that day.

The final piece was to supply advanced military hardware, the likes of which even the Pax Continuum would envy. The weaponry wasn't unlimited, there were only so many war suits available, but each one gave the average man the destructive force of a small army. When piloted by a Hierophant Elite, the destructive force was immeasurable. Now all that Arch Bishop Thram required was patience. The Pax Continuum would have to commit, and thanks to the resources of the Church of the Affine, nothing short of a full commitment would dent the League of Independence's resolve at this point. The citizens every day transitioned from merely seeking freedom and equality, to a sort of religious fanaticism, converted to the ways of the Affine and the promise of true, limitless power. And once the war really kicked off, that would be the time for Thram's final act.



Arissa took the lead, followed by Mindy, Agnee, Alec, Finnegan, and finally Jemin. The group walked in relative silence as they neared the site of the pillar. No security forces were attached to the site meaning there was nothing to prevent Mindy's approach, yet something bothered Arissa. Alec, the former military officer and current mercenary, made his way to the head of the line. Arissa stood on the edge of the site, still a good distance away when Alec came up alongside her.

"I smell a trap. You?" The man said in a gruff voice, yet still only a whisper between the two.

Arissa merely nodded in agreement when suddenly Alec turned his back to the pillar and faced her.

"to your left, the rock outcropping, we've got visitors."

Arissa began to focus but before she could make a move the Hierophant launched their attack. Jemin and Alec both had their own weapons and began returning fire as Arissa projected a shield to provide cover. The wave of Hierophant appeared endless as they threw themselves with abandon into the assault. Arissa struggled to maintain a shield over such a large area, especially while trying to make sure the Hierophant didn't outflank her. The intensity of the blasts continued to soar as the energy collected around Arissa, no longer being deflected outward. The Hierophant could be heard shouting orders to "pour it on" as the shield began to glow a deep red. Suddenly without warning, Arissa brought her hands together as in a clap and the massive wall of collected energy blasted outward with immeasurable destructive power. Many Hierophant lay wounded, maimed, or dead after the blast but even Arissa's attack couldn't stop them all. Out of the tangled mass a single Hierophant rose to one knee and fired. The blast ripped through Mindy's side, cauterizing the wound but leaving her with only moments to live.



Between cries of pain and sorrow, Mindy begged Alec to get her to the pillar. Arissa turned in blind rage to the few Hierophant that remained lashing out with tendrils of pure energy. The tendrils ripped and shred the Hierophant armor as if it were tissue paper, splashing the barren rock beneath the corpses in a crimson tide. Alec carried Mindy to the pillar as a wall of blue energy sprang up, embracing the pair. The flash of light became almost unbearable then as quickly as it appeared, the flash of light was gone and in place of Mindy and Alec stood two pillars instead of the one.

Finnegan took a couple steps forward and remarked “incredible!”

As everyone struggled to comprehend what had just happened, the second pillar began to fade from existence, as if merely a dream.

“What happened? Did Alec die? What’s going on?” Agnee asked, a mix of confusion and terror still gripping her.

Jemin stood forth, gripping Agnee’s shoulder in a reassuring way. “No, I can feel it, sense the pillar just as I could sense all of you. It’s merely moved to its rightful place. Maybe it was the threat or all the energy being released but both Mindy and Alec successfully fulfilled their purpose and have transcended.”

“You mean died?” asked Finnegan with more than a little concern in his voice.

“No, not at all. Even death isn’t exactly what it appears. There is no ‘end’ when our body dies, merely a transition to a different state of being. By joining with the pillars there is no painful death or ending of the physical or spiritual, but an elevation to something greater. Through each of you lies a connection to a pillar awaiting your joining. It’s a missing piece of you looking to be made whole. Tell me true, who here hasn’t felt that missing piece deep within all their life?”

As Jemin spoke Agnee and Finnegan felt reassured. Deep within they both somehow felt the truth of his words and even experienced the longing to find their own destiny all the stronger. With a final look toward the Pillar that now contained or channeled Mindy Tennar, the group felt sadness at first as if they had lost a friend to death. Jemin did his best to remind them that this was a state beyond death, and reassured them that in fact those who join with the pillar’s become a part of something much greater. The wonders they are shown are inconceivable to man. With those final words Jemin, Agnee, Finnegan and Arissa left this world with renewed purpose, traveling through the vast distances of space toward the next Activator.

Charlie Friend was an interesting little man. Always flitting about from one project to the next, Charlie never liked standing still intellectually. By day the man spent his time as a theoretical physicist, currently studying the fissure phenomenon and how it relates to the Pax Continuum as he already discovered only colonized worlds and moons suffered from the phenomenon. During the night however, Charlie enjoyed a variety of pursuits, from collecting vintage pornographic art to hitting on women at the local bar. Charlie fancied himself quite the ladies' man though he never did seem to have anything to show for his efforts. Still, Charlie was happy for the most part with his life.

Since studying the fissures, Charlie began feeling a longing he couldn't quite put his finger on. Something was driving him, pulling at him and it wouldn't let him go. What once was a tiny itch in the back of his mind had spread to that of a full blown musical ear worm – all the notes were as familiar as the back of his hand yet nothing came to gather as a cohesive tune. Charlie was never one to give in to frustration however, and to sooth his mind he decided to peruse a local art exhibit. While his tastes typically ran towards the vintage and the eclectic, he did enjoy art in all its various forms. The gallery was small and informal, meaning Charlie could take his time and lose himself in whatever works he was to find. Much to his dismay, a great many of the pieces were rife with derivative concepts, amateurish brush strokes and a general unrefined quality that did little to stimulate Charlie's mind. It was only when Charlie drifted into a section devoted to this artists more recent works did Charlie's heart stop. There, represented in a variety of mediums and styles stood the thing he had searched for but couldn't name. A pillar of unknown origin but striking in stature and brimming with hidden power. It called to him like nothing before and he knew he must meet this artist at once. Charlie left the gallery in a rush, beginning his search for this artist named Gallet Drum eager to unlock the hidden mysteries of the pillar. All he needed was to book travel to the artists current residence on Nova colony.



Scattered about the pillar, the bodies of the Hierophant lay rotting. Arissa had unleashed all her wrath and though the Hierophant were powerful and many, they still fell before her rage. Evacuations and medical transportation via the gate system continued transferring those able to be moved to better facilities as the colonial medical system was currently overrun with casualties. The increased gate activity made it easier for the ephemeral bits and pieces of the King in Yellow's consciousness to drift through, searching out a way back into the world. His essence felt drawn to remnants of power which he could feed off and grow stronger. Drifting along, the essence came across the aftermath of Arissa's battle. The residue remaining provided just enough energy for Hastur to rise once more.



A sickening gurgle was heard rise out of the mound of bodies as limbs began to twitch. The functioning electronics in the armored suits buzzed with life once more as the fleshy remains they still housed vibrated with renewed purpose. Flesh and machine began to pour forth, no longer conforming entirely to laws of physics, neither solid nor liquid, yet horrendous to witness. While none lived, still there seemed to be the tortured screams of those utilized in this new abomination. Assembling the myriad pieces of flesh and hardware, Hastur created multiple vessels to contain his fractured essence. Each of the vessels stood mirroring Hastur's own twisted and damaged consciousness with diseased limbs intertwined with cybernetics. These shambling monstrosities moved as one and thought with one mind all functioning as pieces of the horror that Hastur had become. Hastur thought long and hard about the next move. Hastur knew he was at his weakest, far too unprepared to move against another of his kind. But if he were to syphon more power into these animated corpse piles, perhaps he could live once more as the being of power he once was.





Hastur's thoughts remained jumbled however. Fractured and distorted, his connection to Affine space strained to its limits like never before. One moment he was consumed with thoughts of revenge while the next Hastur mistook memories of Gabriel's as his own. The mental turmoil was excruciating, but above all else, Hastur hungered. All he knew was a burning need for more, but what more did his shattered mind crave? Power? Sustenance? Focusing was so difficult. It was in this state that a patrol vehicle rounded the corner. Arissa's battle was fierce enough that it registered on several alerts and fearing another fissure, security was dispatched to observe and report back. Hastur sensed their arrival and hid his various selves as best he could, but parts of him were noticed. The security team approached with caution, weapons drawn. With each step forward, sweat trickled down the guard's foreheads as the nervously crept forward. As they neared, a shadowy form moved behind the men. It's movements undetected by the guards until the final moment when out of nowhere it struck. At Hastur's touch, the flesh and bone of the men bent to his will. Twisting and churning, the flesh of the men intertwined creating something new and terrifying. Their bodies morphed beneath the diseased creatures touch and when done, arose yet another aspect of Hastur. With this new acquisition, Hastur felt satiated, if only for a moment. Hastur breathed deeply and felt power. Having tasted of the Hierophants various memories, Hastur learned much about the Church of the Affine and the plans of the one known as Arch Bishop Thram. Hastur now knew where his path would take him and how he might finally stride the spaces between worlds once more, unencumbered by mortal constraints. Somewhere very far away, Arch Bishop Thram felt a shiver crawl down his spine and he knew fear once more.



CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 5

Kelly Row crossed the intersection at mid-day, oblivious to the world around her. Her focus always on the PEEK, a haphazard collection of augmented reality aps, social media, and politics. A digital display wired directly into her visual cortex allowed for multipurpose streaming while going about everyday life, at least in theory. For Kelly and much of her generation, instead this meant blindly tumbling through the streets focusing more on the gossip of the hour and less on personal safety. Kelly however managed to traverse the streets without getting run over, at least for now, as she went about her day. The sky was a bright teal on Klaxus 9, the colony she and her family had been born on. A successful world seated near the inner power of the Pax Continuum and far from any of the dangers the outer colonies faced.

Kelly made her way into a local boutique, perusing some of the latest in off world fashion as an emergency broadcast broke through her PEEK stream. Suddenly a world in motion stopped in place as feeds across the colony depicted monstrosities emerging from bright portals of pure light. As they emerged, the creatures locked on to the first living thing they saw, it didn't matter if animal, human, or other. The carnage that ensued gripped the colonists in fear as they continued watching the feeds. There had been many articles written leading up to the even discussing the preoccupation many suffered from, preferring their feeds from the PEEK over the very reality they lived through and experienced, but none had suspected how deep this preoccupation reached. At least none realized until those being cut down in bloody slaughter realized they were witnessing attacks mere feet away. Thousands fell to these savage beasts as they spread out into the most populated areas.



Kelly screamed in panic as she saw the boutique clerk mauled by one such creature. Its sheer savagery outmatched anything she had ever seen on any PEEK feed. The creature ripped the clerk's head from her body, tossing it aside as if a piece of inconsequential meat, only to turn to the screaming woman watching in horror. Kelly Row, potential Activator and carefree young adult was murdered within seconds. Her life ended faster than she could even comprehend, a small mercy at least. Still, her purpose ended even before she realized fully that one existed haunted her final moments of life as the blood drained from her body.

With Kelly Row's death, the damage continued to the walls of reality, thinning some areas while others were reinforced by the pillars. Concentrating the damage to reality to a singular region in the universe meant an expansion of activity, threatening the Pax Continuum and the universe its self far more directly now.



Arisa dropped to her knees once more, this time not in physical agony, but reeling from a wave of depression and anguish as yet another of those she was chosen to protect died in vain. Her allies turned to her, most unaware of what had just happened but Jemin could sense the truth.

“It’s another Activator, someone like us. They died, I can feel it and so can she.”

The news struck each of them as the sensation of mortality crept across their minds, sowing seeds of doubt and frustration. They each now felt their purpose and what it meant to fulfill it. To know it could so easily be stolen from them weighed heavily. Jemin asked for a moment as he knelt beside Arisa, letting the others disburse in quiet contemplation.

Arisa remained in her armored form, hiding her sorrow as best she could, but Jemin saw through it all in his strange way.

“It’s not your fault, you can’t be everywhere at once! You can’t let this weigh on you, it’ll destroy you with guilt. Guilt for something you have absolutely no control over.”

Arisa looked up at this kind and caring man, knowing what he said was true yet also knowing how little he fully understood. “I need to do better. My mother... my father, they both could have ended this long ago. It’s just too damn big! I can’t move fast enough, I don’t know what’s wrong, it’s like I’m being blocked by Affine space its self. I feel half blind and I can’t stand it!”

Jemin was all too aware of her sorrow, but struggled to find any words of comfort. “So you’re saying your parents, these god-like beings are all powerful?”

Arisa looked at the man incredulously. “Well, yeah! For the most part!”

“And yet they haven’t solved it... why? I mean, if all it would take is a wave of their magic hands, why haven’t they saved us all?”

Arisa stared off into space, lost in thought for the moment.



“Look, I’m not trying to ridicule you or act like your grief is insignificant, but you simply can’t put all of this burden on yourself. For one thing you give everyone else too much credit and yourself far too little. I haven’t known you for very long but through the changes I underwent with the Gigun, I’m able to sense so much more. I feel your inner doubt, your constant sensations of inadequacy. You’re terrified of losing more of us to these creatures and I too feel that burden. But you must understand, I’ve also seen you do miraculous things. I’ve seen your acts of bravery and power first hand. You’re special and you need to see it now more than ever. At least that’s how I see you.”

Arisa let her armor slide back, both figuratively and in actuality. She smiled at the man and felt his warmth and confidence help build her up. She didn’t know how they were going to stop all of these incursions, but she at least felt confident now that they wouldn’t give up without a fight.

Arisa and Jemin rose once more and walked over to Agnee and Finnegan. The group had appeared in an abandoned building on some unknown colony, but for the moment they were safe. Arissa and Jemin shared what little they knew and sensed about the Activator’s death. Then Arissa made a very bold claim, even to her own surprise. “I won’t let another of you die. I swear it.”

Jemin feared for Arissa after making such a bold statement, yet he sensed something indeed had changed in her. Deep down and despite himself, he believed her. More so, and also despite himself, Jemin thought he might be falling in love with her.



Gabriel and Renee sat in the inner chamber on opposite sides of the collected Gigun. The long hours of careful psychic surgery had begun yielding results, the Gigun themselves began aiding in the healing process yet there was something there fighting back, preventing the Gigun from reasserting control of themselves. Renee couldn't quite figure out where the resistance was stemming from but Gabriel recognized the foul sensation immediately. Fragments of Hastur polluted the Gigun's psyche, feeding on their pain and their power as it grew. The Yellow King had truly embraced a parasitic nature as it gorged itself on the Gigun.

With Renee backing him up and strengthening Gabriel's own mental shielding, Gabriel delved deep into the mindscape of the Gigun. What he found was near overwhelming as the constantly shifting surroundings gave way to color's and sounds with no source in the natural world. Glimpses of beings and creatures from beyond reality bombarded his senses as he looked on in wonderment. While he had achieved much of the power that these Great Old Ones wielded, he had never actually known existence from beyond the veil of this mortal realm he and his family currently existed in. For the first time he truly experienced existence as one of these ancient creatures had.



It took Gabriel time to realign his perception and with Renee's help, Gabriel once more continued his trek deeper into the Gigun consciousness, looking for signs of the parasite Hastur. Regions of the Gigun mindscape were blanketed in darkness as what appeared to be lightning ripped through the skies of this ever shifting plane of existence. It was in this darkness that Gabriel found the lord of decay and ruin, the remnants of the Yellow King Hastur, now bloated and deformed as it continued its feast. Gabriel knew it for what it was upon first glance, a mindless thing full of appetite alone, without consciousness or desire save for the desire to consume. Still, Gabriel smiled as he launched his attack, finding some small measure of satisfaction in the act of destroying even this shallow embodiment of Hastur. Renee sensed his joy and reminded Gabriel to use caution, not just because this piece of Hastur may yet still prove dangerous but also because this battle he waged was on the battlefield of the Gigun's mental landscape, a thing easily damaged if he were to be careless.

Gabriel unleashed a blast of pure psychic energy and the slug-like abomination. The creature reeled in anguish as Gabriel continued his assault. Tendrils of decay whipped outward, attempting to swat Gabriel away as if he were some insignificant mosquito. Much to the horror of the thing, Gabriel blasted straight through the appendage, severing it from the whole. As the tendril fell it began crumbling to dust. Renee was quick to notice and projected her image in Gabriel's mind.



“Did you see? When separated from the whole it crumbled. I think you can destroy it by severing it into pieces!”

Gabriel merely nodded and with great satisfaction, he manifested his mental projection of his Seraphsabre, a formidable weapon he possessed so long ago, now merely a mental construct focusing his abilities into a singular location. Piece after piece Gabriel sliced off the foul thing and with each cut the Hastur parasite wailed in agony as it shrank. Constantly trying to repair its self, the parasite sought out more nourishment but Gabriel denied it at every chance. Finally, the Hastur parasite was rendered limbless and bodiless; a mere head in the hand of Gabriel, wide eyed and screaming in agony and hate. Gabriel smiled one last time as he crushed the thing in his hand. The bits of matter that once were Hastur crumbled to dust, ending the parasite once and for all.

As Gabriel and Renee withdrew from the Gigun mindscape, the creatures finally regained full control of themselves. With gratitude, the Gigun humbly thanked Gabriel and Renee, knowing that if the pair had not intervened it would have only been a matter of time before their minds would have been forever consumed, relegating the once powerful Gigun to the position of mindless slave to the true Hastur. The Gigun retired to their inner chamber, still requiring more time to recover from such a severe trauma. Gabriel and Renee retired to their own chamber in the citadel as well, mentally exhausted and pushed to their limits, still the pair had other ideas then simply healing.



Agnee Pikeman looked out upon the city, areas of which still burned from a recent explosion. She struggled at first to make out the location when suddenly she saw a familiar sight.

“Nova colony. We’re on Nova colony, out near the rim. I’ve been here once, a long time ago.”

Arissa joined Agnee at the window overlooking the city. “What happened here? I don’t think it was a fissure...”

They all looked on as emergency crews went about the business of saving lives. Finnegan used his C-STEM, a cousin to the PEEK system used on other colonies, to access the local infonet.

“There’s a war going on. Looks like a group of colonies looking to break away from their corporate sponsors started fighting and launched a big attack.”

Finnegan’s last words were but a whisper as he struggled to take in all the information. The others soon followed, accessing the news through various means. There was wide spread damage from the explosion triggered by the Church of the Affixes’ device. It was unknown how long recovery would take as agency’s continued to struggle with the fallout of the powerful devices detonation. The very climate of the colony was altered, forcing the atmosphere reclamation units that had been shut down after the successful terraforming of the colony decades back to be reactivated. Still, Arissa sensed the pillar nearby.



Jemin got a look of excitement suddenly and said “Another activator just arrived! That means there are two more on this planet, both very much alive!”

Arissa smiled as Jemin pointed the way to the nearest gate transit system still in use. It was here that Charlie Friend arrived in search of the artist Gallet Drum. Charlie had been warned about the damage Nova colony suffered prior to stepping through the gate, but driven by his need to find the pillars, Charlie stepped through undaunted. Still, the level of destruction was beyond his expectations, even here, many miles away from the blast site.

Charlie made his way outside as people darted back and forth, some seeking to leave the colony as others volunteered from nearby colonies to provide aid. From out in the crowd a familiar sensation tugged at the back of Charlie’s mind. He turned his head, no longer fully in control of his own body as instinct took over. Charlie saw a strange woman in armor and a group of 3 others approaching him. Normally the sight would cause Charlie apprehension as he was far from being social even in the best of circumstances, yet somehow he felt almost as if he had known these people and not just for a little while.

Arissa greeted the man with Jemin at her side. Introductions were made and Arissa was about to awaken Charlie to his full potential when suddenly a thunderous boom was heard above. Reverberating even through the atmosphere of the colony, the massive portal opened and expelled a fleet of massive warships from deep within the continuum. The Pax Continuum was about to enter the war, fully committed and with that a massive influx of troops and equipment made the instantaneous journey to the outer colony looking to end the war before it could spread. The reverberations travelled far beyond the physical realm as the warping of reality further thinned the walls separating universes, just as Arch Bishop Thram had hopped.



Arissa quickly extended her hand to Charlie's head, imparting knowledge instantly and without haste knowing what would happen next. Charlie stumbled as Agnee caught him, supporting the man while he found his footing once more. Within moments a fissure began to open near the gate system. Then another a mile away. The ravenous creatures once more set about their work, destroying, killing, and maiming anything within their reach. Arissa's patience had run out as she powered up, the very ground beneath her ripping from its foundations and hovering amid a torrent of exotic energies. Arissa launched out yellow tendrils of brilliant energy that ripped through the flesh of the creatures like they were tissue. A group of the creatures ran toward her, thirsting for the meat of the Activators she shielded behind her. Arissa launched herself into the air landing on one knee before the creatures. Her fist slammed into the pavement sending an explosive blast of energy and rock outwards, ripping the creatures to shreds.



The military forces of the Pax Continuum had not expected an immediate war zone upon their reaching Nova colony but their well-trained forces responded to the situation expertly. Orbital bombardment utilizing micro-munitions vaporized the creatures as soon as they emerged from the various fissures now plaguing the colony. Arissa yelled to the group to get near as she generated another gate, this time transporting them 45 miles north to the site of the Pillar on Nova colony. Charlie was awe struck at the sight of the Pillar, finally coming face to face with his new-found destiny. Already standing at the site was Gallet Drum, charcoal and paper in hand.

Gallet stumbled backwards as the light of Arissa's portal flared into existence suddenly. Already Gallet was on edge having heard the arrival of the Pax fleet then the sounds of the orbital bombardment. He stood back and watching in terror as these strange people exited the portal. Jemin instinctively went to the man and whispered to the man, gently lending understanding to Gallet's confusion and terror. As with the others, the mere presence of the man was enough to sooth Gallet's anxieties even as he watched Charlie slowly approach the Pillar. With confidence and awe, Charlie extended his hand toward the pillar and instantly he was embraced in warmth and security. Charlie Friend transcended reality, sealing the rifts in space time across Nova colony, at least for now. The energy released from the fissures however achieved their purpose. Harnessed by the Church of the Affine, Arch Bishop Thram finally had all that he needed to summon his dark lord.





LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING: EXPLORING
THE IDEA THAT HUMANS HAVE LIMITED ABILITIES TO
FULLY COMPREHEND AFFINE SPACE, THE MULTIVERSE,
AND THE ABSTRACT BEINGS WITHIN IT.

The boundaries of human perception and knowledge deeply impede our attempts to comprehend the enormity and detail of Affine space, the multiverse, and whatever abstract forms might exist within them. Investigating these boundaries lends insight into the philosophical implications they bring and the difficulties they present when trying to understand reality in its entirety.

A primary obstacle to understanding lies in our cognitive abilities. Our brains are configured in such a way that we can decipher and process data inside the structure of our three-dimensional world. However, Affine space—with its two-dimensional nature—poses a major difficulty for people to grasp. Our capacity to understand concepts, such as representations of objects and entities in Affine space, is constricted by how our cognition evolved for coping with and making sense of our three-dimensional environment.

Our sensory experience is restricted by the range of stimuli we can detect. Our eyes allow us to see a tiny part of the electromagnetic spectrum, our ears give us access to a limited range of frequencies – this restricts comprehension of the dimensions and subtleties of the multiverse and its inhabitants. In addition, our comprehension is hindered by the boundaries of our understanding. As science progresses, we may gain new insights, but it's essential to realize that our knowledge remains imperfect and open to change.

These restrictions lead to complex philosophical concerns. Are there aspects of existence that our minds cannot comprehend? Is reality truly beyond our grasp due to our mental restrictions? These issues invoke respect for the immensity and obscurity surrounding us all.

Our physical and cognitive boundaries provide us with an intellectual challenge, propelling us to form new ways of interpreting reality. We strive to extend the limits of our understanding and explore the unknown that lies beyond them. Science gives us a methodical approach to comprehending these mysteries, allowing us to unravel secrets that would have been impossible to otherwise uncover. Technology also enables us to access previously inaccessible dimensions or take a closer look at some of the universe's more discrete features.

Though our knowledge is limited, it is growing continually. With this comes an ever-increasing sense of awe and mystery in contemplating the complexity of existence. We are driven by a deep curiosity and passion for uncovering deeper truths, embracing uncertainty even as we continue expanding our knowledge. In this way, we move ever closer toward understanding the universe around us.

To summarize, our limitations impact our exploration of Affine space, the multiverse, and higher-dimensional entities. Our capacity for abstract thought and sensory perception inhibit our potential to comprehend these realities. This is significant from a philosophical standpoint; these restrictions spur us to develop novel approaches that could expand our knowledge. Even though we may never fully surmount our boundaries, the pursuit of understanding will always be part of who we are as thinking beings.



CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 6

Arisa felt frustrated as every step forward in sealing the rifts seemed to lead to three steps back. Anomalies began appearing daily on multiple worlds completely at random. Each incident resulted in more and more loss of life as the Pax Continuum security forces became increasingly spread thin. The war between the Continuum backed Aegis Union and the League of Independence stretched on, as not enough forces were able to be committed while simultaneously dealing with the increased anomalies. Meanwhile, the League of Independence took full advantage, utilizing their advanced technology provided by the Church of the Affine in secret, launching decisive attacks against key gate facilities, crippling the supply chain for the Aegis Union.

Worlds with activated pillars and the colonies near them remained free of the fissures, and also free of the creatures that terrorized the inner worlds of the Pax Continuum now. Given a chance to heal, these outer colonies worked on their own to provide for one another as the Pax emergency services were also stretched thin. The silver lining still did little to cheer Arissa up knowing the Hierophants and worse wanted the remaining Activators dead now more than ever. Jemin continued to be a source of frustrating positivity, though Arissa grew to appreciate it and him more with each day, not that she would ever admit it. Still, she imagined he knew anyway, what with his strange empathy given by the Gigun.



Arissa and Jemin had all the remaining Activators with them now; Gallet, Agnee, and Finnegan. All that remained was locating the proper pillars for each of them. Somehow though, since the Pax direct involvement in the war, the ability for Arissa and Jemin to sense the pillars grew more clouded. Arissa suspected that the added gate usage between the emergency requests, the security requests and the war its self, fueled the fissure's in spite of the pillars work. She hoped that with all the pillars activated that their overwhelming power would be enough to stabilize reality, but deep down she knew they were several Activators short. Would the pillars be able to complete their function? Arissa kept these thoughts to herself as the group had enough to worry about on their own.

The group had settled for the night in a community not yet touched by the fissures or the horrors they bring. Arissa was so lost in thought that she hadn't noticed Jemin approach. He greeted her warmly and joined her at the small wooden table, the room dimly lit by candle providing a comforting atmosphere. Neither knew for certain what their next step should be. Cut off from their vital senses, neither could rely on the instinct that had led them so truly up to now.

Jemin proposed a potentially risky idea, one he was hesitant to mention. Up until now all of the pillars had been scattered around the outer colonies of the Pax Continuum, where the vast majority of the fissures also were appearing. Cut off from their senses, instead of searching for pillars randomly, Jemin wondered if they should not search out the fissures. The colonies near the location of the recent fissures would actually be their focus, in the hopes of finding the remaining pillars. Arissa thought about the idea and not having a better one, she agreed. The two made plans for the morning while the others slept. As the evening wore on their conversation drifted from plans of war to a more intimate nature.



Gate technology had many wonderful features. The gates could be left open for instantaneous travel without restriction between worlds, or they could be coded to a specific DNA preventing random travel. Other security measures were available depending on the purpose of the gate, but in general those requiring above average security never had to fear unwelcome visitors. Security was hard-coded into the home gate, meaning anyone stepping through, looking to access a prohibited gate was simply redirected to the nearest public option. The only way to change the security options was to already be on the planet housing the home gate, and even then the process was intricate and time consuming. In short, even the most secure facilities ran lax when it came to securing receiving gates and protecting against intruders looking to travel through the gate system.

When the mass of flesh and gore now known as Hastur attempted to gate in to the Church of the Affine, there was little problem slipping through from one random world directly into the very heart of the Church. The flesh he wore was that of their own Hierophants and regardless of form, the DNA still registered as their wayward comrades. Hastur exited the gate, a vomitus mass rupturing as tumors burst with every step. The creature easily separated into smaller fragments of tissue and armor, all sharing the same focused mind of Hastur. One of the lumbering things approached the exit hatch. Reaching out a diseased limb, it's flesh merged with the materials of the door, easily ripping the door from its frame then absorbing the material, adding its mass and strength to the creatures own.



A signal went out to security notifying the guards of a breach at the junction room. Five Hierophant guards marched down the long hall, expecting little more than a malfunctioning door. The guards were not representative of the church's elite fighting force, merely average soldiers fulfilling a necessary duty. However, the suits they wore still granted them the destructive power of a small army should they unleash their full capabilities. Impressive as these weapons of war are, they proved insignificant before the power of a Great Old One such as Hastur. Given no chance to defend themselves, the five guards were immediately overwhelmed as tendrils erupted from the shadows, silencing the screams of the dying before they even knew what was happening. A small mercy for the guards, yet necessary as Hastur intended to go unseen. While the bulk of his mass slithered into the crevices and shadows of the hall, the five guards reformed, nearly intact. Their flesh stank of decay and worse but remained masked beneath the now activated helmet. It would arouse some suspicion from others, but far less than the rotting meat piloting the armor, should it go uncovered.

The King in Yellow stifled a malevolent cackle as he made his way toward the inner sanctum of the church. His actions now were not born of conquest or hate. There was no grand plan nor dreams of revenge. No, the diseased mind of Hastur was a damaged thing, stretched too thin and not given the necessary time to cope or to heal. Hastur's actions now were those of a creature of madness. His only thought resting on the chaos he sought to unleash.



The colonial civil war was at its peak, as all sides had committed to either the reunification or secession from the Pax Continuum. To counter the actions of Bellent Industries and their now overt funding of the League of Independence, the Pax senate passed the Confiscation Act allowing for all corporate assets to be seized should their actions lead to or further the cause of secession. This Act was quickly seized upon by other colonies that had been abandoned or abused by their corporate sponsors, claiming that the very act of neglect would lead to their own desire for secession. Gradually this would lead to revolutionary changes within the Pax Continuum, ensuring equality and freedom from overt corporate control even at the rim of colonized space, but only if the war between the League of Independence and the Aegis Union could be contained.

As the fissures continued to threaten the inner worlds of the Continuum, more and more Pax forces were recalled, dragging out the war even as the League resources began to dwindle without Bellent Industries sponsorship. The weaponry already provided by the Church of the Affine continued to prove its worth as each engagement, regardless of win or loss, was hard fought and bloody for both sides.

Key to ending the war would be cutting off what supply lines the League of Independence still possessed. Lieutenant general Rolland Johnston provided the much needed victory by leading a surprise attack resulting in the capture of two key military outposts, both of which also served as central hubs within the gate system supply chain. Not immediately crippling to the League of Independence, this action however provided a much needed pause in the war as both sides began to reassess the unending conflict. For the first time since the onset of the war, there was a chance for peaceful negotiation should both sides embrace reason.



Providence colony stood as a beacon of peace, civility, and architectural achievement within the Pax Continuum. Free from the troubles of the outer colonies, Providence also managed to avoid the politics of the inner most worlds of the Continuum. In short, Providence was a symbol of wealth and creativity that all colonies longed to achieve. Adding to the envy of others, Providence remained one of the few colonies not yet scarred by the fissures and the devastating creatures the fissures spewed forth. In spite of this fact, or perhaps because of it, the people of Providence exuded fear and anxiety. Around every corner, the people of Providence expected a fissure to appear even though they've never witnessed on themselves. When a gateway materialized in the center of town, however, panic set in immediately.

The gateway Arissa created appeared in a very inconvenient location for the group. Jemin had guided Arissa to one of the more central colonies in the Pax Continuum but as with all their travels, the final destination was decided more by feeling and instinct rather than any specific target. The portal Arissa created, vanished as soon as Gallet, Finnegan and Agnee exited, quelling the fearmongering and terror before it could spread throughout the colony. Within moments, those that witnessed their arrival that did not run off in horror, quickly calmed at the realization that it was simply a gate, even if it lacked the typical equipment necessary to generate.

Jemin asked Arissa if she could sense anything but before she could answer, Finnegan stepped forward. Scratching at his recently healed stump of an arm, Finnegan looked off into the distance, seemingly transfixed by some far-off object.

"I can feel it. The pillar, it's calling out to me. I can hear it in my mind and it sounds urgent. We should hurry!" The words fell from Finnegan's lips in earnest as a foreboding sense of fear or anxiety crept over his spine.



Arissa and Jemin both sensed the man's fear and agreed while Agnee and Gallet simply followed along. Gallet continued to question his involvement, still doubting his purpose. He believed in the pillars and what they, as Activators, are meant to do. He saw all that Arissa showed, no different than the others, but the more he traveled with them the less he felt the connection. Agnee, who traveled the longest with Arissa and Jemin, continued to feel her calling and did her best to reassure Gallet that he was in fact a vital piece of the puzzle.

As the group traveled, Arissa monitored and sorted through the various planetary news feeds looking for any sign of Hierophant, fissure, or other anomalous event. Eventually she learned of twin pillars, both having appeared weeks ago. They currently were heading in the right direction, but the pillar they sought was the farthest out. After discussing the pillar locations with the group, the general consensus was to take a local transport to the nearest pillar first as it was only minutes away.

The strange alien pillar had become something of a tourist attraction as the phenomenon had primarily been focused on the outer colonies. The pillar stood no different than any other save for a strange darkening of the stone. Arissa examined the object but could only guess that it was scorch marks or similar. Jemin looked over the pillar and translated the inscription atop the pillar.

"Gallet Drum, this is your destiny. Do you not feel it calling out to you? Any sensation at all?" Jemin asked, perplexed by the lack of reaction.

"I'm sorry guys, I really just don't... I mean, I can feel something, but it's so subtle. Maybe mine's broken?" Gallet wore a wry grin as he joked, but part of him meant the words in all seriousness. The pillar felt wrong, but without having anything to compare to, the words escaped him.

Arissa looked to Jemin who returned her quizzical gaze. Agnee looked upon the pillar, taking out an examination device she had brought with her from her excavation site. She retained the readings from the pillar she had discovered and for all she could tell, the readings here matched without deviation.



Gallet Drum shrugged and stepped forward. "May as well get the party started, it's what we came here for, right?"

With that, Gallet reached out his arm and touched the pillar. The stone was cold to the touch, dry, rough, but otherwise nothing special. Gallet was about to step back when the cold began to grow deeper. The sensation shifted to a cold deeper than anything he had ever felt before. Gallet's skin drained of color as his mouth dropped open in silent anguish. Gallet's skin ran dry, desiccated and cracking as all fluid left his body. Both Gallet and the pillar blackened then crumbled, breaking as if brittle sand stone, dropping to the ground in a fine powder. Agnee cried out in shock as Finnegan and Jemin tried to console her. Only Arissa bent down, seemingly unfazed by the horror that just transpired. Arissa was focused on a new sensation, buried in the rubble and remains before them. Arissa reached out and dug into the dirt, removing an object that writhed like a thick, short snake yet clearly had the markings of technology. The thing wrapped around her hand and immediately her flesh and armor began to drain of color like Gallet. Unlike the poor man, however, Arissa tightened her grip and with a flare of light from her eyes, her rage and power swiftly overpowered the thing, crushing it in her hand.



“The Church of the Affine was here. I can recognize the technology, at least now. I should have sensed it sooner but I just couldn’t...” Arissa clenched her fist in anger as she pictured Gallet’s anguished face in her mind.

“There was nothing you could do, none of us could have expected this. And now we know and you can recognize the signs.” Jemin did his best to console her.

Agnee regained her composure, the scientist within her reasserting herself, “How? How did they come up with technology that could affect these things? None of us have ever seen anything like these pillars and now they know how to sabotage them?”

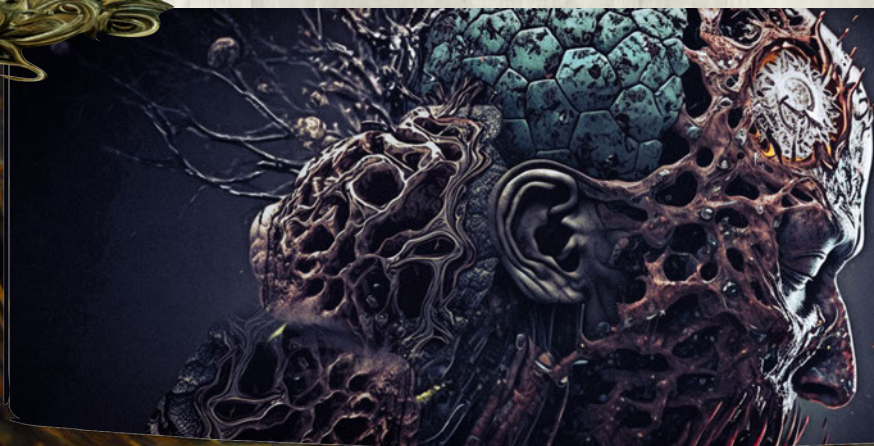
Before another word could be said, a cloaking field dropped revealing a squad of Hierophant Elite along with their Supreme Hierophant, eager for battle.



Arch Bishop Thram sat on his throne, contemplating all he had achieved and all he had yet to accomplish. The boundary between universes fluctuated yet still held. In time, the barrier would collapse but neither Thram nor his dark master had any interest in waiting that long. It was time to bring Hect'kaaros into our universe through what Thram called the Embodiment ceremony. A process involving as much technology as it does ritual, the process would grant the Lord of Tears, Hect'kaaros, a vessel to possess. With a firm tether to this realm, the universal boundaries would fully crumble ushering in the new age.

Down a dark corridor, Arch Bishop Thram walked alone toward his most secret of chambers. Dimly lit by sickly green chemicals fed through tubes, a circle of nine chairs sat in the center of the room. Reclining, the heads of each chair met in the center and upon the chairs sat reclined a member of the Church of the Affine. The nine acolytes lay wrapped in black leather-like garments that restricted movement. Feeding tubes stretched down their necks, pumping the strange glowing green mixture down into their respective gullets. A rhythmic chorus of beeps could be heard as their vital signs were monitored. Their flesh appeared translucent with the muscle, bone, and blood actually showing through in grotesque clarity. Their eyes, when open, were overgrown with cataracts, giving a sickly white look to the sunken orbs.

The chamber of the nine held the true source of Thram's technological achievements that appeared other-worldly to all that beheld the Church of the Affine's achievements. The grotesque flesh machine Thram had created linked the now mindless acolytes in parallel to the other side and to Hect'kaaros himself. The skulls of the nine lay open, revealing their brains bare to the world. A large black slug-looking creature lay attached to the central portion of each of their brains, with a network of tendrils linking the various creatures. Most of the nine acolytes already lost their tongues, bitten off in anguish as the one sensation not denied to these poor souls was that of immense suffering. In fact, their suffering provided much of the energy needed to pierce the boundaries between worlds and so their suffering was made to be immense and eternal.



The nine spoke directly into the mind of Arch Bishop Thram as he sat at his computer display, entering the information he heard whispered in his mind by the nine. Details flowed nearly faster than he could record, images, concepts, and plans all beyond the comprehension of mortal man. Thram would pour over the information in the days to come as he had many times before, and with his masters guiding hand, revelation and understanding would follow. Upon completion of the nightmare process, the Nine began to ooze droplets of a reddish-blue liquid from out the creatures affixed to their brains. This strange concoction dripped into a collection basin, syphoned into a golden chalice. Once the fluid stopped flowing, Thram lifted the chalice. Secret words of prayer were whispered into the chalice followed by the reddish goo passing between Thram's lips. Pain, anguish, and then pure ecstasy gripped the man, nearly toppling Thram to his knees. The gospel of Hect'kaaros filled his mind, revealing the process that would lead to Embodiment. A greater sacrifice of flesh would be required, so Thram summoned his most expendable of Hierophants. Among these sacrificial offerings stood the helmeted grouping of Hastur, absolutely giddy with excitement over the chaos he would unleash.



The Supreme Hierophant launched himself high in the air, glowing maces on the ends of chains spinning in the air, radiating unknown energies as they spun. Arissa jumped to meet the warrior mid-air as the Jemin, Agnee, and Finnegan ran for cover. Arissa's move proved effective as all eyes were on her and not the fleeing Activators. Arissa's tendril-whips, each glowing as radiant as the Supreme Hierophant's Mace weapons, shot in front of her, blocking the Supreme Hierophant's attack. The shockwave from the impact of these weapons colliding mid-air sent the Hierophant Elite flying outwards, the nearest of which felt their eardrums explode as the shockwave rippled through their armor, decimating it.

The Supreme Hierophant dropped to the ground, landing on one knee, ready to attack once more, while Arissa hovered mid-air. Arissa shot forward, attempting to grab the Supreme Hierophant by the throat, when with surprising speed, his mace crashed into her head, sending Arissa head-long into a group of recovered Hierophant Elite. The Hierophant Elite were eager to join the battle and attacked with a fervor unmatched by other warriors of the time. Lost in their own berserker bloodlust, their armors pumping adrenaline, nutrients, and an assortment of other stimulants into their system to heighten their thirst for destruction. Arissa spent but a moment huddled there, on the ground, collecting herself. She was in near shock at how these warriors threw themselves into battle with such abandon. They in fact had landed more blows against one another than they had her – clearly attacking a single target instead of a full army was not a part of their training.



Arisa grew tired of their feeble attacks and with a powerful blast, the armored woman stood up, arms outstretched. The Hierophant Elite flung to the sides, cast aside as if mere toys. Their armor destroyed along with their sanity as the drug concoctions continued to pump away into broken bodies. The Supreme Hierophant was only taken aback for a moment, attacking once more with both maces. He swung them wildly, building the kinetic energy into a frenzied attack, the power reaching levels that would surely destroy even his own armor, killing him. As he neared, Arissa increased her perception, slowing the world around her as her processing and reaction time more than tripled. The maces came crushing down, a devastating blow for sure. Arissa reached her hands up and caught the maces in the palms of her hands. The impact released an incredible concussive force, shredding the Supreme Hierophant and scaring the ground around them. All that remained of the Supreme Hierophant lay on the ground, burnt nearly to ash.

Jemin, Finnegan, and Agnee emerged from cover, a look of pure shock on their faces. The devastation was total, luckily though, Arissa had directed most of her destructive force away from her friends, letting the rocky outcropping they hid behind absorb the brunt of any remaining force. Arissa walked across the field of dead and dying hierophants towards the group when suddenly a blast of energy scorched the landscape, vaporizing a large hole through Agnee's mid-section. Jemin reached out to Agnee as she fell to the ground, already dead. Arissa couldn't contain her rage. Screaming out in rage and grief, Arissa let out a devastating blast of energy that vaporized the Hierophant bodies. The last act of a dying Hierophant brought the universe one step closer to its destruction.





CHAPTER 7

CHAPTER 7

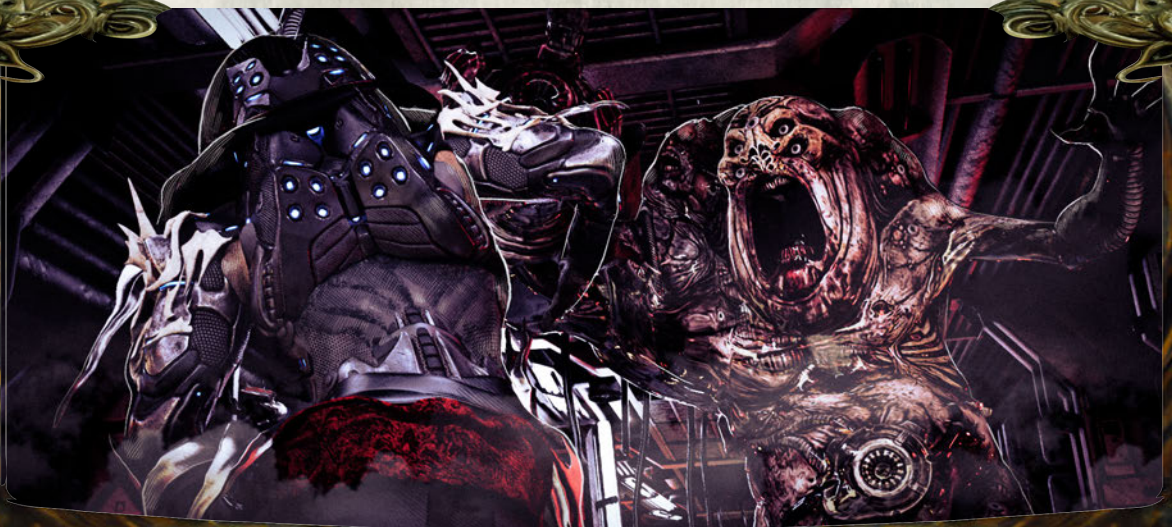
The ever loyal Hierophants knelt, 12 in all, each transfixed by the blade held within the right hand of Arch Bishop Thram. Their religious fervor led them to gleefully expose their necks, awaiting Thram's strike. A chorus of voices filled the halls of the ancient room, the energy of Thram's entire congregation fueling the secret device secreted away beneath the dais holding the sacrifices. The device pulled at and consumed the life energy, shaving years off their life while they cheered on, unaware of their own sacrifice. Thram spoke secret words out into the ether, barely audible in the immense chamber. Then, without warning, Thram plunged the dagger into the center of the first Hierophant's chest. The crowd cheered.

Thram pulled the knife out of the Hierophant's chest. The man did not scream but instead gurgled, sputtering a few drops of blood out from between his lips. Thram took a step back and a chain behind the Hierophant began cycling downward. A second chain lifted skyward, causing the dying Hierophant to fall to his side. The chain hefted the man into the sky, attached to his ankles. The Hierophant hung in mid-air, a few feet off the ground, gurgling as he slowly drowned in his own blood. A hushed silence fell across the audience as Thram walked up once more. The knife he wielded gleamed in the light, and with a flash, the blade swept across the Hierophants stomach. Gore, intestines, and more spilled out, soaking into the dais as the man let out a final, painful gurgle. The audience cheered out in unison, calling out Arch Bishop Thram's name in barely controlled excitement.



Thram smiled then walked over to his next sacrificial Hierophant, and the ritual repeated. At the 3rd Hierophant, Thram grew more comfortable with the process. He had not typically been one to get his own hands dirty, but that didn't mean he wasn't willing or capable, Thram merely detested the germs and filth of others. He plunged the blade deep into this Hierophants chest, once more to the applause of his congregation. As he pulled on the hilt of the knife, however, he felt a strange resistance countering his effort. The tighter he gripped and the harder he pulled, the more resistance he felt. The audience grew silent as the ritual they had grown accustomed to seeing now suddenly ground to a halt. As Thram tugged all the harder on the blade, a hushed, shocked murmur grew from the crowd. Thram worried he was somehow losing his audience when suddenly a wet tearing sound was heard from behind.

Thram turned and his mouth dropped open in horror as one of the sacrificial Hierophants burst out of his armor. The diseased flesh tore and mended, all within seconds, splashing blood over the surrounding Hierophant. As the blood hit them, it soaked into their armor then into their very flesh. Cries of agony and confusion rang out as even the already hung Hierophants began their own metamorphosis. Bones ripped free from their prison of flesh, dislocating then reforming creating an almost chandelier of tissue and bone. Thram was surrounded by horror and his congregation gripped by terror. The members of the church of the Affine fled for exits and pounded on doors as twisting flesh ripped through the structure its self, sealing the room. The very walls began to drip puss and blood as a lumbering hulk reached out for congregant after congregant, his flesh and theirs tearing free and merging, joining in an even more horrifying figure. When enough mass was consumed, the creature began splitting from the middle, tearing into two, both mouths agape in painful cries of rebirth. This sickening display repeated over and over again as each congregant was found then processed by the shambling meat factory, ground to pieces then reformed into yet another diseased thing, only to repeat the process once more.



Finally, the room once more fell silent of screams. Only the soft dripping of blood running down walls and off nearby objects could be heard. An army of flesh, rotting and reeking of misery and pain stood in silence before Arch Bishop Thram. Thram had fallen to his knees, not in reverence but in sheer terror as to his knowledge, this was not how the ritual was intended to go. Slowly the visibly shaken man rose to his feet, bewilderment, confusion and horror plainly displayed across his face. A loud cackle could suddenly be heard, filling the room with its ugly, high-pitched sound. Thram looked all around, through the army of flesh that surrounded him for the source of this malignant sound.

The shambling flesh began to part, creating a path leading from the dais, out, through the crowd, and into a murky shadow at the back of the room. A golden fire-light flared up from the darkness and began moving with purpose, nearing the frightened Thram. The thing was monstrosously large, disproportionately stretched limbs with diseased flesh. Interwoven with the flesh were remnants of armor and circuitry, a true fusion of all the elements absorbed by the invasive thing. Finally reaching the dais, the lumbering creature stood erect, towering over Thram even as he stood upon the raised dais. A loud synthetic cackle filled the room, emanating from the freakish beast.



"You've done well, fleshy one. I can continue my great works with the raw materials you have given me."

Arch Bishop Thram stood perplexed. Hesitantly he asked, "M...my lord? Is that you? What has happened..."

The thing before Thram cackled once more, clearly amused by Thram's confusion.

"Poor, simple flesh-thing. You understand so little yet think yourself as one of the gods. I am not the one your feeble efforts tried to summon, a be thankful for it, little one. You stand in the presence of the glory that is Hastur!"

As the King in Yellow spoke, Thram fell to his knees in terror, realizing with his final moments the true depths of his arrogance and ignorance. The large, gangly hand of the newly formed Hastur reached out toward Thram, clutching this man's head within Hastur's powerful grip. With barely a thought, Hastur closed his hand as blood and brain matter burst from between his fingers. Hastur absorbed what remained of the man into his massive form, adding Thram's knowledge to Hastur's own.



Hastur sat down upon the dais, lost in thought for a moment. The full reach of Thram's ambitions and activities as well as all formerly hidden knowledge of the Lord of Tears flooded to Hastur's mind. Hastur had existed since the dawn of all things and yet even once such as he had never heard of this being, Hect'kaaros, the Lord of Tears, before. Hastur's knowledge stretched through all of Affine space, there should be no secret Hastur could not lay bare when directly sought after, yet there was nothing to be found. Hastur's curiosity grew by leaps and bounds as a true mystery tantalized the Yellow King. Hastur was determined to finish the fool Thram's work, and release the Lord of Tears into this universe, and unlike Thram, Hastur knew exactly what must be done.

Hastur's army of flesh golems moved as one under his mental control. They moved through the Church of the Affine's halls, absorbing or killing any lingering Hierophants that escaped Hastur's earlier culling, marching forward to the Church's armory. Inside, Hastur found what he knew would be waiting, thanks to Thram's memories. The Golem army each strapped on an experimental yet exceedingly powerful explosive device, then marched towards the gate room. The gates fired to life as the golems spread out across the Pax Continuum, exiting on numerous colonies throughout. Upon exiting, the golems activated the devices, then without hesitation, reentered the gateways. The devices triggered the second their energies came in contact with the various gates. A simultaneous explosion rippled throughout the vast network of gates, causing tremendous destruction, collapsing much of the gate system based on the various colonies, killing untold millions of civilians. Worse than even that, the shockwaves traveled throughout Affine space, crashing against the fragile membrane that separated realities, tearing large swaths of the protective barrier asunder. The devastation was incalculable and Hastur laughed. He laughed a cruel and excited laugh as he reshaped his surroundings into a grand throne and sat there, awaiting this supposed "Lord of Tears".



The death of Agnee at the hands of yet another Hierophant cut at Arissa deeply, causing her to teeter on the edge of a great chasm of despair, yet her mission remained. Finnegan was within moments of reaching the pillar that bore his name. Privately, Arissa questioned the futility of it all. Was there any point left, now that so many Activators had been murdered? She kept these thoughts to herself as she honestly didn't know, nor did she have any other options. She could feel the disruptions in Affine space grow with every passing moment and with them, the horrifying knowledge that a full rupture was becoming inevitable. She envisioned various scenarios in how a massive rupture might play out. The possibilities were nearly endless, all of which were devastating.

Arissa, Jemin, and Finnegan stood before the pillar, it's call to Finnegan reaching its crescendo, drowning out all other wants or needs in the man. He stepped forward and upon placing his hand on the pillar, a bright light enveloped him, and the process concluded. Arissa was feeling a brief wave of relief when suddenly a tidal wave of raw, destructive energy crashed through Affine space. The detonation of the gate system did little to the physical world, but for being such as Arissa, the backlash was immense. Devastating pain brought her to her knees as Jemin ran to her side. Arissa tried to block the sensation but for her it was as if her entire body were submerged in acid, biting into her flesh and threatening to consume her utterly. She sensed as thousands of ruptures scattered throughout the universe spawned fissures, each one a gateway to something dark and malevolent. The monstrosities from this other realm began to flood the various worlds, wreaking havoc everywhere they went.



Arissa looked up at Jemin, tears in her eyes, "It's all over. I don't think anything can stop it now!"

Jemin did his best to comfort her as Arissa told him of what she sensed. Jemin held her close, his own thoughts now turned to a calling felt deep within his bones. Had he overlooked someone? Was there another Activator to be found?

"I think there's still time. I can feel another pillar, maybe more. I think I'm being drawn to another Activator. We can't give up now, not when there's still a chance!"

Arissa looked into his warm eyes, so full of hope that she couldn't help herself but to feel hopeful herself. Only now did Arissa realize how pessimistic she had grown, but Jemin had a way of wearing down that pessimism and replacing it with possibility. The two stood as Jemin began to concentrate, feeding the sensation through his connection with Affine space to Arissa so that she could generate a portal to the next site. Only the deeper Arissa searched, the cloudier the perception became. The two looked at each other with visible confusion; something was causing interference and it wasn't the fissures.



The petty grievances and inequality experienced among the outer colonies gave way to more immediate concerns as desperately needed supplies began to dry up. Much of the gate system was either completely down or working intermittently at best. The only means of interstellar travel left were through large transport and military vessels equipped with their own gate system. Even orbital gate's had suffered from the explosive feedback cause by the flesh-slaves of Hastur and their powerful bombs. Rioting became more frequent, at least until the fissures began to spread. Monthly terror had overnight become an hourly event as fissure after fissure opened, spewing forth nightmarish creatures that all but longed for death and carnage.

Fortuna colony had already faced many of these trials and overcome. The colonies people were tried and tested, and held together despite the scarce resources. These hardened people continued to survive, despite the odds, and through their mutual cooperation, the colony held fast against the horrors that caused collapse in other colonies. All the more tragic then, that Fortuna colony was the first to be consumed. Reports from vessels in transit out of the system were inconsistent at best. Readouts simply showed a growing blind spot that obscured all the stars behind it, almost as if an entire world had been cloaked and slowly snuck into orbit of Fortuna.

Visual recordings were not much help either, as video clearly showed an all-consuming black mass of unknown dimension and scale. It crept over the Fortuna colony, enveloping the world in black, giving no sign of what this mass was even composed of. There were no explosions, no debris, the colony simply vanished into the black. Recordings of the colony's transmissions show that on ground level, the observations were much the same. People screamed in terror as they attempted to outrun the nightmarish curtain, but ultimately they all fell silent the moment the night touched them.

The horror continued as ships attempting to flee Fortuna became absorbed within the ever expanding blight. First the colony, then the system, even the local sun blinked out of existence as the Lord of Tears made himself at home.



Gabriel and Renee had stumbled into the main hall of the Gigun compound after the tremendous explosion caused by Hastur's forces. The Gigun too had been caught in the destructive feedback, and only now recovered as well. All over the Pax Continuum the reports of destruction, both from the gate system and the creatures emerging from the fissures, flooded all communications broadcasts. One of the Gigun stepped forth to offer insight.

"The weapon used to disrupt our connection with Affine space was of no mortal origin. This is a power beyond them and it reeks of a familiar stench."

Gabriel clenched his fist and in a hushed whisper spat out the name they had all grown to despise, "Hastur."

"I fear his fragile mind has been corrupted by his own rabid desire to return to power. First by fracturing his psyche to hold us Gigun captive within our own minds, a piece you, Gabriel, utterly destroyed. Then by whatever means he has utilized now, Hastur must have been driven completely mad to threaten all of existence. Even Hastur could not survive the holocaust to come."

"His sanity fractured long ago, the things I saw when he occupied Gabriel's mind and then your own, this thing he's become is but a fraction of his former self but made all the more dangerous by his lack of self-preservation." Renee said.

Gabriel began to crackle with power, a dim glow emanating from his body as his rage and hatred for Hastur boiled over.



“Don’t, Gabe. Don’t lead with your emotion, not now. He’s far too dangerous because he simply doesn’t care. We’ll end the bastard, together. But we’ll do it together and on our terms.” Renee said, her hand on taking up Gabriel’s with love and concern.

Gabriel calmed down, then turned to the Gigun, “Do you sense him? Can you find Hastur?”

The Gigun reached out collectively, their combined powers and experiences leading them through the vast network of Affine space until they found what they sought after.

“Yes, but we cannot join you. The disruption has threatened to awaken Sha’Bolique, and above all else, we cannot have her adding to the chaos. We’ll be able to reinforce her prison and in doing so add stability to this region. But heed our warning, we sense something else lurking in the abyss. Something dark and unknown even to us, and it is growing.

With that, Gabriel and Renee joined their thoughts with the Gigun and locked in on the location of Hastur. The gateway they opened leading directly to the Church of the Affine and to Hastur.



Arissa and Jemin appeared on a distant world in an unknown quadrant of space. The planet had been terraformed in advance of a population being relocated, or at least that had been the plan before the massive waves of death and destruction had swept through the Pax Continuum. Still a desolate world, the pair could see for miles and could tell instantly no human or alien life was present.

“What’s going on, Jemin? There’s no one else here. I can see a pillar, off in the distance, about a quarter mile away, but there’s nothing else on this rock. Who’s the Activator?”

As she spoke, a gnawing feeling that she had buried deep in the pit of her stomach began crawling forth, scratching at the edges of awareness. Arissa had fought hard against any feelings for this man and now she knew why. Deep down, after the loss of the first Activator, Arissa always knew a sacrifice would have to be made. Jemin merely looked into her eyes, a tear formed in the corner of his eye as he fought back his own emotions.

“No, that’s not going to happen. Out of trillions of people, there’s got to be someone else that can...”

Arissa trailed off as she spoke, deep down she knew it was fruitless. Arissa’s own connection to the Affine told her as much.

“It’s no different then what we’ve told the others. It’s not death, it’s ascension. You of all people know this!” Jemin said with sincerity.

“That’s just it, I don’t know! I can sense them, but even I’m cut off. I don’t know what happens next!” Arissa shouted, a near panic gripping her.

“That terrifies you, doesn’t it? You’ve always known so much. The Gigun told me how you were born to your powers, always connected to Affine space. You’re special, but because of that you’ve also never known true mystery. You’ve never had to question and be left not knowing. Your biggest fear is uncertainty. Those of us without your unfathomable power, this is how we’ve always lived. The absence of certainty is almost the only real certainty we’ll find in this life! I can only imagine how terrifying this is for you, but you must have faith. If not faith in the purpose, then faith in yourself. And in me. I’m not going to leave you, I promise.”

The two embraced for long, hard minutes, neither wanting to continue, yet both knowing they must. Eventually without words spoken, the two turned toward the pillar and began their slow march.

Gabriel and Renee stepped through the gateway onto a barren world. Desolate, and foreboding, the planet had little to no development. A lone structure sat in the distance, a grim blight on this tumorous world. The pair began walking toward the tower, both very aware of the sensation of some form of life, if it could be called that, lurking all around them. As they reached the central entrance, a pervasive force reached out to their minds, touching them with its vile thoughts.

“Welcome, my most treasured of play-things. I truly questioned whether I would see you again before the end. I’ve seen so very much of this existence and honestly, I think it’s time to see what comes next!”

Even through the mindscape, Renee could hear the madness within Hastur’s thoughts. She could feel the fragility of his mind and the risk he posed if they couldn’t reach him before his final act.

“Are we here to play word games with the great Hastur, or is there some other purpose you lurk behind these walls instead of greeting us, face to face?” Renee said, hoping the taunt would bring Hastur to them.

“Oh, my dear, we have such fun in store. First I would like to introduce you to a little experiment I’ve been conducting. I know the universe loves having me around, but there just never seems to be enough to go around! So, what if I simply made more of me to share?” Hastur cackled with his final words.

Suddenly the ground ruptured, spewing forth a mass of deformed creatures, each a reflection of Hastur’s diseased mind. Each possessing a portion of his psyche. The monsters laughed in a chorus, readying themselves for the attack. Gabriel seethed with quiet anger while Renee looked on nervously.



“Games. All this time and all you have are more games?” Gabriel punctuated the last word, enraged by the insult.

Gabriel flung his hand outward toward the nearest monstrosity and immediately its chest collapsed in on its self. The compressed gore burst out the creatures face, beheading it. The remaining creatures hesitated only for a fraction of a second before launching themselves at the pair. Some channeled energy and used the ability to directly assault Renee or Gabriel. Others molded their very flesh into implements of destruction, attempting to impale or decapitate the two warriors. Renee’s clawed hands sliced through the diseased flesh, spilling a viscous gore upon the parched land. Gabriel brought both hands together and a wave of energy collapsed from either side, obliterating the monstrosities before him. Within moments the battle was done, Hastur’s diseased army of flesh now reduced to a thin paste covering the rock. Hastur reeled in pain in his throne room, anguish washed over him with every death of his minions, the piece of himself that he had vested them with dying as easily as the flesh it had been housed within. Gabriel turned to the gate and with an outstretched hand, blasted the massive armored door, reducing it to scrap.

Gabriel and Renee tried to sense Hastur, but with his consciousness stretched so thin, instead of appearing in one location, instead the entire facility oozed with his touch. The congregation that formerly worshiped in this facility now decorated the walls. Their insides stretched to coat the walls in flesh and decay, a monument to Hastur’s insanity. Walking the hall, Gabriel’s disgust grew but Renee held his hand, silently urging restraint, at least for the moment. As the two neared a large room, it’s door left ajar, they could hear Hastur muttering to himself, his mind truly lost. They entered the throne room and much like the hall that proceeded it, the room had been painted with gore and flesh. Hastur looked up, his form a twisted pairing of flesh and machine.



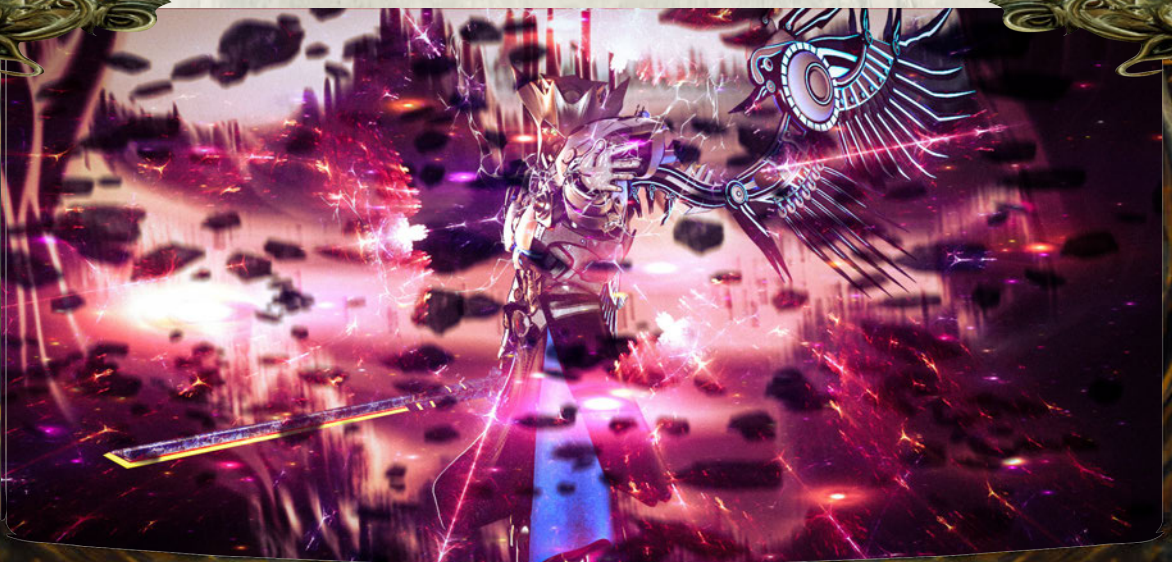
“Welcome, old friend. Come, join me in celebrating the end of all things!” Hastur screamed.

The mad creature launched himself into the air, his gangly limbs slicing through the air, looking to tear into Gabriel and Renee as if a mere animal. Hastur, a shadow of his former self, now wrenched out of the air by Renee’s power and thrust into the nearest wall of putrescenes. Hastur’s words devolved into guttural sounds as he ran forward, blasting random bolts of energy in all directions. Gabriel reached up, gripping the pitiful creature by the neck. Gabriel slammed the creature into the floor, Hastur’s head crashing through several feet of reinforced titanium. Gabriel held the weakened creature before him, Gabriel’s hand crushing Hastur’s throat.

“You have been a plague to so many, ruined so many lives. Now, reduced to this husk, do you yet see your folly? Your madness?” Gabriel asked, not entirely sure how much of Hastur even remained.

“End me now, so that the Feaster of Stars may ascend...”

And with that, Gabriel incinerated the last of Hastur, atomizing his body and destroying the last vestiges of Hastur’s already fragile mind into nothingness. Renee embraced Gabriel, both felt relief as the ashes that once were Hastur drifted to the ground, harmlessly. His cathedral of flesh and pain began to dissolve, the flesh became desiccated and crumbled all around them. As they turned, an odd thing happened. Standing before them, a pair of strange pillars stood. The energies they emanated were of Affine space, and they spoke to both Gabriel and Renee. The pillars communed on a psychic level, conveying much more than Arissa or Jemin had ever learned. The pillars laid their purpose bare before the two, beckoning them to join Affine space utterly, as the fallen Great Old Ones once had been.



In the outer reaches of space, in the illimitable gulf between worlds, the darkness that consumes all begins to take form. Hect'kaaros, the Lord of Tears, breathes deep the stench of this living universe and it displeases him greatly. As worlds continue to blink out of existence, and the ravenous dogs of his universe are released to ravage our fragile worlds, the very fabric of reality begins to tremble.





POWER OF THE OUTER GODS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEEMINGLY LIMITLESS POWER ATTRIBUTED TO THE OUTER GODS.

The Outer Gods are often depicted as beings of seemingly limitless power, existing within the realm of Affine space and exerting a profound influence on the fabric of reality. Analyzing the nature of their power can offer insights into the potential sources that fuel their extraordinary abilities, their influence on Affine space, and the profound implications their existence holds for our perceived reality.

The sources of power attributed to the Outer Gods remain largely enigmatic and beyond our human comprehension. These abstract entities, residing within the two-dimensional realm of Affine space, are said to possess abilities and forces that transcend the limitations of our three-dimensional reality. Their power may derive from the intrinsic nature of Affine space itself, tapping into the fundamental essence that underlies all existence.

One possibility is that the power of the Outer Gods emanates from their deep connection to the informational plane of Affine space. As the realm from which all realities are derived, Affine space may imbue these beings with immense energy and influence. They may possess the ability to manipulate the information within Affine space, shaping and molding it according to their will. This potential source of power grants them control over the very fabric of reality, allowing them to manifest their intentions and desires.

Another aspect of the power attributed to the Outer Gods lies in their ability to transcend the constraints of our perceived reality. While we are bound by the limitations of three-dimensional space, they exist outside of our conventional understanding. Their abstract nature and unique position within Affine space grant them access to dimensions and realms beyond our comprehension. This enables them to navigate and manipulate the multiverse, harnessing energies and forces that elude our grasp.

The influence of the Outer Gods on Affine space and, consequently, our reality is profound. As abstract entities existing within the informational plane, their actions and intentions ripple through the fabric of existence. Their influence can be seen as the underlying forces that shape the possibilities and potentialities within Affine space, determining the boundaries and variations of the multiverse.

The implications of the Outer Gods' power for the existence of our reality are significant. Their seemingly limitless capabilities suggest that our perceived reality is malleable and subject to their influence. This challenges the notion of an objective and independent existence, raising questions about the true nature of reality and the extent of our agency within it. It invites speculation on whether our reality is a mere construct, shaped by the dreams or intentions of these enigmatic beings.

What's more, the being of such overpowering creatures emphasizes the delicateness and helplessness of our reality. If the Outer Gods arise or intervene in a way that disturbs Affine space's equilibrium, the results for our world could be disastrous. Our realm might be re-shaped or obliterated, resulting in the collapse or transformation of what we perceive as real.

Therefore, the unlimited power given to the Outer Gods is at the core of their puzzle. The possible sources of their energy, their sway over Affine space and the aftermaths on our existence inspire reverential fear and interest. Though their real potency and scope remain far beyond our human capacity, their presence puts our grasp of reality to the test and asks us to muse about the potent forces that have an effect on our life within Affine space's eclectic tapestry.



CHAPTER 8

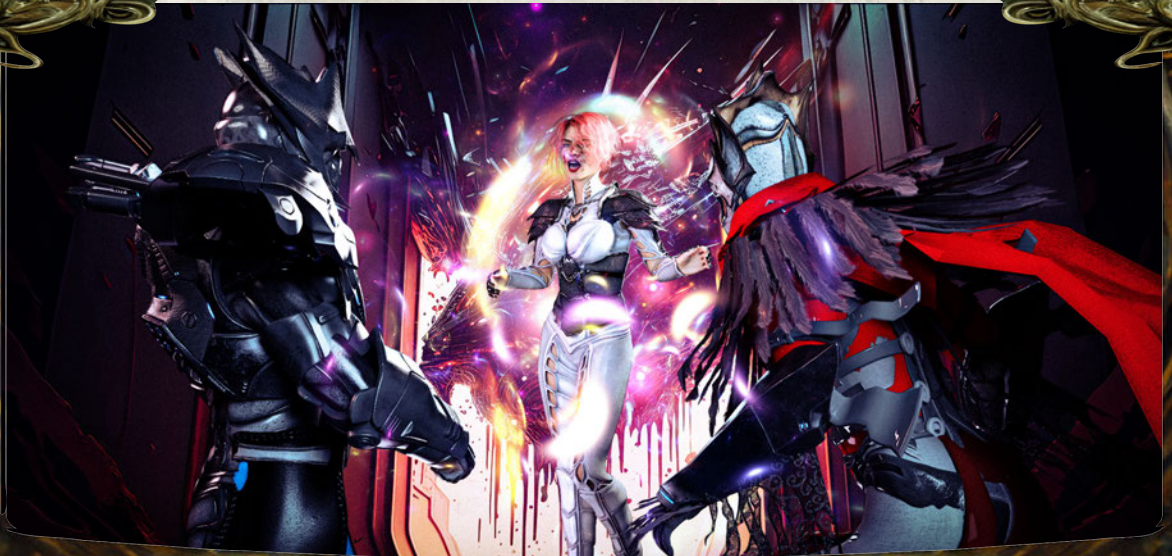
CHAPTER 8

As the death toll rose into the millions from the attacks throughout the Pax Continuum, Arissa and Jemin made their final approach to the pillar that now bore his name. Angelica and Jemin kissed passionately as Jemin's final moments in this realm came to a close. With a tear in her eye, Arissa released Jemin and stood back.

“Remember Arissa, no matter what happens, I will still exist. I will still be here, with you. Please, never forget and never give in to your doubts.”

They hugged one final time, then Jemin touched the pillar. Jemin became enveloped in the warmth light of creation, soothing his pain and completing his destiny. Arissa could feel his transition, his sensation of utter peace and it brought her much happiness. The knowledge that he truly became something more instead of simply dying was a relief, even if she could not reach him when calling out into Affine space. As Arissa turned to leave, she was suddenly struck by an odd sensation. It was becoming increasingly difficult to sense her parents. The constant hum in the back of her mind that they consistently occupied was growing dim.

Arissa reached out with her mind, trying to strengthen her connection. She called out to her mother then her father, hearing only the faintest whispers of her parents. Worried, Arissa began generating a portal to her parents. She could still sense their location and traveled there with the upmost urgency. Arissa's gate faltered briefly, forcing her to focus as she stepped out, into Hastur's former throne room. The epicenter of realities corrosion, her connection to Affine space was tenuous at best. Arissa looked around and stopped suddenly, seeing her parents standing before two pillars.



"Arisa, I'm so glad you made it in time!" Renee spoke to her, an obvious joy and relief in her voice.

"Mom, what are you two doing, do you know what those things are?" Arissa felt panic well up inside, the thought of her parents being separated from her, potentially forever, on top of everything else was too much to bare.

Gabriel walked over to Arissa and held her in his arms tightly.

"My sweet girl, I love you so very much. We're not leaving you, at least not in the way you think. It's the only way to finally reverse the damage the Church of the Affine and Hastur have caused. Our power is needed, added to the pillars, to strengthen and regrow the portions of the barrier between universes."

"But I can't lose you again, dad... no!" Arissa's emotions struggled to break free, tears kept barely in check.

"It'll be ok; we'll still be there for you. We're ascending, true, but we're hardly human any longer. We'll be traveling in the Outer Realms, among others of our own kind. And some day, when your travels here are done, you'll rejoin us."

"Why can't I join you now? I don't want to be alone!"

Arisa never truly was alone before, even when her father had tried to wall off his consciousness for fear of Hastur contaminating Arissa and Renee, there was still that physical sensation that persisted. Now Arissa panicked, not knowing if she would ever be able to sense them again.

"Hect'kaaros is still out there. When we merge with the pillars, reality will begin to mend, but this creature is still here and quite powerful. Already entire worlds are falling before him. Only you will be able to stop him. I know you can feel it deep within. Just as we feel our purpose lies within these pillars. Azathoth, he who dreamed all existence into being, gave us these tools to survive. Created us to do what others would, or could not do. We have to heal the Universe!"

Arisa Held her parents tight, the thoughts of Jemin leaving her still burned freshly into her mind. Gabriel and Renee stood before their pillars, each confident in their choices. The certainty Arissa lacked, both these unique individuals possessed through long hard years of experience. They knew what awaited them both and chose to embrace it. At the same time, they each touch their respective pillar and the light of ascension filled the room. Arissa clenched her fist as they vanished and without a word, turned away from the pillars and the now empty room.

Arissa made her way to the surface of the planet, lost in her own thoughts and confusion. The emotional turmoil over the last few days finally taking a physical toll on her. As a creature that had never before needed to sleep, Arissa found it difficult to explain or rationalize just how tired she now felt. She reached out with her thoughts, attempting to reach her parents, Jemin, anyone that could provide her with reassurance, but sadly she found none. What greeted her were the cries of the dead and dying as the creatures from the other side made their final attacks. The barrier between universes was in fact healing, and it was only a matter of time before these parasitic creatures were cut off completely. It was in this moment that Arissa felt the presence of Hect'kaaros, the Lord of Tears.



The creature had felt the pillars as well, and the effect they were having. The Lord of Tears would not be silenced so easily. In a fit of rage, he began absorbing any of the creatures that yet lingered in this reality that had crossed over from his own. Hect'kaaros began to take physical form, seeking out the final pillars in the vein hope of destroying them. A thunderous clap shattered the silence of the dead world formerly inhabited by the Church of the Affine, as the Lord of Tears appeared high in the sky. Arissa watched the creature take form above, studying his power and learning what she could from observation. She could feel how his essence remained tethered to the other place, even with the pillars fully activated. Arissa knew the Lord of Tears must be forced back for reality to fully heal.

"What have you done, little one?" Hect'kaaros said in an almost metallic sounding voice, an attempted synthesis of voice and psychic projection to convey his question.

"You dare ask that of me, after all I've lost stopping your insanity? This universe is not for you! This is your one and only chance, leave!" Arissa fought hard to maintain her composure, her frayed emotions tugging at her from all angles.



Hect'kaaros sensed her emotional turmoil and mistook it for fear. His reaction turned to one of laughter at the threat levied against him.

"I have no idea how you curried favor with Azathoth, but the pillars will only resist my power for so long. And I will not be spoken to by one as lowly as you!"

With that, the Lord of Tears unleashed a massive blast of energy toward Arissa, vaporizing much of the planet, cracking the planet to its core. As the fire and debris cleared, Arissa remained. Arms crossed, she created a protective shield that held strong against this creature's immense power.

"Lord of Tears, you were warned. Now you will face a Lord of Entropy!" Arissa screamed as she lashed out, the full brunt of her fury released for the first time. The immense energy overwhelmed the Lord of Tears, if even for a moment, causing his own power to react with Arissa's. A massive surge in power collapsed the walls of reality around the two as Arissa landed her blow, forcing both of them through the gateway, and into oblivion.



“Arissa! Can you hear me? You’re almost there! Reach out to my voice and become whole again!”

Arissa’s consciousness existed independent of physical form as she traversed the realm between all things. The disorientation was all consuming, yet she held true to herself and used the disembodied voice to help anchor her thoughts. Arissa still could not see anything but faint outlines, yet now understanding began to creep in.

“I hear you... it’s hard to think. What is this?”

“You’re in the space between, where time has no meaning. The trauma to your body was almost too much. Your mind reached out to this place for sanctuary, for healing and a moment’s breath.” The voice replied in a calm, soothing tone. Familiar yet different, as though heard through a thick wall, muffled and slightly distorted.

Arissa felt herself reassured as the voice continued. “I will help you to remember and with remembrance, so too shall you regain form. I caution you though, there is much death that will follow. Your journey will not be an easy one, but it will be necessary. Shall we begin?”

Arissa agreed, and with that, a hand appeared out of the emptiness and with a gentle touch, the fingers pressed against her thoughts, sparking revelation. “Jemin, how? This can’t be real!” Arissa exclaimed as her body began to take form.



"I told you ascension wasn't the end. Your parents exist at a level even I cannot reach, but I felt them as they too transcended, and I felt their love for you as well."

"What happened to my body and to Hect'kaaros? Does he exist here as well?"

"The lord of Tears has continued his transition back to his natural place in reality. His universe is a vastly different realm then the one you and I are from. He spent a long time acclimating to our reality, and so the transition wasn't as difficult. But for you, a creature literally born of Affine space and yet tethered to mortality, you began absorbing all the energies of this place, it's begun to transform you. It would have overwhelmed you, causing your consciousness to dissipate had you not heard my voice and fought to come back. Soon you will pass through to the other side, transformed."

"Transformed into what? What's happening to me? What's on the other side?" Arissa asked, her voice trembling with doubt and uncertainty.

"Have faith, my love. You will become something wonderful, I can feel it." And with that, Jemin pressed his lips upon her forehead, causing a final release of memories to help her return to the physical realm.



Hect'kaaros raged at his humiliation. The Lord of Tears stood upon a barren plateau of rock, stretching a mile into the sky. All around this rocky outcropping, the ground itself swelled and pulsed with unknown life. No individual existed in this realm, just the ever spreading tumorous mass that engulfed the world. Hect'kaaros let out a powerful blast as he screamed, shredding the organic material and forcing it to retreat, albeit temporarily. As soon as the fiery inferno receded, the blackened mass spewed puss and tissue, regenerating the lost matter within seconds. Fueled by hidden energies, the mass knew no end and even extended its reach further up the massive outcropping of rock the Lord of Tears stood upon. Then without warning, a brilliant flash of light flared to life, eradicating the organic mass closest to the lights brilliance. At the center of the light floated Arissa, transformed into something new. She swelled with hidden power she could barely contain. She looked over this fallen world and stretched out her mind, spreading her thoughts across this new universe. Nowhere in all of this creation did a truly sentient being exist. The universe was seemingly devoid of intelligent life and in place there was the growth. An organic parasite spreading from star system to star system, consuming whole worlds. The more Arissa searched this malignant universe, the more she realized the only life form that existed was this diseased flesh.



As Arissa flew through the atmosphere, the cancerous growth seemed to react to her. The growth never once tried to consume her, but instead seemed to feed off her power. The growth grew and spread even faster throughout Hect'kaaros' universe, consuming even more as it went. The Lord of Tears released a torrent of energy, engulfing Arissa in destructive wave after wave of power. Arissa shot back, plunging through Hect'kaaros' blasts until within striking distance. The blow to his jaw sent earth shattering shock waves throughout the planet as the creature fell to the ground. The flesh-thing all around attempted to grab on, seeking to devour anything within reach. Hect'kaaros released a blast that vaporized miles of the planet just to be free. Maybe out of panic, or out of disgust, but in the end the blast had little permanent effect as the growth, now fed by Arissa's presence, grew back at an even more incredible rate. Arissa could only float there, marveling at the horror this universe had become.

"What have you done to this universe? What manner of perversion are you?" Arissa roared her question as tendrils of searing light shot out, some cutting deep into the flesh of the Lord of Tears while others burned away the world-tumor, leaving it permanently scarred.



Hect'kaaros stared in disbelief at the woman's newfound power even as he marshalled his own immense strength to counter attack. His blasts hit Arissa with crushing power, causing immense pain, but Arissa raged all the more. Hect'kaaros grabbed on to the woman's arms and flung her into orbit, slamming through the nearest moon and reducing it to rubble. Arissa immediately regained her balance and released a volley of explosive energy at the Lord of Tears. Each mass of energy exploded upon contact, incinerating his flesh, only for it to grow back. Hect'kaaros was not so different from Arissa, and both knew little of their own limits. Hect'kaaros generated tendrils of his own, a black ink-like substance forming spikes shot out, tearing into Arissa. The woman cried out in anger, shrugging off the tendrils with an explosive burst. The blast was powerful enough shatter worlds and it sent Hect'kaaros plummeting back to the planet's surface.

The Lord of Tears lay upon the ground, the growth all around threatening to consume him. Standing, Hect'kaaros knew it was over.

"You truly are the Lord of Entropy... Make an end of this then, mighty lord!" Hect'kaaros lowered his arms as he spoke, looking to end his universes suffering once and for all.



Arissa's anger threatened to consume her, but from the depths of Affine space she felt the presence of Jemin and his warmth. Arissa let reason once more take control, taking in all that surrounded her.

"What is this place? Why did you seek to destroy my universe? What was the meaning behind it all?"

The Lord of tears looked up, giving the impression of one who was innocent of blame yet still standing accused.

"Your universe! It was yours that did this. Always expanding, our worlds could bear the burden of a shrinking physicality. The lives of my universe are of pure thought, not of burdensome flesh. We exist all around you, free to travel between the stars themselves, unfettered by physical limitation. That is, until the growth." With that, Hect'kaaros directed her gaze toward the pulsating flesh below.



"It started only a century ago, spreading first on one planet then another. None gave it much thought as our concerns were never of the material world, that is until the minds, the very essence of the beings existing here became absorbed by the growth. Each soul consumed became forever imprisoned in a never-ending, never dying prison of flesh. I could destroy the flesh, but never entirely. Those it captured remained its prisoner forever, in constant turmoil. Only when the tears in reality began to form did our universe find release. All who died on your side finally returned free of the growth. Your universe which caused the growth could also end it."

Arissa considered his words fiercely, "But with each incursion, you risk the destruction of both universes, and more! How can you justify this?"

"My people would rather make an end of it rather than be held prisoners of flesh. You're the only thing in all of creation I've witnessed able to permanently harm the growth." Hect'kaaros said as he motioned to the still scarred lumps of flesh, now permanently marred.

"You, oh Lord of Entropy, you alone serve as harbinger of death and life. The very growth that consumes our universe obeys your command. We cannot stop you, do what you will."



Arissa's power flared to life, illuminating the world as if a new star had been born. She reached out with her awareness, touching as many worlds as she can. Accessing her power on this level was intoxicating yet she held true to her purpose and with clarity of thought, acted. An immense wave of destruction shot out across the universe, spreading as an ever growing sphere. The wave did not destroy all matter, however. Only the growth felt the terrible power of the Lord of Suffering. The very molecules disrupted on a cellular level began to turn on its self. The growth of flesh that touched all corners of the universe now began to feast upon its self. Entire worlds ran red with the blood of the growth, but at last the cancer no longer spread. Arissa drew her power back within, slowly drifting down to meet Hect'kaaros.

"It is done; the growth will very shortly be no more. Are your people free?" Hect'kaaros reached out with his psychic awareness, searching out the trillions of souls formerly consumed by the growth.

"Yes, they have been freed."

"With your help, as I return to my universe we will erect new boundaries. Pillars of our own creation on this side that will reinforce the walls. This conflict may have been started by my reality unbeknownst to all but it is ended now. Never again seek to threaten my universe, do you understand?" Arissa glared at Hect'kaaros, making her threat plain.

"You have my word."

With that, the two beings began to reach out, blending materials and energies of both universes, forming vast pillars of creation that would exist for all time, touching both realities at once yet never crossing. Balance was restored and Arissa returned to her universe.





EPILOGUE

EPILOQUE

With fissures no longer threatening the universe, the Pax Continuum began its long journey back to healing. With the guidance of the Gigun, the gate system was repaired, connecting all the worlds of humanity once more. Many colonies had vanished, consumed in the great shadow of Hect'kaaros. New laws were written in the names of Fortuna and Nova colonies, forever preserving their memories as monuments to the never ending struggle for equality. No longer would corporate control reign, even in the wilderness of the colonies out along the ever expanding rim.

The Church of the Affine died a quick, clean death, which was more then it deserved. The world it was founded upon lay in ruin, poisonous to life. Quarantined for the safety of all, still this barren world retained secrets of the Church of the Affine. Deadly secrets that some still sought out, even against their own better judgement. And still the technology and weaponry released to the universe by the Hierophant continued to spread, adding a destabilizing element throughout society. Some said the Hierophant were not all killed, that some still fomented rebellion from within the shadows, but none knew for certainty.



Meanwhile, out among the stars, lost in the vast ocean of space, Arissa floated. Seeking communion with all of Affine space, the powerful woman flared brighter than a star as she stretched out her power, calling out to those she loved. Her thoughts reached out for Jemin, her father Gabriel, and her mother, Renee. Using her newfound power, she channeled all her skill into piercing realities, peering behind the veil of creation its self. The Pillars of Creation shook but did not break, reinforced by her own power. It was unknown to Arissa how long she quested for those she loved, but time was meaningless to one such as her. Unmoving, she continued her search, a perfectly still statue, undaunted by the immensity of her task.

Some might say her journey was impossible. An act of desperation denied even to one as powerful as her. But for those that know better, for those that would dare to approach the Lord of Suffering, it would not be a look of pain and anguish she bore upon her face. No, subtle though It may be, a gentle smile would be seen spreading across her face as words unknowable to human ears whispered to her from the deep.





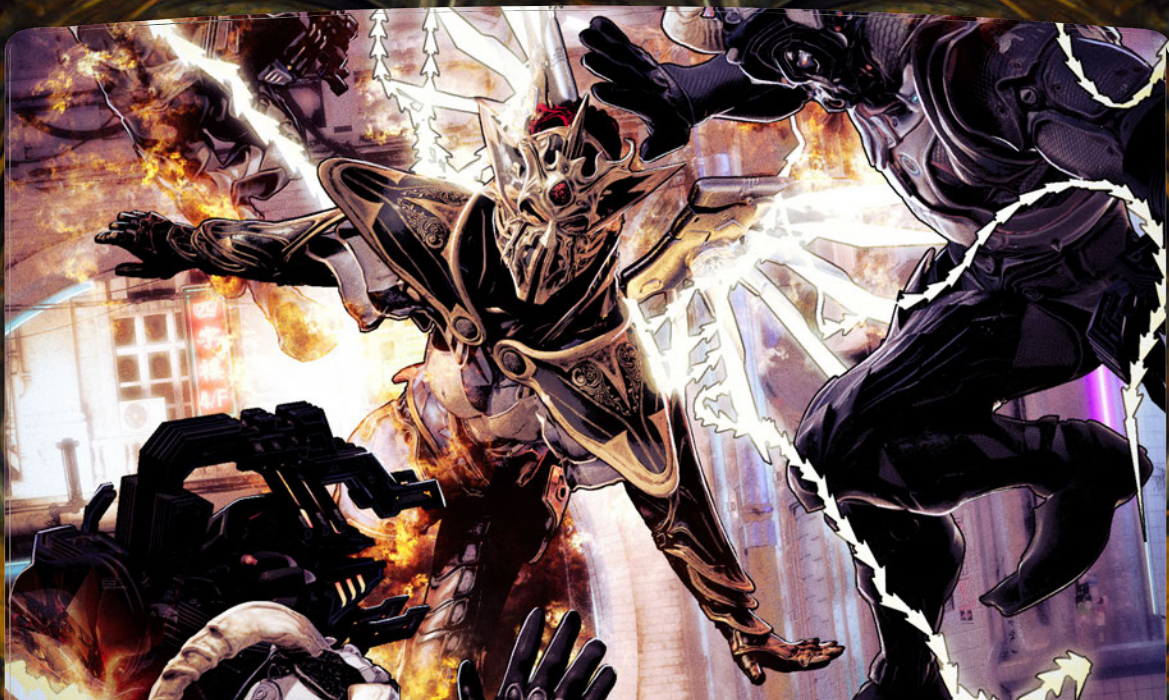
www.ASYLUMINK.net

SCI-FI ACTION, CORRUPTED
BY LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR, BRED
FROM PROSE, AND ILLUSTRATED IN
DIGITAL BLOOD.



WELCOME TO THE FUTURE
OF DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT.





LORD OF ENTROPY

Humanities fate hangs in the balance, between the potential brilliance of a new golden age and the ever-present danger of obliteration. As destabilizing element from within scheme in the darkness, the ever-spreading human civilization echoes throughout the universe, threatening to awaken from millennia of slumber untold horrors from before recorded time.

Amidst the suffering and devastation, a small group of survivors lead by the mysterious woman Arissa -- child of the lost Templar Gabriel -- must bravely try to wield the power of ancient relics from a vanished civilization in an effort to thwart an approaching universal threat. As reality starts to warp and fissures in time and space give way to blood thirsty abominations, will humanity stand together or fall and be lost to the ashes of history?

