



**FREE  
ENERGY  
VOL. 1**

# **FREE ENERGY**

Volume I – Uncertainty

Author – J. E. Kuri

## Chapter 1

“Damn hackers, it’s been one week since they breached the banks’ security and the world is already collapsing,” I told myself as I made haste towards Vino’s flat.

Rain was pouring down, cold. I had to keep an eye open, at all times. Anything could happen on the streets now.

“Who knows, maybe it wasn’t the hackers, but someone else lurking in the shadows. Perhaps a different actor influencing the political strings. In any case, I shouldn’t be risking my life out here for a book and some numbers.”

A sudden sound of sirens emerged loudly, piercing through the night with its multiple high-pitched frequencies. I acted as a chameleon, keeping a slow pace while staring inadvertently at the floor.

Two vehicles violently passed by. I checked my Holo-Pad once they were gone. I saw Vino’s last message: an “a”. That’s all he wrote, still, I was sure that that “a” could only mean one thing. “He has it. He must have gotten the book.”

I kept walking. Eventually, the rain stopped. Chaos could be heard all over the City. Hereupon I saw a person being restrained in an alley.

“No, please...! Have mercy!” he shouted. “Please, I beg of you, have mercy!”

The fear in his words intensified as he was being pushed around. I felt a rushing impulse towards the alley, but it extinguished promptly. “You can’t right now. You’ve got to get to Vino’s no matter what, remember?” I asked myself.

I clenched my fingers and closed my fist. The shouting could be heard all over

the surroundings. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and kept walking. Moments after, a gunshot was heard.

“What has become of this place? I should have done something,” I thought, hypnotized by my own distress.

Vino’s neighborhood was right around the corner now. Things were worse than I’d expected. People dead in the middle of the streets, cars on fire. As I kept going, I saw a group of Locrians glancing at me, speaking amongst themselves. I kept walking. The Locrians were a recently established faction of gang members and cyberpunks. They were against the Region; they claimed to be anarchists, though they were slaves of the current system as much as anyone else. The Locrians had acquired plenty of military equipment in the past months and were feared amongst the civilian population. They were out on the streets every night since the financial meltdown occurred. They were known for killing people and other rage acts.

I somehow managed to walk by relatively unnoticed, which kept me safe for the time being. Minutes later, I found myself at Vino’s street.

“Finally...”

I rushed by the sidewalk towards the last building. A moment of silence; Vino’s street was incredibly quiet. Most of the City had no electrical power at this point and, apparently, neither did Vino’s district. Everything was covered in black. I took my Holo-pad out and called him.

“Hello?”

“I’m here.”



“Is that you? I’ll be right there.”

After a couple of minutes, I heard someone coming from the other side of the building’s door.

“Renn? Is that you?”

“Hey, brother.”

The front door opened. I felt a sensation of relief.

“Come on up.”

I entered the small building as Vino glimpsed at the street before closing the door. We went upstairs, to the second floor. Once we entered the apartment, he handed me a towel as we sat on the table and began talking.

“So, I see you’ve got my message there, right Renn?”

“An “a”? Could you be any less expressive?”

“Ha, that’s right, I hardly could have, couldn’t I?”

“So, tell me, have you got it?”

“Yes, it’s here.”

I took a deep breath.

“Show me.”

He brought the book. It wasn't until now that I came to realize how Vino's flat was lightened with candles. It seemed odd. I had always seen it during daylight hours or brightened by electricity.

"The world is changing, isn't that right, Vino, my friend?" I asked him.

"That is indeed most certainly true. It always is," he replied as he handed me the heavy book.

I then saw its cover. It was dark-green, with a white symbol in the middle of the cover page.

"This is it," I said while staring at the symbol. "I still can't conceive the fact that you actually got it. Thank you, my friend. I must read this now, can I stay here by the table, brother? Oh, and could I borrow some paper and a pen of yours?"

"Sure, Renn, there are some paper sheets and other things there by the mirror, just don't make any noise, ok? You see, sometimes they come to verify how everything is going around these parts, so try to stay quiet and avoid the windows. They have new regulations now, and I'm not allowed, no one is allowed, I should say, to have visitors without a permit. I don't want to sound harsh or anything, you know? But this could cost us both a lot, all that I've built during the past years and so on..." he explained. "Anyways, there is a couch there in case it suits you, a pillow and some bed-sheets next to it. There's also food in the fridge, oh, and hey, listen, Renn, I need to know. Is everything ok over there? I've been pretty worried, wondering if Julie and the others will leave at some point. Last time I spoke with her was four days ago, and I thought I..."

"Everything is fine," I sort of interrupted. "Look, there's no need to panic, alright? Since they decided to enter the Program they have nothing to worry about, right? They left today for the Regional Center... And well, they should be safe." I made

a short pause. “Besides, they know how to take care of themselves. Me, on the contrary... well, let’s just say that I was thrilled when I got your message. I was just thrown out of my building and I was starting to run out of the little food I had taken with me, and... well, thanks a lot Vino, my man, I can’t believe you’ve got the book for me.”

“That’s ok, no worries. I suppose being in the Program has its advantages, huh? That’s how I got that book of yours. You can find anything in the New-Wires, did you know?” he asked, referring to a new system which provided great amounts of information to those in the Program, including, on occasions, artifacts, such as the book itself. “Before I forget, I’ll be moving to the Other Side in a couple of days, once all the paperwork is finally done. If I may ask, Renn, what are you planning on doing? Have you thought about entering the Program or something?”

“I don’t know, man. I have to read this, that’s all I know for now.”

“Uh, way to think about your future, boy. What are you going to do when I’m gone? How are you going to get your food? That book should be the last of your concerns...”

“Look, I have to read this, alright? You have no idea how important this is to me. If it meets my expectations, it will reveal so much... Anyway, thanks for everything, brother.”

“Yah, don’t even mention it. I’ll see you tomorrow, try not to stay up too late. The bathroom is a bit messy, but we can sort that out tomorrow. By the way, I’ll be going for supplies in the morning. You can leave a note there by the fridge in case you need anything, not too expensive though, because I...”

At that moment I opened the book and stopped listening to the world around me. I stared at the first page. Blank. The second page. Blank as well. The third page

had an amazing art pattern all over it and I felt, just by looking at it, that this was definitely something unique.

I began reading around midnight, a bit after I arrived at Vino's. Afterwards, I lost all grasp of time. I was impressed with how well written the book was. Mathematics, prohibited mathematics, the patterns of nature and numerological coincidences converged on its pages. At some point, after hours of reading, I realized that I had missed a key element and went back almost to the beginning of the book. "How could I've missed that?" I asked myself. "Of course, his treatment of the numbers is even more accurate than I thought. How could I have not seen that?"

I kept reading and reading, trying to get inside the author's mind. Going deeper into his words. I eventually reached the end of the first chapter and I found myself utterly impressed with the way my fundamental understanding of triangular, square, prime and other number-sequences had changed over the past hours. "Woah... ineffable," I said to myself.

While still in deep thought, I heard a voice, a voice speaking to me. It was Vino. I looked at him and was dazzled by the sunlight on my face.

"Well, good morning there, Renn," he said.

"Hey, good morning."

"You stayed up all night, didn't you?"

"I suppose I did, I just realized it is morning already," I told him.

"Want breakfast?"



My stomach began roaring, as if it had heard Vino's words by itself.

"That would be awesome, thanks."

Vino and I had breakfast. We spoke about the Program and how my ex-girlfriend Julie, my mother, my brother and almost everyone I knew was moving to the Other Side. The Other Side, as was often referred to, was the side of the City guarded by the government, or what was left of it, where electricity, food and water were supplied to the people on a daily rationed basis.

Vino explained to me how the only way to survive now was to enter the Program and how it was madness to stay here, in the unattended side. I tried to listen, after all, I considered him a very smart and cunning person. We've had amazing talks in the past, discussions that I enjoyed and valued, but this time my mind was still deeply absorbed by the numbers. He finished breakfast, and in the blink of an eye, went out to work.

He had just got a job in the Other Side and was moving there in a couple of days. The last time I had seen him he told me, holding a beer with one hand while giving me a handshake with the other, that he would get the book for me. He also told me that, if I ever needed to, I could stay in his place before he moved. Vino was risking a lot by allowing me to do so, after all, we were only friends since recently and he had no apparent motivation for helping me out. He was a good man, I supposed, and I could really use the help of a good man at that time. He was an old friend of my ex-girlfriend, a close one, but we did not speak much about her once she and I broke up. Maybe that was the reason, maybe he was doing it for her. I'll never know.

Soon after Vino left, I realized how eager I was to start with my work. I looked down at the book. I grabbed it and began reading where I had left off. My mind slowly adjusted back to the complex topics at hand. The author of the book was

one of the few in particular that I still respected.

“Rubbish, pseudo-science, numerical assumptions, mathematical structures that do not manifest in reality...” I said out loud.

What I was searching for was not a common topic. According to my research, very few authors had written about it. It was convoluted, boring and slow to digest. Even some of the most respected thinkers from the past had come across it and deviated from it. What I was reading caused me some strange feelings; it resonated with me. I kept reading, page after page, writing down all sorts of equations and conversions in the paper sheets beside me. Every once in a while, I checked my Holo-pad for additional information, facts and measurements, but I finally put it aside, focusing solely on the book and the papers.

As I kept going, I began to understand what the author was talking about. His perspective was very similar to mine, but expressed in a different manner, in a way that I had not thought of before. This brought much excitement to me, at least at the beginning. As I kept going, many of the overall ideas that were clear to me hours ago became blurry and I had to go back again and again, trying to figure out if something was wrong with the author’s reasoning, or my own, for that matter. This new approach to certain concepts caused a broader gap between my ideas and those of the author. Something big did not fit in my perspective, yet, we were speaking about the same idea.

After hours pondering upon the pages, I found myself devoting great amounts of time to pure thinking. Reasoning for what seemed like days, trying to solve the obnoxious doubt which had begun bothering me just hours ago. I went back to the book and kept on reading. Suddenly, I heard a noise. It was the door, opening. I saw Vino as he greeted me. I realized it was nighttime already and I was even more confused than before regarding the author’s approach.

“Hey boy, are you still reading that thing?” Vino’s voice seemed a bit slow and tired, somewhat altered.

“Hey, Vino, my man, how is everything out there?”

“Everything is crazy, bad crazy. The neighborhood is full of those Locrians now, you know? By the way, I saw your brother earlier before. He’s pretty pissed at you. He certainly took his time to let me know, ha...”

“Yes, I know that,” I muttered, “Did you tell him I’m here?”

“Yah, I think he knows.”

“I see...”

“Anyways, kid, I’m pretty tired. I think I’m going to have dinner in my room, if you don’t mind. Tomorrow is meet-up day and I don’t want to miss the show tonight, they are putting it on the New-Wires for free, you know? By the way, I brought you dinner, I left it there, by the oven.”

“Thanks, Vino, my friend. You’ve been good to me, I appreciate it.”

“Say no more. Listen, get some sleep, ok? Are you crazy? What are you doing, boy?” He took a long breath. “Anyways... Have a good one, see you tomorrow.”

I had dinner by myself with the book next to me. I felt new strength and entered into a deep reading session once again. This time, I tried to approach the topic in a different way. I focused merely on what the author was trying to express, the pure content of his ideas. The connections brought by him were undeniable, but his overall reasoning... He didn’t include things as a whole, and at some point, I suffered every passing page because of this. I kept going. I kept on and

eventually the pages began to get heavier and heavier. I felt massively tired and laid down on the couch. I stayed there, thinking about the numbers and their significance. I was pretty shocked by the huge content I had just read. Still, not in harmony. I eventually fell asleep.

A ray of light came down gently upon my eyes. I heard Vino going to work as he closed the door. I felt a bit rested. The smell of breakfast was irrefutably exquisite. That also woke me up.

“He left breakfast for me...” I thought.

I got up the couch. After eating and taking a bath I felt reborn. The hours of sleep were good for me too and I was ready to approach the book once more. I grabbed it and began to read. I went back a couple of hundred pages.

“I have to digest them easily,” I thought, “otherwise I won’t understand how the layer of information that he is speaking about moves.”

This time I gave myself the right amount of time to blend these new patterns, and so, I soon felt the need to rush through the pages as I began to understand. I was still puzzled by the clear misconception I had overnight. If I had it right in my head, reality would seem different by now, it would be as I expected, or at least that’s what I thought.

“...Anyway, I shouldn’t be concerned with that at this point,” I said out loud. “Things come when they must.”

This critical section which I was passing through was the whole concernment of my study, one that I had carried out for over a decade. To understand the foundation for the existence of numbers, to understand consciousness.



I ended my digressions and focused back on the book, which was my last hope not to become ostracized for my theories. This man; this man who I didn't know knew something that I was also well aware of. The meaning of this book and my interpretation of the same could be a turning point for us all.

The sheets of paper remained untouched that day. I didn't notice the hours passing by. I did notice my stomach roaring once or twice, nevertheless, I focused intensely on the numbers and the connections brought up to me by the author. I was extremely excited. I could not believe what I was reading. A whole different living being making the same crazy-connections I myself had done. It all began to make sense now, I had known it all these years and I was partially corroborating it. This fact also brought to my mind my deepest fears... What if I was right? What would happen then? I left these thoughts aside and kept on reading.

Hours after lighting up the candles, I noticed Vino's absence. I was starting to get worried when the door suddenly opened. It was him, smiling, carrying a couple of bags and a briefcase.

"Hey there, Mr. Renn Barsak."

"Hi there, Mr. Vino, argh, Vino... your last name slips my mind, brother, I'm sorry, I..."

He laughed. "Vino Franco, Vino Franco, my friend," he said, "I brought you dinner, again. You must be hungry, I figured."

"I sure am."

Vino cooked for us and we had dinner on the table this time. He was certainly friendlier than the night before. He looked like he wanted to mention something to

me, but he didn't. He then began speaking about the Other Side and how I should have moved right away. I simply nodded this time and the conversation went along nice and smoothly. He eventually went to bed. I stayed up feeling really satisfied with the food in my stomach.

"Time to get to it," I told myself while grabbing the book.

I was beginning to feel familiar with the touch of the pages, the weight of the book itself, the chair I was sitting on and even the candle light that allowed me to read. I once again focused all my attention on the text and the pages began to fly by. While solving some of the problems suggested by the author, I noticed something. "Could it be?" I asked myself. I then grasped the paper sheets and began to write equation after equation. I felt I was hitting upon something, something of great importance.

The author had just given me a hint about a problem that I had already been working on, a solution to the paradox which emerged from my theory. If this was accurate, I could finally have the means to continue my hypothesis without breaking with logic.

I allowed my thoughts to run free, writing down everything that came into my mind. I continued reading and thinking, reading and thinking. "If I'm correct, what will happen then?" I couldn't resist the idea of all that would be implied if my thesis was right. I got scared again. Suddenly, I closed the book. I stared at its cover. "What am I doing?" I asked myself. "I shouldn't be dealing with these topics, I know that... damn, now that it all begins to make sense, after all these years, I realize the true implications as well."

Slowly, I pointed my finger and directed my eyes towards the pencil lying on the table. I focused my mind on the pencil. "I'm not ready, I'm simply not. It would be obvious by now if I was," I thought.

I grabbed the book again and kept on reading, restraining my mind from free flying. I digressed from the paradox scheme and kept focusing on the general meaning of the book. After all, the paradox, though of great importance, was nothing but one of the many critical implications of treating the numbers as conscious archetypes. What we knew about the numbers was only the shadow of the self-existing archetypes; a fundamental and recurring thought in my head since I was a boy.

Every hundred pages or so, I became more used to the ways of the author, as if he was talking only to me, as if he was doing his best to express to me what happened in his mind. I felt the need to express myself too. An endless need to express myself. I suddenly felt agitated. I stood up, closed the book and opened my eyes wide. I thought that I had heard a sound coming from the door. I approached the flat's entrance and heard nothing. I stood there by the door. I then looked at the fire from one of the candles next to me. I looked at it intensely, for a moment. As I kept my sight on it, it suddenly extinguished and a loud noise came from the door behind me.

"Open up," a voice said.

A series of hard knocks were felt all over the flat this time and Vino came over. He saw me there, frozen, by the door. He then signaled me with his hands to come over where he was.

"Get inside the second room and do not make any noise," he whispered.

I moved silently towards the end of the corridor. Once inside the room, I heard Vino opening the entrance door.

"Are you the owner of this place?"

“What’s the meaning of this? Who are you?” Vino asked.

“I’m with the Region. You should know this. Now, are you, or are you not the owner of this apartment?”

“I rent this place, yes, if that’s what you mean. What makes you think you can come at these hours? I was sleeping and I...”

“Hear me out, old man. Don’t make this situation more difficult than it has to be. I make the questions here, is that clear? Do you live by yourself?”

“I, I do, yes, I do, I...”

At this point, according to Vino’s later retelling, the person had a glance at the interior of the flat.

“You’ve been warned,” he said. “If you are keeping someone else here, we’re going to find out.”

I then heard the door closing. I looked outside the room and saw Vino coming over.

“Well...” he murmured. “We’re gonna have to be more careful from now on.”

We spoke that night in whispers. He explained to me how sorry he was with the current state of affairs within his neighborhood.

“Them, coming at these hours, knocking at my door... Who do they think they are? I can’t believe this,” he quietly said.



He then mentioned that I could stay in the apartment until he left to the Other Side.

“Argh, these guys...! Listen, Renn, I’m not going to throw you out or anything, ok? I want to help you before I go,” he added, very quietly. “The Region must somehow be aware of your presence here. Did you make any noise? Why were you at the door when the knocking began?”

I assured him I had remained silent all night. “I’ve been very quiet, I think. Out of nowhere, the knocking began...”

“What about your Holo-pad? Where is it? It is cracked, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Of course it is,” I answered. “I never would have brought it with me if it wasn’t.”

“Ok, well, still, I’m sure if the guards wanted to, they could listen to us through it at any rate, so...”

I showed him my Holo-pad and we left it by itself over the room at the end of the corridor, turned off.

I barely slept that night. I couldn’t concentrate in my work and went straight to the couch. The following morning, Vino seemed a bit worried. “Stay inside. Do not open the door to anyone. I’ll try to be here earlier than usual,” he explicitly stated as he left for work.

Though I tried to bring my attention back to the numbers, I couldn’t stop feeling guilty for what had happened the night before. Nevertheless, I slowly began to move forward with my study.

The hours had gone by and, little by little, I began to feel comfortable again. With

each passing hour I understood the text further while forgetting all about the recent incident. I could feel myself scraping through the content's layers, slowly.

The day went by and, before I could tell, it was night time again. Vino arrived home soon after.

"Hey, how was everything today? No regional guards knocking at the door?" he inquired.

I laughed and explained how smooth the day had gone by. As usual, he brought food for me. "We can't have dinner together or speak between ourselves anymore, we have to be cautious," he stated. "I'll be leaving to the Other Side in three days, so you'd better find a place to stay before I'm gone."

I didn't have enough peace of mind to be thinking about my near future. I was trapped with the book again. I had dinner by myself and Vino went to his room. The night went by calmly; no Region officers showed up this time. I managed my way through some complex topics, key elements to understand the functions that allow the parts and the whole to interact.

Just as the sun became visible, I felt very tired and went to the couch to get some sleep. I realized how the incident from the night before seemed long gone. I was still missing something, though. Just before the officer had knocked on the entrance door, I had seen the fire from the candle extinguish. I was sure I saw it just a moment before and, not when, or after the knocking occurred. This seemed very odd to me, it happened in a strange fashion.

"The real meaning..." I thought.

Since I went to sleep probably around the time Vino left, I didn't hear him exiting the apartment this time. I woke up alone hours later, only to find a cold breakfast

waiting for me as well as the book.

Once I was done eating, I took a shower. I got out of the bathroom and prepared myself to grasp the intricacies of the numbers once again. While washing the dishes before getting started, I saw behind the cupboard a couple of tea bags. I got somewhat excited. I hadn't had a cup of tea in a week or so. I used to love the smell of tea and the warm feeling of a cup in the morning. I prepared myself one and tackled the heavy pages of the book once more.

I had a great start this time. My mind felt well rested and the author's words went fluently by. I managed to solve some heavy equations and numerological associations before I realized how hungry I was. "I can't keep eating once or twice a day," I told myself. "I must get out of this apartment. Vino's luck might run out anytime now, and I do not wish to put him in a difficult situation."

I needed to hurry. I had no time. I rushed through the information. I switched my mind to full speed when I realized I was leaving this cozy life very soon. I advanced a huge bunch that day. As the hours went by and daylight vanished, I began to hear some sort of outbreak on the streets. I left the book on the table and carefully looked out the windows. Whatever it was, it was happening far from my sight. I got worried about Vino. "I hope he is alright."

I went back to the book while I waited for him. Hours passed and the outbreak seemed to continue outside. I then realized that I had just finished the chapter before the last one. "Hmm... I should be ready by now... I'm not ready. Why am I not ready?" I asked myself.

The door opened all of a sudden and Vino entered the flat, a bit agitated.

"Hey, are you alright, my man? I heard something going out there on the streets," I said.

“Yah, I’m fine. The streets are not, though. I had to rush here and couldn’t take a clear look, but I think there’s a conglomeration of Locrians a couple of blocks away. They were hanging around what seemed to be a great fire of some sort.”

“Are they like, burning something?” I asked.

“I don’t know, it’s like a huge fire, and the Region isn’t even doing anything about it! Shit, I don’t want to know, I’m out of here. How can you choose to remain in this side of the City, Renn? I don’t get it, your brother doesn’t get it and certainly Julie isn’t the exception,” he said, in a loud tone.

“Hey, remember to be quiet, brother,” I said, “I know I’m crazy, it’s just that, it’s just that I... the...”

“Yah, the book, right?” he asked.

“Well... amongst other things, such as my discontent with the Program,” I replied.

“That’s fine, Renn, never mind, I don’t understand you, no one does, apparently. Sorry I yelled before, the streets are dangerous and I don’t like it one bit,” Vino deemed, a bit more relaxed.

“I understand, it’s nothing. I thank you for all your help, don’t ask for my forgiveness.”

“Very well then,” he said. “Let’s have dinner together, quietly, just in case the violence out there ends up intensifying the distress.”

We had dinner, this time in silence. The yammering outside had increased since Vino arrived but by the time we finished eating the outbreak seemed to be over.



“Alright then, have a good night there, boy.”

“You too, brother,” I said.

I began pacing quietly around the place, doing some heavy thinking. “I don’t want to reach the last chapter before getting some concepts straight,” I thought to myself. I stayed awake the whole night, thinking, trying to clarify some misconceptions which remained in my mind. A fact of great relevance was to understand deeply from within, or so I thought. The hours went by, and before I knew it, Vino was up.

“You don’t seem to need any sleep now, do you, boy?” Vino said before leaving. “I’ll be back early today, try to get some rest, will you?”

I didn’t need any sleep. I had a clear mind that morning. After eating some leftovers, I opened the book’s last chapter. I felt ready for it. I saw the pencil next to me. “Answer.” I said out loud.

I began the last chapter of the book. My mind was filled with excitement. This in particular was the one in which the author was finally going to reveal his true position. His conclusion was crucial. I had already absorbed his ideas and observations regarding the behavior of the numbers by themselves and their interactions amongst each other. I had my own thesis, I needed to read his conclusion.

I went on, nonstop. I kept my eyes on the lines, intensely immersed in each word, in each paragraph. I constantly went back and forth, reading each page several times. As the night came and the hours went by, the author finally began to admit his real implications. My mind froze.

“...Wait, what?”

I lit up the candles. I went back to the book and read the same page a couple of times over. He was finally revealing, after chapters and chapters of justification, what I had been looking for through all sorts of medieval and ancient texts, as well as in the newest research papers provided by the regular Wires. He knew a way; he knew a way to alter reality in the most essential way possible. He knew how to guide reality according to one's mind. We all do, in a certain manner, but he knew how to avoid the local and non-local causality directly, let us say.

In the last pages of his book, the author explained how the human mind can define the collapse of the wave function as it pleases. He didn't think there was a way to manifest this, but I had the rest of the pieces of the puzzle.

“What is this? Are you kidding me?” I yelled.

I kept on reading till I reached the final word in the book. I had finished. I was shocked. Finally, someone had just revealed to me what had been missing from my theory: The How. How could I put into practice all of my theory. He revealed a way for me to consciously interact with the variations of what constituted matter in a very small scale.

“This is... an epiphany,” I yelled again. “He can't be right. Is he right?” I asked myself.

There were simply too many emotions racing through my veins. I felt the heated rush of blood deep inside my body, all aspects of myself got electrified. At last, after more than ten years, I knew a way to put everything into practice. I couldn't believe myself, I couldn't resist anymore.

“Of course... the mind at the precise moment of the collapse of the wave

function..." I said out loud. "To alter the tendencies of reality."

I turned to the pencil still lying on the table.

"Answer."

I pointed my finger towards it. I focused my mind for several minutes straight on the wood and the lead themselves. I did so until my head began to hurt really bad. I was trying so hard that I even felt dizzy and had to stop once I passed out on the floor. The pencil remained there on the table, immutable.

I got up. "Maybe something else..." I thought.

Hereupon I noticed how cold my right hand was, somewhat steady.

"I know," I said to myself

I began rubbing my fingers. I closed my eyes and slowly forgot about the flat I was in, about Vino and all the recent events happening in the world. I kept my eyes closed for what seemed to be a long, long time... I kept rubbing my fingers as well, focusing my mind on the mere interaction of frequencies and values, concentrating on the manifestation of energy. I needed to alter reality. I knew it was possible. Why wasn't it happening?

I kept on going, and kept on going. Suddenly, as a shock going through my body, I sensed something. At that instant, I felt my hand getting extremely hot. I felt water, warm water pouring out of it. Drops and drops of water coming out of nowhere. The situation then aggravated and I felt a continuous stream pouring down my hand. I opened my eyes and saw it all; I couldn't believe it!

I leant my hand towards one of the candles next to me. I saw the stream pouring

down, extinguishing the fire from the candle. I stopped the constant movement. "Am I dreaming?" I wondered. The palm of my right hand was warm, yet, as dry as it could be.

"Fuck this shit," I screamed.

Water, out of nowhere. I managed to accomplish this with nothing but my mind and my body. I then looked at the pencil again, and while taking a deep breath, I pointed my finger towards it and gave precise instructions with my mind. After a couple of seconds, the pencil began to slowly levitate a little over the table. I then screamed with all my strength and the pencil fell.

I stayed there, in shock, in panic and excitement at the same time. I realized that I was massively tired again. Cold sweat ran down my whole body. I felt very frightened, a kind of fear that could not easily be described with words.

I was magnetized to the same spot; my whole body was frozen. After some time, I heard the front door opening. I realized I had loudly screamed some time before and began to expect the worst.

To my relief, it was VINO, arriving home. He entered the apartment and saw me there, standing still, shaking.

"What are you doing now, boy?" he asked.

"VINO," I said, high amplitude in my voice. "VINO, you are not going to believe this, you have to see this!"

"Shhh, don't make any noise, Renn, what the fuck is wrong with you?" he shushed me.

I grasped his arm and took him to the table. The bags that he was carrying fell to the ground and I noticed he instinctively wanted to go back and pick them up. I stopped him and forced him to stay in front of the table.

“What you are about to see, Vino, my man... unless I’m crazy... You can’t say anything to anyone, EVER, do you understand me? This is the craziest shit you’ll ever see. You have to promise me.”

“Promise what? What exactly am I going to see here?” he asked.

“Just promise, please,” I begged.

“Yah ok, ok... I promise. Unless you are going to show me something ugly, if it’s something ugly I...”

“Shut up and watch. Stay quiet, stay still, please...”

As we stopped talking, I closed my eyes and again focused my mind on the pencil.

“This may take a couple of minutes,” I told him.

We stayed there, in front of the pencil as I tried to fully concentrate on it. Vino awaited calmly, he didn’t make a noise.

“I’m almost there, just a little longer,” I said

Moments after, it happened again. The pencil began to slowly float just a bit above the table and I heard Vino shouting while jumping, somewhat scared.

“What is happening? What did I just see, Renn?”

“The book!” I said as I stopped and the pencil went down. “I told you the book was very important to me!”

We sat on the table. I can honestly say my mind was fucked up; Vino’s was too. I explained to him that I’ve been working for years on how to manipulate reality without the need of a local event.

“It is all within the numbers,” I told him, “and inside our minds. When I first heard about a phenomenon called quantum entanglement, I knew that local causality was not the reason behind permanent change.”

“Look, I don’t follow any of that kind of talk, kid, but I want to listen to you forever. How did you do that? Do it again, I want to see it!”

We didn’t sleep that night. I showed Vino the water thing as well. We were both in the most delighted state of mind possible. The candlelight and some music he played to disguise our voices made me enter the desired mental resonance. We kept talking. I explained to him how I still didn’t understand entirely how I was doing this. I also told him that I thought I had to be in some kind of altered state and that I had to force my mind to be in it. Vino kept asking questions. This time, his expression changed completely. He was so into my words. He wanted me to explain everything to him. When the first sun rays began to color the flat and Vino had to leave for work, he said to me, “Fuck work. Wait a minute, Renn, I’ll call in sick.”

Vino went inside his room to make the call. I took a shower and realized that I was smiling. I couldn’t stop smiling. I felt as if reality finally agreed with me, as if it was letting me know that I understood a fundamental aspect of itself. How it operated and how humanity had been basing its knowledge only on the surface of things.

Once I got out of the shower, we stayed in the living room conversing for hours. It was helpful for me to re-explain some of the concepts, since it helped me spell out and organize my thoughts, subconsciously rooting some ideas into my mind. Vino made lunch for both of us and we kept on talking. He then asked me if I thought I could make fire manifest. There was something about fire which was difficult for me to actualize. I didn't understand what actual fire was. Heat? Gas? Matter and polarity, nevertheless. The frequency of fire was not easy for me to grasp, let us say. I had a couple of attempts and failed. We then decided for me to try and levitate heavier objects. This time I made a glass of wine float and I moved a jar of pickles a couple of feet away from where we were. The overdoing soon made me dizzy and I had to stop. Vino and I laughed, we were truly enjoying what was happening, as if we couldn't believe our eyes. The sun eventually reached the horizon. I certainly couldn't believe what was happening. Once more, I felt exhausted. I hadn't had a good sleep for some time now and the consequences were all over me. Vino cooked an early dinner for us and told me that he was leaving the next day to the Other Side. He didn't want to go now that I had showed him what I was capable of. He wanted to stay with me. "You have to go, Vino, we'll see each other again before you know it," I told him. He eventually agreed.

I pondered my options. I needed more time, but there was none. A bit after, I went to the couch and fell on it like a rock. While still half asleep, I thought about the great significance behind my small achievement. I admired the great importance of the book and the ever-unexplainable layers of reality itself. There was something big bothering me still, though. My deepest fears took over. All of this meant that my predictions were true and that, unfortunately, the world could be about to change in the most radical manner. I fell asleep, profoundly.

## Chapter 2

I had a dream that night, a very peculiar one. I don't recall much, but I do remember the sensation of being extremely happy, as happy as one can get within a dream. I kept laughing and laughing; probably a mixture of my ego being overfed with the joy of the possibilities.

Interestingly enough, an old memory mingled with my thoughts that night as well. I remembered, when being a kid, having this crazy idea of changing the world. I soon realized, like many others, that the structure of society and the human psyche are more set in their ways than it seems. One needs to offer a lot in order to move things around. This is probably one of the reasons why I ended up studying mathematics; I felt free, there my mind could move much faster than the world around me. While still a youngster, I used to see people on the streets, begging for food on my way to school. I thought, "Why? Why are we all allowing this constant suffering?" Years and years later, I grasped the crude reality of our society. I understood the meaning of money. I understood the false value of objects, and how most humans adore them; their possession brings them higher up on society's hierarchy scheme, creating a gap between humans through false ideals. I think all of these thoughts manifested in my dream as well, I vaguely remember.

Deep inside my mind I still was. I felt cozy and comfortable when, out of nowhere, a harsh movement woke me up. I opened my eyes but couldn't see a thing, it was still nighttime. I then discerned Vino's face; he was trying to tell me something while grabbing my shoulder, agitated. I heard a series of hard knocks on the front door.

"Open up now," the same voice from a couple of days ago said. "This is the Region."



I stood up immediately, as if someone had just thrown a bucket of cold water over my head. Vino whispered to me; we were in serious trouble this time.

“There are many officers waiting behind the door,” he murmured. “I think they might have a warrant to search the apartment. I don’t think I can hold them off long enough now.”

Lots of thoughts crammed into my mind at that moment. I instinctively reached Vino’s arm. It was time for me to leave and put an end to the troubles I was causing.

“Many thanks for everything, brother, I’m out of here. Give me ten seconds and I’ll be out the window,” I said

“Ok, I’ll try to stall them. Hurry!”

“Say hi to Julie for me on the Other Side.”

“I...” He looked at me directly in the eyes. “Consider it done.”

Those were the last words I ever crossed with him.

Once having grabbed the book and the papers on the table, I ran to the end of the corridor and got inside the room on the left. I opened up the window as I heard Vino making excuses for not opening the door just yet.

“My Holo-Pad,” I recalled.

It was there, lying on the bed. I heard the front door being open violently. I immediately grabbed the device and headed to the window. The floor was several feet below me. Without much thinking, I jumped and landed heavily on

the pavement. I checked if my Holo-Pad had been damaged from the fall; it seemed fine. I then checked if there were no Regional guards surrounding the area. Once I saw a safe path towards the back of the buildings, I prepared to run.

Just then, I heard a gunshot coming from Vino's place. I felt terrified. "Could they have shot him?" I asked myself. I remembered the incident in the alley from a couple of days ago, how I should have done something, and I didn't. I had a chance back then and did nothing. I was not going to allow myself to escape from the situation this time. I looked above to see Vino's window. It was still open. I left my Holo-Pad on the floor and began to climb through the wall, and as I did, I heard Vino's voice again, arguing with an officer. He was, apparently, safe.

"Maybe the shot came from somewhere else," I thought. "I shouldn't risk all our efforts. I must keep going."

Once I felt sure regarding Vino's safety, I grabbed my Holo-Pad and began to run; I kept running and running until I became out of breath. I didn't quite know where I was, still, I kept getting away from Vino's neighborhood.

"This world... what is happening to this world?" I asked myself.

As morning quickly came, I noticed the streets were filled with Region officers. I also noticed some sort of manifestation held by a group of Locrians. I walked away avoiding to get any attention and began to search for a place to stay. I couldn't just show up in front of a friendly door anymore. I didn't want to cause trouble again, to anyone.

At that moment I thought about how much I wanted to go back to my old place, but I couldn't. It had been taken by the Regional Property Administration a week ago. They closed the whole building off and I was left on the streets, along with many others. There was no way of claiming back my property. They told me it

had to be taken indefinitely, since the area became a restricted outpost for the Region. They gave us the option of staying in a SECTA shelter for the time being. Once they made us stand in line and began to ask for our names and so, I felt the rushing need to run away. A second later, I did. The Program was not the right place for me. I preferred to be considered a fugitive rather than allowing the Region to do whatever they wanted with me, as if I needed to be told what to do. "Their system broke up, which authority do they claim to have now?"

As I kept walking I began to feel a bit more relaxed. After all, I wasn't the only person walking around the City. The officers had no real reasons for detaining me now. I was just someone else, someone with a whole new paradigm exploding inside his head.

I realized then that I had neither food nor money. "I wish I can repay Vino someday," I thought. I wasn't very hungry yet, but I was definitely going to have to deal with that later. I looked at my gold watch; an old watch given to me by Julie's mother. I took it out from my coat's inside pocket. It was time to put the relic to good use. I could sell it for at least a thousand credits, maybe even more, and that would be just enough to live for a couple of weeks.

I decided to go to the market area and see how worthy it really was. Once there, I entered a store where they valued the price of gold and other commodities.

"Hmm, quite the antiquity you've got here, sir," said the store owner while looking at it. "I can give you, hmm, let's take a look here..."

He took a weighing scale and a recipient filled with some liquid. He carefully put a drop of the liquid on the watch and then weighted it.

"Let's see," he continued, "all I can give you is eight hundred credits. I'm deeply sorry, to be honest, it's not such a fair trade, sir, but you see, things aren't at its

best these days, wouldn't you agree? I mean, gold is worth something, but still, you can't eat it, or take shelter in it, am I right? So, what do you say?"

"It's all yours."

I went out the store with the eight hundred credits. I then went to a grocery store, one of the last ones still open in this part of the City, and managed to buy food for a day or two. The place was overran with people. The Region officers in this area seemed much more equipped than those at Vino's or my neighborhood. There even was a Robot-Unit piloted by an officer in the middle of the intersecting avenues. I saw at least a dozen bodies lying on the streets, without anyone giving a fuck, as if they were just part of the decor. People just wanted their food. A truck came to pick the bodies up. They washed the streets and I saw the blood mixed with the water falling to the sewers. I received my change and vanished away from the market area.

It wasn't safe to stay within the heart of the City. I had to go to the outskirts in order to find peace of mind and figure out my course of action. I got away from the downtown area and kept walking towards one of the City's main entrances. The City where I lived was one of the last ones standing, though chaos was slowly breaking in. It was the second capital of the North Federation; its people had lived through many convoluted situations before and it wasn't going down as easily as other cities had. At least not for the time being.

I arrived at midday to one of the main gates and saw the chaos brought upon by a group of people who wanted to get inside. The Region had an outpost there, with tanks and several officers standing by.

I had to try and remain unnoticed. Just then, I saw one of the bridges above the river, which flowed from the outside to the Inner City. There were stories regarding the people living in the sewers and under the bridges, and I thought to

myself, "Well, time to find out if the anecdotes are true."

I walked towards a small bridge and certainly began to feel segregated. A few vagabonds were lying on the ground, trying to conciliate sleep.

Once there, I found an isolated corner and sat down. One of the beggars woke up and saw me. He murmured something to himself as he kept looking at me. I turned towards the river which ran right in front of us. As the beggar lost interest in my presence, I began to look at him. He was dirty, with his long hair all over his face. He was wearing an old hat and dark clothes. I then noticed he was in some sort of pain; he seemed to be hungry, or perhaps ill, for he kept both his hands pressed against his stomach.

I remembered the bag of groceries sitting next to me. I took out a couple of pieces of bread. As soon as I did, the other vagabonds woke up as well. I stood up and handed the pieces of bread to them. They kept looking at me, disconcerted. I returned to the corner and sat down to eat as well. As I was there, I had such remembrance, a feeling of past experiences. I saw the river flowing by, the sky was deep blue, and I thought about the lives most of us led before this whole mess began. Suddenly, I felt quite relaxed. I had nothing to fear; the whole situation with the world was coming to a point of no return, but I didn't care. I just stood there, looking at the beautiful view of the river. I thought about the Region and the Other Side. War had been a recurrent topic in the media-feed before the banks crashed, but no one seemed to care anymore. People had neither food nor water in most parts of the Federation and fiat-currency was disappearing quickly. I thought about Vino and all the suggestions he made while I stayed at his place. "The program..." I thought. "How can people renounce to their rights for a momentary lapse of tranquility? I won't do it. Maybe the Region had something to do with the market breakdown, such uncertainty at this point... Are they here to protect the people? The Region just took my home away... like they cared for the people."

While conjuring these thoughts, I saw a person approaching. She was a young woman, wearing what appeared to be elegant clothes. Without peculiarly noticing me, she approached one of the vagabonds and sat down. They began talking as she took something out of her bag. I immediately noticed her delicate pace and I wondered what someone like her would be doing in a place like this. She took a piece of bread out of the bag and handed it to the beggar. The beggar then said something to her that I could not hear and showed her the piece of bread that I had previously given him. She seemed to have asked something to him. He lifted his arm, pointing at my direction. The young woman then glanced at me from over her shoulder. She saw me there, sitting in the corner. She immediately turned back to the vagabond and they resumed their conversation. She sat down with the others and handed them bread as well. I stayed in the corner, minding my own thoughts. She then stood up and left. The beggars returned to sleep, and so did I.

I napped for a couple of hours while thinking how to use my mind for the right purpose. I had to go and see one of the high representatives of the Federation soon. I had to warn them. I had my reasons for doing so, and they needed to know.

Once the night settled and I felt rested enough, I grabbed my things and headed to one of the City's entrances. Everything seemed to be at peace. Neither Locrian nor civil activity that I could see. Upon arriving to the gate, I noticed a couple of officers on their night shift. I approached one of them.

"Can I help you, sir?" he asked. "You shouldn't be wandering alone around the City at night."

"Yes, I know that, thank you. You see, officer, I came here because I wanted to ask you something. If I leave the City right now and come back in a couple of

hours, will I be able to enter again?" I asked. "I saw many people trying to come inside today and I was wondering..."

"Well yes," the officer said, "but you would have to come early in the morning, around six or seven will do, just when the merchants arrive, otherwise I can't guarantee you anything. You saw what happened today..."

"I see. Well, thank you," I said as I walked away.

I was impressed with the fact that they still allowed people to come in and out just like that. I also felt relieved with the fact that the officer didn't take a list of names or something out of his Holo-Pad once I approached. A small suspicion arose in my mind, that my name was listed as some sort of fugitive since the moment I escaped from that queue and yelled at the officers after my home was taken away from me. There were new regulations every day, and digital privacy was nonexistent anymore. After the banks collapsed, all federal data had to go through the Wires. "I bet they could legally force me into the Program if they wanted to," I thought. "They won't need to force the people though, everyone will go begging for entrance once food runs out in this part of the City. It's just a matter of days before credits are worth nothing."

I kept thinking about this as I left for the woods. I checked the time in my Holo-Pad: 1:11 am. I had at least four or five hours before having to return to the City. I also peeked at the unread messages stored. Nothing to worry about, not for now. The path to the woods unveiled a small brawl ahead. I felt a bit agitated once I recognized a group of Locrians in the main road to the woods. Trouble was to be avoided, and so I took a secondary road.

Eventually, I arrived at the desired spot. The sound of the woods was overwhelming, it was all in harmony. I sat down on the grass. I could smell the trees and the leaves, such petrichor, such a different sensation to that of the City.

The deep smell of the night evoked in me a suitable state of mind. I felt connected to myself, to my thesis, and began to address one of the rocks next to me, with my eyes closed. In a way, I spoke to it, as silly as it sounds. I asked it to move. I kept asking and asking while trying to collapse the wave function and change the momentum, the values on its transformation matrix, as I liked to see it. Every time I was sure I had made something float around me, I opened my eyes and felt complete joy while looking at the levitating branches and stones. After a couple of hours, I tried to actualize fire. It didn't work out. Regardless, and in order to keep things going, I approached different topics. I tried, for instance, taking a deep, deep breath and lasting several minutes straight without taking another one. I had to concentrate very hard to achieve this at first. I felt as if the air inside my lungs lasted longer than usual due to the fact that I was focusing directly on it.

I stoically attempted this on and on until I was able to hold my breath easily without focusing my mind entirely on it. Once appeased, I decided to try my agility skills. I was sure that if I could focus just enough, I could move very, very fast. I don't think I was all aware of this; I knew this instinctively, though. I tried moving my arm quickly from a straight position to a flexed one. The more I tried, the faster I got. I was impressed with my movements. At this rate, I could easily catch a fly. I thought about the extra work and energy needed for me to do all of this. Where was it all coming from? "It doesn't require extra energy," I thought, "just the right change in tendencies."

At this point I felt that I was becoming, sort of, over-capable, beyond my wildest dreams. I wasn't the same as before; this knowledge had changed me profoundly, somehow.

"Has anyone else realized or accomplished anything like this before?" I wondered.



The training for the night ended and I returned to the City. Hundreds of merchants were already gathered outside the gates, some had already formed a line and were speaking amongst themselves while waiting to enter. I walked towards the end of the line as some of them looked at me. Dozens of trucks filled with food and other supplies were waiting beside us as well. When I finally reached the entrance, I got a bit nervous. A couple of officers asked for my ID card; I showed them a digital copy in my Holo-Pad. A guy then said, "I see, Renn Barsak, let's see..." He had one of those virtual glasses, a Holo-Shell on. He seemed to be searching for additional data of some sort with the movement of his retina, and after a minute or so, he allowed me to pass. "Move along. We haven't got any time to spare!"

"Well, my name isn't marked at the gates, apparently." I thought to myself.

Once inside the City, I went directly to the market area. The place seemed calm for now, but somehow, about to collapse. The whole City was in distress; still, there was no shouting on the streets, though.

I arrived at the marketplace and saw that the grocery store wasn't open just yet; some people outside were waiting already. Hereupon I decided to find a coffee shop nearby and wait. Once I saw one that fitted my purpose, with a great drawing of a man in a long field looking at the sun, I entered and sat in one of the tables. I grabbed my Holo-Pad and checked the media feed. I saw that other Federations were declaring themselves bankrupt already, how suppliers couldn't do their work without money and how the whole establishment was falling apart. I then asked for an espresso. This whole breaking of Federations had to do with nothing but their own abuse of power, or so I thought. The people were not strong enough, not much knowledge amongst them, and so, I wondered why the show had ended a week ago, after all, there couldn't be many players left moving the pieces at this point. "Who hacked the banks? What's the real purpose of all of this anyway?" I asked myself.

While waiting for the beverage and developing these thoughts further on, the couple sitting on the table in front of me left, allowing me to see a familiar face at the end of the coffee shop. It was the young woman from the bridge. She was now talking to a man, a man in a suit. She seemed to be a bit agitated, expressing herself with slight hand and arm expressions. The other guy just sat there, listening to her speech. The cup of coffee arrived. I grabbed it and kept glancing at them while looking at my Holo-Pad... I instantly realized I was somehow intrigued by her character. "What are the odds of running into her in this coffee shop at this precise moment so early in the morning?" I asked myself.

Their discussion intensified as she slightly raised her voice. I then heard a chair moving somewhat harshly. At this point she stopped talking. The man spoke to her now in a direct manner, with a strong, straight voice. I couldn't hear what he was saying, and so I looked at them directly to see what was going on. I noticed that her eyes were wide open, tense, yet humid. She had her hand pressed against her lips and was standing still. He then finished talking. She turned around and left her seat rapidly. Just as she was walking through the entrance, our eyes crossed paths. For an instant there, we looked directly at each other. I saw inside her eyes, ephemerally, as she vanished.

I wondered for a second about her story as I finished the espresso and turned my Holo-pad to standby. These thoughts rapidly wander off as I approached the cashier. The coffee shop accepted regular currency at the digital cashier. I had heard that the stores on the Other Side accepted decentralized payments only which, ironically, were said to be privately regulated. I left the place. Once outside, I saw the grocery store, now open, with many people already inside and others still waiting outside. "That was fast," I thought.

I went to the back of the line. An old senior lady approached from my back. "Is this the end of the line, son?" she asked.

“Yes,” I answered, “come, you can stand in front of me, if you want.”

“You are sweet, my child,” she said as she moved forward.

We were waiting to get inside when I saw a couple of Locrian cyberpunks on my left that I hadn't noticed before. They were apparently in a sort of fight with a couple of other guys. After yelling at each other for a minute or so, they started to wrestle and one of the civilian guys fell to the ground. Shortly after, I saw both cyberpunks taking out from their jackets what appeared to be a couple of electric knives. I then saw their faces; their general expression was like that of a person in a complete altered state, much in contrast with the one I experienced in the woods and at Vino's. They looked at each other and reached down for the guy who was lying on the floor. The guy's pal had already left the scene. He began to scream for help, desperately.

Before I had time to react, a gunshot was heard very close to where I was, and the cyberpunks stepped back. Apparently, some man was carrying a gun.

“Get the fuck out of here, you psychopaths,” he yelled.

In an instant, everyone in the whole market panicked; ramble and disorder all over. The couple of cyberpunks made a strange hand sign to the guy with the gun and left the scene rapidly.

When the man on the ground stood up, I noticed that the senior lady had been holding on to my arm this whole time. “It's all good now,” I told her. “I don't think the stores will remain open, you'd better go home for now.”

She released my arm and vanished amongst the yelling crowd. The familiar sound of sirens could be heard coming closer. I saw the man who had just been

attacked walking towards the one who saved him. He was thanking him, kneeling. I approached them. "You did the right thing there, brother," I said. He didn't answer. He stood there, gazing at the Region units rapidly arriving. I realized then that I should have left minutes ago. I saw the whole market closing their entrances from top to bottom and I began to run away. "Get out of here, get out!" I shouted while stepping away from the scene.

I kept running, I couldn't get into trouble just yet. I glanced back once, just once after the Region patrols arrived, and saw the two guys being detained. A woman kept screaming, "It was the Locrians, it wasn't them!"

I had to get away, still, I felt the need to justify my departure. "What could I have done to help those people? I would have only caused myself to get restrained too," I thought.

But I knew well deep inside me that, the time at the alley, the time at Vino's and this time as well, I was just completely scared, protecting only myself and my own interests, pretending to be altruistic. "The man with the gun," I thought, "he didn't have to think things twice, did he? He just responded... If it wasn't for him, those Locrians would have probably killed the other guy right there."

Perhaps some of these thoughts remained in my head as I walked towards the bridge, perhaps I was still a bit shocked. I realized then that I didn't have much food for the rest of the day. "It hardly seems to be any left for today," I said out loud while looking at one of my trench coat's inner pockets. "I hope they reopen the market by tomorrow morning, at the latest."

The City was even worse then than the day before. At this point, none of the corpses from last night had been picked up by the Region trucks and they were just lying there, motionless. Seeing one of them, one of their faces, a young one, a strange feeling invaded me. I began crying quietly, touched by the City's

immense pain and suffering. A couple of Region officers saw me passing next to them, wiping my face. They didn't say a thing. I couldn't shake off the feeling of frustration for not being able to do anything about the state of things. "Ironic, I wanted to change reality so much, I didn't realize how it has changed me." Who was to blame anyway? No one knew exactly what had really happened in the financial gate last week. This whole thing was a mess...

I finally arrived at the bridge and sat down in the corner, still concerned. This time one of the vagabonds greeted my arrival, "Hey, it's the guy from before," he said aloud.

"Hey there."

I laid on the grass and began to breathe. I took several deep breaths. I felt comforted. The sun was on the perfect spot upon the sky; the light shining over our heads coming from the left side of the bridge quickly changed my mood. The wind was blowing lightly, and it made me feel alright. I heard the beggars waking up again and I saw the girl from the coffee shop approaching silently. This time she saw me lying there as she came near my new friend. She opened the same bag from the day before and gave him some bread. They began to talk. They spent a lot of time having this conversation; I noticed this because the shadow of the bridge finally reached my sight. The beggar then held her hands and told her, "Thank you, thank you..."

"What could they be speaking about anyway?" I thought. I closed my eyes, although every once in a while, I took a glimpse at them. Eventually, she approached the other vagabonds and gave them some bread as well. I then saw her standing up as she quickly vanished.

"What's her deal anyway?"

Slowly, I began to fall asleep. When I woke up a few hours later, I couldn't remember what I had dreamt, but I felt relaxed and well-rested. As the sunlight faded away, I decided to go to the market area once more. I grabbed my things and left the bridge.

Once in the marketplace, some people outside informed me that the stores had announced they wouldn't be re-opening until the next morning.

"I see..." I said. "Thank you."

It was time again for me to go back to the woods. I had to continue my training for at least some time before I could speak to one of the Federation representatives. "I have to be absolutely sure before I say anything," I thought.

I went outside the City. I saw once more the main road to the woods blocked by the same Locrian gang from last night; I took the secondary road again. It was almost midnight when I found the perfect spot. I sat down and began my training. This time I wanted to make heavier objects levitate. I spent hours in silence, eyes closed, making things move around me. Just when the sun appeared in the sky, I managed to lift a rock that weighed at least ten or twelve pounds; I was able to control it completely and I moved it about several feet as I pleased. I felt satisfied with the training and decided to go back to the City.

The sun was beautiful that morning. I was lucky enough to see its splendor as I was coming down the hill. I felt moved by its beauty. Eventually, I arrived at the South entrance and I saw again the line of people waiting to get inside. I stood at the end of the line and waited for the hundreds of merchants before me to be granted access. When I finally arrived at the gates, the same procedure as the day before occurred. "...Come on, move on, move along...! We don't have all day."

I went directly to the marketplace. I was hoping to buy food for at least three days or so. "There better be no Locrians waiting to ruin everyone's day today." When I arrived, the sellers were just opening the stores. I thought for a moment about the young woman from the bridge. "Maybe I'll see her around again today," but I didn't.

It all went smoothly this time and I managed to buy food for a day or two. The rations per person were now restricted, and so, they didn't allow me to buy any extra food for the upcoming days.

On my way back, I noticed less bodies lying on the streets than the day before. This made my morning a bit more tolerable. It was hard enough to live day by day now, and seeing dead people on the streets... well, it was too much for me to handle. I didn't have the courage to help with the picking up whenever I saw a Region truck. I needed to get out of there, I needed to crash under the bridge that had been my shelter these last days and clear my mind. I soon arrived. The sunlight was hitting hard and I felt very tired. Once I sat down on my usual corner, my vagabond friend came close by. It was obvious he had some serious alimentary disorder.

"Hey, guy from before," he said.

"Hey, how is everything today, my friend?" I asked him.

"Well, well, well. I can't complain, can I? Have you looked at the beautiful day before us?"

I was somewhat bothered by his answer. "How can he respond so lightly? Is he blind?" I asked myself. Though it seemed like an absurd one at first, his answer was right. We were still alive and we couldn't complain. Everyone was having a terrible time since the banks collapsed. All major banks, as well as the central

banks from each Federation had simply vanished from society. They had been closed for more than a week, and when riots finally broke in, they found nothing. The buildings were basically empty. I read there were trials and some other things going on in the media feed but nothing of relevance that might help fix things. The only announcement the banks had issued to the public so far was that they had received orders to shut down. Orders from whom? There was no money, there were no reserves. Where were the shareholders? No one was to blame, apparently, but the hackers, or so said the media. People went crazy. Food rapidly began to run out, for many bought as much as they could once the news were out. The Region and all major Federations asked their citizens to remain calm. Nevertheless, chaos broke out. The Locrian gangs and other groups who had remained hidden emerged from the shadows. I could only wonder what the Southern Federation was dealing with.

“You are right,” I told the vagabond.

At that point, out of nowhere, I thought about showing him one of my secrets. I made a pause and reconsidered this thought.

“...Want to see something cool?” I asked.

“Well, yes,” he answered.

I then began to concentrate; a branch next to us levitated. He stood up and looked at me deep in the eyes. “How, HOW?” He inquired. I sort of explained to him what was going on. He kept looking at me, petrified. He didn’t seem to believe what his eyes had just shown him. “Bah, you’re playing a trick on me, uh?” He began laughing and went to his side of the bridge. He kept laughing for a while.

I then began to laugh along with him. Though I didn’t think about it at that



moment, in a way, it was better for him to believe it was a trick. I shouldn't have shown this to anyone. I needed to keep it a secret, but I so wanted to tell the world what I had accomplished. We finished our shared laughter and an extreme tranquility filled the air under the bridge. The night trainings were very tough and I needed extra rest. I fell asleep in the middle of the day, lying by the river.

It was nighttime already when I woke up. Two of the beggars were gone and the other one was still sleeping. I wondered if the young girl had come today. Why was I thinking about her? Just before leaving, I left some bread next to the vagabond and again began to get mentally prepared for the woods.

I kept this routine during the following days. I went to the woods at night and to the marketplace every morning. I slept like a baby in my new home. The river was always fresh and this allowed me to get cleaned. During this time, I learned a ton about myself while training in the woods. Each night I was more aware of my capabilities and achieved new things. No fire still, though. I began to run and exercise my body as well as my mind. I ambioned even more meaningful changes. I hadn't been precisely taking care of myself on those days, and so, I began to spend faster the amount I had obtained from selling the watch. I had to be concerned with eating on a regular basis from now on. I wanted to do something about all the chaos in the City, but I needed to know myself more and more before taking on that challenge. Besides, there was a bigger problem, way bigger, one that required my attention. I knew this, deep inside.

This theory of mine implied various things apart from the fact that, with tons of training, almost any human could be able to move things around with his or her own mind. It also implied the following. When I first attempted the water thing at Vino's and achieved it, I, sort of, asked for reality to show me something I already knew it could do, to some extent. At that moment, I "forced" reality to reveal an aspect of itself. This "revelation", since extreme, brought along many consequences with it, from the abstract to the material. One of those

consequences was, as I had already speculated in the past, the quick increment of probabilities for an important event to occur within the next few weeks. This event involved the materialization of some sort of being, a different type of consciousness from those we are familiar with. My cracking this code increased the chances for an unknown conscious force to appear, to appear here, close to me, searching for me. Unless someone else had cracked the code before me, my theory pointed to this fact. I didn't think anyone else had done it before; the access of massive information that the regular Wires provided me with, the book and simply so many topics had to converge in quite a weird manner for someone to accomplish what I did. I wasn't sure if anyone could have done it as well in the past, but I wanted to believe it. This was the root of the fears that haunted me while at Vino's. I cracked the code nevertheless, and I knew the moment I did that I was playing with fire.

By the fifth night of training I was moving my body swiftly, jumping distances of over 30 feet. It felt as if I was floating, as if my body was lighter when I required it to be so. It felt somewhat like an inhaling and exhaling cycle. I was fixed on the idea that I could somehow achieve some sort of flying or hovering at least. I was in the right path, apparently, for I managed to jump twenty or even thirty feet high, but I always went back down. I hadn't figured out a way to remain suspended in the air. By the eighth night I tried to create electricity instead of fire. I had felt electric currents flowing through my hands and body when playing as a kid, and I thought I could approach the topic this way since I was able to remember the feeling sharply. The first attempt was trying to burn a leaf lying next to me. I reached my hand close to it and focused. Several minutes went by and I felt the heat coming out of my palm without the need to rub my fingers as before. I tried to mentally guide the heat towards the materialization of something different than water. I didn't know how to invoke something like electricity. I tried to change the values of the heat within my head and make something occur but after dozens of attempts nothing did; the leaf remained intact.

It was not until the twelfth night that it all finally sort of, happened. I made the energy from the inside of my hand contextualize outside of it and flow into the air. I was marveled with this achievement and I kept trying to master it. Unfortunately, this also meant that by now I was sure of what I was hoping never to be sure. I was now certain that the inevitable would come to this world. Even if I had taken my life at this point, it would have come. I was so curious about this being. What was it? I had only encountered it theoretically; it was just a mathematical expression to me. But I did alter reality, and I kept doing so, progressively with each passing day. This was one of the clear consequences of his existence. He already existed, somewhere, and was soon to come.

### Chapter 3

The last night of training was exceptional, encompassing the previous ones while serving as a critical source of guidance. I consolidated several aspects of myself. I was enduring the consequences of having the mind that I did. It was very important for a man, in my perspective, to tame the man inside the man. To be able to act as one, to penetrate all aspects of oneself, both animal and divine. There was no time to play around anymore. The hype of the first achievements was long gone. I had to prepare and endure for what was coming. Only one with a clear mind could.

At this point I had worked out my dexterity tirelessly. I was able to move around and jump distances of over a hundred feet, but I still kept coming down, I couldn't remain suspended in the air. I could also roast something with my hand in an instant if I wanted to. As I developed the heat inside my hand further on, a sort of golden electric current began to come out of it. I had acquired extensive knowledge regarding my abilities and began to control them. Each day I managed to lift heavier objects with my mind, which was a sort of a measurement tool for me, allowing me to evaluate my progress. My short training had come to an end. I had to speak with a high positioned representative of the Northern Federation the next day.

As usual, I went down the hill and was amazed by the sun shining barely above the horizon, as seen from my perspective. I made my way towards the gates and saw the merchants outside. I felt sorry for them, sorry for all of us, for what was happening to the world and what was about to come. Uncertainty arose.

This time I skipped the marketplace and went straight to the bridge. I wanted to get ready and go ahead with it; the Federation needed to be warned regarding what was happening. I was well aware that the amount from the golden watch

was about to run out; I planned on spending the last of it at the marketplace once I had the talk.

I arrived at the bridge and greeted my beggar friends. They were all awake and chatting amongst themselves. I took out the last pieces of bread and butter and shared them. While having this sort of early breakfast, I also shared the fact that today was an important day for me; they began to shout and whistle. I went to shave by the river while cracking some jokes with them. I unwrapped a fictitious story about me meeting with a beautiful lady later, and told them that was the reason why I was shaving. They didn't believe me and started to alter the story in their own way. The funniest of them all seemed to have told the others about the "trick" that I performed weeks ago, for they called me "el mago" since then. Needless to say, I liked my new nickname. We were having the sort of a good time that I needed before speaking with the Federation, when out of nowhere, the young woman from before appeared again from the left side of the bridge. We stopped laughing and one of them stood up to greet her. She had come earlier than usual, and I wondered if there was a reason for it. I kept shaving, gently pressing the knife's sharpened end against my skin. As she walked forward to sit under the bridge, our eyes met for a second time; she quickly looked away.

I had forgotten about her. I hadn't seen her since the day of the coffee shop. That was exactly two weeks ago, and I had been completely absorbed by the hard night shifts since then. The group of beggars seemed to be happy with her arrival. She brought bread once again. I kept getting ready and, without meaning to, I heard her voice. She was closer to me than ever before and this was the first time that I actually listened to her speaking clearly. She had a soft tone, softer than what I had previously imagined, anyhow. I heard her say, "I'll be back tomorrow, hopefully. The restrictions are about to get higher than ever before, so please, beware, things might get awful and it will be best to leave the City then. I must go now."

Just when I finished getting ready, I saw her standing up as the beggars said goodbye to her. She passed right in front of me. A heavy silence came out of nowhere, and I, for one reason or another, tried to utter something but only half a word came out. She didn't react to it in any way, she kept walking. I cleared my throat and said in a louder and clearer tone, "Goodbye." Either my words didn't reach her or she simply decided to let this one go. I then felt a bit embarrassed and looked at my beggar friends, who had a big smile on their faces while trying not to laugh out loud. I saw her silhouette fading away in the distance, and after taking one last glance at the beggars, I grabbed my Holo-Pad and went running towards her. "Hey, wait up, I said goodbye!" I kept shouting.

She was calmly walking towards the main road when I reached her and synchronized my walking with hers. I cleared my throat again. "I said that I said goodbye."

She kept walking without looking at me directly, "Excuse me?" she asked.

"I said that I said... never mind." I made a short pause. "You know? I was wondering why you haven't offered me a piece of bread like you do with the others... If I may ask, is there any particular reason to avoid me?"

We kept walking. She took half a minute or so to answer, "I don't avoid you. I had barely noticed you and I don't think I have any specific reason to acknowledge you, do I? About the bread... how can you even ask so?" She looked at me right in the eyes this time. I saw her pupils rapidly changing size due to the angle of the light passing through.

"Why... what's wrong with me asking?"

We came to a halt as she suddenly faced me. I focused my attention on her facial proportions this time. Her gesture was distinctive, sort of unique indeed.

“I saw your Holo-pad before, the one you are carrying right now, I think?” she asked. “An X-3 model, very expensive little thing. By the way, I’m sure you have noticed the coat on your shoulders and the boots that you wear, am I correct? I know that type of coat and I know only someone with luxurious ways would be wearing that, unless, of course, you stole it or something... So... I don’t know why you arrived at the bridge a couple of weeks ago and it’s none of my concern, I just figured out that you knew your way around, that’s all, as I said before, I had barely noticed you in the past.”

She was quite arrogant! She was right, though. The Holo-Pad had exposed me. The coat belonged to my father. A beautiful coat that fitted me perfectly. This coat symbolized the life that I had while living with my parents, a more comfortable and stable way of living. It all seemed like an old dream now; to think that my mother and the others were probably living on the Other Side by now... The coat sold me out for what I used to be not long ago, and she saw right through it.

“I see you like your assumptions there,” I said. “What if I found it on the woods? You think you have everything figured out, don’t you?”

“Of course I don’t, only a fool would claim such things!” she replied.

Argh, she did it again! “Ha, well, I’m not going to argue with that... Anyway, I’m all out of dumb questions for you today, so, if you’ll excuse me, you have a good day.”

She then looked at me, smiling. “Good day to you too. By the way, my name is Felina, what’s yours, old man?”

“Old man?” I asked. “Who are you calling an old man? Watch it. I’m sure you’re

almost my age or so... Anyway, I am Renn.”

“Almost my age or so?” This triggered a huge laughter on her behalf. When it finally ended, she took a huge breath and said, “I’ll see you around then, Renn, the youngster.”

We took different paths. I was heading to the Region’s main outpost. It was located in the center of the City, next to the market, just before the wall that separated the two sides of the City; the biggest surveillance access to the Other Side. I was sure that someone there could direct me to the person I was looking for. Either General Korsla, the Region’s head in the City or one of the Vote Casters from the North Federation would be ideal. These were all powerful people and it wasn’t going to be easy to get their attention, but it should be easier than moving objects with one’s mind, and I assumed at least a couple of them worked near the outpost. It was still early in the morning and I hurried; with a little luck I would find a person of interest by midday.

By the time I reached my destination I realized how excited I was with all of this. Perhaps it wasn’t due to the talk that I was hopefully going to have later, but because of the opportunity to show again one of my performances. Once I found myself inside the Region’s head outpost, located in the square next to the gates that divided the City, I approached one of the main information tents. There I saw a bunch of people standing on the perimeter and a few Region soldiers inside the tent, speaking to the civilians. They all seemed to be in a rush. I slowly gained terrain and went to the front of the tent. People were all yelling at each other and out of nowhere a soldier asked me, “What’s your PPI?”

“...My what...?”

“Your Program Profile ID, what’s the number?”



“My Program ID? I don’t... I...”

“If you are here for a second rally, I need your PPI right away, what’s the number?”

“No, you see, I am not here because of that, I...”

The soldier then looked at one of his mates and said something that I couldn’t hear while rolling his eyeballs. “Then what are you here for? This is the second rally point. Are you here to get an authorization for the first step in the MS-1 transfer? If you’re not here for a transfer, what the fuck are you doing standing on my tent?” he asked in a hurry.

Just having to exchange a few words with the Region people was tortuous to me. I took a short breath.

“Alright, who’s your superior?” I suddenly asked.

“What?”

“Your superior, a name, who do you take direct orders from?”

He didn’t answer. A small group of people next to us was suddenly intrigued with our conversation. They stopped yelling.

“Well, who is he?”

“Look,” said another soldier standing next to the first one, “We all respond to Lieutenant Huffen. Now, guess what? You’re in luck, pal, he’s right over there, so why don’t you go speak to him and get the fuck out? We’re busy here, buddy, can’t you see?”

“Alright then,” I said as I sneaked outside the tent.

Once I got away from the multitude, I saw the so called Huffen character standing not far from where I was. A lieutenant on the field had to be uncommon, I was indeed in luck. I went straight to him while thinking of a strategy to address him.

When I reached the group of people surrounding the lieutenant, I stood on the back and waited in silence. While listening to their discussion, I looked ahead and saw that one of the members of the group was staring directly at me. It took me a second there to realize that what I was looking at was one of those humandroids I had seen in the media feed before. I had never seen one and it really caught me by surprise. It looked so realistic; if it wasn't for the surface of its face, which was detached from the rest of its body, I probably never would have noticed that it wasn't human. The look inside the concave glass which mimicked the eyes of a mammal suggested, almost without a question, the presence of a living consciousness behind the metal. It observed me, it was scrutinizing me and I felt as if it was alive, responding to my presence, just like any other animal would have done. It then stopped staring at me and focused on Huffen's words, which were addressed directly to it. I saw, with a smooth motion, the surface of its face aligning perfectly with the rest of the metallic structure.

“Yes, Lieutenant,” I heard the robot say.

These humandroids were the highest existing tech at the time. I had seen some videos in the feed a couple of months before, when FARSA, one of the private companies in charge of developing new technologies for the Region, had made them public. These robots were killing machines and one had to be extremely careful around them. As I thought of this, I heard another member of the group say:

“It will be done, sir.”

With a quick tap on the floor, everyone dispersed and the lieutenant was left alone with the humanoid and two other soldiers. I was quite nervous, to say the least. I then made my move.

“Lieutenant Huffen,” I said aloud with a straight voice as I approached them, and he addressed my appearance. I felt chills down my whole body. What was I doing there? The familiar need to run away, to escape, invaded me once more. The robot’s artificial eyes were set on me ever since the rest of the company had left. This humanoid in particular looked quite strange to me. It was dressed as a civilian female; no visible weapons. It was very different from the prototypes that appeared on the feed. Why hadn’t they announced this civilian prototype? The ones I saw before resembled a sort of super soldier, but this one was much more detailed, almost frighteningly human: alive.

“Lieutenant Huffen, excuse my abrupt appearance. I have a very important message, a critical one, I should say, to share with you, or perhaps one of your superiors, if possible.”

“What do you want, scum? Be quick about it.” he asked while looking away from me.

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you just like that, Lieutenant. You see, this information is of extreme importance. What you are about to hear is of great relevance to the future of the Region.”

He took a glimpse at me.

“Please, I must tell you in private and only in private will I do so.”

“Don’t bother me with such nonsense. Either you tell me right here and now or I ask the soldier next to me to interrogate you for bringing this up out of nowhere. This is suspicious, coming here with such demands.”

“You don’t seem to understand, Lieutenant. Maybe you were the wrong choice. I thought you had what it takes to receive this information. If you knew what my message was about, you would never allow me to say anything in front of these people,” I said. “So, if you don’t want to hear me out, address me to General Korsla personally. Where is he at the moment?”

The lieutenant looked straight into my eyes and burst into laughter. The other soldiers laughed as well.

“Who do you think you are, kid? What makes you think Corsario would even consider talking to you?” he laughed once more. “Now, are you really going to make these two go away? Don’t you want them to get a good laugh again?”

He snapped his fingers and the two soldiers left. The humandroid remained next to him.

“Thank you, Lieutenant. I see you are a man who listens to reason. If you don’t mind, the robot beside you must leave as well.”

“You mean Tharissia here must go too? How do you know she...?” he asked as they both looked at each other. “I don’t think so, kid. The only reason I have allowed you to speak is because I want to have a good laugh. Tell me now, you’re breaking my patience.”

I noticed in his expression that he wasn’t joking. I was probably not going to get a better opportunity as things were developing and it seemed like this lieutenant

could eventually lead me to Korsla himself, since he addressed him in a personal manner before. I took my chances. "Alright then, the robot may stay. What I'm about to tell you, I can prove. These are most unfortunate news, and by the end of our conversation you will see that all that I'm about to say is accurate. I will ask you then to please reconsider referring me to your general."

It took me several minutes to explain to him in detail what had happened to me up to that point. He listened without interrupting. Every once in a while the robot and him looked at each other. When I was done, he said, "All this fairy tale... this is what you bring to me? And I thought I was going to have a good laugh... You wasted my time, vagrant. You said you have proof, well then, show it to me before I ask Tharissia here to send you where you belong, you thug."

I sensed a radical change of tone in the lieutenant's voice. He had become quite angry by the end of my speech. Strong cognitive dissonance everywhere. Some of the narrowest minds in the whole Federation were those of the Region, or so I thought, though this time I had to be fair, what I had said sounded unreal, delirious, and he had absolutely no reason to take me for my word.

The Region was basically the strong arm of the Federation. A private entity, nevertheless, funded by Budget Builders and Vote Casters from each Federation as well as undisclosed investors. The lieutenant in front of me was most likely one more peon in the Region's long hierarchy chain and I was obliged to show him one of my secrets if I wanted to retain his attention.

"Alright then," I said as I looked around for an object to interact with. I then saw a bottle lying next to a trash can, several feet away.

"Do you see that empty bottle over there?" I asked the lieutenant. He didn't answer. I pointed my right hand towards the bottle and closed my eyes to establish a link. In a matter of seconds I sensed it and began lifting the bottle. I

opened my eyes and saw it floating as high as the trash can's height. I then threw the bottle inside it.

"Well?" I asked him. He didn't respond. After half a minute or so, he said, "Hmm... do that again, but this time do it with my gun. Then we'll talk."

"As you wish."

The lieutenant took his big gun out and placed it next to us over the floor. This time I lifted the gun without having to close my eyes. The weapon then reached the lieutenant's hands. I noticed then that the humanoid was inspecting the show as well, all immersed. It seemed to be even more interested than the lieutenant himself, probably overwhelmed by the many processes and soulless conjectures it was carrying out. Once the lieutenant grabbed the gun and put it back inside his body armor, he said, "What was that, kid...? How are you achieving this trickery?"

"It is not trickery, as I said before, it is just what you saw. Reality responds to what I have to say. So please, now that I've given you proof, can we contact the general? The second part of my story is only for him to hear. The City is in danger and I need to warn him right away."

I had to gate-keep from my speech the part where a powerful function of mathematics was about to materialize right in the middle of the City. I excluded this last segment as leverage.

The lieutenant then looked at the humanoid and asked, "All clear?" The robot nodded.

"Hmm, I see... Well then, tell me the end of your fairy tale and I'll communicate your message to the general."

“I’m afraid that is not possible. I wanted to show you this, so you knew I wasn’t lying. You realize the relevance of what I just showed you, right? Don’t you think the general would like for you to contact him at this point?”

“I’m the one who decides when to contact the general, vagrant. Silence,” he harshly said.

The lieutenant then began to tap his foot on the floor as he scratched his forehead with his left hand. He didn’t seem to be aware of his quasi mechanical reaction. He kept thinking and meditating on the subject.

“Tharissia,” he suddenly said, “contact General Korsla through a secured line, now.”

“Of course, Lieutenant.” said the robot.

“If this is trickery of some sort, I... I will make you regret it, kid.”

“You can relax if that’s what’s bothering you, it is not a trick, I told you before...”

I had just managed to convince the lieutenant to contact Korsla himself. So far, everything was going way better than I had expected but I knew that, after the call, they were probably not going to allow me to walk away just like that. I needed to speak with Korsla and vanish before they could try anything. I certainly didn’t want to put this Tharissia robot to the test.

After speaking with a couple of intermediaries, the call finally came through and the General answered:

“Yes, Huffen?”

“General, I have something important to tell you. I’m here with someone who claims the City is in great danger. Allow me to say, General, that I wouldn’t have asked for your time if I thought this could be a scam of any sort... I assure you. The individual just showed me proof of what he is saying, or at least some kind of proof... I decided I should call you immediately, General, sir.”

I noticed the change of tone in the lieutenant’s words, a not-so subtle change. He was afraid of the General, he was afraid to mess up. He certainly didn’t understand what had just happened to his gun and had entered a common state of mind within the Region where the subject does as the manual says, with no further questioning.

“Did you just say proof, Lieutenant? Your judgement isn’t always proper,” said the general. “Who is this person? Put him in.”

The lieutenant then looked at me, insinuating I should answer the call. I saw the apparatus from which the call was being made. On its metallic hand, the humandroid was holding some sort of a special Region Holo-Pad. This device was showing a very colorful and nitid hologram of the general, a sharper image than what my X-3 model could ever achieve.

“General Korsla, I thank you for your time. I asked Lieutenant Huffen for assistance so that I could speak with you, and he was wise enough to listen. I’m here to warn you of an upcoming catastrophe which will take place in this City. I seek now for your attention, General, and your wisdom to take the necessary measures to prevent any human losses. You need to evacuate the City and allow me to try and contain the catastrophe with the help of your men when the time comes. You see, General, this is all rapidly approaching, and you will be required to act. You must now listen to what I have to say, I...”



“Enough,” interrupted the General.

We stood there, waiting for a few seconds.

“Lieutenant, you can’t be serious. Is this your way to ensure your exile from the Region?”

“No, General!” the lieutenant loudly assured. “You have to listen, sir. This individual, although he sounds completely nuts, he proved what he was saying! He claims that the end of his message is for you only.”

“And where is the proof, Lieutenant?”

“I will show him,” the robot intervened. “Do you have a Holo-Shell device near you, General?”

“Aye.”

“I’ll send the data through the Wires. Full range of measurements from the spectrum were gathered. No explanation to the phenomena other than what you are about to see.”

At least the robot got it. We then saw Korsla’s hologram putting the virtual glasses on and listening to our previous conversation coming through his audio. It began where I explained the lieutenant about my past, and as the general watched and listened, the lieutenant whispered to me, “Who are you? What are you? Is this for real, thug?” he quietly laughed. “You can’t be serious...”

He looked completely different now, as if he had finally managed to wrap his mind around the truth. He got out his Holo-Pad and started speaking through what appeared to be a Region’s private channel. “Hey, Artix, Bollen, you have to

come see this, I'll send my location, get on your way.”

Listening to Lieutenant Huffen calling for his buddies made me worry about my safety. I needed to get out of there soon. After all, I had almost finished sharing the message. I needed to tell the General the rest of it, even if it was in a bit of a hurry.

After a minute or so, he finished watching and took the virtual glasses off. “Humandroid?” he carelessly asked, without even taking into consideration if I knew it was a robot or not.

“Yes, General?”

“This surely is fakery or mockery of some kind. It must be. What I just saw... you were there in the front row, did the show seem legit to you?”

“Yes, General. According to the full-data range analysis, his explanation of the witnessed phenomena sounds most accurate.”

“Hmm, I see... but this can't be, can it...? This is unexpected, but still, most interesting... and why now? Just when...”

“Excuse me, General Korsla,” I interrupted. “Excuse me, sir, but I need to tell you the rest of my story. The important part of it. According to my calculations, a powerful force, a powerful entity will appear in the middle of the City within a few days, as a repercussion of my acts. I know this sounds impossible and absurd, but it isn't. It is one of the consequences of what you just saw. This is the catastrophe that I spoke about before. Most likely, on the twelfth day from today, at midday, it will come. You have to evacuate the City and face this being with the power of the Region. He is not from this world, sir, he is from the, the...” I stopped for a moment, “...From the abstract, for the sake of calling it

something... General, you have been warned, you have to be ready when the moment comes.”

“What absurdity are you speaking of? An entity, a force, you say?” asked the general in an arrogant manner. After a moment, he continued. “You sound like... could this be?” he made a pause, “Lieutenant?”

“Sir?”

“Expect my arrival within the hour,” he made a short pause again, “Humandroid?”

“Yes, General?”

“One, one, three, four, seven, two, zero, seven.”

As soon as the General pronounced these numbers, the humandroid began to walk towards me. It seemed like it had just changed its programmed state and I backed away slowly. Something was wrong.

The robot came right at me. I felt the need to enter a panic driven by fear state, but I handled myself. My whole body wanted to freeze, but I wouldn't allow it. I kept backing away but the humandroid kept coming closer and soon tried to grab my coat with its stretched hand. I managed to dodge it twice and then saw its left fist coming right at me with an increasing speed. I barely avoided it this time and realized just how quick its reactions were. The robot stepped back and gathered momentum for a second before attempting again. It then came at me with his whole body and I realized it had the advantage. When I saw its right fist coming straight at me, I instinctively raised my left arm to protect my face from the strike. I understood my mistake half way through the action and tried to back out, but it was too late. The metal fist landed directly on my forearm and I felt it crushing my bone structure completely. In an instant, a deep pain emerged. I backed away

and went down on my knees while attempting to grab my broken arm and assess the damage. As I did, a terrible pain took over me and I screamed. A second later, I saw the humanoid's feet standing right in front of me. I felt it grab me by the neck and lift me high with its arm. I quickly began to feel pressure upon my throat. I started kicking its body, but it was useless. I suddenly realized I was soon to faint and felt a terrible fear coming down my throat. I summoned the last of my strength, placed my right hand upon the robot's face and invoked the heat. I immediately saw a golden flash of electric current burst directly into its face. The humanoid released me and stepped away with some smoke coming out of its artificial eyes and face. Its upper part was pushed back while its legs stood still. As I was catching my breath, I saw it recovering. At once I jumped as high as I could towards an open window on the brick building next to us. As I did, I saw a section of the robot's leg displace; a sort of gun came out. The robot grabbed it and shoot what appeared to be a laser beam at me. The ray hit my left shoulder, instantly burning my coat and flesh. I landed on the ground.

"It is faster than I expected," I thought to myself as I slowly stood up and saw the humanoid getting a sort of electric baton out from its back. "What now? Is it going to stun me?"

It then got ready and made its launch towards me, "he said we should restrain him, not kill him, Tharissia!" said the lieutenant, as I saw the robot fastly approaching.

In an instant, the humanoid got in front of me and released an attack. A fighting feeling bursted inside of me. "There is no fucking way," I said out loud. I then conjured again the heat from within my right hand. I stepped back and launched the lightning burst onto its chest. I yelled as I did, feeling a gigantic amount of energy being released this time. The Robot's metallic surface exploded, and its body was thrown onto a wall beside the lieutenant. The whole place became filled with smoke. Even the floor we were standing on got a bit cracked, allowing

a massive amount of dust to elevate and surround us. Without thinking twice, I ran as fast as I could. I took a last glimpse at them before turning right on the next street and saw the humandroid already up, searching for me. Just before I disappeared, it saw me; I felt a crazy fear taking over my body once again. I ran as fast as I could through the City's cobblestone passageways, clumsily pushing away the merchants who stood on my way. I knew the humandroid was close. I then saw a small alley on my right and went in. It was very narrow, and I sneaked in with all haste. There was a broken wooden box somewhere that I didn't notice; I felt a huge piece of wood piercing through my right leg. A pain expression escaped from me as I kept going. I then heard people screaming on the street I had just left behind, and I knew the robot was closing in on me. I hurried as much as I could and rushed out the alley. Just as I came out of it, I stumbled upon a person who was passing through. We both fell hard to the ground. As I began to recover from the fall, I saw the piece of wood still piercing my leg; I felt nauseous. The woman on the ground began insulting me. I then heard a familiar voice amongst the yelling crowd, calling for me. I raised my head and saw the young woman from the bridge standing a couple of feet away with an anguished expression. She was staring at me, and just when I tried to walk towards her, I fainted on the floor. She then came running towards me. She helped me stand up again. I thanked her. I felt stunned, all the pain and adrenaline kept rushing through my veins, but my body was about to collapse. I began to hear the Region's sirens and my vision began to blur. I looked at Felina, she was all worried asking me what was going on. "Hey, Felina," I told her, "You know how you said earlier that I knew my way around? Well, I don't think I do as much as we thought." I attempted to laugh.

I saw deep into her eyes. With a mild tone, yet, an agitated expression, she kept asking what had just happened.

How strange, we barely knew each other, and just by seeing her, I forgot for an instant about the humandroid hunting me. "Renn, answer, WHAT HAPPENED?"

She asked loudly. I snapped out of my thoughts.

“I think my arm is broken, please, get me out of here, Felina.” I felt the pain coming back. “Argh, please...”

She helped me walk and we left the street. “Careful, try to avoid the sirens, they are in fact looking for me, at least a couple of them must be...” I said

“What? What did you just say, Renn? Listen, I don’t want to help you out if this is a...”

“I’ll explain later,” I interrupted. “You have nothing to worry about. Please, just get me to a safe place, for now.”

I could barely speak anymore. I closed my eyes. The pain had increased radically, and I was about to fall to the ground. I think she could feel my suffering and she was, in a way, willing to help me. I felt as if I couldn’t walk anymore when we finally reached the entrance of a small house on the corner of a narrow street and Felina got some keys out. She then opened the door and we rushed in. As soon as we did, I collapsed on the floor. I heard the door closing and Felina’s voice in the background, but I didn’t understand what she was saying. I heard the sirens fading away, as my vision went black.

## Chapter 4

A terrible pain woke me up all of a sudden. I instantly began to feel my broken arm and pierced leg. The sensation was even worse than before. I felt my burning shoulder as well, but this did not bother me as much. The words, "Where am I?" crossed my mind. I heard the sirens farther away than before and immediately remembered what had just happened. Cold sweat was pouring down my body. I felt the adrenaline coming back again and my whole system reacting to it. I was lying on a couch inside a fancy home with wooden decor. I looked for Felina but didn't see her anywhere near. Taking a sharp intake of breath, I began to uncover my forearm from beneath the clothes. I almost stopped due to the pain but finally managed to see the injury. It was massively swollen; blood poured down to my fingers. I couldn't see the bone structure, but my arm's shape was definitely messed up.

As I attempted to check my leg, I heard two voices approaching. It was Felina accompanied by another woman. "Here he is," Felina uttered.

"He's awake now, good," said the unknown woman. "My name is Sully, I can be of assistance. Felina told me about your arm, do you mind if I take a look?"

"It's ok, Renn," Felina intervened. "She's a doctor, she's my friend. I called her. I didn't know what to do with all the bleeding and..."

"Of course, go ahead..." I exhaled softly and felt the sensation of being a bit more than worried about my situation. "Thanks, Felina. Thank you too, friend. You both are doing me a great favor, I'm in your debt."

"Don't say that," Sully said, abruptly. "Now relax, let's see what we've got here, let me have a look..."

She glanced at the piece of wood stuck inside my leg. She looked at me directly in the eyes, and without much hesitation, removed the wood at once. After cutting my pants down to the right knee, she disinfected the wound with a sort of ointment and covered it with a couple of bandages.

I was doing fine so far, inhaling, exhaling. She began to examine my arm and cleared the blood with a wet handkerchief. As she did, the pain increased thoroughly and I allowed myself to scream somewhat loud. Felina came close to me and whispered. "Try to remain quiet, Renn, we don't want to get attention, remember?"

"Yes, alright," I muttered. I began a second inhaling-exhaling sequence to release the tension. I thought about the forest, about my training. I thought of this as yet another test to prove myself.

Sully kept cleaning the blood. She then reached the core of the fracture, or so I felt. The pain increased profusely, and I screamed again. Felina and Sully looked at each other.

"I haven't even checked for comminuted fractures. At this rate, someone might hear us. Could you please hand me that one, Felina?"

"Which one? This one?" Felina asked as she handed something to Sully. I then saw her disinfecting a pretty big syringe. "Listen, Renn, I'm going to have to administer a sedative. It's a cocktail to prevent a possible infection. It will be better for you once you're unconscious. Your arm and leg seem to be in pretty bad shape, so I'm going to have to clean them and fix the bone. Look at me in the eyes. Are you aware of what I'm saying?"

"Yes, I am."



“When was the last time you ate?”

“I... a couple of hours ago, I guess, don't worry about that, just do what you need to, let's get this over with,” I said, heavily breathing.

Felina and Sully looked at each other. I then felt the needle piercing through my skin and a cold liquid running through my veins. The pain kept increasing and I felt scared. I slowly began to lose consciousness until I finally passed out.

A series of dreams and half-awake nightmares occurred for an extent of time. How long? I didn't know. The only constant was the pain; a reminder of reality while the crazy fever took over me. Every once in a while, Felina came and woke me up. She tried to feed me, or so I thought. My dreams were often mixed up with the pain and her repeated appearances. The wound in my leg was my main concern. Even in my dreams I kept fearing the possibility of an infection.

These few critical days struggling with my injuries happened to be quite revealing. I felt as if I was going through an internal fight within myself, although it might just have been a delusion caused by the potential leg infection. Whatever it was, there is a dream I remember very vividly; two, actually. The fever made them feel so real and I could swear, even now, that in a way they were, indeed, a sort of an altern experience. An evanescent one that I had the chance to live.

I was a different character in this context, one who was physically injured as well. I had lost an eye; I didn't quite remember how I'd lost it but felt the constant lack of its presence.

I was a half-blind man belonging to a mystic sort of tribe, a group of people with some specific spiritual beliefs, or so it felt like. They had great beards and were strong and intelligent men. We were like brothers. We lived in a rainy bamboo

forest and gathered every night inside a large tent around the bonfire to discuss several topics. I don't remember these as much, but I do keep the feeling of them being psychologically intense in essence, life changing discussions. All the members of the tribe somehow knew what the others felt, as if our empathy levels were high above average. When one of us lied, all the others automatically knew and saw through the lie. After what seemed to be weeks and months, the group had mimetized so much that the conversations seemed more and more like a one-man speech, every argument reaching a common ground. I felt their views as my own. Once the group stumbled itself upon a great disjunctive, a certain discussion took place. This time it was a personal matter, judgment upon the actions of one of the members of the tribe. I barely remember the subject of it. A great disharmony fell amongst the group, for the first time. The Elder of the tribe stood up and spoke directly to the brother sitting next to me. The whole tent heated and the fire grew stronger. I looked at the Elder in the eyes. He kept his strong speech and, out of nowhere, a shadow emerged from behind him. It moved slowly towards the fire and merged with it, turning it blue. The blue fire was now radiant. The Elder slowly began to change the tone of his speech and, as he did, the fire diminished.

The younger brother sitting next to me had changed his form and appearance at this point. He now had a half-wolf, half-human face. He was hurt, his flesh was covered with scars and fresh cuts. He had an arrow on his back, which was hairy as a wolf's, and he was moaning while still looking right at the Elder. The Elder came now close to us. He began to pet the wolf-like brother, but he tried to bite the Elder's hand. With a fast movement, the Elder dodge the bite and hit the top of the wolf's head in a warning, yet, strong manner. He then kept petting the beast, which had now turn fully into a wolf. He did so until the wolf laid down on the floor. The rest of the brothers and I kept looking at each other, in silence. The Elder took a deep breath and looked directly at me. He asked, "What do you have to hide?" At first, I didn't answer. Lots of thoughts came rushing to my head. Did I have something to hide anyway? I felt primitive, I hadn't thought about this

in a long time. Such a trivial question, yet, complex and fundamental. “What you hide, you must know, and onto him one must surrender, for he will be the one who sets you free,” he said.

The atmosphere created by the blue fire and the Elder’s deep posture was sort of magical. I remember abandoning my kneeling position and dropping sideways to the floor, in a fetal position. I closed my one eye. When I opened it, I awoke at Felina’s couch. My mind was still there, inside the tent. I felt my body still moving about the floor, still surrounded by the Elder and the brothers, but I was awake too, my eyes were wide open. It was the first time I had ever experienced such a strange state of mind, both inside the dream and in reality. I stood up with the moonlight over me and felt my leg in lesser pain, almost tolerable. I stood up in the dream as well. As I did, I felt the Elder’s hands slowly reaching for my face. Immediately I panicked in what seemed to be real life. The Elder, still with his hands upon me, pronounced the following, “You must flow, put your fears aside. How else would you flow?”

I looked into his eyes, “...What exactly are you implying? How can I fear not?” I asked him. We kept looking at each other. A second after, I saw a light bulb being turned on in the living room where my physical body stood still. I saw Felina coming next to me, yet, I kept looking at the Elder.

“Is everything ok, Renn? I heard a noise and I...”

“Yes, everything is fine, I just...”

“FLOW,” said the Elder.

“...I woke up,” I continued, “I’m sorry, Felina, for all the trouble that I’ve caused. How long have I been here?”

“Well, two, almost three days now. Are you feeling any better?”

“Yes, I...” I stopped. The Elder slightly pushed my head back. I reacted to this motion within the dream as well as in front of Felina. I saw the Elder returning to his seat and I tried to lie on the couch. Felina sat next to me. She seemed worried, in the same anguished manner as she was on the street where she had helped me days ago. It was the same sort of look she had when speaking to the vagabonds from the bridge.

“I’m fine now, I actually don’t feel that much pain, it’s a little weird,” I told her.

“Can I...?”

“Sure.”

She took my arm gently. We both saw my skin once the bandages were removed. My forearm seemed much better now. In the dream, my “other” forearm looked strong and was painted over with fine curved lines.

“Wow, it’s almost as good as new. Sully must be way better than I thought. I should call her early in the morning,” suggested Felina, somewhat excited.

“I’m sure she is...” I said. I hadn’t been aware of the recuperation process while passing through the layers of dreams and nightmares. I was intrigued by this. “Could this healing process be a side effect of my current mental state?” I wondered.

I heard the Elder speaking to the group and felt the fever running wild through my body again.

“Listen, Felina, about the sirens and all that... I feel like I must explain myself.

That day I tried to warn one of the Region's generals about something. I have some key information I got my hands on and things went worse than I expected. I have done nothing untrustworthy, I assure you, I wouldn't have got you into this if that was the case. I thought you should know that."

"Well... I kept telling myself I wasn't helping the wrong person, you know? I barely know you and I didn't know what to expect. Thank you for sharing this with me now, I guess..." She stopped talking. We remained silent for a second. She quickly changed the topic. "You said you met with a general, uh? What sort of information are you talking about?" she curiously asked. "It sounds important..."

"I'll be sure to tell you once I feel better, you deserve to know, after all, like everyone else in this City. You wouldn't believe me if I told you how I am still inside a dream right now," I said as I kept staring at the Elder.

"I understand. You rest for now, but I do want to know once you feel better, huh. You are not going to leave me hanging like that, you know?" she said and smiled.

"Of course," I agreed, "thank you. I'll repay you somehow, Felina."

"Don't say things like that, just rest for now," she stated as she stood up and left the living room. "I'll see you in the morning."

I rapidly went unconscious once she left the room. I had another insightful dream that night, one that I will always remember. This dream became a fundamental part of the transformation I was suffering.

I found myself alone, in a desert. I was standing next to the entrance of a walled structure. I looked around; nothing but sand and a clear blue sky. I approached the entrance in front of me and began to walk inside. The place was a sort of a labyrinth, with high walls and narrow pathways. The sun was outstandingly bright

and I promptly felt warmed up.

As I began to walk through the maze, I saw a figure coming towards me from afar. "What now?" I thought. A few minutes later, it stood right in front of me. He seemed human, a man with strange proportions; gigantic hands and feet. He had a big hump in his back and was carrying a bag full of what appeared to be paper scrolls of some sort. He stopped in front of me and said, "Oh, the Elder has finally sent you. Are you the one who is here to help?"

I wasn't sure of what he was saying. The Elder? What Elder? Suddenly, I somehow thought about the Elder from the tent. Could my dreams be related somehow? I don't remember consciously thinking about this. I just intuitively guessed who the Elder was, I suppose.

"He didn't send me," I replied. "I came here by myself."

"Oh, so you are not the champion who was promised?" he asked. "I should have known. You definitely don't have the aspect of a champion."

"A champion?" I questioned. "I wouldn't know. I have never seen one in the past."

"Oh well, let us see here," he said as he took a scroll out of his bag. It was a map. He laid it down on the sand. I kneeled at the same time he did and we both started looking at the torn old relic.

"What kind of map is this anyway?" I asked as I saw the drawings in it move about the paper, as if they were animated, somehow.

"It's an old map, don't you see? Now, don't distract me. The champion, let us see... Where's the champion?" he asked in a quiet voice. "Oh!" He made a weird sound. "Here he is, standing in front of me. See? Looks like you are our

champion after all...”

“What?” I asked, surprised. “It cannot be, I’m not a champion by any means.”

“Yes you are, the map says so and desert maps can’t be wrong, everyone knows that...”

I kept looking at the map. He had his finger pointing at a particular area. Indeed there were two blurry dots of light slowly blinking. One dot was blue while the other one was golden. This last one had next to it an inscription that I couldn’t read.

“I’m so glad that you’re here. The Elder kept his word, after all. Though it’s a bit strange to find a champion who does not know himself, a champion unaware of his title, one could say. How can this be so?” he inquired silently.

I remained still. I kept looking at the man-like being in front of me. I was extremely disconcerted, obliviously watching my situation unfold.

“A champion must know himself, you see? He must know the pathways within him.”

The Elder’s words came back to me at that moment; he asked me if I had something to hide. Why was I having this sort of introspection now?

“So...” I uttered. “What would a champion do in my place then?”

“Ah, he would be wise enough to search for the Keeper of the labyrinth, of course.”

“The Keeper of the labyrinth, you say? Alright, and who is the Keeper? Where is

he?”

“Can’t you guess? It’s so obvious. You have it in front of you!”

“Do you mean, you? Are you the Keeper of the labyrinth?”

“Well, of course I am.”

This all seemed strange to me. What if he was trying to fool me? Where was I anyway?

“Right, I see... How can I be sure that you are indeed the Keeper ? How can I even know if there is supposed to be one?”

“Well, if you were a champion who knew himself you would certainly be aware of this!”

“Alright, let’s assume you are the Keeper for now. My name is...” I stopped.

I couldn’t remember my own name. Who was I? I suddenly felt in complete ignorance regarding my own identity.

“Yes, your name is...?”

“I... Forgive me, I seem to have forgotten my own name.”

“Oh! Must this be as it is? A champion who doesn’t know himself to the extent to forget his own name? Oh Elder, who have you send to our aid?”

I literally couldn’t remember my own name. My mind was completely blank. Though I knew the necessary words and concepts to express myself, and I had a



vague sense of who the Elder was, I couldn't figure out anything else.

"Oh well, things are as they must be, so don't be troubled. Walk with me, forgetful champion," said the Keeper.

We began to walk along the narrow paths of the labyrinth. I followed the Keeper while trying to remember my name.

"I wouldn't let it bother me..." he said. "Your name will come back to you when it's time. Do not push things over, that is one of the rules that a champion imposes himself from the beginning. I suppose you don't remember that either, do you?"

A striking thought came, like a vanishing memory, soon lost. "I... I don't know, I don't even know why I'm here," I answered.

"Well you have a lot to learn, champion. Let's see, I suppose I can give you a hand. I must assume, due to your level of ignorance, that you don't even know what the labyrinth is in itself. Am I right?"

"Can we simply leave aside the fact that I forgot most of what I used to know? Am I even supposed to know what this place is?"

"Oh, oh, oh, well, of course! This place is yours, champion. You created this place, according to your wish and your wish only."

"What did you just say?"

"Indeed. This place is yours and only you know the way out. Although I'm the Keeper, I'm not the champion, and so, I don't know what the Elder has planned for you. I ignore what you have planned for yourself inside this place, you see?"

I'm just here to help, I suppose."

"What I have planned for myself? What do you...? Never mind. How long have you been here?" I inquired.

"That is indeed a good question. How does one measure time? I've been here since I exist, of course, and that's my answer."

"I see, fair enough..."

I somehow didn't have a perception of time which was accurate or measurable, by any means. For instance, at that point I looked at the sun and it didn't appear to have moved at all, considering some time had passed. I was still very disconcerted regarding my situation. I couldn't even tell how long I had been walking along with the Keeper.

We finally reached a fork in the road. The Keeper made a halt and turn around to face me.

"Well? Which way should we go?" he asked.

I saw the two arches above the entrances to each of the pathways. The one on the right had a carved symbol in the shape of a water drop at the top. The path on the left had no symbol, but a small stone hanging from a chain.

"Where are we heading anyway?" I wondered out loud.

"This labyrinth holds knowledge from the one who cast upon it." I heard the voice of the Elder merging with the Keeper's. "Only after casting from within can one spell the world outside."

The merged voices surprised me. The Keeper then kept going as normal.

“Once we reach an answer you will understand... Do not worry, champion, as I said, I’m here to help.”

“Alright...” I uttered, looking at both entrances. “Let’s take the one on the right then, for now.”

“As you say, champion.”

The Keeper and I walked towards the right pathway. I noticed that the stone walls had the same configuration as before; irregular shapes which perfectly fitted amongst themselves, like a stone puzzle. Although slightly more vegetation could be seen crawling up the walls. I thought about the complex functions describing these curves and the derivatives needed to find their slope and calculate their volume. We kept walking for a while until we came across a wall blocking our way. Right in the middle of our path, next to the wall stood a mirror. It seemed out of context there, somehow. I looked at the Keeper and asked him:

“Now what? Do you have any idea what this means?”

“Well it’s a mirror, apparently, look.” The Keeper said as he walked forward until his image appeared on the front face of the mirror. I walked towards him until I saw my reflection too, clear as day.

I now wonder why I remember all of this so clearly. I’ve heard about dreams being nothing but a construct of one’s mind, yet, I slightly differ, even now, after all that has happened.

Once I approached, I took a glance behind the mirror and touched it with the tip of my fingers. It seemed like any regular mirror in a wooden stand.

“Come on, let’s find out what the other path holds for us,” I told the Keeper.

As we walked back, I took a last glance at the mirror. I saw my reflection, I saw my face. I stayed there while the Keeper continued walking. I kept looking at myself. I thought about what the Elder symbolized. At some point, I saw something which terrified me. I observed my image turning around without my physical self doing so. A sudden expression of surprise escaped my voice, as the image in the mirror walked towards the path behind it. As I attempted to get closer, I blinked and saw this time a different image reflected in the mirror; it was the rainy bamboo forest, with the enormous tent far behind. It looked so realistic. I kept looking at it, paralyzed. I then heard a noise behind me and turned around instantly. It was at this point when I saw myself walking towards me, like a mirage in the maze. I screamed and closed my eyes for just a second. When I opened them, I saw nothing but the empty pathway and the Keeper far away. I looked back at the mirror but didn’t see my reflection there, just the misty forest. I approached it and inspected the sudden change. I had no reflection in the mirror, but the Keeper could be seen in the distance, as if he was in the forest and not in the maze behind me. I looked at the mirror one last time and ran towards the Keeper.

Once I reached him, I said, “Hey, you should see what I just...”

“No, it is just for you to see,” he interrupted. “I do not wish to know what you saw, for I myself have seen other things.”

I noticed the Keeper’s voice had changed; it sounded quite strange to me. I ran a little farther to face him and said, “Look, Keeper, I need you to come with me to the mirror and check if...”

I stopped. I saw his face. It had radically changed. His body was now smaller and

his clothes were different too. He now had a pale-green tone of skin and a gigantic nose, although he resembled exactly the old Keeper indeed. He was now carrying a bottle with a blue liquid and the bag with scrolls was gone.

“Yes? You were saying?” he asked, looking at me directly in the eyes.

“Uh, it was nothing. Let’s keep going.”

“Indeed we must, if you wish to find that which you seek.”

We walked back to the bifurcation while I kept inspecting the sudden changes which emerged on my new friend. I was quite astonished, since I didn’t really know what was going on or who I was at the time. Of course, I wasn’t aware that I was still inside a dream, nevertheless, I trusted the Keeper and we finally reached the bifurcation again. Both right and left entrances had changed their appearance as well. There were two torches with fire that I didn’t remember from before. I approached the left pathway and looked for the hanging stone; it was gone but the chain was still there, swinging faintly. When I turned to speak to the Keeper there was no sight of him. He was gone as well. I found myself alone. The place had now turned a bit darker and I felt somewhat worried. I shook my fear away and walked towards the left entrance. As I did, I noticed an ignition of some kind occurring on the end of the chain, where the stone previously was. It happened twice, and the third time a flame arose from the chain and continued burning indefinitely. Strangely enough, drops of fire seem to pour down from the flame into the ground, although they seemed denser than mere drops. They disintegrated once they reached the floor. After seeing this peculiar phenomenon, I got my hand close to the stream. Another drop fell, I caught it with the palm of my hand and felt a strong and increasing heat burning my skin. I let the drop fall. Still intrigued by such phenomenon, I went through the arch and kept going, minding only the path ahead. I thought I heard some voices, but ignored them all; I kept going. Little by little, the dark atmosphere faded away and

the narrow path became wider and clearer. I eventually encountered an open field at the end of the hall which was marked by two artsy columns, one on each side. I noticed soon enough that the walls didn't really end, but surrounded this beautiful place before me. A lake could be seen just ahead. A deer was eating grass before the shadow of a large tree. I slowly approached. The deer acknowledged me for a second with its intent gaze, and then turned back to the grass. I laid on a spot near it. The tranquility over the small portion of green grass and the lake in the middle of the desert was outstanding. I promptly realized that I had never known of a place like this. I knew something didn't fit, but couldn't quite put it into words.

"Why would there be grass in the middle of the desert? Is this somehow another mirage?"

Hereupon I saw a figure approaching from one of the many entrances scattered on the circular wall. It slowly walked towards the deer and me. The deer looked at me, its eyes strongly set upon mine. I heard a voice inside of my head, but it somehow felt as if it was coming from the deer itself.

"Listen to yourself. Not to the other selves within you," I heard. I thought I was becoming crazy.

"A place to look for strength has been given to you, though the consequences of this are for you to decide." The voice kept saying.

"What?" I asked the deer directly. "What are you trying to say?"

"He who walks through existence leaves a mark, and yours will be a strong one."

"A mark...?"

“If you decide to act upon it, a fair understanding will come to you.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. All my attention was set on the animal's deep black eyes, when all of a sudden, they turned to the figure approaching, which was now close. The deer then turned back to me.

“You must decide in all that is mind how to spell your existence. Walk along my path, come along.”

The deer went away and I recognized it was the Keeper who was coming towards me. He had changed his shape even more drastically; he was now bigger and his disproportioned head stood out from every other part of his body. He was carrying on his right side a big-cloth bag, leaning on his back. I could also distinguish a knife held by his belt, a big one.

“Well there you are, champion,” he loudly said. “I just got us dinner, come, walk with me.”

I saw the bag moving abruptly every once in a while. I then looked around searching for the deer, which was now standing next to another entrance far away from us. As I saw it, it looked at me for a second, as if it was reaching for my eyes, and then rapidly went into the entrance next to it.

“Well, what are you waiting for? I just told you I got our dinner, so...”

I faced the Keeper. He had a horrendous aspect, yet, he reminded me of someone else, someone who symbolized the exact opposite. As soon as he pronounced the word “dinner” this last time, something was triggered in my mind. A memory about a different time, a different context. Yet, I couldn't really recall anything definite.

A name finally came to me. "Vino, what had happened to Vino?" At that point it all converged in the back of my head. I saw the Keeper and recalled my recently pierced leg and broken arm. I looked at my body and saw no harm, realizing how deep within thought I was.

"My name is Renn, Keeper," I said. "I know who I am now. I know what has to be done."

"Oh, oh, that's precisely what I have been wanting to hear all along, champion! And excuse my abrupt manners, but what precisely would that be...?" he questioned as he dropped the bag on his back.

The bag began moving on the floor, still barely tied up. It was big, and it seemed as if something was about to break its way out, forcing the knot and squirming on the grass. The Keeper took out a sort of mace from his belt and was ready to strike the bag with it, when suddenly, the rope untied and a human figure, a man, came out of it. He was naked. He immediately stood up and ran towards me. I saw his face. It was mine. It was me, running naked towards my location. He finally reached me with his arms wide open, as if he was going to hug me or trap me. It all happened so fast. I glanced at the Keeper, who was twice his previous size now, as he swung his mallet towards us. While I was being held in a loving, yet strong manner by my other self, the Keeper struck both of us down with one strike of the mallet. The last thing I heard was a mirror crashing. I opened my eyes and found myself under Felina's roof. I heard birds singing right by the window next to the couch. I stayed there. I was calm, but still shocked by what had just happened. I kept my eyes closed while thinking about the significance of all of this, when suddenly, a sound coming from the other room echoed through the whole house. A minute later, Felina entered the room and saw me, awake.

"Hey," I said. I then coughed a little.



“Good morning,” she greeted me. “I’ll be out for a couple of hours. Sully is meeting us here later when I get back.”

“I see...”

“Here,” she said as she handed me a glass with a thick beverage. As soon as I tried to look into her eyes, she looked away.

“Are you going to be fine by yourself? Are you feeling any better?”

“Yeah, I’m alright,” I affirmed. “What’s with the solemn face though?”

“It’s nothing. I’ll see you later.”

“I... I wanted to thank you again for...”

I heard the front door closing.

“Hmm, did I say something? I suppose my presence here may bother her quite a lot, I should get out of here as soon as I can. What am I doing crashing on other people’s places lately anyway?” I asked myself.

I thought about Vino again, and my recent dream. I took a sip of the beverage and placed the glass on the table next to me using only my mind. It tasted fine, comforting. Many thoughts came rushing into my head, as sudden and insistent waves forcing me to rethink concepts and ideas I had believed to be true. My mind was on fire that morning and kept the feeling of warmth left by the desert’s sun and its comforting wind currents. I could feel my whole body meditating on the couch, yet, standing in the desert as well, as if I could control it, a sensation just for me, this beautiful one.

I realized how lucky I was that Felina had found me. That humandroid had really hurt me; I was naive and slow, and got scared in the middle of it all. I looked at my arm. I felt no pain or discomfort for the time being. I attempted to take a further look at it by removing the bandages. They were completely dyed in red, yet, extremely dry and not encrusted in any way to the surface of my skin. They came out easily and I saw my forearm, apparently, looking surprisingly fine. I moved it around and it felt alright as well. I then decided to test it and made a jar on the table float across the room rapidly into my hand. The task was accomplished without me being able to perceive inner harm, any signals of post-damage.

“I must remain careful, it may very well manifest sometime later... Had my inquisitive mind really healed my injuries so rapidly?” I kept asking myself this question yet again.

Time went by and I fell asleep. The sound of the front door opening awoke me. It was Sully and Felina approaching.

“Hi,” Sully greeted me with a smile on her face. “How is your arm feeling this morning?”

She checked my forearm right away. Amazement could be seen in her expression, as she turned to Felina with a stupefact look on her face.

“I told you so,” Felina reiterated.

“Wow, I’ve never seen anyone recover so fast! It’s almost as if it was never broken, I mean...”

Both Felina and Sully took a further look. They then glimpsed at me. Sully uncovered my leg and saw it had healed as well.

“This is amazing, truly amazing, I mean it. I see hundreds of injuries and their recovery process every month. I have never encountered anything like this. I mean, I saw your arm, it looked really, really bad. I was actually worried yesterday, I... Wait a second,” she stopped. “What did you do?”

“Do you mean me?” I asked her, a bit disconcerted.

“Of course, I mean you!”

“Well, nothing, besides resting and having a hardcore session of dreams, I suppose...”

She looked at me right in the eyes and said, “I’m amazed! I have to tell everyone down at the center.”

“About that...” I tried to elaborate, unsuccessfully, for both Felina and Sully began to speak amongst themselves while ignoring me.

Eventually, Sully turned to me and said, “Take these, in case it starts hurting. I’m sure it will. It may not look like it, but there’s no way your arm and leg have healed so fast, so... I got to run, the Center has been without electricity this whole week and it’s making everything just so difficult... I’ll try to come back soon.”

“Thank you so much. Uh, Sully, can I call you Sully? I truly appreciate all the attention.”

“No worries, thank Felina if you wish to thank someone. I’m mostly doing this for her anyhow. Bye bye then, keep resting or doing whatever it is you are doing, it is working,” she said as she walked towards the front door in a hurry, accompanied

by Felina.

I heard the door closing and saw Felina coming back to the room.

“Well?” she asked once she stood in front of me, scowling.

“Uh, well what?”

“Are you going to tell me what is happening here? I thought Sully was a pretty good doctor, but obviously, I was being silly and I hadn’t realized just how amazed she was with the healing process too. She told me she did nothing special to your arm and leg, only what could be done, you know? She didn’t believe me when I told her that your arm was already as good as new, at least for the most part, that is. And then...” she paused. “I remembered you mentioned that a general did this to you. What in the world is going on? I thought you lived beneath the bridge with Elmer and the others, I...” she rushed her words, frowning, increasing the volume of her voice.

I laughed a bit, trying not to offend her. “Calm down. First of all, I didn’t tell you that a general did this to me. I said I got into some trouble involving a general, and that is far different from...”

“Don’t lie to me,” she interrupted. “I really, really hate when people lie to me. If you want to stay here, for a while at least, you better think your next words carefully. They better be the truth, old man.”

“You have to be kidding me, I...” I looked at Felina. She was getting impatient and seemed to be doing a great effort to hold herself back. “Alright, look, don’t worry, I was planning on telling you the whole truth anyway... You helped me when I most needed it, you know? A serendipity factor, as if the universe offered me some help. That is greatly appreciated by anyone,” I reassured her. She

calmed down for a moment and grabbed the chair next to the couch.

We talked for a while. I explained to her why I needed to talk to a general in the first place. I even got a little carried away when speaking about the numbers and the specifics of the process I had been going through during the past two weeks. I also insinuated that the reason for the rapid healing process, most likely, had to do with my mind. I still remember the way she remained silent while I was explaining things out, similar to the way Vino had done back in his apartment. After some time, I ended my story. She then intervened. "Come on, Renn, you're not serious, are you...?" She laughed for an instant. "Show me. You said you showed Elmer back at the bridge, right? Well even if he didn't believe you, I'm sure I can try to. You can show me here and now, isn't that correct?"

"It all comes down to that, huh? To remain most skeptic in a world of lies is convenient indeed, but if you are expecting a joke or something like that, you are going to be disappointed..."

"Oh come on Renn, you really want me to believe that..."

At this point, I asked the now empty glass on the table next to us, in whispers, to levitate, and it did. I saw Felina's face, her pupils were as wide as they could be and she quickly looked back at me with the most astounded expression.

"You, you have to be kidding me... How in the world are you doing that?!"

Just as with Vino, we spent some time experimenting with that which I could now do. My old life seemed so distant to me now. Felina and I shared some laughs for the first time. Her mood had changed completely, just as Vino's had back then, as I so vividly and so joyfully recall. I showed her how I could make water pour out of my hand, though I couldn't perform much, for some reason. I told Felina that I had attacked the humandroid which broke my arm with a sort of an electric

shock that came from the palm of my hand, and how I had taught myself to do that. She then interrupted me and said, "About the humandroid... I wanted to ask you before."

"Yes?"

"Well, you mentioned that it didn't look like the military type, like those known to the public, correct? And you also mentioned that she looked like a female, a civilian, right?"

"Right..."

"I know the kind you mention. Did you, by any chance, hear her name? Was she called Sassia? Or Tharissia?"

"Yes, in fact she was! Both the Lieutenant and the General referred to her as Tharissia. How do you know this? Now I'm the one intrigued."

"Well, you see, my father, hmm..."

"Yeah...?"

"Let's just say that my father holds a certain position within certain circles, and all of that..."

"Well look who is not telling the whole story now, huh? I'm sure he holds a certain position, that's for sure..."

"It's not like that, I just can't speak about it..." Felina said, as she turned her eyes away from me.

“Don’t worry, it’s not like I need to know anyway, I was just messing with you.”

“I’m sorry,” she paused. “At any rate, I have seen, or met, I should say, Tharissia in the past, though she wasn’t aggressive at all back then. She was actually pretty nice to me, or was programmed to be, I don’t know... Anyhow, I’m so impressed with your story, not to mention that I can’t still believe you can make things be suspended and move around... and your recovery skills...”

Felina made a long pause. She then stood up from the chair and looked away from me. “What are you...? Are you like, still human? Were you born human, Renn?”

“Well, I don’t exactly remember when I was born, but I did and do have a mom... Look, of course I am a human. You or anyone else might be able to develop these abilities as well, I know how... which brings me to my next point.”

Felina looked at me, “Well tell me, don’t just stop talking like that.”

Once she sat down again, I summarized for her what I had told General Korsla a couple of days ago.

“I see... And did the general believe you? Are we like, is the City in danger because of this being which is supposed to be coming?”

“In a way, but I’m not completely sure. I can’t even begin to attempt to understand nor explain what this thing is, or will be, since, as of now, it still isn’t. Though everything already exists in the world of the nonexistent, in a way, you see, I...”

“I don’t need to listen to all that right now Renn, we have to tell everyone in the City, specially because there is another major event unraveling. Some people

already know about it, but not many speak of it...”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s a military operation, kind of, to suppress the true remaining opposition against the Region in the unattended side of the City. You see, Renn, when, allegedly, the hackers, specifically, the hacker group known as Insomnia got into the system, key evidence involving debt issues and such was erased. This should have gone quietly, but it didn’t. Some still remain in high places who do not agree with the after terms of the financial scandal.”

“Woah, how do you know all of this? Do you mean that the Region wants to execute the leaders of the Locrian movement?”

“No, not at all. Those leaders are actually with the Region, pretending to be against it. You see? They are paid off by the Region anyhow. The struggle for power is huge among men, and yes, I study it, and try not to get involved... as much as I can, all things considered. I just try to help and pass information on, to avoid the killing, all those people Renn...” Her eyes became wet. “Innocent people will suffer soon, it’s always innocent people who suffer, and now you come here with this supposed mathematical structure, or being or whatever it is, I... I just can’t believe it...”

“We can be at ease for now, but you are right, we do need to tell the people. I’m sure neither Huffen nor the General will do anything regarding my words, still... People might need to evacuate, the whole City maybe, in the following days.” I said, looking at the wooden mosaic and their marvelous patterns on the floor.

“Felina, will you be willing to help me out again?”

“What do you have in mind?”



## Chapter 5

We spent the rest of the day figuring out strategies to handle the situation. I revealed to Felina my intentions to talk to Lieutenant Huffen once more, as a last attempt to bring sense unto him. Felina thought that I wouldn't change his mind in any way, but as soon as I insisted, she said she knew just the right person to help us out, a backup, as she called him, and that she would arrange for us to meet later that week.

Satirically, I found myself even more intrigued by her character. She used language properly and express herself in a logical manner. I, perhaps partly as a mathematician, really appreciated those qualities since they were most difficult to find with each passing day. She had well established goals and worked towards them without hesitation, as if she knew already what had to be done. This, in a way, was dangerous. She had a mind which resembled her physical appearance, close to a primordial proportion, or so I thought at that point.

Just before having dinner, I recalled I wanted to give Felina all the money I had left, as a small payment for the inconveniences I had caused. I grabbed my coat and offered her the small amount. She accepted it and said she would take it as a symbolical payment, for she was not interested in my money but did want to acknowledge the gesture.

That same night Felina printed out dozens of flyers for us to spread out the next day around the City. I was feeling very comfortable in the small wooden house. I rejoiced in the fact that my arm and leg had healed so quickly, and I remember feeling extremely exhausted, mentally, as if my mind had performed some heavy lifting during the dreaming sessions that ended that same day in the morning. When we finished cleaning up the table, Felina said farewell and I went to the couch to rest. Suddenly, I thought about the book. "Where is it?" I reached for the

chair next to me and searched inside my coat's inner pockets. The big book was still there, as well as my Holo-Pad. They had suffered no damage during the fight. "Excellent... I need to review a few passages."

Before going to sleep, I spent a couple of hours reading some of the book's middle chapters. I was searching, in particular, for a portion which mentioned the propagation of electromagnetic radiation and resonance of the mind in the so called "theoretical" aether, a not so vague way of explaining things out, a way for me to imagine a field around me. You see, reader, all of this is ancient history for me now, so it should be hard to remember, but I do, vividly. It was that night when I began to think of a way for me to protect myself against physical damage. Much harm was done to my bone with such an arbitrary strike from the humandroid. If there was a way to generate some sort of controlled energy-field around my body, I wanted to figure it out.

Although I went to sleep peacefully that night, I still had some major concerns regarding all the sudden changes I had gone through. As I mentioned before, my past life seemed so distant to me now, as if I had been reborn with this recently acquired knowledge.

The next morning, we went out on the streets and pasted the flyers all over the City's walls. The words, "Danger: Evacuate the City now. A major event will take place within the next few days. Evacuate now while you still can," were printed in every flyer. We also spread the rumor verbally to several groups of people amongst the streets located some blocks away from the main outpost where I encountered Huffen days ago. No sight of any Locrian group that day that we could see. Many Region operatives everywhere, though.

As daylight began to vanish, Felina and I returned to the wooden house. I asked her if I could stay in her place again today, and she said, "By all means, old man."

“Hey, we established already the fact that I’m almost your age, remember?”

“Yeah, right, the fact, ha. How old are you, Renn? Seriously.”

“Well, I’m thirty, alright? Laugh all you want. What about you?”

“Hah, see? I knew you were old... I’m twenty-five, if you must know.”

“Well not that young at all there, missy.”

We laughed on the way back. We were developing a positive relationship, or so I thought. When we arrived, Felina opened the door and, once we were inside, we spoke about meeting Sully and Jix, the so called –backup–, tomorrow morning. “Who is this backup anyway?” I asked her.

“He works for private security, among other things... one of the pros, I should say.”

“Felina, this humandroid is something to be reckoned with, plus, there may be soldiers nearby and...”

“He’s a sniper, silly. He could be positioned on a roof or something and create a distraction for you to escape... What? Do you think my plan sucks? I wasn’t planning on fighting the robot so you can now break your other arm, you know?”

“Ha, very funny. Well now that you mention it, that could give me just the time I need to get away, plus, I’m figuring a way to flee in case things get up to that point. Anyway, this sounds great, let’s meet this Jix guy, though I don’t have any money, and I already owe you a couple of favors, alright? So... thinking it over, I’m not sure...”

“Don’t worry about it, Renn. You don’t owe me anything. At this rate I just desire to save as many people as we can. He’s a dear friend, he would never charge any silly money to me...”

Felina and her acquaintances were quite useful and available without the use of credits or some sort of payment. I believed at this point that Felina simply had strong bonds with these people and, by her apparent selfless nature, they were willing to help her out. I realized that I had probably found the only, or maybe one of the few individuals in town who would have offered help to me in this way, and I thought of this as no coincidence, the same kind of feeling when I saw the candle at Vino’s extinguish. I was exchanging information with reality, and reality back to me, in a subconscious level.

I looked deep into Felina’s eyes and I realized I was liking her a bit too much. This occupied a larger fraction of my mind every time I saw her. She was standing there, looking all innocent, and I didn’t want to get her involved in any of my concerns.

“Well, I don’t know about this, Felina. Look, I appreciate the help, but I believe I have to handle this by myself in order to...”

“In order to what, Renn? Forget about your pride and let us help. To get my point across, I saw what you did... making things float...” she made a pause, “I believe in your words. Unless you tell me right now that it was a trick or something, oh if you tricked me Renn...” she raised her voice.

“It’s not a trick...”

“See? Then you have nothing to worry about. I’m doing this for the people, not for you. They don’t know what is coming. We don’t know either, correct? You said so

yourself...”

“Alright, alright, let’s talk to him tomorrow.”

“Fantastic. I’ll let him, and Sully know. Sully usually wants in in situations like this. She can be of much help if someone...” she purposely coughed, “gets hurt.”

“Ha, very funny...”

I spent the moments prior to sleeping thinking about all the changes in my life, about Felina. It had become evident to me that ever since I read the book my regular feelings had been sort of augmented, as if some external multiplier entered the equation and potentialized my feelings. I was living life differently, all in a rush and full of radical, extreme and crazy things happening to me. It took a great effort to remain calm in the middle of it all, for my head was filled with racing thoughts and most of all with fear, fear of what was coming, and fear of what I had become. This also affected the small relationship I was developing with Felina. I was bursting with all kinds of emotions, as a teenager falling in love for the first time, precisely when I thought I had moved past all the absurd social preconceptions attached to the notion of love. Still, I couldn’t quite picture this as love, but as desire, not necessarily lust, but a crazy need to get involved in everything that had to do with her even further. This seemed very strange to me and I suddenly realized how absurd it was, and how I was overreacting to every little feeling that got into my mind lately. I recalled my training. I decided to go to the forest after speaking with Felina and her friends. As soon as I did, I fell asleep.

The first thing I heard the next morning was Felina’s voice telling me that Sully and Jix were to arrive within the hour. I took a shower and had some coffee Felina made for us all. At nine o’clock sharp, Sully and a man knocked at the door. They entered the room I was momentarily using. Sully came near me and

gave me a hug. She then said, "No one believed me down at the Center... Did it hurt again? Can I take another look?"

"Of course," I said as I rolled up my sleeve.

I then extended my right hand to the guy I presumed was Jix.

"Renn, nice to meet you, friend."

"Same, I'm Jix."

As Sully finished inspecting my arm, she said, "It looks as good as new... have you experienced any discomfort?"

"Not really..."

"I see... But how? How...?"

"Well..." Felina interrupted. "Since we're all here, and you guys have already met, let us not waste any time."

We sat on the table and Felina briefed both Sully and Jix about me, about what I had shown her and about the thing which was coming. She certainly took her time and explained everything in detail to them, sometimes looking at me to confirm if she was laying things out correctly. She explained Sully that my mind was precisely the reason for my fast recovery and that, though all of this sounded as silly and weird as it could, I had, in fact, showed her proof of my words.

Sully and Jix were both quiet. I then explained to them, in a more precise manner, how I had developed these abilities. "Everything has to do with the mind, and how it perceives reality," I told them.

“That’s some story you’ve got here, Renn,” said Jix. This was the first time I heard his voice clearly. He then turned to Felina. “And you saw him making things move and fly around? Could we see all of this?”

“Of course,” I assured.

I stretched my right arm and turned the palm of my hand from right to left, slowly making some paper sheets which were lying on the table fly across the room. I then turned my hand downwards and directed the sheets back to the table. Next, I extended my left arm and whispered to a couple of apples which resided on a fruit platter to move upwards. They began to float at my will. I saw both Sully’s and Jix’s expression, which was fixed upon the apples. I retracted my arm slowly as the apples came down to the platter again. I finally said, “If you would like to see more extreme examples, come with me to the forest later. I don’t want to damage Felina’s home, you know?”

“What the hell was that...?” Sully contemplatively inquired.

Jix seemed perplexed. His expression had changed radically. “What the...?” He stared at me with a profound look. “I want to go with you to the forest.”

“Sure. I will show you more, friend.”

Sully had opened her mouth wide and was covering it with her hand while looking directly at Felina. “I told you...” I heard Felina saying in whispers.

A minute later, they began to smile and act joyfully, as if they had just seen a magic or an entertainment show, sort of a group reaction towards that which couldn’t be accurately explained. Even Jix, who had seem so serious all this time, was incapable of hiding his excitement. After a couple of minutes and

questions, Felina said, "Enough. We have to plan our next move." She then explained to them that I needed to talk to Lieutenant Huffen and that we needed their help. Felina had already devised a plan for us to follow, one in which, while I spoke to the Lieutenant, Jix was to be positioned on a nearby building ready to strike if someone tried to apprehend me, without harming anyone, of course, merely creating a panic scene. I was to be informed of the situation through an earplug so that I could be ready. Sully would be located on a nearby street, waiting with a vehicle for Jix to come down from the roof and flee the scene. Felina, as strange as it sounds, suggested to wait for me inside the sewer and help me disappear from the streets if necessary. We were all to arrive at the wooden house approximately at the same hour. Though we didn't quite know where and when we would be able to find the Lieutenant in the following days, Felina's plan sounded well thought to me. Jix had a couple of holes to point out, but we talked them over and they were soon solved.

Apparently, these guys had been in operations of this sort before and they conducted themselves according to their roles. I was all impressed, to say the least, and so, I agreed with the plan.

"Thank you for helping me," I said.

"Hmm," Jix made a dismissive sound, "I wish I knew if there are any reasons not to trust you. And also... don't say thank you, just like that, don't say that, ya know? Worry about putting some sense into the Lieutenant. If your story is true, Renn, then we're all in danger, right? The City needs to be evacuated, right?" Jix asked me directly.

"Right..." I said as I lowered my sight. I felt remorse. It was all my fault to begin with, and now we had to come up with some preventive measures against an event which we didn't really know much about. I felt ignorant and repugnant at that moment. I had been selfish and arrogant to these people who were offering



help without asking anything in return... I felt horrible.

“I’ll find out which day of the week suits for us to act. I’ll let ya know Felina, Sully, via private chat on the Stem server in the Old Wires. You do know which one I’m talking about, don’t ya? Have you got a Holo-Pad, Renn?” Jix asked.

I didn’t react at first, I was buried deep inside my thoughts. “Renn?” He asked again.

“Yes, yes, sorry, I do have a Holo-pad, I know the Stem server,” I replied.

“Ok, so, I’ll let ya know. I gotta go. When are you going to the forest? Can I come by later today?” Jix asked me again. It seemed he was serious about seeing more of my abilities.

“Sure, I’m going to be there in a couple of hours until around midnight. Feel free to send me a message to my Holo-Pad once you approach the second entrance. Do you know the one on the right from the City road? The main one is usually closed by Locrians, at least when it’s getting darker it is.” I said as I reached for my Holo-Pad in my coat, put it on my right wrist and placed it near his. Both Holo-Pads made a beep sound.

“Great, I’ll let ya know.”

Suddenly these people had entered my life and were getting involved in it. I didn’t want any harm to come upon them because of me, either directly or indirectly. I felt the need to be alone, and as soon as our conversation was over and both Sully and Jix left, I turned to Felina and said, “I will be in the forest today.” I placed my Holo-pad beside hers. They both made a beep. “Let me know if you need me to come back or something. I’m planning on crashing on the bridge or the forest tonight, as well as the following nights. We can contact each other via

chat, and let ourselves know if..."

"Renn..." she interrupted me, with a smile on her face. "There is no need for that. You can stay here, but then again, you do as you see fit."

I felt horrible once more, as if I was going to get her involved in some sort of danger due to our constant involvement in the last days. I grabbed my things and left the wooden house in a hurry. I walked the streets with a fast pace. I was thinking to do some work today in exchange for credits in order to buy food and rush to the forest. There were, after all, more than a couple of tasks I could do until midday while still working mentally on this energy-barrier concept. I walked probably for around half an hour, when half a mile away or so, I glanced at a fisherman by the main river. I walk towards the river bank and waited for the fisherman to come back to land. After another half an hour or so, the fisherman arrived and I greeted him, "Hello there, friend."

"Hi."

"I was wondering if you would happen to value a second sailor who could help you catch those fish today. I've got until, let's see... an hour or two past midday, and I ask for only 3 of the fish we get. Are you a cook?" I asked the fisherman.

"Hmm," he groaned. He looked a bit surprised while scrutinizing me. "Have you fished before? The fish in this river are difficult to catch, they are used to our ways."

"Yeah, I can fish. I'll tell you what, allow me to join you and we'll catch at least a dozen. If you can cook these three fish that I ask for me, then we have ourselves what looks like a fair deal," I proposed.

Indeed I thought about getting some fish by my own means, but I didn't want to

get anyone's attention, and I was hoping the fisherman would cook the fish for me, which was a must. For a second there, I thought about our eating habits and felt disgusted by the idea of raw fish.

"Hmm," he kept his eyes on me, inspecting me, probably wondering if I was up to the task. "Ok, ok, come on up to the boat, let's see how well you do."

We spend the following hours on the boat, which turned out to be such a pleasant distraction from the general context of the City, that of suffering and anxiety. This got my mind off my preoccupation concerning Felina and the crew I was getting involved with.

We caught at least nine fish; some of them were quite heavy. The fisherman seemed pleased with my fishing skills. Around two hours past midday, he said to me:

"Very good, that's enough for now. I'll cook the fish you asked for. Can you come back in an hour to this same spot?"

"Of course, I'll be here in one hour. Thank you, kind sir, I hope my skills did not disappoint you," I told him, hoping some sort of further deal would come between us.

"Yes, you did fine," he stopped there for a second, "If you wish, come back tomorrow morning, around eight o'clock, that's when all the fish come to the surface, yes?"

"Alright, I'll be here tomorrow morning. Again, thank you."

"No problem," he said and then asked: "What's your name?"

“I’m Renn, it’s good to meet you, friend. May I know yours?”

“Yes, I’m Elkbar. Nice to meet you Renn,” he said as he bowed his head. He then grabbed two huge buckets with the fish we had caught and left.

I felt comforted after finding this man in the river. This way I needn’t worry about my food for the next few days. Once an hour had passed, I got the cooked fish from Elkbar and went straight to the forest. Once there, I ate two of the fish and kept the last one for dinner. I was ready to begin what was probably going to be my last training days before chaos emerged in the City. I had, mostly, one objective in mind; to devise a way for me to protect myself against physical damage. I sat on the same spot that I used to before. I first entered a desired state; an empty mind would find the correct flow of information in order to generate a contained type of energy field around me. I only knew how to deliver energy in an explosive way, so far, by focusing my mind in a very precise manner, to redefine the values of reality itself. This time I restrained the free flow of energy and began attempting to release it from my whole body, and not only the palm of my hands. I eventually got the feeling as if my whole body was doing nothing but increase its own temperature. I felt tired promptly and thought about approaching the subject from a different perspective. After a few minutes of rest, I tried to talk to my own body, finding the right words, the proper pitch, thinking about the frequency fluctuations themselves in order to guide the energy with my mind. I soon felt this approach to be far superior, for I rapidly felt my arms warmed by heat, this time, exclusively on the surrounding area and not the flesh itself. I felt my fingers numb, and had to stop after a certain point.

While meditating for a long time on what had just happened, I found myself thinking about the entity who was soon to appear, the way in which it was related to nature itself, and to me, in a way. These thoughts brought a reminder of the fact that Jix was due to come. It was late already and he hadn’t sent any messages via Holo-chat. While seeing the hologram displayed in my X-3 model, I

noticed that the battery was about to run out in a day or two. I had last charged it at Vino's using an external power unit. "It has definitely lasted a while now. These new batteries on the X models are definitely worth the trouble," I thought. I also noticed the time, 11:11, in the liquid screen. "Tell me more," I said out loud.

Time was slipping away. I ate the last fish and got some additional work done. I did notice some improvements that night. I went to sleep around one in the morning and set an alarm for five hours later so that I would have enough time to arrive with the fisherman at eight o'clock sharp.

I woke up in an upbeat and felt rested enough despite having slept for only a few hours. I went straight to the gates of the City. This time there were even more people wanting in, including some merchants with their Holo-shells and digital helmets on. I had to push my way through a gap between the people in order to reach the entrance and make it in time. In spite of everything, I arrived five minutes before eight o'clock and saw the fisherman in the middle of the river. I noticed that there were more people by the river banks than the day before. I barely saw any dead bodies lying on the main avenue while I was on my way to the river. More tanks and some of those piloted robot units from the Region could be seen roaming the streets every day.

"It's going to be tough speaking with Huffen this time," I thought.

Once the fisherman and I ended our work for the day, around midday, I headed to Felina's wooden house. Again, the fisherman asked me to come back later so he could have time to cook for me. On my way I saw some of the military-type humandroids that had already been publicly displayed on The Wires, gathered upon with the Region's men. "Could Huffen and the General have taken my words seriously? No way, the recent increase in units must be rather related to the operation Felina spoke about," I thought.

I arrived and knocked on the door. All silent. I then took my Holo-Pad out and called Felina. She answered. "Hello, Renn?"

"Yes, hi Felina. Listen, I'm at your place. Are you here?"

"Oh, I see, well, no, I'm not. You should have let me know you were coming, you know, old man? I'm working on something right now, but I'll be out in a couple of hours. I'll meet you there, sounds good?"

"Alright, I'll meet you here."

"Don't get too bored waiting for me."

"I won't. See you then," I said as I ended the call and saw the battery even lower than I thought. It was 12:12. I had some relevant messages but nothing to be concerned with.

I went to the back of Felina's house; a yard with a table and a couple of chairs, high grass and many sorts of trees and plants placed in a baroque fashion. I wondered at this point how Felina had gotten this place. I didn't know where she worked or how she earned credits to survive. These thoughts flew by and dissipated soon enough. It was here, in this beautiful small portion of nature which seemed so apart from the City itself, that I managed to uncover the key for me to develop an energy barrier. I grabbed a stick and broke it in half. I then attempted to push it through the skin of my shoulder while focusing on changing the variables of the possible states of the air around me in order to deflect the stick. I attempted this several times in different ways, but had no success for the time being. I did manage to get smoke out of the stick once before it reached my shoulder, and this was the key I was speaking of. I somehow arranged the air molecules within the space between me and the stick at the right moment.

Eventually, I noticed it was time for me to go see Elkbar the fisherman and I went to meet him. Just like the day before, he included in the bag he gave me a small portion of rice, a plate and so on. Did I forget to mention that I brought the bag back to him every morning and so on? Memories, reader, grateful memories, feelings, I should say, come to mind while remembering all of this, so distant in the past.

Once I said goodbye to Elkbar, I headed back to Felina's place. This time I saw a large group of Locrians gathering in the same avenue that I had just crossed. I saw their flags and some smoke coming out of some burning metal barrels which were carried along with the group. The symbols on their flags, for one reason or another, reminded me of that which Felina had told me before, "*You see? They are paid off by the Region anyhow.*"

"What exactly did she mean by that?" I asked myself. The Region gave the impression to diminish their presence, not at all acting as if they were part of the same group. I supposed, if I understood her insinuations correctly, they were merely playing a role, just pretending to be the opposition. "Right?" I asked myself. I felt confused. I couldn't care less anyway, I never had liked or dealt with political topics in the past. I felt disgusted by these prestige-seekers. I was not interested, to say the least, in these military groups or their activities.

Upon arriving back to the wooden house, I saw Felina walking towards the entrance. We greeted each other, as she opened the door and saw the fish I was carrying with me. "Smells good, what's that?" she asked.

"Some fish me and Elkbar caught this morning," I replied.

"Who's Elkbar?"

"He is one of the City's fishermen. Are you hungry?"

We ate the three fish by the table. I asked Felina if I could charge my Holo-Pad's battery. Once I plugged it I asked her if she had heard anything about Jix.

"Nope, not a thing..."

I then asked her if she thought printing more flyers for us to spread around the City in the following days would be a good idea.

"Yep, that's what I wanted to hear!" she said. After a moment, she added. "Although... I'm not sure. I don't think anyone took the previous ones seriously or left the City anyhow... We need to make them more distinguishable, write something more convincing."

"I see your point. Anything in particular on your mind?"

"Well, any word on the Region might get the flyers taken down, so... What about...?" She made a pause. "What about, "5 Days Until the Cataclysm Occurs. Evacuate the City Now.""

"Flamboyant, better... I don't know if anyone is going to take them seriously this time either, though. We may be wasting efforts here, don't you think...?" I asked. Felina deeply exhaled.

"You know what?" I continued. "Let's forget about the flyers for now, we should go out on the streets telling people personally, one by one. We can leave the flyers as an alternative for later."

"Fine... Fine, I hear you. I suppose the flyers won't cause much difference anyhow. Let's leave that for later, as you suggest."

We spent the rest of the day approaching people to warn them about what was



coming. Either they weren't interested or had no time to listen to our explanations. People seemed pretty busy before, and even in the last few days, always looking for a way to earn credits. Electricity was available at Felina's and other neighborhoods on the unattended side, though still the vast majority had none. People could be seen on the streets carrying supplies and working in groups along with the Region; thousands were now asking about the Program, which was about to enlist certain individuals to go to the Other Side, the side of the City which remained semi-intact from the recent financial crisis. When night came, Felina and I said goodbye to each other. I told her I would be spending the night nearby. She simply laughed and said, "Great, whatever suits the grumpy old man."

I still didn't want to get Felina involved in the deeper layers of what was coming, and so, I spent the following nights sleeping either in the forest or under the bridge, which was now apparently abandoned; no sight of Elmer and the other vagabonds. Each time the bridge was chosen, I could hear distant screams of agony and pain, unlike the previous weeks.

Even though it gave me some relief to have the help of Felina and her entourage, I was still troubled by the idea. I went to the forest to train every day, and by the fourth night, I was finally able to modify the composition of the air between me and a specific object, causing the object to be deflected from its path. I was quite impressed with myself. I began to think that maybe everything I could imagine logically could be achieved in reality, and although I knew this was a fallacy, I enjoyed playing with the idea every now and then. That same night, around midnight, Jix sent a message via the Old Wires. It read, "Tomorrow, eleven in the morning where we last met. Until then." Minutes later, I received a private message via Holo-chat. "Are you in the forest? Can I join you?" I replied, "I'll see you here, let me know when you arrive."

Jix showed up soon after. He brought food for me. "Sorry I didn't contact ya

before, been pretty busy. I hope you haven't had dinner yet," he said as he handed me a paper bag.

That night we spoke about many topics. We barely slept even though we were to execute our plan the next day. We discussed our ideas regarding the Region and its Program. He had the same political posture as Felina and explained to me in greater detail the information which sustained such claims. He got his Holo-Pad out and showed me photographs, documents and articles he had found hidden deep within the Stem server on the Old Wires. He then suggested that the banks had coordinated a financial crisis and were gathering the people along with the Region in order to annul their rights, ultimately, to rule over everyone, unopposed. These allegations were all kind of new to me and once again I felt the cognitive dissonance produced by the absorption of such different information to the one I had been reading daily. Everything was still too speculative for me at that point anyway. It turned out that Felina, Sully and Jix belonged to a small organization which was neither with nor against the Region, but tried to work undercover for the people's general wellbeing, distributing information and carrying out small operations. He explained to me how most of the time these "operations" consisted in bringing food to communities nearby. Certain people were not allowed within the City anymore, neither to buy food nor seek shelter. A major concern began to spread out. The whole food production chain was being dismantled, and according to him, most of the farms located near the smaller towns and Cities were closing. I couldn't believe I hadn't heard any of that from the sources I myself checked. I wasn't an expert researcher by any means, I had to admit, neither did I invest much time doing so, but I did consider my skills going through the Wires to be at least a bit above average, and all of this was just so radical. "Not everything that is being implemented or planned by the Vote Casters is told to the people. We believe they deserve to know, at the very least," he stated. He also suggested that everything had blown out of proportion with the hacking attack, which had been staged by the bankers themselves. I did remember hearing a rumor when the crisis emerged, that a high executive from a

certain banking branch had come out and revealed that the banks themselves were the real hackers. It wasn't until now that I began to take these allegations more seriously.

Since I never in my life had met anyone involved in such activities, all of this felt quite unusual to me. All I had previously done with my time had to do with thinking: philosophy, numerical problems, languages and the like. As I have mentioned before, never had I being interested in politics or it's tricks and mysteries, as intellectual as they were. I thought, yet again, about the great coincidences that had to be given for such alignment with these people. It felt to me as if the universe, or something else, had arranged things for this to happen. In fact, I leaned to the idea of this situation being exclusively created in my mind, nevertheless, I felt an external influence. "How easily does coincidence explains the inexplicable. If I would have just assumed that all the crazy connections in my mind were mere coincidence I would never had achieved what I did at Vino's," I pondered, while looking at Jix, sitting on the grass, with his sniper gear on. He told me that the next day was the perfect day for us to act. The Lieutenant was being appointed to an outpost within our reach, in the unattended side of the City.

"...We should strike then, I'll explain more once we meet with Felina and Sully tomorrow," he added. After a short pause, he continued, "Listen, I don't understand anything about what you showed us that day. Felina seems to believe your words almost entirely and that's enough reason for me to help ya."

"I see..." I said, gazing at his pupils, black, lightened by the fire torches beside us and the bluish-purple light emitted from our Holo-Pads. They were as black as the night itself.

"Now, I wish to see more of your, uh, abilities. I suppose I could call them that, huh?"

“Yes, actually...” I said as I raised my hand, whispering to a rock behind me to float above the ground. I saw Jix’s expression, he was absolutely impressed. “I was hoping you could help me out with something too,” I asked.

I explained to him how I wanted him to shoot a bullet near me in order to put the energy deflecting barrier to the test. “Don’t worry, I presume I will be able to come out of the situation intact,” I awkwardly said, trying to laugh at the end.

We carried out the practice, although Jix felt uncertain about it the whole time. He aimed his first shot near my shoulder, a little to the right so that the bullet wouldn’t actually hit me. I had been able already, or so I thought, to create the barrier effect all around my body just hours ago. This effect took place during a very short time frame, but if well synchronized, it could block more than just a bullet, I assumed. I was eager to put it to the test, but I couldn’t achieve it in the first couple of attempts. Jix shot at me again and, this time, I was actually able to redefine the values right at the moment I heard the gunshot. I instantaneously heard the bullet being repelled; a pleasant, strange sound. “Wow, what the fuck...?”

“What?” I asked him.

“Didn’t ya see? Something blocked the bullet, and... like, I saw like electricity reacting on the impact zone, what the...?”

“Whoa, no, I didn’t see that, I had my eyes closed when I created the barrier. Amazing! Let’s try again.” I suggested.

“Renn, I mean, seriously, how...? Did you just repelled the bullet? How are ya doing this?”

This time, as well as the subsequent ones, I asked Jix to shoot directly at my

body. I was sure this wasn't a good idea, but I needed to put certain aspects of myself, of reality, to the test. Indeed, I was able to deflect the next couple of bullets, but the shooting distance didn't vary. That is the reason why I wasn't that worried about my safety, for I, somewhat, purposefully failed the first couple of attempts in order to calculate, more or less, at what time I needed to create the barrier based on the location of the shooter. This could cause some inconveniences and I realized the barrier was nothing but a safety net, or at least for now it was.

Around three in the morning, Jix said, "It's late now, I'm out. You are not sleeping here, ya come over to my place. There is a couch on the hall you can crash in, better than these trees for sure."

"Thank you, but I'm fine here, I actually prefer it this way. I appreciate the gesture, though."

"Hmm," he made the same dismissive sound he had done that day at Felina's. "Are you sure? Do you really wanna sleep here? We should be well rested for tomorrow, ya know?"

"I will rest fine here, friend, thank you. I will see you tomorrow at eleven. It's nothing, believe me, I've been sleeping here for a while now, and I get all the rest I need."

"Fine, fine then. I'll see ya tomorrow. Until then."

I was indeed fine dealing with things myself. It must not have been evident to them, but my mind was actually going through lots of changes in so many levels and I had to be careful in every sense of the word. I was starting to like these people and, if something were to occur to them because of me, I could trigger some events before they were supposed to happen, or something along those

lines, I thought. I didn't want to get them involved any more than necessary. "The fact that they are helping me tomorrow is more than enough already," I told myself.

I didn't have time to let the fisherman know that I wasn't coming next morning, for I needed to get as much sleep as I could and decided to wake up late. Around ten thirty, I arrived at the City gates only to find them closed. "Well, what did you expect, Renn?" I asked myself out loud. I got my Holo-Pad out and called Felina. She quickly answered, "Hey. Did you get Jix's message?"

"Yeah, about that... I'm outside the City. I overslept a little, you see..."

"Oh boy, what a sleepy old man," she laughed. "Don't you worry, you're talking to me, aren't you? Sure I can be of help."

"Wow, Felina, you are beginning to impress me, is there something you can't do?"

"Well I cannot do what you do, silly. Stop mocking me, ok?"

"Hey, I'm not mocking you, I..."

"Shut up and listen," she interrupted. "Now, are you facing the southern gates?"

"Yes."

"Ok, well then turn to your left and casually walk next to the City wall. You don't want to draw the attention of any guards, Renn, did you hear me? Don't make any Guards follow you, Renn! This is very important!"

"Yes, don't worry, I'll make sure not to, alright?"

I walked for a minute or so. “Ok, now, do you see the canal flowing inside the City? It should be blocked by a greenish metal gate,” she warned.

“Oh, alright. Wait a second... Yeah, I see it,” I said as I gazed upon the canal’s gate. Outstanding architecture, just like the rest of the City, which had this particular selection of granite and limestones, wood and old-style metal ornaments. The general aspect was that of an ancient city mixed with high tech everywhere, combined with colorful flags and a flora which made it unique. I just realized how little I have spoken about the appearance of the City, that which I considered my own, long ago.

“Fine, keep going until you see the third canal on the City wall.”

“What are you going to make me do, Felina?”

“Don’t worry, it’s nothing. You’re going to have to swim, but that’s nothing, isn’t it? Come on...”

“Well, if you say so...”

Once I arrived at the third canal I asked Felina, “What now?”

“Ok, go in direction to the gate.”

“I’m going to have to get inside the canal in order to do that, you know...? Alright.”

I got in the waters and headed towards the gate, with the book and my Holo-Pad up in the air.

“Are you there yet? Now grab the gate and feel the bottom part. There must be a missing metal square down to your right,” she assured.

“Yeah, alright, I think I know what you mean. Swim and get inside the City, right?”

“Yep. I’ll see you here, old man. Try to remain unnoticed on your way here,” she said and hung up.

I lifted my items above the gate with my right arm and grabbed them with my left hand on the other side. I then placed them on the small rock pathway which was just above the level of the canal and sunk in the waters in order to swim underneath the gate onto the other side. Once out, I grabbed both the book and my Holo-Pad. I soon reached the end of the canal and made sure no one saw me getting out. I kept walking, all wet. Some people stared at me as I did, but soon lost interest. I avoided the main roads and any guards or Region officers. I arrived at Felina’s a bit past the stipulated time and knocked on the door. A motorcycle was parked next to the entrance. Felina answered, “Renn?”

“Yeah, it’s me,” I said as she opened the door and I went inside.

“Look at you. How were the canal waters? Cold as usual?” she asked. I saw Jix and Sully already there, sitting by the table.

“Yes, they were. They say cold water refreshes the soul, haven’t you heard?”

“I bet it does,” she replied. “Well? Go on, take a shower first. We don’t want to smell the odor, do we? Up the stairs to the right. Be quick about it, Renn, you are late already, and if I wouldn’t have told you how to get inside the City, you wouldn’t even...”

“Yes, yes,” I interrupted. “I’ll hurry, you don’t have to yell, alright?”



“I am not yelling, this is my voice when I’m agitated, I...”

Sully began laughing and I heard Felina addressing her as I went upstairs. I had never seen this section of the house before. Felina’s place was wonderful, extremely pretty. Once I began showering, I speculated on the outcome of the “mission” we were about to execute and thought about how these guys were apparently familiar with situations like this. They didn’t seem nervous at all. The hot water surely helped clear my head. I felt rejoiced once more with everything that was happening. I forgot for a moment about the upcoming arrival. I suddenly felt closer, somehow, to the numbers that I had studied for so long, closer to my deepest feelings. I imagined in my head baroque strings and woodwinds while pouring shampoo on my head without using my hands.

I took my fair time showering and came down once I was done. Felina and the others were having tea. I saw Jix’s rifle leaning on the kitchen’s bar and sat down by the table with them.

“Well, now that we’re all ready...” Felina opened the conversation.

“Sorry for the delay. I’m here now. Let’s do this.” I said as I looked at each one of them.

“Precisely what I wanted to hear,” Felina asserted. “Now, as I understand, it is extremely important for us to try and get this message one last time to the lieutenant. Is that correct, Renn?”

“Correct,” I replied.

“This being, Renn, that is coming. How will it appear on the City? Where is it coming from?”

“Well, I’m not sure exactly how it is going to materialize. And regarding where it comes from, it is nowhere we can measure or even interact with here in our reality. It goes beyond the numbers, imagine something like that...”

“So, you don’t know much, uh? What are you planning on telling the Lieutenant then?”

“Simple, we already discussed this. First, the Region needs to evacuate the whole City. Secondly, The Region must provide their full support in case of an abrupt exchange of, words, with this being.”

“What? So, it has intelligence? Is it going to like, speak to the people? What the hell is this, Renn?”

“It will, as I understand, possess more intelligence than we can fully comprehend. Though I may be wrong, of course, and it might be more of an irrational being. I don’t know, look, it’s an eternal archetype of nature, alright? I don’t know what is going to happen altogether, nor do I know exactly what I’m going to say to Huffen. I just know that the whole City should evacuate in case things get ugly.”

“...Things get ugly, huh?” there was a short pause. Some birds chirped on the background. “Jix, can you give us the details?” Felina inquired.

Jix went on and told us the specifics of the operation. Huffen was scheduled to be on a patrol point for a few minutes around one hour past midday. He was supposed to carry out some inspection in the area and that was our opportunity. Jix got his Holo-Pad out and displayed a map of the streets. He explained the details further: the patrol point, Sully’s location at the back of the building and Felina’s position on the sewer, three blocks away. We were all to communicate through earplugs and the microphones of our Holo-Pads via private call and let

each other know what was happening at all times.

“This call will be impossible to hack in the timeframe of our mission, and in this way, and only if it comes to that, I’ll let Renn know when and where I’ll be shooting. I hope I don’t actually have to. If there are any droids with the lieutenant, they’ll know almost instantly where the shot came from, and that’s where you and I, Sully, must get the hell out as soon as possible. Is that understood?”

“Sure,” Sully nodded.

A couple of minutes past midday, we finished going through the plan and went out to the streets. Sully and Jix said farewell. “We’re heading there. I’ll make the call as soon as we’re all set. See ya guys here later.”

They hopped on the motorcycle and left the scene. Felina then said, “Be careful, ok? Just run to my location and I’ll open the sewer before they know where you went.”

“Alright... I gotta warn you, though. There are rats in the sewers, but don’t be afraid, they just have a bad reputation. In their defense, I’ve had interesting conversations with some.” I joked. These fatuous interactions were often an escape from our, to some extent, unpleasant context.

“Hah, shut up, silly... I bet you’re the one who’s going to be afraid if we find any,” she said.

I laughed as I held Felina’s hand. “Thank you again, Felina, I’ll see you later.”

She then came close to me and stood there for a second, looking at me profoundly in the eyes. A moment later, she turned around and began walking

down the street. I saw her as she was leaving, with all these flashing thoughts rushing through my mind. I snapped out of it and began walking towards the opposite direction. If for any reason anything unexpected happened, I was prepared to use the barrier. I needed to be one step ahead from the Humandroid and the Lieutenant. No one was going to be put at risk because of my message.

## Chapter 6

The patrol point was located at the end of Second Avenue. I was still far away, but I was finally able to see it along with dozens of tanks and soldiers. I decided to find a place to put the earplug in and connect it to my Holo-Pad. The perfect alley, perpendicular to the avenue, was just around the corner, and once I saw the green light displayed by my device, I waited for Jix to make the call. It was half an hour past midday; a small group of soldiers proceeded violently down the avenue towards the patrol point. "If the situation gets too complicated, we'll have to withdraw," I thought.

Twenty minutes went by and I received the call.

"...Ok, so we're all here," I heard Jix on the other side of the line. "We're all set, Renn, and I have eyes on the lieutenant."

"Hi there, Renn," I heard Sully say.

"Hey there. Is Felina here as well?" I asked.

"I'm here."

"Excellent. So tell me about it, is the lieutenant surrounded by Region guards?"

"Right now he is. It looks like a blonde woman and a couple of suited agents are closer to him. The rest of the group is listening."

"Tharissia, just like last time..." I sort of interrupted.

"What?"

“The blonde woman is probably Tharissia, the humandroid which Felina told us about. Please, keep going.”

“Hmm, right. It looks like you’ll have to approach him after he’s finished his work here and is ready to leave. Supposedly, he has a meeting scheduled in half an hour. I believe I see the car, but I can’t confirm if it is his vehicle.” Jix stopped for a second. “Listen, Renn, I need ya to be close by in case he makes a sudden move and disappears. Looks like he’s not done yet with his speech for now, but still.”

“I understand,” I got up and began walking down the avenue. “I’ll try to talk as less as I can from now on, as a precaution, but I’ll be listening.”

“Agreed,” Jix said.

I kept walking as I listened to their quiet voices through the earplug. They were all very calmed, informing every once in a while their status and activity. Jix kept describing the general context. When I was close enough to have a visual on the lieutenant, I said, “I’m here now. I’ll fake a call on my Holo-Pad. Tell me when the rest of the soldiers leave and I’ll make my move.”

“Right,” Jix said in a tranquil tone.

Moments later, I noticed a great deal of movement around my location. “Is something happening? Tell me what you see, Jix.”

“It seems the crew is ready to mobilize. Prepare yourself, you might have to act soon.”

I got even closer to the lieutenant’s position, still pretending to be in a call,

speaking to a loved one.

At every chance I got, I confirmed Huffen's location, who conveyed the impression to be finishing his intervention.

"Time to act, Renn. Huffen is heading for the vehicle, a couple of feet behind his current position."

I became very anxious but began walking towards the lieutenant nevertheless. I located Huffen and approached him directly. Indeed, the group of soldiers around the lieutenant had dispersed, yet, many troops were still around, and I didn't see any way for me to speak to him in a more private manner. Once I was just some feet away from them, before they got inside the car, Tharissia noticed me and I immediately heard the android saying: "Lieutenant, we've got company." It had already been fixed from our previous encounter.

Huffen turned around and saw me. I was looking at him directly in the eyes.

"Well now, who have we got here? I see you're in better shape now. You've got the nerve to come here again, kid?" he asked.

"I do," Precisely when I pronounced these last words, my knees felt heavy and I sort of lost balance for a second. I hadn't realized before just how nervous I really was. As soon as the lieutenant spoke, some of the soldiers in the surroundings looked at me and began to concede their attention to the unfolding situation.

"...And what do you seek, vagrant? To tell more lies, or did you simply come here to finally get arrested? Not that this concerns you in all matters of consequence, but you caused a lot of trouble to me the last time we met. The General wasn't at all willing to forget the fact that you managed to escape." He made a pause as he addressed a second lieutenant on the scene. "Lieutenant

Schmuler, apprehend this individual right away.”

As soon as I heard Huffen’s words, Jix said through the earplug, “Keep calm, Renn. I’ve got ya covered, I’ll tell you when to run...”

“Wait!” I suddenly shouted. “I certainly didn’t come here so you could ask these irrelevant questions, I came here to warn you one last time about the importance of the event which is to come. You saw me that day, Lieutenant, you know there were no lies, and I’m pretty sure the General knows this as well.” I made a pause. “So why haven’t you begun to evacuate the City? Are you going to ignore the fact that the entire population is in danger?” As soon as I finished this sentence, Huffen made a gesture with his hand, ordering the soldiers who were about to arrest me to stand by.

“Listen up, thug, before we take you in, let me tell you. The General perceived something in your words. He somehow linked your words to a major thing. I’m astonished with the show you put up that day and I witnessed the way you handled our friend Tharissia here. So I must recognize, in a way, I believe what you said that day. Seeing you here now only corroborates the fact, since you would have to be pretty stupid to risk your life by coming to tell us the same fantastic story yet again. But at the same time, it’s very naive for you to think we’re going to mobilize the entire City just because of what you said that day. Did you really think we were going to evacuate the whole City?” He made a pause, and I felt like a fool for believing even for a second that the Region might have actually listened to me.

“You’re hopeless...” Huffen continued, “Be that as it may, we’ll have time to speak later, when I go to the Region’s Detention Center. For now, thug, I admire your courage coming here, but it was a stupid idea.”

“You have to listen to me, Lieutenant. This being is indeed coming to this City in



a few days, and when it does, you better gather your men and..."

"Schmuler, please proceed," he interrupted.

When, once again, Huffen ordered the soldiers to arrest me, I heard Jix's voice through the earplug, "On the count of three, Renn. One..."

Tharissia seemed to have heard Jix's voice as well this time, for it got into alert mode and said, "Lieutenant, he's not alone, he..."

"Two..."

"There is someone else nearby, Lieutenant, sir. I just got access to his Holo-Pad and..."

"THREE!"

I instantly turned around and ran as fast as I could. The impact of Jix's bullet on the wall caused a second of commotion around us which, just as planned, gave me the perfect opportunity to find a pathway through which I might easily escape. While trying to get away as fast as I could, I saw some of the soldiers behind me; they seemed to be shocked by the pace I was moving at. A second shot stroke near them and they stopped trying to apprehend me. When I glanced back at the multitude, already fifty feet behind me or so, I realized that Tharissia was chasing me and she was just a couple of feet away. It didn't panic like the soldiers, who were mostly in fact looking for the shooter, but ran just when I did, and I now had to think fast.

Felina was stationed just a block away from my current position, on the street's cross section to the left. As soon as I noticed this, I asked Jix to help me out one last time. "Can you hear me Jix? Are you still there?"

“I’m here.”

“Shoot at the android one last time, directly at it, NOW!”

“I’ve got it, give me a second...” I heard Jix’s voice as I felt Tharissia closing in on me. “I’ve almost got it in my sight... Now, Renn!”

The moment I heard these last words, I turned and faced Tharissia. I saw it rejecting the bullet shot by Jix with its right arm instantaneously and without any effort, while taking a gun out and shooting towards what I assumed was Jix’s position. The humanoid performed this last action without taking its sight off me, and a second later, it attempted to hit me using all the momentum in its body. Tharissia was that close in fact, and I had been gathering energy on my right hand for long enough now. As I raised my left arm towards her, in a defensive bearing, I said out loud, “It’s not going to be like last time!”

I closed my eyes and generated the barrier at the precise moment she tried to hit me, only for that moment. In a split second, I saw the robot being pushed back, colliding forcefully against the field around me. I raised my right hand and delivered a full charge directly onto Tharissia. Its metal chest exploded while its entire body flew away near the group of soldiers, who were already coming towards me. Some of them backed off, while others kept coming, taking their guns out before attempting to neutralize me. I then sprinted towards the end of the block, as I yelled, “Felina, open the sewer, now!”

I reached the intersection and made a left, vanishing from their sight. Just a couple of feet away, I saw the sewer’s metal lid being lifted by Felina’s hands. As I drew near, I help her out and got inside. We placed the sewer cap back on its place and began running through the underground sewer canal. I could still hear all the commotion above us. I instinctively grabbed Felina’s hand as we got

away.

We kept heading forward until we reached a two-way path. “To the left,” Felina pointed out. It wasn’t until then that I realized she had been calling for Sully in whispers and that I remembered how Tharissia had shot at Jix’s direction before. We suddenly heard Sully’s voice. “We’re fine, we’re on our way to the house. Is everything ok over there?”

“Yes...” Felina answered, sighing. “Don’t forget to throw away your Holo-Pads on the way. We’ll see you there.”

We had all previously agreed that certain measures needed to be taken in order to ensure our escape. Felina and I threw our devices to the canal waters.

We ran for about ten minutes until we reached some metal ladder which, according to Felina, led to a street just a couple of blocks away from her place. “This is our exit,” she said in a rush. “Damn, I didn’t get to see you freak out about the rats.”

I went up before her and delicately opened the sewer metal lid. I took a glance at the streets which remained apparently unaltered by our previous encounter on Second Avenue. I told Felina it was safe for us to come out. Once we did, we placed the sewer cap back and began to walk as casually as we could. “Hold my hand,” she indicated. “Let’s try not to draw anybody’s attention.”

“Right...” I said, grasping her left hand.

We walked for a couple of minutes and finally arrived at the small wooden house. I didn’t see Jix’s bike, but I said nothing. They were supposed to arrive a bit before us and I imagined different possible scenarios in the blink of an eye. Felina got out the keys to the main entrance and tried to open the door but I

stopped her. "Let's go through the back door," I suggested.

We walked towards Felina's baroque back garden and saw Jix sitting on a chair. His left eye was being examined by Sully, who greeted us on the spot. "Wonderful, you guys are here."

"What happened, friend?" I asked.

"We'll talk inside, come on," Felina suggested as she opened the back door.

Once inside, Jix explained to us how Tharissia had shot him and how he didn't have any time to react. Though the bullet didn't get him, it did hit his sniper rifle and Jix assumed some pieces scattered and might have gotten into his left eye, for he felt the inflicted zone extremely warm and had retained his eye closed since then. Sully had barely had any time to inspect it, and it wasn't until this point that she asked Felina and me to bring her a couple of towels, hot water, a pair of scissors, her first aid kit and assigned us with additional tasks.

We spent the following hour on this process. Apparently, some metal pieces did pierce into Jix's skin next to his eye, and though the outcome seemed positive, there was a perceivable tenuous tension throughout the whole experience. At the final step of the process, Sully cut some of the towels and implemented an eye patch for Jix to wear. She placed it on his eyes and we all began treating Jix as if he couldn't see us anymore. "Oh, come on guys, I see ya," he said.

A moment of relaxation. The effect of the adrenaline slowly left our bodies. Sully then said, "Don't worry sniper Jix, you'll be okay within a day or two. You were quite lucky, half an inch to the left and I wouldn't been able to save your eye."

We all felt the release of tension created by the outcome of our operation and began joking around. "You three are amazing," I said once silence arose. "I'm

impressed. Nowadays everyone keeps quiet, helpless to act against the oppression of the collapsing system. Although Jix might say, “hmm, don’t say thank you,” and things like that, you have my total gratitude for what we accomplished today. It may not have looked like it, but I’m sure Lieutenant Huffen is even more aware now of our imminent situation, and the Region will be prepared in some way or another. So, I thank you.”

“Plus, those soldiers saw you running like the fastest rabbit. I’m sure you at least started a gossip, and that’s kinda what you wanted, isn’t it? I ain’t gonna say I’m not worried about my eye, but I accept your gratitude this time. Don’t abuse my kindness though, ya’ll regret it,” Jix said in a playful tone.

“I won’t,” I said with a smile on my face.

Region sirens invaded the streets for the rest of the day; at times we could even hear them going near the wooden house. We wondered what had caused this increasing movement, and if in fact we were the reason, but doubted it. Felina took out a couple of bed sheets that night for Sully and Jix to stay over. We were basically untraceable now that our Holo-Pads were gone, Jix assumed, “But then again,” he said, “I couldn’t predict that Tharissia will be able to access Renn’s device that fast, so, we’ll have to remain alert.”

“I’m terribly sorry that we had to throw them away. I’ll find a way to make it up to you,” I assured them.

“Hey, it’s fine, we agreed to it beforehand, didn’t we? Yours in the sewer, ours in the river. Besides, we can always get a new Holo-Pad, don’t worry Renn,” Sully tried to cheer me up.

That was the first night I felt the arrival of the abstract being so close to me. While having dinner, Felina asked how I knew the precise date of the event to

come. I explained them the few things I understood regarding the primordial language of nature.

“...The what?” Jix asked.

“Well, you’ll be listening to a kid attempting to elaborate, since I myself have no clue on this matter, no way of explaining things out, really. All I can say is that, decades ago, I began noticing weird coincidences between certain numbers and certain events, thing which led me to study the roots of some of the languages we use here in the north, and the numbers associated to them.”

“Hmm, ok, and?” Jix asked.

“Yeah, so? You didn’t answer my question,” Felina pointed out.

“I’m getting there... So, I realized that there was a deeper pattern behind these things, there were no hardcore coincidences between these apparently unconnected facts, but logical assumptions. Nature speaks to us in this way, to all of us, in many ways, subtle, but not coincidental for sure. You see? Once a link between two apparently separate things is made visible, it cannot be undone.” I said as I made a pause, lifted my left arm and asked in whispers for the cup next to Jix to levitate. Once I put it down, I continued. “By understanding the numbers and their deeper relationship with our language, with the sky, with world events, the way in which synchronicity expresses itself, certain things can be predicted, or assumed, inferred, because of this inner connection with certain numbers, and that is how I’m predicting that date, because all coincides, yet, not coincidentally.”

“Do you mean, like, nothing is meaningless, you say? I don’t get it. Is this why you are able to move things with your mind?” Sully asked.

“Yes, partially. I had to demonstrate this to myself in order to believe it. It all resides in the realization of our nature, which is an expression of the matrix of reality. And whether we think it is coincidental or not, what we interpret can lead us to strange paths indeed. To me, at least to me, reality speaks in numbers, and feelings, of course. I was able to deduce certain things because of my mind’s particular looking glass, if you will, which manifests in reality, along with it, and which, ultimately, is a part of the eternal itself.”

“Wow, what? You sound so fundamentalist, Renn, but your words become more believable when you deflect bullets, or create electricity on your hands, so... I wish I could understand ya better,” Jix said.

“Well you can, therefore listen to me and try to understand me, for we are all taught in a certain way, regarding the material, the way of the ignorant mind, which is indoctrinated upon the ways of the Region. When I saw weeks ago all these young minds enlisting in the Program... they asked me about a PPI number, some sort of ID or some shit... Their minds are so far from knowledge, true knowledge regarding the logic of harmony and nature. This makes me insane. There is simply much more to reality than we want to believe, and I wish for everyone to know about it,” I arrogantly said. I felt all sorts of ideas rushing through my mind.

“Fucking shit Renn, yes man, what is going on with that new attitude, uh? You do sound like an absolutist, but I like it,” Sully mentioned.

I laughed, “Well, it’s only because I’m so excited about all of this... even if what the future holds seems terrible for now, I can’t hide my real feelings towards reality.”

They all looked at each other. A moment later, Felina said, “Well don’t get too excited, old man. We must be prepared, remember? What are your plans when

this thing comes anyhow?”

“Well, that... That I haven’t thought about. I think this being will be looking for me, as I will be looking for him. I don’t know how we are going to communicate, but we must, for that will solve my doubts, and his, in a way. That is, in part, why he is coming, do you see? For now, that is my main assumption.”

The three of them looked at each other yet again. Felina then added, “As long as we are trying to evacuate the people, you can count on us, Renn. Isn’t that right?”

“Of course,” Both Jix and Sully affirmed.

“Indeed. I believe once the Generals and the Vote Casters see this being with their own eyes, they’ll try to capture it, for sure. This may be our chance to focus on evacuating the people, but where to, Felina? Once the people are out of the City, then what?” I asked.

Felina’s house phone rang and she answered. “Hold on a second,” she said.

During this interlude, Sully and Jix explained to me how Felina’s father, along with other businessmen, had implemented an autonomous Civil Center some miles away from the City. They finished the project even before the hacking-attack ignited the crisis. Information was key amongst those who played politics and, apparently, Felina’s father was well aware of things before the situation finally came up in the Wires, and on the streets, for that matter.

I was impressed, to say the least. They told me that if our situation required it so, the Civil Center would be mostly available, at least for a couple of hundred people. “We needed to confirm the allegations. Felina’s father is aware of you and our circumstances. He stands for good principles, I assure ya.” Jix



mentioned.

“Alright... I believe you, but why didn't you mention any of this before?” I asked.

“It wasn't the right time, etc. We were getting ready to evacuate the people regardless. Your situation only puts us a couple of days ahead of planned.”

“I see...” I meditated for a second.

“Are you mad?” Sully asked, “We are sorry that we kind of hid some things from you. We were not using you in any way today, Renn, but we needed to assess the situation. We only care about rescuing as much people as we can in these, apparently, last days of the City. We needed to verify your intentions.”

“Yes, I understand,” I said as I looked at them. I wasn't angry in any way. This didn't change anything for me. I then saw Felina coming back into the room. Sully told her what they had just explained to me.

“Oh, well now you know. I'm sorry Renn. And, actually...” Felina made a pause, “That was my father on the phone. He wants to meet with us.”

“Wow, the old Wolf wants to see us, huh?” Jix asked. “I guess we did a good job today and word spread already.”

“That's right, although not with the general public. The information about Renn neutralizing Tharissia reached my father and his men's circles. They're going to proceed with the evacuation in the next days. That's why he wants to see us, specially you, Renn.”

“Don't worry, he's not as badass as he usually is when Felina is around,” Sully mentioned. At this particular juncture, I remembered the man Felina was

speaking with that day at the coffee shop. I wondered if that man was the old Wolf.

“Enough, guys. He wants us to come to one of the outposts tomorrow night,” Felina informed us.

“Should I remind you that’s the night before the entity is supposed to materialize?” I prompted.

“Yep, that’s right, I know. Still, Renn, would you come with us? Please, I’m asking you,” Felina addressed me in a formal, yet, personal manner.

“Of course, I’ll come with you.”

We went to sleep around midnight. The next morning, I woke up before Felina and the rest. I headed directly to the river in order to meet with Elkbar one last time. As soon as he saw me, he inquired about my absence the day before. I explained to him how busy I had been and how that day was probably the last time I was going to help him out. “Ah, that’s a shame...” he said. “We’ll have to get as many fish as we can today, ok?”

We caught plenty. Though I did notice how the river surrounded us with its beauty in previous occasions, that day was peculiar. We fished until two hours past midday. Once Elkbar felt satisfied, I explained to him how I was planning on cooking the fish myself for some friends this time. “I see... a good idea. Here, take five fish instead,” he said. I thanked him one last time for the opportunity and stumbled upon the chance to warn him about what was coming. Once our conversation was over, I headed back to Felina’s place. While on my way, I came across a disturbing situation between some Region officers and a couple of what appeared to be vagabonds, searching for food inside a waste container near Third Avenue. The officers seemed to be trying to get these people inside one of

those flying units. Basically, they were getting one inside while kicking the other one who lied on the floor. I noticed more of these high-tech vehicles arriving at the avenue and immediately knew I couldn't intervene. I felt a strong need to express my discontent against this violence, nevertheless, I kept walking towards the small wooden house, feeling disempowered by my self-centered condition.

Upon arriving, I saw Jix getting his motorcycle out of Felina's back yard. I noticed the fact that he wasn't wearing the eye patch anymore; his injury seemed to have healed already. He looked at me and said, "Hey, Renn, all well? Uh, that is a lot of fish you've got there. I'll see ya later at the outpost, gotta take care of some things before."

"Sure, friend. I'm glad to see that your injury is doing better. We'll meet later then."

"Of course it's doing better. See ya," he said.

I went to the back of the wooden house and knocked on the door. Felina saw me through the window and let me in. As she noticed the bucket I was carrying, she asked, "What's that, uh? Raw this time?"

"I went fishing again with my friend Elkbar. Please, Felina, I need you to help me cook a decent dinner."

"What, why?!"

"I want to thank you guys, but I might mess up the kitchen, so..."

"Oh, ok... You're not giving me any other options here, uh? Don't worry, of course I'll help."

Once we prepared the fish, Felina added, "You shouldn't have gone out today without telling us. Remember how I found you that day? Like a scared little boy in the middle of the street. We don't have any way to communicate now that our Holo-Pads are gone, remember? What if they saw you?"

"Yeah, you are probably right, I suppose I didn't think about that."

"Well, how didn't you? Aren't you, you know, supposed to be the genius and all?"

"Not really, no one said that..." I answered, as I gazed at the garden through one of the windows.

Sully was out. Felina and I, well, more like Felina herself, cooked the five fish Elkbar had given me. Every once in a while, I helped her here and there, though it felt like she was only trying to make me feel useful. By the time Felina had just put the fish in the oven, Sully arrived and we sat at the table. She mentioned something about Jix's rifle being repaired as we spoke. "Of course, that's why he left," I thought. Hereupon I found out he had two younger brothers; according to Sully, he was very protective towards them and he was always trying to help them out in his spare time.

He was to meet us in the outpost, so we kept his dish ready for when we came back. While having dinner, I asked Felina why she stayed in this side of the City. "Well, for starters, we wouldn't enlist into the Program, right?" She looked at Sully, "Just like you, there are things we don't agree upon. Second, the help, the real help, is needed on this side of town, the unattended one, silly, you are silly and old, you know? What's the real question here?" she inquired.

"Hey, quit it," I said, laughing. Felina and I certainly had developed our relationship even further during the past few days. My plan of getting away from them once the operation was completed had failed and I found myself

consciously allowing this. Still, this vague sensation of fear towards me acting selfishly was kept, as if something was going to happen to them. The more I knew them, the more this feeling arose on the surface as well. “What I was wondering was if this house belongs to you, I mean, did you earn the credits to get it? How did you? That’s impressive.”

“Well...” Felina made a pause, “I myself payed for the house with the savings I had from all the private operations I’ve been involved with since I was sixteen. The house then belonged to my mother. She passed away a year ago, and now, well now the house belongs to me again.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to...” I tried to interrupt, but she continued.

“It’s ok, don’t worry. She had a good life. I know she lived a happy life... and just so you know, it is really the Region who owns this wooden house, what do you think would happen if I stopped paying the taxes?”

We remained silent for a moment and changed the subject as we dined. Eventually, I mentioned how I, though it sounded absurd, had been thinking about actually teaching the people how to do what I did once the crisis was over.

“Hah, that certainly sounds fun,” Felina deemed.

“I would like to learn too, for sure,” Sully added. “Imagine how much I could speed things up with my patients, huh? Ha! Teach us already, Renn.”

“Maybe once we are safe in the Civil Center I will. I mean, if we all end up there, that’s what I’m trying to say. Ha, I’m already assuming we’ll be able to stay there and haven’t even asked Felina’s father or anyone in charge,” I laughed again. “I’ve told you about the Region ‘momentarily’ taking the place where I used to live, right? I still haven’t given up the idea of ensuring a place to sleep in, in the

near future, I suppose...”

After an hour or so, we prepared to go to the outpost. It was nighttime already, around eight thirty. Felina got some robes for us to wear out of a wooden chest. These were the typical type of clothing worn by most of the people in the City.

We must have walked for around twenty minutes when, out of nowhere, Felina said, “It’s here.” She knocked at a particularly beautiful metal-engraved door and we immediately heard a voice coming from the other side.

“Yes?”

“It’s me, Felina. I’ve come to see the Wolf.”

“Right, Felina.” A man said as the door opened. He was wearing a stylish Holo-shell. The entrance to this building was situated in a small alley, across a tiny bridge. It was close to the so called danger zone and the ancient architecture was still more rigid here than in other areas. The whole City had a sort of baroque style, mainly on the larger streets and major avenues. There was a certain touch to the buildings and features around which caught my eye.

“Come inside.”

The three of us went through the small building’s front door and walked past the hall towards the waiting room. “He’s upstairs,” said the man who accompanied us as we left our robes on a coat rack. We then went up to the second floor. I gazed at a couple of faces and the place’s decor. There seemed to be women and men all over the place and there were flags hanging on some of the walls. There was a paper stamped on one of the walls of the staircase. It read: “The earth provides as the autonomous man walks upon the land, to walk even further.” A second sign said: “No man shall suffer in vain, no man shall abuse the trust bestowed

upon him.” Some other had the words: “The mind creates the hierarchy. The hierarchy requests the credits. The credits spread the bloodshed.”

As we arrived to the second floor, I realized this outpost was actually a part of the rebellion against the Region. I didn’t even know there was one before meeting Felina. I thought the Locrians were the legitimate resistance but lately I was being introduced to different ideas. For some reason or another, I found myself pondering on the words I had just read on the walls.

Two men were guarding the master suite. As we approached, we heard Jix coming from our right, “Hey, here ya are.”

We greeted him and gathered to speak to the guards directly.

“Felina,” one of them spoke.

“Hey, Bagnon, am I right?”

“Yes, madam.”

“Bagnon, we’re here to see the Wolf.”

“He’s expecting you, please come inside,” said Bagnon, as he and the second guard opened the finely carved wooden door.

A huge library was then revealed to us, lightened by candles. There was a desk at the back wall, piles of books everywhere and a couple of tables displaying several maps and other instruments. Two men and a woman were speaking quietly by the desk. We approached them. I was amazed by the whole atmosphere. As we came closer to them, one of the men, the one standing up, said farewell to the other and addressed us before leaving. The woman left as

well. We were now alone with whom I assumed was the Wolf. Though he was still sitting down, he seemed like the strong, tall type of man. He had a thick, well-shaved black beard and blue piercing eyes. These eyes reminded me of Felina's at first, though slightly different in color and depth.

"Father..." Felina spoke.

The man stood up and approached us. He greeted us from left to right, first Jix, Sully, his daughter and lastly, me. He had a strong handshake. Once in front of me, he said, "You must be Renn."

"Indeed. My pleasure, sir."

"Hmm," He uttered a sound as he looked at me. "The pleasure is mine. Please, walk with me."

We got out of the master suite while he asked Jix a couple of questions. They discussed the result of a video production, and later he asked him about a food delivery operation, or so I understood. He then addressed Sully to speak with her about the Medical Center located at the Other Side of the City. I hadn't realized before that the place Sully had mentioned was actually on the Other Side. I wondered for a second about my mother and the wellbeing of all the people I knew who had enlisted in the Program. Without a Holo-Pad, I was completely unaware of their situation.

We kept walking through the hallways. As we came upon an open roof, sort of an inner garden within the building, the Wolf sat on a bench and asked us to join him. We did as he began to talk.

"The moon, the beautiful night. The sun. Things we give for granted, yet, they're so special."



We all remained silent. He continued.

“Do you know why I asked my daughter to bring you here tonight, Renn?”

“I, I really have no idea.”

“I don’t ask just anybody to come here, to our “secret” outpost. Autonomy is something rare in our times, although it shouldn’t be this way. Radical moves are always being made in politics and having a place like this is a, luxury, I appreciate that, still...” he made a pause as he looked at the night sky. “You know, Renn? I don’t agree with being called the resistance. We’re not actually resisting the system. If that statement was true, the people would have stopped the banks before the collapse even took place. I prefer to think of ourselves as information providers, or something along those terms. Perhaps you have heard by now the name Insomnia, hmm?” he asked, addressing me directly.

“Yes, I have, sir.”

“Well of course you have, everyone has, since the narrative laid on the Wires accused them of being the hacker group who broke into the markets. You know, Renn? We have been working with this group and many others for decades now, stealing compromising documents from the Region’s many databases. I don’t know your level of awareness about the many layers of lies and secrets within our ruling system. I understand if all of this seems mad to you, so feel free to stop me if you wish so. Now, as diverse underground groups began to join our movement, more and more people began to see the misleading information purposely provided in the Old, as well as in the New Wires, Renn. Our systems’ structure is founded on the premise of disguise, intrinsic lies build upon the public’s awareness.” He glanced at the floor, then at Felina and smiled to her. “As we were growing exponentially, someone, somehow broke into our private

server and all the work that we had built up to that point. A week later, Insomnia was blamed for the collapse of the credit system, and since then, many of us are being followed by the City's authority. You may have realized by now that the Region is basically starving people to death faster than before, and only those who accept the Program's axioms are allowed food, etc. So, this finally brings us to the point at hand, concerning you, of course. My daughter has described something to me, something which you can apparently do. I have also heard about yesterday's situation with Huffen from other sources. Finally, if I understand correctly, tomorrow something very dangerous will be arriving into the City according to you, is that correct?" the Wolf asked.

"Yes, I believe tomorrow is the day, sir, though I lack comprehension towards the phenomenon itself."

"I understand..." he paused. "Felina, Sully, Jix, please leave us. Attend the necessities of Griora instead. She's down at the basement. I will speak with you later."

"Right, yes, sir," Jix said.

"But..." Felina hesitated. She then said, "We'll see you later."

The Wolf and I stayed in the inner garden by ourselves.

"You see, Renn, the tech firms, the contractors, they're all part of the market meltdown. Steep profit, big money comes with certain decisions, certain lies, misinformation, and blunt power is indeed what some in high positions seek... They use the entire system to ridicule the truth, threatening anyone who wishes to push it forth. Now that I gave you an introduction, let's move on. I want to see a fierce example of your mental skill, if you wouldn't mind me instigating." He promptly said.

“Ah, not at all, I... I’ll show you, by all means.”

Hereupon I thought of a situation which would cause no harm to the building nor the narrow garden itself and noticed a huge rock just some feet away from us. I closed my eyes and asked the rock to move upwards, raising lightly my right arm and pointing my index finger at it. Once the heavy rock levitated fifteen inches or so above the floor, I lifted my hand abruptly while murmuring as it rapidly flew ten or twelve feet across the air. I then slowly placed the rock back to its original spot.

At that moment I realized that the Wolf’s gesture had utterly changed. He might as well have not expected me to do anything at all, but as soon as he saw the rock back on the floor, he was frozen.

“I believe much more than lifting rocks can be achieved, I’m only beginning to experiment with these abilities, so forgive me, sir, if my example was a bit simple.”

“How... How can you do this? What’s going on here?” The Wolf asked after an unpleasant silence.

“Well, it’s all about knowing, believing and understanding reality in terms of numbers, frequencies...” I replied.

“This is marvelous. You’re something else... the sorts of which I have never met before. You are gifted, son. Furthermore, somehow... Somehow I feel there is much more to this riddle than what your words suggest... Wait a second...” he made a pause. “Could this have anything to do with...? Could this be...? This is ambiguous... You’re probably what the Region is looking for, you were foolish enough to get into their den before, and by now, I’m sure they know.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, somewhat intrigued.

“What I mean is that the Region might have had some knowledge on these matter, even before you did. I may be wrong, though... Yet, allow me to explain. Over a month ago, we got our hands on a particular document, one of the last ones that we managed to secure. It detailed the appearance of some strange readings captured in the light emitted by the sun. Concrete patterns, or something along those lines. It also spoke about the possible repercussions on certain humans, strange repercussions. At the time this document seemed meaningless to us, but it might just be connected to you, somehow, who comes out of nowhere. I’m not sure, I wonder... What is the answer to this riddle?” asked the Wolf, as he looked at the sky once again.

“That doesn’t make any sense. I discovered these abilities thanks to my realization regarding the primordial language of nature. I don’t think it has anything to do with the light emitted by the sun, as you imply. This piece of information would seem to me unconnected in any way.”

“Perhaps, perhaps... I’m merely suggesting, joining the dots just now, since this paper has been a puzzle to us. Neither Lieutenant Huffen nor General Korsla are aware of its existence that I know of. This document was meant to be seen only by the highest spheres.”

“I see...”

All of this seemed quite out of synchronicity to me. Maybe I was refusing to recognize a new clue, this extra piece in the puzzle.

“At any rate, I needed to see with my own eyes what I have just witnessed. You must be the one human, perhaps, who can make a difference. You’re special,

Renn.”

“I’m sorry to disagree again, sir. I mean... we are all special. I presume anyone, almost every single human can develop these abilities, it’s just a matter of...”

“Are you a mad man?” the Wolf interrupted, all of a sudden. “Can’t you see the obvious? Do you think just anyone can achieve what you have done?”

“I... I don’t know...” I turned my sight towards the floor, as I continued. “I suspect anyone can, it’s just a matter of changing... of realizing the belief structure within our minds and its relation as a part of the whole, yet, it may be complicated to understand reality in a homogenous way.”

“In a homogenous way, you said?” Felina’s father asked.

“Yes, it takes years to realize, but... Look, I’m sure someone else in the past has figured out this secret or whatever it is, existing within our minds. I cannot be the only one, it’s not that I’m something special, I’m sure about that, I just...”

“Don’t you realize? It’s either that or the document we found must have all the relevance. Regardless, Renn, there is something in you, whether you see it or not. I sensed it the moment I saw you... It’s so obvious to me. Didn’t you just mentally-move that stone over there? You can’t be this blind... If tomorrow’s event is indeed to take place, it involves you, personally, isn’t that correct? Can you then still deny the...”

“You are wrong, fool, you are the ignorant who doesn’t realize.” I interrupted out of nowhere. High amplitude in my voice.

Following this abrupt conjugation of words, I felt ashamed and began feeling completely ill. I was forced to put one knee down to the ground while holding my

chest with my right hand. The Wolf swiftly stood up in order to help me, but I refused his assistance by making a sign with my left arm. Once the moment passed, I recovered myself and looked at the Wolf directly.

“I’m profoundly sorry, I don’t know what came unto me. It wasn’t my intention to say that, I...”

“It’s ok, relax. I’m the one who is sorry for dragging you into this situation. I do, however, need to tell you one last thing.” The Wolf seemed serious, an opaque expression took over him. He didn’t seem to care much about the fact that I called him a fool seconds ago.

“Renn, tomorrow, if the City is actually in danger, I will along with my partners evacuate part of the population, a small one, I must say. Moreover, you can count on me and some of my men to back you up. Felina told me that you believe this being will speak to you, is that right? What I mean is, if you need us to do so, we can certainly help.”

“Thank you, thank you very much,” I whispered, but couldn’t look at him directly in the eyes. A second later I said, “I cannot accept this, sir. You will need all your men during the evacuation. With all due respect, I don’t deserve your offering. This is something I must face by myself. I appreciate your gesture so much, deeply, really, and I’m so sorry about what I just said, I...”

“Renn, it’s ok, son, you don’t have to apologize, I...”

“I am very sorry, sir, I have to go,” I yelled.

In the blink of an eye, I found myself running hastily towards the outpost’s entrance. I saw people’s faces passing by as I came across the hall that led to the street. “Open up,” I sort of commanded the keeper standing by the front door.

He did, and once I was out, I felt the need to rush over to the forest. I ran as fast as I could towards the City's south entrance. I did not care if anyone saw me, I felt anxiety and a boiling rush of ideas, like never before, like a mad man indeed.

Once near the south gate, I glanced at the many officers patrolling the area. Some of them noticed me and began to shout, and I, regardless, rushed towards the one hundred and fifty feet tall wall which enclosed the City and climbed it without effort. Once at the top, I grabbed impulse and jumped outside the City. I realized then that I was almost three hundred feet above the water level of the canal on the ground, full of momentum, and suddenly felt the cold fear of the fall. As I gazed upon the ground and some trees that marked the beginning of the forest, I prepared myself to create the barrier at the exact moment of the impact. I managed somehow to keep the barrier around me for a couple of seconds, and this protected me from any harm. I rolled for what had to be at least fifty feet straight, stood up, and rushed towards my usual spot deep within the forest. At some point I lowered my pace and began to think about what had just happened and what was about to come, to be precise, in a few hours now.

Once deep in the forest, I sat down and closed my eyes. I began whispering to all sorts of stones and branches around me, making them float in the air. My Holo-Pad was gone now. I set on fire a couple of branches on the floor using the electric current flowing from my hand. I remained seated while thinking about Vino, my brother, my mother, Julie and all the people from my previous life. I then thought about Felina and my recent involvement with her acquaintances. I was feeling something inside, something new that I hadn't experienced in the past. This conspicuous sensation was kept within me for some time until it slowly faded away, and I was finally able to conciliate sleep.

A decade ago I could have never imagined that by studying the relationship between prime numbers and other self-evident characteristics of reality I would embark myself into this madness. I couldn't believe either the way I had talked to

the Wolf hours ago. I felt the presence of the abstract being getting close to me, closer than ever. I could no longer contain the expectation, the fear crawling inside me. The City was about to experience something out of this world, and I, I had to be high above my conscious level in order to face it. I was finally going to speak to the nonexistent.



## Chapter 7

The following morning I woke up all of a sudden, hardly remembering any of my dreams while feeling completely rested. As I glanced at the horizon, being dazzled by the sunlight, my mind adjusted back to reality and I headed straight to the City.

Although I simply disappeared from everyone's sight last night, I decided to go back to Felina's. Once in the south entrance, I saw a large group of people standing outside, jabbering as a line of guards tried to keep order. I realized it wasn't as late in the morning as I thought and made a left in order to get to the sewer canal which had helped me evade the City's restrictions before. I eventually reached the gate with the missing square and infiltrated the City through the waters. I had to be extra careful on the way to the wooden house, for the south side of the City was overrun with Region officers. I heard a loud message broadcast on the City speakers far away, and though I couldn't discern it's meaning, I wondered if the being, somehow, had already materialized. As I rushed towards Felina's, I noticed a group of people watching a holographic projection which appeared to be a message to the public. I came as close as I could in order to listen to it. A woman was seen speaking about a disturbance appearing on Ninth avenue, without giving any specifics. Some images of the avenue were then shown, displaying a partially evacuated area but showing no other irregularities. There appeared to be some people gathered around a certain spot, talking to each other. A military perimeter could be seen on the back. The woman then appeared again and asked the public to remain calm. She proceeded to explain that everyone was to remain in their homes and that anyone found on the street was to be treated as a suspect and arrested. I stopped watching and continued my way to Felina's.

Just like before, I arrived all wet to the small wooden house and knocked on the

back door. I glimpsed at Sully acknowledging me through the window as she told someone about my arrival. In an instant, Felina opened the door; she seemed angry, and I had no doubt regarding the reason.

“Well? What are you doing there? Come inside already,” she said.

I noticed Jix and a few others that I hadn’t met before were already there.

“Here he is,” Felina said. “Do you know what’s happening as we speak? Your story is already materializing in the middle of the City...! Why did you disappear last night? What are we going to do Renn, why...?”

“Hey, relax. It’s alright now. It wasn’t my intention to...” I tried to elaborate as Felina came towards me and I held her, for the first time. I noticed dry tears in her eyes. She softly punched me in the chest.

“...You stupid, and why did you call my father a fool? He was only offering to help you and...”

“I know, I’m deeply sorry. Just like I told him, I don’t know what came over me. His words, somehow, triggered something and... Please, accept my apology. I will apologize again to him the next time we meet. That’s all I can say for the moment.” There was a pause.

“Yeah... I suppose that’s alright, old man. But never do it again.”

“I won’t, I promise. Thank you... for the comprehension. Now, I saw on the Wires a public message and...”

“I was waiting for someone to bring that up,” one of the unknown individuals interrupted. He was a tall man. He had a deep scar in one of his eyes and was

wearing a long coat. He had a machine-gun hanging from his back, as well as a long carefully-brushed ponytail. "I'm sure there's a lot to explain but time is running out. Let's get on the specifics of the operation here. Please, mister Renn Barsak, come with me. We..."

"You don't have to be so formal," I interrupted. "Renn is fine. Let's proceed."

"Hold on there. You go get a shower, then we proceed, ok?" Felina intervened, "You're making a mess already. Look at the floor and...!"

I laughed as I saw the rest of them attempting to do so as well. "The world might be about to fall and Felina is so meticulously bothered by the canal waters. Of course, I'll be right back."

They all laughed, specially Felina, as I rushed to the second floor.

This time it only took a few minutes for me to get out of the shower. Although Felina's drier machine was extremely effective, my clothes remained a bit wet. I couldn't believe what I was being presented with. "Could this be an illusion? Am I actually awake? What the hell is going on?" I asked myself as I rushed down the stairs. They were already waiting for me at the table. Coffee was served. There were fruits in a bowl as well as bread and butter on a bronze platter. Once I seated, I had breakfast while they explained to me that, little after I had ran away the night before, the authorities had received a report about something that resembled a strange space aberration; there was a distortion in the air.

"Our sources caught this message too. Hours later, some information was released to the public," Felina added.

A perimeter was established around five hours past midnight and, instead of evacuating the civilian population, the Region asked for everyone to stay put.

Felina then described how her father and his faction were already mobilizing some of the people to the Civil Center outside the City through a secondary road.

“By the way, I’m Torken,” said the man who had spoken before. There were two others, who introduced themselves as Uthor and Melli. One was a technician and, apparently, he could hack all sorts of devices. He was to provide us with intel the whole time by staying at the wooden house; he already had equipment in place, monitors, cables and such. The other one was a woman, rogue-like character, who had experience, or so she said, in breaking people out of unfair apprehensions before they concluded.

“So, listen closely,” I said at some point. “I believe that the so-called disturbance, this weird phenomenon which seemed to have appeared on Ninth Avenue, will let the being through, or will become the being itself, eventually, or something along those lines. I don’t know how long it will take, though. Now, by speaking to this being, I believe I can, sort of, convince him to dematerialize back into the non-existent. I know all of this sounds so strange, and I...”

“We’re listening, keep going,” asserted Melli, the rogue-like woman.

“Well, that’s about it. You guys just cover me while the being and I have our talk. I’m sure the Region will try to intervene, of course. Now look, this is very important, if there is nothing you can do, simply leave me to my fortune. I do not wish for any of you to be harmed. I explained this to the Wolf last night, but I see he sent you anyway...”

“Our mission is to help you in any way we can, and so we will. We’ll be under cover near you, at all times. Let’s communicate with these,” Torken said as he handed me an earplug and a X-5 model.

“Wow, is this for me?” I asked him.

“The Wolf asked us to send his regards. We follow him for he conducts himself in the path of righteousness, or so he has, so far,” he made a pause. “Do you follow something, Renn? What do you follow?”

This Torken character reminded me of the Elder from my dreams. I thought about the Wolf, and how poorly I treated him.

“Thank you,” I said as I closed my eyes, pondering further on his question.

“Not so fast. Before you take that, allow me...” said Uthor as he grabbed the Holo-Pad from my hands.

We waited for all the devices to be ready and in place. I spoke further with Torken and Melli, as well as with Jix and Sully regarding our plan. Felina had been in a call for a while now. When it ended, she said, “I have news. One of my father’s sources just got access to a set of cameras on Ninth Avenue.”

“Let me see that,” interrupted Uthor, who abruptly turned back to the monitor behind him.

“And...?” Asked Sully.

“And, allegedly, the thing has now become several feet larger.”

We all looked at each other. The moment was coming even closer.

“I’ve got it, come watch this,” said the technician.

We all went to look at the monitor and saw indeed the footage from several security cameras which displayed a weird looking thing, a transparent-like

distortion in the middle of the avenue.

“What are we waiting for? Let’s go check it out ourselves,” Torken suggested.

“Give me a minute, man, I’m almost done with your Holo-Pads. Use the server labeled A-1 on the open construct. The channel is called “Eternity” We’ll be all able to hear each other there, privately.”

“Right on,” Torken said.

“Ironic,” I thought.

Though little was spoken about the course of action ahead of us, we revisited the plan for a minute. “We’ll remain hidden until we have eyes on it. Let’s stand by until then. Jix will be positioned nearby, right? Felina and Sully will stay here with Uthor. The rest of us will be in our posts,” I pointed out.

“Sure thing. Your Holo-Pads should give you access to a vehicle a couple of blocks away, spot marked on the map.” Melli added. “Just in case you have to be even faster than they say you are.”

“Ha, thoughtful.”

“All settled then. Is everything ready, Uthor?” Torken asked.

“Yeah man, all set.”

Once outside, we said farewell. Felina expressed to me her desire to come with us, as well as a feeling of emptiness. “Just get rid of that thing and come back. We have so much to do in the Civil Center, Renn, don’t we?”

“Right...” I said as we came close for a second. Once we briefly held each other, I looked away and added, “If anything happens, tell your father I...”

“What are you talking about? Nothing’s gonna happen, old man. Remember you told us you were going to teach both Sully and me? Listen here, silly, you are the one who speaks to stones and predicted this thing coming, aren’t you? I’m trusting your word on this as well.”

I looked deep into her eyes. I then nodded faintly, “You are right... We’ll catch on later, I better go now.”

Jix went his own way. As he got on his bike I had the chance to thank him one last time. His eye had healed now, and he seemed positive about the outcome of our mission. “Do what you gotta do, Renn,” he said. “Oh, and by the way, last night, when we got back, I had some of that fish of yours. I’ll admit it wasn’t that awful, ok?”

“Right now you would be criticizing Felina’s cooking, but alright, I’ll take that as a compliment.” We laughed for a moment.

I joined Melli and Torken who, just like myself, were wearing robes. It took us fifteen minutes to walk to Ninth Avenue. A couple of guards were blocking the access; tanks, flying vehicles, a few piloted mechs and some officers could be seen in the distance. We then walked towards a diagonal street nearby. Once there, Uthor gave us access to the footage of the many cameras placed all along the avenue. We saw on our Holo-Pads the densely populated perimeter. There were many civilians and some journalists. It seemed like only a selected few were allowed inside the area where the now big distortion was located. There was a separation of at least six hundred feet between them, or so I estimated. Things were beginning to look difficult.

“I’m in place,” we heard Jix after some time. The City’s speakers were playing a loud message: “To all citizens of the Northern Federation, keep calm and remain at home. The Region is performing an exercise, we repeat, the Region is performing an exercise. The Citizenship will be informed once it’s over.”

“They now call it an exercise, huh?” I asked.

“Yes,” Felina answered through the private call. “That is the consensus in the Wires, though it doesn’t seem like the people is willing to believe their story... Many still theorize and are treating the topic apart from the Region’s diagnosis.”

“Hey, guys, there is something happening right now, you better check it out!” We heard Uthor say as we took a peek at the footage on our devices. The aberration was now displaying mutable, iridescent colors on its surface, with a sort of a chromed effect. It was changing its shape slowly, as if it was a big piece of moving fabric.

“Let’s move it people, let’s get closer,” Torken signaled.

We used the crowd of onlookers to camouflage ourselves until we got out of the diagonal street and blended in, always looking at the ethereal distortion still far away from us. I was analyzing our different options in order to get closer to it. While inspecting the general panorama, I noticed a multistory parking garage just next to the area where the distortion was located, which seemed to be a great spot for us to catch the show and stay close enough.

“Alright,” I said, “Torken, Melli, follow me. The rest, stand by.”

We slowly moved away from the civilians towards the back of one of the buildings which stood before the military perimeter. As we secluded ourselves, we realized that there was no back ladder nor any apparent way for us to get to



the roof.

“So, now what? How do we climb?” Melli inquired.

“Alright, let’s try this,” I pronounced these words while attempting to lift her body with my mind, as she tried to climb through the back wall of the building with my help. Though this method seemed strange at first, it did work out, and a minute later, both Torken and Melli were up in the roof. I jumped the fifty feet tall wall at once and saw their expression of amazement as I landed, first clinging to the edge of the roof. We then moved closer to the disturbance.

We awaited on the upper level of the parking garage. We now had a good view of the scene. The distortion seemed to have grown indeed.

“Check that out, Huffen, Korsla and others are located some feet below your current position. Stay hidden,” Jix mentioned, and I glimpsed at the group of generals below us. They seemed to be considering their options, for they were pointing at different locations while explaining something that I couldn’t hear to a few soldiers around them. A couple of militarized humandroids joined them, Tharissia too, and a second woman, who was most likely a humandroid as well, for the resemblance was uncanny.

Suddenly, a general standing next to Korsla appointed one of his men with a certain task, for I saw them all intriguingly looking at him. Hereupon the one soldier took a long, deep breath while turning around, as he began walking towards the disturbance. “What is going on? What are they trying here?” I asked myself.

As the soldier came closer and closer to the area, I noticed Tharissia and the rest of the humandroids completely immersed in the phenomenon, gathering information with their central processing units. Once the soldier came close to the

space aberration, he disappeared out of nowhere, as a chaotic pattern of colors was displayed for a nano second over the distortion itself.

I was impressed out of my limits, for we all witnessed the soldier, apparently, forced out of existence, or something that I couldn't explain at that time. Even now, I still regard that moment as the one in my life where I was most amazed. Deep inside me, in the center of what I regarded as my own existence, I pictured for the first time the realization of that which I felt but couldn't speak of. Somehow, this soldier disappearing open my inner eyes to what I was involved with, what I had forced upon reality, upon myself and now, upon other people as well. Torken then looked at me and uttered just a couple of words, "What the...?"

The group of generals and everyone who was close enough to see what had just happened seemed puzzled out of their minds. This strange silent atmosphere lasted for a minute or so. In the meantime, I noticed Tharissia and the other droids talking to the general next to Korsla. They were informing him about something which seemed important to them. At this point, a group of bodyguards opened the door of a uniquely fancy black vehicle parked just a few feet away, allowing two distinctive men and a third one out. This last gentlemen seemed to be speaking rather hastily to the others, until he was eventually stopped by some of the bodyguards. The two remaining gentlemen approached Korsla and his group. They conversed for a couple of minutes. "What are they saying?" I couldn't stop myself from wondering.

As Korsla finally nodded, he raised his right arm, instructing something to his people. Movement began to occur. "What the heck is going on now?" Uthor asked through our private call.

"I'm, not sure." I responded.

"My father said the highest spheres possess knowledge about this thing as well,

Renn. Do you know what they are planning?" Felina inquired.

"I have no idea..."

A block away, two piloted robots mobilized. A huge vehicle supporting what appeared to be a black metal sphere was then seen on the avenue. This last vehicle brought the sphere near Huffen, Korsla and the rest. The finely clothed men began walking along with the generals, coming closer to the vehicle. "Uthor, it would be extremely useful to know what they are talking about," I insinuated.

"Hmm, I don't see a way to make that happen, man, but let me see what I can do."

Eventually Korsla and the rest gave the impression to have agreed upon something and ordered a few soldiers to dismount the sphere. The two piloted units came close to us, and we had to hide all of a sudden because one glanced at our location. "Did he see us, Jix?" Torken asked.

"No, I don't think so."

When we peeked again, the sphere had been positioned close to the disturbance and it began executing some mechanical maneuvers while floating in the air. It deployed four metal legs and a drill which then began rupturing the avenue itself. Once it finished the process, five mechanical arms were deployed, and it began emitting a red light from its front, as if the sphere was attempting to create its own fabric, almost in a spider-like fashion, but somehow different. Out of nowhere, and even though it was further away, the black metal object disappeared in a similar manner as the soldier had, while the distortion again displayed a chromatic change of tones. The strange space aberration kept growing all this time and it now covered the whole width of the avenue, getting closer to the buildings. The disappearance of the black metal device left Korsla and the rest

puzzled, as the third man, the one who was being restrained by the bodyguards, manifested himself. "Do you see now? I told you!" At this point I realized that their efforts were merely making the situation worse and I would have to intervene soon. One of the suited men came close to the third man and slapped him. He then threw him on the floor and asked one of the bodyguards to hand him his gun.

"I gotta run," I said out loud, leaving the torn robe behind. This time, an inner desire to get involved in the madness finally arose in me. Finally.

I jumped from the roof as I heard Torken on the background, "Dammit, Renn!"

I landed in the middle of the avenue, between the generals and the disturbance, protected by the energy shield. I stood up quickly after rolling on the ground, and commenced speaking out loud. "What are you doing, gentlemen? You don't even understand the phenomenon you are facing. Why would you want to disrupt it?"

Everyone looked at me. I didn't like the presence of their sight, nevertheless, I continued, "You see, it is because of me that this thing appeared in the first place, so allow me, fine men, to explain how..."

One of the two suited men approached to me and yelled, "Mind your tongue! You mean nothing, you're worthless, nut job! Shoot this whipper snapper at once!"

Two soldiers came forward and shot me twice without hesitation. I managed to avoid being harmed with the help of the barrier, and a fast movement of my arms threw the soldiers away towards the sidewalk. Melli and Torken revealed themselves behind me at this point, allowing Huffen and the rest to see that I was not alone. The finely clothed men seemed perplexed, and the one next to the third broke his silence by saying, "You don't understand, you are not the cause, but one of the consequences."

“You are wrong, sir. I unequivocally initiated the process, and I may as well prove it to you before your pathetic attempts cause the whole thing to collapse.”

“You, you, you little insolent!” the other stammered.

“Me? You just ordered two of your men to kill me for doing nothing and without a warning, just like that! Who is the pathetic insolent here? You men don’t...” I stopped. I heard murmuring all around me. I then turned and saw again the chromatic changes varying even faster and in a constant pattern, but nothing seemed to be disappearing in any way. They ceded after a moment. My instincts, almost like a second voice inside my head, instructed me to walk forward towards the disturbance. I did.

“You may not! What exactly do you think you are doing?” I heard one of the suited men inquire behind me, rushing his phrasing. Not really minding his words, I said out loud, “Stay out of this.” Torken and Melli pointed their guns in a defensive bearing, as I saw them carefully nodding at me.

No one interfered. “It looks like one of the humandroids was about to attempt a move on you, Renn, but one of the chieftains intervened. They’re going to let ya get closer.” Jix said through the earplug. I assumed they were, after all, somewhat intrigued by my apparition and were allowing me to proceed for now.

Once close, I contemplated the disturbance itself. “Why hasn’t he disappeared? Is he crazy?” I heard someone behind me. The whole translucent phenomenon suddenly began to collapse slowly on itself until it became about two cubic feet large. People were astonished. It seemed to me at this point as if this thing was denser than before and was, sort of, looking at me, for its changes in tone and shape resembled to me somewhat of a conscious expression. As I got fully immersed in the colors and shapes that the aberration offered, it began to

change its form again, taking on a humanoid shape. As its color stabilized, it launched a great shockwave. Some tanks in the perimeter lost their balance for a second. I got even closer.

“What the hell is going on, Renn?” I heard Torken asking sixty feet away from me or so.

The disturbance, little by little, had took on the shape of a human and was now revealing itself to be alike me, in a mirage-like fashion. I, again like in my dreams, saw myself in front of me and panicked. Though my actual fear was finally standing only a few feet away, an immense anxiety arose. It was an existential anxiety. I then heard Melli saying, “Holy...! It’s you, Renn! How is it two you’s?”

“...What?!” Both Felina and Sully asked in unison through the private call.

As I gazed further upon this being who now physically resembled myself in a translucent and distorted version, the anxiety vanished, and I suddenly experienced the deepest feeling of tranquility I had ever felt. My heart kept the accelerated pounding while going through these contrasting emotions. I came forward and he lifted his hand, pointing his index finger to my forehead; a barely visible ray of light was then emitted at me. I didn’t feel any pain or discomfort. After a couple of seconds he stopped and lowered his arm.

“I see...” I heard my own voice coming from the being. It then started to morph into something different, although still preserving his human shape. He turned into a tall, bearded man dressed in light-brown and white robes. An enormous and beautiful pair of wings emerged from his back, and were fully extended as I heard a different voice saying, “What are your thoughts on this shape? I believe this form may be appealing to you, Renn Barsak.”

My pupils dilated. A great deal of thoughts flashed before me. There seemed to

be different textures moving across his whole figure, as if there were variations on the way light interacted with his whole persona. I then heard all sorts of exclamations behind me and looked back at Torken and Melli, who were both stupefied. His presence was glowing, radiant. He seemed to be floating without any effort. The space distortion had now become the being itself, who was looking at the sky and everything around him with his three eyes. As we were all observing in shock, he asked, "Well? Is it not appealing to you? Rather, am I not speaking your language correctly?"

"No, no, you are. I understand you," I replied. I remained frozen. I could barely talk and was excited out of my expectations, but still, full of fear and doubt. "I'm sorry I didn't answer before, I'm still processing the fact that we are actually speaking."

He made a sound as he smiled, "Naturally, take your time. I am in no hurry by any means, or not just yet, that is to say."

"You... do you know who I am?" I asked.

"I think I do. You are the one who saw me. It feels like it is you. I am almost certain," The winged-being proclaimed.

"I may be..." I implied. An unpleasant delight.

"May I ask if you know who I am?" The being inquired.

"I think I have an idea, still, you remain a mystery to me. Although your abstract functioning says it all, it doesn't express much to myself... In any case, I'm very pleased with the fact that we are actually talking. I have something you seek. The reason why you..." I made a short pause, "...You materialized. There are things that you need to hear, and I assume that the fact is likewise for me... Can I

inquire, where do you come from?”

“Where do I come from, you ask? It isn’t where, for it is not a place per se. I come from a different state of being. Can you think of a state different than either existing or non-existing, and every combination in between? Though your mind cannot probably grasp this idea, it may understand that I come from one of these possible states. Now, if I may change the topic. While reading your mind just a moment ago, I could not obtain all the information I sought, in neither your electric system, nor in your abstract self, and I should have, which makes me wonder. A further puzzle, you say there is for me? I can’t seem to believe your words entirely, for you are a liar, like all humans, according to yourself.”

“Indeed, we tend to lie, but we speak the truth as well.”

“That is, according to you. Now tell me, Renn Barsak, which interest did you have in seeing me? How did you manage to? I am here now. It certainly feels, exciting, to exist... In my form it does, and...”

Out of nowhere, I heard gunshots all around me and Torken’s voice reverberating loudly, “Renn, take cover!”

When I looked back, two large groups of soldiers were just a few feet away, coming towards both the being and I from the sides.

“Thank you, Mr. Barsak, we’ll take it from here,” one of the suited men yelled.

Hereupon I heard a soldier whisper amongst the right group. “Better get a move on, kid, run away now if you want to live. You’re not our target, not just now,”

“...What do you think you are doing? Do not intervene, do you know how long...?” Suddenly, a small projectile hurled by a sling or something that I



couldn't see hit me right in the head. I was knocked down. A terrible pain invaded the inflicted zone and I was forced to the ground with both my hands on my head.

"Renn!" I heard Melli scream.

Torken came forward and shot at the soldiers a couple of times, preventive shots. They shot back, forcing him to look for cover. As the first group approached, one of the soldiers kicked me towards the sidewalk. They were organizing themselves in front of the being by now.

"Renn, are you ok?" Jix asked in a shocking tone.

"Renn, say something!" I heard Felina's voice. I had forgotten all about her for a moment.

"Yeah, I'm alright... those damn dogmatists hurt my head, but I think I'm alright," I asserted as I felt the sharp pain slowly going away.

Once the soldiers stood right in front of the being, I heard one of the suited men speaking loudly behind me. "Well, commander? What are you waiting for? Neutralize him now."

Some of the soldiers kept looking at each other. The one on the front spoke to the entity. "Hey, can you hear me? Surrender now." There was a pause. "Walk towards me and lay on the floor. Do you understand me? Do as I say, now, or we will be forced to act." There was no reply, not even any sort of acknowledgement. "Didn't you understand me? This is a final warning."

No answer. I looked at the being, who had closed his eyes. Suddenly, two soldiers from the group located in the right got closer to the entity. They disappeared. Without much hesitation, the men in the front line began firing at

the bearded being, they all did. Many rounds were heard, but no impacts; it seemed as if the bullets had completely vanished in the air, for all of them looked then intrigued at each other and at their rifles. At this point, the being looked at me, brief but profoundly. He then addressed the soldiers with his intent gaze, as some of them began to point their own guns at themselves.

“What is happening? No, what in the hell?” some shouted.

“What the fuck is happening, commander?” others questioned.

Slowly, one by one, the soldiers began to shoot either at themselves or at each other on the head, as if their bodies were being puppeteered. Soon, all their corpses lied on the floor; a river of blood flowing next to them.

“No!” I yelled, looking at the being. He looked back at me.

“Well, what now? I’m merely blending into your world, Renn Barsak. Humans kill and get killed, isn’t that correct? Was I not supposed to retaliate? Regardless, why were these men following someone else’s orders in the first place?”

“No, no...” I repeated to myself, punching once the asphalt with my right fist. I looked at the bodies on the ground, some with their eyes still open. I felt their demise, reader, directly involved with me. I stood up.

“What are you doing? You didn’t have the right to claim these men’s lives, listen to me...”

“Hmm, you seem to give importance to this, as if it had any, getting emotional so quickly.” The entity made a pause. “You are right, in some aspect, for I did kill them, assuming they were what you thought they were. I happened to act as the judge of their fate, ultimately. Should I have tried to attain a certain level of

sophistication and read their minds before ending their lives? Indubitably. And I didn't, for I was interrupted before, me being so egotistical, didn't have the patience... I too allowed the emotions of this physical body to act on their own, momentarily. Is this the reason why you seem to be upset? I thought you humans saw this nefarious conduct as normal."

"What are you talking about? We don't let our emotions flow out of control all the time, not all the time..." I looked at the entity with anger, but at the same time more intrigued and fascinated by his character. "You were not supposed to kill them, it was a cruel act."

The being laughed. "This illusion brings life and death for you to experience. I wasn't unfair, for they knew the consequences of attacking me. They crossed my path, trying to impose their will against mine, thus, I mirrored their actions. What you call death is not what you believe it to be. All I did was to move the clock forward, allowing the next cycle, allowing their escape from duality. Now, I wish to speak to you further, before I lose my patience again." The being made a pause as he looked at the group of Generals and the suited men. He then looked back at me. He continued.

"We were, before being interrupted, about to discuss how you were able to perceive me. Tell me, Renn Barsak, how did you? You humans certainly don't seem to have the means to. Allow me to expand. For what I read in your mind, you define, for instance, matter as a superposition of waves, and waves accordingly as a superposition of forces. You define what you call energy as a function of the position and the momentum, yet, you define it with different terms as well, even daring to equate divergent phenomena by association, all according to your narrow perspective. The fact that the infinite nature of nature is self-revealing should be enough for you to understand the eternal. Yet, you keep all this confusion, defining, knowingly or not, things illogically. You attempt to measure the unmeasurable, to subjectively understand the objective. Thus, you

attribute to chaos the creation of logic in the ridiculous misinterpretation of yourselves. Absurd. I see a badly structured hierarchy in your society. I see no understanding on the patterns of nature. It appears to me that most humans dislike both mental and physical effort, and as long as they don't have to do it themselves, will comply with anything... Even with the derationalization of the celestial clockwork. By such primitive means, it seems awfully improbable for you to have detected my trail, yet, unexpectedly, you did. Do you blindly agree with the way your fellow men bring understanding to you? You are different, Renn. In a way, aware, aren't you?"

"The way we understand reality might seem absurd to you, for we don't have all the answers, but you are wrong, nevertheless. Do you presume to understand it all? Are you all knowing? Perhaps I may realize the intricacies of reality are more complex than some suggest, as you imply, but that doesn't give me the right to judge anyone," I was so angry at the entity, but still, overwhelmed by his presence.

"Interesting. You see, magnitude, force, volume, magnetism. These are in fact only differentiated by your interpretation of things. Everything is an expression of the language of reality, the eternal duality of the present, acting as one to create the illusion we are immersed in. Your mind, the human mind, however... It has been tainted... on purpose. It now lacks fundamental reason. Help me understand your kind, Renn, who makes up lies, willingly, creating tormented stories in the pinnacle of their existence, reflecting the fractal dichotomy."

"You speak... the way you speak reminds me of something, but I... I can't put my finger on it. It is uncertainty which lead me to figure things out, as you know full well already."

"Yes, but it was so unlikely. You seem to be, somehow, aware of the plot-holes in your human fantasy, am I correct? Can I even dare to say that you see that

which is unseeable?”

“Well, I don’t have the answer to that. But I did see you, and that is without a doubt the manifestation of one who superimposes consciousness and not waves or forces.”

“Ah, very interesting. It might even seem now as if we have some common ground.”

I cannot describe with words the way his presence made me feel. It would take me pages and pages to assert the peculiar characteristics which emerged from being next to this entity. An overwhelming sense of indeed existing, I would say, if I had to choose some words. Just when I was most immersed in our conversation, I heard Torken’s voice once more, “Stay sharp! We have company, again.”

I turned around and saw a small group of soldiers accompanied by Tharissia, Sassia and a male humanoid, walking towards us.

“Stay out of this, Tharissia!” I yelled.

“Let’s see what we have here,” I heard the being saying behind me, as I glimpsed at six barely visible light-rays pointed at each of the soldier’s and the humanoids’ foreheads.

“Interesting, complex arrangements of information, yet, no abstract self,” I heard the being again. “And still, these others...” he made a pause. “These other humans are certainly different than what I would have thought, than what you would have thought, Renn. These information matrixes give me further insight into what your species actually is.”

I saw the being musing. The movement of his eyes denoted, to me at least, the elaboration and conclusion of rapid thoughts, almost as if he was merging the minds of these three soldiers with his own. His expression suddenly changed and he began to speak to himself in a lower voice; an angry, mad expression. Something had gone wrong.

“What is this?” he then asked, addressing me directly. “This is so different... You, Renn, had an awful, bitter taste, nevertheless, tolerable. I now experience in a bigger range the taste of the human mind, a rotten smell.”

We were all looking at the entity. He began conjuring ideas again and seemed embedded in himself. Out of nowhere, he pointed all his fingers, while moving his arms, in different directions, casting light rays once more. There were so many of them. Perhaps, I assumed, he was examining more and more people located far from our location. His expression was mad, that of someone who was giving away self-control.

“So complex, outstanding, capable of deep understanding, yet, so fragile. Your mind is so easily enslaved by belief, so easily confused by false ideas, false interpretations. An incomprehensible amount of pain,” frowned the being. Just then, I saw deep tears coming out of his third eye, almost out of context, lamenting upon himself privately. This was, at first, shocking to me.

“Disgusting. You humans are rottenly beautiful. Things naturally grow, naturally flow, and yet you find a way to obstruct their high nature. A marvel gone to waste,” he shouted. I could hear a much lower pitch on his voice now. He addressed the suited men, rapidly pointing his index finger at one of the two individuals. His pupils suddenly locked wide open, all wet. The mourning intensified. The crying reached a peak and then a sudden end. It must have lasted only a fraction of a second, but I discerned on his gesture a boiling anger as he began screaming sonorously, while his shape began to change once more.

His wings became sharp and dark, as well as his whole figure, which was now thinner and curved, although still resembling a winged-human. A pointy long tail could be seen now; the beard had disappeared, and his face morphed into some sort of a demonic facet. Something he perceived in the mind of this man clearly had changed the projection, and I was going to have to adapt to the situation with haste. Once the being stopped yelling, massive amplitude, he addressed directly to the suited man with a variety of pitches and intonations in his voice.

“Self-worshipping scoria, dross. Soulless ego, perverted scum. Evil deeds that you will pay for.”

The being then uttered some words quietly, as if he was speaking only to the suited man. The man grabbed his head as he screamed. He fell hard on his knees.

“What are you doing to him? Stop this!”

The being didn't look at me this time. He was emitting a rare visual phenomenon all around him, filtering the light passing across his surroundings.

“I'm obliging him to realize the density of his actions,” the being said. He now looked imposing and terrifying.

I gazed at the suited man, who seemed to be living his worst nightmare. He threw himself on the floor, kicking around.

“Enough.”

As soon as the now horrifically looking being pronounced this last word, an abrupt, strange-looking purple explosion arose where the agonizing man was, overturning a tank and a second vehicle parked just next to him, creating a cloud

of smoke and a hole on the avenue. The being's long, dark wings were extended; they slowly retracted after a moment.

"Enough suffering, enough deceivment. Useless pain indicted upon weak useless minds. You have defiled the offering, and I proclaim now to be your wise judge."

The profound lack of control that I had feared all this time was manifesting right in front of me. This materialized chaotic function had now been initiated, before I could attempt to secure it and send it back where it came from.

"The denying of the propitious way has come too far."

"And aren't you, in any case, breaking this so-called propitious way with your actions?" I asked, frustrated.

"I'm merely following the consequential order of duality. Could you hold on, Renn? For I will make them all realize the suffering they have dispersed."

The being suddenly disappeared. He vanished, and we were all left standing in shock. It wasn't until this point that I actually noticed my knees were shivering. I saw the Region's personnel aiding the surviving well-clothed man, as well as inspecting what everyone assumed to be now a burned corpse. The humandroids snapped out of their trance and returned to the general's location along with the small group of soldiers. I stared at the floor; the sound of sirens and general panic could now be heard all around our proximity, a sense of the aftermath was clear. I saw Torken and Melli approaching. "Renn, are you ok?"

"Yes, though something disturbing just happened. You might want to leave before it's too late. Go back to the wooden house, Torken, Melli, go back and help with the evacuation." I said, still resenting the pain on my head.



“You too, Renn, come back,” Said Felina, who was listening through the earplug. Her words touched some deep fibers in me.

“I...” No words came out.

“There’s no way we are going to leave you,” Torken asserted. “If you decide to stay, we’ll do so as well. We must get cover now, I don’t think the Region will allow us to escape so easily, and now might be a good time to...”

In an instant, the being re-appeared next to us. He materialized out of nowhere in his previous location.

“A lock on the shackles has been broken. The poisonous heads breath no more,” The entity claimed, as he cleaned the blood on his large-nailed fingers with a rapid arm movement. I saw the long trail of blood smear the pavement and could only wonder who it belonged to. I was to find out later on that the lives of many big names in the banking system, the corporate industry and the Region were claimed at that moment. A number of undisclosed individuals and civilians died precisely at this point as well.

“I truly dislike the process of ending a low-functioning abstract self.” He continued. “It’s a pity what the human family has cast upon Teratra, upon itself. I will end the suffering now, for each individual, for each of you.”

“What are you talking about? This isn’t justice, this is horrendous! No one asked for your help, listen to me...!” I said, realizing how the being seemed now awfully mind-twisted, allowing his temperament to flow free.

“No one did, but you humans will allow anything. What wouldn’t you allow as long as it does not concern you directly? Evil roots, it resides in the human mind. Your

species is annihilating what you once were, already walking through the swamps of disgrace, heading to a full totalitarian regime. If anything, I'm granting you all a favor. Have you forgotten, Renn, the fear harbored in the words of that man who you saw being restrained on an alley not long ago? You speak without authority. You are the sole artificers of the chaos you have brought upon yourselves. The vain suffering must end."

We hear music playing on the background. Beautiful music. He who improvises is seen sitting, completely immersed in his creation. His figure is translucent and luminescent. There are walls, curved walls all around him. The stoic gesture of the character changes for an instant, returning to its previous posture after a moment.

“Father, father,” we hear a voice say as a figure approaches. “Father, did you feel that? Was that it?”

As the character keeps on improvising on a large stringed instrument, he answers. “Yes. Did you feel it too? It’s already happening.”

“Yes, I felt it.”

“...Still,” the improviser foresees, “there is an extra piece on the board, can you feel it? One that I have not contemplated in the past.”

“Not contemplated? Isn’t this last one a part of your improvisation, father?”

“It is not. And its significance, will soon be revealed.”

## Chapter 8

His long tail oscillated from one end to the other in an ominous, intimidating fashion. In despair, I felt weak and powerless. The being, who seemed to be completely embedded in his arrogance, wasn't looking at me anymore. I tried to call his attention by saying, "What positive reaction have you brought forth by killing these people? You didn't even comprehend their context, nor did you put yourself on their situation, acknowledging the events which partially caused their actions. You merely passed their information matrix through your conscious filter and cast judgment upon them without hesitation. You aren't wise. Those are not the ways of a wise judge, as you claim to be!"

"Foolish human, who factors in so little. You ignore their despicable actions. If you would only comprehend, you would be the one getting rid of their existence, which caused tortuous pain to millions in vain, now irrelevant, nonetheless, for it is too late for humanity."

"No, you cannot speak in this way. Answering chaos with chaos? Ludicrous! You speak as if you knew everything regarding the significance of being a human. I thought you were going to be different, but you are a fool, nothing but a fool!"

The being laughed, still without placing his sight on me. "Your trivial thoughts are unimportant. What could you know about me based on the reflection of your world? This will be the test cast upon humanity by the judgement of the order of nature. Try to stop me, Renn, you or anyone who disagrees with my will. Let's see how far humanity goes to save one another. Perhaps then you can prove me wrong."

The being stood there floating, arms crossed. The changes on his appearance made me anxious once more. Two sharpened, thin, large horns had come out of

his forehead. He seemed to have lost interest in my words and was now decided to take action into his own hands. "What the hell is happening here? What have I done by realizing the existence of the nonexistent?" I asked myself. The situation developed so sudden, without me managing to react. A part of the abstract was in front of us, angry against humanity, manifesting itself. Before materializing, at least in its abstract form, the being was defined by me as an iterative mirroring function. He was, in other words, merely acting as a reflection of the human mind, tending towards chaos, and those were exactly my worries, the ones I couldn't put into words before. If the function operated in our world, it wouldn't be long before it tried to destroy it.

While thinking of a proper situation to correct the actual trajectory of events, I heard Tharissia's human-like voice. "Arrest those individuals, commander. We'll take care of the rest."

"Geez, gimme a break! They're coming!" Melli said, as we retracted towards one of the nearby walls. The three soldiers accompanying the humandroids were already shooting, moving forward. Before we could take cover behind the concrete, two of them reached us, forcing me to turn around so as to face them. I generated the barrier and punched one in the face, then on the stomach, and then yet again on the face, throwing him a couple of feet away. The second came at me faster than I expected; Torken, out of nowhere, knocked him down with the bottom part of his rifle. The third soldier stayed a bit behind. Abruptly, he took his machine-gun out and began emptying it on me. I felt the barrier taking all the damage, as for the first time it received way more than just a couple of shots, and when the soldier attempted to reload his weapon, I, with an arm movement, stroke him down with the golden electric current coming from the palm of my hand. This time the current flew a larger distance, and for a second I feared that the intensity might have killed the man, but apparently it just neutralized him. "Come on," Torken said as we attempted to get behind cover.

“Watch out!” Melli warned all of a sudden. As she did, she grabbed her gun and shot at a fourth soldier who was about to execute both Torken and me from behind. He was positioned on the second floor of the building to our left and we hadn’t seen him. I probably wouldn’t have had time to generate the barrier and felt lucky to be joined by both of my new partners. Melli killed the soldier who had now half of his body hanging from the building’s corridor.

“Hurry it up! Let’s move.” Torken said.

When the three of us finally took cover, we heard a rain of gunshots coming near us. “We need to find a safe place, what about that building?” Torken suggested.

“It’s... It’s too far away.” Melli deemed.

“Let’s get inside the parking lot, we can hide there and take a look further into the situation. We’ll take a decision once safe.” I proposed.

“Right on, let’s move,” Torken signaled as we made haste towards the building. With precaution, we infiltrated through one of the open sides and carefully sneaked amongst the cars.

“Let’s head to the first floor,” I suggested.

We got out of their sight for the moment and, once we got to an ideal spot, we analyzed the situation. The humandroids had already began to mobilize in front of the being. Two piloted robot-units approached as well. The being remained indifferent, eyes closed. Lieutenant Huffen, General Korsla and the rest of that group could be seen not far away, in a small, temporary outpost near the one they had before. The one suited man who survived and the third man, the one who yelled when they first came out of the elegant black car, were gathered with them. The announcement on the City’s speakers was heard every three or four

minutes now.

Once Sassia gave the order, one of the piloted units suddenly launched a short-range missile attack at the being. This time, the entity received the impact directly and we all saw an enormous fire explosion. Afterwards, the smoke dissipated and the silhouette of the being was still there, intact, floating immutable with his arms crossed. A second wave was launched from a different direction. The missiles vanished in mid-air; the same sort of effect I saw with the soldier's bullets before. The being said out loud, "Can't you see? There isn't any difference whether your unsophisticated technology is used against me or not. Evidently, your efforts are futile."

I barely heard his words, but I did notice how, while pronouncing them, he accommodated his hand in the same posture as when he spoke to the now perished man of wealth. "Is he going to control the minds of the pilots?" I thought.

Indeed, this sinister action took place, for one of the mechs then stroke the male humanoid with its metallic arm. The droid could barely hold-off the giant piece of metal.

"What's happening?" Melli promptly questioned.

"He is manipulating the minds of the pilots, that's the reason they are attacking the droids," I explained.

Suddenly, the second piloted robot began firing both of its prominent machine-guns at Tharissia, who began running across the opposite side of the avenue. The second female droid, whom I assumed was Sassia, kicked one of the legs of the piloted unit, making it fall and thus releasing the male droid from the pressure. Tharissia suddenly jumped way above in the air, avoiding the bullets. Seconds later, it landed on the reinforced glass cupola, killing the pilot

hypnotized by the entity. The male humanoid then broke the glass on the fallen mech, taking care of the second pilot.

The three droids confronted the entity, who laughed and said, "Worthless metal pieces." Sassia and the male humanoid began running towards him. Tharissia stayed on the back, shooting a laser beam at the target as a flying vehicle approached her position. The being remained with his arms crossed. In a flash, both Sassia and the male humanoid ended the sprint, and once motionless, began furiously hitting each other. After a couple of seconds, the male droid reached for a gun on his back, rapidly pointing it at Sassia's metallic face, who, a second after a gunshot was heard, stroke the other, penetrating its chest. They both remained there for a second until they fell to the ground. A fourth humanoid that I hadn't seen before appeared on the scene, attempting to attack the being without a warning. It was one of the military type, hidden somewhere, and just before it reached the entity, I saw its metallic parts collapsing to a point in which a small, very compressed metal spheroid fell on the ground.

All this time, the laser beamed by Tharissia had been striking the entity's face, but no apparent manifestation of damage could be seen. The being then directed himself towards Tharissia, who was now accompanied by two flying vehicles. The droid stopped beaming the laser and got an electric sword out. "Cover me," The membrane of its speaker was heard.

"Now would be a good time to leave this place," I heard Torken beside me. "Not yet," I thought, "not for me anyway. I have to fix this, somehow..."

To some degree unexpected, one of the flying vehicles started a risky maneuver and fired a massive round of missiles towards the entity; again, they disappeared out of sight. Tharissia jumped forward and landed close to the being. The last humanoid stood and ran forward; its large electric sword unsheathed. I glanced



at the being who, without any movement, arms still crossed, released a sort of electric shockwave while saying: "Be gone." The electric wave ran free through the avenue, neutralizing the robot and vehicles, but it was so intense that it reached the militarized perimeter where the journalists and the common people stood. Alas, their bodies fell on the asphalt, including those few soldiers standing in the area as well as a third flying vehicle, which landed heavily on the ground.

"No! Fuck, no!" I uncontrollably shouted. Unfortunately, my voice caught the attention of a couple of soldiers located one floor below, who immediately began firing at our position. We took cover behind a car parked next to us.

"Hear me out, Melli, Torken. You must go back to the wooden house. Go back and help the Wolf. There is no time left," I warned, hastening my words. "I'll meet you there in a while. I cannot leave things as they are, I must finish what I started."

"But Renn..." Melli's words faded in silence.

"What are you talking about, Renn? Listen to me, you...!" Felina murmured. Her voice sounded distant through the earplug.

"No, listen up, Felina," I interrupted. "I must, at the very least, attempt to control the situation here. I might be one of the few, or perhaps the only one who should be trying. Please, understand my position..." There was a pause.

"I'm heading there. I'll find you once I reach Ninth Avenue," she quickly answered.

"No, Felina, please don't do that! Listen to me, don't even think about coming here, I...!"

“I’ll see you there.”

We then heard Sully yelling on the background, but we could barely hear her, for the transmission wasn’t at all clear in our location.

“Shit, Felina is coming over now...” I said, a bit overwhelmed by the situation. “Torken, Melli, please, go back and intercept her on the way or something. She shouldn’t be near here, in fact, you should all be heading to the Civil Center. I don’t think things are going to get any better soon, so please, go now, we don’t have time. Thank you for all your help, and...” I was brought to a halt while glimpsing at the being. I then heard the soldiers from below getting closer, “... send my gratitude to the Wolf. Tell him I’ll say it myself the next time we meet, and I can show him more of the teachings.”

They both looked at each other. “By all means, Renn. We will pass on your message. Stay sharp. We’ll see you later, man,” Torken affirmed. We shook hands.

“Indeed, brother, and thank you.”

Ducking over the cars, they left the scene. I noticed the two soldiers approaching; they were now quite close to our location. When they placed their sight on Melli and Torken, I asked both their machine-guns to fly away, and with a movement of my arm, they did. The soldiers were all scared for a second and I took advantage of their state; I pushed them hard against the wall behind them, knocking them down from my position without being seen. I promptly stood up and saw them both, unconscious. I went over to verify if they still had a pulse. They did, and I took a long exhale. I got ready to jump again from one of the ivied walls of the parking lot unto the wide avenue. Before doing so, we all heard Jix saying through the earplug, “S-Stupid Felina, what was she thinking? Did she even take her Holo-Pad, Sully? Can ya hear us, Felina?”

“No, she didn’t. She just took the earplug off and ran away,” Sully replied.

“Don’t worry, we’ll find her on the way,” Melli asserted.

“Ya better,” Jix reacted, after which a small silence arose.

“...Haven’t you noticed, Renn? She really seems to care about you,” Sully mentioned. “Sometimes we women do crazy things when we care.”

We all remained quiet.

“Way to state the obvious, doctor,” Said Jix. I heard Torken and Melli laughing faintly.

“I care about her too,” I asserted. “I care about all of you, that’s why we need to stop this madness. Jix, are you still on site?”

“I am. I’m currently changing my position. My sight got blocked a minute before, but I’ve got ya covered now.”

“Excellent. Just stick with me a bit longer, I have an idea. Be ready to leave the scene when I tell you to, my man. Well, I’m heading in again. The best of luck finding Felina.”

“Best of luck to you both,” Torken said through the call.

I took a moment before entering again into the storm. “The vehicle,” I thought within myself. “Worst case scenario, Felina could always use the vehicle Melli talked about. In this way she could get to the Civil Center... Alright, nothing to worry about. I gotta focus. You gotta focus Renn.”

I immersed myself into the deepest part of my small existence; a quick return to the basics. I thought about the forest and the feeling that the recollection of those nights provoked in me. I had to tame the man within the man, to keep tempering the mind. This situation was, in a way I felt, about to embark the people on a tempest. Only a man, yet again I thought, in his most perceptive state would be ready at the high stakes given.

After a long exhale, I slid down quietly and landed on the sidewalk. I noticed that the being, who remained in his previous location, was actually exchanging words with one of the unknown generals who was now close by. As I took a further look at the small outpost where the generals were organized before, I realized that most of them were dead on the spot; just a few still alive, some of them agonizing. The suited man seemed to have gotten killed, as well as most of the bodyguards.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I picked up the pace and walked in between the last standing general and the entity. While closing in, the General's expression caught my attention; he seemed to be in a trance. He was speaking out of his mind, babbling as fast as he could. I then heard the entity asking, "... Do you agree now?"

"With discomfited regret, I do. In all fairness, I would've never had the clarity of mind to see all of this by my own means. Without your inspiration. Let this be the last lesson for me. Shall I proceed? I find no reason to go on living," the General quickly asserted.

"I see no reason either..."

"What is this nihilistic mind-twist? What sort of ominous psychopath are you? No one in their right mind would talk in such way." I tried to intervene, addressing the

entity directly.

I ran towards the General, who at this point was about to shoot himself with a big silver gun. As soon as I reached him, we struggled for a second and I somehow forced the gun to slipped out from his hands. He pushed me away, grasped his second gun from his medal honoring coat and blew his brains out in front of me. The body fell to the ground in an instant and I couldn't ignore the sharp feeling of anxiety this triggered within me. A few tanks and flying vehicles slowly came across my peripheral view. Region men quickly got out and attended the wounded few who had survived.

"I allowed him to accurately recognize the repercussions of his actions within a short lapse of intellect. It was him who decided to end his life. I didn't force him to do so."

"Are you attempting to justify this misery? This is insane...! Why are you doing this?!" I asked. Something else then caught my eye; Lieutenant Huffen was still alive, being procured to an ambulance nearby. I turned away from the entity and ran towards the lieutenant's location. Upon arriving hastily, everyone looked at me with a careless expression. Huffen recognized me and called me out, "You, vagrant, come here."

"I'm in position. Just say the word," I heard Jix on the call.

The people who were carrying Huffen on a stretcher stopped so that we could speak. I immediately noticed they weren't trying to apprehend me right then, due to the current state of the situation, I assumed. "Listen to me..." the lieutenant muttered. He seemed badly injured. "This is a small truce, thug. Come with us to the bunker. We've got information you might want to see. We know where you were last night, hanging with that crowd. I'm hoping a spark of sense hits you now. Come and work for us. Work together, is what I mean. Listen kid, don't stay

here, the only reason we didn't lock you up before was... argh... At any rate, come with, come on."

At this point the third man who accompanied the finely clothed men, the one who almost got killed for yelling before, approached us. He was walking fine and seemed barely harmed.

"Excuse me," he began speaking. "Lieutenant Huffen, please forgive my interruption, sir." The man then addressed me personally, "You are one of the subjects, aren't you? How interesting. I'm Doctor Lennitz. Listen to the lieutenant, come with us. I know my colleagues would be delighted to talk to you and..."

"I thank you for the offer, but I'm going to have to refuse it." Perhaps I interrupted him in a discourteous fashion. I continued, "...Subject, huh? That's a curious choice of word. Anyway, Look, I understand you people believe that all of this originated with some strange light patterns emitted by the sun, but I can assure you, you are far from the truth."

"What...? How would you know this?" The third man asked impatiently. "Of course we are not...! How would you know? You just received these abilities, just weeks ago, am I right on this one?"

"indeed, but not due to the reasons you believe."

"Please, mister, Renn, is that your name? Come with us. I'll personally see that you are treated properly and..."

I looked at the man, all misaligned and stressed.

"With all due respect, don't you remember the way they acted towards you a couple of minutes ago? You certainly can't ensure my safety, and I would

suggest you stop working for these people.” I rushed my words.

“What?!” Haffen loudly asked.

“I’m sorry, Lieutenant, don’t take it personal. In any case, I came to corroborate if you were indeed alive. Furthermore, I’m taking the opportunity to ask you once again to move your levers in order to achieve the evacuation of the City. You saw what this monster can do... I’m hoping this brought sense unto you all.”

“...Listen carefully, vagrant. I’m not in charge of the situation here. It’s a shame you won’t come with us in peace, you’ll regret it, I assure you. They’ll force you later in their own terms. One last word of advice. They are going to fry this place if things don’t go according to the plan, so you should be leaving already. Remember, this fraction of peace between us will only hold for so long.”

“Be well, Lieutenant,” I said as I focus my sight towards the entity.

I began walking at a moderate pace. Down to my left, I saw General Korsla facing the ground as he was being turned around by a couple of medics; he appeared to be dead. I kept the rhythm of my footsteps until I came close to the being. Once there, he spoke, “Are you finally done? Can we finish our conversation so that I may proceed?”

“...The generals, the journalists and the City’s people, the soldiers... Why would you kill any of them in such odious manner?” I inquired.

“I’m not interested in explaining my actions to you, pitiful human, who, like I’ve said before, factors in so little. This is exactly how I blend in. Humans are useless, indifferent to the obliteration of everything but their ego. You kill for greed, you lack empathy. This so-called modern society is a deception sculpted by your hand. You said before that you had some piece of information for me, but

as far as I can see, that was another lie.”

“Hear me out! You’ve tampered with the balance of this realm of existence. There is a certain frequency which resonates in our world, and by superimposing one’s will unto the right patterns, while collapsing the...!”

“Silence,” the being harshly interrupted. “Your words are meaningless. You have such a small understanding of your own existence and the state of things that none will correspond with logic and I am beginning to lose my patience once again. You saw me but have no idea who I am or what I’m doing here. I am not a mathematical function, as you ridiculously claim. I am a present archetype of the layers of reality.” He made a pause. “Our little gathering wasn’t a coincidence, as you humans profess. Nothing is, and it all will soon be over.”

“I’ll say it point blank then. You have to go back, you have to leave before you destroy yourself and our world along with you!”

“I have no intentions of going back, neither of destroying myself. Unquestionably, I will take advantage of this land to create a better world, a different one, build upon the ground bases of logic, as it should be. No humans will be part of it, Renn, for your narrow egotistic views corrupt everything you touch, anything you place your sight on...”

“That is not true. We humans are capable of all sorts of things, not just terrible ones. We are still discovering the mysteries of reality, don’t you remember? What have you done with your obnoxious behavior so far? You speak about creating a better world but know nothing about what it takes. So far you have only destroyed other’s.”

“The annihilation of the human species is so insignificant it can barely be called an act of destruction. It will only represent a minuscule step towards the creation



of a new era. On any given situation, creation requires destruction, the always-changing eternal flux of life. You see, Renn, at first, I might have gone with your words. I had scant input, all was, reasonable, from your perspective, at least. But once I scrutinized what you actually are, what you have done to yourselves and to all life-forms in the material existence... You have become superfluous profiteers, monstrous minds profiting at the cost of others' vain suffering. The scar left upon the harmony of your nature, the knowledge you have hidden from yourselves. No, I won't tolerate this."

"What are you implying here? Are you going to judge us all for the actions of others? Nonsense! You seek to control with fear and anger, not to liberate with truth. Things can be tuned, polished to serve a better purpose. You speak as if the world was nothing but pain caused by humans..."

"You see, the animals you consume are not aware that they are brought to life with an unnatural death sentence dictated by your society. It is only until death is in front of them that the fact is acknowledged, at all levels. In a similar manner, you have a herd-mentality on the big scheme of human control and enslavement, and it has extended too far now. It is time for a reset. This world has a natural rhythm, a logical harmony that I intent to restore."

"So why don't you help us out instead? Are you suggesting that there are no humans worth your embrace? It was a human who brought you here, after all."

"There may be, you being one of them, perhaps. According to your collective mind, some in the old ages even arrived to the self-evident truths concerning the material world, but in its current state, the self-centered perception of yourselves will bring nothing but suffering. The centralization of wealth and power is slowly becoming an oppressive technocracy. It is too late to reconcile."

The being made a pause, as if he was reconsidering his phrasing. He then

continued.

“As a matter of fact, you are a part, a subdivision of the whole, and can only describe with your reduced language what already is. But to know something, is indeed a different aspect of the self-realization. The experience of life has eternal concepts and rules, and I cannot accept this degradation. I believe this is the reason for me to self-realize, and if my judgment is clouded, let judgement be cast upon me.”

“I can’t believe what I’m listening. How so? Is it that you don’t recognize the value of things? You must not understand this beautiful world of colors and shapes, of numbers, feelings, intentions...!” I shouted.

“Without a doubt I do. It is your mind who can’t escape the system’s construct and the system will appeal to you, unavoidably. All can be defined as one. Moreover, you have nothing else to measure with, but only the proportions of the tangible in respect to each other. How would you know just how beautiful and logical it really is? You are that which gives meaning and don’t even acknowledge the reason for the eternal.”

“Look, we are aware of the suffering, of the pain... I actually agree on many instances with your reasoning, at least from what I understand, It’s just that...” I exhaled and made a pause, “If you had an even wider perspective you would see how we fit perfectly within existence, not at all illogically.”

“I’m by all means aware of that, inferior human. If you had a wider angle you would see why I now proclaim to be your judge, why your time is up. Your reasoning capability is suppressed and clouded by your own species. The doctrine begins when your mind is raw. It is taught to repeat and blend without question. Your already small experience is then reduced and encapsulated. Disgraceful. This collectivism has defiled society, creating a human farming

system built on a centralized oligarchy. The aristocrats are minuscule minded slaves to their ego, slaves to the tainted ways which humanity naively adopted as their own. This incongruity rips the entire purpose of your own existence apart. I will improve the current flow, ending the unnecessary suffering and the enslavement foisted upon your species. The time has come. You humans are killing yourselves and everything around you. I'm here to build something out of it, in your name, if you would like to see it that way. Something beautiful out of your rotten situation. This is just an enhancer, if you will, a time advancement," the being preached. His multiple-pitched voice mixed with the sound of approaching sirens.

"Wicked function, you will only iterate yourself to your doom," I rushed my words. The establishment of any common ideas seemed so distant at the moment, I was failing to transmit my message. I found myself thinking about the right set of words which would trigger an impact on the being's psychology, for lack of a better term. Again, the Region insisted on disturbing us at particularly key moments. I heard the sound of boots behind me once again and glanced back only to find out a couple of dozens of soldiers. This time I noticed some very, very tall individuals amongst the lot. It almost seemed absurd, the size of these people. They were around, I would estimate, around eleven and a half feet tall, and were well armed and protected by various shielding layers. I thought they might be new droid models, but they didn't seem robotic in any way. Without having much time to acknowledge this odd situation, I saw the group assembling into an attack formation. As soon as the leader of the platoon gave the order, they all began firing at both the entity and me. I barely had time to react and create the barrier, deflecting the first incoming wave. I noticed the pressure put on my defense mechanism and, when I was beginning to get worried, the attacks ceded. Hereupon I saw with my own eyes all the clothing and equipment, previously worn by the soldiers, falling to the ground. All the bodies disappeared in a flash. The sound of the metal helmets and shields hitting the ground was heard this time, unlike the previous dematerializations. I then thought about the

Region's stand after I had rejected their offer. They were now shooting without hesitation.

"The weakest amongst you desire absolute power, but have not understand the complex dichotomy involved. Fools, who would subjugate everyone to their will if given the chance."

"And isn't that what you are doing?!" I yelled, bursting with anger.

"Not in the least. I will, as I have said before, cleanse this land."

The being extended his right arm and spread his long, sharp fingers. He turned to face me. His fingers then began flexing in front of me. "You know, mister Barsak, strangely enough, I cannot manipulate the matter that conforms you to my will, neither could I read your mind entirely. Since you, as you described, superimposed your consciousness to bring me into existence, you remain out of my reach. Fairly interesting, I would add. You seem to be so delicate, all humans do. It's hard for me to conceive the fact that you are the organism who managed to perceive me in this form."

"Well, I was quite excited at some point in regards to your arrival. All the numbers, my assumptions converged on this rare synchronicity I was foretelling, but it seems I don't have the wisdom to turn it into what I was expecting. Listen to me, you are not where you think you are. Your presence here is unwanted, it can easily change this, and your abstract world's destiny, or what I call the abstract anyway."

"You know nothing, for if something, this is the abstract. You, weak creature, lack understanding," The being stated as he raised his arm, with his index finger pointing at the sky. Slowly, a mostly purple, multicolor mist was seen gathering all around his figure. "The infinite and the finite... eternal concepts which

transcend human interpretation. Your existence is your thesis, thus, you brought an antithesis following your dualistic desire, bringing my existence upon reality, all, to create the synthesis. This, is the synthesis.”

As this last sentence was pronounced, the entity’s eyes turned bright, a flaming purple. Out of nowhere, a gigantic, crystal-like material broke its way through a section of the avenue close to where we were. The huge dodecagonal structure rose above the buildings nearby. Several of these crystal-pillars spread crushing streets and buildings on a ten-miles radius. I noticed the same mist which surrounded the being now coming out of the pillar closer to us, as well as a strange-looking electric current. The being again crossed his arms, and his multiple-pitched voice, extremely powerful and vibrant, got my attention once more.

“There are no words you could pronounce to change my mindset. The time is now. If you are planning on doing something, human, do it now, for I will finish with you all before you know it.”

A moment later, he moved his right arm forward, throwing me fifty feet away or so. I crashed hard against one of the side doors of a militarized vehicle.

“Did I mean to throw you that far?” the being asked himself loudly. “I’m merely creating a context, so you show me what you claim your species to be. Because all I see is a vast number of easily-governed minds, easily manipulated into a self-worshipping cult of ignorance, abusing the material to gain small vanishing pleasures while turning their sight away from the pain inflicted upon others. Unmeaningful semantics, poisonous rhetoric. The will of the self-revealing, which is treated with disgrace amongst humanity, will be heard now. You think you know everything, led by the lowest function of your existence, the curtains of which most of you are not even aware. Arrogance, envy. You humans, though great knowledge and understanding dwells within you, are disrespectful to the

ever-present logic of eternity. You have dispersed yourselves from the nature of the Hidden. A complex set of instructions is required to build you up, haven't you noticed? You use it all for nonsense."

While the being orated his speech, I recovered myself and stood up. He threw me quite hard, reader, and I was quite afraid at this point. To speak with sincerity, much more frightened than in the previous encounters with humandroids, or any other time before, for that matter. I then heard Torken's voice through the private call, a bit agitated. "Not to worry you or anything like that, people, but Felina is nowhere to be found. She may have taken a different route."

I believe it was from here on that things radically developed. "I can't trace her through the security cameras either," Uthor added. I immediately began to worry about her. I was eager to predict, but I couldn't; our probabilistic world held no chance for determination.

"What did you do that for, imbecile?" I yelled. As I began walking forward, the being raised his index finger. I saw the ground breaking apart in a line, like a fissure on the asphalt. The braking pavement soon reached my position and I jumped way high to my right. Once I landed near the sidewalk, I prepared to counter attack. "Why am I doing this? What am I trying to achieve here?" I asked myself, deeply frustrated.

By getting rid of these last thoughts, I raised both my hands, slowly, and with a fair amount of effort, projected several golden currents from above, striking the area where the being was. This was the first time that I managed to do something of the sort, but it only came natural to me at this point, to generate the source of energy far from my location. After this small thunderbolt sequence struck the being, and dust raised all around us, he bursted out laughing, uncontrollably. I realized my efforts were accomplishing nothing. Then rabble was heard once the attacks ceded, as a rampage began to infiltrate the avenue.

A few civilians approached now that the militarized perimeter was sort of broken, still, soldiers acted upon their actions and began evacuating people from the scene. Somehow, I sensed something nefarious going on. Some civilians, as well as soldiers, seemed to be attracted in an odd pathological way to the crystal-pillar next to us, apparently, for many attempted to touch it and get close to it. I saw a couple of bodies already lying on the floor next the dodecagonal pillar and realized how these crystals were much more than mere decoration.

The entity ended his laughter. "What kind of ridiculous spectacle is this? We are speaking about the manifestation of nature against the despicable actions of men. Are you going to eradicate this beautiful symbolism by liberating some electricity around me? I see now that you have no ideas on how to conjure me out. Such pathetic attempt. And to think that I was worried, you having a secret or something of the sort."

"Dammit," I thought. He was right, though. I had no idea how to deal with the situation much longer. I had in my mind the vague notion of reversing the materializing process that the being entered. Without much contemplative thought, I naively proceeded to attempt the unveiling.

I closed my eyes while performing an arm movement, my right foot retracted. The motion stopped and I retained the fingers on my right hand steady, parallel to my nose. I focused my mind profoundly on picturing the being and my current context. I thought about triggering the dematerialization by redefining the values on the abstract plane. In other words, I didn't have a clear idea how to, but I tried to mentally redefine the tendencies which constituted the entity in a way that cancelled his own existence. I had previously elaborated on these ideas back in the forest but didn't grant much attention to them. Now I found myself regretting this, for I knew back then that my lack of discipline was going to come back to bite me. I then focused my mind intensely, feeling an electric charge going through my spine, although I couldn't really picture what I was looking for. I was

stressed and afraid. I thought about Felina. I couldn't really concentrate at the level required. Thoughts about fleeing the scene to be able to tune my mind correctly flashed before me. I needed to be alone, but before I could develop any further ideas, the being's voice interrupted, allowing me to realize that he was now positioned just a couple of feet away from me. I opened my eyes and saw his floating figure, irradiating energy all around it.

"What now? Are you trying to send me back to what you call the abstract? Don't waste your efforts here, it is much more complicated than you realize."

I slowly faced the being, noticing a slight aura coming from my hands and body. It seemed that my system did react in some unknown way due to my short but acute mental effort. "Yes, it probably is, but that doesn't mean it isn't possible."

The message on the speakers suddenly became an alarm, and though distant, I could discern a voice mixed with the noise. For the first time, I really thought about retracting from the situation.

"Is that what you really think?" the being inquired, laughing subtly in disbelief. "Just like I warned you before, your time is almost up. I'm not going to stay here and wait till you figure things out."

Saying this, the being attempted to get close and I impulsively created the barrier around me. I naively attacked the entity in desperation. My arms felt as if they were being slowed down in a denser medium; my fists didn't even reach him. He remained arms crossed, floating in front of me. I attempted to flee by jumping in order to reach the roof of the building behind us, but I was pulled back a second after. I was somehow forced with a great velocity to the pavement.

As soon as I touched the ground, I stood up, recovering my posture. I noticed a dense trail of multicolored mist gathering in front of me. Without second thoughts,



I invoked the electric current in the palm of my right hand. I accelerated the process and released a gigantic amount of energy unto the being, who seemed fascinated by my actions. He began applauding inside the cloud of dust generated by the impact.

“Very nice,” he said. “How wonderful!

Needless to say, there wasn't any harm done by my actions this time either. As soon as I began charging a second strike, the abstract function raised his right arm and I began floating on the air along with it. I felt an extreme discomfort and began noticing how my throat was closing little by little, “Jix, leave. Now,” were the only words that came out of me.

We keep hearing mellifluous tones emanate from the stringed instrument. A third character approaches. An old looking man, mincingly walking towards the father and his son. He is also translucent and luminescent, with a slight tone of silver-gray. He addresses the kid.

“Can you feel it too, Zenitha?” the old man asks. “Your father’s creation is taking form.”

“Indeed, but not necessarily with the intention that I had consider.” says the musician, as he keeps on improvising.

“Everything is as expected throughout the one looking glass.”

“What do you mean, grandfather? Is my father’s improvisation not how you would have imagined either?”

“It sure is, Zenitha. Precisely these things which we do not contemplate are a fundamental part in our improvisation.”

“...And who, or what is this unseen piece my father mentioned before? Is it a part of what we don’t see, like the archetype was?” the kid inquired.

“No, it is different. It belongs to the material. A piece on the board not yet revealed. One not inspired by your father’s improvisation,” the old man says, after which a long pause follows.

We see the musician focusing even deeper into his creation.

“Come, let us leave your father alone. His second overture is reaching the right resonance.”

Both the old looking man and the kid move on to another room, leaving the improviser by himself, absolutely immersed in his immediate decisions.

“Now,” the entity said, “before I get rid of you, the one who sees, I wish to ask one last thing.”

I was lacking air. My neck felt firmly restrained and my vision began to fade away. Suddenly, three shots which were heard very near brought me back, and I instantly felt less pressure; my throat was freer than before. I took a deep breath, still literally floating three feet above the avenue and felt the life coming back to me again. I promptly concluded that Jix shot the being and I felt grateful for his intervention. “...Thank you, brother...” I murmured. The being stood still in front of me, as if nothing had happened. He kept both his eyes on me, almost as if he was trying to communicate something. I then heard Jix’s voice in pain through the private call.

“Help me, someone help me, PLEASE.”

“What is going on?” Sully asked. “Jix, are you alright? Answer, Jix!”

We heard Jix in trouble, rambling on without sense for a second, and then, total silence.

“No, damn you!” I said as loud as I could, still restrained. “Damn you. What have you done to him? Answer!”

“Your question is irrelevant. I’m tired of your doubts and speculations,” I heard the entity say as I felt again the pressure on my throat. “Was I forcing your fragile neck more than needed? How reckless of me. I don’t want to kill you before I hear your say on this. I’m intrigued by that which would happen if you cease to exist. I’m actually pre-existing as of my actual form, and so, it would be sort of a paradox to kill you here, am I not correct, mister Barsak? I wonder if, by killing you, would I make myself disappear, and with that, all that is to be cast upon your world.”

“You, execrable fuck! I’m going to make YOU disappear. You are going to regret all of this. Nonsensical expression, speaking about righteousness while causing agony. You are the despicable one. You don’t understand anything!” I was silenced by an augmenting pressure, and my voice ceded.

“I thank you for bringing me unto this world. I see you have no interest in my mental experiment, so I will reach the conclusion by my own. I wonder, though, why none of the celestial bodies have come to your rescue. I presumed the keepers of time would be here by now. Whatever the reason may be, I will build a better world in your name now. I assure you Renn, in your name only. Thank you, once again, for bringing me into existence.”

I was beginning to lose consciousness, rapidly. My vision went black. I was being strangled too hard and felt a sensation of release, a release from the illusion of life itself.

“Renn!” I heard a distant shout through the earplug. Some whispering further, far away, as I felt the last bit of my thoughts abandoning my physical self. I felt unready to die, like any other frightened mortal. A shivering reaction, the last attempt of my body to fight back. There was a constant overwhelming tone in my ears, a fixed one. I vaguely thought for a moment about the Other Side, about my mother and all the people that I loved who remained there. The Region, the Program and the manipulation of the markets only brought further that which was already erupting. Society had brought discordance within itself long ago, and with this realization, I was to die here by myself. Felina and the Wolf came to my mind as well... I thought about all of them. These flashing thoughts arose, and as I felt cold, extremely cold, I could not yet believe the events which lead me to this precise situation, how my life had lately exploded with feelings and emotions. I ultimately realized the releasement of this even further punishment cast upon men, which I brought by, and was causing my dead at this precise moment. My

disgraceful intervention on this world was about to end, and I attempted to embrace it with peace, for all that I tried in the past turned out to be a complete failure, and I was proud to fail. "Will I meet with you, eternity?" Were my last thoughts.

End of free energy volume I