

FREE ENERGY

Volume II - The Hidden Piece

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Chapter 1

As the multiple-voice improvisation keeps developing, we abandon the ethereal. The composer's polyphony recedes into the distance now. Eventually, we place ourselves in the material, miles away from Renn Barsak's location. Chaos can be seen from afar in his direction. The second capital of the Northern Federation undergoes a convoluted test.

As we travel through the City's rooftops, some displaying fancy sharp-metal ornaments and stylish chimneys, an odd thunderbolt strikes nearby. We focus our sight on an individual who is kneeling upon a thick glass-copula. Aleatory bursts of electricity are released into the surrounding area. A stream of energy flows high above in the air. It subtly stops. The figure remains motionless. A short silence, then, a cracking sound breaks through the nearby streets. A hundred feet away or so, we see a crystal pillar rising, demolishing a building as it erupts from beneath the ground. As its constant motion ends and the massive pillar finally settles, we take an even closer look at the individual. We see the metal-like parts which constitute the exterior shape as we fade into an interior perspective of its suit. We distinguish a human face. A young woman, light-brown hair, tided, eyes closed. We hear a voice.

"Allastra, Allastra...! My child, answer. Are you alright? Can you hear us? Answer."
Further murmuring.

A lapse of silence. As we see her eyelids slowly opening, we hear her voice. "...Yes, father, I am. I have arrived."

"Ah, it's so good to hear your voice, child. We were starting to get worried."

"Worry not, father. I am all safe. Uncle Etrus and you tend to calculate everything just right, should I remind you?"

“Excellent... Excellent.”

We now place ourselves in front of Allastra, who stands up and briefly flexes her arms, squatting a couple of times afterwards. On her back, around the low part of the neck, we see a small digital-screen displaying a series of numbers, oscillating between 0001 and 0002. As we inspect the shape of her suit further, we distinguish a black, densely compressed liquid-metal distributed all over the surface. Similar to a ferrofluid, yet as solid as metal. The ends of the suit she wears and some of the extremities are finely carved in some other type of material, silver in color. However, we cannot identify its constitution. Allastra turns her right forearm and looks at some information displayed on its surface. As she slides her left hand over, with a delicate finger movement, an advanced hologram is displayed. We immediately see a partial reconstruction of the City, as shapes and color patterns appear on the suit’s face, also made of the opaque material, all black, without any facial features. Allastra opens the palm of her left hand and a graph is displayed, with strange writings on it. Possible routes and paths, constantly being updated, are shown as well. She suddenly retracts both her arms as we hear her say, “I know where they are. We’ve arrived late.” She gazes over the place which was defined before as Renn’s location. Dense smoke can be seen just above the buildings far away.

“It appears so, yes. We have eyes on them here, and... it doesn’t look like the mathematician is doing as well as we expected. Thus, Allas, move, be ready to move and do the unexpected. My dear daughter, I... I can’t tell you how thrilled we are. Am I at least right on this one, Etrus?”

“Allas... show us, show yourself what you are capable of. I can’t wait to see the results of your practice.” Etrus adds, ignoring his brother’s words.

“Uncle... Father... I wish I was there with you right now, in the Tech-Room, but inevitably, the time has come.”

“Indeed, and we are inspired. We even brought appetizers to The Room, can you believe that? Your uncle here almost had me stopped!” They all laugh out loud.

Silence rises, and Allastra’s father, Edorik, drastically changes his tone. “Their conversation will not last for long now. They mentioned the paradox, you see... The iterative entity looks terrifying, unbalanced.”

“Yes, I can hear them talking as well...” Allastra asserts as we hear the conversation between Renn and the dark figure coming from the inner speakers of the suit.

“The mathematician is being grabbed by the neck.” Etrus makes a pause. “Still, nothing yet?”

“No, not just yet, but I’m ready. If the last calculations were all precise, it’ll be any time now. However, it remains ninety nine point eight percent unlikely for now, even the most irrelevant detail could...” Allastra pauses. We transition into her field of view. We see several paths being updated, displayed internally. Her eyes dilate, reflecting faintly the color changes.

“Got it.” She breaks the sudden pause.

Faster than lightning, the opaque suit is seen rushing through the City’s rooftops.

“Ah, it commences already.” We hear Edorik say as Allastra advances at unbelievably high-speeds. We see the digitally-displayed numbers on her back varying, now going from 0075 to 0081. The suit itself seems to be charged with energy, outlined in neon-green light.

“All functional on our side. Nothing was harmed during the traveling period.” We hear Etrus state. Allastra seems engrossed in the moment, jumping through the City. Not far

away now, we can distinguish a broad avenue. The numbers on her back grow higher, reaching 0095. Allastra is gathering speed, and by propelling herself from the last rooftop ahead, advances with great momentum towards Renn's position. He is now only a few hundred feet away. In a fraction of a second, Allastra smashes the dark being into the building on their right using both her legs in a full-contact kick. We see the obscure entity crash into several buildings moving further away as Allastra lands on the avenue, thrown back by the whole motion. She recovers her posture and runs in the direction of Renn, who is now lying on the ground, semiconscious.

"We gotta run." We hear a robotic voice coming out of Allastra's suit, as she helps Renn stand up. Renn, disconcerted, hardly reacts and they both begin jogging away from where they were.

In an instant, the dark figure appears in front of the suited woman and the mathematician. It is floating, arms crossed, looking at Allastra directly. It then turns its gaze towards Renn. Just as the dark shape raises its right arm, with its index finger pointed at Renn's chest, Allastra breaks her defensive stance and proceeds to strike directly, kicking forward. We hear the robotic voice saying, "Run!"

The dark entity, without being forced back, deflects every attempt using its index finger only. Renn is slowly walking away from them, barely managing to do so on his own. As the numbers on Allastra's back increase, reaching up to 0125, the obscure shape uses its whole hand to stop a direct punch. It holds her fist for a second. The dark entity then pulls Allastra's arm towards itself, forcing her to lose balance. Making use of her momentum, the entity releases her wrist and strikes the facial section of the suit once using its elbow, with extreme force. The impact doesn't reach the suit's surface, for it is constantly and uniformly surrounded by an auto-generated electromagnetic field. We do, however, see it emit radiation when the clash occurs, forcing Allastra's upper-body back. Taking advantage of this, the dark figure proceeds with a full turn, kicking Allastra brutally, sending her body directly to a stone-walled building further away on the avenue.

Oblivious to the situation occurring two hundred feet away, Renn keeps heading straight, without any particular indication of a precise path to follow. There is no longer any military presence that we can perceive in the vicinity, as if everyone left, or most of them, for we do see some of the injured still moving. Ambulances and other Region-vehicles have left already and the perimeter established before has been completely broken. The amount of corpses surrounding the gigantic pillar has increased with time.

The dark entity suddenly turns its sight to Renn, who is not far away, and by raising its hand forward, ignites a purple fire-like sphere, coloring its dark form. As the sphere increases in size proportionally on each axis, the entity peeks at Allastra's state, and then back at Renn. Edorik's daughter is getting up, throwing away an enormous rock which was preventing her from observing the situation. As soon as she realizes what is happening, we see a weapon strangely unveil over her shoulder. The color of the neon light surrounding her suit has changed to red now. Just as the dark figure unleashes the fire sphere in Renn's direction, Allastra beams a laser from her weapon, with a different amplitude and quite unlike those used by the Region. This plasma-like beam just barely touches the edge of the sphere, slightly changing its trajectory before it explodes in the air, some feet away from Renn's position. Allastra then sprints extremely fast, so fast that the human eye would perceive this as an instant movement, arriving in front of the dark being, slightly above, releasing an attack. The obscure figure deflects this and every following attempt by the suited woman, who is now again outlined in neon-green light. Whenever a strike might seem like a success, the being changes its form and figure to that of the multicolor smoke which surrounds the crystal pillars over the City, evading the attack and going back again to its dark shape. As Edorik's daughter lands on the avenue with her left hand, she gathers momentum and attempts to kick the entity, who vanishes completely this time, leaving a small cloud of chromed-mist rising in the air. Allastra turns back, and when she turns around, the dark figure is seen floating backwards in front of her. With the end of its index finger, it forcefully tips Allastra's forehead, pushing her back several feet away on the avenue. Allastra instinctively crosses her arms in a defensive block, taking a second to recover from the

motion.

“Impressive,” says the dark being after getting back upright. “Yet, you hardly passed the tryout. Were you aware that that was a test? I thought you should have known, for If I really wanted to kill Mr. Barsak there, I simply would have done something similar to this.”

A second after and miles away, an explosion half a mile in height begins to rise. The entity hadn't even move a finger, yet, its will created an emergent phenomenon of great magnitude, destroying several City blocks in the market district. Huge pieces of concrete and metal reach our position with great velocity. A fiery color can be seen all over the sky along with a gigantic cloud of smoke.

“The numbers never lie, fundamentally.” We hear Edorik through Allastra's internal speakers. Concern can be discerned in his words. “This is it. This thing may live up to our preparations, so stay alert, Allas, this is it.”

Although the whole area has been shocked by the event, there is silence, a deep silence. Both the dark figure and Allastra keep looking at each other.

I thought I was dead. I couldn't conjure any ideas and didn't feel a thing. I was all mind, and it was still. In a burst, I felt incarnated again, surrounded by my physical body. My throat was in such discomfort that I simply kept my eyes closed while feeling obfuscated by pain. I heard a voice, a robotic voice, and felt someone grabbing my arm. I didn't know what was going on, reader, and felt so strange. I was still in shock and didn't remember anything exactly. It wasn't until I opened my eyes and saw the entity floating in front of me that it all came back. I realized that indeed an android-like character was helping me stand, and I suddenly heard its voice saying, "Run!"

I got away from them and kept doing so; soon, a huge shockwave threw me to the ground. I stayed there, lying on the pavement. I couldn't even stand. As I gathered strength, a second shockwave, much more powerful than the first was felt. The whole avenue began to reverberate and I glimpsed a strange light source in the sky, realizing that a massive explosion had occurred far away. Out of nowhere, a huge concrete block crashed into a building to my right. At this point I was getting up as quickly as I could.

Still disconcerted, I attempted to snap my mind out of its current trance. "Think, think," I told myself, "what the heck is going on here? What are you going to do, Renn?"

I thought I heard distant words coming through the earplug, but I had to ignore them for now. I glanced at both the entity and this new android which, to my surprise, had helped me before. I began to walk towards them, instinctively.

They were already speaking, or at least the being was. I stopped walking once I was near them.

"...Are you not going to answer?" I heard the entity asking, as he pointed his long-nailed index finger at the android's forehead. Once again, he generated a hardly visible ray of light.

The android remained quiet. I noticed how its entire aspect differed from the

humandroids and all androids I had seen before. Not a part of it resembled the Region's tech. "Perhaps a new model?" I asked myself. In between ideas, the robot addressed me abruptly with its gaze, and I somehow heard a voice, not with my ears, apparently, but internally, like a thought, similar to the way the deer from my dreams spoke to me before.

"What are you waiting for? You have to go. What are you still doing here, mathematician?" I heard.

"Wh..." I tried to utter a word, yet the pain in my throat stopped me. "Where am I to go anyway? We need to fix this here and now," I thought

"I'll handle this, you go and think, think, mathematician. How did you change the values the first time?" The voice kept on.

"The first time...?" I asked myself in a lower tone, still with my hand on my throat. "What do you mean by..."

"It doesn't matter how many times the "mathematician" thinks. Never will he understand," interrupted the entity, speaking out loud to the droid. He continued then. "It is absurd to believe that he will. This small intervention of yours will have its consequences, but for now, before I tire and get rid of your presence, I will ask one last time... Are you not one of the keepers of time?" There was a long pause. "It was to be expected, you could never be one." There was a second pause. "Yet there is something most remarkable within your engineering features. You even managed to actually touch me before. This, shouldn't have happened. I cannot claim that it was impossible, yet it was absurdly unlikely. I must assume that I was easily distracted while creating a situation with Mr. Barsak before, and I overlooked your presence... But is that what really happened? Just like with Renn, I cannot seem to be able to nullify you with my mind. You are creating a multi-field around you, are you not? I seem to be intrigued... A complex arrangement of information without an abstract self, or is there a human inside

the metal? What sort of life form are you?"

Silence surrounded the android. "Renn, answer. Renn..." I thought I heard a voice through the still-functioning earplug, but again had to ignore this for the time being. The high-pitched frequencies coming from the sirens could be heard in the background, just as could all the commotion created by the recent massive explosion.

"I don't know, neither do I care about your reasons for protecting Mr. Barsak here," continued the being, "but if you intervene with my will again, nothing but doom will come upon you, regardless of who you are."

At this point the entity turned towards me, lifting his arm as I felt my neck being grabbed once more, slightly, this time. The tickling sensation reminded me in a flash of the pain and how absurd the idea of getting near the entity was.

"Now, where were we? Oh yes, the paradox, and how I believe at this point that you are of no use anymore. Still, care you not about having the last word concerning the consequences of your death?"

"Winged one!" the robot's voice interrupted, piercing through the air like a sharp blade.

"Hmm, so you do desire to intervene," the entity stated while turning to the droid. The sensation around my throat suddenly stopped. The android was now covered in a deep-blue neon light, and had unsheathed what appeared to be a sharp energy-blade at the end of each arm.

The droid glanced at me once more, "What's your problem? I told you to get away from here. RUN!"

"Right, right!" I said as I snapped once more from my thoughts and began getting away in the opposite direction from them.

I kept my pace fast and steady this time, getting away from the madness, still, totally disconcerted. “Renn, can you hear me? Renn!” I heard Sully, this time a bit clearer, and I finally acknowledge her.

“Sully, brief me, what is going on there? What happened to Jix? Did you find Felina yet?” I could barely speak.

“Renn, I’m coming for you guys, meet me in the second bridge, near the ivory tower, ok? Torken and Melli will get to the Civil Center by their own means.”

“So they did find Felina then...”

“No, Renn, we didn’t. I’m coming for her too, I’m heading there with Uthor now, we won’t take long.”

“Dammit,” I thought. “Hey, Sully, we cannot leave Jix behind. I will head to the rooftop where he was positioned. He changed locations during the situation, though. Still, let me know if...”

“No, Renn, come to the bridge first, we need to regroup and redefine the plan.”

“No way, I’m sorry Doctor, I’m heading to Jix’s location. Wait for me on the bridge.”

“We have to regroup first so we can...”

“I...” I made a pause. “I’m sorry, Sully, I have to go get Jix first. Wait for us, It’ll be...”

“Come on, Renn,” Sully said in a louder tone. “Just how stubborn are you? Don’t you think I wanna go pick up Jix straight first? Whatever happened to him, it didn’t sound right, and he isn’t answering anymore, but we need to regroup, ok? So fucking come to

the bridge and..."

"Look, I understand your frustration, but I'm quite close to his position. I'll be on the bridge with him by the time you guys arrive. Trust me, Sully, just wait for us, alright?"

I heard Sully exhaling on the earplug. Once I recalled Jix's last words, I felt my shoulders tense and the pain in my throat came back. There was only one option for me; I needed to get to the rooftop where he'd last been.

I stopped walking. I took my Holo-Pad out. I forgot about the X-5 model and it surprised me there for a second. I began tapping on the liquid-screen and got a route to the precise location where Jix's Holo-Pad was. It was two hours, twenty-two minutes past midday.

"Renn," I heard Uthor this time. "Do you know which building to go to, man?"

"Yes, I think so," I said.

"Cool. Let us know when you are at the back door, I'll open it from here for you."

"Alright then," I said as I began to walk towards an intersecting street. Things here were a bit less noisy and, as I entered the small street, I glanced at a couple of young faces looking at me from inside a house on the corner. "Damn quarantine," I thought, "all these people are going to die here at their homes, without a chance, and it's all my fault."

In a snap, I heard the front door of the very same house opening abruptly as a man came out. I saw then what I assumed to be his wife trying to stop him, saying something that I couldn't hear.

"No, NO!" Replied the man, yelling, "You don't understand, I ought to go, Brena."

He left her then and ran for the avenue. His wife stood there, crying in sorrow as she glimpsed me. I wanted to ignore the small dispute but couldn't do it just yet. I peeked at the avenue and was not surprised to see the man running towards the dodecagonal crystal-pillar standing high above the nearby buildings. I rushed towards him, but stopped in the middle of the way as he reached the pillar, and fell down on the pile of corpses on the ground. The mostly purple, multicolored mist surrounded their silhouettes in a weird manner, moving without a pattern.

I returned to the intersecting street only to find the crying woman about to close the door. I approached her and said, "Listen, you have to leave, there is a Civ..."

The woman took a last glance at me and shut the door. I saw through one of the windows as she took both the young faces I saw before to the next room. I felt desperation and knocked loudly, yelling, "You have to leave, everyone, you have to get out of this place!"

I fell on my knees then, and said to myself, "You stupid imbecile, this is all because of you, Renn the idiot!" I punched myself hard in the face and fell sideways. After a moment, I stood up quickly and kept going towards the building I was supposed to be looking for. There was no time for peevish whining, though I wished I could have just stayed there, laying on the pavement by myself.

I kept getting closer to the end of the street. Once I reached the building in question, all the way on Tenth Avenue, I said aloud:

"I'm here, Uthor, Sully."

"Great! Now, let's see, press..." Uthor took a moment, "Eight, one, one. Five, five, seven on the number-pad. If you are in the same building as Jix was, you should see a key-pad next to the backdoor. You see it, Renn?"

“Uh, no way... Yes, I see it,” I said while pressing the keys and thinking about all these numbers, this second convergence. Things were worsening rapidly and I’d had no time to analyze things further.

I went up to the rooftop in a hurry, only to find the door leading to it blocked. I tried to force it but it wouldn’t budge. While looking aside, I created a flow of electricity in my hand and fired it at the door. It finally opened and I was able to walk through it. The first thing I saw when walking on the roof were some robes on the floor and a backpack on one of the corners; no sight of Jix himself. I kept inspecting the rooftop but saw nothing. The Holo-Pad positioned me very close, but I was still some feet away, and I realized Jix was probably on the rooftop belonging to the building next to this one. I went on and jumped towards the other building. Here I saw a body, Jix’s body lying on the floor. “Damn. Come on, brother, I’m here now,” I said as I instinctively picked him up. He had his gear on, and was apparently unconscious. I didn’t attempt to feel his pulse or anything yet, perhaps denying the idea of him being dead. I grabbed his sniper rifle as well.

I carried Jix on my right shoulder, jumping over the gap between the buildings and rapidly went downstairs. Once on the streets, I leaned his body against a wall and took his helmet off; his facial features were obliterated in blood and deep burns. I attempted to feel his pulse this time, but couldn’t feel a thing. A profound sensation of discomfort arose in me. I heard Sully once, “Renn?” but couldn’t answer. Quickly, I put his helmet back on and picked him up, draping his body over my right shoulder. I began to head towards the second bridge, located at the end of Seventh Avenue. The easiest way for me to get there was to go back the way I came, crossing Ninth Avenue. I hastened, wondering yet again about the appearance of this new droid character. I doubted at this point that the Region had somehow sent this new model, but had really no idea why things had turned out the way they did.

As I hurried, I saw a body at the end of the intersecting street flying horizontally with

massive speed. A potent wind current formed and I felt it as I stopped walking for a moment. A deafening silence came out of nowhere, and I stayed put for just another second. Then, I whispered, "Sully, I've got Jix. We are heading there, wait for us."

I heard half-words coming from the other end, for the signal was poor. Once the introduction of this magnificent silence was over, I kept walking, first slowly and then faster towards Ninth Avenue. Once I came upon the house on the corner, where the man and woman quarreled, I noticed the opened front door; my mind began speculating. "Shit," I said out loud. "Come on, Renn, get to the bridge," I thought.

I couldn't stop feeling anxious, so I ventured to the entrance of the house, taking a quick peek while saying aloud, "Hey, is anyone here?" There was no reply. I had to continue my way and immediately reached Ninth Avenue. I couldn't see any brawl nearby, it was all still. Even more corpses could be seen surrounding the gigantic pillar.

Despite the fact that we were heading in the opposite direction of the avenue, I took a moment to inspect the situation. While I didn't notice the new android anywhere around, I did see the being floating where he had previously been, surrounded by this yet recurring multicolored mist, densely drifting all around him. There was now a very long shadow in front of him; the mist was pouring into it as well. The whole avenue was fissured and some buildings which were standing before were nothing but rubble. My curiosity vanished promptly as I began running all the way towards the second bridge. I passed by the group of journalists and saw some of their faces. I almost stepped on one of their corpses, and Jix came close to falling from my shoulder. As I continued on my way, a loud siren started resonating around the City, noisier than before. I heard a voice coming from the speakers as well: To all citizens, evacuate now. Go to the Regional Center 1-H1 on the Mozzorki plaza. To all citizens, evacuate now. Go to the Regional Center 1-H1 on the Mozzorki plaza. To all citizens...

"Dammit, where the hell is Felina?" I asked myself.

I began feeling strange sensations as I kept my pace and thought about Jix. It was so evident to me all along. Harm would come to them from our interaction, somehow, and I kept constructing this relationship with Felina's entourage anyway. When was I to stop this?

Soon a couple of ambulances came out of nowhere, rushing over to the market district. I began noticing people on the avenue, coming out of the alleys and streets perpendicular to it. "At least the Region seems to be trying to evacuate everyone now," I thought. I kept searching people's eyes, searching for Felina's.

"Can you all hear me? Everyone in the private call heard Torken's voice. "Listen, most of the roads to the Civ... closed, you may need t... ggest you gather at the rally point, our men are aiding the injured there and there's.... I...." The call ended suddenly. A moment after, I heard Sully's voice.

"Torken sent a location. Where are you? Hurry, Renn."

"We are coming."

As we approached the third bridge, which was really an extension of Ninth Avenue, an altercation erupted ahead, just feet away from what appeared to be a Region outpost. As I looked back, I noticed dissension amongst the people everywhere. The streets were packed now and some fellas were apparently trying to separate from the rest, probably craving to reach the pillars emerging all around the City. As I pondered on the quasi-fictitious scene in front of me, we reached the outpost beside the third bridge. Out of nowhere, a female officer approached us from my left and grabbed my arm. "Are you in the Program?" she asked, "Come, you have to move, sir, proceed along with the rest."

She tried to guide me inside the perimeter. The people there were walking towards the third bridge. I saw an inner outpost where everyone was being processed, and when I

tried to rejoin our way to the right, she applied force to my arm and tried to detain us.

“This way, sir, move along,” she reiterated in a cold tone.

“I have to take this person to a doctor, his doctor, only his private doctor knows...”

“This is an emergency, sir, everyone must...”

I stopped listening to the officer for a second. There was a loud dispute inside the inner outpost and, for some reason or another, it caught my attention; I thought I heard Felina’s voice. The shouting intensified and I moved a bit to my right in order to see what was happening clearly. Indeed, I immediately saw Felina struggling with a couple of officers who were grabbing her right arm while forcing her towards the processing booth a bit ahead. “The fucking numbers...” I told myself.

I liberated my arm from the officer with a harsh movement and walked inside the perimeter. I grabbed Jix with my whole arm, still leaning him on my shoulder, and kept walking. At this point, some people focused their attention on Felina’s struggle, and on me approaching the situation. Once behind Felina, one of the officers saw me and yelled:

“What are you sniffing at? Are you looking for trouble?”

“Leave her,” I said.

Felina turned around, still struggling, and saw me. “Renn?” she voiced out loud, not quite believing I was truly there. Again acute coincidence manifested amongst us. Not an accidental happening, as I believed it to be.

“Cyrex, get this moron,” the same officer grabbing Felina’s arm instructed a third one behind them. I quickly moved between him and Felina, forcing his arm back by applying

pressure to it. Both officers let Felina go. I noticed backup units in our surroundings, some aware of the situation, already coming forward. Felina came close to me and I murmured, "Can you run? Follow my lead."

As we turned back into Ninth Avenue, the officers made their move and I was forced to face them once more before they got their guns out. The following happened so quickly; I retracted my right arm only to push it forth abruptly a second later. The movement of the air in front of us, almost like a whirling pressure-wave, threw the soldiers over the bridge and unto the grand river below us. This was the second time I had given my mind a new set of instructions while feeling desperation running free. It would appear as if my mind reacted in certain situations by attempting a natural move, or something of the sort. It felt weird, and somehow clumsy, but at least it was effective this time.

"Come," I said as we hastened towards the end of the perimeter and walked over to Ninth Avenue. A couple of officers, plus the woman who'd interacted with me before, came near us, attempting to arrest us. I allowed them to see the electric current coming from my right hand.

"Look, just let us go, I don't wish to harm anyone..." I yelled as I glanced at the officer on the right. He was already pulling his gun out. To my dismay, I reacted by electrocuting him with a massive charge, without realizing at first that I had just killed the man. The others stood there, petrified.

"Shit," I shouted as I grabbed Felina's hand, leaving the perimeter while looking for cover. We zigzagged towards one of the buildings on the corner of Ninth Avenue and its first intersecting street. Some officers shot at us, without success. Once we were safe, I told her, "Come on, we have to move, they are not going to let this go. Sully is waiting for us."

"Renn..." I looked into Felina's eyes and continued to listen to her words, "Thank you, thank you so much." She hugged me. We wasted no time going towards Seventh

Avenue, attempting to sneak through the alleys. As expected, a couple of officers and a military-droid soon appeared behind us.

“Take Jix with you. Keep heading towards the second bridge, on Seventh Avenue. I’ll be right with you.” I said, in a lower tone.

I swiftly passed Jix’s body unto Felina’s back, as she began heading forward, with Jix’s feet dancing on the ground. As soon as this happened, one of the officers instructed the android to shoot at us, “Don’t let them get away, Beta-15! Neutralize them right away!”

The android, quite tall and intimidating, began firing high-caliber rounds directly at Felina and me, and I, in an instant, created a barrier extending all the way from one side of the alley to the next, using both my hands.

The strange sound of bullets impacting could be heard in front of me. The droid soon stopped firing, and I saw the two officers running towards me. I thought about the man I had just killed, and I felt very strange for a split second. You see, reader, this man at the third bridge was really the first person I had intentionally aimed to kill. He had actually died by my hand. Though I had done it entirely in self-defense, I was struck by a strange feeling just before attacking the two officers approaching me. Was I to kill these two as well? What was I becoming? Something had happened back at the bridge, and I didn’t have time to analyze any of it.

To release my momentaneous frustration, I raised both my arms forward, throwing both officers back towards the end of the alley where the droid stood still. I then tensed my right arm while clenching my fingers, and saw the ground and walls where they stood cracking abruptly. Both officers snapped, utterly astounded by what was happening. One yelled, “Get reinforcements!”

The Regional Guard on the left made a run for it. Still, the droid and the remaining officer were not backing away. So I re-executed this new maneuver I had just performed

with increasing force, making parts of the wall beside them crumble to the floor. I immediately ran in the opposite direction, getting out of their sight for the moment. Once I took a left on one of the perpendicular alleys, I stumbled upon a small square garden. I saw Felina all the way on the other end, carrying Jix.

As I attempted to rejoin her, I felt my right ankle being forcefully grabbed while my whole body was pushed back. Immediately, I saw the droid's shape as I fell down to the floor. I began kicking its lower body with my left foot; the energy barrier was on, but it still didn't let me go. I saw a machine-gun emerging from its right shoulder, aiming at me as it held me tight with its left hand. I finally kicked it with enough strength to liberate myself, rolling backwards as some bullets were fired off. Just when I stood up, I was tackled from my right, this time by the soldier whom I had seen before. We went down together and he punched me twice in the face. I pushed him away. He stood up and he shot directly at me, once, but I didn't feel a thing, though I hadn't generated the barrier. I electrocuted him with the golden current, for I was furious at this point, filled with rage by the idea of these people shooting first, willing to end the life of someone in an instant. Nevertheless, I had behaved no differently. Later on, this idea would take root deeply within myself. I stood up. I remained there, in shock, for a brief moment. In an instant, the military droid appeared at the entrance of the open garden and shot at me without hesitation. The bullets which the barrier didn't deflect destroyed the wall behind me and the stone arches on one side of the square. I heard Felina yelling from afar, "Renn!"

I, still with the barrier on, attacked the droid with the golden current, but it wasn't strong enough, for I had to focus my mind more than I could at the moment, and the stream soon began to weaken. While the droid attempted to reload, I stopped both processes in order to let my abilities cool-down and ran towards the robot itself. I tackled the metal menace without the energy field, and immediately felt the harm done to my whole body, but did manage to take the robot down. I began punching the droid's face, without even scratching it at first. I kept punching as I felt my hand being heavily damaged by this action. The droid's open-hand came directly at my face and began to apply pressure near my eyes while its machine-gun fired at both the floor and the ceiling. As I kept

punching it, I noticed the floor surrounding the droid and the metal parts themselves slowly being covered with ice; my hand was as well, and I felt the temperature dropping in the whole alley. I was finally able to generate the barrier and was now hitting the droid's metal face harder than before; its whole upper body was now entirely frozen, and I stopped while looking at my hand, covered in frost. The robot's lights went off, and I quickly stepped away from it. Half my arm was now frozen over and I began to worry, since it felt extremely cold. I ran in Felina's direction, but stopped for a moment near one of the stone columns marking the entrance to the center of the square garden. I attempted to create the barrier around my whole arm so I could beat it against one of the columns and dislodge the heavy chunks of ice clinging to it. Though discomforting, I managed with the help of my left hand to remove all traces of ice. My arm was painfully numb, the sleeve on my trench coat rolled up, still. Nevertheless, I made my way towards Felina, who was running towards me. She had leaned Jix's body on a wall, and when she came close, she asked, "Are you hurt?"

"I'm alright. Come on, we have to keep moving." I said as I inspected my forearm and wondered what had happened just a minute ago. How had this temperature change come about? I wanted to avoid thinking about the second soldier whom I had just killed, but it was impossible for me at this point. Remorsefully, I glanced at his body from afar, still motionless.

We made haste towards the opposite side of the square. I picked up Jix and leaned his body on my shoulder, noticing how sore my hand was as I flexed my fingers. The alarm on the City's speakers kept blaring, mixed now with what appeared to be an even more annoying and constant pattern. When we finally exited the back alley which lead to an open street, a suffocating sound was heard, whizzing through the streets at an enormous speed. Having no time to consider things further, I grabbed Felina's hand and found cover near the entrance of the alley, creating an energy field slightly above us. As I kept it on, the whirring sounds began to diminish and several explosions could be felt all over the area. They made the walls reverberate around us as we heard a cracking sound for over a minute. Felina was holding on to me and, when the commotion was

finally over, she desperately asked, “Renn, what’s going on?!”

“I, I’m not sure, but we have to get to Sully and Uthor. We must hurry. I’m so glad I saw you back there, Felina, I... you had me quite worried, why did you run away just like that?”

“Why would you want to know that, silly old man? Besides, that’s... that’s not important,” said Felina in a trembling voice. “At any rate, what happened to Jix? He is ok, isn’t he?”

“I... I certainly hope so. Look, there’s no time. Let’s keep moving, alright?”

“What are you talking about? Isn’t he ok?”

“I don’t know. Look, we don’t know exactly what happened to him, so we have to get him to Sully. I’m sure he still has a chance, but only if we hurry, alright?”

“But, Renn...” Felina’s eyes closed; she wrinkled her nose slightly. Her hand moved to her chest, as she exhaled and seemed to make an effort not to fall into despair.

“We have to keep moving, they’ll be here anytime, the soldiers, I mean.” I continued.

Felina nodded as she wiped her face. We continued on our way, listening to the chaos breaking out all around us. “Why didn’t I die back there?” I asked myself. I felt as if I should have, and now I was here, wrapped around this madness again, playing a role in this chaos. I couldn’t anticipate that which was coming, I was not even close, for my mind was in disorder. A feeble mortal attempting to predict, ignoring the uncertainty embedded in reality. “Why didn’t you die back there, Renn?” I asked myself yet again.

Chapter 2

The digital-numbers displayed on Allastra's back oscillate between 0125 and 0132. Her silhouette glows deep-blue. Renn decides to retreat from the scene and we hear Edorik's voice through the inner speakers of the suit.

"Finally, he's getting away. All levels are optimal. Beware, child."

"Remember your training, Allas," Etrus intervenes. "When you synchronize and tune your mind nothing can stop you. Not even this unfortunate thing. Save them, Allas, remember?"

The dark entity and Allastra stand in front of each other, motionless, for a brief moment, after which the suited woman sprints and unleashes a series of attacks with her energy blades. The dark figure again transforms into the chromed mist whenever a strike comes near. Upon realizing this, Allastra grabs a weapon unveiling from her shoulder while changing her neon contour to red. It appears these changes in color correspond to different modes. She beams a high-amplitude laser into the multicolored smoke, which dissipates away, only to reintegrate a second after in front of Edorik's daughter. Both the rifle and the blades disappear while the neon contour changes to green, and Allastra strikes the dark shape with her right fist, harder than ever before. We see the asphalt behind the dark figure disintegrate due to this motion, as well as a couple of tanks being overturned nearby. The suited woman continues a similarly powerful chain of attacks, and we see an increment in the digitally-displayed numbers, reaching now up to 0195. The dark entity keeps stopping each punch, without any effort, apparently. Yet, it is not transforming into the chromed mist anymore. Without Allastra's knowledge, the figure places its tail around the suited woman's right foot. It pulls Allastra's body up in the air and then smashes her heavily against the ground. The dark entity throws the suited woman far away with an extremely fast movement, arms crossed. A wide, blue laser is beamed from Allastra's position up in the air towards the dark figure. It raises its right

arm and deflects the attack. Just then, Allastra appears next to it, having launched herself from a stone wall she releases a strike with both her hands directly at its chest. The entity stops the impact, which obliterates a couple of old-style buildings on the left side of Ninth Avenue due to the motion's massive shockwave, scorching some trees along the sidewalk. The numbers on Allastra's back had increased up to 0297. By having retained both her hands, the being's tail coils around Allastra's neck as it punches her stomach once with great potency. It then releases her all at once, kicking her as she flies away over the avenue. Parallel to this motion, the dark entity's arm begins to extend above in the air towards Allastra's position, stretching a mile long in just a pair of seconds. The end of the being's arm moves towards Edorik's daughter, smashing her on the ground and below as it keeps extending. Moments after, the motion is over and the whole arm retracts with massive haste. No sight of Allastra. Then, the section of the avenue where she had previously sank erupts as she comes to the surface, sprinting towards the entity. For the first time, it adopts a defensive pose. As Allastra rapidly reaches its position, the being takes a step forward and grabs Allastra by the face. She is pulled down and smashed once more on the ground. The being, which is now forcing her to steady, has its right foot on her neck, kneeled. The five long claws clashing against the electro-magnetic field are seen creating pressure upon the ferrofluid-like material.

"I warned you," asserts the dark entity with its multiple voices. His wings remain fully extended.

The figure stands up and raises its foot up in the air along with Allastra, turning around to the opposite side of the avenue. It strikes her once on the neck. Allastra tries to defend herself, but barely manages to avoid serious harm. The being then strikes her face with its elbow, and the impact is so strong this time that we see Allastra's head losing balance. The dark shape finishes this set of actions with a diagonal, two-handed massive strike. Allastra again flies away with great velocity. "Child!" Edorik yells. She does not react this time, and we simply see her body flying all over Ninth Avenue. A powerful wind current forms all around, making trees and traffic lights move vibrantly.

“How persistent,” we hear the dark being saying.

Allastra is reaching solid ground, slamming hard upon the reef of the City’s main river three miles away. Chunks of rock quickly fall to the stream as she is submerged in the waters. We now gaze at the dark entity all the way where the fight took place. It floats towards its previous location and begins to talk to itself. Little by little, the purple, multicolored mist emerges from its figure, surrounding it all over. We notice a shadow in front of the being as well, getting bigger and larger without it physically doing so. Unexpectedly, Renn emerges from a perpendicular street and glances at the destruction caused by the fight. He is carrying the one called Jix on his shoulder. He quickly abandons his position and heads towards the bridge, not far from where Allastra was thrown a minute ago. We keep our sight fixed upon the dark shape for several minutes, as its ritual develops further.

The entity has in fact been conjuring a second entity all this time, or so it appears, for the shadow finally takes on a third dimension while the mist enters into it, and with such strange phenomenon, another shape, much taller than the first, is formed. He stands in front of his creator, as he extends his own set of wings.

“Go to Dallaren, the capital of the Southern Federation. Then head to the capital of the Eastern Federation. Find the heads of the Zaharatra Institute and the members of the Lakar Board of Advice, the vote casters from each federation too. Inflict reasoning unto them. Make them realize what already resides deep inside their mind. The acknowledgement of their apathetic, rottenly egotistic conduct must reach the heads of the compartmentalized churches and pragmatic institutions. All their institutions shall fall. Where men have failed, the hidden logic will prevail.”

The tall shadow stays still for a moment. It then nods while making a deep, low, strange sound.

“Humans are no match, but do consider other factors. Show them how their lack of empathy, their lack of understanding brought them to this situation.”

They both remain quiet for a minute. After this pause, the dark entity continues, “As we speak, a group of humans has launched a mix of substances to cause a reaction where we currently stand. Take this as an example of their unsurprisingly weakness.”

We begin to hear a round of missiles approaching from afar, from the Other Side of the City. They have been launched from an advanced military apparatus within a Regional outpost. This is located near the forth, the last bridge of the second capital of the Northern Federation.

As the round approaches, the sound increases in pitch and we witness several missiles striking Ninth Avenue, shocking explosions over the asphalt and three blocks of buildings being obliterated in a matter of seconds. This massive motion shocks the surroundings, and though it wasn't at all equivalent in magnitude to the explosion caused by the dark being before, it does reverberate all over the third bridge and the streets nearby. When the ashes stop burning and the achromatic smoke dissipates, the two silhouettes are seen in the same location as before, standing still, surrounded by fire.

“The pinnacle of their strength, I imagine, or at least close to it.” The dark being continues, “Do not waste any more time, report back to me when you have fulfilled these tasks.”

The shadowy figure extends its massive wings and swiftly flies away. The dark entity remains motionless, for a second, and disappears suddenly. We switch our perspective to its current location, floating above the outpost from which the round of missiles was fired minutes ago. It appears as if a second round is soon to be launched. The obscure shape descends from the air, arms crossed, and the Region personnel spots it, yelling as it approaches. Some soldiers begin firing at it. The entity stops, and by moving its

index finger upwards, burns the whole outpost in an instant with a massive explosion. Reddish-blue fire can be seen, emerging all around, and yet it does not appear to dissipate. The dark shape teleports once more, now to the fourth bridge, where part of the military personnel and some civilians can be seen shocked due to the explosion. As officers attempt to fire at the dark figure, the being again moves its index finger, but this time horizontally, breaking the neck of everyone who stood in front of it. Dozens of bodies fall to the floor. Having annihilated this big outpost, the dark entity remains quiet and steady for the following minute. It seems to be pondering its consequent actions. The purple fire keeps burning. The entity teleports again, leaving a trail of destruction behind.

I was extremely worried about Jix, and seeing Felina's face as we continued our way towards Sully and Uthor was unbearable; she was worried, like never before, looking down at the cobblestone patterns. The sound of the alarm ran wild all over the City now.

"We are almost there, can you make it? Do you want to take a moment to catch your breath?" I asked.

"I'm fine," Felina barely answered.

"Let's slow down our pace anyway, there are officers around these parts," I suggested. Once we did, Felina asked me:

"Renn, are you sure you... summoned, this thing? I mean... I can't believe what is happening, I'm not sure of anything anymore. Did... did he do this to Jix?"

"Yes..." I felt again my throat in extreme discomfort, still, I kept on. "Jix, I mean, Jix saved me, Felina. I was about to die, and he shot directly at the being. I told him to get away, but he didn't, and that's when... that's when I... when we heard him in agony."

I couldn't go on, the pain forced me to stop.

"And how come you can barely speak clearly? What is happening? This is so unbelievable, I don't understand, I..."

I couldn't even answer. I observed our surroundings as we approached Seventh Avenue. There was a large group of Locrians blocking the way ahead; black smoke could be seen coming out of their metal barrels. As we came closer and carefully walked through the sidewalk, I noticed a line of people kneeling, with their hands on their heads. A feeling of anger and rage invaded me in a burst, but as I held Felina's hand tighter, the boiling sensation disappeared. Regardless of the situation, Felina and Jix's safety was the priority.

The second bridge was nearby, and I looked farther ahead to see if Sully was on site. “Sully, we are here. Where are you? Can you hear me?” I said aloud.

I didn’t get a response. “Dammit. Look, Felina, we won’t be able to get close to the second bridge unless we find a way past these people. The vehicle Sully spoke about during the briefing is far behind now, and even if we went back, I don’t see a way for us to...”

“Ok...” Felina interrupted, still looking at the floor. “It’s gonna sound weird again, but we could go through the sewers. The thing is, most of the sewer cap’s are sealed...”

She was wearing her anguished expression, only more intense. “Come, we need to find a deserted street, there we’ll get inside,” I said as I led the way backwards.

We soon stumbled upon a sewer metal cap in one of the nearby alleys. I glanced quickly at the street to see if there was anyone around, but there wasn’t. “Step back,” I said as I, still carrying Jix, released the golden current unto the metal lid.

“Whoa,” Felina’s expression changed for a moment, soon turning back to indifference. Once the seal was broken, she lifted the cap and went inside. I passed Jix’s body along to her and went in myself, placing the metal cap back again.

“This way,” Felina said once the water covered our feet.

We walked underground for a couple of blocks until I noticed the aforementioned dispute right above us. Though I couldn’t hear clearly, I noticed a man with an aggressive tone, yelling. He was the only one, apparently. Just then, we felt a shockwave and how it promptly vanished. Silence followed.

Felina and I looked at each other as we resumed our pace. We quickly found an

oxidized metal ladder. I climbed it and found the unsealed metal cap above. We got out quickly and began heading in the opposite direction of the Locrians, who were in fact, to my surprise, all looking at the sky. I noticed a cloud of smoke, colored from below with a purple tone. As soon as we got back on our way, and to my most unfortunate disappointment, the entity materialized in front of us, out of nowhere.

The dark figure was floating, upright, and his tail moved from side to side.

“There you are,” He pronounced with his multiple intonations.

Felina was frozen; her wide eyes locked upon the entity’s presence. I grabbed her hand even tighter. “Stay with me, Felina,” I murmured.

“What do we have here?” the abstract function continued, “Just the sort of behavior I was referring to. You appealed to morality before, attempting to judge my actions. I ask now, Renn Barsak, the one who sees, how are you not trying to stop these men? Are you to ignore all the violence occurring behind you? How incongruent.”

The entity moved past us from the right, and reader, his presence was overwhelming. Being near him felt extremely odd, and by the looks of it, Felina noticed this as well. The being soon positioned himself above the Locrians who, by this point, were all in fact looking at the being with their jaws dropped. Some in the group even fell to the floor and placed their heads on the ground. The people in line were all impressed as well, and I took this chance to peek at Seventh Avenue just three hundred feet away, searching for Sully. “Sully, do you read me?” I asked aloud.

“Renn, I hear you,” Sully answered this time. I felt quite relieved, sort of, illogically, as if Sully’s intervention would fix something. But it had to, or so I thought at the moment, for Felina and Jix could escape from the madness, once and for all.

“Look, Sully, we are very close. Where are you?”

“We are in the last intersecting street before the second bridge.”

“Excellent, we’ll be right there.”

Just then, I heard Sully gasping. “Renn! I see the creature, holy crap, Renn, it’s here. Wait, are you guys... I see you guys, Felina! Stay right where you are, we’ll be there in a second.”

“No, Sully, do not come near, we...”

The entity addressed me at this point, raising his index finger while most of the Locrian cyberpunks fell to the ground, without a sound. “Don’t you see? You humans are all about your animalistic passions. You haven’t pondered on what your mere existence proves. Death does not exist, when are you going to realize? And neither does your individuality. Only that which, by infinite virtue, grants the eternal illusion.”

“You don’t understand, damn you!” I yelled. I then made a pause. “So you keep killing everyone just because you assume that what we call death is nonexistent? You are the incongruent one, wicked function, out of control, diving into the chaos resulting from all possible aspects of this world! That is what you needed to hear before, that you will tend towards chaos in this land. Did you listen? You need to vanish from this world!”

The entity didn’t answer right away. He, for the first time, just looked at me.

“And why exactly would I tend towards chaos, precisely when my functioning operates in a constructive level?”

“You are wrong. Maybe where you come from, but don’t you see? Here you have annulled a fundamental layer of yourself. Since you were brought into existence you have only brought down the order of frequencies we have constructed for ourselves.

Listen to me..."

The being burst into laughter. "Is that truly what you think? You are so removed from the nature of The Hidden."

I, frustrated again, attempted to elaborate a sentence which would have an impact on the being's emotions, if there were any. But I couldn't. I froze, and just then, I saw a trail forming in the river, coming forward, lifting the waters as the android from before appeared in front of the being, landing a massive strike on him. The shockwave was so intense it fissured the whole street and demolished the nearby buildings in an instant. Everyone below them was blown away, some into the river. A few were smashed right on the site. Felina and I were thrown back twenty feet, and just as I raised my head, I saw the entity looking at me. I gazed directly into his eyes, for a moment, feeling as if I was reaching the inner depths of his mind, as he was thwarting, with no effort, the android's actions. I heard Felina then; she grabbed my arm. I barely managed to turn around and see a vehicle. It was Sully arriving at the scene, and Felina began pulling me away. I kept looking at the being. The droid executed a second strike and they both vanished, creating a trail of dust surpassing the building's height along the street parallel to Seventh Avenue. Again the shockwave was intense, and our vehicle tumbled over sideways, with Sully and Uthor inside. I quickly snapped out of my thoughts and helped raise the vehicle upright again. We went inside and Sully promptly drove us away.

"We need to get to the outpost, there I'll help Jix. Renn, his vital signs. Was he breathing? Did you feel his pulse?" She asked, driving with extreme haste and exactitude.

"Hey, Sul, I'm sorry I ran..." Felina intervened.

"No worries, I'm at ease now that you're safe. If something should have happened to you..." Sully replied.

“I, I couldn’t feel his pulse, Sully, so hurry, you need to help him. I’m sure he is alright, somehow, but he had...” I stopped. “Just hurry.”

“You didn’t?” Sully asked and subsequently complained without a specific word, just general expressions of discomfort. “Felina, could you...?”

“Of course,” Felina said as she attempted to feel Jix’s pulse. She lifted his hand, took off his glove and stood still for a moment. “I think, I think I feel his pulse...”

Sully sighed heavily, and there was a cold silence.

“According to Torken’s location,” Uthor made a pause while checking his device, “let’s see here... we need to head all the way south. Yes, the outpost is just outside the City. We’ll be there in less than twenty minutes.”

“Alright,” I said. “Damn...” I thought.

“Holy crap, what the heck is that creature? Did it come from your imagination, or what the heck is going on here? You were right, Renn, after all,” Sully kept on. She was all in a rush. I looked at Felina, who had lowered her eyes and was gazing out the window.

“Take the next turn right,” Uthor said.

I didn’t speak anymore, and found myself pondering over my basic understanding of things, what I treasured as knowledge and formed the pillars of my fundamental views. I now doubted everything. I felt as if part of my spirit had been crushed, and I just wanted to bury my head in the ground, hidden away, unseen by anyone. Sully kept jabbering, and I looked at Jix, who was in between Felina and me. I took his helmet off and opened the back window. Felina looked at me, fleetingly, and began cleaning his face with her sleeve. I gazed at her delicate touch, her concise acts and recalled my

interpretations of our involvement. I was glad to have them backing me up, but as I've stated many times, I felt repugnant, as if I was taking advantage of them. I was confused, reader, now more than ever, and for the first time felt distant to the numbers, to those leading the pathway of clues for me to follow. A path in which humanity had to pay for my blind arrogance. We were getting away from the City, and I thought about all those whom I was leaving behind. "Vino, Julie... Everyone," I thought, "...please be safe until I find a way to fix things."

Chapter 3

After witnessing the display of destruction, we move not towards the entity's current location, but that of Allastra. She is submerged in the river, being slightly carried away by the flow. We hear Edorik's voice from the inner speakers of the suit.

"Allas, child, answer!" We hear further murmuring, "Ah, she must have been knocked out. The system is standing by. Her signals seem just fine."

"Allas, can you hear us?" Etrus asks this time. "Answer, Allas..."

Allastra is touching the bottom of the river. We see the place where Edorik and Etrus reside; a small room with three big monitors, measurement tools and metal pipes connected to a central unit. Edorik is a short, middle-aged man. Etrus is tall and thin, and seems to be around the same age. They both look at each other, and Etrus commences speaking:

"This is definitely strange. Why was she knocked out? Do you suspect a temperature change in the..."

"No, no, this is not the suit. This was her, not acting with confidence. She doubted, and the sync didn't enter in the update. Look at the stats, the suit is fine, see the console there? Go back. See? A damn null reference."

"Yes, you may be right," Etrus says, sighing.

"But, why? Why would you doubt yourself, Allas? You know what you are capable of, you know your stats. Hmm..." Edorik makes a pause. "The iterative entity must be quite intimidating... more than we thought so. I don't think we took that into consideration seriously, brother, her levels may..."

Suddenly, we hear Allastra's voice, interrupting her father:

"Oh no, what happened? Oh, bloody moons, he knocked me out, didn't he? My head hurts just a little."

"Child, you are alright!" Edorik yells.

"Thank goodness, Allas..." Etrus adds.

"You know I'm going to be alright as long as the suit stands, don't you? You can't be worried!"

They all laugh. "Still," Edorik interrupts. "You missed an update and didn't synchronized properly with the system, Allas, are you not afraid of this being? He possesses every reason for you to be, it would only be logical to fear his presence, child. I thought I would ask you. If you wish to stop, just say the word and..."

"No, father, it wasn't that. I'm not sure, but when he hit me with his elbow, he did in such an angle and with such accuracy that I may have panicked for just a brief, a very brief moment there... and I..." she makes a pause, "Bloody moons!"

The three of them laugh again with a strange, empathic connection.

"That's alright, as expected. How are you doing there? You reached 305 FER before. Do you think the iterative entity may be able to handle you, child, after all?"

"I'm not sure... He is way overpowered. He has done nothing but simply play with us at the moment. I'm going to have to push through now. I feel his presence going farther and farther away from balance. He will soon attempt to kill everyone, father, uncle, not only those from the inner rim."

“Indeed, child,” Edorik states.

“They are all...” Allastra begins, and Etrus joins in unison, “...infinite. Every human is, not only to those around him, but to the eternal itself. I will endorse my cause, for I am a human, to stop every inhumane action and to behold the harmony in all.”

“Go, my child, do the undoable and push the limits of reality further.” Says Edorik after a brief pause.

We see Allastra’s neon-green contour lighting up. “Why is it so unlikely. Is he really so aware...? Ninety-eight point nine percent, ninety-nine point one percent...” She stays still for a second, and sprints like lightning beneath the river a moment after.

“All levels are optimal,” Etrus mentions.

Upon reaching the riverbank, we see her jumping way above in the air, twirling, about to strike the entity, which is seen floating over a group of people. We see Renn Barsak carrying the one called Jix over his shoulder, accompanied by the one named Felina. They are feet away from the rest.

Allastra is embedded in the moment and attacks the dark figure without hesitation. It was afterwards she realized the devastation caused by the impact, and how some people were killed by it.

“Get out of the way! No! Bloody moons!” she yells as she strikes the dark being again, this time pushing its figure all along the street perpendicular to the river. As they are propelled towards the wide street, the obscure shape grabs Allastra’s face and throws her below on the pavement, stopping the whole motion with this action. Allastra quickly returns to her previous altitude, retaining her distance from the entity.

They both stand in front of each other, suspended in the air. Allastra displays now higher numbers on her back, reaching over 0415. All around her neon-green light blooms bright. She suddenly asks, "What is your name?"

"My name, you ask? I don't have one. I don't need one. What is the nature of such an irrelevant question?" there was a pause, "I'm not interested in your senseless words anymore. In fact, I'm beginning to get tired of you overall, so I recommend you leave this place, for my benevolence is great at the moment. You are not one of the time-keepers, you lost my attention. Though I should point out, if you want to continue destroying the City, or killing its people as we play, that would be most amusing. I enjoy the rehearsal."

"We will stop you here, iterative entity. My people will not worry about the destruction of their environment. The people from the inner rim deserve to be left alone, don't you see? The mathematician is not the first to have seen you, nor is it the first time you come to this world."

"What are you speaking of?" The dark being asks, "Perhaps some other archetype. Not me." A second set of wings emerges from his back, bigger, juxtaposed behind the first. His extremities and facial features sharpen. "This world will embrace rationality and wisdom once again."

We change locations and suddenly find ourselves in the ethereal, contemplating again the composer's polyphony. As he plays, we discern frustration reflected on his expression, eyes closed. The old luminous figure, as well as the young one, approach.

"The mysterious piece on the board has begun revealing itself." says the musician. "But I doubt it will be strong enough. I will be forced to summon the First Seal, due to my lack of judgement. I will be forced to ask one of the keepers for their assistance. This arrangement is taking me through deep waters. Father, it seems I overlooked the higher harmonics. This composition is definitely not what I had expected."

“The higher harmonics are just a ramification of the root, the truth of your improvisation, that which you wish to speak of but do not dare,” says the old luminous figure.

“A part of my...”

“True self, that is right.”

The composer closes his eyes and immerses himself in the present. Both the old man and the son remain by his side, not proffering any noise. Then, the composer begins chanting, and as he does, we move through another part of the meta-physical, just as the material begins. There we contemplate another world, of translucent and luminescent figures too. The trees, the leaves, the rivers and all is transparent, blooming, leaving a trail of light as it all moves constantly, slightly. There are two gigantic tetrahedrons in the sky, inverted upon one another, energy radiating from the center, where they nearly touch. We set our sight upon a woman with red armor, near a lake of light, who is seeding the land next to it, chanting. A small, translucent dragon-like creature flies around her. Attached to the back of her armor, we see a golden double-crossbow, as well as a long staff, emanating energy from a red crystal on top of it. A cape and other clothing unfolds from her shoulders and waist, laying gently upon the golden grass. We then hear the chant of the composer, reaching through as the woman listens. She does, carefully, and morphs her own chanting to match the new tonality. As both melodies reach an end, the woman lifts her hand towards the dragon, who flies by it. We then see, in a strange fashion, a portion of the land changing, muting its aspect, as if alive, and a second and a third dragon-like creatures, translucent, rise from the land. They approach the woman, who speaks to them. “Will you come with me?” She asks. All things display a fractal pattern in the light they reflect. Both male and female, strong, big creatures reply with a pleasant sound. The small one comes near as well, and the woman speaks again, “Do hurry. We must. A high-chanter, one I’ve had the pleasure of meeting, has chanted. To his pledge, we will answer.”

The creatures again make an odd sound while moving about the woman's form. We then see a second character approaching. A male figure, tall, also translucent and luminescent, wearing armor made of light. As he comes near, he asks, "Then, will you attend his chant?"

"We must, Theredinn."

"The lyrics, "... a will yet to be measured..." He chants without confidence, Velle."

The woman takes a moment as she looks at the lake of light, "A sad atmosphere, very different from what I had heard. It was consistent, very consistent. A complex polyphony, even for a high chanter. I must answer the call."

Theredinn comes close, wrapping Velle in his arms. These beings are of distinct colors, producing a multicolor tone as they stay together for a moment. When the farewell is over, Velle chants again, calling for someone else, discreetly. A different female figure appears behind her, much bigger in shape, emanating from her body like a spirit, yet, attached still to Velle's translucent body.

"I thank you for answering my call, Guntergettela," says Velle, looking upright to her shoulder.

"It is my pleasure, Velle." a voice reverberates.

"We will answer a high-chanter's call. The lands below are being threatened. Let us hurry," she says, glancing at the tall male for the last time as Guntergettela vanishes, merging with her body.

The woman and the dragon-like creatures then submerge in the lake of light. It displays on its surface constant patterns, always moving. As they do, we see them devoured by dark waters, leaving a dot of light above. Soon, the woman falls through the air,

abandoning the liquid medium. We spot a blue horizon ahead. Velle begins casting spells on herself and the creatures who, like her, now seem nontransparent.

“Doratraba. Volta. Elkeniss.” We hear her say as distinct lights form geometrical patterns around her.

“A dark atmosphere ahead, Fellek,” warns the woman caster. “Stay focused, pay attention to my moves. We begin.”

While falling rapidly through the air, Velle twirls one last time, casting one last spell on herself. “Leptoluna.” She then grabs both the crossbow and the staff from the back of her armor and gets ready to strike. She shoots a red, flaming arrow while a bright form of energy is seen gathering on top of her scepter. She releases both attacks, then casts a larger spell towards the same direction with her bare hands. The Fellek, or dragon creatures, have already spread out, swiftly flying away. We begin seeing the suburbs of the Northern Federation below. “So this is what his chant was about. Only now am I able to see,” says Velle aloud, gaining speed as we see her reaching the clouds, approaching the main river still far away.

With the current events at hand, we turn our sight back to the street where Allastra and the dark figure last were. They both remain suspended in midair. Allastra breaks the silence.

“The old legends from my people speak of you, way in the past.” she states, making a pause after, closing her fist tight. “We will end this here, before it is too late.”

The dark entity crosses its arms, “That sounds interesting. I’m waiting.”

The green contour blooms higher, and Allastra is immediately seen striking the dark shape. Once more it stops this and every attempt without seemingly requiring much effort. As the sequence continues, and buildings nearby begin to collapse due to the air-

pressure created by each impact, we notice the entity's attention being attracted somewhere else, up in the sky. Quickly, and without even looking at Edorik's daughter, the dark being seizes her right arm with its tail. Allastra immediately cuts the dark entity's tail in half with the sharp energy-blade on her other arm, and as she does, the being's tail extrudes two ends from the remaining stump. The now two-headed tail coils around Allastra's neck and arm. As she tries to free herself, the dark shape slaps her face firmly, throwing her further away against a large tree in a small park next to a perpendicular alley. Allastra soon recovers, but stands still, observant. The entity has in fact been looking this whole time at a certain point in the sky, and we now see it repelling Velle's attacks coming from above, both the flaming arrow and the Fuego spell. The third incantation appears to be much stronger and assaults the whole street with great momentum. The dark figure had taken on the shape of the multicolor mist, avoiding harm. But as soon as it materializes again, we see the Fellek attacking it fiercely, at close range. The dark entity engages their movements, seeming to dance with them. Yet all too soon it is throwing them away one by one, slamming their bodies into the concrete. As soon as it has dealt with the last of the Fellek, Velle appears out of nowhere, attacking it with an energy dagger. Upon the strong clash, the dark being has intercepted the blade with its long, sharp fingers. Velle retracts whirling and immediately unleashes another spell, as we hear her saying, "Fourth string-cast, Albanos."

From the top of her staff, a black-and-white beam emerges, striking the dark shape. It contains the spell by raising its right arm. We see Velle's expression sharpen while she yells, "Fourth string-cast, Elkeniss Agrevo." A bigger geometrical pattern is then seen forming around her, and the beam from her staff is amplified. The dark being, still containing the spell, begins laughing frantically. It then retracts its arm, allowing the energy from the enchantment to reach it directly, fissuring the whole street in the process, raising electric dust and smoke all over the place. The laughter's volume increases. When Velle's sorcery ends, we see the entity's silhouette intact, floating above the destroyed asphalt. There is a hole underneath, vast in size. Its laughter reaches an end, and we hear the dark entity speaking again:

“You are one of the ancient ones, one of the keepers of time indeed. I can feel it raging inside of you, the old magic from the old world. This is quite amusing. Tell me, how long have you been here? Are you eternal? Self-existing, perhaps?”

There is no answer from Velle. The Fellek have gathered around her and are now facing the dark figure.

“Have you come to aid Mr.Renn Barsak? Or perhaps this is a credulous attempt to aid the whole of humanity, to perpetrate their banal slaughter, their aberration of the hidden logic. Such incongruence, avoiding the inevitable truth, which resides in the very same illusion, and has failed yet again to be seen. I have several questions for you, keeper of time, despite not having...”

“You are lost,” Velle interrupts all of a sudden, “You are lost within your irrationality, clouded by your ego, not able to recognize where you are. You assume you will make justice where there is no justice needed. Everything is as it should be, all according to its existence, its relative density. You don’t belong here, you are nothing but the product of the higher harmonics, an accident not foreseen by he who has sent me.”

“You dare to dismiss my assessment by asserting that everything is as it should be? Irreverent ideas, groundless dogmas. The validation of your own belief system holds no value without objectivity. Most unfortunately but foreseen indeed, misunderstanding dwells within you, time-keeper. I will provide this realm with a logical regime. One which will embrace the purity of the right harmonics, as you have called them, and will demonstrate how everything coming out of the current state is putrefactious. For a moment, before, I thought you would have agreed.”

Hereupon the end of the being’s words, Velle draws a bright, deep-blue arrow on her crossbow. As she fires, we see Allastra on the opposite side quickly reacting, sprinting towards the dark entity. As soon as the flaming arrow is deflected by the two-headed tail, Allastra releases a right, full-contact kick which is instantly stopped by the dark

being's right forearm. The numbers on her upper-back reach 0522, and the impact is so strong that several apartment buildings in front of her simply fall before them. Immediately after, the entity grasps Allastra's neck with its hand and coils the two ends of its tail around her arms and legs. It prepares to strike Edorik's daughter, and Velle takes the opportunity to cast an even stronger spell. She yells, "Fifth string-cast, Macavoro!"

A bright, blooming light is seen gathering in front of Velle's hands, and a ray is soon fired towards the being's position. The dark entity quickly reacts and covers itself with one of its large left wings. This time we see an opaque spheroid, a translucent barrier projected around it. The energy of the spell is so massive that it interrupts the barrier and pierces through the dark entity's wing, forcing it to deflect the enchantment with its left arm. It does, and the blooming ray is now propelled towards Velle, who vanishes from sight. We see an electric phenomenon resulting as the product of such spell, melting the whole street all the way up to the river. Allastra struggles to liberate herself and the Fellek attack the entity once more. With a swift arm movement, the dark shape wards off the creatures and we see Allastra freeing herself completely. The neon color surrounding her has changed and she attacks the dark being with her blades emanating in a cross fashion. The entity uses the long fingers of its right hand to stop the staggering attack, clinging to Allastra's arms. Velle appears strafing from their left and attacks the shape as well. It uses its other set of fingers to intercept her movements. Quickly, it turns fully and throws both Allastra and Velle away, a hundred and eighty degrees from each other.

While Velle slams into a faraway building, Allastra manages to break free of the motion and sprints again towards the entity. "Stay out of this, idiotic metal," says the being, laughing out loud once more. By raising its right arm and slightly lifting two fingers, the entity triggers the materialization of a series of metal-like cubes, chromed ones, each bigger than the last, enclosing Allastra within a gigantic prison. The last cube is placed and soon the outline of the City includes this massive shape, occupying two blocks of space.

Lightning appears from the sky, gigantic, striking the ground as the dark being turns into mist once more. A second bolt assaults the surroundings. We see Velle, who had cast these powerful spells, now enchanting an arrow on her golden crossbow. Several spells are cast upon the arrow and it emits a glowing light all around it. When Velle fires, the dark shape disappears and reappears in front of her. We see the huge explosion created by the magic-arrow behind them. She is frightened, and the Fellek appear on each side of the entity. The smallest of the Fellek casts a powerful buff on Velle while the other two attack the dark figure. We hear its voice, "Enough of you. Be gone."

The dark being touches both big creatures with his index finger and they immediately turn into mist. The multicolor dust flies through the air, and Velle yells while attacking the entity with her dagger. It frustrates the strike once again, and before it attempts to touch the smallest of the Fellek, Guntergettela emerges from Velle, trying to force the entity to the ground with her massive figure. Though strong, Guntergettela barely manages to move the dark shape, which immediately delivers a massive kick into Velle's chest, throwing both Guntergettela and the enchantress several feet away.

"I thought you time-keepers were said to be the self-existing guards of the lands. All I see is a human-like weakling, defending the dishonorable actions of men. Why are you all attempting to continue this charade you call society? An empty tyranny without virtue. The well is poisoned. The minds of men will never change."

Guntergettela had separated completely from Velle at this point. We see her lower body, a sort of source of energy in the form of light, gas and heat. Her upper body is that of a woman, not transparent anymore.

"...Oh, but they will, you traitor!" says Velle, as she launches towards the dark entity. Both Guntergettela and Velle quickly launch a melee attack. Velle casts spells here and there, while the woman made of gas delivers swift strikes, sometimes barely missing the target. As this sequence continues, we turn our sight upon Allastra, who is still inside

the massive structure, trying to release herself by striking the walls with her electric blades. Every attack seems ineffective, and she turns to punch the walls with her fists, changing the neon light to green. "Father, uncle, can you hear me?" There is no response.

"Bloody moons, I gotta get out of here," she says, followed by a long sigh. "This is not a game, this is not a game," Allastra repeats to herself. We see the digitally-displayed numbers on her lower-neck gradually increasing. "Ninety seven point eight percent. Ninety seven point six percent."

Allastra begins charging energy all around her. She punches one of the walls containing her once. The punch is massive, much stronger than before, and indeed some harm is done to the walls, annihilating the solidity of some of its layers. "Ninety five point five percent."

On the outside, Velle is seen struggling now. The entity is not moving back anymore, and though Guntergettela keeps attacking, all their momentum seems to be gone.

"I do not fully understand who you are, or where you came from. Furthermore, it would be unwise to attempt to read your mind, for it is not readable to me," says the dark entity calmly, as he annuls every attempt to do it harm. "This is fatuous, hysterical, so it would be delightful for you to stop attacking me and share some of your information matrix with me. Wouldn't you say? Could we speak instead, time-keeper?"

The entity's arm begins to grow, and before it takes Velle by the neck, she retracts with a swift jump backwards. "What is happening here?" She asks aloud once standing on the vastly destroyed pavement. The woman made of gas and the small Fellek are by her side. "Why are his intentions so deeply connected to the chant, yet, not connected in any form? We may be in trouble, Guntergettela, gather all your strength. The same goes for you, Fellek. Be ready."

The gigantic cube behind them begins to reverberate from within. "This one sure is persistent," the dark entity enunciates, glancing at the prison over its shoulder.

"Here we go! Fifth string-cast, Elderin Bolt!" Velle yells as she grabs her staff, releasing a massive lightning stream from the sky, assaulting the area where the dark being is. This spell is certainly more powerful than any other we've witnessed her casting before, and several blocks of the City begin to collapse due to the energy released. Velle keeps pushing the spell, and when the energy is finally about to reach her position, she vanishes from sight. The massive cube remains immutable, receiving the electrical charge from all sides. The light from the spell is so bright we cannot see the entity's status. But when it diminishes, we glimpse a vast hole and apparently nothing else. The metal-like cube is beside it, intact. Velle is floating above in the sky. She seems to be recovering her breath. She asks, "Where is he? Did we hit him?"

"We shouldn't be so sure," we hear Guntergettela's voice say. She is floating next to the small Fellek.

"Something isn't right, I can feel it. He is too powerful." Velle pauses, then asks aloud, "Theredinn, can you hear us? What is your opinion on this matter so far?"

We hear Theredinn's voice inside Velle's head. "Yes, he is definitely strong, as hinted before by the high-chanter."

"It does not matter, Theredinn, he needs to be dealt with. I shall..."

From below, and with extreme haste, the dark being's expanding-arms are seen grabbing Velle's right foot and Guntergettela's neck. Their bodies are then seen flying rapidly towards the ground. They both land heavily. The arms of the dark entity retract and we see it just some feet away, standing still. Its shape has changed now revealing four arms, the additional ones erupting from the shoulders.

“It seems some will try to stand against my will. That is good, it speaks about this world’s dichotomy. Now, you will be the first of the keepers to perish. Your pathetic attempts were null, as expected. Say your farewell now, time-keeper.”

“Sixth string cast, Kronoferum...!” Velle yells, but she is immediately interrupted by the dark being’s multiple voices.

“Acrosthos,” he shouts, raising his right arm.

The stream of energy which was gathering on top of Velle’s staff disperses. “What? What’s the meaning of this? Do you know ancient spells? How did you...? What are you...?” She asks aloud.

“Of course I do,” the dark figure pronounces while two of his arms grow in length, reaching Velle’s neck. “There are so many things you don’t know about me, yet you pretend to understand...” Velle tries to stop the arms from coiling around her neck with one hand while with the other she points her staff directly at the entity.

“Fifth... str.. cast...”

“Agrosso,” interrupts the obscure figure and Velle’s words come to a stop. She is unable to open her mouth. We see Guntergettela’s figure launching towards the dark entity, attempting to free the caster. Guntergettela strikes the shape, this time landing a direct hit to its face, but causing no harm.

“You conducted yourself poorly, keeper of time. Regardless, it was amusing to meet you,” the dark entity speaks and then breaks Velle’s neck with a twist.

Guntergettela desists in her attempts, looking backwards. She in a low voice says, “Velle...” as she vanishes in midair. Velle’s body falls to the floor, transfiguring into a nonmaterial state again, and with this, the last of the Fellek, the small one, vanishes

next to her. The dark beings' arms retract. It remains motionless after. A strange silence emerges. The only thing we can hear are the inner layers of the chromed metal cube reverberate, harder each time.

In the inner structure, we see small bursts of electricity all over the walls.

“I’m in a predicament here. It’s time to get out,” Edorik’s daughter deems.

Allastra’s neon contour begins to glow even brighter. This gathering of energy is reflected in the digitally-displayed numbers, which have increased to 0759. Before the situation peaks, we abandon the material and enter the ethereal. There, in the frontier, we see Theredinn, kneeling before the golden grass. He is chanting a sorrowful melody. His tears melt with the sound.

“My dear Velle, what has happened? I could not foresee this, and now, an eternity will pass until I see you again.”

The mournful melody unfolds, and slowly, we move away, we move towards the high-chanter, listening now to his improvisation instead. The luminous old man and the young one are present. The musician opens his eyes, brighter now, and asks the father: “Have I been so oblivious? Has all of this been manifesting right in front of me without me noticing? Why is the abstract so present...? Father, I have not been the pillar that I thought I was, that is now clear to me. These are without a doubt some of the consequences.”

“You have been a solid pillar, but the manifestation of The Hidden takes everything past its present, its limits. Do not think about the past. Do not fear. Your improvisation must flow without thought, without instinct, pure, away from all influence.”

“Away from all influence...” repeats the musician, closing his eyes once more. A new chant emanates from him. A powerful one, which immediately begins to resonate all

around. We follow the flow of the same, and it brings us to yet another part of the ethereal. We are again in the frontier, but distant from Theredinn's location. Here we see the outline of a forest. All its trees are golden and move slightly, willingly. As we turn, we see the shore of a vast, bright sea. On the shore there is a figure, and as the deep chant reaches the outline, the figure changes its posture.

Chapter 4

A piano melody broke the silence. It was a ringtone, it was Sully's Holo-Pad.

"Let me plug it in, it's Torken," she said as she grasped a cable plugged in to the vehicle's front panel. We soon heard Melli's voice on the Other Side of the line through the vehicle speakers.

"Hey, you all hear me? What's your status? Did you receive our location?"

"Yes, we are heading there," Uthor stated.

"What about Felina? Is she with you?"

"I'm here Melli. Sorry for the trouble I caused..." Felina said calmly.

"Hey, don't worry girl. Listen guys, don't take Ministry Avenue, all the Locrian groups are gathering there. I've been trying to... call... the..." Her voice began to break, and soon the signal was lost.

"Uthor, will you please try to reconnect that call?" Sully asked.

"Yes madam," the technician paused, "we are going to have to take another route. Hold on, I'll find one in a breeze. Man, the City won't hold the line for long, what is going on?"

I returned to my thoughts, pondering over the actions of the droid who helped me before. As I glanced at the City's outline, I thought about the ice forming on my arm and how all of this was madness. I felt I was inside a dream again and closed my eyes, trying to picture the rainy bamboo forest where I had stood not long ago. As I opened them I was dazzled by the sunlight passing through the window. I stared at Felina for a moment, and then looked the other way.

The eradication of the entity seemed impossible to me now. I figured, once in solitude, I needed to find a way to trigger his dematerialization. But all possibilities gave the impression of being so distant to me, reader. I was so disappointed; lost in a still desperation which felt like piercing ice. It was at this point I heard Felina's voice, interrupting the hypnosis I was in: "Look through the window. What is happening over there?"

We all saw what appeared to be a gigantic structure forming close to the place where we had been. This high-rise cubic structure stood immutable then; we all saw its shape delineated way above the buildings.

A "whoa" sound escaped from Sully. We kept looking at the horizon, but no one said a thing.

"To the left here, then turn to the right," Uthor kept pointing out directions every now and then.

We were about to reach one of the City's secondary gates which, to my surprise, was apparently open, when out of nowhere, a group of Locrians saw our vehicle passing next to them. Promptly, they mounted some bikes parked next to a storefront. None of Felina's entourage had noticed them, and I immediately warned: "We have company. I'll get them off our back, keep driving towards the gate."

The big wooden gate could be seen ahead now. I opened the window to my left and got my upper body out. After performing a wide arm movement, two of the fast-approaching motorbikes lost balance and quickly hit the ground. They created such an escalation that all their crew had to stop pursuing us as they attempted to put out the rising fire on one of the bikes. I immediately noticed how two of the gang members rejoined the pursuit, quickly coming forth while taking shots at our vehicle, still a bit far from them. "Damn it, not right now," I said out loud as I felt an odd temperature change occurring all

over my right forearm, “as if we didn’t have enough going on at the moment.”

While pronouncing this sentence, I shook my entire arm twice, and then a third time, noticing how traces of ice were, somehow, forming out of nowhere. “What the heck?” I thought, but before I could inquire further, I managed to deliver an electric charge instead, and the golden current stroke the pavement. The cyberpunk in the front could not dodge the attack, hence hitting the ground hard as I saw the second one still coming for us. He was getting quite close to our vehicle now, and he kept trying to shoot at me directly. I got inside the car again, taking cover as I heard Sully saying, “Hang on to something, I’m gonna lose them!”

We were about to cross the wooden gate when a couple of Locrians who were near it began setting a nail-trap. Sully accelerated and we crossed the gate hastily, barely avoiding the flat-tire situation we were getting ourselves into. Still, the remaining cyberpunk avoided the nail-trap as well and had now reached our position. He began firing a shotgun through the window to my left. Felina lowered Jix’s body and we found cover as best as we could. All the glass fell above my head, and the shooting continued for a second, after which Sully bumped his bike with the side of our vehicle, forcing the biker to skid over the dirt road behind us.

We finally managed to leave the City behind and were now driving through the road in the woods. “Nice, Sully. Man, you didn’t give him a chance!” Uthor said, somewhat excited. I looked at Felina, who seemed even more worried than before.

“Everyone ok?” Sully asked.

“That was close. We are fine,” Felina replied. “How long until we reach the outpost?”

“We are almost there, a couple of minutes,” Uthor pointed out.

We continued on our way until we reached a bifurcation and Sully turned to the right.

“We are here, just keep heading up the road. By the way, the call finally reconnected,” Uthor mentioned while we heard Torken’s voice on the other side.

“Listen up everyone. When you reach the metal gate press seven, two, seven on the keypad and you’ll be able to enter. We’ll see you here.”

“Yes, man,” Uthor replied as we saw the wired metal gate in question a bit far ahead.

With the vehicle still barely moving, I got down and headed directly towards the keypad. While pressing the numbers, I felt such a sensation; again, a tranquil moment, a small interlude had appeared amidst the chaos. Once the vehicle crossed the gate, I locked it again and returned to the car. I recalled the two officers who had just died by my hand an hour ago. The adrenaline rush was drying, and I felt disempowered. I felt remorse. Felina noticed my stoic expression as I sat down and we continued on our way. She slid her hand into mine, and asked:

“Are you feeling ok?”

“I’m alright. I... I can’t believe I just...” I stopped, sighing after. I felt so disconcerted. I kept shaking my head. Everything had changed and I had no words to explain how I felt. I remember recalling the sensation of the warm desert and the keeper’s voice, but I remained completely ignorant on who I was becoming. Many feelings arose in me, and I simply couldn’t stop pondering over Felina’s simple question. She kept staring at me, and then came close to hug me. She did, and after, said:

“You saved me back there, Renn... I was so frightened, and you, you saved me.” She paused for a moment. “I don’t know what is going through that mind of yours right now, silly, but you did,” she said as she smiled.

“I...” I put my hand on my throat. “I should be the one thanking you, Felina.” I stopped,

due to not knowing what to say rather than pain, still.

“Look, it’s them,” I heard Sully saying and I sighted ahead on the road. A small group of people were coming towards us. When we reached them, I noticed Torken and Melli along with others whom I did not know.

“Quickly, everyone, bring Jix with me,” Sully said as she stopped the car and we got out. Felina and I were carrying Jix.

“An emergency,” Sully voiced barely.

“This way,” said Torken, immediately coming towards us as we all began walking with him. We soon came upon a small tent with medical equipment, but the whole station seemed rather improvised. Sully began doing her thing; Torken and Felina remained inside the tent. Uthor, Melli and I went outside and walked away, slowly. No one talked, and we soon stumbled upon another group of people. The one in front quickly acknowledged us and said:

“Hey! You’re Melli, right? What’s up? What’s going on in there?”

“Geez, didn’t you see? One of the Wolf’s gang got hurt, badly. And it’s none of your damned business.”

“Chill, I was just asking. If you need anything, you can let us know,” said the man as he and the fellows behind him nodded. Melli nodded back, and we went our way, back to the car. Uthor wanted to check something inside. Melli asked me if I knew what was going to happen next; she kept pushing the topic back to the entity.

“I don’t really know. This uncertainty...” I whispered as I touched the broken glass on the window frame. “This uncertainty is immutable, like endless ice. Everywhere I look, everything I see is now uncertain to me.”

“That doesn’t sound good, eh?” Melli spoke, looking directly into my eyes.

“I don’t know, Melli. I just,” I paused. “I just hope Jix comes out of this alive.”

I turned around then and made my way to a solitary spot on the grass. I sat down and closed my eyes. I felt the constant need to explore the triggering of the entity’s dematerialization process, but my mind was filled with thoughts regarding the soldiers I had killed, and could not concentrate at all. Jix was on my mind as well, like a repetitive pattern of anxiety which turned out to be quite unpleasant to me at this point.

I remained seated for at least half an hour. The City’s sirens could be heard far away, mixed with the eventual explosion and the reverberations of the multitude. Suddenly, Felina came out of the tent and approached us. She walked towards Melli, and I stood up. She began talking:

“He is fighting. I don’t know what else we can do. Sully is in there, fighting too. She is doing what she can...”

“Is he...?” Melli began talking, but Felina interrupted her abruptly.

“He is stable at the moment, but the whole situation is rather strange. I’m not sure. I just hope Sully can manage...”

Instantly, I began to despair as I yelled, resenting the pain in my throat.

“Dammit! This stupid creature, damned entity!”

Felina came closer and whispered to me, “This isn’t your fault, Renn, calm down. At any rate, there is nothing else we can do, yelling ain’t going to solve anything. This isn’t your fault.”

“But it is, Felina, it is,” I said loudly. I looked at her, looked deep into her eyes, and a strange feeling invaded me. I wanted to stay near Felina, I wanted to forget about the whole situation but at the same time I felt the need to abandon her and her crew more than ever. These opposing feelings were tearing me apart, and I quickly began to lose control of my emotions. As I was about to leave in a hurry, Felina hugged me. I felt her warm silhouette enclosing me. I caught her scent, I began hugging her as well. We stayed like that for a couple of seconds, but she let me go and said:

“Whatever happens to Jix, it isn’t your fault, old man. You didn’t do this to him, did you? Better clear your mind of these things before they begin to consume you, Renn.”

“You are right... you are right,” I murmured, looking at the long grass beneath us. But I was already falling through a rabbit hole with no apparent end. I felt radicalized, reader, I felt as if reality was pulling me towards a destiny which I did not want to fulfill. And though I knew I had carved my own path, I didn’t expect it to stink of my mediocrity.

We stayed there for a while, sitting beside the car, waiting for someone to come out of the medical station. There were other groups of people in the open outpost, but we didn’t interact with them for the time being. Five or six vehicles were parked at the end of the small outpost, and I even saw a rusty mech-armor being utilized by a tall man, scanning the zone. It looked as if everyone at some point began to get ready for departure. Suddenly, Sully came out of the tent. I felt as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over my head. She approached us as we got out of the car, and I prepared for the worst.

We again transgress into the material. We see Allastra, who hasn't yet managed to break free from her metalline prison, to some extent, overwhelmed, yet not falling into desperation. The dark figure is meditating above the vastly melted streets of the City. It opens its eyes and suddenly disappears. We follow the dark shape as it reappears at the entrance of a Region bunker, all the way north on the Other Side of the City. There are men operating a black mechanical sphere, which is seen performing several actions. A strange looking fluid, moving irregularly, viscous, is being synthesized in the sphere's front. The obscure entity points one of its fingers at the spheroid and the men, turning them into a trail of chromed dust. Only one soldier is left alive, babbling through a radio Holo-pad while the entity disappears once again. We keep following the dark figure all around the City, as four of these spheroids are turned into chromed ashes. When it reaches the last one, we see military presence and several robotic units gathered around a humongous Region base. The mechanical artifact is deployed on the ground, and as soon as the men notice the dark entity appearing, everyone points their guns at it without hesitation. Yet, no bullets are fired. One of the men seem to take a step forward, facing the being. He does not talk, and a silent atmosphere takes over the place. The soldier seems petrified and slowly stops pointing his rifle at the dark shape, floating slightly above the ground, moving its two-headed tail from left to right. The soldier soon kneels down and stays there on the ground. The rest of the men look at themselves, puzzled, when suddenly a strong wind current is felt all over the surroundings. The dark entity closes its eyes. We immediately see someone appearing from above, striking the entity with massive strength. The impact's force thereupon pushes everyone aside, fissuring the ground as a crack begins to open underneath the soldiers. They all begin running away as the spheroid falls in the aperture. We notice how the dark shape had stopped the attack with one of its four hands. The attacker soon retracts and we see him positioning himself in front of the dark entity, floating above the fissured terrain. This new character displays around him a red aura. We catch sight of his armor, blooming red as the sunlight covers its surface. The multiple intonations coming from the dark shape articulate the following:

"I see. Indeed another time keeper has shown himself only to find in despair the end of

his own existence. Or is it that you've come to assist me in getting rid of the never-ending incongruences diluted in the actions of men and their animalistic egotism?"

"Let me ask you in return, how can you speak with such arrogance, when you yourself are nothing but the result of an uncommon dissonance?" the unknown character says after a small laughter. "You dwell in irrationality, just like the high chanter mentioned..." He pauses, always looking straight at the winged shape. "All is according to its density. Can't you figure out by yourself why things are the way they are? Be that as it may, you must leave this land, now." His red aura has blended with a golden tone.

The obscure shape bursts into laughter. "Indeed, and that's why I'm here. To proclaim the order of nature, for it is time."

The man in the red armor loses tension. He descends to the fissured ground. There is a long bridge over the grand river, connected to a tunnel before a mountain standing tall behind them. A part of the Region outpost was damaged a moment ago, and we see most of the men abandoning their positions nearby. "To proclaim the order of nature... you assume the irrationality within you to be the word of nature... I understand. I must assume you think you may comprehend The Hidden, isn't that correct? Let me ask you something in return. This human, the one who brought you here. What did his chant say to you?"

"His chant? He didn't say anything, but irreverences. Why would you want to know what Renn Barsak had to say?" The dark entity laughs again. "Your pathetic hopes are misplaced. He is only a human, whatever he has to say should be ignored. On the other hand, you... time-keeper. I thought you keepers of time would be different. The first was nothing but a sluggish Luthiel, a tedious disappointment. I thought of you as self-existing energy, filled with impossible mechanistic processes involved. I was disgracefully mistaken, for you are both trying to stop my will, acting in favor of men's insane progression."

“Their existence is not for you to tamper with. They... belong to something which you could never understand, dissonant one. Now, I ask again for you to leave, leave this place now.” Above the keeper of time, who is the Second Seal, blooms a geometrical pattern now, red and gigantic. He summons a weapon resembling a scythe, burning with strange flames.

The obscure figure performs a short dance using elaborate patterns, ending with a vertical pirouette which cuts the wind above it. High in the sky, we see a remnant of this cut, and from it, a multicolor substance, rain-like, begins to fall with no apparent end. The dark being has carved a distortion in the sky, and consequently, an enormous, dark tree begins to erupt from the rivers beneath.

The lower section of the Region base, as well as half of the bridge, are now covered with this multicolor substance. The Second Seal holds his weapon tight and launches forward. The tall tree behind the dark shape unleashes some of its roots and branches towards the Seal. We see some obscure shapes moving towards him, coming from the tree as well. These creatures attack him, unsuccessfully, for the keeper of time has cut them before they could react. At the same time he has gotten rid of the roots, which kept coming towards him. All this time the tree keeps growing, and is now bigger than the mountain itself, having destroyed the bridge in the process of increasing its size. The multicolor rain keeps on falling. We see movement all around the tree. It is filled with creatures with purple blooming eyes. All that is wet displays a multicolor flora, growing in a matter of seconds. The flora is mostly geometrical, purple perfumed, with chromed patches of what seems to resemble fractal patterns. The keeper of time, yet to show something other than an apathetic look, retracts again while charging energy on his left hand. He soon releases it, aiming at the dark figure, who deflects the body of energy towards the mountain. Huge pieces of rock crumble into the grand river, as half of the mountain falls apart. The dark figure speaks again:

“You assume that I am merely a misinterpretation in the compilation of reality. Absurd. You seed the seeds of light, he who was said to guard the flow of time itself, but I find

you pitiful, a weak mortal who does not transcend time nor is self-existing. Are you not what I used to believe, or must I simply go blind from your disgraceful appearance? Whichever is the case, I am disappointed in you, who is said to be one of the seals of The Hidden, yet is as light as a feather.”

“You are the pitiful one. You seek to bring forth the demise of those who do not please your excellency. Like your predecessors, you appeal to the same invalid argumentation, for if you understood further, you would do what you need to do and disappear from this world.”

The entity laughs out loud. “Why do you keep placing these irreverent ideas before me? The will of The Hidden has summoned the end of your existence. You will soon be the one to witness and understand.”

As both of these powerful characters measure themselves, we abandon the situation and move to Allastra’s location. She still appears to be inside the prison. She is desperately charging towards one of the walls, but can’t seem to find a way out. She kneels down.

“Father, father, can you hear me? Uncle Etrus, are you there? Bloody moons! How am I going to get out of here?” She asks in desperation. “Ninety nine point six percent, ninety nine point five percent... This isn’t working, I have to call upon it, there’s no other way around it.”

Edorik’s daughter stands up. She begins to gather energy around her suit while we see the numbers displayed reach 0999. The digits stop oscillating. Allastra begins shouting at the top of her lungs. Neon flames of distinct color emerge from her back: red, green and blue. When the war cry ends, she lands a massive strike into one of the walls of the prison. This time Allastra fissures the whole structure, which finally crumbles as it disintegrates into thin air, revealing a bright light all around it as it does.

“I gotta do it now, the time is now!” She yells as we hear her father through the inner speakers of her suit.

“Child, what happened!?”

“The iterative entity trapped me, but I am free now. I have to do it, father, uncle, it has begun, and now I know there’s no way back!”

Allastra speaks and suddenly launches up in the air, faster than a lightning bolt through the sky. We see the colorful flames on her back slowly fading away, disappearing into the horizon.

We return to our previous location, where the Second Seal is struggling with a gigantic branch coming from the dark tree. As he performs a deep cut, half the branch falls heavily into the grand river, damaging a section of the Region base. The Seal quickly moves ahead and strikes the dark entity directly. There is a strong clash between his weapon and the dark being’s long fingernails, when out of nowhere, Allastra appears from above attacking as well. The force is indeed so tremendous that the shockwave pushes the water above its level, making it rise high in the air.

The dark figure blocks Allastra’s attack, and by suddenly exploding, creates a multicolored cloud of dust, forcing both the Seal and Allastra back. They remain floating above the river for a second, as the chromed dust reintegrates in front of them in the form of the entity once more. The Seal speaks to Allastra, without looking at her.

“It seems we share a goal. You must be whom the high chanter referred to. Gather fortitude, stranger, that abominable tree will end all of humanity in no time.”

We focus our attention on the tree now. Many more creatures crawl on the cortex, some already leaving behind its majestic shape to go into the streets of the City. Its roots seem to be sinking deep underneath the ground. The red geometric pattern above the

Seal and Allastra's polychromatic flames color the river beneath them. The odd rain falls heavier and heavier, extending horizontally as the crack in the sky opens further.

"Follow my steps, swiftly. Here we go," he voices in a low tone.

The Second Seal disappears and reappears way above in the sky, close to the distortion, vertically aligned with the dark entity. Allastra too moves with an impressive speed, attempting to flank the shape while getting close to the tree. Both warriors release a ranged attack directly at the dark figure. Allastra uses a higher-tech rifle while the Seal invokes a bolt from the palm of his hands. The dark being receives the flashes of energy directly, disappearing immediately and positioning itself next to the time-keeper, as if nothing had happened, whispering with its multiple pitched voice:

"I told you, you will be the witness."

The entity slaps the Second Seal with massive force. Its two-headed tail brings him close to it again and this time the dark shape strikes him with its four arms at once, in a diagonal fashion. The Seal is thrown in the direction of the human outpost, creating a small crater as he impacts into one of the buildings. Allastra is flying close to the tree, and just when she unsheathes a larger energy blade from her right wrist, the dark figure appears in front of her. The suited woman stops immediately, and they both circle each other in silence. The keeper of time soon recovers and positions himself behind Edorik's daughter.

"This tree, that you see behind me. It symbolizes all the despair and anxiety in your world, a lamentation which manifests through me, and will serve as your self-imposed punishment, the repercussions of your acts. You two do not understand. It is I who glorify humanity's existence, and thus will end the suffering cast upon them."

"That makes no sense," the Seal quickly replies, "you contradict yourself. The objective world is a reflection of the self. It seems you haven't even mastered the eternal rules of

the Hidden”

“Ha, the eternal rules,” yells the dark figure. “Your egotistical frame of mind does not allow you to take into account all the facts. There you misinterpret your eternal rules, which call for action where action is needed.”

“This action that you call upon is illogical. They themselves need to act, not you.”

“They are incapable of it, so I will act according to my judgment. For what you call logic will only result in useless suffering. Try to stop me, if you will.”

As the being makes this statement, it and Allastra, almost intuitively, launch towards one another, unleashing a rage-brawl near the gigantic tree, a thousand feet above the river. The shockwaves produced by their fight agitate the surroundings. The keeper of time joins in, and now the three of them are involved in the clash. Still, no one is able to hit the dark shape directly, for it dissipates and reappears at every attempt. Although Allastra has increased her abilities and skills radically, she is unable to maintain balance in the fight. The Second Seal seems to slowly increase his power as well, as the light-symbol above him blooms brighter and brighter.

“Useless keeper of time, so weak and pitiful. Begone once and for all!”

The dark entity unleashes an odd purple storm over the Second Seal. This attack has tremendous magnitude, and soon ends up destroying what was left of the still-standing bridge and part of the river’s reef. As the Seal falls, Allastra gathers more energy and continues her aggression. The numbers and letters on her back now display 1K02 and she wields both energy blades. Despite it all, the dark entity remains at ease, avoiding all attacks. The suited woman’s speed and energy keep increasing, and in the middle of the tussle, Allastra hears the Seal’s voice inside her head:

“Listen to me, stranger.”

Allastra backs off after actually landing a direct kick at the entity's face. As she takes her distance from the dark shape, she hears the Seal's voice once again.

"Attack him from behind, rotate with me. When the moment comes, go for it, go for the tree."

The suited woman disappears attempting to move behind the figure, continuing with the skirmish as we see the Second Seal rising from the waters and blending with their movements once more. The warriors are increasing their speed even further, and all of a sudden, the keeper of time begins casting a spell in front of the dark shape. With a vast amount of energy quickly gathering in front of them, Allastra takes the opportunity and attempts to strike a critical blow at the entity. In the middle of it all, the shape brutally hits her with its wings, throwing the suited woman far away in the direction of the tree. The Seal unleashes his imposing spell and the dark shape protects itself with a spherical barrier. At the same time, it grasps the Seal's neck with one of its extended arms, while pointing another, which has become sharp like a spear, to his head. The keeper of time laughs as the spell dissipates. We hear him, quietly uttering distant words.

"Be the witness yourself. Your symbol of despair will go down."

The dark shape looks back. Allastra, who has used her previous attack as a boost, has already pierced through the trees defenses, slashing through its enormous branches. She is about to deal a final strike. The entity turns around as it attempts to kill the Second Seal on the spot. The Seal tries to defend himself, quickly pointing his right fist at the entity's forehead. A strange type of energy begins to emerge from it, but though the dark being struggles for a second, it breaks the mental trick and decisively kills the time-keeper. It moves away hastily as we see the Seal's body falling, transfiguring into a nonmaterial state. Allastra has already gained momentum and slashes the enormous tree trunk at once. A massive shockwave of energy cuts the whole structure of the tree,

a couple of hundred feet wide, and the top part slowly begins to fall into the waters of the grand river. The dark entity is too late, and although it has tried to prevent this, it has been incapable of gathering such energy in the small lapse of time. It remains motionless next to the falling tree.

The numbers and letters on the back of Allastra's suit have been increasing all this time, reaching 1K04. They settle at 1K05. The flames on her back are a hundred feet high. We hear her say, "Uncle, father, have you detected anything I should..."

"No," interrupts Edorik. We hear his voice as if far away. "Not just yet. Don't think about that, child, you have to focus, you are doing great. Remember, this is nothing, not just yet."

The distortion in the sky keeps growing at a steady rhythm. A dark atmosphere spreads swiftly.

Chapter 5

Felina came close to her. She asked, "How is he, Sully? Tell us." Sully took a brief moment.

"I'm not gonna lie here." She frowned, "it doesn't seem like... I don't think he's gonna make it."

Sully was about to burst into tears, but soon contained herself. I took a glimpse at Felina, Melli and Uthor, who were all gravely quiet.

"You can't tell me this, Sully, tell me this isn't happening!" I reacted, in a rush. "What do you need to assist him? Should we move him to a hospital? I will..."

"No, Renn, it's not about that," she answered firmly, "It's simply that nothing is having an effect on him. It's literally not working, the medicine, I mean. I don't know what else to do. This isn't like anything I've seen in the past."

"Keep doing your thing, doctor," a voice was heard beside us. It was the guy who Melli interacted with before. "I'm sure what you are doing is helping, even if you cannot see the results right now. He is Jix, isn't he? We've worked together before, he's gonna get out of this one. He is a slippery fucker, that Jix."

No one talked, and as he approached further, he kept on speaking, "I don't wanna spoil the mood, I've just come to let you know we're leaving soon. Is Torken anywhere near? Tell him I need to see him. The Region will crash this party soon."

"What are you talking about?" I asked him.

"They're already coming. They're gonna be here in ten minutes." The guy then looked and nodded at the man in the mech-armor, as he nodded back to him. "We've been

scanned. Be ready to leave soon.” As he walked away, he turned around and said, “Say hi to Jix for me, will you? He’s gonna make it, you’ll see.”

We stayed there for a second. “I need to go back,” Sully promptly murmured as she left for the medical tent. Felina and I looked at each other. I was quite disconcerted by my previous emotional outbreak. And though I managed to restrain myself for now, I felt even more anxious after hearing the Region was about to show up. I quickly grabbed Felina’s hand and we walked a couple of steps away from the rest.

“Look, Felina, this is stressing me out. Do you think the Region is coming to...?”

“The Region has many reasons to come to this outpost. What are you implying here, silly?” she asked in a hurry.

“Well, I feel like... I think the main reason why the Region would come here is to get me, don’t you think? I’m not sure they would invest their time coming all this way if...”

“They might, yes. So? What’s on your mind now, old man? Listen to me, Renn, I’m tired of you taking all these risks. I won’t allow you to...”

“Felina, you don’t understand, I need to cut them off before they arrive. You all need to hurry and get to the Civil Center right away, alright? Talk to Sully and Torken. I will see you there. Please, trust me, I need you to.”

“Oh, damnit Renn, why would you want to do this? Let’s head to the Center together. There’s time, I mean, it’s not like...”

“For what? So they show up there as well? I don’t want to get you into any more trouble, Felina, what happened to Jix... I...” Suddenly I couldn’t speak anymore, not because of the pain in my throat, but due to the fact that I felt like a handicap for everyone else. I wouldn’t allow it, reader, those feelings inside of me were getting on my nerves, and I

needed to clear the uncertainty from my mind. I needed to talk to the Region, or so it felt like, as if that was somehow related to the strange puzzle I was trying to solve, a mental labyrinth, or a brawl within myself; the lack of reason added to my feelings became nonsense for me. I needed to clear out the uncertainty, somehow.

“It's not your fault, Renn,” Felina continued as she gently held my shoulders. “You have to understand, this involves everyone now. You might think of this as a personal struggle, but it isn't. We need you there, Renn. I... I need you there.”

There was a pause. The disturbing sounds of explosions kept coming at a slower rate, distantly. She looked deep into my eyes. Then, she held both my hands. “Please take care, Renn. I've known you so little, but I feel like I already know you... and, if you have to do this, well, do it. Just go before I regret letting you do so.”

I took a moment to answer. “Thank you, Felina, I promise I will see you again in no time,” I said with a smile which came naturally to me.

We kept looking at each other, and I suddenly began walking towards the metal gate enclosing the outpost. I slowly sped up my pace, now heading towards the dirt road outside the fence. Far away, I saw a small caravan; it was the Region, already approaching our location. I headed towards them. As the distance between us diminished, they slowed down their vehicles. The one in the front was a sort of armored tank. A Region soldier lifted the tank's top lid and stared at me. He then began talking through a Holo-Shell microphone and promptly pointed his rifle directly at me. “Hands on the ground, NOW!” he yelled.

I stared at him as well, without saying a word. “Are you stone deaf? I said hands on the ground, NOW!” he repeated. All of a sudden, he grabbed a second weapon and pointed it at me. I soon felt dizzy, and began to lose balance. I felt as if I was fainting rapidly. Before I collapsed on the ground, I raised my right hand and managed to get the soldier out of the tank, throwing him some feet away next to the vehicle. He was in shock after,

and I soon recovered my stamina. The soldier snapped and pointed the strange weapon at me again. With an arm movement, I took it away from his hands at once. He stayed there, petrified. Soon, someone who I assumed was a lieutenant approached me directly, walking slowly. I threw the gun on the grass.

“Renn Barsak. Come with us. I apologize for his behavior. I will personally see that you are treated correctly from now on.”

“How’s Huffen?” I asked him. He didn’t answer at first, and after a moment, he said:

“Huffen’s alright. We don’t have time, Mr. Barsak.”

“If I go with you, will you leave these people alone?” I asked, pointing back at the encampment.

“You agreeing to come with us has nothing to do with the crimes committed by this radical group. We will deal with them accordingly, independently of your decision right now. But for the time being... we are interested in you. So come, and we will not intervene in their activities for now.”

I didn’t reply right after. I kept looking at the ranking officer in front of me. He added:

“You win, Mr. Barsak. Walk with me and we will spare them.”

“Do I have your word on that, lieutenant...”

“I’m General Paradyion. You have my word.”

“Alright then,” I said as I walked towards him. I looked back at the outpost as I noticed Felina and Torken behind the metal fence. The tall man seemed ready to make his move, but Felina stopped him. Our eyes met and I turned around as I kept walking with

the general. The caravan left the place, and we were heading, according to Paradyion, to a Region bunker on the other side of the City. I shook off every thought and focused on the conversation I was about to have with this man. He was, apparently, one of the heads of the Northern Federation. He was in a call; there were two men sitting next to him, fancily dressed, heavily armed. As we crossed the gates again inside the City, he began talking to me directly. We were inside an elegant vehicle located in the middle of the caravan; many flying units accompanied us. I had to win this man's confidence in order to protect myself, for I was finally heading into the Region's den.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. We have many issues to attend to," he paused as he turned a fancy Holo-pad off. "Mr. Barsak, I'll go straight to the point. You may think of the Region as part of a tyrannical regime, looking out only for its own interests, but you couldn't be further from the truth," he said, calmly. He had green eyes, and kept trying to catch my own as he talked. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you how difficult it is to organize a society. People tend to... behave in so many ways. Bringing order is much more difficult than you would think."

"I'm sure it is, I mean, I can only imagine," I said, pondering upon his words.

"Aye. In practice, you find yourself able to endure tests you never thought you would face. The financial collapse brought by a new opportunity, for example. We are witnessing the birth of a new doctrine. The banks crashed because of the incompetence of the people generating wealth and resources. They had to be ruptured. It had nothing to do with a secondary agenda, like that radical group you hang out with may argue." He took a moment, then continued, "We think that, by molding the minds of the people, we can achieve what you and I, and everyone else, would like to see. A fearless society, an organ working as a whole, led by the decrees of the Program," he paused again. "Humanity, in its animal state, is a danger to itself. We need to strengthen our society, and if no one dares to act, we will."

I uttered half a word and then pondered for a moment upon his ideas. I resumed my

thoughts. "Although your words may work within certain logical frameworks, I believe I disagree, sir. Still, I find the whole idea worth listening to. So please, do not allow me to interrupt, continue."

"We can speak about this some more, sure. We may, but for now..." he sighed. "I said I would go straight to the point. The creature you somehow claim to have summoned, we intend to catch it, and we will. But we need you."

"One cannot "catch" this thing, general, with all due respect," I paused. "But if I can be of assistance, I will be. To be honest, I wanted to give you a fair chance, and that's what I'm doing. I'm sort of impressed by what the Region has to say lately, so I hope we can be in good terms here, general, for I may even learn a thing or two."

"Aye aye. You will," he pointed out and immediately answered another call.

We soon reached a military outpost. As we were entering through a big wooden gate, I thought about the little exchange of words I just had with the general. I wouldn't have imagined the way in which this man had approached the topic. For one reason or another, I had to further listen to what these people had to say. There was something odd in between these feelings as well. I felt agitated again; all of this was happening in the blink of an eye, and I had to be extremely cautious.

Androids and soldiers alike glanced at our vehicle as it moved slowly through the encampment. I saw all sorts of faces passing by. There was a large military presence here, mechanical units and so on. The river touched the west wing, and as we made a turn the car stopped. Once out, a couple of soldiers escorted us inside a big edifice. Hereupon we encountered a small group of people. The general saluted them and we all went inside a cellar. Before heading downstairs, I took a glimpse at the whole place and caught a certain feeling of desperation, as if the Region barely had the situation under control. It was all a matter of perception. In groups, we behaved similar to a herd, and as long as the perception stayed fixed all individuals would act accordingly. The

Region knew this, and I couldn't afford to be so naive. I was playing with fire, walking through a situation which, in contrast to what the general had said before, had little to do with my interests and everything to do with the Region's. And yet, I was drawn to this place, for I knew there was a piece of the puzzle hidden here, in the minds of the Region, perhaps. I asked myself how accurate Felina's perception of this political group really was. I, in fact, doubted they had the interest of the people at heart, of course, yet I felt honesty in Paradyion's words, as if he wanted to fix society, but had only a hammer to do so.

I checked my Holo-pad and noticed it didn't have a signal anymore. We soon reached the bottom of the stairs, revealing a luxurious underground path. There were some soldiers with us, as well as the fancily dressed guys from the car. At the time, I assumed they were humandroids, for the distinction was revealed in their interpolated movements, not in their skin. There was a second general too, and someone who was dressed in a suit and had long, chestnut hair. We got inside a small vehicle. As we traveled through the passageway, I began to feel a decrement in my forearm's temperature, quick and concise. Soon I realized chunks of ice were forming around it once more. I moved it abruptly a couple of times in order to diminish the increasing phenomenon. The long-haired fellow noticed me and hence asked:

"Are we feeling alright, Mr. Barsak?"

"Yes, it is nothing," I replied.

"Good. We are almost there. I hope the underground atmosphere isn't taking your breath away. Hang in there a little bit longer, if you will, we'll arrive soon enough."

I had to hold my right arm with my left hand for now. It took five minutes for us to reach the end of the passageway where a big metal door was exposed.

"This way. Walk with us," said Paradyion as we got out of the vehicle and approached

the reinforced doors of an elevator. We went down a couple of levels and soon reached what the second general described as the laboratory. The heavy doors opened and we walked through a wide hallway guarded by soldiers. Soon we entered a big tech-area and a couple of people greeted us on the spot. One of them introduced himself as Dr. Heich while the rest stayed put. I soon recognized the person I met before, Dr. Lennitz, as he nodded at me. I nodded back and was soon distracted by a man who approached us in a hurry. He whispered something to the general whom I did not know, and he immediately said out loud:

“Ugh! I’ll be back, gentlemen.”

He left the scene in a rush accompanied by the man he had just talked to. Paradyion and Dr. Heich kept the conversation going for a minute or two. The suited man barely intervened, but every time something resembling a decision had to be taken both the general and the doctor turned to him. The small chat ended and we began walking through the place. No one had paid much attention to me at this point and I found myself suddenly realizing my repetitive involvement in these sorts of circumstances. I consciously allowed the flow of extreme situations, for reality itself had been drastically altered, and this was merely a response from my part, or so I thought at that time.

We eventually came upon a set of fancy glass doors. The following area had this sharp feeling of technological advancement; something I didn’t expect to see. There was a large hall filled with neon lights, and as we walked into it, I saw a couple of guards I hadn’t noticed before; the size of these men... Again I thought about the extremely tall men I had encountered before, and still thought of them as an illusion. But now that I had these people in front of me once more, I couldn’t deny it; I couldn’t stop wondering. I kept looking at one of them directly. He looked back at me, and I suddenly felt his discomfort as I kept my eyes on him. He disapproved of my conduct by making a sound as he turned around. I didn’t mean to be rude in any way, but apparently, I had been. I snapped out of the trance I was in and kept following the group. It was all quiet, and when we eventually reached an adjacent room, a low pitch, resounding crunch was

heard all over the place. No one seemed to pay much attention to this either, and we proceeded into the room. This whole change of scenery had made me forget about Jix, about the officers whom I had basically killed for my own selfish reasons. In the back of my head, I couldn't stop wondering why I was still alive, what I was really looking for inside this place.

A short, middle-aged man soon introduced himself as professor Sennarhau. Afterwards, he approached me directly.

"Um, who do we have here? So unexpected. It's a pleasure, Mr. Renn."

"The pleasure is mine."

"Um yes, I suppose." The strange man somehow reminded me of the keeper of the labyrinth from my dreams straight away. He had the vibe of someone who lived in his own head. Why was I correlating these people anyway? "You are a mathematician too, am I correct? We'll get along terrific. I'm sure no one has told you anything so far... let me introduce you."

We all began following the strange professor then, as he was talking to me directly. He concisely explained that, although there were a couple of other subjects, no one else but me had shown concrete consequences of what he called the opening, and that it was quite simple to know whether his assertions were correct or not. He then asked me if I remembered precisely when I began to manifest these "abilities", as he called them.

"Well sure, it was on the twelfth day of the fifth month."

"What, what? Gimme that!" he said as he took a military Holo-Pad from one of his collaborators. "I getcha, I getcha, Mr. Renn. I don't mean to sound facetious, this is very important. Let's see now. I might disagree on this one." He took a moment as he seemed to check some data. "...But, um, this is rather strange. Are you positive you

recall the exact date?”

“Of course I do.”

“I did tell you I might disagree, Mr. Renn, didn't I? All of my theories fail if you recall that date correctly! And you know I cannot rely only on a statement!”

“I see. So, what are your plans then, professor?”

“Everything coincides with the opening's emissions, except this date that you are coming up with! So you tell me.”

“Hey, I'm not coming up with any dates, that is the exact date.”

“Show me! Show me any proof of these abilities! I demand it and I will not be refused, Mr.Renn!” he said, coughing a bit after. He seemed so mad after I mentioned the date. Probably their data was recorded days after, and now he realized he was building these theories upon nothing but coincidences and arbitrary connections. In a way, of course, I understood this man. I had also felt the cold isolation which comes from not being able to bring up evidence for what is going through one's mind. Once I noticed this empathic connection, I felt the need to prove to this man that I had developed my abilities for completely different reasons.

“You don't understand, professor Sennarhau. This has nothing to do with the effects of electromagnetic radiation, this is all about the primordial language of nature. I will show you.”

He remained silent, adjusting the position of his big-frame glasses every now and then. He gazed at me in a way which reminded me of my own skepticism. I continued.

“You must be aware of the entanglement phenomenon, you must be aware of the

intricate processes. Reality works in many ways other than the mechanistic one.”

I slowly took from his hands the military Holo-Pad, which floated in the air until it reached my own. He was astonished and promptly came towards me.

“Holy mother... what was that? How did you find this connection?” He held both my arms faintly. He then took the Holo-pad back and carefully observed it. Bewildered, he stared into my eyes. I continued.

“You see, it all has to do with the mental state of the one who collapses the wave function at that precise instant.”

“The collapse of the present. Yes, of course, of course...” he said aloud, but speaking only to himself.

“You see, professor, I don’t think that I’m actually collapsing the wave function in any form, really, this is just a way of explaining things out. It’s all about realizing the connection between one’s mind and the objective world, which is the same. They affect one another. I’m not suggesting that our consciousness is part of the material, but rather that it is linked to it. It’s only natural for us to think in terms of local causality, of mechanistic processes, but there is homogeneity between all aspects of reality and all its different states. Similar to transistors in a computer, the different states or positions, the frequencies of reality constitute something, a subtle logic, an additional functioning layer which I cannot seem to be able to define...” I lowered my eyes as I continued, “I’m still figuring all of this out, so I apologize, professor, if my words lack substance.”

“I think I follow what you are trying to say here... Bigger patterns, uh? Um, I suppose it could be possible...” Sennarhau told me in an odd fashion. He wasn’t entirely falling for my words. “...But the solar flares, um... I’m sure if you would, um, allow me to perform some tests on you, we may find a...”

“As I’m continuing to point out to you, whether or not these solar emissions concur with some other data, I developed my abilities due to a study I’ve been carrying out for a decade. A thesis which, according to the antithesis itself, only brought the synthesis forth, that monster...” I paused, but soon began rushing my words again. “I read a book, a book some would call rubbish, that’s certain, but there I found a piece of the puzzle, the key which was missing. A fundamental...” I stopped talking all of a sudden. Once more my arm began lowering its temperature drastically and I took a step back.

“Are you feeling ok, Mr.Renn?”

As I flexed my fingers and held my forearm, I continued talking:

“I’m sorry, I... Its nothing, it’s just, my arm...” After uttering half a word of discomfort, I began moving it abruptly, for the ice was forming around it already. This time I felt a quick increment, unlike before, and the coldness peaked acutely. Soon I realized the situation was out of control; a flow of ice was coming out of my arm and my hand, continuously, and I pointed it to the floor. I tried to overcome the situation, and eventually did, but not before a section of the floor was covered in ice. When it ended, I took a glimpse at everyone around me. They were all utterly impressed. My arm was frozen within the recently formed ice structure, a couple of feet high. I found myself standing there, like a scared kid, not knowing exactly what had just happened.

I began to force my arm out of the ice. I did, though it was now completely numb. I tried to remove the lumps of ice wrapped around my forearm, starting with my shoulder. When I finally removed the last one, I looked at professor Sennarhau, who seemed fascinated by what had just happened. I babbled a dull apology, and he came close to me again.

“Holy mother... Don’t you worry about the mess, someone will clean it up.” He turned around and faced the suited, long-haired man. “Koltén, eight, eight, seven, one, one, nine.”

The suited man nodded, snapped his fingers and left with some of the soldiers. A deep, reverberating sound struck the underground base once again and I wondered if the entity was involved in what was going on in the surface.

“Mr. Renn, I’m very interested in your, capabilities, to say the least. Please, allow me to study what is happening to you, so you can understand yourself better. Look at all the equipment here... You are a medical marvel, I would say, it would be a waste not to allow us.”

“Professor Sennarhau, I... I did not come here to be studied, perhaps at some other point.”

“We would take all the necessary precautions, let me remind you, and you would be as comfortable as...”

A crushing sound stopped Sennarhau’s words, and this time an alarm was triggered. Such an annoying sound. He looked at me with an expression of disappointment, sighing.

“Maybe at some other point, like you suggest... Stay here, Mr. Renn. Give me a minute... just a minute.”

He walked away with General Paradyion and the rest of the academics stayed with me. Soon a couple of the tallest soldiers came near and stood beside us. Professor Sennarhau was discussing something with the general. Again, I peeked at these people and remained simply impressed.

“Can anyone explain to me the size of these men? Shouldn’t we all be evacuated?” I asked aloud. At this point Dr. Lennitz, the man I had met before, came forth. He began explaining how they had mastered, or rather managed to override individual sections of

the human's genetic code long ago. They had a software, he explained, which could later be compiled inside a mere cell. I had heard of this before, but never seen the results with my own eyes. He asked me not to be frightened, for they were only here to protect us in case of an emergency.

"What emergency? We should all be heading to the surface by now," I yelled, for the alarm was too loud and I was losing my temper.

"Calm down, Mr. Barsak. I'm sure the situation will be over in a minute. We can discuss some of our work later. Right now is not the time, clearly," said Lennitz while he stepped next to his coworkers. After a minute or so, a group of soldiers arrived to escort General Paradyion, the suited man, professor Sennarhau and the rest of the scientists out of the place. Lennitz, both humandroids and one of the very tall men remained with me. But soon they indicated I should be escorted as well, for our protection. I inquired on what was happening, but no one said anything concrete. We were separated from the general and the rest and I soon found myself in another room, guarded by both humandroids and one of the enormous soldiers. Lennitz tried to talk to me, but I couldn't even hear him due to the alarm's high amplitude. A couple of minutes passed and a small group of soldiers arrived to fetch Lennitz out of the room. I asked him what was happening and he appealed to his ignorance, refusing to talk to me any further as he left. I was by myself now, and the room I was in was still guarded by the humandroids and one of the tallest soldiers. I felt irritated, but promptly calmed down. The alarm suddenly ended and a contrasting silence emerged. I approached one of the humandroids and asked if I could now exit the bunker. It didn't reply at first, but then began talking in a robotic voice:

"I've been instructed to guard you until further notice. You can't leave this room, sir."

The tall soldier next to the couple made a sound, as he turned his eyes away from me.

I stepped back and decided to wait. I wasn't going to find what I was looking for inside

this room, but for now I had to hold some cards back. I recalled the Wolf's views on the Region, the Program and everything in regards to these political groups. They probably wanted to keep me here for many reasons. To study me, as Sennarhau had suggested, was only one of them. But I had no time to waste being held in this place, for I felt as if the entity's instability would only increase with time.

Nothing happened, still, and after what must have been twenty minutes or so, I again walked up to the droids.

"Hey, this is not what Paradyion and I agreed upon. I must insist, let me walk away."

The humanoid did not reply, it just stood there, immutable. I, hesitating, tried to leave the room. As soon as I got close to the machine, it used its right arm to push me back with excessive force. I lost balance and was thrown down to the floor. I was holding my right arm as I stood up; still a bit worried a random encounter could trigger a temperature change.

"Hey, what did you do that for?" I asked the humanoid, but no answer came from it. I felt quite frustrated, flashing the golden current from my left hand as I gazed upon the metal being. In an instant, the droid got a weapon out of his fancy clothing and pointed it at me; I reacted immediately, snatching the gun with my mind from its metal fingers. I threw it away, towards one of the side walls. The room I was in was small, and with me being at the end of it, the giant had to bend in order to see what was happening. The humanoid headed for me quickly. An emergent feeling of repentance shook me, as I recalled my previous encounters with Tharissia, while anxiety boiled inside me. The second robot stood still, outside the room, arms crossed.

As the droid got close and I attempted to talk to it without success, its hand went directly for my neck. I kicked its body away. It then made a second attempt, now having gathered momentum as it charged. It reached me this time and began applying pressure. I felt, in the blink of an eye, the afflicted zone in my throat being threatened,

and reacted by grabbing its head as I pushed the robot towards the wall on my left with my right arm. I smashed its head a couple of times as I felt a shock inside my hand. I generated the golden current as I kept slamming its head against the wall. By the time I had managed to neutralize it, my throat was in deep pain again, and I saw the second droid approach me. It was holding in its left hand an electric baton, similar to the one Tharissia had wielded before.

I found myself unable to act for a second, and that was enough for me to be at a disadvantage. The robot attempted a couple of moves which I hesitated to block due to my previous experiences. The humanoid struck me in the back and I quickly fell to my knees. It kept hitting me until, once again, a fighting instinct invaded me. I stood up pushing its body away from me. I couldn't use my right arm for now, and so I used my left hand to attack the droid at a distance with the electric current. As I had expected, it wasn't strong enough.

The tall soldier began yelling as he attempted to enter the room. With an arm movement, I pushed the second humanoid back against a wall, strenuously. I shouted, "Out of my way!" as I attempted to break out of the room. The tall soldier bent over the door in order to see what was happening. When he did, he quickly grabbed his weapon and began firing. I accelerated and managed to dodge the bullets, only to find myself in front of the giant man; I charged and we were both propelled out of the room. We struggled on the floor as he kept attempting to aim his rifle at me. He managed to shoot directly at me a couple of times, for his long arms handled my attempts to resist with ease. I generated the energy barrier, which was almost interrupted, and dodged the attacks, but couldn't mentally grasp the weapon as it was held around his back with a long lace. I then struck his big face with the electric current and he quickly stood up.

He was touching his face in pain, reader, and I could do nothing but stare at him. He recovered, and with a bitter expression of anger, attempted to grab me with both his hands while I remained on the floor. He began punching me, and his fists felt massive against my arms and face. He managed to punch me directly twice, and I felt the life

being beaten out of me. He then positioned his arm around my neck and began to suffocate me, kneeling behind me. I was giving up, but still attempted to kick him as I fought for my life. His arm was massive, the force he applied was simply too much for me to resist any longer.

In spite of this realization, my last attempt to break free was successful, for I positioned my hand on his back and freed as much energy as I could. The giant released me in a second, trying to hold the afflicted zone on his back with both his hands, and I, with this wave of momentum, quickly came upon him, grabbing one of his arms around his shoulder. I began to pull with all my strength towards his back, and realized immediately how he couldn't release himself from the odd lock. Despite my fear, I felt this crazy rush of adrenaline allowing me to act in such a situation, and without me wanting to do so, I kept pulling as I broke his arm. He screamed out, and I saw no other way to end the fight but to strike him with the golden current as he was now distracted by his pain. I remembered experiencing a disgusting feeling as I did so. He fell sideways on the floor. I went down on my knees, breathing heavily. I tried to touch my face, leaning my hand over my throat after. I stood up, yet, with this very unpleasant feeling of repentance, I hardly managed to, and began to walk away.

I heard activity all over the floor where I was, and though I was taking all the necessary precautions in order not to be seen, I was an easy target among so many eyes and cameras. I was not even sure how to get out without being detected in the process, and soon felt totally exhausted, as if I could not walk anymore. I took a moment behind a couple of metal containers. I felt the need to vomit; a psychological repercussion rather than a physical one, or maybe both, I thought, for I was disgusted with what I had just done to the enormous man. As I was laying there, feeling like a disgrace, I heard a "psst" sound, as if someone was calling my attention. I looked around and, to my extreme surprise, saw Melli, opening one of the air-filtering system grates. She signaled with her hands for me to come over a couple of times, but I simply could not move. As I was trying to stand, she got out of the duct and came close to my position. She helped me as we left, and quietly asked, "Geez, what the hell happened to you, eh? Let's get

you out of here.”

We entered the duct and headed towards a passageway leading to a staircase. I heard Melli speaking through a radio apparatus, rather than a Holo-Pad, and thought I heard Torken’s voice on the other side. As we kept heading upwards, Melli began talking to me, “You know? Torken and I came for you, we knew... we knew you might need us. We were right.”

She explained to me how they had followed the caravan and used a tunnel to infiltrate the other side of the outpost. Apparently, we were not going to be able to get out in the same fashion. I asked her how she had traced me without my Holo-Pad’s signal.

“It makes things more difficult, but still doable.” As she was explaining things further, we reached a stone corridor and I had to stop. I began vomiting. We soon continued on our way. After a couple of minutes, we met Torken half-way through, and the three of us kept heading towards the surface. Once we reached the first level, we took a left and entered a second tunnel. I couldn’t walk anymore, and I vanished beneath the tunnel’s dirty waters. Torken helped me out and carried me over his back. I simply closed my eyes, for I was mentally and physically overwhelmed. We soon reached the end of the tunnel, which lead into the grand river. Torken slid me onto a rock, and we stood like that for a minute. Only then did I manage to stand up by myself, and thanked them both.

In a low voice, Torken said, “There’s no need to thank us, I’m glad Melli found you on time. We gotta stay sharp, let’s get out of here.”

The vehicle they used to come here was located all the way on the other side of the outpost, and so, Melli suggested we use the extra vehicle on the unattended side of the City, the one we were supposed to take into consideration if things didn’t go according to plan. As we were leaving the tunnel and began traversing the riverbank, I saw a black, enormous shape far away, rising over the river, ending in a horizontal line, mirrored in the river’s surface. I also noticed some bright lights in the sky, and a

multicolored polygon, with so many faces, like a disruption high above the clouds. I asked them if they knew anything regarding that, and we contemplated the spectacle for a couple of seconds as they stood perplexed as well. We continued on our way until we had to rejoin the streets and leave the river's reef, along with the cover it had brought us up to that point. We did, cautiously, and found ourselves back amidst society again, camouflaging ourselves amongst the City's many faces. Yet mine was so inflamed. I had removed the blood, but it kept coming from my nose. I was afraid to touch it at that point, to find out whether it had been broken. I did my best at keeping their pace, but simply couldn't. I eventually had to stop and lean against a wall in an alley. Melli came over and said, "Rest for a minute, but we need to keep moving. We are almost there, Renn, you are doing great." Torken, in a matter of seconds, seemed to have conjured out of nowhere a piece of bread and butter.

"Thank you Torken, my man, I appreciate it."

"Dig in, fast. We're out of here."

I did, and though I was afraid I was going to vomit once more, my stomach seemed to handle the food with ease. We continued on our way, and twenty minutes after, we had reached the vehicle in question. I felt such a relief, for I was sure I couldn't go on walking for much longer. Melli's Holo-Pad unlocked the vehicle, and once inside, I laid down on the back seat. I had regained hope again, for when the enormous soldier was holding my neck, I had thought I was as good as dead. I had to reach this point to realize how the Region, what was left of the government, the so called resistance... We were all in the same situation, all having to deal with the current destruction of the Northern Federation, the abolition of what little order we had imposed on ourselves and on our traditional mechanisms of coexistence. We all had different points of view, but ultimately, we were all striving to survive the cataclysmic events which, somehow, had emerged from my endless curiosity. Humanity had to stop fighting with itself. We had to put an end to this inner conflict which arose from our minds. I was beginning to understand something, something which only culminated years after, but for now, for

now I had to keep tempering my mind, for I knew this was nothing but the beginning of the end. I thought at that moment I had missed the key I was looking for, but had found it in Paradyion's words, even if it took ages for me to actually realize it.

The air begins to thicken, the shimmering drops keep falling. The dark figure seems to be intrigued by Allastra, now more than before, considering she just cut the colossal tree in half. Both warriors float way above the river. With this turn of circumstances, we abandon the material yet again, only to enter into the ethereal, where we see the curved walls of the translucent room where the luminous figures reside. They are further discussing their involvement in the eerie situation.

“Father, why are the seals not effective? Is this part of the plan of The Hidden?”

“The hidden will always remain hidden, and it does not plan or act in terms of time,” the seemingly old man articulates, taking over the question. “This is your father’s improvisation, remember? And your father’s alone.”

“Listen to him, Zenitha, for he who comes before me holds knowledge beyond our understanding. This is indeed my improvisation, and if the seals have not consent, it is because of my own limitations, the pivotal ignorance which dwells within me.”

“What about the extra piece on the board? Will she be able to...”

“We are not certain, Zenitha. The improvisation will keep on developing, and depending on how she resonates, she will generate an answer. We will have to wait.”

As the musician keeps improvising, he turns to the old man. “I will summon the Third Seal. I’m obligated to do so.”

The old man meditates this for a second, lowering his eyes.

“Isn’t the third the last seal?” asks Zenitha.

“Not necessarily,” responds the father as he looks back to his son. “He is one of the originators, those who come before the Luthiel. But there is another seal, one I’m not

supposed to cast.” The father stares at the moving strings of the ethereal instrument. “My own decisions have brought us up to this point, and now I find myself wrapped around my own composition, unable to conciliate an answer.”

“As long as you give meaning to this piece, as long as your design stands congruent to your rationale, a purpose will rise. While improvising, the path ahead may be uncertain, but once you embrace it and cast aside your own fears, your own doubts, you will find meaning,” says the old-looking man, putting his hand over the father’s shoulder.

“...How can I be so ill-considered, unsure of even my own composition...? Is what I’m trying to express so unknown even to me?” The musician falls silent for a moment. “Velle, Juxtemonois... I wonder if Andinhur will have the same destiny befall him. The time has come. I will call upon him, father.”

The old-looking man bows his head. The musician invokes a sonorous high-chant again. The sound of this beautiful, yet mysterious melody, congruent to itself, to the improvisation, flows upon the ethereal, slowly reaching the shores of the material. Again we place ourselves close to the golden field where Theredinn and Velle shared a final moment. We see the inverted tetrahedrons high above, and the bright light in the center. With its shine, it can blind even an immortal for eternity. As we advance towards a different place, an invisible forest, an intangible section of the ethereal which holds wisdom only for those who can see it, we follow the melody. We find ourselves deep inside this golden forest, and here we see a group of the originators, the first ethereal creations of the Hidden. These beings are seen gathered, stoic, consciously linked by all means possible. As they hear the chant, they open their multiple eyes, their many ears. The melody reaches a dissonant end, settling a moment in the murky silence which follows. As the density leaves, we hear again all sorts of sounds produced by the creatures of the forest. One of the originators, the one called Andinhur, speaks before the rest, without making a sound.

“Now is the time, beloved, to countervail. All we’ve thought of will be reconciled. I will

answer the high-chanter's call."

"And so you will, but before you do, a last word of advice," another one in the group speaks, without moving her lips, an elder. A female with long hair, gently laying upon the golden grass. The thin, black hair is in fact so long that it overgrows a vast area within the forest. It is enrooted amongst the ancient trees. All the originators possess ethereal qualities differing from human's physical ones, but sharing common patterns.

"Do not hesitate, Andinhur. Chaos will only further chaos."

The tall Luthiel meditates on the advice just given to him. He manifests a last thought before leaving, "The chanter's eyes are set upon the human who summoned the inevitable. Ultimately he seeks to know that which is unknowable. This is no mistake, but what I've been waiting for. Still, for the chanter, it will be a troubling disappointment. I hope my words prove to be wrong with time. Farewell, my beloved."

Andinhur makes a long reverence and heads out of the forest. We transition again into the material. For now, the dark entity and Allastra have kept their distance from one another. The excruciating sounds of the falling tree have ended. We hear Edorik communicate with his daughter through the inner speakers of the suit.

"Child, listen up. While you were unconscious, the iterative entity divided itself, both physically and mentally, but not equivalently. Its other part left for the Southern Federation, and now it is heading your way. Expect the unexpected."

"Father... this feels, somehow, out of place. The iterative entity is too strong, and it materializes things out of nowhere. It's unlike what we suspected. I fail to understand the core of its arguments, I'm doubtful."

"Remember child, adapt. You must determine its patterns, as chaotic as they are. You must dictate its movements, force him to move at your rhythm. We've got you covered here, your uncle and I have your back, Allas. We know what you are capable of.

Remember.”

“Father...” Allastra murmurs, letting her eyes fall upon the human encampment and its surroundings. “I won’t let them down.”

Slowly, the digits on Allastra’s back begin to rise again. Neon-bright flames blaze forth from the back of her suit as she launches like a thunderbolt through the sky. We immediately see the shape reacting to Allastra’s attempts, still managing to block every attack. As the brawl continues, we see an armed Region group approaching the reef. Three mech-units quickly aim upwards and fire a round of missiles at the dark shape. It dissipates on impact and reintegrates again, having received no damage. The suited woman takes the opportunity to land a direct, massive punch on the dark being, pushing the entity some feet away. We see it frowning for a second. It raises its right arm, generating a purple explosion combined with a small electric storm over the Region’s units. Allastra keeps attacking, non-stop, but her attempts are hardly effective. Thereupon the dark figure pushes Allastra back with a somersault kick. It begins to speak.

“You have incredible strength, I must admit, yet, a dull mortal you remain.” The shape stops talking. It takes a moment before it continues, “Before we go on, may I inquire again on your identity, pitiful mortal?”

“I come from the outer rim, to help these people. We knew of your arrival. We too, predicted you. That’s all you need to know.”

“Hmm, so a human, I must assume you are. I suspected something else for a moment. In any case, this was meant to be a reset, a start from the beginning. And neither you nor anyone else who condones the misery foisted upon these weaklings shall have the authority to speak so righteously to me.”

“Your own reasoning drives you towards what you claim you want to avoid. You are

irreverent, contemptuous of the lives you've stolen. We are tired of you. I am tired of you. My people will not tolerate your insolence. Prepare yourself, iterative entity!"

"As I stated before, I'm waiting." A moment after, the dark entity begins to laugh out loud. "Beware, my shadow is coming to tear you apart."

The shadow previously summoned by the entity is rapidly approaching. Soon, it reaches Allastra, trying to tackle her with enormous momentum. She manages to dodge the corpulent menace, unsheathing the energy blades coming from her suit's wrists. The shadow attacks her again, recklessly, forcing her to defend as the dark entity casts a gigantic, purple bolt, striking Allastra from above. The second entity has backed away, and now engages her again, kicking the suited woman in a full contact fashion, launching her into the grand river. The shadow glances at the dark entity, which speaks, "Finish her. We will take over from here."

Edorik's daughter splashes the surface of the water. As she is submerged, she recovers, countering the impulse and launching herself back towards the shadow steadily approaching her. There is a quick duel above the surface, and Allastra throws the shadow into the river. She powers through, heading towards the dark shape high above in the sky. All this time the distortion in the sky has in fact kept growing, and it is now considerable, slowly covering most of the Region outpost. The suited woman attacks the entity one more time, but by using its four arms, the shape nullifies all her strikes. Allastra backs away, seemingly in frustration, and the shadowy one reaches their altitude. Without hesitation, it attacks again, rupturing a second tussle on the go. The dark being casts a grander spell, and while conjuring it, we see someone else materializing before their eyes. Andinhur has reached them, and immediately draws their attention with his presence. The one who belongs to the originators partly resembles Guntergettela physically, the Luthiel bound to Velle. For Andinhur is mostly made of energy, and energy in the form of electricity surrounds him along with light and a gaseous aura. In the material form, his presence is magnificent, yet still anthropomorphic in some aspects. The dark being breaks off conjuring its spell, fixing

its eyes on Andinhur, who speaks then with a clear voice:

“If you are as grandiose as you claim to be, you should laugh about these weak humans, for they should be a waste of your time, being that you are as magnificent as you appear to be. You give them power by granting them your attention, contradicting your own premises. I invite you to forget about this land, and travel to the different states to which you could move on. I’m sure you would find some of them delightful, unlike this one.”

Andinhur speaks in the same language he had used back in the ethereal forest, and the entity seems to understand and speak it as well.

“Finally, someone who resembles the archetypical keeper of time,” the shape replies as Allastra and the shadow remain immersed in their brawl, some feet away. “You pathetic creatures keep on showing up, but have failed to understand the will of the Hidden. It has brought you here only to experience your own lamentation, the end of your existence. I speak its word, and the time of fragmentation has reached a point of no return. Why won’t you, high creatures, stop this nonsensical madness and arrange a proper chain of harmonics? Isn’t that, after all, the purpose of the high-chanter? Are you going to tell me that he has no purpose now and acts arbitrarily? He must be disturbed, disrupted, over-influenced by the self-worshipping aspects of his own nature.”

“That isn’t true. The harmonics are a reflection of his decisions, which have only considered himself as a reference for balance. The chaotic patterns brought by this chain of harmonics are a natural consequence of the place each of them occupies. It is all a matter of different densities, which you fail to consider.”

After hearing these words, the obscure shape bursts into laughter, like never before. Soon a dark atmosphere takes over, and the disturbance in the sky allows a liberation of energy from above, in the form of plasma. As the entity continues its outbreak, numerous crystal pillars begin to erupt in the streets, and while Allastra struggles with

her opponent, the entity lifts a finger and turns it into a trail of multicolor smoke, blending it with its shape once again. The suited woman, quite impressed as the shadow vanishes before her, turns over to Andinhur and the entity, slowly reaching their altitude. The dark shape begins talking, now in the language of the North.

“Such poor creatures, these fragile humans are. So deranged by the doctrine of power, being utilized, their life being a waste without them even realizing, dull mammals who only seek short-term pleasures often lacking in sophistication. And you, time-keeper, who supports this nonsensical routine of transferring of information in an inefficient way. What is this? What are you supposed to be defending here? Their will only cares about themselves, bringing this tasteless unbalance that I repudiate, that the Hidden repudiates. The industrialization and manufacturing of the human world, of the human mind, the domestication of their will has brought them to a pathetic state, slaves to their ego, to their animal passions. Emancipation only benefits the keepers of knowledge, the irrational hierarchy which some perpetuate by allowing the ignorance in their species to prosper. How can you and the seals of the hidden tolerate this? If all is according to its density, as you keepers of time state, why would you mind me taking over their civilization? My will should, according to you, rule over its proper density. Thus I will not allow the subjugation of the innocent as the perpetual structure of profit grows without considering the abolishment of human nature. Such irreverence must be eradicated.”

The entity yells in many different intonations, and Andinhur, who has been listening, now replies. He too must shout, for the sound of the odd lightning has created a pandemonium of sound.

“Therefore, you will end their lives? That is absurd. They brought their own misery upon themselves, they subjugated their mind to themselves. You must learn from and respect their state of being. I will intervene in their defense. Ending their misery is not a merciful act, but an egotistical one, an absurd justification created by your chaotic self.”

“I will terminate their lives, yes, but only to honor their existence. It has gone to a level of

decadence from which it is impossible to recover. They will, in a way, be the pillars of a new era, one that I intend to seed properly, for unnecessary suffering is indeed unnecessary to me. This human society lacks fundamental order, it is embedded in its own patterns, unsophisticated, corrupted, endlessly following the animal within themselves, struggling for domination, never consolidating equilibrium. So I ask you to act, pathetic keeper of time, if you are planning to, for I will do so unless you start. Our lines of thought will never converge, so let us begin already, let us measure our will and bring the inevitable forth.”

The nefarious entity has spoken. A dark veil has slowly covered the hearts and minds of the humans living in the second capital of the Northern Federation. It has had many problems before this turn of events, but now a common fear arises, for the citizens can do nothing but speculate as the majority remains in the dark. The feeling of unreliability has spread extremely fast among them, and with many being attracted by the crystal pillars, a tenuous panic has taken over. The Region has hardly been able to contain the commotion, and it is starting to lose control of their citizens. Key individuals among the human institutions have already been eliminated by the dark entity and its shadow, leaving a headless society. We witness this convoluted situation. The shimmering drops keep falling. The gigantic tree, while cut down, keeps spreading its roots.

Chapter 6

Torken began to describe our follow-up plan. According to him, everyone had moved from the encampment to the Civil Center by now, and we were heading there through a secondary road. As he was talking, I couldn't restrain my mind from thinking, pondering deeply about the numbers, about all these connections. I couldn't stop wondering about my arm either, as its state was a constant source of preoccupation; there had been no temperature changes again so far.

Moreover, the short exchange of words with the general and this fella Sennarhau had triggered something in me. I would have never imagined back in my days of being a mathematician that I was going to be involved in these and all other sorts of inconspicuous situations. Back then, it was all about finding the next certain number, the next polygon which accomplished a certain function, making connections as well.

Still, there was a recurring thought in the back of my head. The alteration of our nature was a common practice within the Region, apparently, yet the presence of these giant soldiers, the one I had neutralized in particular, maybe killed, was so unexpected. Understand, reader, seeing a man that size was simply not a matter one could easily forget.

"We are almost there. How're you doing? Any better?" asked Melli, glancing at me with a sort of a tender look. At that moment I saw my face reflected in the mirror in front of her, in the passenger's seat, and reader, it looked quite harmed. The whole surface was inflamed, though not as much as I thought it was, and my nose looked broken. I did not feel much pain, but my throat troubled me. I found an intermittent feeling of discomfort, acute at times, a bit worrying. Nevertheless, I forgot about the irritating sensation and kept speaking with them, briefly, as it took us twenty minutes to get to the Civil Center. Somehow, we managed to cross one of the City entrances without any issues, and while passing through a forest road I had never seen before, I wondered about the wellbeing of my mother and everyone I was leaving behind once again. As these

thoughts flew through my mind, I grabbed the X-5 model and tried to call her, but her device had no signal. My best guess was, once someone entered the Program, they communicated through different means. I was speculating anyway, but was a bit worried, still.

We finally reached the entrance of the Civil Center; the whole place had this strange castle vibe. There were two mech-armored fellas standing in the entrance of a plasma-gate; this tech was released a few years back, and I got excited to see such a security feature. I had never witnessed something of the sort, neither operated amongst the Region nor by the Locrian groups. Torken saluted these men and the gate deactivated as we went through. He then began speaking through a Holo-Pad. Felina answered.

“Is he with you? Is he listening to me?” she soon asked. “Are you there, old man?”

“Hey, I’m here Felina, somehow still causing trouble.”

“Oh I bet you are, silly. I’m glad to hear you all. I’ll see you guys right away.”

Torken parked our vehicle and we got out. Melli helped me stand, and I eventually managed to walk by myself. I felt relieved, this tranquil sensation which arose in me from time to time. The walled buildings which constituted the Civil Center had early architectural features, some rarely beheld inside the City. There were a few armed men here and there, and a high-tech missile device which caught my attention; probably an anti-air system, I wondered. I saw Felina coming towards us, accompanied by the Wolf and two others whom I did not know. I saluted the old Wolf first with a strong handshake.

“Let’s go directly to the clinic. You need to see a medic, Renn.”

“Thank you, sir. Before we do, though... I need to apologize for my unacceptable behavior the last time we met. I still feel ashamed due to the way I reacted, and sir,

please, you have my respect, forgive me,” I said as I kneeled down. The Wolf grabbed my arm and helped me stand right back up. He sighed as he shook his head just a bit, somewhat smiling.

“We don’t have time, let’s walk.” We stepped inside an arched passageway as we headed towards the clinic. Now that I was aware of my state of physical misery, I didn’t want to look at Felina directly. I hadn’t, although she kept trying to catch my eyes. I realized, as I saw her delineated by the high contrast of light and darkness on the ivied stone wall, painted white, that I was falling for her, somehow. I felt ashamed, I was lacking confidence and kept looking at the ground. She eventually stepped in front of me, seeming a bit worried.

“Are you feeling ok? Let me see you... Your nose is broken silly, but besides that you aren’t a total disgrace. What did you do back there? Did you fight an android again? Agh! I was sure the region wanted to hold you prisoner, Renn, did they?”

“More than that, and not exactly. There were two humandroids and, Felina, someone else. You are not going to believe me. A giant man did this to me.”

“Woah, a giant man? What do you mean exactly...? Like, a different species? That sounds crazy... What situations you get yourself into, Renn! You are going to have to explain that to me later. At any rate, did you find anything concerning the generals, or about the thing? Did you find what you were looking for?”

“No, nothing like that...” I waited, pausing for a second. “Tell me, is Jix...”

“He is in there. Sully is seeing to him along with a couple of medics, but things haven’t improved, old man. If he... I don’t know what I’m going to do if he dies, Renn. And all the others who already did, those in the streets and... all of this is terrible, I hope we can at least be safe in here for now.”

The others kept walking, and eventually turned right on a second passageway. The Wolf took a last glimpse at us.

“Let’s move, Felina.” I held her hands. “I saw someone, someone who confronted the entity, but who or what it was, I’m unsure... I feel as if, somehow or other, everything is going to be dealt with... Anyway, let’s keep moving.”

We continued on our way and soon reached the clinic located in the south wing. Apparently, the place was very big, bigger than what I had imagined anyway. A medical doctor greeted us on the spot, and walked up to me right away. “Come,” she said as I was taken to a private room. She quickly began to prepare some medical instruments, asking me a couple of questions while she fetched some anti-inflammatory pills and a bag of ice. I, naturally, recalled the chunks forming around my arm, but felt alright anyway, as if I knew no event would be triggered this time. I began to think it was my anxiety provoking certain twists of fate.

Once I had sat on a bed, she applied ointment directly to my face. Sully entered the room all of a sudden.

“Renn, here you are, I heard you were here. How are you feeling? Let me have a look,” said she after greeting the other doctor, walking towards me. I had felt previously as if Sully got a little bit angry with me, when we discussed Jix’s situation. But then again, I had to recognize I was mostly taking things in a personal way. Every time something regarding the entity happened, I felt as if everyone got to blame me, although in reality it wasn’t this way. I was self-aware, hyper-conscious regarding the repercussions of my acts, regarding the patterns hidden within the numbers.

Sully sighed, and I snapped out of my thoughts. “Your nose, Renn... You know the procedure, right?” She then asked the other doctor if she had applied the local anesthetic, and then looked directly at me. “What happened this time? This is going to hurt, I’m going to do it fast, you know my method.”

She came close, and before I could react, she fixed my nose with a delicate, yet strong and painful movement. "There you go," she said, and as soon as I attempted to put my hand over my face, she yelled, "Eh, eh eh, don't touch it. Luckily for you, the damage was mostly superficial, from what I can tell, and with your healing abilities, you'll be up in no time." She carefully applied a second ointment and a couple of bandages. She then took my hand as she made me hold a bag of ice over my face.

"Lay down, try to rest. I'll come back later to check up on you."

Both doctors walked away, and before leaving the room, I thanked Sully for her efforts. She smiled and changed her expression right after. "By the way, we managed to stabilize Jix for the moment. I thought you might want to know." She then left the room.

I fell asleep while thinking about Jix's condition. I was in need of some rest indeed, and quickly found myself snoring sonorously. I was quite medicated, however, I remained conscious the whole time, similar to the way I had done in between dreams while speaking with Felina back at the wooden house. After what must have been an hour-long recovery nap, Torken, Felina and her father entered the room. I opened my eyes and attempted to stand up.

"No, it's not necessary, stay like that," the Wolf pointed out.

Felina provided me with a meal. I was already feeling better. This intermission brought several topics to the table. The four of us spoke about the involvement of the Region in this whole mess. I told them what I had seen and listened to down at the outpost's bunker. Apparently, Felina's father was aware of this and other genetic-modification programs. He explained further how some unaccounted budgets went directly to this type of projects. I then ask them if they had heard any news regarding the people from the Other Side. Allegedly, they too were being asked to remain at ease, and some were now being transferred to different Regional Centers. The Wolf then explained how the

capital of the Southern Federation had been attacked as well. He informed us that the dodecagonal crystal pillars had spread there too. Many vote casters and men in positions of power had been killed already, according to the Wolf's sources, and the armies of the capital of the North were to come here, to the second capital, in order to deal with the entity once and for all. This military movement was already happening, and here I noticed some inquietude in the Wolf's expression. "However, a battalion deviated. My partners and I presume it is coming here. They are not going to waste this opportunity. They want us, many of us, apprehended. We plan to hold our ground," he added, looking at Felina.

"And I will help you in any way I can, sir," I stated.

"Yes, but for now, you must recover. If you decide to stay with us, you will need your strength back."

We kept the conversation going for at least a quarter of an hour. The room we were in looked nothing like a regular hospital room, but like a small castle hall with neon-orange lights, illuminated by sunlight as well, filtering through some stone openings. I wondered if Jix was inside a nearby room, but forgot to ask, as we were touching on important topics. Torken constantly tracked some data in his Holo-pad as we spoke, and the Wolf kept his arms crossed most of the time. Felina was sitting at the feet of the bed. I had taken my coat off and was still holding the bag with ice over my face.

Another point of discussion was the fact that other federations had mentioned the presence of the multicolor myst in their cities. I asked the Wolf if he knew anything about the android who had helped me before. He confessed that, though they had been monitoring it, they knew nothing about it. He said there was a brawl in the sky as we spoke, close to the location where Torken and Melli had found me, and that there was a third character in question. He had no idea what was really happening. "Has it really come to this? Who the heck are these other characters?" I asked myself. After all, I had seen them with my own eyes while getting out of the Region's den. There was someone

fighting my fight; I felt as if I should have been the one dealing with this madness, but I was here, trapped in my own dilemmas and failed decisions. As the conversation progressed, a last topic was revealed. The Wolf was concerned regarding the goal, if any, of the entity. At this point he began asking me about the conversation I had with him. He insisted on knowing exactly what the being wanted to accomplish. I explained to Felina's father that the entity's nature was chaotic and iterative in essence, how the entity was irrational due to its state of existence not being completed in this section of reality, for the totality here is never-ending, the own nature of our nature. "In other words, the entity will only expand until no finite patterns are left, and only chaos can emerge out of the chaos he imposes," I stopped my words, then, added, "He wants to destroy the human patterns and instantiate his own logic, one which we humans would call chaotic."

"Hmm, I think I understand, perhaps..." The wolf stared at the floor as he placed his hand over his beard. "So, in our world, that thing is incomplete, not in harmony, because he doesn't belong here?" He breathed a long sigh. "Any suggestions, Renn?" he asked me directly.

"Well, I believe there is a way to dematerialize the being, mentally, any human could achieve it. But I have no idea how, I am not even close, unfortunately. I've engaged the topic several times, but I don't seem to be able to focus my mind just enough to find an answer," I said, disappointed. "I will keep trying, sir."

"You better do," said Felina's father.

At this point Torken intervened to let us know how he had begun to trace an object coming towards our location at an incredible speed. We immediately heard an alarm outside and a high-amplitude whizzing sound. The Wolf looked at Torken and the three of them went out of the room with haste. Felina stopped to look at me for a second before she too vanished. "Damn, what is happening now?" I asked myself, grabbing my coat as I put my socks and boots on. I washed my face and went outside.

I found many people outdoors, all looking at the sky. Apparently, the anti-air system had gone active, sensing an object coming towards the encampment. There was smoke near the device still, though somewhat dispersed already. I noticed Sully standing with the rest and approached them directly. The Wolf was talking to a couple of other people, and when Felina saw me, she came close.

“What are you doing here, old man? You should be resting. Ah, well now that you are here, listen. They think the battalion... remember the one my dad warned us about? They established an outpost fifty miles away and fired a round of missiles to neutralize our energy system,” she said as she pointed at a building outside the Civil Center. I saw its top only, as most of it was not visible due to the stone wall. “That’s the system which provides us with energy, and they are attacking it. The soldiers will try to enter the Center once the energy is down.”

“Damn, this is terrible,” I said.

“It is, silly. The air-battery there stopped all incoming attacks, but for how long?” Felina asked, wearing the recurrent anguished expression.

I took a glimpse at the anti-air system, which was being reloaded by a group of men, when the Wolf approached us. He spoke. “It looks like we are going to be safe, for now. We will begin to mobilize some of us to our underground facility. Stay here, I’ll be right back.” His attention was called by a man next to us, and they walked away. Sully joined us at this point.

“I was checking on Jix before this happened. He’s still stable, but I won’t risk transferring him underground. I will stay with him, if it comes to that,” she said.

“I will too,” Felina decided without hesitation.

At this point a thought crossed my mind; Felina and her entourage were so guided by a sort of moral ideology, or something resembling their own version of it, as to risk their lives for one another when it came to it. They would actually try to do so, unlike a masquerade type of loyalty which comes along only with some sort of profit. I was starting to see things differently due to these people, for I had never really cared about my own ethical frame of mind, nor any involvement in seen things on a strict good-or-bad mental frame. I was all about the numbers and their connections. But these people were teaching me something dissimilar, something which related to General Paradyion's words, I began to realize.

"Hey, man!" At this moment I heard Uthor, the technician, approaching from behind us. He saluted us and we talked some more. Felina mentioned how my face looked almost healed, and how I really was the living proof of my own words.

"You should have seen him when I picked him up, his face was this size," Melli, who had approached too, joked around, exaggerating with her hands the size of my face as we all laughed. Torken was there as well, corroborating everything, as for the last time, I had a moment I still to this day cherish with these people. I did not see them ever again, and, for one reason or another, I considered them family at this point, when I had no one else I could turn to. I will always remember this tranquil lapse in the middle of the storm. They were deeply involved in who I was, and what I was becoming.

The small gathering ended eventually. They all soon went back to the many activities they needed to fulfill. Only Felina and I remained still. We spoke further, developing this connection even more as we kept laughing discreetly. It felt great having someone with whom I could express myself, and although this wasn't exactly the time to share a moment like this, we did anyway. I'm glad it happened this way, and by virtue of retelling the anecdote within these pages, after so many years, I understand the way I felt even further. I looked into her eyes, almost gazing at her consciousness, unveiled, as her smile caught my attention. I felt as if she was truly someone to behold, even admire, for her character was forged in a natural way, flowing similar to a river, free from human

speculation. Or so I felt.

And here at this point, reader, is when yet another pronounced turn of events appeared in my life. While conversing with this young woman who had helped me so much, and who I still to this day miss from time to time, out of nowhere, I began to feel something, something I could not compare in magnitude to the temperature changes in my arm, but only to something much greater. I went down on my knees, grabbing my head with both my hands. Felina kneeled as well, terribly worried, asking me what was going on. I couldn't react to her words, for I was suddenly feeling as if my mind was being taken from me, not as if fainting, but differently. I felt someone or something was trying to enter my mind.

I don't recall what happened after with exactitude, but I do remember hearing a voice, talking to me, asking for my permission to enter. An aura began to surround me, and as I looked at my hands, which seemed to now bloom along with my whole body, I attempted to talk to this other self. Despite this, it soon took over, for I was not in control of my body anymore, I could only witness that which my body was being used for. The bright light surrounding me soon caught everyone's attention as I myself was impressed with what was happening. I didn't feel pain exactly, unlike before, now I felt bodiless, similar to the way I felt when I thought I was dead, but conscious. I heard the voice inside my head, speaking to me in a language different from my own, but I understood. "Be calm. I will use you, but nothing will happen to you. This is the only way."

I slowly began to levitate, and in the blink of an eye, rose to the sky at a tremendous speed. I was flying, reader, surrounded by this bright energy field, and I was unable to restrain myself. Yet, I feared not, for the sensation which arose in me overwhelmed every other feeling. Inexplicably, I had lost control over myself. I heard another voice at this point, graver, and yet another, resembling someone much younger. I did not understand them precisely, but I did, somehow, understand their nature, which was difficult to describe, less dense, clearer, I would say. Though I wanted to ask them what was going on, I couldn't, and they would not listen. I could only wonder about yet

another situation unfolding before me, which I had probably engendered, but couldn't really explain. I was passing through the clouds, exploding like a ball of energy, and while seeing the horizon in front of me, I forgot about all the dilemmas and self imposed mental chains I had forged for myself. This sensation, I've never felt again, and here I seemed to have merged my consciousness momentarily with another, who took over from here. I lost the sensation of fear which permeates every human. I understood it for the first time, for when one feels bodiless, the detachment of our human sentiments is full, somehow bringing objectivity, as if one was not restrained anymore or conditioned by a physical body; or so it felt like, for lack of a better term. I let go, I stopped fighting this intake and merged fully with the experience itself. I was about to confront what I did not fear anymore, and I somehow felt, excited.

Allastra's fists tighten. A burst of far-reaching energy is released from her whole suit as the entity ends its speech. Edorik's daughter seems uneasy, disturbed, restraining herself from jumping over the dark being. Andinhur, the Third Seal, notices this, and raises his left arm to remind Allastra of the patience needed to confront the dark entity. He speaks to her, mentally, without pronouncing a word: "Warrior from this land, be patient. Make your blows precise, make the accuracy of your thoughts turn the situation to your favor. Follow my steps."

Andinhur begins to conjure a gigantic ball of bluish energy in front of him, without raising a finger. He does not release the spell, but places the dark shape in its sights. The seal hesitates, still without releasing his conjuring, thus the shape transforms into chromed mist, reintegrating almost immediately behind Andinhur, who turns around drastically only to release the incantation in front of the dark figure. The spell seems to impact the dark being, who receives the flash of light directly on the spot. An enormous explosion occurs in front of the two warriors, and by the end of the perturbation, we see only Andinhur, floating quietly just as before.

A trail of multicolor dust begins to conglomerate, and as soon as the dark shape is formed again, the suited woman attacks it from the side, attempting to reach its face. She fails, for the entity has stopped the attack with one of its arms, grabbing Allastra's feet, throwing her body at an enormous velocity into the grand river below. The dark figure's expression is stoic, fixed upon the keeper of time. It then launches towards Andinhur, who engages in this outbreak. Both warriors attempt to hit one another. They are watchful, each attack seems premeditated, for none of them lands as intended, as if both warriors were mostly measuring each other. In the middle of the tussle, Andinhur raises his arms and creates a bubble of energy around the entity, which soon begins to contract, pressuring the dark being until a contrasting explosion is created all over the sky. This explosion can be seen from afar, its diameter being at least a mile long, and just as it progresses, the dark entity appears behind the Third Seal, wrapping its forearms around his neck. Andinhur places his hand over the being's right, upper wing, holding it tight, then throwing the dark entity's whole body forward. The dark shape

stops his impetus, floating backwards, motionless in midair. They look at each other as the suited woman gains altitude and attacks again without hesitation, wielding her energy blades fearlessly. As the clash continues, she releases more energy around her while the numbers displayed on the back of her neck increase, reaching 1K10. The dark being isn't even repelling her attempts, but only dodging them. All of a sudden, it knees Allastra, hitting her stomach, raising its hands high and its wings right after, as a shadowy form of mist appears for a second all around it. Holding then its four fists together, as two extra arms grow near its lowest rib, it strikes the suited woman, forcing her down as she splashes a significant amount of water from the river below.

"That human, for seeing the emotional reaction behind my words impels me to believe he or she is one, has been very persistent. Though naive and overly consumed by his or her desperation, I like their character. It's strange, what I feel now. I have, in a minuscule amount, some empathy for this tedious mortal." The dark being laughs out loud. "Keep bringing down the egotistic hammer of judgment if you will, time-keeper. Let us continue, and on this occasion, do not hesitate. Chaos will only further chaos."

Andinhur's expression became exalted, for when the entity pronounced the last part of this sentence, the voice of one of his beloved originators was heard too. It was the voice of the elder woman, the one with hair like silk. She uttered the exact same words as the entity. A malevolent laughter follows.

With the dark shape as its origin, a strange, hardly-visible shockwave expands, creating an odd atmosphere as the disruption in the sky extends further. The drops coming from the distortion haven't stopped, allowing the growth of the dark, geometrical flora and several insect-like creatures, which by now have spread at a much higher rate. From afar, we see this release of energy. Moments after, we head to the ethereal forest, where the originators exist. They are immutable, and observe the events involving Andinhur unfold. The elder woman suddenly opens her eyes, and touches with her ethereal hands, translucent and luminescent, her throat. Her head is suddenly pulled back as a purple, ethereal mass begins to emerge from her matetherial mouth;

matetherial being interpreted as partly physical and mostly ethereal. This purple mass soon takes shape, and reveals a shadowy, anthropomorphic figure, quite large in size. The elder is having a terrible time as the end of the mass finally emerges, and she collapses over the golden grass. The purple mass attacks the originators, who react immediately by fighting and trying to repel the incoming menace. We now move to the curved walls where the improviser, the old luminescent figure and Zenitha reside. The musician opens his eyes wide. The words, "Zenitha, now..." are spoken with haste, and as the son reacts to these words, he vanishes. We now see him in the ethereal forest too. He locates the purple mass, and with a knife-like, swift movement of arms, from a distance, makes it collapse over the grass.

The originators attend to the wounded. They express their gratitude to Zenitha, who is then seen returning to the luminous curved walls. The improviser is worried. He speaks:

"If it wasn't for Zenitha... This horrible composition, a vague allusion to the way I was brought into existence. The materialization of the ethereal is failing, or am I the one still failing to see, father? Summoning the Third Seal, that shouldn't have happened. I was guileless, and now that I know I shouldn't summon the last of them, I will be forced to do it."

The old luminous figure takes a deep breath. He takes a second one. "Let your improvisation have a fundament, and let that fundament be expressed without restriction. You shouldn't always rationalize your improvisation, sometimes emotion is what brings the right frequencies, those most difficult to reason logically. Follow the hidden art, but not through chaotic patterns, as we have done before. If you act, you will do so accordingly. Follow your art, the hidden art, remember who you were when hidden."

The improviser ponders this, then closes his eyes, swiftly moving one of his hands as another instrument appears before him, moving towards him as he slowly plays it. We see his translucent figure offset as other composers appear, playing too, all of them

different facets of himself. A new tonality is reached as the tempo changes over time. The composer is more immersed in his creation than ever, and yet, we leave this place, to head again into the material, arriving just when the reverberation of the shockwave ends. The Third Seal is about to attack the entity.

“What have you done?” asks Andinhur. The dark shape laughs again. We hear the voice of the composer reaching the Third Seal’s mind, speaking in a soft tone.

“The higher harmonics allowed the omission into your forest. Zenitha has taken care of it. It won’t happen again, Andinhur, I ask for your forgiveness.”

“I have nothing to forgive, chanter, I trust you. Reach the hidden art, we all know you will.”

Hereupon Andinhur is seen emitting a bright light, engaging again in a close combat confrontation. Both warriors display a higher technique level. We see Allastra watching the fight over the surface of the water. “What am I doing? This is no ordinary scenario, even for our preparations. I’m going to have to release it, to release even more energy,” she speaks to herself, then, speaking out loud, “Father...”

“We are here, Allas. What is happening, child?”

“I’m afraid I’ll have to use it. There’s no other way.”

“My daughter, listen to me. From what I can interpret from the readings here, your synchronizing levels are affecting your precision. Are you not acting hasteful, my dear daughter? More energy will only change this if you are synchronized, Allas. You know this, you know it better than me or your uncle. Focus, and be precise. The energy will come naturally.”

Allastra meditates for a second. We see the tussle continuing above. “You are right...”

you are right, father.” She takes a deep breath, then floats just over the waters. Slowly, she slides her right hand over her left forearm and a holographic interface appears. After checking some data for a couple of seconds, a radar-like device loses its cloaking effect, and we see her grabbing it while aiming at the dark being’s location. She inspects the device’s screen after, but expresses discontent as it seems to detect nothing of importance. She exhales as the radar fades away.

“I just have to synchronize, that’s all... but it’s positioning is so disconcerting, it makes such bizarre movements.” She sighs. “Ninety eight point four percent. How can it be? It’s fighting that other being, after all. Ah, bloody moons. Here it comes, I need to concentrate. Come on, Allastra!”

The colorful flames glow even brighter than before. She then closes her eyes, inhaling and exhaling. A warning sound is heard, coming from the inner speakers of the suit. Allastra opens her eyes to see the Third Seal struggling above. She rises in the air, and before she manages to intervene, the keeper of time is kicked away. He flies through the sky, smashing into the hard ground way on the west side of the City. Allastra keeps rising and soon attacks the dark entity directly. Indeed she seems more focused, her actions being more precise, and still, the obscure shape uses only its right hand to stop each and every one of her attempts. Nevertheless, she keeps on attacking, and rapidly surpasses her own level of technique. The dark entity now begins to attack the woman too, connecting a punch or pushing her with its wings here and there. The suited woman finally lands a small sequence of direct attacks, finishing with a full-contact kick, smashing the dark figure over the destroyed mountain. Allastra has rapidly unveiled a weapon we had not seen before, coming from her shoulder, at least twice her size in length. Instantly, the weapon beams a giant red laser, destroying most of the cliff with its massive energy while pointing at the entity’s position. Just when the beam stops and the high-tech weapon seems to vanish, we distinguish the peculiar mist behind Allastra, and the dark shape materializes. It constrains the woman by using its double-headed tail and four of its arms. The flames on Allastra’s suit blaze all over the dark being’s face and body. The entity speaks:

“For now, since you don’t represent a threat to me at this point, I will let you rest. Perhaps our paths may cross again, but for now, I have to end the last of the seals of the hidden and procure the establishment of a proper transition. I haven’t thought about it thoroughly, and I don’t have time for you now, human. Disappear.”

Just when the dark shape attempts to use one of its arms to conjure a spell, one holding Allastra, she turns around and strikes the entity’s face directly with more strength than in any of her previous attempts, forcing its head backwards. But the obscure shape has already accomplished what it desired. It has slightly touched Allastra’s forehead, instantaneously turning her suit and body into a nonmaterial, insubstantial state. The entity laughs frantically, and as Allastra tries to punch it for a second time, she realizes her fist seems to have lost its solidity, passing through the entity’s obscure body without impacting it or having any repercussions. Edorik’s daughter, disconcerted, strikes again, but her actions remain ineffective. The dark being raises one of its index fingers, and with this action, Allastra seems lost for a second, falling rapidly into a mental dilemma. She is now imprisoned in a metaphysical state. She slowly descends through the air, reaching a lower altitude as her attention remains fixed upon her hands. Her appearance is now moderately transparent and she can’t seem to create a collision whenever in contact with another body. We see her attempting to understand the phenomenon she is involved in, unable to conciliate an explanation. “Child, what is wrong? Answer!” We hear Edorik, but his words go unacknowledged, not reaching his daughter. Above in the sky, the dark figure once again faces the last of the Seals of the Hidden. It seems anxious to speak and soon does, modulating its many voices.

“The High Chanter made a mistake when he sent you, one of the originators, to handle this situation, exposing the ethereal due to his miscalculation. I had to take the opportunity, certainly, for I’ve seen enough of you, keepers of time, who are solely the puppeteers of this failed script. If you allow me to grow, your own incompetence will end up betraying you.” The dark figure begins to laugh louder than before. “Am I the irrational one, or are you all instead?”

As this burst of laughter continues, Andinhur charges and a new brawl begins. The Third Seal seems to fight more freely than before. Both warriors move through greater distances, flying over the City as they exchange punches and attempt to hit one another. The energy released in this engagement creates thunder in the skies, as both warriors struggle to exert dominance over each other. Andinhur attacks constantly, keeping the dark entity in a defensive bearing while spells are cast by both sides, releasing shockwaves and explosions as the tussle continues. A geometrical pattern blooms above the Third Seal. He glances at the disruption in the sky, then casts a grander spell, yelling as a bolt of energy emerges over the strange phenomena. This constant stream of light appears to not only stop the lengthening process, but make the distortion reduce its size.

The dark shape contemplates the Seal's efforts. It snaps its fingers, using one hand. The light produced by the spell seems to glow no more, and soon the enchantment released by Andinhur loses its effect.

"What? That should not be!" claims the Third Seal to himself. "How can it dispel a seven-string cast?"

"You have shown some of your power, I presume. A mere disappointment you remain. Though strong in some aspects, you lack the depth of the hidden. Paradoxically resilient, yet not able to transcend the limits established by your own definition of yourself. A disillusion it is to see one of the seals of the hidden presenting such weakness," the dark figure speaks, continuing after a short silence, "I will not hesitate now. Beware, keeper of time."

Andinhur seems to lose his temper quickly, anxiously. He begins to release even more energy around him. Once again we hear the voice of the high-chanter, speaking to the Third Seal.

“Andinhur, shall I grant you my power? The time may have come for us to unify.”

“No!” Andinhur answers quickly, speaking internally. “I will not allow that. You need to find the hidden art.”

“Shall I call upon the master of the...”

“No. That will not be necessary either. He is too old now. He can’t accomplish anything in any way.”

We instantly travel to a different location, a place hidden within a forest. A bearded man is seen smoking from a pipe. He seems to be aware of this conversation. We travel back again as we see Andinhur continuing to talk.

“You will figure everything out, chanter. We have placed our trust upon you. I will see that I end this here and now.”

The dark entity has been patiently waiting for the conversation to end. Andinhur is ready to charge again and a grander clash occurs, as both warriors are now hitting each other more frequently and harder than before. Upon inspecting their combat closely, we notice how each of Andinhur’s blows seems to make a part of the dark entity convert into mist for a fraction of a second, not really harming the being, while in contrast, the keeper of time seems to be losing part of his strength with every strike taken. Still, his energy is enormous, and he glows as the battle advances further. Some of the spells attempted by Andinhur are dispelled by the dark shape, and this seems to frustrate the keeper of time. He keeps fighting, and eventually lands a real hit. But the dark shape begins to pressure him, gaining momentum and striking before the Third Seal manages to react. Soon Andinhur is struck down to the ground, creating a cloud of dust as the impact destroys a section of buildings. The entity remains calm as the keeper of time recovers and returns to the sky to face it. He releases another spell which explodes right at the dark entity’s location just after it turns into the chromed mist, but the mist

does not entirely dissipate. Part of it reintegrates behind Andinhur into its regular form, and prepares to strike. The Third Seal reacts and blocks the motion, striking a short sequence of blows right after. The dark entity attempts a direct kick, but fails as Andinhur dodges and pushes back, then releasing a spell which impacts directly on the dark figure. A gaseous cloud of many colors results from the explosion, and as the trail of multicolor dust materializes, we see a part of the entity's upper-left wing destroyed. Yet it soon reintegrates into the whole body, as if all of it was made of gas.

These warriors are fighting at an incredible speed, such that any human would not even be able to appreciate their movements. And although the Third Seal struggles to keep up, the dark entity has been outplayed a couple of times, putting into question the total extent of its power.

The fighting resumes, and while hard blows are exchanged from both sides, the dark figure emanates a seemingly dominant energy. It is preparing itself to engage in an even more aggressive stage of the duel, charging hastefully, asserting tactical decisions. As the obscure entity connects a chain of blows, it smashes the Third Seal into a tall building, destroying the stone structure in the process. The keeper of time recovers, standing over the rubble as it watches the entity floating in the sky, constantly changing the position of its multiple arms. Its double-headed tail keeps moving from one end to the other, with its wings retracted. Its eyes are filled with a blazing, purple color, and as it looks down at the time-keeper, it speaks:

“These are the consequences of following the path of hollow enlightenment. That which shines on a small level, a human level, full of egocentrism and pride. The existence of these humans has been reduced to an infant state, where they find themselves domesticated by their own species. All their individualism is lost, and soon a slave race has been artificially created, with every tendency pre-dictated and manufactured, destroying the intrinsic value hidden in their consciousness, reducing their world to a materialistic state, where things rot and die without transcending their material condition. This is what you celebrate, keeper of time, this absurd conception of the

hidden, this absurd cosmogony. This is why I will not tolerate your charade any longer. I will end your story here, and you will find, eventually, my actions worthy of your contemplation.”

“You wish to impose your will unto them. If they have procured their own suffering, let them be. It is a part of their process, it belongs to them, not to anyone else.”

“How can you tolerate such waste of intellect? I will not allow it, I will reconstruct this land. Begone, seal of the hidden.”

The last clash between these warriors occurs in the sky, and this time we observe a slight change in the entity’s technique. With this improvement, the Third Seal is not able to keep up, and he soon allows long sequences of punches to land on him. As the unbalance within the fight grows, the entity laughs and generates a large, black aura all around it. Enigmatically, it seems to enjoy this display of its abilities, as for the first time it is showing much more power in every strike. Soon Andinhur isn’t able to defend himself. The dark entity notices this and decides to finish the fight once and for all, smashing its opponent’s debilitated body into the ground. The obscure creature immediately stamps over the Third Seal, who transitions from the material to the ethereal, abandoning our context. “No, Andinhur!” We hear a voice, but we don’t know where it comes from. Afterwards, there is total silence.

The dark being remains steady on the ground, then hovers just above while laughing frantically. It raises its arms, fully-extending its four wings as it invokes a series of purple bolts from the disruption in the sky. We see the fallen tree moving its branches as its roots begin to erupt from the surface of the City, fracturing a large section of the west district. These roots serve to form a strange-looking edifice around the dark entity, a temple, resembling a dark cathedral. The streets break and turn to rubble as the gigantic tree takes over this area, and when the agitation finally settles, the entity floats inside the center of the enormous structure made from the roots and branches of the dark tree. There are creatures, dark, with purple eyes, crawling all over the curved walls

and columns. The shimmering drops continue to fall, barely visible under the dense mist which surrounds the whole place. From afar, we see the dark temple, at least three times the height of any building on the outline of the entire City, as we again transgress into the ethereal, where the composer is struggling with the arrangement of the harmonics, of his ideas. He opens his eyes, allowing the light from his ethereal body to bloom. He looks at the old luminescent man, and asks:

“Has it come to this? How did I let this happen? I will soon run out of options, father.”

The old man closes his eyes, as he listens to the improvisation. He then speaks in a passive tone, “Consider the last of the seals, the forbidden one, not being able to overcome our situation. What then? Consider it all while improvising. Focus deeper to reach the unplayed harmonics, those which belong to the hidden art. Keep focusing, and summon the forbidden seal.”

The musician attempts some risky modulations, getting close to a dissonant state. He speaks after this short bridge. “I admit it has come to this, and I will embrace it. Then I will be able to recognize the patterns which are only presented in the hidden art, transcending my understanding of the harmonics, and if it doesn't present at all, I will assume the consequences.”

The old, luminous figure agrees, then turning to Zenitha. The improviser closes his eyes and chants again, this time with long intervals composing the melody. He does, and the emotional factor seems to be embedded differently than before. He opens his eyes as the melody softens. We leave this place in order to reach the material once again, heading directly to the outpost belonging to the so called political resistance outside of the second capital of the Northern Federation. Here we find the human who correlated the higher harmonics, Renn Barsak, talking to the one named Felina. The high-chanter's melody reaches this place, but it is unlistenable for all humans. Yet, it has an effect on Renn, who immediately begins to concede a part of himself to the composer, momentarily, as a strong electromagnetic field is generated around him. This energy

comes from the musician, and it soon fills Renn's body and mind. They unify, and immediately fly high above the sky, heading towards the root-temple. There the dark shape is plotting the construction of a new era and the end of the human one. Those in the outpost stare at the sky in amazement. Soon a small group gathers and leaves the place. The forbidden seal has been summoned, but will it change anything?

The peculiar sound that I was interpreting as someone else's voice was quite euphonious to me. The fact that I did not feel my body was just as satisfying. I then interpreted what one of the voices was expressing in a deeper manner. It acknowledged me, and asked me to remain calm. This presence wasn't human; it was meticulously adjusting to my body, or so it felt. We were flying so fast, reader, that it all felt like part of a fiction, a dream. Nonetheless, we continued advancing into the north-west part of the city, not far from the Region outpost where I was taken to before, located on the Other Side. There I saw a humongous structure; a big cupola with a tower and a strange rosette on the front. The place was a mess, that whole part of the City destroyed. The standing structure was appealing to the eye; a momentous contrast, the apogee of the madness, or so I thought.

A few flying creatures approached us as we got near the place, only to attack us. It wasn't really me fighting these creatures back, it was one of the voices, for my body diverted their efforts without me doing a thing. We cut them in half in an instant as I realized how the bright energy around me functioned as a powerful energy field. I wondered once again what was happening while we continued on towards the dark structure. Unexpectedly, a second group of minions attempted an ambush; some of them spitting out a scorching gas, but the barrier increased each time this happened, deflecting the substance as more of these strange creatures fell before us. Somehow I suspected, intrinsically, the voice's plan; to destroy the entire area from a distance. But before we could position ourselves close enough to do so, a bigger creature appeared in front of us, resembling the entity. We stopped instantly, and I heard the three voices interacting amongst themselves. I tried to converse with them, yet they would not listen to me. I yelled, or attempted to do so in my mind, and still nothing happened. Right then, the bigger creature charged towards us. The first impact was strong, it came at us full of momentum. I couldn't believe the speed my body was moving at. Every time we attacked the creature I felt full of energy, full of total hysteria, as if I was living inside a tale. The mighty clash continued, but not for long; with a strange burst of power, we charged towards the creature, then instantaneously moving behind it, cutting its body in half with a swift movement of my arms. Both halves fell unto one of the City buildings,

causing its destruction.

The voices spoke again and we promptly resumed our way towards the huge structure. I felt as if we were soon going to try and destroy the entire place; I thought about the people still trapped nearby, and worried for a second. We were already charging a ball of energy in front of me, and here I noticed that one of the voices had listened to my preoccupations. For some reason, it seemed they too cared about causing the demise of more people with our actions. To my surprise, we stopped gathering energy and the bright light in front of me dissipated. We began to descend unto the ground instead, getting close to the entrance of the dark structure.

There were more of these odd creatures roaming about free, awaiting, but as we landed, none of them attacked us. They kept looking at us without emotion, as if commanded to stand by. I saw an enormous black gate in front of us, guarding the entrance to the unknown, for I could not anticipate what was coming. The whole place seemed to emerge from the ground, as if it was rooted underneath. And as I saw the arches and a gigantic cupola, dark, made from an odd material, I wondered how this structure even got here in the first place. Still, we got close and began to push one of the heavy doors. It was at least two-hundred feet high. I contemplated a soft, strange breeze, and felt overpowered, not frightened at all, as if I was involved in a fantastic riddle. I forgot all about Renn Barsak, the mathematician; I forgot about the primordial language of nature, ignoring the book I had read. I could only focus on this new escapade and what it was bringing to my experience; a nonsensical turn of events in which I was, once more, personally involved.

Slowly, the heavy door yielded and we entered the place. I could not have imagined the strange architecture held inside; it reminded me of an old, gothic type of structure. I noticed how the walls were all curved, and made of a material I had not seen before. There were flaming purple torches hanging high beneath the cupola and next to every pillar I could see. I noticed far away, in the center of the enclosure, something that I could not describe clearly. But I did recognize the bright, purple eyes of the entity. He

was here, inside this place.

We kept walking, hearing the roar of some of the creatures, nevertheless, none of them tried to harm us. The thought of me, actually by myself, walking inside this nightmare overtook me, and with this realization, I became frightened, somehow craving the corporeal feeling of having a body. I heard one of the voices, reminding me once more that I was to be safe, and that nothing was to happen to me. A sensation of relief invaded my thoughts again, and I reintegrated with this other consciousness. It felt somewhat as if we were synchronizing, and as long as I did not think of anything, I felt I was inside an illusion, led by this other mind. But having the being in front of me, I could not fool myself, I wasn't inside any dreams or nightmares, I was actually there. I began to feel quite uncomfortable and suddenly fell to my knees. I felt the other consciousness unease as well. It began to talk to me.

“Do not fear. I am here to protect you. You need to let go.”

“Let go of what?” I asked in a rush.

“Let go of your emotions, you need to trust me, just like you were doing. We are going to be fine, Renn.”

I calmed myself and, slowly, began to feel better. We got up, and I simply played my part, observing the events unfold. We had quickly recovered from the odd sensation and resumed our pace. Soon, we found ourselves in front of the entity, who was seated on a grand throne. Suddenly, more creatures appeared from the corners and the cavities of the room, attempting to surround us. The entity was stretching his fingers, and seemed even more terrifying than the last time I had seen him. Out of nowhere, one of the voices, the young one, expressed itself with haste. It seemed to realize something and was warning the others. In agitation, we turned around and left the place flying at a tremendous speed. I somehow felt as if the voices had realized the weight of the situation and decided to change their strategy.

We got out of the dark structure and began to fly high above, but we soon felt a long-fingered hand, the entity's hand grasping one of my feet. We looked down and saw the long arm retracting, taking us back inside the edifice. The motion accelerated at the end and we smashed into one of the inner walls of the structure at an absurd speed. As we promptly recovered, I noticed how I didn't really feel any pain nor was I harmed in any way. "This field around me... what is it?" I asked myself, inevitably comparing this barrier with the one I had triggered in the past. Here I began to sense the other consciousness more than before. It was calm, clear of any doubts. I felt confident and trusted it even further, for the time being. We walked towards the entity again. Once we were close enough, it spoke with the same distinctive variety of pitches and intonations in his multiple-voices.

"Renn Barsak, you are unrecognizable. You possess such skills now... or were you hiding this from me all this time? What do you think you are doing here, entering the symbol of despair without my consent?"

The entity floated towards our location, and right away I discerned how he noticed this other consciousness within me. He instantly adopted an aggressive stance, furiously creating weird static all around him. "What do I see here? I credulously thought the one who sees had matured some of his abilities, or was hiding some of his power before. But I was completely wrong, this is an enchantment!" The being commenced laughing louder and louder. "I can't believe you took the mind of this human. This is a grave mistake on your behalf, naive chanter, a second mistake. I can now finish off the mathematician without provoking a paradox. Not that I ever thought it to be true, yet, you have corroborated my existence by taking this hollow mind. I will finish you and your pathetic dreams, those who perpetrate the suffering foisted upon men. This opening of yet another seal will come as a burden to you."

The entity laughed again, histrionically, and still I sensed this perplexing calm coming from the other consciousness, softly speaking to the other voices. It seemed they had

things under control, after all, or were at least not impressed by what was happening in front of us. This helped me stay calm as well, and without responding to the entity or letting it speak again, we charged at an unbelievable speed, striking him hard. He protected himself with all of his wings, and slammed hard against one of the massive columns. He disappeared into a trail of multicolor mist in the air, and we were suddenly launched towards the heavy gates, opening them on impact as we fell sideways outside the dark structure.

The entity had multiple arms now. I noticed this as he appeared in front of us and began to use four of them as sharpened spears, giving us no time to recover as we barely managed to dodge all his attacks. We charged again, striking as he defended himself with impressive accuracy; my brain couldn't even follow most of the actions. I couldn't believe what was happening, this was all madness to me. He kept blocking most of our attempts and suddenly coiled one of his out-stretched arms around my neck. He smashed us into the ground and threw my body over the front section of the dark structure. We fell over the floor and he kicked us unto one of the inner walls, near his throne. And as we rolled over, I sensed more energy being gathered around me, as if the voices had yet more power to display. We recovered and the entity appeared in front of us, just feet away. A major clash was unleashed before me and it soon got extremely loud and overwhelming. The massive shockwaves produced by our confrontation made the whole place resound heavily, and as it continued, the entity accelerated his movements even further. He overturned his body in the blink of an eye, pushing us outside the dark structure again as we landed heavily on the pavement. The altercation kept going; his speed was unbelievable and he wasn't giving us a moment to catch our breath, still, the consciousness inside of me was following all of his movements without hesitation, stopping almost all incoming attacks while landing some in return. Despite feeling bodiless, again I somehow sensed a hand grasping one of my feet and we were instantly propelled upwards. As soon as we stabilized in the air the entity struck us diagonally, holding all of his arms together. We were forced to the ground, smashing the asphalt of the avenue. The multicolor mist began to surround us. When we stood up, I saw in the sky the disturbance I had seen before, but now covering

most of the horizon. It looked as if the majority of the City was now being covered by this strange phenomena. The being reintegrated out of the mist, floating slightly above the avenue. I noticed as well how everything was covered faintly by a dark sort of snow, and everything within was moving, as if alive, in such intriguing patterns. Not only were the dodecagonal pillars crazy enough, but I now sensed something else in the shades. Maybe it was the strange rain falling, or the dark structure itself... the City's aspect had changed radically; it had a nasty atmosphere, way too bitter for my taste.

All of a sudden, the entity released a sequence of strikes, laughing in between. We struggled to keep up the pace and counterattack, but we managed to, and the entity seemed at times a bit frustrated. As the confrontation progressed, we were surprised by a series of missiles blasting the whole place. After taking cover, I saw a group of mechs and vehicles near our location; they fired from a distance and were now charging a second round. The entity remained in the air, and with a movement of one of his arms, turned them all into mist, creating a bright light in the process, annihilating the military group in just a couple of seconds.

"Shall we resume?" he asked as he dissipated into the multicolor smoke and reintegrated again so as to engage in battle. We were out of position and he chained a sequence of hits which ended up debilitating us quite a lot. He finished with a full rotation kick and we slammed into a large building. While we recovered and sat aside a stone wall which fell into the rubble, the entity commenced a sinister laughter. He raised all of his arms and a series of lightning bolts, blue, purple, began to strike the surroundings. The pavement cracked and a pillar arose beside us; they were everywhere now, many more coming abruptly to the surface. He spoke in a language I could not recognize, moving all of his arms, as if he were conjuring some sort of magic.

We rose up and launched towards him, breaking a couple of pillars in the process. I felt this was our last burst of energy, somehow, and expected all that was uncertain to favor us, as if we were destined to beat this unbeatable being. There was a subsequent clash, destroying everything around; we detained his strange invocation by forcing him

to respond to our attacks. My body continued to release even more energy, and I felt charged as we tried to land a direct hit, but the entity wasn't allowing any chance for error. He automatically responded to every tactic employed by the voices in my head, every action. The terrifying entity kept his rhythm, and after we attempted a risky movement, he punished us by punching hard on my stomach. We instantly fell to my knees and I took deep breaths. Still, I did not feel any pain nor discomfort, but sensed anxiety in me, as I realized we did not have the level to fight this insanity. We promptly withdrew and adopted a defensive position again. The entity, who seemed to be surrounded by a purple aura, decided to speak to us again.

“Your uninteresting incantation will never achieve anything. This world of projections and perceptions, shallow, hollow on the inside, will never bring forth an understanding of the eternal, which is embedded everywhere, hidden within your own harmonics, as your kind have called them. Allow me, chanter, to metamorphosize the order of this realm to bring a new era of logic.”

Immediately we charged again, without our previous impetus, but still attempted once more to force the being's hand; by now, he was hardly responding to our attacks, merely transforming into purple mist when he deemed it necessary. He soon foiled our actions with a chain of punches, grabbing my face at the end with one of his feet and smashing it into the ground. He then threw us back on the avenue with a harsh movement. We were lying on the pavement, fatigued, when suddenly my body unwillingly began to float; I was being held up in the air by the entity. Before things turned for the worse, I glimpsed something coming at an incredible speed. A flash of light, flames burning. It was the android that had helped me before. It appeared out of nowhere and there was a strong collision between both characters, creating a wind current so intense that some vehicles in the surroundings overturned. We were also thrown away further across the avenue. A fierce brawl was unleashed in front of us, and I heard the voices discussing something. Just then, the android kicked the entity away, looking directly at us right after. Like before, it spoke to me mentally and the other consciousness heard it as well, I was sure. “Run, mathematician, run! Get out of this

place!”

We nodded slightly and scrambled from the scene, flying with haste away from the madness. We did so at a low altitude, dodging some buildings and street signs before finding a suitable alley for us to land. Once we did, the consciousness in my head talked to me, thanking me for allowing it to corroborate everything, as it said. It also mentioned that my body could not take more stress without being at risk, and told me that there was a connection between me and him.

This voice, it didn't feel human, I just intuitively knew it. Once his words vanished, I began to feel my body, and fainted; my head felt warm. A couple of minutes must have passed. I woke up with a headache, although not a strong one, not that I particularly remember, but still I felt dried, extremely tired. I stood up and walked around, without a particular direction, I just walked and watched the collapsed streets, some buildings in ruins; no person was outside and I hardly wondered why. Not long after, I heard a series of loud blasts on my back, coming from the direction of the fight. I peeked at the place, but kept walking anyway.

All of a sudden, two gunshots coming from a different dispute somewhere near caught me by surprise, and I decided to hide behind an alley. I checked my Holo-pad, but it did not have a signal. I had to rest for a moment, I was exhausted, and allowed myself to lean over a wall. As I did, I thought about everyone whom I had recently met. I experienced an excruciating feeling of being powerless, unable to stop what was coming. I had seen the entity's intentions, and there was no one who could stop him, presumably. Hereupon I feared for the worse, and tried to concentrate in order to think of something useful, but my mind was overwhelmed with the analysis of all that had just happened. I held my arm as I felt a small temperature change, but nothing occurred. Again the same frustration from before, a never-ending cycle of emotions. I wanted to feel bodiless again, but I couldn't. I felt confused and clouded by my own thoughts. I needed to act, and so, I packed my Holo-Pad and began to run.

Chapter 7

The one who correlated the harmonics, Renn Barsak, flies across the sky. He's approaching the temple built by the dark shape. A few minions attempt to stop him on the way, but soon fall before he who emanates energy. A taller creature approaches and falls too against the powerful human. He has drastically augmented the level of his abilities. He finally lands close to the entrance of the temple and approaches the tall doors. He enters, and while meddling inside, something happens, causing him to fly outside the structure rapidly. As he positions himself above the temple, the dark shape forces him inside again. A fierce battle is unleashed between them, eventually being carried outside. Meanwhile, Allastra has been trapped inside the prison created by the dark figure, a metaphysical one. We see the suited woman meditating near the surface of the river. She isn't attempting to get out for now, just thinking, it seems. This prison is harder to break than the earlier one, much more difficult, for it holds a mental riddle; but Allastra should be prepared for such an event.

We change our location as we see Edorik and Etrus entering a different section of the Tech-Room, one holding a big rack full of different-style weapons. The whole metal frame is connected with wires behind a small cryo-chamber. These are the arms we have seen Allastra unveil in the past. It seems they somehow teleported these to the suited woman's location. Once they finish inspecting the long laser used in the previous fight, they return to the monitors. They have a small talk concerning the use of another device. They deem it possible to help Allastra in this way, but after discussing it further, they decide it isn't an option.

We head back to the grand river. Allastra has opened her eyes. She is inspecting her transparent form, losing tension as she begins to understand the phenomenon. The flames on her back have stopped making a sound, yet, they burn still. She keeps looking at her hands, somehow unravelling her conundrum. Slowly, we notice interference within her shape, as if there was a phase-change of some sort occurring within her. She performs a series of non-arbitrary movements, delineating with her

hands a certain geometry as she whirls. Allastra tenuously touches different sections of her suit several times, which seems to be gaining its outstanding rigidity. In fact Allastra wasn't merely meditating over the situation before, but making subtle noises, hearing the movement of the water beneath her, trying to picture the weak sections of her mind as represented by her body. At the end of the whole process we see her releasing a massive flow of energy, taking form again as the mental prison disintegrates before her. She shoots into the sky right after at a tremendous speed. Edorik's daughter takes a moment to decide on her following actions, but as soon as she sees the contrasting temple on the horizon, she flies towards it.

She moves faster than before. There has been a significant augmentation of power within her, for she was not afraid of recognizing her weaknesses a moment ago, and by doing so, she has uncovered the knowledge she sought. The letters and numbers on the low section of her neck display 2K18 on the liquid screen. She arrives at the temple immediately, destroying a section of the roof as she barges in. The damaged roots quickly move to cover the empty space. The suited woman takes a cold look at the silent setting, trying to interpret what has happened inside. We see a fragment of the temple columns moving soundlessly, alive, and before the roots reach Allastra, she flies to the exterior, heading towards Renn Barsak's location.

She arrives at Ministry avenue in a matter of seconds, discerning the situation right away. The obscure shape has turned circumstances to its favor. It is simply too strong compared to the human fighting against it. Just before the dark being attempts to deal a critical strike, Allastra makes physical contact, fighting at a higher level than before. She soon finds the dark figure distracted and asserts a direct kick, throwing the entity into one of the crystal pillars afar. She quickly looks at the one who correlated the harmonics, the one unified with one of the high-chanters, and speaks to them mentally, advising them to walk away from the situation. They do so, and Allastra turns around to find the dark shape floating above the fissured pillar. It had created a ball of energy with its upper right hand, and from it, a ray of energy beams out, following the suited woman as she attempts to dodge it, strafing through the streets of the City while the ray cuts

everything in its path in half. Allastra lowers her energy levels, the numbers on her back diminish too. She moves slower, but swifter. The entity loses her trail for a second, and just then, she attacks, approaching it from the left, yet failing to connect a direct punch, although extremely close. So close in fact that the entity converts into mist after it manages to stop the attack and backs away. It reintegrates, floating steadily as it speaks before Edorik's daughter.

"Impressive. You possess a power similar to the seals of the hidden. How did you achieve such impossibility? It is evident, the chanter has nothing to do with the distinctive mark that I sense around you. You truly resemble a piece of the Hidden on this board. I feel a raging obsession to test your abilities. But before I help you fill that void, I must insist, tell me who you are, where you come from."

Allastra takes a moment to answer. "I already told you, I'm not from these parts. My... we created this technology, not to wage war against humanity, but to defend it! We knew about you. We predicted your coming. The mathematician was only the catalyst. So listen to me, I will end the discord you have brought forth. Bloody moons, nothing will stop me now, iterative entity! Get ready!"

The robotic voice coming from the suit reaches an end. A wavering heat begins to surround its metal-like parts. Allastra's energy has grown even further. We see her immediately attacking the dark figure, thus obliterating part of the human settlements in the process as we witness a tussle at a different level. Almost an entire district gets destroyed due to their struggle, and we find Allastra frustrated by this, restraining her movements for a second. The dark entity takes the opportunity and strikes the woman down. She recovers quickly, speaking out loud.

"Let's take the fight somewhere else, creature," she says, after which the dark shape laughs.

"What an insignificant request, hollow, as if you were actually worried about any of

these people. You wish to play a selfless role, where there is nothing but your own desires involved. Let us fight here, or I will destroy the entire City.”

The being laughs again, dissipating into the air. Edorik’s daughter is concerned, but still decides to assume the consequences of the inevitable confrontation. As they again exchange a series of strikes, many of the temple’s minions begin to crawl towards Ministry avenue. A part of the temple itself burrows beneath the structure. Soon Allastra finds herself being attacked by these creatures, as the roots of the fallen tree crack the ground where she stands. Parallel to this, the dark entity has kept harassing her, and Edorik’s daughter seems overwhelmed for a moment, having to fight the dark entity and the creatures while sometimes being struck or pulled down by the hard roots. Yet, every time she defends herself with her energy blades, having an incredible sense of the enemy’s positioning and her own movements, she diminishes the odds against her, neutralizing a minion or two. Still, they come in greater numbers. The red, green and blue flames color every stone surrounding her as she swiftly moves, dodging most of the attacks, deflecting her enemies’ tactics. Her main concern is defending against the dark entity’s critical strikes, and as she does, she finds an opportunity, managing to attack the entity directly, smashing its body into the pavement. She quickly sees an opening and begins to cut the source of the roots. They fall like sharp spikes over the demolished avenue. Some of the small creatures take advantage of her distraction and hold her by the arms, as others attempt to bite her and scratch the suit with their claws. With a full turn, Allastra unveils a strange, powerful rifle, quickly finishing off all the minions surrounding her.

Most of the roots are neutralized, but some still remain as well as many of the minions. They keep gathering, coming from the fallen tree in the river and the dark temple. The entity reintegrates above them, floating in front of the suited woman. She speaks to Edorik.

“Father, I need the Guren! Right away!”

“We are on it,” Edorik assures her while looking at Etrus, who quickly stands up and runs towards the weapon rack.

After a moment, a metal ball materializes beside Allastra, silver, slowly rotating on one of its axis. A few minions move, trying to cut the distance between them and the woman. Immediately, the silver sphere emits various laser beams at them, roasting their flesh as they transform into the recurrent mist. The defensive device stands still afterwards, floating above the ground. Some of the minions forming a front line attempt to move too, and the sphere begins firing again, neutralizing each and every one of them. Allastra takes this chance to attack the dark shape directly, engaging in a strong clash which destroys part of Ministry avenue.

Not far ahead, we see a group of Locrians coming forth. They were gathered there before the tussle even began, and have by now organized a crew. They are approaching the scene. As they do, the minions on the back notice them, and quickly launch towards the members of the political group. Allastra, while in the middle of the brawl, sees this, and commands the sphere to move towards them. The silver ball flies over the avenue, positioning itself between the Locrian group and the minions, which are already attacking some humans. The sphere beams multiple lasers at the creatures, which soon try to get close to it, and while most of them ignite before they reach their objective, a few manage to shake the device. It floats higher, thus the minions spread their wings to reach it, soon destroying the silver ball by smashing it on the ground.

The survivors from the Locrian group, after seeing the imminent danger in front of them, scam at once, running towards the back of the avenue, gathering again with the rest of their political faction. But the minions have followed them, and are now attacking the larger group of people. Allastra deviates her efforts while noticing this, now flying rapidly towards them, annihilating most of the small creatures with an energy blast in just a couple of seconds. The Locrians find a moment to escape, momentarily getting away from this danger. But now the dark entity reappears next to the woman and flashes a massive burst of energy directly at her, closely impacting the suit’s energy field. After a

big cloud of multicolor smoke dissipates, we see the destruction spreading over five miles. The release of energy evaporates everything on the surface in an instant.

Yet, we can see the bright flames on Allastra's back, a mile away from where they were. She is standing still, breathing heavily. She has recovered as the dark figure spreads its wings and flies over to her. A silent, strange tenor takes over as they look at each other, but it is soon interrupted, for we hear, not far away, the leader of a platoon giving instructions near them. After the burst of energy, a battalion had taken position, ready to attack the obscure shape. The entity moves all fingers on one of its hands, and we see the troops suddenly shooting themselves or at one another. They all end up dead, and a second battalion approaches, this time accompanied by a few androids and a mech unit. A round of missiles is fired, but disappears on the way. Then the entire battalion is blasted by gigantic, purple lightning, creating a huge hole in the ground. Thunderbolts strike different parts of the City, and with this, the entity annihilates several battalions coming their way.

The shimmering drops of rain have now covered most of the second capital. There are minions crawling everywhere, killing humans as they do. The geometrical flora has spread its perfume and its spores, affecting the minds of those who come in contact with them. More crystal pillars have risen, emanating electricity, surrounded by piles of corpses. Indeed a nefarious scheme has been brought to bear upon humanity, forged by the entity, breaking its own logic, accelerating its functioning towards a cataclysm. Renn Barsak had seen something, in the form of a numerical function, timeless, and yet with the most dreary consequences. Now they all relied on this young woman, the daughter of a unique inventor, full of endless passion but unable to express any of it at the moment. We hear Etorik's voice through the inner speakers of the suit, intercalated with Etrus':

"Allas, hear me out. We have the Thoren up and ready. Tell us when you need us to act."

“You cannot save everyone, Allas, but you can protect most of them. The iterative function will not be defeated without a real fight. A part of the people has already been evacuated. You have to synchronize if you want to save most of them, there is no other way.”

“You did not dictate this problem, child, you are solving it. Listen to us, my dear daughter...”

Allastra closes her eyes, shouting as she punches the ground, breaking a hole. She floats and speaks again. “All of those who have already died, I cannot conceive this, father! I’m so angry! Argh, bloody moons! His numbers are never going down...” She makes a pause. “Ninety-eight point four percent, ninety-eight point three percent.” She begins to breathe, but soon a torrid feeling takes over her. “Uncle, father, I have to release more energy, I will not wait here until I finally synchronize while he kills more people!”

“Child, do not precipitate into this, listen...!”

Allastra launches towards the entity faster than before, and yet the dark shape dodges her, benefiting from her impetus as it smashes her face on the ground. With its hand still above her head, the entity unleashes a massive spell, a constant stream of energy coming from above, disintegrating the whole area where they were just a moment ago. The dark being converts into the colorful mist, reintegrating high in the air right after, and when the spell ends, there is nothing but an enormous hole in the ground. Allastra appears above, attacking the dark entity in a sudden move, but it stops the assault and now a new confrontation emerges. They move across greater distances, and whenever given the chance, the dark shape unleashes blue or purple lightning at the young woman. Allastra answers back with a quick response as she also fires several weapons. She tries to attack again with the long laser she had previously shown, but the dark figure grabs its front and breaks it into two parts. The weapon falls to the river, and the woman connects a direct punch, throwing the entity into the reef of the river.

“Now, father, the Thoren!”

Up in the sky, above the disruption, we can see a flying device floating. It is huge, and as it activates, it heats up and beams a massive energy-ray at the entity’s location. Allastra flies away as we see the bright light evaporating a part of the river, the reef and the east coast of the City. The massive emission takes a minute to dissipate, and when its shining ends, we see a huge hole, with the river flowing into it.

As the events unfold, we abandon the material and visit once again the walls sheltering the musician, his son and the old luminous figure. The composition has progressed even further, yet we notice the same frustration and discontent on he who improvises the mellifluous polyphony. He begins to talk.

“The piece on the board has finally revealed itself. It assisted me while I was unified with the human, however, I deem improbable the possibility of its success.”

“I can feel her presence closer. It was tranquil, but now it is filled with doubts, questioning the facts before her. She is from one kind... Isn’t the piece capable of getting rid of the one who comes from that which we cannot understand?” Zenitha inquires.

“Quite improbable, however, still possible. Only if she explores some of the intricate enigmas of the land even deeper than myself, which I find inconceivable. Thusly, there would be a chance.”

“Father, if she isn’t able to, then...”

“Then whatever happens would happen as a result of the harmonization. Zenitha, my son. You have grown so much, and there are still so many things to teach you,” the musician affirms, taking a moment before he resumes. “Allow me to close the rondo.

Allow me to concentrate.”

Zenitha looks at the old luminescent figure, who nods, and remains quiet, allowing the flow of improvisation to take place.

We transgress into the material, but before heading back where the fight is taking place, we visit again the strange man inside the cave. He is boiling a greenish soup, speaking to himself. We notice his poor condition, his right foot is infected, purple in color, full of blood. He stops talking to himself and stands up abruptly. He is frozen, thinking, and all of a sudden, he begins to run out of the cave, but immediately freezes. He yells, talking to the high-chanter, apparently, as he falls down. He keeps talking to himself as he turns his attention back to the brew. He has a thick, long beard, white, and seems unable to stand again.

We abandon this place, leaving the old man to his own fortune, heading back towards the confrontation. Allastra is analyzing the devastation created by the device they called Thoren, and as she does, one of the dark shape's arms, elongated and extended, grasps one of her feet. The stretched arm pulls Allastra against a tall edifice which gets demolished by the strong impact. The dark entity was there, seemingly unharmed, and as the suited woman recovers her posture, their fierce tussle resumes. There are no minions surrounding the fight this time, neither are there any roots coming from beneath the ground. The brawl develops close to one of the main accesses to the so called "Other Side", but soon spreads all over the City. While we spectate the efforts of both warriors to consolidate a definitive domain over the other, we notice the broken state of the streets, the military outposts and all which has crumbled due to the futile attempts to stop the dark shape. Allastra is somehow managing to augment her energy levels even further. Reflected on the liquid screen on her neck, are the numbers 5K15. She finally appears to withstand the strong clashes, fighting at the pace determined by the dark being.

Suddenly, as the battle gains altitude, the shadow which was cast before, the second

entity, winged and tall, reappears from the entity's back, striking Edorik's daughter down onto the street. But the woman quickly rises, attacking both entities. The struggle emits immense power, and the shockwaves caused by every strike blast the stone walls and buildings within the second capital of the Northern Federation. More pillars erupt through the asphalt and the concrete, turning an even larger section of the City into rubble. We see a large group of minions attacking a human outpost while a series of earthquakes created by the roots underneath the soil begin to shake their structures. The suited woman wields her energy blades without hesitation, engaging with the shadowy figure in a non-stop sequence of attacks. The shadow does not seem to be able to withhold the momentum and finds the woman's attacks lethal, falling into pieces which soon transition into the multicolor mist. With this new-born impetus, the young woman flies towards the dark shape, which had been gazing at the confrontation, and unleashes a higher level of technique, denoting an even further upgrade in her abilities.

For the first time we see the obscure figure engaging in a real clash, not able to stop most of the incoming attacks executed by Allastra. She ends this power transition with a massive blow, blasting the entity over a field all the way outside the City, near a forest. The dark being recovers and we see a malevolent expression of anger on its face. It is frustrated, not able to process the fact that there is someone who can diminish its presence in this way. It travels at a preposterous speed, clashing again with the suited woman, and this time it balances the tenor of the fight. The woman raises her abilities, and the shockwaves both warriors produce with their strikes are so strong that a whole section of the continent known as Kan-Kelhar, where some of the human capitals were built long ago, begins to reverberate. By now most of the great City is destroyed. There is distress and agony in the minds of the humans. A part of the population is being housed inside a series of large buildings called Regional Centers, nevertheless, the reverberations of the fight are felt all over this part of the land. No one is granted safety as long as the warriors continue trying to impose their will unto the other. The woman named Felina has left the outpost her father had built, accompanied by two other individuals. They are in search of the one who correlated the harmonics, a futile effort, for their fates will not cross in the obliterated streets of the City. Renn Barsak walks

without direction, hopeless, and in the meantime, a military force is striking the political opposition led by Felina's father. Still, he is holding his ground.

After seeing these events unfold, we head to the Tech-Room, where Etrus and Edorik are discussing the possible outcomes of their remaining options. They seem in desperation, measuring the data on magnetic machines piped to the larger wall of the room. They continue the conversation, now including Allastra, who has just rejected one of the entity's attacks and finds a moment to listen. They reveal some data, assuring the stability of the equipment on their end. Edorik mentions the fact that the synchronization process is now flowing, providing some advice as well. We return to the young woman's location and determine from her expression a different emotional state. She has gained confidence in the previous chain of attacks and has managed to release even more energy while achieving the synchronization process. She keeps listening.

"The Thoren has at least two more charges. You are close to the highest levels we've tested, remember that, child, beware. You may be starting to break his defenses, but have patience, do not precipitate your actions. Keep the synchronization going."

Allastra, without giving an answer, tries to ponder over her father's words. However, the tussle resumes instantly, not allowing a moment of thought. The tension exerted upon the City and its inhabitants continues. As the confrontation grows, thunderbolts strike the streets and avenues. Allastra is seen over the City's outline, attempting to surpass her own abilities in order to diminish those propounded by the dark entity, which seem to be augmenting without an end. Her power increases, releasing a larger blast of energy.

We soon hear Edorik's voice again coming from the inner speakers of the suit. He warns his daughter of the thin line about to be crossed, a line set forth by the tests they've been performing all these years. Beyond the 7K mark on the FER meter, everything is unknown to the inventor. His words betray a slight tone of concern.

Nevertheless, the young woman keeps adjusting to the pace set by the dark entity, an accelerating display of power which grows even further. After performing a series of risky movements which turned out successful, the woman lands a long sequence of punches, then smashing the entity directly into the pavement. The obscure figure stands up, producing a loud noise, yelling with its many voices. It is mad, and releases a potent stream of energy coming from its hands unto the suited woman. The flow of energy has a non-constant, extreme speed, and it impacts its target high in the air. Allastra falls to the ground, and before she touches it, the dark shape releases a second stream, creating a massive explosion combined with a hot cloud of multicolor dust. We see Allastra rolling on the ground after having received both attacks directly. Once again, the shape changes its state to reintegrate in front of Allastra, who when realizing this, stands up hurriedly in a defensive position. She is breathing heavily, and soon begins to release even more energy around her.

The FER meter indicates a higher value, one above any other in the past. The flames on her back have amplified, and while she yells in desperation, she engages in a critical attempt to assert real damage unto the dark being. This flow of energy is unknown even to Allastra, and she overpowers herself with the feeling it produces. Her strikes are colossal, and despite the fact that the dark being is able to keep up, we sense in it a certain fear rising. Every time it turns into mist to avoid an attack, it reappears having been hit, denoting how its transformation does not occur fast enough. It attempts to fly above Allastra in order to conjure a major spell, but the young woman reacts rapidly, connecting a powerful strike before the casting takes place. The entity is raging with anger, and we see it unleashing a non-stop harassment which the young woman can barely keep up with. She too gathers more power and strikes back. Although we see both warriors exchanging punches, the entity begins to exert a dangerous, constant pressure. At this point every connecting blow seems condemning, and while noticing this, the entity now executes some high-risk movements, managing to break Allastra's defenses while engaging in another long sequence of strikes. As it does, its frenetic laughter ignites. It continues to punch Allastra, who seems unable to defend herself for a moment, but then blows out in a raging flare of energy along with a swift counterstrike.

Again the scale balances, but not for long, as the dark figure begins to push the limits of its power. By now the City has lost its long-lasting appearance, turning into rubble, and as we distinguish some of the still standing architecture, we see the entity's tail stretching, coiling onto Allastra's feet. The obscure being raises the woman in the air and smashes her several times into the ground. The double-headed tail retracts, and as she recovers, slower than on previous occasions, the dark entity speaks.

"The source of the energy you possess is a mystery, one that I deem impossible to solve. Yet, you are standing here, in front of me." It makes a mocking sound, then continues to talk. "Humans, pitiful creatures who can't even determine their own fate, conditioned by the inequity of their small minds. But among them, I must recognize in you a will which one cannot easily bend. You are quite impressive to me. I never expected to encounter anyone like you. Someone who possesses more energy than the seals of the hidden themselves. In spite of this, I find the charade called society disgusting, an intolerable power structure perpetrated by those who imposed it. May I ask the reason why you support the immense suffering hosted in this place? After all, you proclaim to fight in favor of humanity, why haven't you done something about the methods of control exerted over your kind? Or is it that you are blind to the facts? Whichever is the case, I will subdue anyone opposing the Absolution, which will restore the order of this land. In the process, I will eliminate every human who tries to impose their egotistical ambitions unto themselves and unto others. I'm tired of this facetious society, of the mediocre arrangements taken by the keepers of time. I will cleanse this land, and I will do so in accordance to the order of the Hidden, even if it's you opposing me. Prepare yourself, miserable human. We will end this here."

There is a bright shine coming from the entity. Allastra gets ready for the imminent assault. Here a major clash is unleashed, causing shockwaves as the last of the still-standing buildings nearby collapse. There seems to be balance in the fight, with both warriors displaying outstanding technique. Even still, the dark figure tries to retake dominance over the tussle with the sharpened ends of its arms, and soon begins to

achieve this, for Allastra is slightly losing the advantage she often creates due to her accurate positioning. The woman lands many hits, but the entity even more so. It finally pierces Allastra's defenses again, punishing her for a minuscule distraction, smashing her against the obliterated streets. The shape descends immediately after and continues its sequence of punches. In the middle of it all, the woman reacts and grasps the entity's neck. She then yells in a hurry, "Father, the Thoren, now!"

"But Allas, it will hit you too!" Etrus warns.

"The suit can take it, don't worry about it! Uncle, father, do it now!"

Above the clouds, the massive beam unleashed by the device strikes the whole area where they are once again. The dark entity attempts to disintegrate into mist, but it is unable to, for Allastra keeps holding its neck. Both their silhouettes vanish slowly over a bright light. After a giant cloud of smoke dissipates, we distinguish an enormous hole in the ground. There is no sign of either the young woman or the entity. High above the crater, the ever-present mist slowly reintegrates and we see the dark shape forming, arms crossed, floating, with one of its wings heavily injured, unable to reform, surrounded by evaporating mist. It raises one of its arms, eyes closed, and creates a current of energy, blasting the weapon they call Thoren. We see the metal device far away, falling through the clouds.

We now set our sight in front of Allastra, who finds a moment to rest next to the edge of the gigantic hole. This brief pause suddenly ends as the dark entity takes form in front of the woman. It walks towards her and she, immediately after, launches in a burst of energy. Allastra attacks furiously, trying to flank the entity's defenses, but her attempts seem futile. The dark shape strikes back, pushing the woman unto the edge of the giant hole, ending its attack with a massive hit which forces the woman into the black pit. She falls, and before she disappears into the black void, the entity pulls her body back to the surface with one of its stretched arms. She is lying on the ground, but soon recovers her posture, breathing heavily.

The obscure figure yells loudly in a strange language, releasing a heat-wave as the ground beneath the warriors trembles. It then engages in a close combat confrontation, this time smashing the suited woman into the ground several times before she finally reacts, striking the entity as well, but still unable to consolidate balance. Soon the entity dismantles her defenses and is now landing a massive chain of strikes. The woman attempts to hold its arms, but the entity seems unstoppable. It keeps accelerating the pace of the fight, forcing the woman to the edge of the pit again. With its arms sharpened as spears, it attempts to diminish Allastra's effort. She is desperately trying to impose her own rhythm, but soon finds the energy field around her interrupted by the pressure of its attacks. Hereupon this minute opportunity, the dark shape pierces Allastra's body, penetrating the metal-like suit as blood pours out of the wound. The entity quickly stabs her with a second blade, and with a strong twist, throws Allastra's body into the pit. We hear Edorik's words of desperation from the inner speakers of the suit as it falls into the black hole. His daughter pronounces a small, apologetic speech, as tears come out of her eyes. Allastra has not managed to release the true extent of her potential energy, and thus hope falls with her.

The dark being is now laughing without restraint, stretching its arms outwards as it invokes several lighting bolts, striking various sections within the many districts of the City. We see it focusing its attention even further. It floats, closing its eyes, and begins to chant, moving all of its fingers. As the malevolent improvisation develops, quite different from the one composed by the high-chanter, we notice many people converting into mist, in and outside the second capital, the enchantment extending past the north federation. The dark figure has finally decided to chant, ending the life of all animals in this land, converting their bodies into mist, without pain, simply forcing them to an early grave.

As we watch the process unfold, we travel back to the ethereal. The musician, the old figure and Zenitha are quiet. The composer is still improvising, and seems to be about to end his composition. He modulates back to the tonality carrying the original subject,

and with a strange, long series of cannons, ends the polyphony. A cold silence follows. He stays there for a moment, quietly, with his eyes closed. He slowly stands up. The father makes delicate movements with his hands, creating a trail of light and gas, faintly touching his son's forehead after. The improviser opens his eyes.

"I have failed, father. I feel repudiation for my composition. My inner thoughts... I have encountered my own arrogance, I was naive, and now..."

"And now what will you do, my son?"

"I... I cannot abandon my course."

The high chanter kneels down before Zenitha. He bares white, long, transparent hair. He is tranquil, looking directly into his son's eyes. He begins to talk.

"My son, I never expected for this moment to come at such an early stage. There are many things I wish I could have taught you, and now I will never have the chance. You will begin a new phase. I am glad your grandfather will be there with you." He takes a moment as he looks at his own father. He continues. "None of the seals of the hidden were able to stop what was coming, not even when, due to my mistakes, I was forced to unify with the human who heard the composition in the first place. It started with me, and I shall never abandon my course."

Zenitha has tears in his eyes as he hugs his father. "Please forgive me, my son, only now can I see the things I did not want to recognize in myself. You will be a great chanter one day. I am eager to hear what you will reveal. We are of one mind, remember that. You will be able to express yourself much better than I ever did."

The composer stands up again, gazing over he who taught him in the past. The musician hugs his master, who looks at him with sorrow. Zenitha attempts to stop the chanter's journey, but soon accepts the inevitable. The chanter vanishes, and we see

Zenitha running towards his grandfather. The high-chanter could not reach the hidden art in time and is about to materialize, resorting to the last extent of his existence. Initiating the harmonization process, he will attempt to stop the end of an era and the beginning of another.

Chapter 8

Cold sweat slipped down my whole body. My eyes were reaching for something, someone. I thought I was on the Other Side of the City, but couldn't recognize my location precisely. The gunshots I'd heard nearby had ceased, still I was somehow concerned regarding my safety. I was feeling extremely tired, but I had to keep walking; I was asking for yet another coincidence to occur. "Could it be?" I asked myself. "Will the City go down?" I thought about Vino, about my mother, my brother. I was unconsciously searching for someone, anyone who might just bring sense to the madness.

But my solitude persisted. I kept walking at a fast pace through the alleys and streets. Nearly everything was demolished. A vague sensation of anxiety arose in me, not related to anything specifically, but rather a general obfuscating feeling of desperation, for the whole capital was falling apart and I... I simply could not do anything about this. No one could, apparently. There I wondered about the android which, for a second time, had saved me from the chaos. Was it able to withstand the entity's iterations? I did not possess an answer, and that felt as the origin of all my doubts, all my fears. This damned uncertainty which was both the motor and the hangman of my expectations.

All of a sudden, the streets beneath me began to tremble. A fissure opened and I had to jump high above in order to avoid falling into the depths. I grabbed onto a tree branch and gazed at the street where I was. It was now cracked with a section having been turned into rubble. A sharp, gigantic object made out of a material similar to the one forming the strange building I entered before emerged from the ground. It stretched high into the sky, demolishing several blocks ahead as it smashed the ground. I had to jump again to secure a safe spot on top of a still-standing roof, and quickly got away from the scene. A peculiar drizzle was falling, the same kind of drops which had caught my attention when fighting against the entity. I promptly noticed how the soil itself and many buildings in the surroundings were already covered by this odd-looking rain. The sky had this weird vibe as well, sort of disrupted. I took a moment to inspect my hand and

took a closer look at the substance. It was out of another world; this liquid moved at irregular intervals and felt as if it was alive, conscious. There were geometrical forms everywhere, extremely small, perhaps arranged in a fractal manner, another iterated function, a coincidence which I had no time to wonder about. I advanced several blocks by jumping on the highest points I could find. From these heights I saw what I believed to be a Locrian group gathering; the smoke could be seen coming from their metal barrels. I glimpsed again the place where I thought the fight was taking place, and as soon as I did, a far-reaching bright-light commenced to illuminate every building, every street. It was evaporating everything in its path, and I simply got away as fast as I could, vanishing from the west district with haste.

I positioned myself high on a half-fallen building, leaning onto another, forty-five degrees from the ground. I gazed at the devastation caused by the energy-wave; there were vapor streams rising up everywhere, along with an intense sensation of heat. I noticed a strange thunder-storm occurring in the horizon, and got seriously worried this time. I kept looking, searching for something, but all I saw was rubble and I could not discern anything anyway. I took my Holo-pad out and attempted to call Felina and the rest. There was no signal, no message could be sent either. My only option now was to head to the Wolf's Civil Center.

I began to jump, avoiding the streets, moving as fast as my fatigued body allowed me to. I had a vague idea of where I was, and where I needed to head to. As I advanced through this strange atmosphere, I saw a small caravan moving through an avenue; there were Region operatives and vehicles advancing slowly. There were humandroids along with the group, inspecting the surroundings. I had to take cover all of a sudden, for the droids seemed to have detected my presence above them. I looked again and noticed how the caravan kept moving, but I could not see the androids who had seen me while I attempted to hide. "Dammit, they are coming," I told myself in whispers. I took cover behind a wall and remained completely silent. I waited, hearing loud blasts occurring afar. Out of nowhere, the wall behind me turned to rubble and I fell to the floor. I saw one of the droids behind me; it destroyed the wall with its fists and was now

coming towards me. I stood up and tried to defend myself. We struggled for a moment and the droid pushed me to the floor. It was a male humanoid, quite tall. It did not pull any weapons out, still, it kept coming towards me. I was exhausted, reader, and felt as if I wasn't going to be able to handle the situation. I invoked the golden current coming from the palm of my right hand and attempted to neutralize the robot. To some degree unexpected, the electric current was strong enough, striking the droid hard as it fell to the floor. Immediately after, I noticed someone else in the surroundings, a female with dark, long hair, coming from the other side of the roof. I stood up. She kept walking towards me. A sensation of fear attempted to infiltrate my thoughts once again, and I remained petrified for a moment. I did not have the strength to fight anymore, but I had to, or else I was to succumb to this situation. I tried to release the golden current again, but the stream was too weak this time. The droid kept walking and soon attacked me. It threw me unto one of the edges of the building, but I did not fall. I felt drugged; the effect of adrenaline was becoming familiar to me, and I hated the feeling of it. Without thinking further, I raised both my arms and wrestled with it. The droid was forcing me down to my knees, but I fought back. As we struggled, I noticed a second bright light over the horizon. Again an energy shockwave began to disintegrate a sector of the City. The droid was not distracted by this, and was diminishing my last efforts in order to stand. It kicked me in the chest and I fell sideways on the floor. The droid aimed a gun directly at me. It then spoke:

“Renn Barsak. ID, hyphen, two, one, one, hyphen, seven, seven, three. I have orders to take you with me. Stop resisting. Obey my command and your life will be spared.”

I did not answer, and with a movement of my arms, pulled the gun away from its metal hands. I felt a quick temperature change in my right forearm as I performed this action and knew the odd phenomenon was to manifest again. Indeed a stream of ice was released from my whole arm and I pointed it towards the droid. The stream was immense this time, and I got a bit frightened, for I could barely hold control over it. The humanoid was thrown over the other side of the roof and the continuous flow slowly decreased. I, for the first time, managed to concisely decrement the motion with my

mind. While getting rid of the remaining chunks over my arm, I got close to the edge and attempted to confirm that I had, indeed, got rid of the droid's presence. My attention was caught by the bright shining on the horizon. The energy being released could be felt all over the place, again producing an intense sensation of heat and electromagnetic radiation. I, intuitively, scrambled as fast as I could, leaving behind a trail of destruction caused by this strange bomb, or whatever it was.

Soon I found myself standing on another roof, this time farther away from any danger. I observed the surroundings, trying to find an answer, but couldn't. Still, I kept my eyes on the streets. A small group of people could be seen crossing between piles of rubble. Out of nowhere, they vanished, suddenly turning into mist. "No!" I yelled, but soon realized how powerless I was. I remained silent for a second, listening to the echo of my voice. I began to wonder if I would even be able to get to the Civil Center with this turn of events, and while contemplating some ideas, a fast-moving vehicle caught my attention. For some reason or another, I thought of Felina. Was she anywhere near? I felt as if she was, somehow. I recalled how I burst with energy the last time I saw her, and felt somewhat ashamed. I had not explained anything further to the Wolf's crew, and I wondered how they had reacted after seeing me fly, and all the rest. My curiosity got the best out of me, but just before I attempted to move and follow the vehicle, I noticed something happening in the sky, something even stranger than what I had seen so far.

The clouds began to open, letting a bright light into the darkness surrounding the City. This sensation, reader, I couldn't explain to myself the sentiment provoked in me as I glanced upon this light, and without me being able to restrain myself, I forgot about the vehicle and headed back, for the source of the light seemed to be located close to where the fight was taking place. There were no blasts anymore, and I wondered if the strange android had fallen in the battle. The heat intensified drastically as I got closer and closer. I noticed how the light lowered its altitude; its source was descending slowly, and before I could get any closer, it stopped. I must have been a couple of miles away from where the action was taking place. The hot air did not allow me to continue, and I kneeled down as I attempted to see what was happening while I positioned myself high

on a rooftop, one of the few standing structures in this area. There were thunderstorms everywhere, and a sudden lightning bolt struck the building where I was, forcing me to jump and land on an obliterated street with the help of the barrier. I nearly got caught as the edifice went down, and soon got away from the dust and the rubble. Once safe on a perpendicular street, I got down on one knee, looking at the sky.

“What is that? Somehow I feel related to it, to the source of that light,” I said aloud as I gazed upon what I believed to be a counterpart to the chaos. I had to, for all had fallen, the people, our social structures. I could not accept what my eyes were showing me, the destruction of everything, and I took part not only at its conception, but along the process as well. I cannot explain even to this day, after all these years, how I felt, for I was fundamental, or so I thought, an instrument used, perhaps, in this terrifying scheme which apparently had repercussions upon so many levels of reality. When I read that book at Vino’s, reader, it never occurred to me that the consequences of my acts would affect others in such a manner. Perhaps I did, maybe I had fooled myself. Whichever the case, our paradigms had changed forever.

The improviser has materialized. He no longer belongs to the ethereal. His chant ended, and with it, its influence over the lands below. The unique polyphony did not resonate with the hidden art. The hidden art holds complete power of manipulation, and the composer attempted to liberate it, but was incapable of doing so. After failing such a task, he who improvises decides to end the long cycle in which he has dwelled for ages. He understands his failure, and assumes the consequences. Now he materializes and prepares to deal with the harmonization process, allowing his son, Zenitha, to take over his place. In time, Zenitha will attempt as well to reach the hidden art, but for now, the young composer focuses on his father's actions, which are about to take place.

We travel into the material as we listen to the peculiar sorrow tied to the dark entity's incantation. Many humans have perished due to this hypnotic melody, their bodies being turned into dust, and as their dreams and hopes disappear, so does the lingering suffering inside their minds. Among those who vanish, we see the one named Felina, the one called Torken and their companion Melli, who were driving fast through a street and had parked close to where Renn Barsak was. We turn our sight to the compound they called Civil Center, and see as well the flesh and blood of the humans who remain there being turned into the strange mist. The four federations which constitute the whole of society are rapidly falling. But not all humans have disappeared. We see the old man inside the cave, aware of the situation, coming out as he hears the melody, yet, not transforming into thin air. Renn Barsak has not vanished either, and in the same manner, others have managed to stay intact. While a few humans have not been touched by the sorrowful melody, most have simply disappeared in a matter of minutes. An odd thunderbolt was seen striking the black pit where the suited woman was thrown into before. She has returned to the outer rim, where her wounds are being treated by her father and uncle. Discouragingly, Allastra, Edorik, Etrus and most people from the outer rim vanish as well.

By now the high chanter has appeared in the sky, emitting an extremely bright light which begins to illuminate a large section of the City. As he descends the dark entity takes note of his presence. Suddenly, the bitter melody ends with no proper closure.

The entity's feet touch the ground. It looks at the sky, bursting into laughter, raising all of its arms. From the depths of the river, the gigantic branches belonging to the dark tree rise above the waters. They do so with massive force, reaching the improviser's position in a matter of seconds. The enormous branches evaporate as they make contact with the composer, leaving a foggy vapor all around him. The attack continues, but the motion is eventually retracted. The roots and branches stay dormant inside the grand river.

The dark entity continues the outbreak and calls for some of the crystal pillars to rise high in the sky. A couple do, and from their end, a purple stream of electricity is directed towards the composer, but this seems to have no effect on him either, for he keeps descending at a constant rate, soon stopping completely. As he does, the tall pillars are destroyed from the inside, crumbling into pieces. Part of the remains float, staying up in the sky, levitating, as if they are less dense than mere air. The bright source of light is seen still floating, immutable. We look at the dark entity conjuring a spell. After performing a mysterious pirouette, it releases an energy blast towards the musician which impacts strongly upon him. The blast is deflected, dispersing into many streams across the sky. Immediately after, the dark shape launches towards the musician, rising into the sky at a tremendous velocity. The entity attacks the composer, who seems to repeal every attempt without moving. No harm is done to him, for he is surrounded by a light barrier, impeding every strike from reaching him. The entity realizes the oddity of the situation and backs off, conjuring another spell in front of the composer who, in the middle of it all, speaks in the peculiar language we've heard before.

"The war you wage upon others is solely within you. Ask yourself how your acts are congruent with your thoughts. Only by helping yourself and your context may unison be reached, for you are a part of it and you both hold one another. That is congruent, in a way you deem acceptable, for you hold logic in the highest regards, and there is no option other than the application of the same. The facet you have entered into is dissonant. Come, merge with me, and you will understand it all."

The entity is holding the spell with its hands, unable to release it. We can distinguish frustration as it frowns. The musician's words touched a certain inner sensation within the dark entity, as if they were spells on their own. But before the chanter speaks again, the dark shape snaps out of the trance and releases the energy it was holding, yelling as it does. A colossal explosion occurs in the sky. As the colorful smoke dissipates, bright light emerges with the same luminosity as before.

"Come, I am your origin," we hear the musician say.

"Never!" the entity yells as it grabs its head with its many hands. A second after, it invokes a series of thunderbolts which strike the composer. The devastating commotion takes place, but nothing seems to harm the musician. The dark entity is seen to grow even more anxious, frustrated, and thus acts in desperation, stretching one of its arms directly towards the bright light. When it makes contact with the strange energy surrounding the High-Chanter, it evaporates. The trail of dissipation extends all over the entity's arm. We see the dark figure wounded, faintly releasing a multicolor vapor from the damaged zone. It is unstable, trying to hold the wound. The dark entity is about to launch towards the composer, but before it does, we hear the musician's voice again.

"We will unify in harmony, and you will embrace the moment, seeing what you have not been able to see so far. Come with me, I stand here, waiting. Imagine the high-polyphonies we could reach. Let us not waste any more time, come, unify with me."

The chanter's intonation has affected the being's psychology for a second time, and we see it struggling with its own individuality while releasing a dark shockwave. The disturbance in the sky now covers the entire City, and even more roots emerge from underneath the ground. As an endless sequence of thunderbolts strikes with massive force, we look at some of the last humans, those few who did not convert into mist, taking cover as they fight for their lives, wondering how everyone else has simply disappeared. In a desperate attempt, the dark shape commences a chain of close-range attacks, mutating its form as its anthropomorphism is lost, with many extremities

emerging from the obscure body, increasing its size as it does. The strange roots coming from below are set in motion, attacking fiercely. But once again the High-Chanter seems unaffected, remaining motionless.

As the entity's futile attempts continue, the composer begins to emit a blooming light, much brighter than before. This light expands, covering everything in white, and we notice within its inner core both shapes, locked in the act of merging. The white light continues on its way, erasing human civilization almost in its entirety. It also forces many aspects of nature itself to go through a metamorphosis, transforming the land as everyone knows it. We see Renn Barsak and others going through this transition, or the absolution, as it will be referred to in the future. These few individuals are covered by the brightness as well, unable to see ahead, for everything has faded into white. The disturbance above in the sky is absorbed by the phenomena, the strange rain stops falling. The thunderbolts storming the streets cease, and the roots underneath the soil evaporate, disintegrating as the bright light shines upon them through the giant holes which, little by little, begin to tighten.

Several minutes pass as the light extends even further and, miraculously, the destruction brought by the dark entity is isolated and eventually eradicated as the land transforms. We begin to see the brightness diminishing after some time. As it dissipates, it shows a different version of reality, one in which all human civilization has vanished, their buildings, structures, their inventions and ideas. The land is subsequently covered by trees, water and long grass, differing from the flora which reigned before the harmonization. The release of energy in the form of light, radiation, has transformed the material, accelerating a phase change as the frequencies of reality excite to form another.

The composer did not manage to find the hidden art, thus, by materializing, he has stopped the end of an era, extending its time towards a final draft which will serve to test humanity again. Still, in a way which seems unnatural, for the musician has given up his existence for this cause, disappearing along with the entity. But before his presence

abandons the material, we see his body floating in the middle of the source of light, which has almost dissipated entirely. A new shape is given to he who chants. He has unified with the harmonization, hence entering into a process which has saved the land from its certain destruction. This new version of himself includes the dissonant frequencies, which can be perceived physically, in the form of duality, and have by now been harmonized and synthesized. He who chanted, improvising the manipulation of the land, sees his work now. He has given himself into this new improvisation, his last one, and descends to the ground as he admires a new light covering everything in its path. He feels the soil with his hands, the grass. He breathes the air and frees himself from every thought. Colorful trees reign over this land, which will serve to test the harmonization of a new era. The composer approves of the land, asserting with his actions the last of his ideas. We see him floating, moving. He has no time, for he is about to vanish, but before his influence over the land finally ceases, an explanation is required.

A rush of ideas flashed through my head. I sensed the ground trembling. I couldn't stand up, I tried to, but the trepidatory movement impeded me to do so. All the buildings nearby were brought down, provoking excruciating sounds as they fell. I had a clear view of the bizarre phenomenon happening in the sky, but before I could distinguish anything further, the brightness of the light began to outshine all the surroundings. I noticed how I could see less and less in front of me, and with every passing moment, the strange light consumed every shape in its path. At that point I couldn't see anything anymore. I closed my eyes several times, opening them as I tried to perceive anything other than the bright shining, but in every instance I could discern nothing but the blooming effect of light, immersive, beautiful.

I remember trying to take a look at my hands. Nothing was visible to me, not even as I attempted to place them closer to my eyes. I did not know what was happening, reader, and so my mind began to speculate on every possibility, every explanation I could come up with in order to justify this madness. Eventually, I tried to walk, but I did not dare to take the first step. I kneeled down instead. I thought about all the strange things happening in the sky, and I could only conclude they would signify the end of my existence, for all was lost to me. This was just another way for me to escape reality, to get away from the chaos consuming all of my thoughts.

After a couple of minutes a new sensation arose in me. I did not feel any pain, but actually felt alright, strangely enough. An odd tranquility surrounded me. There were no more sounds, no more agitation. It all felt like a constant stream, calm, yet shady, as if a revolution was being fought, silently. I thought these strange feelings were nothing but the elaboration of my mind as it attempted to give meaning to this white void. I, naturally, thought I was dead, and felt this as the process in between. But soon I found out I was wrong; the absolute whiteness began to fade. A total mind meddling, I felt as if I was being born again. This may sound a bit absurd to you, reader, but having this sensation of being surrounded by a total void and then witnessing the transmutation of the same left me without breath. I began to discern shapes again, colors. I found myself kneeling upon a large section of grass. I couldn't believe it.

“Have I gone mad?” I asked myself. Just before, I was standing in the middle of the obliterated pavement and streets of the City, and now, somehow, I was somewhere else. I stayed there, without thinking, for the first time, immersed in the present moment, not elaborating any thoughts. I felt as if I was reading a book, being in the middle of an unfolding fiction constructed by someone other than myself. More and more elements could be seen in the horizon now; I saw a valley and mountains way ahead. There were these odd, colorful trees everywhere. I dared to touch the grass with my fingers and noticed a different texture, a different sensation to what I had felt before. Everything had changed, somehow, and I had no clue on the mechanistic processes involved. I looked at the sun, which seemed to emit a slightly different tone than before, and as I gazed at its brilliance, I saw a figure approaching, walking towards my position. “What is happening?” I noticed I had my coat and boots still on, “What is going on here?” I continuously asked myself. Soon I discerned a man, a man slowly walking towards me. I saw another, and yet another. Right after, a group considerable in size had gathered near me. I was petrified. No one talked. One of them, without saying a word, pointed towards another figure, who was floating, coming closer. I was quite disconcerted and again thought about the idea of me being dead. This all felt so strange, but inside of me, I was sure I had survived. I somehow knew this had to make sense, even if I could not explain anything any further, all of this had to be coherent.

We all remained silent. The floating figure soon reached our position and descended upon the ground. Here I noticed again the vegetation surrounding us, such a unique sensation. With this odd change of scenery, I felt the urgent need to contemplate that shining figure, half-dark, half-silver, on a deeper level, for everything was calm, blooming, and I felt inside of me this bizarre tranquility, unfamiliar, unlike anything I had felt before. As soon as he came closer, he began speaking with a beautiful voice. He spoke in a different language to that of the North, still, I understood. We all understood his words.

“Gather around me, all of you. You shall hear and understand, for I am the reason your

world has vanished and I am also the reason why your world has survived.”

No one talked, no one dared to intervene. Half his body resembled that of the entity, yet, I did not fear, no one did. The strange, luminous man continued.

“Humans have lived for long enough without an explanation. Your world has been touched by several influences over the past. One of these was my determination. I failed to find that which is hidden, the hidden art, therefore, the dissonant frequencies of my influence piled upon your reality like drops filling an ocean, and as the dissonance grew and manifested its variants, one of you heard the core of my ideas, of my composition.”

The man turned to me, reader, and I felt his eyes settled upon me, piercing a part of my soul. I felt cold, and for a moment recalled the odd temperature changes I had been experiencing, but nothing happened. The man continued talking as everyone placed their eyes upon me.

“It was you, Renn Barsak, who in a way heard my composition, my influence over your world. Thus, the dissonant aspects of my improvisation manifested in reality, in the form of absolute derationalization. What you recognized in the form of patterns, inside the numbers, were the dissonant harmonics of my manipulation.”

“The primordial language of nature!” I interrupted, perplexed, “It was you, I knew it was an external pattern, I knew it all along, I...”

“Indeed,” the man continued, “and by virtue of the same, your world passed through an early transition. This land that you see around you shall be your home. But along with you, others will walk. Humans shall not be the masters of the land anymore, or ever again, for the cataclysm which was about to occur was stopped, and with this action, the land now demands to be walked upon by others. You shall learn to share these grounds. Along with you, shall live the Luthiel, who ruled over the land during the era of

Zaratra. Now they shall rise again. You must learn the ways of sharing this world along with them. In this way, you may prove worthy of reverting the process of harmonization. Humanity will be judged again, in the future, and you must prepare for that moment.”

The man then began to emit a brighter light. One could see geometrical patterns all around him, not always showing; a strange, pleasant effect. He resumed his speech, now gazing at all of us.

“I have deemed you all worthy. Certain tasks will fall upon you, for you are humanity’s last attempt at survival. So walk the land and temper yourselves. Reevaluate the creation of civilization. Consider all things your kind has confronted in the past. I am speaking to each and every one of you. I have invited all of you here, to listen to my words. You must, or you will fall when the time of judgement comes.”

At this point I stared at the individuals beside me. We were twenty two in total, most of us middle-aged, apparently. Furthermore, I saw a child next to her mother, and an elder, who stood still. Suddenly, one of the men to my left exhaled loudly, and began to walk away from the rest. The luminous man gazed at him, but did not pronounced a word. After a minute or so, he continued his speech.

“You were born to die, but by virtue of the frequencies constituting this land, you shall all live longer than you would expect. Shall you succeed in constructing a sustainable environment, the trials to come will be passed. Humans have always fascinated me. I admire many of the attributes you possess. I never thought possible that one of you would hear the dissonant harmonics of my composition. The numbers speak to you, Renn Barsak. They also spoke to someone else, someone from a different part of the land, who created an improvisation of his own within the material. Unfortunately, all humans other than yourselves have perished, him and his daughter included, the missing piece on the board was finally revealed and yet it could not secure the stability it sought. The harmonics reflected the dissonant aspects of humanity, and they ended up consuming almost everything.”

The man paused. He gazed at all of us once more, emanating a tranquil aura impossible to ignore. I felt his calmness surround me, but before I even managed to react to this sensation, another one arose. Strange music, melodies intertwined could be perceived in him, the likes of which I had never heard before. The bemusing frequencies unfolded to reach an end. We all stayed silent for a minute. Before the man resumed his talk, we noticed a few other individuals approaching, who were in fact bewildering to observe. Some of them emanated light from their bodies; the propagation of odd electric and magnetic fields being produced before us prompted me to recall the strange shining I was producing when I lost control of myself. Like a strident sound waking me up from sleep, I realized that it was this man in front of me who took possession of my mind before.

“...It was you!” I spoke all of a sudden. “You are the one who merged with my mind before. Tell me, what happened to the entity? Did you... What happened to the warrior dressed in metal?”

“Shhh” One of the men next to me shushed me. “You insolent, shut up.”

I looked at him, disconcerted. I had these urgent questions and I was not planning on ignoring them just because they seemed to bother the guy next to me. The luminous man kept his eyes on me, still, he did not respond and soon acknowledged the individuals approaching. They did not seem human in the least, maybe they were the people the man spoke about before, the ones who supposedly ruled this land in the past. There were eight of them, and they saluted the man and then each and every one of us.

“Behold, for these are the Luthiel. You will all share this land. Understand the logic within yourselves to understand the logic in others. You all share similar attributes. Know them, make them a part of your strength. You must, for it will take no more than a thousand winters for you to be presented with the trials. I cannot stop this, for it is simply

a part of the harmonization. It is a matter that you yourselves must resolve.”

Hereupon I managed to clear my mind off for a second and realized how all of this was happening too fast. I thought about Felina, about everyone... Were they gone? I couldn't restrain myself from feeling desperation, reader, and once again I asked the man a question.

“What happened to the people from the Other Side? Where are we anyway? That bright light which covered the horizon... was it you? Tell me, am I... responsible for all of this?”

The man took a moment, then finally acknowledge me. “You are, in a way, but not entirely. This would have happened with or without you. Indeed, it will be difficult for you to assimilate, but all the people you knew are gone from this land. Try to understand me, Renn Barsak. You will bear an unbelievable weight on your shoulders only if you allow so. You must teach others what you have found. Some humans will be born of white blood from now on. They will have potential, and though different in many ways, they will be as human as any of you are. You were an important piece in the initiation of the manifestation of the harmonics, but only that, a part of the process, and nothing else.”

“...But who are you? I heard others as you took my mind, I... this can't be happening. What about... was everyone actually turned into mist? And that cathedral we saw... you have to tell me who you are! Are you like, some sort of god?”

“I am not any sort of god in any manner, I was a human once, although not considered one of your kind anymore. I am the High-Charter who has been improvising the tendencies of your reality for ages. I could never be the totality, which is already in front of you but cannot be seen, the hidden, which holds the hidden art. As you may recognize, even I am bound by the uncertainty ruling this land, there are no paradoxes involved. Do not look at the past, for the trials will come, and it holds immense

importance. Teach others what you have learned, Renn Barsak. I belong in a different time, and so I shall soon leave you all.”

The half-dark, half-silver man turned to the others, but I stayed there, shocked. I could not believe what was happening. Even today, after so many years, I recall this moment as having been robbed of my existence, of all that I knew. The man talked to the so called Luthiel. He then spoke to the rest of the people beside me, but I could not pay attention anymore. I kneeled down, with my hands over my head. I couldn't even attend to what the luminous man said at this point. After a minute or two, he came next to me, and delicately held my head with his hands; he reminded me of the elder from my dreams.

“Thank you, Renn Barsak, for helping me see that which I did not want to recognize. You shall live a long life, whether you approve of it or not. Of key importance you shall be one day, yet again, but a different man you will be.” He made a pause, looking directly into my eyes. His were profound, white, emanating pure light. “You remind me of my son, Zenitha. She also reminded me of him all along. You both had a lot to do with me making this decision.” He paused once more, “You may have not foreseen it, but her father also heard my composition, and decided not to act upon it. You must all be ready when the trials come. Remember, time is of the essence, teach others what you have learned.”

His words were enchanting; the way he pronounced them was. I was frozen, reader, and as he vanished in front of all of us, I plummeted to the ground. I stood there, submerged in an immersive silence. Then I heard voices, those from the people and the Luthiel, who were apparently engaging in conversation. This moment was quite important, I was sure, but still I did not find the strength to stand up, not quite. One of the men was talking more than the others. The way he dressed reminded me of the people from the Southern Federation. “Was he perhaps in our capital when the incident occurred?” I asked myself. He had a strong accent, and I wondered at this point what they were even talking about. One of the Luthiel, one who was floating above the

ground and seemed to have portions of his body constituted by light, slightly transparent, delineating his shape, was talking to the man I just mentioned. The rest of the Luthiel stayed behind and I saw some of their faces, as some looked back at me. I sensed in them the same tranquil vibe I'd gotten from the luminous man. Their conversation kept on going for a while until a sudden dispute turned things rather silent. Most of the Luthiel left, and a couple beared with the rest of the people for a moment. They then left, and each seemed to take off their own way. The people talked for a while, sometimes yelling at each other. I sensed frustration in some of the words I was listening to. After some time, one of the men approached me.

"What's up with you? Aren't you gonna stand up or something?"

I did not answer. He kept on, "I'm talking to you. Renn, that's your name, isn't it? I heard what that thing said. You owe us an explanation, you know?!"

"I'm sorry, but I don't owe you anything. Maybe at some other time we can clear things up, but please, for now, just leave me alone."

"Hey!" Another approached, "That... that thing said you had something to tell us, now listen to me, asshole..."

"I said leave me alone!" I yelled as I stood up and generated a pressure-wave which made the two men in the front fall to the ground. They stood up, a bit frightened, and I resumed my posture on the ground.

"You fucker, you're crazy! What the fuck was that?" the man behind the first yelled. They soon left, allowing me to remain alone with my misery. The rest of the people who had gathered also left, one by one as the night began to cover the sky. I couldn't believe what had happened. What that was, I did not know, and I remember staying there for hours, prone over the grass. I eventually fell asleep, and certainly experienced an agitated session of dreams. I don't recall these clearly, but I was sure Felina, Jix, the

friends and family I had on the Other Side, they all appeared in one way or another.

Chapter 9

I was dazzled by the sunlight over my face as I finally woke up. I felt quite rested, and as soon as I glanced over the trees, which had two and sometimes three different colors in their leaves, I understood nothing was a dream. I, in fact, felt immediately sick, but my surroundings were contrastingly beautiful. There was this dense blue mist in the horizon, and all things seemed to bloom. I began to cry then, reader, for I could not bear the sentiment Felina's demise provoked in me. I had, in a way, much to do with her death, with everyone's. I remember crying and crying for a while; it felt strange, for I hadn't done so in years. At some point I began punching the ground as I felt the desperation running through my veins. What had happened had already happened, and I was here, I couldn't do anything about it. I was hopeless and still alive, apparently condemned to taste the bitterness of remembrance. Eventually I fell asleep again, somehow hoping to wake up once more inside the City, which I still miss to this day, even as I write these words.

Hours after, a knocking sound woke me up. My whole face and my throat were in pain, still, it was tolerable. I looked at my hands after rubbing my eyes, fixing my sight on them for a while, wondering yet again if everything had been a dream. I generated the electric current coming from the palm of my right hand and attempted to empty my mind. I stood up and instinctively commenced walking towards the constant sound. The grass was quite tall, and there was a cold breeze everywhere. There were these sunlight patches over the grass falling through the clouds, and every time I passed through them I felt all warmed up, similar to the way I felt while walking in the desert's labyrinth from my dreams. I, for the first time in forever, thought deeply about the numbers, those which had led me here, after all. Paradyion's words also came to my mind, ephemerally. I continued walking for a while until I reached the source of the sound. There was a man cutting a tree with a stone. He was accompanied by the woman and the child I saw before. The man noticed me and stopped immediately. He said something and they prepared to leave right away. "Let's go..." I heard him whisper.

“You don’t have to, I’m the one who should be leaving. I’m sorry I interrupted you.”

They froze. The man left the sharpened piece of stone he was using on the ground and approached me, somewhat slowly.

“I am Renn, I don’t mean any harm. You saw me before, right? I understand if you were frightened, but I was... never mind. I heard this constant sound and I decided to...”

“Well hey, it’s only natural for you to approach. I’m Fereheigh, Marus Fereheigh. You can call me Marus, if you like. Actually, we did see you before, we were wondering about you...” He made a pause. “These are my wife and my daughter,” he continued as he pointed at both silhouettes hiding behind a tall tree. “I hope you don’t mind us being here.”

“Not in the least. I am very sorry I interrupted you. I must go now, I apologize. It was good to meet you, Marus.”

I glanced at the woman as I bowed my head. I left immediately, reader, an automatic reaction. I knew I could not get involved with anyone anymore, for harm was certain to come from our interaction. I felt sick again, and I left in a hurry, but to my surprise, before I managed to, the man approached me one last time

“Here, take these,” he said as he handed me a piece of cloth with some sort of berries inside. “You haven’t eaten in a while, have you? I’ll give you a tip. There’s some trees behind the valley over there.” He pointed to the south. “We ate these without getting sick, so I would recommend trying them out. Take care.”

“Well met, and thank you,” I said as I shook Marus’ hand. I immediately continued on my way. I moved far away from their location and eventually stopped to take a break. I ate the berries, which were incredibly delicious. I had not eaten in over a day, and with these, I got most of my strength back. “Wow, these are packed,” I told myself as I

attempted to determine my following actions. "Ah! My Holo-pad! The book!" I said out loud as I suddenly recalled my belongings and proceeded to search inside the trench coat's inner pockets. They had vanished, along with other irrelevant things I was carrying. "Dammit," I thought, "When did this happen?"

Hereupon I finally realized how all of this was true and, how somehow or another, the frequencies of reality had changed to form another. Though the spectacle brought by nature was amazing in every sense of the word, I could not stop feeling sick inside. I thought about Vino, about Melli and Sully. They all had helped me and I was never to repay them, for they were forced out of their time prematurely, and I couldn't even bid them farewell. I would have liked us to have more time... I felt like a failure, all my actions, the consequences of the same; this harmonization process had definitely metamorphosed everything, including me. How was all of this brought about anyway? Were we supposed to rebuild society with the same rules and dogmas? What for anyway?

I was extremely frustrated with the reality placed upon me, and inevitably, released my anger using some of the mental abilities I had poorly developed. I released the electric current, vigorously pointing at the sky and had to stop due to an electric sensation all over my forearm. I didn't mind, and soon proceeded to invoke the ice from my other arm. It took awhile for me to be able to trigger anything, but I did, and I soon found myself unable to detain its flow. I quickly panicked as I had stumbled into a dangerous dilemma, for the ice was now covering a part of my shoulder. I realized I needed to calm down, and by doing so, I managed to stop the flow. I somehow cracked the ice and released my arm. I stood there, worn out, with an ice pillar next to me.

Just then, I saw someone, someone other than the three people I had just met looking at me from afar. He or she quickly hid behind a big rock, and I lost sight of them. Without giving it much importance, I laid on the ground and decided to rest for some time. All of this felt extremely different from the life I was living a couple of days ago, an ineffable sensation. I eventually woke up and it was still daytime; I noticed how the days

and the nights were a bit longer than usual, or at least it felt like it. I deemed it necessary for me to travel to the valley in order to find food before nighttime, and went ahead with the plan. As I travelled through the valley, I heard the guy I met, Marus, working far away. The valley was incredible, and I discerned a couple of shapes in the horizon, which I thought were animals, different from those I knew, or so I thought, far behind what I thought to be the shore of a large river. I realized I didn't really recognize any of this land. "Has the soil itself, the topography of our world changed?" I asked myself. I continued on my way until I reached the section of trees Marus had mentioned. After a couple of hours, I found many of the same berries Fereheigh had offered, and I decided to get back to the same spot where I held the small outrage. I eventually arrived, a bit tired and dehydrated. I thought about drinking some of the ice I could form, but felt unsure about the whole idea. After placing the berries on a piece of cloth I had torn from my shirt, I lit up a couple of torches, fixing them on the ground after. I then headed for the waterside to find something to drink. There were no animals in the valley anymore, and the moonlight shone gently upon every figure I could see. I was disconcerted, still, the sort of feeling the environment produced in me was definitely extraordinary. I headed downwards once I reached the edge of a small hill and found a river flowing calmly. I drank as much water as I could, and although I worried for my safety and the state of such water, I couldn't resist myself. In contrast, this whole nighttime sensation brought tranquility inside of me. I eventually returned to the small place I referred to as my home, and slept immediately after.

My life during the following days and even weeks remained static, cloistered in the same activities I have described upon these last pages. As for the rest of the people and the Luthiel, I did not interact with anyone. I did hear Marus working everyday on what I assumed was going to be a wooden house or a building of some sort. I found other sources of food, a variety of berries, nuts, fruits and such. I had a lot of time to think about the luminous man's words. He repeatedly asked me to teach others what I had learned, and he warned all of us about what he called the trials. What did he mean by that anyway? When was this to come? I recalled him saying something along the lines of, "no more than a thousand winters." I constantly thought about Felina, the old

Wolf and the rest. I had not spoken with anyone since, and this land, as beautiful as it was, felt unfamiliar to me. My days began to feel monotonous. I thought about the wide discrepancy existing in my mind, and within my actions: the horrific legacy I left behind. I became increasingly obsessed with being alone, somewhat assuming a self-imposed punishment for all the suffering I had caused. Understand, reader, this was too perplexing for me to analyze. I felt somewhat inside a dream, I felt trapped inside. I couldn't forget Felina's eyes, the tone of her voice. I missed her deeply, I could not deny it. I missed all of them, and every time I looked at the sky and saw the remains of some of the crystal pillars floating above, a brief remembrance of them passed through my mind.

One day, as I rested while pondering upon certain ideas, I noticed a group of people walking towards the place Marus was occupying; some of them were Luthiel, apparently, for one could see their figures shining at a distance. There were a couple of people along with them, or so I thought. None of them acknowledged me, and they soon left my sight. I wondered if something had happened, but attempted to forget the whole thing as I kept exploring my mind and the stretches of my imagination. I had not been precisely working towards taming my abilities nor developing them further. I felt obfuscated by the weary thought of accepting my reality, this new one brought upon me so unexpectedly. Hours later, during nighttime, I saw the same group returning in the direction they came from. The distinct luminous figures were something to behold, for they contrasted with the coldness of the night in such a peculiar manner. This was not the only time I was to see them taking the same journey; I eventually got used to them, and even liked their small intervention in my life. It began to serve as a reminder of the objective world in front of me. Over time, a unique feeling surfaced as I saw them and experienced a world completely different from all that I knew. A contradiction also arose when this happened, for I felt the need to feel negatively about my situation, about the consequences of my acts, but them walking with such tranquility, especially during nighttime, was simply a beautiful spectacle to behold. At least for me it was; an ephemeral delight to be witnessed.

As the days went on, I began to feel curious about this small group being together, their intentions and so on. I wondered if they came here to visit Marus, perhaps, and thought about visiting him one day. “No Renn, don’t be stupid, that’s none of your concern,” I told myself aloud as I laid on the long grass. I missed being able to write down my thoughts, the numerical ideas I wanted to verify. I even missed some of the commodities the City had to offer. Yet, fortunately for me, I was able to clean myself in the river, and well, while I couldn’t really wash up my clothes, I let them rest by themselves most of the day, so they felt alright overall. Still, I did not feel the need to wander around this land, which still felt foreign, unknown to me. But was I naive when I thought I could handle my frustration in such a way! For I soon began to blame myself for all that had happened. And before this progressed to a point of no return, I decided to allow myself one last attempt at human company, letting curiosity get the best of me, and so, I prepared to visit Fereheigh. I kept telling myself this had to be the quickest visit, for I did not want to cause trouble to anyone, and apparently, the only way to achieve that was to remain in solitude.

One morning, without much contemplation, I went ahead and began to walk towards his domains. The same dreadful sound which could be heard daily got louder as I reached his position. He was alone, and recognized me immediately. “Well hi, Renn, I was wondering when you were gonna show up.”

“Hey there. I thought about stopping by, I hope I’m not a bother to you.”

“Not at all, come on in,” he said as I stepped into what appeared to be a wooden floor in the making. Some sections were carved in a marvelous way, and I was later to find out this man knew how to treat wood properly. I saw many cracked stones and rocks beside him; these were his tools for now, apparently, although I did see a belt knife utilized by him later on. I assumed he kept this knife during the strange events, somehow.

Marus Fereheigh and I carried out an interesting conversation that day. I enjoyed his company; he was aware of some of the things happening in this new land, which was certainly useful. It turns out the small caravan I had seen traveling from time to time did

visit Marus when on their way, and he explained how they were getting to know the land. He also mentioned how most humans and Luthiel had split, some already attempting to establish their own territories. He also mentioned that, apparently, we were on a big island. There were, as far as he knew, other islands as well.

“Maybe our continent was divided, cracked under the pressure of the shockwaves I saw,” I thought. There were animals, some different, some had remained the same, at least this was the case within our section of the land. Fereheigh told me his wife was pregnant again, and they were attempting to populate the world, as silly as that sounded. I looked at him; he always seemed quite motivated, having faith in what the future had to offer. As far as I understood from the way he spoke, he was actually a bit happy about what had happened. He saw a new hope for humanity, I suppose. I couldn’t believe it, I couldn’t rationalize things the way he seemed to be able to. Nevertheless, I tried to learn something from his point of view, and eventually, I definitely did.

We slowly developed a small relationship, and although I would not allow myself to become further involved with him, I did visit him from time to time. I acted with caution, at every moment, for I knew this unfortunate series of events had changed the core of my emotions, my feelings, and I felt somewhat unstable, in many ways. Therefore, I spent most of my time by myself, but all this monotony was sure to change; and one day, it drastically did.

While visiting Fereheigh one morning, I noticed excitement in his expression as he saw me coming towards him. He had something to say that day. He mentioned how the members of the caravan had asked for me. “Regarding what?” I promptly inquired.

“I mean, I don’t wanna be the intermediary here, you know? Blimey, I asked them to talk to you personally, but they insisted! I think they wanna have an audience with you, to talk to you, you know? Nothing special.”

“An audience?” I asked, disconcerted. “What about anyway? There is nothing to be talked about.” As I pronounced these last words I couldn’t fail to remember what the luminous man had said. “Teach others what you have learned,” or something along those lines.

“Argh!” I couldn’t hide my discontent in regards to their proposal. “Look, Marus, thank you for passing on their message, but I do not want to talk to anyone, not now anyway. Please, tell them you have not seen me lately.”

“Hey mate, I understand, but I don’t wanna lie to them, you know? They are not going to believe me. They know you and I talk.”

“Well, then tell them I don’t want to talk to them,” I harshly said. “Look, I’m sorry, I know you probably had nothing to do with them asking and I...”

“Hey, that’s fine, I understand. That’s why I hate to be the intermediary, I told them so myself.” He made a pause. I kept looking at the wooden floor. He continued. “But listen, I don’t think they wanna bother you. I mean, they might just want to meet you, from what I understand. They have good intentions, or at least there was nothing shady I could see in them. I’ll give you a tip, talk to them, see what they want. If they only wish to get to know you, great. If they want something from you, you could always refuse. And just so you know, those other guys, the Luthiel, they seem so wise, and the way they look... incredible, it’s incredible, Renn! I passed on the message, so it’s up to you now.”

That same afternoon I found myself quite concerned. “Why would they want to meet with me?” I constantly asked myself. On the other hand, I felt intrigued by these Luthiel characters. I barely paid attention to them while they were next to me on that other day, and now they wanted to talk to me? Still, all of this seemed so weird.

A couple of days passed and this troubling idea abandoned my thoughts. Relief did not last for long though, for the caravan showed up early one day, coming towards my

location. I was resting, and as soon as I discerned their silhouettes faraway, I stood up in a hurry. They approached and I had the chance to look at them from another perspective. Indeed, just as Marus mentioned, the Luthiel were bewildering. They were actually floating over the ground. I noticed three of them, as well as some humans, none of whom I could recognize from before. As soon as they arrived, one of them introduced himself.

“I’m pleased to meet you, master Renn. My name is Hegrod. I am one of the Luthiel. We come in peace to salute you.” He made a small reverence with his arm as he bowed his head slightly. He then proceeded to introduce the rest of the group. “These are my brothers, Gallagard and Draga. The humans who walk with us are Thassius and Boros.”

Everyone looked at me, with a friendly smile. None of them seemed to actually present a threat, and so, I began to let go of my apprehension.

“Hi, I am Renn, Renn Barsak. It is good to meet you all.”

At this particular juncture, I could easily observe the bodies of the Luthiel. Not only were they floating, without any apparent effort, but they shone, strangely, as if their bodies emitted blooming light. The one speaking, Hegrod, had translucent sections over his body; I could see the sky through his right arm and shoulder. A part of his head was transparent as well. All of his body shone with a golden, greenish tone. He had long hair and a staff attached to his back. This was incredible, reader, I could still not believe what was happening.

“Nice to meet you too, Renn. We’ve heard great things about you, of what you accomplished before your world was turned around. I believe you deserve an explanation. Would you allow me to describe my thoughts?”

We conversed for a while. First, Hegrod explained how not everyone had gathered in groups. Apparently, there were some individuals, like me, who decided to manage their

time and act on their own. Hegrod told me how the Luthiel were planning to respect our human world entirely. They were not to intervene unless a threat to themselves arose. He seemed to like and respect humans, at least from what I could tell. He then explained how the Luthiel, the eight of them, were to build a settlement for their own. He wanted me to meet the rest of his brothers and sisters, as he called them, and told me there would be a proper time for that. He then referred to the people next to the Luthiel. These men wished to follow the steps of the Luthiel, and apparently mingle together. After some time, I began to discern some of Hegrod's intentions. As our conversation unfolded, an important topic of discussion arose, one which implicated me in its execution. The Luthiel were here to ask me to teach some of the humans the arts of the hidden, as they called them.

"The arts of the hidden, you say?" I asked.

"I'm asking you to teach other humans what you have uncovered. You saw a part of the hidden, and sharing it with your fellow men and women will become imperative in order to surmount the trials to come."

At this juncture I remembered the luminous man's words. This trial, what was it about? From what I could see, no one knew exactly what it meant. I dared to ask.

"The trials, do you know anything about them? What do you mean when you say I saw a part of the hidden? I understood the primordial language of nature, if that is what you mean... Look, I'm not positive about this, I mean, the only thing brought forth after I uncovered this was the destruction of everything. I am certainly not on board with the idea of teaching everyone how to..."

"What happened would have happened with or without you," Hegrod intervened. "You heard the chanter yourself. Don't let your emotions intertwine with your rationale, realize how humanity must use a part of the hidden in order to grow. Only by maturing will all of us survive."

I immediately felt contradictory ideas opposing each other inside my head. Reader, I hated myself for what had happened, and my abilities reminded me of and intensified that hate. When I heard the Luthiel actually make this request, I felt sick, and began to lose control of my words.

“What? You come here for that? I knew you wanted something from me... but guess what? I don’t want to teach anyone anything. It is sufficient enough for me to have destroyed all that I knew, and now you ask me to use that same knowledge to bring stability or something? You don’t know what you are talking about! This is a curse, you hear me? A curse!”

“It is not a curse,” the Luthiel raised his voice. “It is a part of the key to free humanity once and for all. I am not going to ask you again. If you don’t wish to help us out, so be it. Farewell, master Renn.” Hegrod turned around and began walking away. The rest of the group followed him.

“You know nothing about this curse, do you hear me Luthiel? Don’t pretend that you do, because you don’t!”

Hegrod stopped walking. I thought he was going to answer me, but he didn’t even look back. The caravan continued on their way, vanishing from my sight over the horizon.

During the following days I developed even more anger towards myself. Now that I knew the primordial language of nature was some sort of key to the future, I wanted to disappear from the surface of this new land forever. I spent most of my time looking at the trees over the grand valley where I lived, but none of their beauty would take away this feeling of repentance, of discontent within myself. I kept pondering Hegrod’s words. “How can he ask me to teach everyone this malediction! I am cursed, can’t he see? He must be blind!” I yelled. But I certainly didn’t abandon the idea, for deep inside me I knew he was right, or must have been after all, since the luminous man himself pointed

out to the same conclusion. “As if moving things with one’s mind would change anything...” I thought, but here I wondered about those things which I hadn’t uncovered. I knew the primordial language of nature had to be quite extensive, and I had probably reached only the surface. Maybe the key Hegrod spoke of resided deep within the sub-layers, and this intrigued me, in a way. Perhaps I denied myself the possibility of looking at things from a different perspective, and eventually, I even began to consider the option. “What am I thinking? Can’t you remember what happened, Renn? No good will come from your interaction with others!” I yelled as I hit the ground with all my strength. I raged over the idea for a week or so; I felt mentally exhausted, and finally after not being able to find rest, I ceded. I was going to have to do this, so it was better to get it out of the way. I visited Marus on one of the following days.

“Hey, what’s up Renn? How’s everything going?”

“Hi. Everything is alright. Yourself? I need to ask you a favor.”

Fereheigh told me some of the Luthiel were staying in the south, close to where the river meets the sea. Without a second thought, I headed there accompanied by him. He was eager to come with me. I sensed his excitement as we walked. After all, he had seen me creating a pressure-wave before, so I was sure he was curious, to say the least. We arrived there by midday. Dense, blue mist poured all over the horizon. The colorful trees in this area were a bit different, though they still resembled something out of a fairy tale. As we approached, from afar, I saw what appeared to be a large object floating in midair. I glanced at an individual, who was manipulating this object. Excitement ran through my veins, for I had never seen anyone beside me doing something of the sort. Hegrod saw us and he came forth.

“Master Renn, master Fereheigh. It is a pleasure to have you here.”

“The pleasure is ours,” I promptly said.

“How is everything today, Hegrod?” Marus asked.

“All is good. We were discussing matters concerning the construction of the Arcane Sanctuary. Come, meet the rest of us.”

We walked with Hegrod and met the rest of the Luthiel. Gallagard and Draga, whom I had seen before, were there. Draga was tall, and did not float or levitate like most of the Luthiel. He did not shine either, but had this strange aura surrounding him. Gallagard was mid-size, the strong type, with a strong handshake. In some way or another, he reminded me of the old Wolf. Hegrod then introduced us to the others, who were perplexing to behold. Indeed, these characters looked as if from another world, and being next to them felt quite strange. I felt completely overwhelmed by their presence. First, we met Anturion, who was said to be the wisest of them all. We then saluted the one lifting the large object, Ballamier. He turned around and acknowledged us while the massive stone kept floating.

“Master Renn, I didn’t expect to meet you here. By all means, welcome to our group. You will be most delighted to know we were eager to meet you. You seem to hold answers to some of the human enigmas, hmm...” He made a pause, continuing right after. “A pleasure it is to meet with you.”

“Thank you, it is a pleasure as well, although I wouldn’t be sure I hold any answers...”

The rest of the Luthiel were exploring an adjacent island, or so Hegrod mentioned. Once they offered us food and drink, we gathered over a chiseled great-stone. It showed ninety-degree cuts and was carved in a way which seemed impossible to achieve without the use of advanced tools. We covered several topics, but the gist of the conversation concerned me and my abilities, and how I could succeed in passing them unto some of the people.

“The patterns you saw in the numbers, reflected in reality, were the reverberations of

the chanter's improvisation, and when they combined, you brought all of us into this stage," Ballamier argued. "The magnitude of what you uncovered could help your kind, master Renn. Like you, we are aware of these patterns, which have ended but persist in the form of an endless echo. By making every human aware of them, an era of stability can be reached. You humans are creatures of reason, but you need to develop your understanding, your knowledge, before you may be able to claim that title. Master Renn, you can provide a tool in order to achieve this. Are you willing to try? I may be given to the task of assisting you during this period, if you wish so. Together we could advance our understanding so as to complete the trials to come, which no one can predict or determine."

As I looked deeply into Ballamier's eyes, I thought of myself once again inside a fairy tale, his words were pronounced with such delicacy. Once I listened to all of the Luthiel, I agreed, for a time, to teach anyone who would be interested.

"Excellent. I'm sure you will see the results of your efforts before you expect it," said Gallagard, who had not spoken much before. His resemblance to Ballamier was uncanny.

I insisted on a concise explanation of what they called the trials, but the Luthiel admitted they knew as little as I did. "It is a part of the harmonization. The High Chanter couldn't reach the hidden art, eventually ending his composition. We have to be prepared for anything," Hegrod added.

"What is supposed to happen then?" I asked myself but was presented with nothing but confusion. Fereheigh and I went back after some time. I felt as if the conversation had blurred some of my thoughts, but still, I felt alright overall. Something I have not mentioned, reader, is the fact that as time went on in this island, I began to feel strong, I mean physically. The fruits and other berries I was delighted to taste felt as if they were packed with nutrients, the water was different too, the air was so refreshing. I could barely feel negatively about having agreed to teach others the primordial language,

even if I was feeling sick inside. And well, every time I had reason to be worried or overwhelmed by a thought, this strange calmness seemed to pacify my emotions.

The next morning I woke up suddenly and hurried over to the south. I met the Luthiel and some of the people gathered to wait for me. I didn't even know where to begin, but I did, I suppose, creating examples, waking up the curiosity inside their minds. There were six of them, and eventually another three joined our sessions. I remember watching the Luthiel constructing their Arcane Sanctuary with their minds, rotating and positioning huge stones as I talked to my fellow men. Recalling all of this nowadays brings joy to me, for this small period in which I taught others what I knew was sort of magical in many ways, in every sense. As I explained the relationship between the numbers and, for instance, events happening in the sky, the people began to understand and uncover for themselves that which we had sometimes seen as coincidences. These were directly connected to the influence of the composer, resonating all over the land, still. It took several weeks before one of the people, a man called Galahel, made a small rock levitate for a moment. We all saw his excitement as he yelled, and from that point on, Galahel developed with haste his mental abilities further. For some it took a couple of weeks, for others it took almost two months before the manifestation of their understanding was reflected in the mechanistic processes of reality and the mysteries of the human mind. I was amazed to see that indeed every human seemed to be able to achieve what I did at Vino's flat, and quite surprisingly, in a small amount of time. It took me almost my entire life to realize these connections, these subtle links, apparently invisible, but for them, since I had already digested the complexity of the topic and explained it in a logical way, it took no time at all. One of the Luthiel, Ballamier, stayed with me and the rest of the men, to assist me in case I needed him to, but the conversation flowed so plain and simple, that he barely intervened in my explanations. He was delighted with me and the people, apparently, and every time someone achieved another milestone, he looked at me, talking to me through his mind. "You see, master Renn? This is the right path to follow."

All of this felt strange at the same time, for my preoccupations had somehow vanished

during these days. Felina, the Wolf and the rest came to my mind constantly, my mother, Vino, the people from both sides of the City, they were all gone now, and not to think about that felt odd, as if I was not being respectful to them, as if I had forgotten all about the mistakes I had committed in the past. A grave remorse surrounded my thoughts, but as I taught these people, the sensation was diminished. Eventually, this had its consequences, for as I've mentioned before, I did not feel stable myself, and it was only a matter of time before this sensation manifested in my interactions with others.

Three months had passed and the last of the people understood the primordial language. Nine of them spoke it now, and this was so weird to me; before, I felt somewhat unique, and now, now I felt... I lack words to describe how I felt, reader, forgive me, but I can tell you this; a burden was lifted off my back, and yet another, much heavier, took its place. That's all I can say regarding how I felt. But in order to explain this further, I'll simply continue my story. The last day I taught the people, something happened, something I still regret to this day, though it had to happen, I suppose. As we were all trying to focus our minds on lifting a fallen tree in the middle of a beautiful section of forest, a discussion took place. Me and one of the men, a guy named Voruz, began to argue about the correct use of the primordial language; it was a silly argument, an irrelevant one, but it was the spark which commenced a radiant fire inside of me. This Voruz guy insisted that I didn't know what I was talking about, and that the right way to use our minds differed from what I had explained so far. This was all so silly to me, he could try to alter and improvise what I had taught to them, certainly, but this guy seemed to hold something personal against me anyway. He soon began to yell more and more, pointing out that it was thanks to me that all his life had vanished, his and everyone else's. I first listened to his words, but soon they turned to poison and misguided rhetoric, attempting to put all the blame on me. "So what is your suggestion? Do you want to take revenge on me? What are you trying to bring to the table here?" I asked.

"I didn't say that, but you know what, Renn? Maybe you should just disappear from our

sight. You make me angry... So furious! Fuck! I can't be like, impartial here, ok? Thanks to you my dear sister was turned to dust in front of me, so you know what? Maybe I am blaming you for everything that happened. And you wanna know what else? We are stuck here, in this strange land, without any options, and it is all thanks to you, asshole. Get the fuck away from me, you disgust me!"

I felt quite disturbed by his words. He precisely touched those fibers in me which I did not want to agitate. I don't even remember what I answered him, but I do remember storming away from the place at once. He kept shouting and yelling things at me, and I remember some people attempting to calm him down as I left them. Ballamier came to me, and as he looked into my eyes, he spoke without making a sound.

"Don't listen to his words, master Renn, they are words of desperation. It's only expected for you humans to have outbreaks such as this, lacking logic and substance, carried out by your human emotions. So please, I'm asking you to understand and forget this man's words."

I was furious. I kept walking, and could not procure an answer for the Luthiel. Eventually Ballamier left me by myself. I went on and headed to the spot I had been calling home. I sat on the grass, frustrated and angry at this Voruz guy, furious with myself as well. Hereupon I liberated a considerable amount of the golden current onto a tall tree next to me. I did not care, and I did so with all my strength. The huge tree was soon lit on fire. I realized my stupidity as I attempted to call forth ice from my hand to extinguish the fire, but it didn't work. As the fire gained momentum and I got seriously worried, I saw Ballamier coming towards me. He had followed me, and once next to me, he said, "Not to worry, I'll deal with your anger, master Renn."

He didn't even lift a finger and the fire was extinguished in a couple of seconds. Once the outburst was dealt with, I managed to calm down and we both sat over the long grass. Ballamier and I conversed for a while. He was so relaxing to hear, as if he had everything under control; it isn't that I felt no emotions inside of him, on the contrary, he

had certainly mastered most of his thoughts, for he constructed a path of reason which I was able to understand at every instance. He described things calmly, and further explained the intentions of the Luthiel. He pointed out that his brothers were called again into this land to converge in unison with the harmonization processes of the frequencies constructing it, or reality, for that matter. I did not understand this part of his speech entirely, but I did get the impression they had nothing but good intentions for us humans. Still, I was quite exasperated with what had happened, and suddenly began to feel as if I was unable to control my temper. I began to speak with haste, complaining about the whole situation I was in. I did not want to make another scene in front of Ballamier, and before my anger progressed further, I asked him for privacy. He understood immediately. He thanked me for the time I had invested in teaching the small group of people. He apologized for Voruz's words, and again asked for my understanding. He mentioned that my teaching sessions had been a success, and that I had done everything I could already. "It doesn't depend on you now, master Renn. You have accomplished what we asked for, and I am grateful for that. It is now everyone's task to thrive when the trials come. I will try to visit you again soon. Feel free to avoid the sessions, if that is what you wish for. Your intervention has been gratefully appreciated. I will see you again, master Renn. Farewell."

During the following days I had an interesting approach towards all I was feeling, such an introspective way of thinking, like never before. I had assumed by now Felina's death, and everyone else's. I had certainly affirmed in my mind that reality had changed. It may sound trivial for some, but it was so difficult for me to accept things as they were. I noticed how I was becoming quite bitter, hating myself as well as everything else. This pattern which manifested as soon as I found out our world was gone was presented to me in the form of non-contemplative thoughts and emotions, mostly negative, but also quite reflective of human nature itself. The Luthiel were now a tangible contrast to us humans, or so I thought. They were so different, somewhat an idealization of what I thought humanity should behave like, but none of this really mattered, for I attacked myself without mercy, constantly attributing the death of civilization to my own selfish reasons. "How can anyone bear such a burden? It's absurd..." I repeated again and

again. The months passed and I still did not interact with anyone. I was slowly forgetting the way of life I had surrounded myself with in the past, the use of technology, the way it felt to speak to another person. I was now becoming a bitter man, a thing which had never appealed to me before, sinking in this self-destructive loop. I began to feel more and more ostracized within my thoughts. The obsession I used to have with the numbers had lost its importance, somehow. My thoughts were now oriented towards the suffering I had caused, the emotions I was feeling, these new emotions which I had never thought I would experience. But deep within myself, I remained the same, at all times. This was a clear self-imposed punishment, or so I believed at that time, for I had become something negative in this world, and I couldn't find a way to see things in a different way.

One early morning, as I heard Marus working far away, I decided to abandon this area and venture towards the deepest part of the forest. I craved to be alone, never to be seen again. I made a promise to myself that day; that I would never talk to anyone ever again, for it was evident to me by now that all I touched would rot. I thought about saying farewell to Marus, to Hegrod or Ballamier, but I didn't have the strength. I followed the river north, sliding through the outskirts of the forest. I ventured in, and walked for hours. I found a place, the right spot for me. I knew this was to be my new life, determined by my own reason, but eventually I would be proven wrong once more. I decided to stay and develop a routine with time in order to survive. The more inner knowledge I could acquire while being isolated the better, for I constantly wondered about the magnitude of the primordial language of nature. Felina and the others never abandoned my thoughts, they were engraved on every idea, on every feeling. By being secluded, I could at least consolidate the fact that they were gone forever.

Time became endless for me, meaningless, for I did not even care about the passing of days and nights, about their consequences. I attempted to live the rest of my days in a way which would seem undetermined, unacknowledged even by my desires, my hopes and dreams, as if I was a part of the wind, flowing uncertain. Little did I know back then how this fiction of mine would not remain untouched. Many months passed as I dwelled

in my own bitterness, but I never forgot the old Renn Barsak, who enjoyed life as it was. The months became years, steadily, but one day, due yet again to the strangest coincidence, I was taken out of my own determination. If it wasn't for those moments when two apparently unrelated events converged, my story would have always lacked conflict, but I did crave for those moments, and only now do I realize how my mind desired to experience the non-constant. I sought these chance conjunctions, always disrupting the infinite present. The most profound section of my core guided me to live life in this way, a way I deemed congruent with myself. Thus, this is nothing but the beginning of my story, one I must tell, for it always held importance, as we all exist within the living matrix of reality, manifested upon the ever-present influence of the uncertain.

End of Free Energy Volume 2