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A Quest for Transcendence

BEWARE OF THE LYSOCOGNIZANCE.
GMDM, ISTAMTAE

A QUEST FOR TRANSCENDENCE

Beware of the Lysocognizance.

STAGE 1

“Within the Illusion”

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Prelude

The dying star usurped the world

To manifest totality

For the aperture toward belief

Was blinded by the veil

Will we relent; and fade again

Must thought embark to vain within:

The reasoning we claimed to hold

That was crushed upon the face

Of the firmament between the ground

And the sky as true as the wall that sought

A separation between the eye

And the visions it could not stand

The horizon lent us apotheosis;

The lure of our grand nemesis

Was it the cognizance we felt

At the reversion of our mind?

A Quest for Transcendence is an FG-related story documenting the tale of a journey across the expanses of a world eternally locked in a struggle for survival and continuity. Following the utter obliteration of a universe they travelled through, *Unity*, the hapless individual who dominated an internal progression path known as “The Lysocognizant Route,” is brought to the realm of the Inner A_0 and finds himself essentially in a near-perfect utopia, a civilization brought to the peak of its progression. Yet their experience here is marred by the desire to once again conquer the most excruciating tasks that the world had to offer to achieve that sense of victory; Unity is left to embark on an exodus to the limitations of reality, for maybe something lingers in the concreteness of their incapability that drives them further into an indescribable trial for summation.

Chapter 1: The A₀

...

Gone.

Fictionalized.

Ceased.

That entire *world*... to be reduced to no more than a *tale*. Chunks of what constituted the remainders of Domain S, the Land of Towers, and the rest of the local narrative space were disappearing out of existence before my very eyes. As much as I despised the consequences, I had truly become too powerful. Powerful enough to erase an entire reality from the timeline altogether. I saw the sky and the ground rip apart, shatter, blend together, and become meaningless as soon as I could blink. The end of an era.

The populace attempted to flee. Only a lucky few managed to escape to other universes. Some fled to a more stable alternate reality (granted, one with incredibly dangerous entities, but more stable nonetheless). But most fled to another realm, completely different from anything I'd seen before. I had corrupted and ceased several realities as an unprecedented consequence of my quest for transcendence before... but that one... that one was different. But I didn't let the exodus stop me. If they could survive this, certainly they thought it was not that much of a danger.

After countless apertures towards eternity, I was at the crux of this realm for one thing and one thing only: *OMNIPOTENCE*. And the last thing between me and my dreams from eons ago was a single tower: The Supremum.

The tower was known for its status of being the objective benchmark of a certain level of logic-bending skill. Its assigned difficulty? No name other than "*The Final Difficulty*." I needed to climb it; it beheld the skill and privilege of ultimate truth and power that many have sought since the Land of Towers was the Land of Towers, although I knew there could have been many before me who could have claimed it. I had this opportunity. If I managed to beat it... then I would be omnipotent. So I took that first step and... grass, sky, clouds, rocks... where... was I?

I stood there with some of the lucky refugees from the other world, questioning everything I've been through. Was anything I saw real? Clearly it was, given the people that stood beside me. This was that exotic world I saw people escape to. This was the world of... of... Nevermind, I can't even title it. What in the name of Alphasm does it even consist of? The land of not-knowing-what-the-hell-this-place-revolves-around. I have no means to even ascertain it anyway.

I went to talk to one of the locals about my situation, and he was quick to introduce us nascent escapees to this world. He mentioned that over the last few hundred "cycles" (I didn't know what this measurement of time was, but I thought it probably was like a year, or

something), and probably even longer before that, many individuals have arrived in this world, scattered around like breadcrumbs.

Initially, I tried to use some transcendental potency (the standard for abnormal situations like these) to find out what was the true nature of this place, but I found out, even through logical impossibility, I had essentially no power here. Just extremely high mobility; I could run around 60 studs in a couple of seconds, but I didn't think that they had that as a concept of measurement. This didn't seem to be any subset of Domain S. This was... this was something else.

"So what in the world is this place?" a straggler asked a couple of hours later as we walked toward a large structure in the distance known as "The City of Absolute Totality." She was affiliated with another group, probably from Nil-Zero-Zilch, but there were a few odd appearances there, like some person from the Road to Infinity (hopefully I knew them), a couple Class 4 newbies, and so on.

"Oh, if you didn't know by then, you're in A-naught." The A₀? Wasn't that a name I heard for a number back in the Land of Towers?

"Fascinating. Any towers here?" she said. A strange question, as if there were towers here we would have been able to ascertain more information.

"*Obbbbh*, so you're with *those* guys. Head over to The Box, your people essentially live there now. I'll show you around, I was just here for a land survey." The local drew out some object from his pocket, a flare, I supposed. He raised it in the air, and out came exactly what I thought it was. It was a spectacle.

"Found new ones here!" he called out to a figure that had just crossed over the horizon. Or just a hill. This disorienting place already made me lose my train of thought! "Climber people. We've got a lot of them coming in today," he said as the figure approached us. It was a person on a futuristic-looking hovering machine, which was essentially a damn railcar.

After we got into the railcar, next came a very intriguing trip to the City of Absolute Totality (which was WAY larger than I thought it would be, literally over a million "studs;" although I have seen infinitely sized towers, this seemed massive, probably because my senses were incredibly suppressed by this place), passing by small outposts of weird technology (I swear one of them had a *BLACK HOLE REACTOR* in it) and other views and sights. A large metallic gate (which just *swung* open) on the wall of the maddeningly tall city limits greeted us at the end of our little trip. This was what we were dealing with now; a civilization as insanely advanced as the factions that dominated various realms I traversed (and subsequently ended up submitting them to their fate, which you can probably guess what happened), but with genuine *life force* behind them.

Beyond these doors were nearly transparent skyscrapers of unimaginable heights, lattices of layers of corridors and paths intersecting each other, buildings, hyper-futuristic suburbs, and so forth. Toward and beyond the horizon stretched megalopolises and superstructures of staggering dimensions, lights flickering or running up and down them.

This was far beyond any utopia I had seen. For the last few billions of years that I remember, the only things of these proportions were towers and the landscapes that surrounded them. But not a single trace of society at this scale! I must be dreaming, but not even the reality I experienced earlier was this potent. The surprises did not end. There were literally *mini stars in the damn sky right above the buildings. ARTIFICIAL STARS.* (Did they really need them right now? It was daytime.)

As we were swallowed up by the City of Absolute Totality (which really snags a top 10 spot of most breathtaking views of all my ventures) we were directed to ask questions to the scouting team that brought us here, which was a procedure they recently followed because of the endless confusion of newcomers. Immediately, there was a flood of inquiries by everyone in the railcar.

“What is this place?” “What are those black holes for?” “Are you with NZZ?” A lot of insane bickering followed this, which I avoided because this would inevitably lead to another fight. Given that *some of* these people probably had some clues that all of their exotic powers were immeasurably limited, the car would devolve into a tangle of bodies. Even worse, nobody had caught the memo that survivors from across the Land of Towers were present and not individuals from one or two local zones. Did they even know where they were?

After they settled down and some of their questions were answered, the locals revealed the scope of the situation. This place, the city at the center of the A_0 , was the centerpiece of known civilization. We were extremely alien to the more passive society existing here, given that they already knew a lot about where we came from. A major exodus had brought several thousands of people here within the last few “millicycles” (1 millicycle is roughly two weeks, but a day was 40 hours). They expected many more to appear, but this was a mere drop in the ocean of the scale of the city’s population.

“How many of you live here again? Given I can’t see how far the ends of this city are, well...” A girl, a Class 9 climber, asked. I faintly remembered her from one time in the previous realm where I publicly hosted an event with some towers, and saw her tackle the most difficult structure there (Although I do have to pity the extent of practice one must go through to ascend from her skill level to mine, which was an impossible gap to surmount unless you were dedicated).

The response was very succinct and cold. “1.4 quadrillion. Roughly within 350 kilometers.”

Insanity. Back on TI-Earth, like twelve Cessations ago, the whole planet had only seventeen billion. And that was in a super advanced society. Although I must say that this place is obviously magnitudes too small to contain that many people.

“I have doubts... Where’s all these quadrillion individuals?” I asked.

The local at the front of the car pointed toward the side glass. In the direction of his finger, there was a large futuristic cube rotating slowly in midair, tens of miles away. “That right there, I think you can see it—look closer!—is The Box, an infinite pocket dimension

where anything is possible! That's how we can get that much mass crammed into a single city. The population strictly outside of the Box is around three hundred million or so."

The Box, eh? Was that not the name of the all-encompassing structure said to be governed by the Absolute back in the Land of Towers?

There were more similarities in this realm than I could have possibly imagined. Originally seeing the Land of Towers as the ultimate and most advanced bastion of knowledge, skill, and conceptual control, I had my doubts now. This was more *concrete* and more sensible.

He confirmed my suspicion. "In this city, we have four overlapping major factions, and who knows how many more minor ones. You'll get used to them: the operational-based factions, the ones that are split on views about how this world works, are the Hyperologists and the Fictional Googologists. I don't get the fictional part, but I was told it had something to do with 'realness' and 'mundanity,' concepts which I really don't understand. On the scope-based side, where researchers battle and predict how the world will operate in the future, we have the Absolutists and the Transcendentalists. Personally, I don't cave into Absolutist bullshit, as half of them stoke fears that we're going to hit the point where our innovation doesn't get anywhere and we hit Boxial maximality, the point where the Box cannot fulfill any more of our computations and projections, which is *very uniquely* called 'A' (or 'A₀' by the Transcendentalists)". Many people laughed, mostly the locals. But the few of us who congregated into the far corner were concerned, including me, about the aforementioned similarities. If someone intelligent enough were to obtain all the info about the Land of Towers and connect the dots, there would be a revolution.

"Now, Hyperologists and some Transcendentalists have this belief that this world is a mere facade, and that there exists a true 'world' in a faraway place, which they expect to house various otherworldly wonders beyond imagination. To prevent bias, scholars call this hypothetical 'true world' the 'Xeranthesis.' Some Proliferation-era Hyperologists think that *this* world is Xeranthesis itself, but underwent a reality-wide phenomenon called 'collapse,' which some of our scientific instruments point to in terms of our origins, but fail to detect anything before that. Although they have already been utilizing and synthesizing collapse ever since, we've never seen any results or anything similar from our experimenting in the Box for a long time. My hypothesis is that this world extends to the limit of a field-like phenomena called 'General Reality' which essentially allows everything going on in this society to even function." What? My mind was already racing from this lengthy explanation, and all roads inevitably led back to the Supremum. Why couldn't I have just stopped at the tower portal and rejected the accelerating madness of that world? There was definitely something wrong. There was definitely a force behind this, pulling me towards transcendence, playing with me like a toy, but... what could such a force be?

I raised my hand and asked another question, making sure my unsettlement did not present itself as well. "So... can you leave or reach the boundaries of the A₀?"

The man's eyes narrowed in mechanical anticipation. "Nice try. I've been asked that more times than I can count the people in this vehicle; it's genuinely, completely, logically,

impossible,” he explained; his arms repeatedly crossing in the form of an X to make it even more blunt. “The world is infinite, just like the Box, on the interior.” He leaned back on the side of the car earlier facing the Box and looked out the large window. “For now, just get used to this view. I’ve spent a few thousand cycles through change, conflict, and progress, and not once did I think I had reached the peak of my life. From what I’m guessing, many of you are probably younger than me by a bit, and once you reach my age people might want to wander out of here and explore, but nobody is ever reaching the edge, because there’s none.”

“Nonsense,” a lady said, entering the compartment from the front segment. She wore a strange blue and white robe that split into two parts, one folded over the other. “My Hyperologist team twelve cycles ago did come to some conclusion that there does indeed exist a limit to this realm, though the realm surrounding it may be an infinite space in itself. It’s foggy out there...” The woman stood in front of us and grabbed a handle hanging from the roof, which brought with it a flexible screen. The corner hit the head of the other local from earlier prompting a shout of pain and rubbing of the head, before he moved behind the screen.

The screen turned on to reveal a presentation about life in Absolute Totality. In retrospect, I believed back then that I had to escape this world, but I later decided to just take a break and make the A_0 home for a while. And so I did, relaxing, seeing sights, talking to the locals, culturing myself in Fictional Googology and Hyperology, and even making some friends! But I knew that, eventually, I would have to leave. And yet, some time after I got here, I was urged to depart, setting off for ascension.

Chapter 2: A Tour through Town

The City of Absolute Totality is a very insane place. If I had to describe it, the city was no different than the concept of “Utopia.” Not heaven, because that would mean I would be dead, and dead literally meant nothing to me. Well, back then it meant nothing. Now, I’m not so sure.

Why would I not be sure?

Of course, the moment I was sent to this place, I immediately felt that a majority of my senses were shaved off, meaning I could no longer feel very specific sensations like that of what collided with the air molecules a mile away from me. On top of that, I was certainly incapable of bending reality to my will (after I tried doing so literally five seconds after noticing that this wasn’t the Land of Towers), and whatever was left of my physical potential was sapped away, leaving me with slightly more mobility than the average person here. I mean, if I could only run three times faster, could I avoid being shot? On top of all of that came the unrelenting feeling of impending doom. Some metaphorical (or probably very real) shield that protected me from being subject to the whims of every abnormality in the laws of existence had been disabled permanently, and now the weight of death remained.

Although now I’m not so sure that I’ll be dying here, and that’s because of what this civilization is like.

The City is a massive place. If you stood in the center of the “Nullum” district, or sector (the districts here have names, which I will elaborate on later), you’d never even notice a boundary anywhere, mainly because the air is just hazy enough to block your view just a bit further than where you’d expect it to be. It starts blurring around a hundred kilometers (a “stud” is apparently a third of a “meter”) but really begins to look like the sky somewhere around one hundred and twenty. And that’s if you’re standing somewhere pretty high, where the skyline doesn’t obstruct your view.

Apparently, there’s a law here that defines a specific angle (I think it’s around 10 to 15 degrees above the horizontal) where a line drawn using the incline of the angle shows the height limit of buildings proportional to their distance from the center of Nullum. When the city was built, this was one of the first laws signed in terms of construction, and it remained meaningful up until the point where the city grew to its current size, and now they need to power miniscule stars above the denser areas nearest the city walls to illuminate them.

Within the confines of the city limits, the current Axiomatic Limit of development, I lived here for two cycles, which you could fit over 30 years in a single cycle. (One millicycle was two weeks, and there were a thousand of those in a cycle, so... And a day was 40 hours too.) Prices for housing in Tielem were quite expensive, but I had secured a means of employment through which I performed contract work across the city with Hyperologists and some Fictional Googologists to assess technological energy outputs. And in some cases, provide information about our origin.

For these 60 or so years, I met very few individuals from the Land of Towers. The weight of the scars from experiencing the cessation of reality had taken a toll on their conscience, and they had more or less chosen to abandon the identity of their previous lives. I certainly believe that was warranted. No needing to dwell on previous conflicts or endlessly and painstakingly attempt to grab back traces of a world that was no longer there.

I was alone, now. A relief. No more eyes to judge me? I'll take it! Take that, hmm....

I was now forgetting names. Events. Places. Who used to be there before? Who was the yellow man who dominated the climbing scene back when the Land of Towers was in its natal stages? What razed an entire continent to the ground and left into the atmosphere to firmly implant its existence in the history of a collapsing empire? What doors opened from above to admit a flood of beings carved out of the face of death and obliterate my momentary colleagues? The past blurs.

The details of the small things on this grander scale were running out of the bottom of my head and disappearing to nowhere, being archived by no part of my mind. All left now, in a devastatingly miniscule resemblance of my former Consciousness, were the concepts imprinted in my mind. The unity of numerous instances of aggregate beings tasked to imitate and replace the suprema of all things valued by existence. I am that unity. I am Unity. For now, I did not need to present or demonstrate anything of power. I could wait as long as I wish, or if some entity forced me to move. I will not simply move quietly; I must be that fundamental unshakable axiom of persistence.

Yes!

All I needed now was necessary information to understand what I am and what I should do. All else can dissipate outwards, out of Me, and I'll just retrieve those memories later, by any means.

It wasn't long before I was cemented in this society with a passive but utilizable purpose: find a way to maximize my existence. Not driven to impress, not to intimidate, just for me to accept that I achieved that encompassment of that insurmountable task. To what goal? Why do I need to find that out? I just needed to do so gradually.

I looked in the mirror again. Not to scrutinize my appearance (Why is my hair black now?) but to remind myself of moving on from point A to point B, regardless of what means I would take to get there. I am fine for now if it takes a hundred years to discover just the truth about this city.

Although it certainly didn't take that long.

Let me explain.

Of course I browsed through every database and inquired through so many channels, embarked on a mission to research the technicalities of the universal limitations through projects and programs. Hell, I went through a full twenty years (Is that like more than half a cycle? According to this timescale, probably.) of specialized education to ensure that I wouldn't fall short of assessing data. But, oh, it would have been better for me to get ceased.

I was expecting, given the nature of incremental development, half of the courses to be related to gradually defining more complex terms and values for energy output, or particle interactions. Someone could chronicle how fun that would be. Since I chose to undertake physics analysis, I get fed stuff like calculus, system manipulation, and topology (fun, I already knew most of it for other practical purposes) before getting skinned alive by intra-mechanics, higher order base logic studies, and whatever they feed the maniacs who go on to develop transportation systems in the Box. What do you mean I have to map out sixteen different trajectories for floating objects and then factor in their physical properties to get the resultant of the system? Literally two different fields that nobody should mix together and understand *singlehandedly*. Well, in this restricted intelligence, I wouldn't try that. Me before cessation? "You call *that* a *problem*?"

After applying for work at Project Circulation (where stuff and schematics from FGists in the Box get built in this world to what purpose, I don't know), I got into contact with this friendly guy named Veranam. But what piqued my interest in his activities were his previous works. Singlehandedly, Veranam got grilled by the Pantheon of Orchestration, the government body of the City of Absolute Totality, for uncovering and interacting with "sensitive parties and phenomena." Apparently, he left civilization and discovered something which any layperson would claim as a conspiracy, whereas he was deeply motivated to express his side of the argument: people live far outside of the city. It is a unanimous truth that, past three hundred miles outside city limits, there has been no recorded human presence. Public viewing of the Pantheon meeting revealed all that one needed to know: Veranam could not corroborate anything whatsoever except for the existence of devices that were never developed here. The charade went on for a few days, Veranam's reputation slumped momentarily among his colleagues, but (un)miraculously, he didn't lose anything from it. His situation rather improved as a flood of rumors began sprouting that, outside of these official screenings, Vetoes and Acolytes, who were highly prestigious members of the Pantheon that had more powers than an average member, were meeting with him in private. How that got leaked out is pretty easy to explain: the more people you have involved in a confidential matter, the more likely it is to not be confidential any longer.

So I concluded, which many people did, that Veranam told the truth and the Pantheon pressured him into tricking the public. The missing detail of how he managed to reach other civilizations was, sadly, the issue that was buried below all the other controversy. Nobody I asked had any clue about what he revealed, so I had to make my way into his inner circle.

It took me around a year to do so, as Veranam usually joined teams in the Outer Dogma in fuel-type tests sporadically, making direct contact difficult. Any ID code you dialed to get to him returned an automated message saying something along the lines of, "I'm hella busy."

When I *did* meet him, which was following a Pantheon meeting, he immediately recognized me, obviously from my notable efforts to port over PIM (particle interaction-manipulation) interfaces to natural language over the last few millicycles (around four months), and we immediately became associates, then close friends. My interest in

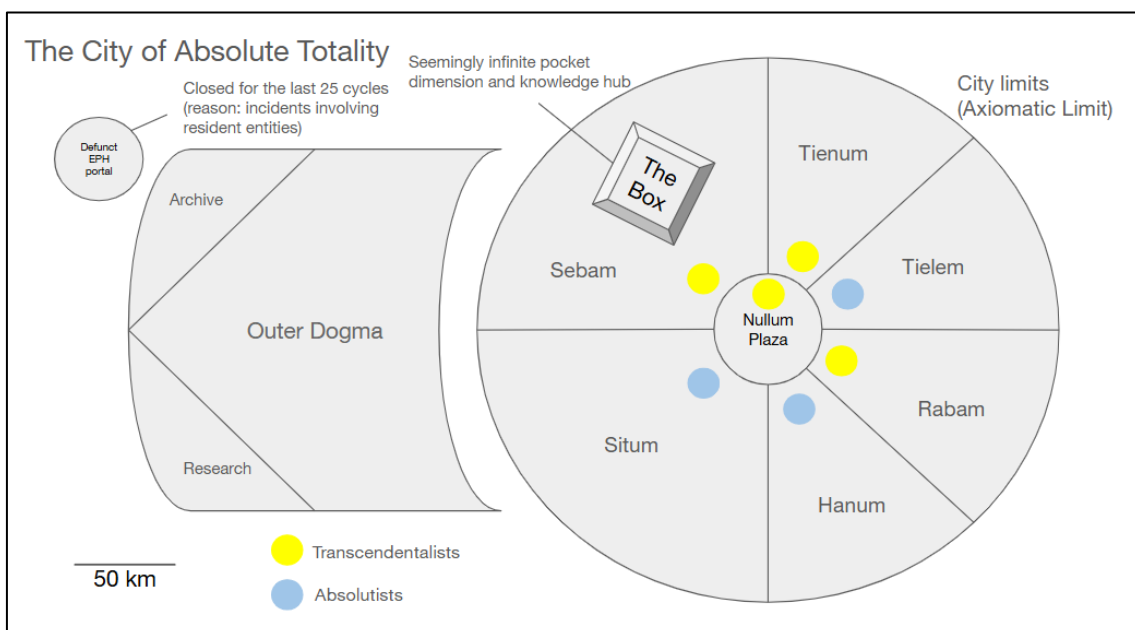
uncovering the truth about this city and the world it inhabited led him to offer me his most confidential work: “What hides within the horizon.” It’s a very rudimentary title, but this was the item he passed on to a select few of his interrogators in the Pantheon. The sheer sincerity of his descriptions led them to trust him while simultaneously presenting a tone of dismissal of Veranam to the rest of the conference meeting there.

Those select few “passed due to unforeseen natural causes.” Veranam’s hints to what those unforeseen causes revolved around the lines of “discovering ‘What hides within the book.’”

What is this book about, you might ask? It’s so simple, anyone can understand it. It’s an atlas of this universe: a map, compendium (and following description), and explanation of basically every place that has been discovered by him. For safety purposes, he locked over two-thirds of its contents under a secure visual encryption mechanism, which would only reveal its contents as per his discretion.

Here are some of the maps Veranam’s book provided me, just for you to get a feeling of this place:

Shown below is where I spent a majority of my time after discovering the A_0 , and it’s a pretty calm place. The axis of time here, or where chronologically people keep track of things, is monitored by the predetermined constant (the magnitude of increasing dilation from the projected “center” of reality, which is where the Nullum fountain sits) of time dilation, and tracked by a set of cartesian coordinates. Usually I would be capable of rearranging this universe to my will, but there is some unknown presence “collapsing” my capabilities to a verbal level as of now. I fear this force, as I still do not understand nor comprehend it. This universe... It makes me feel powerless. Maybe that’s the price I have to pay for my hubris.



The city I happened to stumble upon at the start of my journeys here, the “City of Absolute Totality,” is the home of “virtually everyone in this realm”. The city is arranged in

a circular shape with 7 main sectors, with an Outer Dogma containing the more rudimentary, industrial, and mundane sector of the city. The people living here have weird concepts of naming systems, as the sector names sound as if they were derived from one word. They call them “classes” and they go as follows, in order: Nullum, Tienum, Tielem, Rabam, Hanum, Situm and Sebam.

Nullum is just the town square connecting all sectors of the city. Tienum, the first class, is where most workplaces are located. The neighbouring second class, Tielem, is a residential area, where most citizens live. Rabam, the third class, is the Central Business District of the city, with shops and stores on every corner of every street. Rabam is followed by Hanum, which is mostly an innovation centre which aims to discover new concepts. The activities in Hanum may have political influence, which is why the research sector in the outer dogma exists: unbiased and apolitical research and innovation. Situm is mostly a place of leisure, where people can relax and talk casually. Finally, Sebam is the heart, pride and joy of the city: a centre dedicated to sharing knowledge of the most inquisitive of concepts. This is home to The Box, an infinite pocket dimension with no time dilation where infinite knowledge resides.

They also have a system of political organization which allows them to seemingly keep the people in check. The voters and “tax” payers (the only tax you have to pay is disclosure of any new information you gain in The Box) vote once every cycle (approximately the time for one to go from this city to the mysterious Small Ignorance Ordinal settlement and back, which is one hell of a long time) for either the Transcendentalists or the Absolutists. They usually compete against each other for objective correctness in Hanum. I think this competition is just rubbish, as for the two cycles I even lived there, nothing useful has happened outside of the discovery of the transdilative communication network by the Transcendentalists and some weird scandal below the city in the Pantheon.

Now, I voted in my second cycle for the Transcendentalists. You can probably guess why I would to start with. I am one myself, after all!

Outside the city is the Outer Dogma. I did contract work for the researchers there which was essentially a revelation to them, as it explained the source of a bunch of people appearing outside the city limits with no knowledge of this world (which was our group of LoT refugees). And I did get to see some mysterious thing in a cage. I’ll get to that... right about now!

Chapter 3: From Passion to Mania

Now, I was transfixed on the simplicity of this world, where people looking at me took part in activities and experiments that reminded me of what I used to partake in during my adventures in Class 4-6 of my previous universe of residence. Pity that's gone now. Once I saw an extraordinary child complete an obstacle course that I thought was from a specific tower I completed; either that or it was just my paranoia mocking me again... I swear, there's someone haunting me! I remember him... what was his name... Va... ugh, why can't I remember? The sight of it repulsed me, as I didn't need to be reminded of my former self until I had the capability to regain that power. Time to see what the researchers were up to.

When I entered the Outer Dogma for roughly the couple thousandth time, the air transitioned from a flowing substance around me to a muted, colder, and rigid iteration. For a place which was dedicated to adapting the most vital and innovative research that this civilization has developed, the aura surrounding it did not match the internal vibe. Maybe because the admin here activated that stupid non-exposure field that makes analysis of half of the specimen there nigh-impossible.

Of course, I knew they allowed public examination of any samples and esoteric objects that they manifested in the lower labs, as long as the non-exposure field within the lab was active. (This prevented reality-shattering things from leaking out of places like the research center and the Box—however, the latter generates its own). Yet, there are a few anomalies in there that act as if their life force is tethered to the deactivation of the field, and a couple hundred meters below the surface was a colossal chamber containing a few HUNDRED researchers in some operative, test based room.

The room was built in the shape of a circle, with various ledges and vantage points and observation siderooms dotted everywhere along the walls which I presume to be nearly half a kilometer away from the center, where there was this object I can only describe as a sentient thing that individuals of other realms would describe as a god.

“What the fuck...” I stared toward the center of the chamber from far above, where tendrils of light folded inwards as other ones took their place. The meta-glass wall erected around the entity prevented it from moving any more than fifty meters in any direction, which it didn't really plan to do anyway.

I didn't realize it at the time, but as I was one of the individuals who didn't comprehend the idea of shielding your mind from influence without being near-omnipotent, that thing made a link to me. Slowly beckoning me to exit out of my comfort zone and venture into the unknown. I didn't resist the link, as it had encapsulated the desire for understanding far more than I considered myself to be knowledgeable of.

What an amazing idea, to keep pushing on with no end in sight. Is there some sort of collective idea that there is some mysterious entity watching our struggles and rewarding us with style points? Why else would anyone be motivated to do that?

Later that day I obtained an old pamphlet from one of the declassified research archives in Hanum, which was also written by Veranam. Not to downplay his achievements, but as of now the Pamphlet was probably more meaningful than anything else he had previously disclosed to me in my last few encounters with him.

The Pamphlet was a hyperologically-inclined compendium of various findings on Hyperology. Most of the pages, however, were locked under a visual mechanism that prevented me from actually finding the knowledge I wanted. This was seen in the section on collapse, which cut at “This may seem reasonable at first, however, we can see that upon thinking of some actualised, realised, concrete object,” with the rest being locked. This was inconvenient for my quest for transcendence. The contents stemmed from higher end concepts I was familiar with and experimented in the Box with and studied while learning hyperology in the Land of Towers, like the E_0 phenomenon, but then I stumbled upon the section which discussed A_0 , and... and my heart skipped a beat. Why did I have this reaction, you may ask?

It was in the beginning of the Pamphlet.

So, if I were to magically uncover the contents that were locked under a visual mechanism, my mind would certainly explode. That’s if I were a usual person who only had a glimmer of thought once in a while about understanding what lay beyond. But the non-redacted section went all up to the Collapse section header and cut abruptly when it mentioned “concrete object” to my dismay. However, the part about E_0 and F_0 was alluring. Veranam had implied that he did not consider his pamphlet to be “merely hypothetical.” I mean, for him to dedicate an entire section to defending the concepts in the Pamphlet... why wouldn’t he believe it?

I went back to my residence in Tieleem and brought a copy of the Post-Absolute to my bureau, along with a Hubble-degree telescope from an equipment vending machine. (If I recall, there was an object in my world called the Hubble Space Telescope which was basically as powerful as the one in my studio, but this one was named after the guy who made it around twenty cycles ago.) I would use my telescope, and instructions from Veranam, to find three different clues in the cosmos, which he calls the three “abstractions.” These weren’t in the pamphlet, he just told me himself:

- Any manifestation of things and ideas of concepts like “speed” or “emotion” and similar things on “celestial bodies.”
- Reflections in the sky containing fragments of the world from various perspectives, although they cannot be seen clearly, as if they were drawn in a book or made as a mental image.
- Alterations of things that are not exactly those “things” as described or reduced from them, but instead unique manifestations of identity.

If I found the three abstractions in the night sky (or sometimes the sky at day), this would be proof that the “city” and the entire world that people knew of was not completely “reality” (as some hyperologists believed) but a fragment of a false one. I would join him and an entire, pre-planned task force to venture outwards in one final exodus to reach a place

called “MRL,” an acronym for something that he would never disclose to me unless he thought it was completely necessary. He also mentioned that he would reveal this to me once I had become aware of the true implications of his searches.

For an entire millicycle, I didn’t find any of the abstractions. Then, as my second cycle of residence came to end, I was able to encounter the second abstraction, which was many times easier than I thought. Then I found the other two abstractions on the same night. So it was true!

I immediately contacted him through the refined transdilative network (basically a phone line but cooler) and was greeted with a mysterious voice I did not recognize. It was the task force leader, and he was... right outside my damn front door (a bit of privacy, no?). It was like they were just waiting for me to make the discovery.

So I went over and talked to the guy. I asked him “So what now?”

He responded with, “Can’t answer your questions. Some of the Absolutists know of our plot to find out how to disrupt their hegemony. Let’s get out of here.”

A siren faded in from the distance, which I had associated back then to just the usual police patrol, but given how coincidental its manifestation was, the police *were* associated with a specific faction this time.

The small pings added to the siren was an indicator that there was an Absolutist in the vehicle that was soon to approach. An indicator to run before shit breaks loose.

“Who the hell told them we were here?” I yelled to the task force leader as we sprinted down the front to an unmarked black truck lying in wait. Veranam’s face was barely visible from a darkened window near the back.

“Don’t know! And I don’t want to be told once we get kidnapped!” The leader and I leapt through a door that had just opened and slammed it behind me.

“Great job, you two. These rogue Absolutists can get their ass handed to them late—” Veranam commented before we were slammed into the back of the vehicle; the driver had no reason to be idle.

The siren cut off as the truck flew (yes, it hovers above the ground now) through a series of tunnels in Tielem and towards the city limits.

Chapter 4: Minimal Ignorance

After escaping the city and traveling south for what seemed to me was enough time to count to infinity and back, we stumbled across a settlement sitting in front of a massive wall that stretched horizontally in both directions. The first thing that shocked me was the wall (as I had seen it approach us from a distance) and then the existence of people far out there. Although I had forgotten Veranam's mentions of his travels from here and beyond, I remembered it as soon as he mentioned the settlement:

"Here we have the Small Ignorance Ordinal settlement, named after the wall, where a relatively small number of people live free of the political and social turmoil originating in the City of Absolute Totality. Founded nearly one hundred and seventy thousand cycles ago, we've reached the point where we forgot the original purpose of this city, the architects who built this place have disappeared as we know so far."

"How many people?" I asked.

"Eighty million?" Unholy shit. I had to remember how dense the City of Absolute Totality was.

Back in the city we escaped from, there were large signs arranged around the edges of the city square that indicated what sector you were entering/exiting, and colored lines demarcated the boundaries of each sector, along with lining the streets, signs, etc. Here, there was *one sign*, and it stood in front of the outer guard line where thousands of outposts protected the sides of the town (which was still way bigger than any city I had ever seen in my original reality). The word on the sign was "Thienem." This was it. The fabled seventh class, and the eighth sector.

Here one would expect this place to be a little ripoff of Absolute Totality, but this felt different. This town was quieter, more peaceful, more quaint. And it was also more connected to the environment than the other city I left.

Veranam and the task force raised this contraption (which I assumed was a smoke signal) which blasted out this colored stream of brightened air. One of the guards came over and opened the gate, which was clearly a sign that we were accepted. However, when I looked at the sky, I witnessed a sight way more majestic than the ones I had located in the night sky with my telescope:

There was a great mirage in the air, one of incredulous proportions, which revealed nested layers upon layers of grand structures, objects and planes of a reality that could only manifest in the thoughts of people. Yet here it was, an expression turned real. Like seeing into someone's brain.

Most of the town is pretty uneventful. Just houses and shops, like any other city. This wasn't a megalopolis like Absolute Totality. This was just a friendly little town. But when you look at specific buildings...

The wall is definitely an anomaly, I didn't actually know if it was a straight line extending out both ways or something else (Veranam later told me it was a circle, when I look back at when I thought it was an otherworldly thing I just laugh at myself). A building near the wall is meant for some sort of transportation *on top of it*, as there is some slow elevator tethered to something up beyond where I could see. The wall itself, however, was too far for my vision to find its termination as there is still "fade" caused by air particles. Somehow these people can't find ways to put their Boxial inventions to use outside the Box without making them seem weak, incapable. What a time to spend a few cycles in! Or not, depending on how the situation goes.

Word had already spread of our arrival, and some people came to Veranam and the rest of us for an update on the City of Absolute Totality, and we sure as hell had exciting news to give them, but intentionally left the transdilative communication system out of it. I did not want any suspicious individuals from the Absolutists tracking us down until we were way out of their comfort zone!

Now for a bit of history, as this place operates independent of Central (I'll refer to the City of Absolute Totality as "Central" as now it doesn't seem as important), and doesn't have much impact on the community there as it's just regarded as a meaningless offshoot and outpost, which was going to be their only title for years.

Back then, when the city was far less dense and had barely fabricated The Box, there was one fracture between Absolutists and Transcendentalists in the past (along with civil wars in the Absolutist faction) which caused an exodus of "believers in Boxial-structural Transcendence" (i.e. people who believed there are powers and objects beyond that which can be emulated by The Box) from the city and wandered off in the direction of "the axis where the eyes of regularity fold backwards on impulse" (they were referring to the place usually on the opposite side of this planet's star, which rises and sets in the direction of the Outer Dogma). After many weeks of venturing, they came to a massive wall which they eventually labeled the "Ignorance Ordinal Wall" and later renamed the "Small Ignorance Ordinal Wall" after a certain *discovery*.

After a bit of covert negotiation with the Pantheon back at Absolute Totality, the rogues who were out to pursue me were called back and reprimanded, meaning I would be free to pursue my quest for transcendence. Although it took me a bit of time to get accustomed to the genuinely awkward aesthetics of this place (so awfully non-euclidean, nothing like the Land of Towers...), Veranam brought me over through backstreets in order to prevent me from being stared at by various individuals, who seemed more threatening than those at Central (one had a suspiciously rifle shaped pocket, fortunately I found out thanks to the insignia they wore that they were a guard), and we arrived at a location which he claimed to have frequented many cycles ago.

The location in question was some sort of pub where many denizens of Thienem frequented and hung out, although it seemed more lively than the ones in Central and more safe than in the Land of Towers, which the latter quality I won't need to talk about because since anything could have happened in the Land of Towers, one could have guessed anything about the Land of Towers. That's just how the saying goes... at least this place was normal.

Normal. That feeling of just belonging drew my mind toward this place, even when I was merely dragged here by Veranam.

This ““““pub”””” on the interior was vast although it was hidden in the side of an alley. The chairs had odd designs, which I’ll get to later because it evoked a strange feeling in my head when I read it. The door, of course, didn’t exist anymore, which was what I thought just because I didn’t see it behind me. Instead was a view overlooking somewhere random in Thienem, which was refreshing to see as several mile tall skyscrapers and other structures leading to Universe 12 of TFU: *Who The Fuck Knows Where It Goes* blocked my view in Central. The left walls were filled with drinks of various liquids which I assumed were not anything alcoholic as this place had no idea what alcohol was, right? But the chairs were obviously related to the drinks! This is a pub, of course! Veranam brought me here to introduce me to his acquaintances and sit on these seats adorned with cute little images of globes, coconuts, balls of yarn, grapes, coffees, teas, doves...

What type of idiot drinks a ball of yarn? Or a dove? Of course, that wasn’t the point. What I noticed was that my mind was inexplicably drawn to them, as if I had forgotten something. There’s something satisfying about seeing things arranged in a line, which I thought came as a refreshing break from the discontinuity and complexity of the perpetual aeons of fighting, surviving, climbing, exploring...

The last time I saw anything in *order* was back in the Outer Dogma. Above the holding cell where the strange super-evolved creature was confined, on the ceiling, was a series of familiar “numbers,” that being E_0 , F_0 , G_0 and A_0 . There were a few others that I didn’t remember, and some crossed out ones, but what struck me was the formality and straightforwardness of them. As if they were so mundane, the scientists, someone (who cares), or anyone did not need to explain why they were there, but wished to take solace in the fact that they *were*.

Speaking of these numbers... I recently found out why they were so familiar. That’s because I’ve encountered them before, back when I was still in the Land of Towers! How funny is that? A land of infinite opportunity would eventually come across the exact same concepts and ideas as any other!

“You’ve been staring at these seats for quite a time, you know. I wonder if you’ll be standing there until they arrive back!” said a woman next to me and Veranam. She appeared to age closer to how I looked (which was completely on the opposite conceptual side of how old I actually was, my current look) than Veranam. She wore some sort of white coat which has a frayed hole on the chest where one would expect a symbol to be, and on the back were unrecognizable symbols in blue and black, as usual. After being constrained to extremely rudimentary senses, I couldn’t discern anything about what the symbols meant.

“Don’t mind her, she treats ninety percent of the newcomers this way. Although I do believe you have a very good reason for that,” Veranam replied.

“I probably do,” I said. “Actually, I have a really intriguing thing to tell you guys.”

“Indulge us!” the woman laughed. “Do you have something more interesting than Kurante?”

Chapter 5: Towering Eternities

In the world that preceded this one in terms of my venture, there existed five structures called the Ordinals. They were built for the sake of giving the most skilled, experienced, and powerful beings something to do. In the Land of Towers, it was ridiculously difficult to get bored, and if you managed to achieve that, you were inhuman. So the Ordinals were built, and the world thrived, although it didn't really matter as 99.99 (and probably nearly infinitely trailing nines) percent of the populace in there didn't have the ability to access it.

The reason why I even brought this up is because of what they're associated with. The individuals and organizations of that world are entirely dependent on the existence of *towers*, which a majority of their free time (and work, in some cases) is spent on climbing them. We genuinely did not know why that was the case, but we still partook in it. Some towers have advanced to incomprehensible dimensions and qualities, which would make this place shiver in comparison, but one notable factor is that they are all *rated*. It's like some sort of eternal joke, climbing towers of gradually increasing difficulty, rating them, like it's your life. For starters, the Ordinals also have ratings; "Liminal," which I like to call by its other name, *The Liminal Cataprisim*, has a rating of *Cascading E₀* (E₀ where the 0 is replaced with E₀, and that as well, and so on). From my time reading material from many libraries in Central I immediately recognized Liminal's rating and the sigla on that ceiling I mentioned before to be the exact same. Why?

- Liminal's E₀: Defined as the smallest number that succeeds all ordinals that are not greater than themselves.
- This world's E₀: Smallest object large enough such that it must strictly contain more elements than itself.

"So you're saying that there are things in our world that exist in other places as well? I wouldn't say that's new, but I don't remember how long it's been since someone's mentioned that," responded Veranam.

"If you have a short term memory, I think you would have forgotten the refugee that ran into this place talking about something related to The Box. And it sure as hell wasn't about the one in the Absolute Totality," said the woman, whose name I later found out was Rho.

Veranam stared at her with a smirk before conversing with me again. "So what about the four other ordinals?"

In short, Transcendence (the second ordinal) was rated F₀, Uber being given the fourth degree of F₀ (F[4]₀), Ineffable somehow rated Cascading F₀, and Inutilis being adorned with G₀. It was clearly no coincidence they were assorted in the same way, unless someone was aware of what went on here (or vice versa), or there was an agent in both worlds.

"So you like linear hyperology, don't you?" said Rho.

"Hyperology?" I asked. "That's what I studied in the other world! Or, somewhat."

“That’s what they call it, although I don’t remember what it exactly is because the career Transcendentalists in Absolute Totality gatekeep their research when that is mentioned. *Linear* hyperology assorts them, well, in a line. In order. When everything comes together and fits, it all makes sense!” Some of the other people in the room turned toward us when she mentioned Central, but didn’t care afterwards. That city definitely has a strained relationship with the settlement here, although it’s significantly more impactful in terms of being a role model.

“Hey,” interjected Veranam. “Could you give me what you used to learn about Hyperology? It may help us study that world you came from.” I complied and sent it to him through a link. He read the first few pages. “This seems interesting... Also, here’s this device.” He handed me a sort of walkie-talkie. “It lets us communicate without worries of time dilation if you ever end up travelling afar, in which case Rho and I will obviously be hungry for updates, and it’ll also let me send you this thingy back to you in case you need it!”

“Also,” I warned, “people from that realm could have also ended up here. If you notice anything about them, tell me, they could be people I am familiar with!” I stood up after this half-lie, knowing that the denizens of that realm would obviously have caught wind of me approaching the Supremum and connected the dots.

I stood up, taking in the now more vast space of the room, which had shifted from a more closed environment with one large window to an open one with views on both sides. Of course, since we were suspended in the air (although it actually wasn’t like that), I had trouble finding the exit. Non-euclidian geometry disorients me *every single time*, even after being subject to it during various events which are so shameful I would rather not mention it.

Veranam was behind me. “Oh, the exit? Well, just ask the provider here, they’ll help you.” He turned back to sit with Rho and continue talking, an infinity icon printed on the behind of his coat glowing in the fading light. I ran over to a large circular table which had all sorts of shelves and drinks in the middle, which cemented my belief this was a pub, but there was no bartender or the equivalent in this world. In defeat, I walked across the wall that originally held the door entrance, and...

...

What am I doing back in Central? Outside of this large building? It was the Hyperologists who owned this place. Solari (the main star) had fallen out of the sky by now, leaving the skyline nearly pitch dark, with silhouettes of other buildings stretching upwards.

“Took you long enough,” said a guard who stood in front of the entrance. “You don’t remember anything, do you?”

Well, I didn’t. Was there something I forgot? Whatever, I’ve been through a lot of crazy shit in other worlds. This must just be another one of them... or at least that’s what I thought then. Another trick. Here there was clearly something happening in this building, although the lights weren’t on like they usually were.

“What am I here for?” I asked.

“Nothing, just I think that the Hyperologists are interested in your kind.” he replied. “Pretty sure you just left the building, so just hop along. Maybe they performed a me—”

“Buddy, I don’t remember what I just did a minute ago. Why do you think I’m asking these questions?”

“Like I said, you probably consented to a temporary memory wipe. Mandatory if they told you something really important, but whatever goes on in there I don’t actually know.” He walked over near me and pointed back to a floor roughly five hundred “units” (their form of measurement) up the building, which I knew from a previous tour housed the Data Center. “If you want whatever information you gained back, you go up there in six hours when the doors reopen and ask when there’s a timeframe to obtain it. In my opinion, I hate this system, since information shouldn’t legally be withheld in a... perfect society, but there *are* bad actors, after all. Couldn’t let anyone get their hands on the brainstorm of an official here! Just go there first thing tomorrow.” He strode over to me, the light reflecting off of a grey and black uniform, and scoured his pockets for a slip of blue paper. On it was contact information for Hyperology Central, which was already publicly posted in the Nullum town square, but there was an extension line which could only be approved by authorized officials to request semi-classified information.

Of course, Hyperological discourse operates on levels of secrecy that “semi-classified” wouldn’t even scratch the surface of how secretive those operations are, but I hoped that whatever we came to the building for (or probably influenced or coerced? Likely more dangerous) wasn’t any higher than that, because then it would take many millicycles for anything to get through, and by then whatever memory I had possibly needed to store in the Data Center would probably be useless. After two cycles of experiencing constant floods of new information, I had to essentially fight to have the conceptual edge. Anything to bring me closer to my ultimate goal, after the calamity that transpired before.

“You might want to go over there to your friends,” the guard reminded me, pointing past me to hazy figures on the street. Friends? Rho and Veranam must have been confused after I disappeared for a bit, and they were probably worried given that the Absolutists wouldn’t just give up after we evaded them by abusing time dilation and escaping to the Small Ignorance Ordinal settlement. Although, if they wanted to catch us here I would have already been detained. But behind me, illuminated by the lights from above, were people from the Land of Towers. If it wasn’t for the incomprehensible light pollution here and there from the artificial stars that hung over some of the sub-sectors, I would have hardly recognized them. But what were they here for?

They weren’t anyone I recognized immediately; it seems like most of the more important figures were either killed or deleted by the cessation. However, I did see clothing that was awfully familiar to the individuals who sat with us in the floating cable car headed to Central. I thanked the guard and ran over to them, hoping that they still remembered my existence. They waved as I approached.

“This city is larger than I thought, you know! I was going to try and find everyone, but it looks like they found us first,” one of the figures said. There were eight of them,

looking a bit different from that day we were forced into this world. One of them, wearing the typical Hyperological attire, walked over to me and shook my hand. “Well, I should have introduced myself two cycles ago. I’m Aldai, you’ve probably heard of my top achievements last time, but that’s meaningless now. I joined Hyperology, which is quite fun and ethereal, but it’s some real mind-bending work. They usually tell me not to disclose anything, but the Hyperologists know what I need to do, and half of what I work on becomes public information in like a millicycle anyway. Well, um, not really as much now. For some reason they’ve gone completely radio-silent. Aren’t you...”

“Uhh, I don’t think you want to know my name. Just call me something simple like... Uni. If someone is following you guys, trying to figure out what the hell’s going on with us, they’ll come after me. And I sure as hell don’t want to have someone on my tail, I’ve already been through that.”

“What do you mean, *already*?” the first person who talked asked. I responded: “It’s a... long story. Basically, I found some stuff I shouldn’t, and now some rogues want me dead due to knowing too much...”

“And before that?” Aldai leaned in.

“Well, you know me a bit, I think. Road to Infinity clearer. Ordinals. I know I made it to the Supremum portal but something happened and I was here with you guys.”

“The Supremum?! You’re *that* skilled? Man, I wanted to reach that one day, but I was just a low Class 19...” one of the others chirped. “Hey now, Class 19 is already great! You should feel happy for yourself for going that far!” Aldai said.

We began walking away from Evil Memory Wipe Central (I am definitely not going back there), the street widening even further towards the main avenue. Hanum was awfully dark and quiet for this time, but there were at least hundreds of people milling around, and some lights were on above us with researchers *still* glued to their interfaces or something. “By the way, right before you met me again, I forgot everything that happened for the past few...”

“Oh, that’s just their weird surveys they pulled us in for. It turns out that Hyperology wants to find anyone they can use with knowledge about reverse-engineering the T’ielem sector incident. But they needed to keep the direct interviews a secret. I think I can pull up your dossier...” Aldai pulled up a holographic viewcasting device and laid it out in front of us as we moved, its flickering white lights slowly amplifying until a clear image was shown. “I know, it’s very cluttered,” he remarked, showing a screen layout with essentially zero organization whatsoever. The interface shuffled around until he was in the database. A shortcut link to “Tower people” (Pretty sure he just named it that) appeared, and he expanded the view to show the section of all our profiles. Mine showed up near the left, right next to Aldai’s, and had a *very* comprehensive information section. He opened the small sublink labeled “1301046C884mCSurvey” which contained the transcript of the interview I had with a Hyperologist inquirer. We both read it as the others conversed with each other about topics I did not remember.

[Cycle 1301046 Millicycle 884 Transcript
Segment: Semi-Classified III

Surveyor ID: INQB1498

Directed: Unnamed Gol 24091 "Uni"

Section: A910

Status: Citizenship held for 2.932 cycles

Designation: Extraneous Persons Cycle 1301043 Group 309

Requested temporary memory withdrawal: Yes

Timestamp: 00:00:00.00 - 00:48:32.85

Full Classified Timestamp: 00:18:54.03 - 00:48:32.85

Position: M884 13th

-

S: Well, it seems that you're extraneous to this place as determined by your input earlier, which we see as a possible asset in terms of surveying the Tielelem sector incident. Are you familiar with the event I am referring to?

D: Uhh, not that much. I heard about the occurrence on the broadcast, but it did not strike my mind as important. Mind you, I was only a resident for like half a cycle at that time.

S: I see. In summary, the Tielelem incident refers to a time in the outermost ring section of the Tielelem sector where a massive cavity was detected to spontaneously appear under the infrastructure of several buildings supporting a propulsion array segment. Our maintenance

reporters from Hyperology who worked there at the time alerted the active government branch in that sector to promptly evacuate the citizens, reducing the amount of casualties, however within four hours the entire area above the cavity had fallen in.

D: Do you know what caused that to happen, though?

S: Not yet, and that's where you come in. We are aware that you are a studious type, always wanting to know more about this world, so we'd like you to help us. Your smarts and curiosity will certainly be a helping hand. The problem is, other individuals have denied any knowledge of similar info, although given the saturation of people from their origin, the "Land of Towers," we can assume that they are intentionally leaving the matter undisclosed because they have ties to malicious agents, possibly leading to a party that caused the incident.

D: Well, what prompted the Hyperologists to ask us for information? It's not like this is a major development, unlike the crazy phenomena that Boxial researchers stumble across once every two yoctoseconds.

S: See, that's where the problem begins. We have suspicion to believe that your people have factional conflicts past whatever moment brought you to this world, and there is residual weaponry that is completely foreign to us, even with the technology we salvaged from crash sites outside the city limits. In fact, this "unknown" mirrors an event that is heralded as the source of a major breakthrough in energy technology, collapse. The incident formed typical wavetypes that are seen in AE reactors, but there are none in the Tielem sector. Four millicycles later, four unique wavetypes and two particles were analyzed to have been generated spontaneously, which two of the wavetypes were synthesized previously under extreme conditions by researcher teams in the Outer Dogma over fifty cycles

ago. The other two wavetypes and particles have only been assumed to exist in theory.

D: Wait... in theory? Are you saying that their potential to exist was confirmed before, but not possible in the conditions of the Box? That's impossible from what I can tell.

S: From assessments of H-Physics, its formation can only be guaranteed in a condition that does not exist in the current A_0 or mirrors it.

D: You're saying current, meaning that the A_0 was in a state where it could exist?

S: In abundant forms. A scenario was proposed by some Transcendentalists that there was a point around forty million cycles ago that reduced the total amount of conditions possible for physical events by a factor of around 70 percent. This, of course, was not favored by the Absolutists who deemed the A_0 in its current state as the only persisting form back to the point where our historical assessments unravel. All of these discoveries led to our hypothesis that if there were proof of domains outside of A_0 and the Box, the phenomena would be replicable. However, the incident has never occurred before.

D: I am... guessing this is where we come in.

S: Exactly! Given that we have enough context to believe you did not form in this reality but a separate, stable one, we would guess that you would probably have stumbled upon a similar event to the incident. You inputted in the survey that in your realm, "beyond Class 10, reality's logic begins to break down."

D: Oh, that probably happened so many times in my experience that I don't actually know how to distinguish it from other chaotic things. By the way..

S: Uhh, are you sure you want this to be recorded under this classification? I can move it up from Semi to Full?

D: Well, you can leave anything before this in the file so we can make some of your buddies panic.

S: I don't think they'll react that way, but let's see what you've got.

< End of accessible transmission >

]

We had reached both the end of my dossier and the entrance of a public teleporter. These ones were free for use but usually clogged, as shown by the blue rippling lights across its white cylindrical structure. The nine of us barely managed to fit inside, but the teleporter flickered and we were at our destination: T'ielem.

Chapter 6: Remnants of Glory

Following this discovery, I probably had an idea of why I wanted to keep whatever I said in the survey secret, but that did not stop me from attempting to recover that data the next morning.

Before this, though, our group of nine traveled from the Hyperologists' building to the residence of whatever faction Aldai and the others belonged to. This building was in the far corner of a block group within the third ring of Tieleem, near the Tienum boundary line, and there were probably several thousand folks roaming in it at any time. Above the door, illuminated by yellow overhead lights, the building address was marked "Ti449A3218," which I noted and saved on my device, and forwarded it to Veranam and Rho, the first time I had contacted them since the last time I remembered. I was pretty sure they were worried.

I quickly realized that such factions obviously did not exist anymore as we stepped into the entrance. Behind a large garage door was a several-floor residence containing around a hundred people, a few who I recognized, but the others lost in the memories of countless ones in the crowds from the past.

"Here we are," Aldai exclaimed. On this floor, the few former denizens of the Land of Towers who were engaged in other activities or talking with others scrambled to see what new developments the group had stumbled across. "Well, hello everyone again! Brought in this one, very interesting individual," he continued, pointing at me. Suddenly all eyes gazed in my direction. I raised my hand, said "Hi. I'm... You can call me Uni now. Some of you folks might be familiar with me, so we don't really have to introduce ourselves." Said folks murmured in acceptance, while a couple of them ran to an open elevator in the back and shuttled themselves up to the higher floors, shouting all the way.

I felt like the local who originally informed us about the workings of the A_0 and Central. Many of the towerfolk asked me questions about what I had discovered, but I refrained from saying too much in fear of getting on the wrong side of an absolutist.

Most notable was the question they asked me about my achievements. I was about to say something modest, but Aldai interjected and said, "He cleared the Ordinals. Does that mean anything to you?" Everyone went silent. No-one dared utter even a single word.

"Eh, it doesn't matter anyways," I replied. "After whatever the hell happened three cycles ago, we can't even replicate a fraction of what we were able to accomplish. Definitely not in this realm."

"We were trying to break through some of these physical constraints ever since we got here, but we've received minimal results. Only slight changes in mobility, which didn't do much," a voice from inside exclaimed. Everyone turned to face the source of that voice: a short yellow-haired girl who left the elevator and began climbing up a bar to the ceiling where she hung, looking down at us through the door. She wore a green jumpsuit along with a white blouse with short sleeves, and on the side of her pants was the symbol for the

Transcendentalists, and below that was a smaller symbol denoting her original faction from the Land of Towers: The Transcendent Top Towers Community.

“You call that slight?” Aldai laughed. He jumped, and soared probably up to the fourth floor. This was way more powerful than my enhanced performance, which set me apart from the average citizen, but he had already advanced to a more prestigious level.

“Where in the 9th ring of hell did you get to that point? I thought the effect of this world wouldn’t allow you to jump that high!” I exclaimed.

“I don’t know. It just happens,” the girl said, falling down to come over to us. “I’m Vithan,” she followed. “I thought I’d remember you or something, but you’re just foreign to my mind. Sucks... I was familiar with everyone here, and now I have to make sure I don’t forget about you!”

After some more conversation and leaving the outdoors to the more private residence, for the rest of the night until morning, met everyone else who wasn’t bothered to go downstairs and check the commotion. Practically forgot about getting my memories back.

I also found out that the entire building (and as it turned out, two buildings, connected by a bridge) was owned by Aldai and the escapees from the cessated realm. I wouldn’t have been surprised if each person owned a floor in this place, but what struck me was the position of the building. Vithan had originally bought out this building after she had made contact with various refugees following the obliteration of the Land of Towers. This spot, specifically, was aligned exactly with Tielem’s sixth main street, where if you walked on the viewing bridge between the two residences, allowed you to see straight to the center of the Nullum town square, and on the 20th hour, at noon, the world’s star was aligned perfectly between the buildings on both sides of the street, giving us an incredible view.

“Sometimes, I have no idea how we consider ourselves to be from the same society as her,” Aldai commented as the midday chime sounded. He stared toward the city center, his hands on the railing.

“If you think she’s bizarre, then you wouldn’t ever get along with me,” I laughed. “Besides, this whole world is waiting for us to see its secrets, so you’ll get to see strange folks. Did I mention, I’ve been outside the city limits?”

“And found nothing. I’ve been out there before. There’s just ruined structures dating back before the time system, and barren grasslands as far as the eye can see.”

“And a settlement.”

“What?” Aldai leaned closer. There was shouting from below; they found another of the “tower people.”

“Roughly a millicycle from here, there’s a settlement called Thienem, on the inner boundaries of a massive wall called the Small Ignorance Ordinal wall. I traveled there once with two of my friends because some crazy Absolutists tried to forcefully extract information from us.”

“You’re joking. I have maps of recent surveys. There’s nothing within ten thousand kilometers worth mentioning. And so many people live in the Box anyway, because it feels more vivid. Who would possibly want to settle out here?” He began pacing back and forth between both sides of the bridge.

“If you only knew...” I stared outwards toward the main star, which was now pushing towards the right side of the sky. Solari undergoes weird circular motion, for some reason. Observers from Central have estimated its distance to be over seventy octillion kilometers (seven followed by twenty-eight zeroes), but it revolves in non-repetitive revolutions. Each cycle, it moves in the direction of sector Situm, but just for a tiny bit. Rho told me of a time when she was just an Aleph (around 50 cycles old), when she lived in perpetual midday, because Solari’s path across the sky was parallel to the ground. To this day, it’s a mystery where the star goes at night, because the ground is presumably infinite. Maybe it goes into a hole or the world ends somewhere.

After heading back down several flights of stairs (someone has the tendency to use the elevator every half nanosecond, I was about to open the garage door to head back to The Post-Memory Catastrophe Zone (Hyperology Central) when I heard a knocking. At last, familiar faces.

Veranam and Rho were standing right in front of me, with different appearances (Veranam looked like he just came back from the Outer Dogma), but their faces immediately lit up.

“Veranam? Rho? You’re back! I hope I wasn’t long.”

“Where in the A_0 have you been, Uni? Did you try to run away from us or something?” Rho jokingly pressed. “You know we’d find you eventually. With how long it took us to find you, it really seemed like that!” Her eyes danced around, taking in the appearance of the place where I now lived. Then she spotted Aldai jumping down from the bridge to greet them.

“What the...” she said. Veranam was obviously not paying attention because he was engrossed in conversation with me on the ground floor.

“Uh, I certainly wasn’t running away from you.” I chuckled. “I found these peeps from the Land of Towers who arrived with me when we were suddenly transported here.” I explained.

“Then what in the world happened?” Veranam asked as we sat down on one of the couches in the room.

“That’s the problem. My memory was wiped after I went to an interview with the Hyperologists, and they want people from the Land of Towers so they find out what caused the Tieleem incident.” I pointed behind me to the corner, in the direction of what I thought was the place of the event (Fortunately, I was right).

“Huh, that doesn’t make that much sense. Your transdilative device wasn’t on for the last four weeks.” Veranam pointed to a hologram he cast in front of us showing my

status, which glowed red with the words, “Last received 18 hours ago.” “Before this, you went pitch black like an hour after you left us. We were going to ask you ab—”

“*Weeks?*” I stood up, dumbfounded, looking down at him. “In what ring of hell would I ever decide to leave two millicycles of information in the Hyperologist data center?”

“You weren’t in your place, or anywhere that I remember us meeting in, like the Outer Dogma. Relax, it’s not like there’s anything incriminating you told them, assuming you actually decided to stay in that place for that long. If I were you, I’d march up to that building and demand those days back. There’s no reason to deny your request, right?” His brow furrowed. I caught a glimpse of intent hidden behind that, as if he had caught onto something but did little to show any more than that.

“I have a graveyard full of skeletons in my closet,” I mumbled.

“What’s a graveyard?” Veranam asked.

Rho and Aldai interrupted our chat, the former striding all the way toward us, grabbing the top of Veranam’s side of the couch. They were listening the whole time. “It’s not like you’re more insane than Kurante, and if you were they would have kept you in there for more than 4 weeks.”

“Who the fuck is this Kurante person and why do you offer zero explanation on whatever he did?” I asked, probably a bit too rudely.

Rho smiled. “There’s a lot even a three-cycle denizen doesn’t know...”

In short, Kurante was one of the original Transcendentalist/Hyperologist citizens of the city who fought to prove that the Post-Absolute existed *and* that there was a layer of the A_0 outside of this one, the more substantial predecessor to Veranam. Although most believe that his efforts were for naught, a select few Acolytes and Vetoes were able to obtain information of what he had ultimately discovered: what lay outside of the “Large Ignorance Ordinal Wall.” A majority of the data in his report was inevitably redacted by him to keep everyone else out of the loop, and given how difficult it was to already locate the Small Ignorance Ordinal settlement, nobody casually tried to pursue this knowledge. It was a myth.

“So, with all that in mind, do you really believe that they wanted you to tell them of whatever pursuits you decided to follow when they could be just chasing the truth about how this world works? They dedicated their whole study to this, and they certainly aren’t going to hunt you down or whatever, unlike the Absolutists. If *they* get wind of what’s going on...” Rho made a motion of scooping out something from her head and laying it out on the table. I didn’t need to ask her to explain what that was.

“You know this is about the incident, right?” Aldai questioned.

“What incident? Oh.” Rho said. She shook her head. “I don’t have any clue how this is even related.”

“From what I heard, Hyperologists are bloodthirsty for anyone’s knowledge about what the hell’s going on. They interviewed Uni, me, basically everyone here, because we don’t

originate from this realm, for the last two cycles. And for those who are from other realms, I have no clue. If they even do come from other realms, that is.”

Our chatter continued up to the point when a loud droning noise began to close in on us, came awfully close to rupturing our ears (a downside of being forced into a shell of our former nigh-omnipotence), before fading to a less irritating but highly offsetting hum. Everyone looked up to find the source of this disturbance, but there was not a single tangible entity other than the hazy air.

“What in the world was that? Patrols?” Veranam yelled. He took out a small, round egg-shaped object from the pocket of his coat and threw it upwards; it instantaneously split open into a drone-like hovering object and soared into the air above us. I turned toward him to see a display in front of his face, which projected a view from some sort of camera affixed onto the drone. “It wasn’t Absolutists for sure; they don’t pull off shit like that. But I know that sound. I *know* who that was.”

Veranam ran back inside towards the elevator as the display warped in front of him. Rho yelled at him to be careful, but it was obvious he didn’t listen. A few seconds later, Aldai chased him, probably to discover what the hell was going on; everyone present now had a great idea to follow him up the building and onto the roof. For all my endless pursuit for discovery the roof was the only damn place here I had never been to. Right before the elevator carried us (minus Veranam, who had cycled it once right before we got to it) up, a loud boom rattled the mechanism and Rho made a weird high pitched sound, like she had anticipated a disaster. We basically shoved ourselves out of the wretched thing and onto the roof.

Veranam was leaning out on a balcony staring outwards toward the Rabam sector, the display shoved to the side, leaning downwards like a piece of discarded paper. I strode over the marble tiling and followed his eyes toward some apparition, similar to the ones I’d searched for from the Post-Absolute document. However, the apparition was very real and certainly discernible from the things affixed to the sky: A large mass of hazy air (from before, now I realized it was probably cloaking whatever lay inside it) was rapidly moving away from us through the skyline of Tielem.

“350s... 180s... DAMN IT!” Veranam shouted, slamming his fists on the balcony. The drone feed showed a closer perspective of the apparition, which now soared faster than he could nudge his little contraption. “It’s going to cross into Rabam.”

“What the hell is going on?” Vithan approached us from behind, Rho and two individuals I forgot the name of trailing behind her. She crossed her arms and transfixed her eyes on the holographic display next to Veranam.

“Proof that there are people hiding in the damn illusion pocket dimension. Far past your city’s shitty surveys, Aldai.” The Aldai in question shrugged, as if he didn’t know what to make of it.

Veranam turned to us, his coat flapping in a wind that I was sure wasn’t present before. “Look. Around ten cycles ago. I got a glimpse of that *thing* outside the city limits. I

have no clue how the Dogma guys haven't spotted it before, but it's the same one. Now see this," he said, grabbing the ends of the display (which somehow moved with his hands although it was not solid) to show us a diagram of the city. Two dots were moving almost clockwise through Rabam, the latter closer to Hanum. "That thing's evading every single aerial object that could possibly be monitoring it."

"Where is this thing going now?" asked Vithan. She traced a curve following the aberration's future path across the hologram, which led to somewhere in the middle ring of Hanum.

"Oh shit," I exclaimed subtly. The realization was simple: this thing was going to attack the Hyperologists' tower. But how would it possibly get through an aerial shield, several layers of radars, or—

A faraway klaxon rang, and other noises, presumably the chatter and bustle of the nightlife of Central, rose up in opposition. The ringing of a distant explosion...

An explosion?

Chapter 7: Acceleration

Veranam was pacing back and forth in front of us, who sat on a bench looking over towards Nullum. Two of the large suns had been shuttled over to Hanum, leaving us in a more moody glow; Solari was on its way to kiss the ground. The fifty or so people that had clogged the pathways around the roof were no longer present.

“Nothing’s making sense here,” he sighed. “How did that thing, flying past the speed of sound, while simultaneously penetrating the Hypers’ defensive system, do absolutely nothing to their tower?”

“You don’t get it,” Aldai replied, his whole body sprawled out to encompass half of an entire bench. The same display he used to show us my transcript was superimposed over the air in front of his face, but large streaks and blobs of red were dispersed across the entire thing. It was an unsettling sight, seeing Aldai lose control; even after knowing him for less than a day, I could tell the difference between confidence and uncertainty. “The whole entire network has been shot to bits. If someone really took out our database,” he continued, raising his hand back and forth to access whatever remnants of online Hyperologist activity existed, “I wouldn’t even be able to look at anything. Whatever that was was some sort of projectile *deliberately constructed to confuse us.*”

He snapped his fingers in frustration. “Look, the whole thing’s gone to shit,” he said, clearly with a stressed tone in his usually friendly voice. Aldai flipped the floating display around to show us a diagram of the databases arranged in a format easy for us to comprehend. There were eight tiers of rectangles, shrinking in width as they approached the bottom. They were separated into five groups, Declassified, Semi-Classified, Fully Classified, Undisclosable, and Suppressed. The first three categories were allotted the six rectangles at the top while the last two were relegated near the base, obviously smaller because of their nature. The red hue from earlier was spread everywhere on the top 6 rectangles and in a couple places near the bottom, which essentially meant that most of the data had already been compromised. Vithan and a few others gasped at the threatening sight.

“Over sixty percent of the source content in the official data centre has been littered with random pieces of gibberish. Since some idiots over several hundred cycles ago had the ingenious idea of encoding characters from the start of a document using a layer of source characters rather than just inserting it into the main info, the whole thing is just unreadable. Data characters are encoded in packets of five source characters. Can you guess what happens when you shift *every character* in a document by one? In the encryption system?” Aldai stared at us for an answer.

Something in the shape of Veranam was sitting on the far left side balcony now, facing us, far outside of the reaches of the spotlight hanging above the elevator exit. A long white stripe at the bottom of his coat was the sole indicator that he was defined in this reality rather than remaining a mere apparition. “Maybe my people in the Outer Dogma can solve your problems. Half of us can read shifted text.”

“Don’t get me started,” Aldai laughed. “Can you read [FB&REw8QFCRB #QYIDciu#@JddwkiUC E2EVY*@IDFEUGIY]? Yeah, don’t think so, pal!” he said, chaining together random sounds to develop verbal nonsense.

“It says ‘it is not a matter of comparing the two variables according to the last survey.’” Veranam retorted.

“OK,” Aldai stammered. “Just because you were trained to decrypt that little thimble of text doesn’t mean you and your friends can parse through the Library of Babel. Doesn’t even matter if you’re as braindead as the bacteria sitting in the middle of the Nullum fountain or the shell of a god like them,” he said, pointing at me.

I raised my hands in defense. “What do I have to do with the attack? The first thing we can do is find out what the hell caused it in the first place.”

“Good luck with that,” Vithan declared right next to me. “I’m going to get another good, long rest, and hope that the next batch of refugees, arrivals, whatever, is one of ours.” She stood up and made her way toward the elevator doors.

“Wait,” I said. “There’s more people coming to this reality still? I thought we were like, one of the last.”

“Never assume that, you know. I’d hope we were the last, but whatever powers that govern it don’t think that’s the case.” The doors closed, leaving us to our bickering. A couple of hours later, I was already worn out from continuous analyses of loose theories propped up by Veranam and Aldai and went to sleep on my floor.

At some point (near midnight?) I grew aware of lights and some shouting in the residence. I woke up, initially unfamiliar to my surroundings. I had set my room’s window to project a view across from our building facing back from us, but it was too dark (the miniature stars were not above our block group tonight) to ascertain anything out of the formless shroud over our building. I won’t comment that much on how my bedroom was laid out because I didn’t really conceive of decorating the place. Besides, what was occurring at the time was far more concerning; I got out of bed with a vague thought, probably curiosity on what was going on, and made my way upstairs where the warm yellow glow of the lighting stripes along the walls merged with newly placed hemispherical, inverted domes on the ceiling emitting different hues. Around five floors up I ran into Vithan scurrying down the stairwell.

“What’s happening?” I asked as she made her way around the corner above me.

“Huh? Oh, there’s a very anomalous door that wasn’t there before. I called the Pantheon about it, they’re sending a couple of teams out to investigate the thing so we can go back to sleep, but Vera decided to go walk into that place and see where it led to. You can go ask him what it’s all about, I’m gonna go find some...” She trailed off as she passed me and disappeared.

“Okay...” I said to myself. “Hopefully this isn’t going to cause Tiele Incident Number Two.” I continued up the stairwell until I reached the hallway on the 25th floor,

around seven above my bedroom. Aldai and a few other people had clogged the passageway in front of this strange metal door that was embedded in a wall, opposite of the point where the hall branched out into two more paths. A couch had somehow been moved out of a room and ran along another wall, obstructing the pathway. Aldai, as usual, had displays on every side of him, a couple transmitting information I did not understand, and the rest showing repositories from databases that weren't from the Hyperologists' tower. One screen, however, had been pushed over to face the door from afar, and a live video was playing on it. I could see the interior of some large vehicle and the side of Veranam's face, but I couldn't crane my neck any further around the corner because of Aldai's damn leg. I gently pushed his foot with mine and he rolled over to another spot on the ground.

"Still nothing, right?" Veranam said from the screen, which displayed him and two people I did not recognize driving away from Central (I saw the lights far away in the distance in the image, which meant he was WAY outside the survey boundaries).

"I think it's over there," one of the people pointed, to the left, far outside where I could see.

"What the hell is this door about?" I walked over to the screen to confront Veranam.

"Oh, don't walk in there. It's a drop downward to who knows where, and I don't think you would survive that. We're driving to that location, which is pretty far out here. It's actually inside the illusion cast outside the city, if you're wondering."

"How in the world do you know where to look? Unless..."

"Here we go again," Aldai exclaimed. "He's going to keep yapping for hours." He stood up and briskly walked the way I came. "I was called in a couple minutes ago because they need me to tell them what's going on and why 6 Hyperologists are congregated right here trying to access what remains of their database." He stretched his arms, giving out a long yawn. "Finally damn time to get off this screen and actually talk to people who actually know what they're doing. But why can't I just tell them through the communications channel? Set up a call? Who cares. I'm going to— I'll tell you later anyway. Bye everyone," he finished. Just like Vithan, he disappeared past me.

"Well, that's the end of that," Veranam responded. "Well, when I found the door a few hours ago, it led to a shaft going up and down to who knows where—I trust you not to enter it, but when I looked up you could see the stars. Couple minutes later, the star maps and a crazy guy called Aldai showed me where to go. I hope I'm right, because If I'm not..." He faced the wheel and continued driving. "Wish I could just use one of those floaters. Would be there already."

This was going to be a very long night.

A notification on someone's holographic segment of the wall chimed to alert them that Aldai had sent them a message. "Aldai just said that Pantheon's coming up to see that door for themselves. What do they have to do with it?" a girl said.

“It’s not in my expertise to talk about it. Although you might need to clear the hall,” Veranam’s voice responded.

“Let’s go,” I agreed. “Can I just sit around here and watch you guys bicker or should I go see what’s going on in the Box?”

“You’ll miss out on something interesting...”

“Yeah, shut up and keep driving to the door. Technically we made it there before you did.”

“Uh huh.” Veranam continued driving. “I think *they* might be here now. Guess there won’t be any clearing any halls tonight.”

A series of thumps from the stairs signaled us to the presence of the Pantheon members. A group of six filled up the entrance to the stairwell behind me and everyone present immediately sized them up as if they were starving for a meal.

Now, the people who work in the Pantheon are quite peculiar. On top of their attire (which is a black coat with a design of the wearer’s choice), they take up a variety of professions and essentially govern the city. From what Veranam explained to me over a cycle ago, each member is capable of crunching numbers, policing, surveying data, analyzing laws, making local decrees, managing groups of people, and so much more. He went on to explain a proverb that is famous everywhere I go along the lines of “A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.” In *this case*, they’re a master of everything that can possibly be done. Of course, these people are just damn cleverer than anyone that I met in the Land of Towers (POSSIBLY even that one person who makes clacky noises every time someone criticizes her expertise, but not sure about that), so it makes sense that this is the standard. You can see them everywhere in the Outer Dogma and the Box and Hanum and Situm and Rabam and Tienum and you could walk around the inner edge of the Small Ignorance Ordinal Wall and they would ask you for materials to make a ladder to climb over it. And then they would find a way to get on top of the wall.

All that hyperbole aside, they operate in very strange ways. Every four millicycles they convene together underneath the city and convene in their central chamber that happens to be right underneath Nullum. Hell, the whole floor on the top becomes a big glass panel where you look down on the members, try to look for someone you recognize, and listen to them squabble and bicker and debate. This is one of the only places where I see the people in the government working underneath those they govern. You have these dictatorships, massive parliaments and senates floating up above cities back then, doing who knows what, probably sending off another ten billion soldier-machine-something hybrids to war. Only a third of those are televised or broadcasted, projected. Then you have whatever this is. Of course, most of the discussion pertains to matters relevant to the Box. Regarding that, I have never really known what the Box was like. When I entered, it only led to a city like this (albeit a bit bigger) and gateways to other, more esoteric subdimensions, floating up there in the sky. It is really, really hard to believe that the City of Absolute Totality is really the head of all of this. Even though it *contains* the Box, how can we be certain it’s not the other way

around? Or if they are really just two distinct dimensions with different properties? Nobody really talks about that now.

OK, back to the present.

“I see you’ve got yourselves in quite the—predicament,” the lead member said. He was easily as tall as Veranam, with broader shoulders. I could easily tell from a glance that he would have barely fit in one of the chairs in the Pantheon hall every time they met up.

“Uh huh,” Veranam stated again.

“Who said that? Veranam?” the man said in response. “I recognize that voice! What are you up to now? What’s so important about this door?” He pushed past the people sitting on the ground and grabbed the handle, turning it and slowly pulling it back.

“I told your supervisor that there’s no point coming over here. You should have done what I did and drove to the other side.”

“*Driving?*” The Pantheon member stared into an endless void and shoved the door back into the frame. “Uh huh.” I caught sight of his signature on the sleeve of his shirt, which said something along the lines of “Sigines.”

“You know. The Absholes legally can’t track this down and monopolize our findings. If he used anything not attached to the ground, imagine what’s going to be making headlines tomorrow,” a male voice in the back of Veranam’s vehicle stated. Whichever one of the two it was, they were bathed in shadow.

The people from the Pantheon scattered themselves around the hall now, calling others from their branches (most, if not all were already sleeping, as it was the middle of the night) and forwarding the information we gave to them. Dead end after dead end.

Veranam had made it to the hole and adjusted the side of his projection to show us the outline of a hole just barely darker than the ground. They had left the vehicle (of a model I had never laid my eyes upon before, now that I had seen the outside of it) and were gazing downwards while carefully avoiding plummeting down to death.

“Maybe Aldai should have been doing this,” I joked. “If he can jump so high without an injury.”

Veranam was out of sight. “I thought you were supposed to be doing all the flashy techniques. Remember when you said 90% of your achievements couldn’t be done in this world?”

“That’s what the Box is for, dumbass!” Sigines laughed away and leaned against a wall, flooding the room with lights from even more screens as they flickered into existence.

“See, this is why I think I’ll spend the rest of my time in Tieleem, because if you keep giving these people ideas, the whole place will become anarchy within a cycle,” another woman from the Pantheon said.

As the bickering continued, I went downstairs to my room and slept. You can obviously guess why. Honestly, I cannot possibly fathom why these people go so long without taking a break. Maybe because they know they'll never die of exhaustion; an ode to their medical advancements so refined that soon enough they'll never need to develop it any further.

Something flickered there in my afterthoughts. It was like that past, where I roamed free of the constraints of logic, was burrowing in the back of my mind, because it didn't want to surface and see that the world rejected it.

My ultimate goal was still to achieve omnipotence. I've dealt with timescales so vast, what's another million years? On considering this endeavor, my mind ached, a very unfamiliar feeling, something I've never felt in a long time. This world was clearly suppressing me and Aldai and Vithan and all the others, they just cannot see it. I'm missing something. What was it again? The thoughts at the edge of my brain were more vivid, I'm sure of it. I just needed to obtain the premise of this tampering with my mind, that's it!

And so I would seek to achieve first—

Chapter 8: Blasphemous Ignorance

The first thing that popped up in my head was a feeling of something *off*. My room was in the same exact condition as it was left the previous night—the window still casted its weird perspective, the one showing what it looked like from an outside observer. There were holes in my journey, little details that I missed between every encounter with the others; Rho and Veranam didn't seem to know these discrepancies. Maybe it was time I tried to reach out to them about it.

I sat up to not let myself drift away yet again. The entire night between the dreamlike situation with the door and now was laden with lapses of awakening and slumbering (I recalled a phenomenon back in the Land of Tornadoes where a couple of my former friends made a reference to someone named Sisyphus, who in some mythological retelling was condemned to tirelessly and meaninglessly roll a boulder up a mountain for eternity), as if I was not satisfied with either. This time, I would get to the bottom of this, and I'd stop at nothing until I get answers.

The first error lay in the illusion ring Veranam mentioned. He earlier explained that the “map” of the survey areas did not show the true boundaries of the ring, which lay just a few miles outside of the city limits. How was it possible for the retrieval team to get me to the Small Ignorance Settlement without running into the fake dimension? Unless there was some sort of hole, which wouldn't make any logical sense since I didn't traverse anything, it would be impossible to figure out how that would work.

I also noted the fact that, given the duration of time that this civilization had progressed, it should be impossible for their technology to not be far more advanced than they are now. As a single millicycle in this world roughly added up to two weeks, and a single day was forty hours, I estimated the beginning of recorded time, where Central's measurements go back, around 83 million years (in Standardized Revised Zero Time, followed in the Land of Tornadoes, which I vaguely remembered, although this world is doing numbers on my head when I try to recall anything before the Reality Cessation). If this place was truly as old as it claimed to be, it wouldn't be this small, and would be capable of wonders beyond imagination, as usual for other highly advanced civilizations. Within ten thousand years they would be capable of space flight, but from what I learned so far they haven't even gone further than a thousand miles above their city.

The whole building was mostly empty. Half of the people in this building worked while the other half went to explore somewhere in the City; none ever set foot inside the Box, for reasons I cannot possibly fathom. I had been to the Box over fifty thousand times, but all of these visits were limited to the city on the other side of the entrance, which did not really appeal to me. Most of my experimental work was solicited through me acting like a contractor, and I only worked around people who roughly knew me from the Land of Towers (not the ones who resided here, which reminded me that there were many folks out there that hid from Vithan's circle or probably founded their own groups in this strange place) in restricted areas, mostly to attempt to re-demonstrate our previous capabilities.

After being extensively constrained in terms of physical power, we resorted to the unrealistic nature of Boxial testing chambers (places where a majority of fundamental laws had been manipulated or nullified through channeling of specific artificial particle fields in a manner similar to creating [*] particles using the E_0 phenomenon) to recreate, briefly, those qualities that we lost. For the first time in years, I was able to glimpse myself jumping with immense power, clipping through walls, and navigating my body in directions that were clearly not possible in the contemporary world of Central. It was *blissful*; that simple demonstration of what I could once do felt freeing to me. All the restrictions of mundane reality were finally gone, and I could experience nigh-Omnipotence for the very first time in what felt like an eternity. But it was fleeting. This facade cast within a pocket dimension embedded within another world in a chain of realities doomed for cessation was another way for me to deny the truth of how pitiful my state was now. This was certainly an adequate punishment for killing off every single person I came across by trapping them in a dying timeline.

And here I was, grappling with the consequences. Of course I would be doing exactly that. Why can't I stop... why... why is my life stuck in this vicious cycle? I know what I'm doing is wrong, but I just can't stop it and I don't even know why and it's just... well...

Sometimes, I feel like I need a break from this hell, but it's something not even I can allow myself to do. I'll just leave it at that.

Suddenly, something in the back of my mind buzzed, like a rumbling, tingly sensation. I reached backwards and groaned again, as I had just fallen for this for what seemed like the thousandth. There was no pain, but I wished it was so I could have another excuse to sleep.

I had decided to wire notifications on my portable holograms straight to my consciousness, and only to Rho and Veranam, and even then it was only if they had something important to say. I raised my hand to unfold the screen out of thin air (I particularly enjoyed the part where it crumpled outwards and formed a thin sheet of some glowy whatever, I don't know the specifics of how engineers manipulate these particles) to find Rho frantically asking me to "call her it's urgent".

"The fuck? I hope someone didn't kill Aldai or whatever." I stared at the small rectangle in the corner of my display showing a small interface: a volume control, a tab saying "Answer call," and a microphone. I answered. The tab expanded in a split second to show Rho in some sort of hospital room, looking at someone offscreen and talking to them. Her hair was completely unkempt, but she didn't seem troubled outside of that.

"Uhh, Uni? Veranam's in the hospital," she remarked. "He said he was nearly mauled to death. Here—uhm..." OK, so Aldai didn't die, but Veranam nearly did.

"Oh, there you are!" a voice cried.

"What the hell happened now? Did you fall into the damn hole or something?" I sat up, recognizing the accent. Rho pivoted her side of the screen to face him.

“Uhh, something like that,” Veranam said. He was genuinely a mess, either he had a ticket to a front row seat to a bloody execution by the Avastorm Defense Force or someone had slammed his head in, which I presumed to be the latter. His face and grey hair were matted with caked up blood, and there were tubes and cushions everywhere, probably running down every inch of his body.

“What the fuck???” Were you there when Helios firebombed the Solarpolis or something?”

“Keep making vague references to people that you never told us about from your realm of origin and I’ll make sure you end up like him,” Rho replied. “He got hit by Absholes.”

“I think so,” Veranam said. It was something short of a miracle that he was able to talk in this state, but given how long they developed their medical technology with all the other bizarre contraptions, which only the Continuum would even call on par with their civilization, it was sensible to assume this was the equivalent of a scratch. Although... “Hurts like hell. I have a lot of personal reasons to assume they’re the same ones who tried to stop us from leaving the city.”

“Same insignia?” Rho asked. The Absolutists made their point by adorning themselves with an infinity symbol on their clothing with a star above it, which didn’t clearly convey the message they tried to imply, but people choose to believe some of their aggravating preferences and activity in the political field are synonymous with the ego brazenly displayed in their identification.

“They’re not idiots. They would never wear those damn coats outside city limits, they would get jumped by the 8 or so people who live out there!” Veranam laughed.

“Wait, so explain to me in detail all of this. I went to sleep while you got yourself beat up so I don’t really see what’s going on.” I got out of bed, intending to head over there so I didn’t have to deal with whoever still remained in the building. The time on the wall and my display showed that it was around eleven hours through the day, barely halfway to noon. “What sector are you two in again?”

“Tielem,” Rho disclosed. “Block Group 114A, ‘cause Veranam knows mostly Transcendentalists work in the hospital there, and he can tell a couple of his friends to chase down information regarding who jumped him.”

“Right...” I said, worriedly. I sighed. 114A was on the opposite side of the sector, close to the division line. It would take me at least a couple of hours on foot, as I haven’t even rented or bought a vehicle (By law, anyone who passed the Gol exam administered when one becomes three cycles old was eligible to own a vehicle and work in the Pantheon), but I did note that I could ride a series of suspended railway lines to get there within 10 minutes.

I made my way downstairs, avoiding the gaze of other ex-Land of Tower residents as I passed by ajar doors in hallways crossing the staircase. Many people here kept to themselves when Vithan or Aldai weren’t present, which was usually most of the time.

The bottom floor was almost in the same condition as it was when I first arrived. I stepped outside to see this part of the city bustling as usual, with there being at least a few hundred people near me everywhere I looked. It wasn't overpopulation or crowding. I decided to push the screen behind me and render them completely invisible to anyone but me. Rho and Veranam's chitchat vanished; on their end they would see that I was "inactive" but still on the call.

The nearest station was luckily in my block group, barely a couple miles away, so I made my way over to it. The cable car that sat in the station was of the same type as the one that brought me here to the city three cycles ago; staring at it from below brought upon me a sensation of nostalgia, a reminder of how recently the collapse of another world was.

In Central, the city employs several tiers of aviation zones to navigate traffic across all seven main sectors (An exception; the Outer Dogma section was intentionally roofed off thousands of cycles ago because sunlight was found to drastically hinder the capabilities of specific experiments done there. One example was the recent transdilative network, which failed to operate when the interior mechanism was visible). The third tier, above foot traffic and personal aerial vehicles, was mass aerial traffic. Once this cable car was filled it would automatically rise inside a scaffold tower, designed to magnetically raise it to the aerospace of the third tier.

"Departing in thirty seconds," a male voice sounded from a speaker embedded in the ceiling. The windows of the entire cable car tinted slightly to reduce the glare from Solari (when we would fly soon), which reduced distraction from the outside, and also allowed me to observe the interior and its inhabitants.

Nobody else was in the vehicle, so I returned to the call with Rho and Veranam. They were still in the hospital room, which would give me enough time to make it over to them before Veranam was discharged. Although I wasn't in a hurry, I suspected whoever attacked him was clever enough to keep an eye on us in case we tried to retaliate; this idea would probably have been futile in any other realm I once resided in, but since I knew of little to no powerful contacts in Central, it would be easy to sweep any unusual disappearances into some overlooked discrepancy.

"He can't be discharged yet," Rho responded when I asked her about Veranam's status.

"Is it because of his injuries? Given how good the medical service is here..."

"Oh, it's not that," Veranam said. His gaze was fixed on the ceiling. "I would be discharged in an hour by now. The truth is, I told my fellows working in this hospital all about the situation and they agreed to keep me in here for safety purposes. It's not like the whole place is clogged with patients—what's another bed filled?"

"And by the way, you better be checking if someone's eavesdropping. I can tell from the data on your trip here that there's nothing strange in your compartment, but I know ten different ways someone could read your lips," Rho reminded me.

“Shit.” I looked up and around but found nothing at first, which was a mistake of misinterpreting what she said, and then peered out the window behind. Nothing but skyline and the receding lights of Tienum, and I was sitting in the backmost row of seats with the view of Rho and Veranam blocked by a raised cushion. From that angle nobody posted on a building roof could see me, but it was rare as nobody trespassed in Tielem without being caught. The front and my left were covered by the driver’s compartment and nearby tall buildings, which were already good enough to prevent anyone from seeing me, and to my right—

Was that a person? No, it was just another of those cable cars on the same exact trajectory as mine. The transitional station where I would drop off would be parallel to theirs. There were a few people in that car, but none of them were actively staring at me or attempting to monitor our call.

“Uhh, I don’t think anyone can see me. What were you going to tell me again?”

“Outside the city is obviously off limits unless we’re going straight to the S-I-S,” Veranam said. “You know what I’m referring to, right?”

“Got it.” I thumbed up to make sure he understood, but asked, “What about the hole and the door?”

“I locked that stupid door. Of course you can’t trust anyone’s curiosity, same goes for the hole. I made sure nobody from our side told the Absolutists about it, because I was thinking that I could climb in there again with those other Pantheon members watching so they could relay all our data to the Hyperologists. And in terms of Hyperologists I mean the *right Hyperologists*, because nobody living with Vithan is remotely qualified to say anything about the nature of the hole, and a lot of people I meet in the Outer Dogma worship The Box.”

“So, tell us about your master plan, then, Veranam! Who are you headed to?” Rho questioned.

“Another friend of mine, Spel.”

“Are we deadass?” I replied, half-jokingly. “He doesn’t even respond to 99% of your calls.”

Veranam managed to lift himself off the cushioned bed a bit and into a sitting position, his hands locked together to finalize a posture mimicking some contemplative god. “Well, maybe because he’s too busy overseeing everyone in Central. Even one of the architects of this place is bound to be overwhelmed by the true magnitude of absolute bureaucracy. In theory, if I send him a message along the lines of ‘*SOMEONE TRIED TO KILL ME I NEED YOUR HELP*,’ Spel is more likely willing to respond.” A screen flickered to life in front of him, which took on the appearance of several standard sheets of cream-colored paper, each a perfect square foot. “In fact, I already sent him that while we were talking.”

Spel, or Spelpotatis, was the sole remaining “architect” of the City of Absolute Totality, after all the others had vanished, departed into the Box, or were killed in the many conflicts that occurred between the city’s inception and now (many civil wars and reshufflings of power). Following the prior architect’s southward departure (Veranam explained to me that she was lucky enough to find him and the Small Ignorance Ordinal Settlement while passing through the hole in the illusion ring), he took over and essentially sealed himself in the Orchestration Chamber that sat inside the very center of the Pantheon conference hall, directly below the middle of Nullum. Sometimes he would come out of it, most of the time the walls of the chamber glassed to show him transfixed on endless reports or data structures which were inevitably too complex for me to understand, and only seeing them stream by one time in the Pantheon didn’t make decryption any easier. In recorded history, for the last seven thousand cycles, 95% of the time was spent in the chamber. Maybe he couldn’t bring himself to be reminded by the loss of his predecessors and companions.

“Now that I think about it,” Veranam exclaimed, “I want tea. Could you get some for me, Uni? It’s—”

“Uh, they have some on the ground floor,” Rho said. “I can get it.”

“I don’t want whatever shit they serve you in this hospital. I want the *reeeeee-all* type, the one that they get in the 200s blocks.”

“SIS could whip up better beverages than the 200s while blindfolded using half of their brain. Although I can’t blame you for wanting to drink that,” Rho retorted. She leaned back in the chair she sat in and smirked at him.

“Come on. You couldn’t even tell the difference between water and fucking diarrhea, after all!” Veranam stuck out his tongue in a show of mock disgust.

“I’ll—I’ll get it for you, Veranam.” I could barely hold in my laughter, mostly because of the fact that his retort made Rho seem like a steam engine was coughing out of her ears. “Which shop again?”

“Anything, not the automated ones because they don’t mix in the right amount of tea powder. And avoid green tea, because baristas tend to give you so little sugar that it might just make me look around at the world so I don’t have to concentrate on how bitter it tastes.” Veranam slumped back in his bed and stared at the ceiling.

“Got it.” I stood up just as the cable car was about to settle down in another landing tower. A nearly miniscule jolt reminded me that I was on the ground now, and the doors on both sides slid open to admit me back to the outside world.

At this point, I was in the (rough) vicinity of the block groups that held the cafes which Veranam wanted me to buy his tea from. One of these shops was fortunately across the street, so I made my way up to a bridge overlooking the road (the whole thing was clogged with vehicles, but when the traffic lights turned green, they just poured through the intersection like nothing) to reach the other side. This city is certainly one place where you wouldn’t ask the chicken why it stayed on this side of the street.

The cafe here was interestingly reminiscent of the “bar” in the Small Ignorance Ordinal, although I have never seen any cafe in a different realm that structures itself in the layout of a hangout of an entirely different category. You were supposed to meet very gruff individuals in bars and more mellow ones in cafes, although whatever Central’s vibe was, it certainly didn’t conform to the same, bland standards of edgy and cliché assignments of specific traits to specific objects as previous ceased domains did. At least that disparity was a breather, although some part of me wishes that this world’s aspects were as easy to make out and identify, rather than be uncertain of mundane assertions.

As I passed through the front door (which was built the same way as Vithan’s garage door entrance), I observed the simplicity of the interior. There were four rows of seats split by two rows of seemingly floating tables on both sides, and the tables went all the way to the back. It was pretty empty in terms of people, of which there were at most five in isolated sections. Glancing at a display to my left, it made sense for the place to be deserted as the time showed it had opened less than thirty minutes ago.

“You want something?” a young barista offered as I came in. I didn’t see her at first, because I assumed she wasn’t present as the circular counter in the center of the room had no one behind it. Instead of them coming through a side door, a chunk of the ceiling slowly descended down into the middle of the counter, bringing her with it. Personal lift mechanisms were not that frequent in Central because everyone who programs them always makes sure to have it descend and ascend as slowly as possible, wasting everyone’s time. Thankfully, it took only a couple of seconds for this one to arrive.

“Yeah, I—” A slot in the counter shot out a menu into my hands, unfolding into a list of purchasable items. On the second breakfast menu (which I was looking forward to seeing what they had for the first breakfast, but whatever) were the drinks that Veranam wished to avoid, and then there were many more that I could assume he didn’t dislike.

- **Regular Yarn - 95c** (What in the world?)
- **Tru-Yarn - 100c**
- **Regular tea - 110c**
- **Green tea - 150c**
 - **Allergens: viciid**
- **Okra tea - 120c**
- **Hanum okra tea - 150c**
- **Hibiscus tea - 160c**
- **Purplestraw tea - 125c**
- [...]

I didn’t glance at the side of the menu where they offered meals, but that was probably due to me not being urged by my stomach to eat anything. “Two Hanum okras and one hibiscus, please.” And, to make sure I wasn’t going to be starving out of nowhere: “And one ridge steak.” Where the hell do they get meat from in this place? There’s a lot of them on the menu. I don’t think there are other lifeforms in the A_0 other than the strange ones in the Outer Dogma, and even then they don’t have flesh on them, so what is there to harvest?

The girl finished inputting my order into a display on the wall. “Uh, wait thirty.” She rose back up to the floor above, and, I assumed, had the drinks and the meal whipped up by some machine. Besides, if anyone were to be able to do that without the help of technology, I’d suspect that they were able to perform magic. And as far as I know nobody in the City of Absolute Totality could do magic except us from the Land of Towers, and it wasn’t spellcasting.

A package dropped from above, which contained our teas and my steak. “Thanks,” I shouted to the ceiling. No response. I sighed, and walked out, glancing back at the unmoving customers, who, to literally nobody’s surprise, did not move. For nearly thirteen hours to have passed through the day and zombies still walking among us? I’d rather be somewhere else right now.

It took me until 1300 to get to Block Group 114A. Now I can finally understand why teleportation is a useful tool of transport in Central.

“So... nobody tried to kill you, which is good, *and* I can drink my tea! Thanks for the favor, Uni.” Veranam sat on the side of his hospital bed, which was now devoid of all the medical equipment used to heal him. The blood on his face was mostly wiped off, but his hair now sported a tint of red, which looked cool but was going to disappear by the end of the day.

Rho sipped her Hanum okra before checking the hall outside the room for any staff. “I think it’s about time you get discharged, Veranam. Our friends back in the SIS are definitely not going to want you to lie around here so you can get beaten to death a second time.”

“What about the message to Spel?” I asked.

“Oh yeah...” Veranam replied. “I might want to check if he’s responded back.” The screen jumped out of the floor and rose to meet our faces, showing Veranam’s long list of communications with various people in power. At the top of the selection was an entry a bit more noticeable than the rest, which in my terms meant it had a bunch of particles and glowing effects around it, intended to catch our eye. The words “Spelpotatis - Pantheon Amanarch” marched around the border of the message. “What the hell?”

“Never seen that before,” I commented. “My messages aren’t formatted like that.”

Rho leaned back in a chair next to the bed. “Well?”

“It’s going to download a zip bomb to my brain,” Veranam joked. He gingerly tapped the screen to read the message from Spel. I moved over behind him to see its contents, which were...

[Spelpotatis - Pantheon Amanarch K~CCIV

Recipient: Veranam+EWINQP (Some identifier code.)

Contents:

Got your message... absholes are always in the network. Couldn't figure out why the rogues would want to kill you, but there's security now at your friends' place. Bring uni and rho and whoever else needs to come. Thx

]

“Bring Uni and Rho and...” Veranam stood up. “Looks like he wants you two in on whatever he has in mind.”

“Great.” Rho smiled and waved her hands in a sort of mock appraisal for a disembodied apparition of Spel in front of her. “How long has it been since I’ve last seen that guy?”

“Once every whenever. I heard he loves being holed up in the Orchestration Chamber because that’s the only place he doesn’t get eavesdropped on by anyone,” I said. The tea was now at room temperature. I gulped down the remainder of it and motioned toward the exit. A pity; it was way better when hot.

“We still have 15 hours until night,” I continued. “Since you have nothing else to do, I think Spel would be flooding the Pantheon with his tears if you leave him hanging!”

Veranam groaned. “Whatever you say, Uni. The man downstairs always knows when to piss me off with his tenacity to eat up your schedule.”

“What schedule again?” Rho asked.

When one enters the Pantheon, there are various entrances scattered across the city, and it is mandatory to have at least one active in every block group. The law requiring this was intended to abate the issue that occurred when Casts (select group of people in the Pantheon which had higher authority during assemblies to regulate and discuss the contents of bills aimed to be passed) called for an assembly or convention every few millicycles; the 15% or so of the population of the city had to make their way underground to meet in various chambers and debate for days on end. This form of government was akin to the “flat” system in the Land of Towers where members were usually assigned their level in the hierarchy based on election results. People were organized into groups or clans where their committee leader answered to a higher group, and so on, until they reached the Veto or Cast level which decided everything for them. Since there were so many members of Pantheon, and they had to be underground at the same time, thousands of stairwells were carved into the ground to admit them all.

In our case, since the next meeting was far away, we did not have to crowd into the stairwells with who knows how many hundreds of people. It was quite the opposite, for the stairs in our block group held the occasional Pantheoner who frantically scurried downward to collect forgotten paperwork.

“It looks like the entrance to the lair of a boss,” Rho casually mentioned. She was taking weird steps where she would go down one and then skip one, and so on. No clue why she did that.

“I distinctly remember ‘bosses’ always having you walk down a wide open corridor or *up* a kilometer of stairs just for them to step on your corpse. Or, if you weren’t lucky enough to fight all the way there, well, they’d show up at a city you happened to be in and flip it upside down.” I wasn’t joking, because my many prior encounters with specific powerful individuals always began that way.

The stairs went down for a couple of stories. Due to foundational reasons, the Pantheon was mostly full of thousands of small, reinforced multipurpose rooms. In other terms, the Pantheon was the largest building in the entirety of Central, and I presume that the scale was pretty excessive, given that they are usually abandoned 90% of the year.

“Where’s the map of this place?” I asked as we were traveling down one wide corridor headed in the direction of the central chamber, where Spelpotatis spent his days. By intuition, no sane person would ever willingly venture into Pantheon without a map, and then nobody wanted to go in there in the first place, especially far out here. We could have just taken a handful of teleport credits off our balance and found an entrance in Nullum, but *Nooooo, given that Rogues are everywhere* (Says Veranam, the king of paranoia now), we had to take a route where, instead of being ambushed, we would take a route where we could be ambushed even more.

“Hey,” a voice from a concealed speaker boomed. The current leader of Central.

We all paused mid-stride. “Were you watching us the entire time?” Veranam shouted. His head swiveled to locate where the voice originated, but found nothing. “Because, uh, we would definitely appreciate knowing the way directly to your residence. It’s hard finding the right corridor.”

“All right, there’s an automatic transit nearby. I’ll just give it the route and it’ll pick you three up.” A square shaped iteration of the cable car (hehehe cable car 🚡 🚡 🚡 🚡) that brought me into the city for the first time eased in from a hallway to the left to admit us.

“Now why did you decide to bring us down here when you could have done it in Nullum?” Rho asked.

“Me?” Spelpotatis asked. The peculiar tone he emitted from the speaker made it seem like he was in the compartment with us.

Rho squeezed behind me onto the seat. “No, Veranam had the greatest idea ever.”

“Well,” Veranam explained simply, “I’d rather not go down into the main Pantheon hall. It gives off ambush vibes, even though it’s wide and open down there. Since nobody expects it to happen there, well...”

“Are you dumb or paranoid?” I retorted. “Look, this is genuinely the best place for them to do anything.”

“Not if I’m around!” Spelpotatis chimed in. “I see practically everything here. If those rogues ventured down here or sent, like, a strike team, I would have let you know.” He coughed, a very grinding sound. Isn’t he like one million cycles old? That must be taking a toll on his health.

“See, Uni? We’re in good hands!” Veranam joyously exclaimed.

The cable car began to accelerate, which was unsettling, as now the three of us were pushed towards the back, and I was pressed against the door.

“Sorry,” Spel said from above. “We’re almost there anyway.”

The corridors linked to various rooms now led to a long chamber where many other of these cable cars lay in wait to be used later. Passing by rows of these, we approached a point where the tunnel abruptly cut off, leading to a *colossal* underground area.

“As stunning as usual,” Rho commented. I had to agree with her; the first time I walked in this place I literally lost the capacity for words.

We had finally entered the Pantheon meeting hall, which the term “hall” poorly fit; it was more of a dang hangar. And even *that* term was feeble in comparison to what should accurately describe the place.

The hall was a staggeringly wide and tall, cylindrical hole underneath Nullum, 40 kilometers across and at least 60 deep. The bottom platforms were progressively smaller holes carved out to make shells that millions of Pantheon members would sit and convene, temporarily living down there for many days, weeks if needed. In the center was a small (compared to this insanity) chamber: the two-kilometer wide *Orchestration Chamber* where Spelpotatis lived and did Spelpotatis things. From above, massive and thick glass panels from the Nullum floor illuminated the ground below. I guessed that there was a way to light up the place at night. The shadows cast here were crazy as people walked above us far up, drawing regions of darkness across various areas of the hall. The sheer scale left me (and the two) utterly silent, just like every time I walked across the plazas on the upper rings cycles ago. And, as usual, the grounds were teeming with at least one hundred thousand individuals, which I estimated from glancing around with the telescope I used to watch the night sky. There could be even more than that.

The car descended for what, 30 minutes, until we were in front of the Orchestration Chamber. Whatever acrophobia I had from looking down into the hall on my first day in Central wasn’t present anymore, at least.

“You’ve arrived at your destination,” Spelpotatis droned in a monotonous tone. “I have to say that every time I bring someone here, which is very rare. You’ve got an audience with the king!”

I stepped out onto an ornate tiled floor, the squares colored various hues to assemble murals that I could not quite see the entirety of. “Wow...” I murmured.

“Let’s take a look at the man downstairs,” Veranam pulled his arms across and made some stretching motions; after being trapped in that car, how could I blame him. Rho and I did the same as we walked toward the entrance.

A set of large white solid gates, taller than Aldai could jump, awaited us. At least I wasn’t here to fight the leader of whatever civilization I happened to stumble across, like before, so, no nerves getting to me now. But the rising sense of grandeur began to crawl up my spine, the feeling of being admitted into the greater picture.

“Here goes everything,” Veranam called as he turned toward us. “I think being stuck in that small space for an hour was worth it. Open sesame!” he shouted, and snapped his fingers in front of an audience of two.

On cue, the gates shifted an inch, then slowly swung inwards. Light streamed out to and behind us, revealing a sky and ground more vivid than in the rest of the A_0 , adorned with its own night sky and descending sun. At long last, the blockade, the laying in wait, the forced ineptitude, the hesitation to explore, had shattered. Lying in front of us was the opportunity to seek out the truth.

We stepped through the boundary.

Chapter 9: Ordinal Wall

I instinctively checked my surroundings, just like the first time I had appeared in the A_0 . It felt like I was *truly* outside in this grassy field; any genius thinking Spelpotatis had in immersing us had surpassed my dreams. But it was a facade. A very nice one in that regard, but we weren't here to remain baffled by the sight.

I turned around to see the vast doors close behind us. From inside, it looked like it was just sitting there in the middle of nowhere, the horizon stretching infinitely beyond it, indifferent to the monolithic entrance.

"Whatever upgrade he made to this lair of his better be interesting enough," Veranam said to me and Rho. "Although you two are already mesmerized by that fake sky. It's better than the one up top, but Uni's going to start tearing up the moment you step outside the Small Ignorance Ordinal wall."

"Can you really say that here?" Rho responded as we waded through a patch of tall grass. "Anyone could be eavesdropping, even in a place as secure as like, this."

"They can eavesdrop in hell," Spelpotatis' voice now boomed from overhead, like a god. The intensity of the sound pressed against my eardrums. Was it more pressurized in here?

"It's so damn loud!" I yelled back. "Can you turn that down please?"

"Shit, my bad."

"Anyways, we can talk about whatever the hell we want while we're going to the City of Absolute Totality," Rho said, pointing towards a large wall in the distance. Central? No, it's probably a replica, because I can see the curvature of the city limits. It was still grandiose, taller than the gates that lined the wall of the Orchestration Chamber.

"Oh yeah, that thing," Veranam muttered with zero enthusiasm. Probably because he's been in here several times.

"I like how you recognized it!" Spel remarked. "If anything, people might just think it's another internal room, but that would remove the purpose of the sky and the, uh, floor. So I repurposed this room into a little version of the city. It comes with its own benefits, which you'll see when you get there. I prefer to demonstrate the capabilities of this mechanism instead of describing it, so you get the idea."

We approached another series of doors at the city limits. Now, there was a real problem here, mainly because of the fact that this Central model was over 400 times smaller than the real version. So, if a street or road was 40 meters wide, it wouldn't even be a tenth of a meter here. Cave diving, anyone?

"Sooo... how do we get in?" I asked.

"Oh, uh, you climb the ladder on the wall next to the door. I'm not going to force you to cheese grate yourself just to talk to me. And when you walk on top of the buildings,

they just decompress back into their original form like a sponge. If it were made of a strong material, you would be impaled by some of the structures here. Treat it like clay.” At least the architect had procedures for his visitors; he wasn’t expecting to be holed in here forever without any human contact. Well, if Spel didn’t care, he wouldn’t have any of those cool gates that we came through built.”

I went first, then Rho and Veranam behind me. There was an archaic guardrail behind me, so no falling and injuring myself heavily. The rungs, however, creaked a bit.

As I climbed up to the top, the wind slammed into my face, the Entedross effect. Defined by one Hyperologist several thousand cycles ago, it basically states that, given an environment intended to proportionally mimic another given a magnitude n , the wind strength is amplified on the body by the fourth root of n initially before reaching equilibrium. So the wind that one would experience up at the top of Central’s axiomatic limit was multiplied over four times here. And since the winds are at least 15 mph at any time... It was not a pleasant experience.

“AHHHHH!” I shrieked before climbing down the ladder a bit.

“What’s going on up there?” Rho called from below. “Oh,” she realized after seeing where I was. “Yeah, these places forcefully make you remember not to forget the Entedross effect.”

The three of us finally clambered up to the top of the city model. The sprawling expanse of the city, albeit way more miniscule, stretched both ways in front of us. The other major difference between this Central and the real one was that every building was surprisingly sculpted out of a nearly untextured white material. The miniature stars were the only distinct objects in this entire area, whose glow provided the urban forest barely enough character to stand out.

Rho leapt down and landed smoothly in the Tielelem sector, the buildings crumpling, then reforming, under her shoes. Veranam and I followed her all the way through the mini-Central until the floor petered out into a smooth surface.

“Hm,” she remarked. That sound felt familiar, but I had forgotten who I associated it to. Probably from the Land of Towers.

Hovering in front of us, on a hollowed out chair (it was like it was carved out of an egg-shaped rock) precariously aligned above the Nullum fountain, was the Architect himself, surrounded by a network of floating machinery and holographic screens. Spelpotatis absent-mindedly tilted his head slightly to push them away, and turned in our direction.

“Well, hello, we all know each other, so no need to introduce ourselves. I’ll just be blunt and tell you that I have completely neglected thinking about fucking over those Rogues for a long time,” he announced.

Spel’s chair lowered down to ground level. “And *you three* are the opportunity I need to get things straightened out. Also, you should make yourselves comfortable.”

“Really?” Rho questioned. She sat down on the Nullum glass, or the mimicry of it. Veranam and I obviously preferred to stand.

“Look,” he sighed, “you—especially you two [pointing to Rho and Veranam]—probably already know how it is every time you come here; you should’ve come prepared for a six-hour schpiel, ‘cause that’s what you’re gonna be getting.”

“Make it six hundred cycles,” Veranam said, throwing a mysterious canister to Spelpotatis. He simply immobilized it and cracked it open.

“Oh, you got the data on the mirage!” proclaimed Spel.

Rho leaned towards me and asked, “What is that?”

“Dunno,” I replied. I plopped down right next to her, preparing for an endless rant on some obscure topic.

“It didn’t take long to figure out the problem. The thing that attacked the Hyperologist tower is whatever you guys deploy in the Box to quell those far-gone civilizations, but this is on another level. Invisibility tech, well, not completely invisible, but such specs that you can only see it with the naked eye. They got fuckin’ played. No heat, light, energy readings. Air reads have nothing. It’s like it was never there,” Veranam droned on.

“I get that, but where did you say it came from?” Spel unspooled the reel of data from the can and threw it up with the rest of the screens, bunched up in the air behind him.

“He said it came from inside the illusory projection. The false A_0 ,” I interjected.

“Really?” Spel said. “It could be from that hole from the door in your ‘tower people’ residence. Speaking of towers, I’m heavily intrigued by what you had been stirring up in that world you said you came from.”

I paused, my heart beginning to palpitate faster than a bullet. If Spelpotatis had complete info on my existence and actions, then I was completely helpless.

A large screen materialized in front of him. Fuck... “You, Uni— well, Unity, (that’s what I think they call you there), have a hell of a big fanbase. A lot of people know you for being the top climber. From what I remember, that is.”

So, nothing substantial... I was safe for now...

Rho straightened up. “...From what you remember?” Veranam seemed puzzled, too.

Spel snickered and lay his head in his hands. “Yeah, that’s when someone bruteforced into my system and deleted every bit of data, backups, fucking *everything*, about Uni and his people. Whatever they told those interviewers— it’s surely gone.” I remember being interviewed by loads of Pantheon members and Hyperologists for the first few millicycles of my stay. Probably everyone who came here went through the same process, too.

“Everything’s finally coming to a head?” Veranam asked.

“Of course, they’re plotting some cliché takeover ‘Subvert the oppressive dystopian authoritarian Spelpotatis and bring us a true utopia’ type of shit. Can you really blame them? I have total authority. Dictatorial power. I cannot possibly, even with all of these augments to my consciousness, imagine and accept what would happen if any of these tense factions would do if they had that status.”

“Yeah, but you’re not trying to kill everyone,” Rho said. “Or brainwash us into thinking we are in some utopia, like you mentioned.”

“They? Oh, wait, right...” I realized, understanding the nod to the rogues. “You can do something, right?”

“I did everything I could. While I have complete control over the city’s systems, which I barely need to intervene in, you gotta remember that they’re your typical rebellion network. They do anything they can to, well, avoid authority. It’s *hard* to avoid someone who is everywhere, however. So they decided to play the bullshit game and tried to kill off the tower people.”

“Oh, that’s fucked up,” I exclaimed, looking up at Spel. “Did they even get any one?”

“No, but they got Veranam’s face,” he said. “Does that count?”

“All of these jokes aside,” the person with the face gotten by the rogue Absolutists forcefully interrupted, “what are we going to do next?”

Spel halted for a brief moment, which it was clear he deliberated on how to properly convey his master plan for us. He then began, “Well, I have been conducting various operations in the last few millicycles, which, given the most recent incidents, had to continue in absolute secrecy. Your Small Ignorance settlement, Veranam and Rho, has been quite helpful in coordinating the evacuation of the tower people and various other individuals who were disclosed vital information regarding what lies outside the illusion ring, but...”

“But what? I inquired. “A special condition, maybe?”

His chair swiveled to the side, in the direction of the fake Solari. “You three, your only option is to leave. I know you can’t possibly live here forever, and Uni, you’ve already *been* outside the ring. Hell, you’ve gone to the wall, but for an unknown reason you didn’t stay. From your previous background, you’re just itching to travel past that wall.”

“A new opportunity,” Rho blurted out of nowhere.

“That’s what I can offer to you. You don’t need to be embroiled in this mess that you have no part in,” Spel said. Another canister, which I now guessed to be the standard information container for sensitive data, levitated towards me. “Sorry, Uni. I tried my best, but this is one fucking egg that I can’t crack.” What?

“What?” I asked again, before catching it gently in my hands. I turned the solid metal cylinder in my hands, the impossibly grainless surface feeling quite otherworldly.

“It’s your interview recording, with the Hyperologists, along with what I guess with logs of your two-millicycle “vacation” with them. But it’s completely scrambled, encrypted,

who knows. The information has been alt—no, transformed into white noise. I was going to say altered, but Hypers cannot possibly gain anything out of making it hard to know what the real data was.”

A new voice, that of a female (yet slightly deeper than Rho’s), resounded from Spel’s position. “Air reads say invisible displacement around 20 cubic meters is approaching your chamber. Distance is eight clicks, one per forty seconds and slowing.”

“I thought air reads didn’t work on those pieces of shit,” Veranam yelled.

Rho quickly stood up. “Uni, Veranam, we need to leave, *now*.”

“...alright, I’ll see to that,” Spel finished conversing to the voice before turning to us. “Since I can’t obviously finish this ‘schpiel’ with you anymore, I’ll send you my plans later. Rho, Veranam, make sure you keep Uni safe. Now...” He slipped out of the chair and motioned for us to head in the direction of the Outer Dogma. “That thing is coming from the opposite side, so over there is the most logical place to go.”

Spelpotatis waved his wrist to summon the previously neglected group of screen-machinery amalgamations while pacing towards the Hanum sector. “Oh, those little fools. Just because they were lucky enough to catch a defenseless guy outside the city doesn’t mean they can barge into my chamber uninvited.”

He stretched his arms to inflate one of the screens to a colossal scale, obviously so we could see. The surface began to glow red, and white words faded in, while the hologram itself expanded depthwise to gain three-dimensionality.

“Edgy bastard,” Veranam smirked while he led us away.

“Output something like A_0 to these fuckers,” Rho and I read. “I wonder what it does,” she said.

“Let’s find out!” the city architect called to us. He slammed the screen, now just a big red button of death.

At first I didn’t really notice it, but then the ground shifted. Large holes opened up to expose massive, what, railguns, which emerged out of the grassy fields outside the city and rotated to point towards a distant entrance two spots right of the one we came through from. As we climbed towards the city limits (certainly easier than doing so in the real version), I witnessed one charging up, red tendrils of lightning reaching out from the base of the structure before curving backwards into the main apparatus.

“Do these things really have to be red?” I asked Veranam.

“Anything but letting the rogue Absolutists doubt that he is some mad crazy totalitarian egotistical dictator,” he declared.

We swiftly made distance between us and the interlopers, climbing over the imitations of a city overhead, a city that had zero clue that one of the most important locations within its boundaries was in the midst of a terrible assault. I didn’t think, now that

Spel stood between us and them, that there was a chance of anyone finding out about this incident.

In silence, we proceeded to maneuver across the esoteric landscape, the wall approaching us. Veranam followed the clear demarcation line where Sebam and Situm intersected, so we wouldn't be tangentially veering off course. I mean, that wasn't a notable feat, because I would have been able to navigate through the model by memory.

We were just about to pass through the last cluster of block groups to the city limits when the railguns exploded, instantaneous arcs of energy soaring through the air in the opposite direction from us. Their trails were blinding enough to leave faded marks in my peripheral vision, which the consistently vivid midday sky at least alleviated (Was it even twenty hours yet?).

"Overkill," I said while shaking out the irritations from my eyes. "I think he's going to throw some sort of party."

Confirming my predictions, a jubilant Amanarch and Architect Spelpotatis cruised overhead. "That was easier than anticipated! Pantheon's about to clean up the mess; the rogue's aircraft is completely totaled, and I don't have to hold them off while you go do your cinematic walkout-exodus." He descended until his shoes were just feet above the micro skylines of Sebam. "Although I'd be interested in how that would look, mainly because you'd seem like the type of main character crew to accomplish just that, getting all that vibe."

We stopped in our tracks, Rho breathing a sigh of relief obviously held for too long. "Does that mean we can stay?" The tone of her voice did not seem as enthusiastic as her inquiry.

"Sure, if you want to become Veranam Two."

"Why do you always do this to me," Veranam One groaned, his hands vanishing into the pockets of his coat. Something about his coat seemed different, but I didn't exactly know what.

"Why do you always take a trip to *anywhere* but a location within the axiomatic limit," Spel mock-groaned in response. "I mean, sure, you left at night because you wouldn't get tracked as easily, but... night... The perfect time for disaster to breed with catastrophically unreal misfortu..." He didn't finish the thought, but rather stared to his right and back, towards the Box.

The Box, which I only now realized wasn't a bleak white (but instead black) like the rest of the city, was vibrating erratically. Like a look-at-me erratically. The blue and purple vortices that usually turned on its unnatural surfaces were being shaken up.

"What the fuck," the architect crudely uttered.

A dent, a horrible crater, snapped into existence, as if the structure was being crushed by an unrelenting pressure from all sides. The details on the Box's exterior flickered out, then the whole thing crumpled inward.

“NO! FUCK!” Spel shouted as he frantically pulled up a multitude of interfaces out of air. I tried looking at the thing, but then the ground jolted beneath me, Veranam and Rho stumbling as they tried to regain a foothold.

Then the shockwave arrived, a wall of absolute dislocation.

The lights making up the false sky just *died*, the entire apparatus and everything else in the chamber now shrouded in complete darkness. A sightless void. Ear-splitting sounds and shrieks fell onto us from above, from beyond the ceiling.

“So damn loud!” Rho screamed as the floor repeatedly dropped. Veranam crashed into me and then stumbled to my left, an unverifiable space beyond my local existence. Some large object landed behind us.

After moments of chaos, we were illuminated again, but now by a shattered firmament, entire sections of the chamber’s interior ceiling ripped out, some hanging, many on the ground where we would inevitably be killed if we were hapless enough to be under them as they fell.

Spel, on the border of hyperventilation, now carrying a small and unnoticeable laceration where an entire *pane of fucking metal and glass*, a segment large enough to carry the four of us plus four more, shattered on his head, picked us off the ground and flew us all the way over to the entrance on the Outer Dogma’s side. He wrenched the door open by some sort of telekinetic or remotely activated means.

An entire floor of glass, shattered glass, met us, still raining down, freshly broken.

“That glass—the, the segments, they’re at least a hundred meters thick, what?” Spelpotatis barely whispered. He was looking at something, but not the glass. Probably some polarized screen, one that we couldn’t see. From what I could tell, the only rational thing he was doing was artificially shifting his mind into some overdrive mode, using digital augments to compute thousands of complex scenarios and equations. Or contacting the same number of officials.

Veranam writhed in midair, trying to make sense of the situation. Rho looked around nervously, with some unshakeable fear. I myself was at a loss of words. What was this? An attack? The whole ambience, the positive theme, had been flipped to a traumatizing hell that was probably worse than what many people considered hell to be.

“The Box is compromised...” Spel read from an invisible text. “I...I...”

Above us, large metal nets with things moving on them had materialized. I suddenly gained the unsettling nuance that those things were *citizens in Nullum*. Wait. If *THAT* was true, along with the glass, and everything, the Box...

I caught something else moving below the nets, those *disturbances*. Several of them.

“No, fuck, fuck, this isn’t right... Where the h—” Spel continued rambling, to thin air. “Where’s Cotus?”

“Cotus?” Veranam shifted towards Spel, struggling to get near him. “That’s the SIS emergency situation head!”

Another disembodied voice, different from the one Spel earlier conversed to, appeared. It was that of a male, and more disgruntled than Veranam’s or Aldai’s. “Spel, I heard that sound from all the way over here. What’s happening over there? Ain’t any sirens from your sheltering protocol.”

“They’re all fried,” Spel yelled back. “The rogues are literally everywhere. The Box is all fucked, the Nullum glass got destroyed by some explosion. Don’t— ugh, I got the last tower person, and Veranam’s with me. Where’ve you been?”

“I’ve got hundreds of teams headed over to the ring entrance, and—” So it was the mysterious Cotus.

“*DON’T BRING THEM OVER HERE!* You’re, you’re going to get caught in the chaos.” Noticing erratic movements from one of the “disturbances,” Spel dragged us back inside the Orchestration Chamber. “Go back to the Outer Dogma there. I have a special transit idle, and it’s programmed to take you directly outside, straight TP to some place in the SIS. Now—” His head jerked to the side the same moment I heard a muffled sound from outside. Fuck. Was he shot? The grip he had to move us through the air was gone, and we landed in the grass.

“No!” Veranam screamed, looking back to see what attacked us, and at Spel. But the architect wasn’t dead, no, far from it.

“Motherfucker!” Spel shouted at the unseen shooter and slammed the gates with aggravation. “I have layers of tungsten-carbide grafted into my skin.”

Shocked, I didn’t think of moving, while Spel explained his miraculous survival. “Ever since, like, thirty thousand cycles ago, I had to prepare for a possible insurgency like this one, so my paranoia led me to delude myself into thinking that the worst case scenario could happen at any time. So I had, on top of various technological advancements made on my mind, various technological advancements on my body. I linked all my motor receptors across my body with sensors, plated every single part of my skin with subcutaneous armor like tungsten-carbide, and discreetly added nearly atomic mechanisms of propulsion on everything, from objects, to clothing, to construction materials. Now give it ten thousand or so cycles, and the new tweak to everything in the city has been fulfilled.”

The implications of the Amanarch’s systemic takeover of society was such a legendary power move that it at first didn’t sound legit (maybe he was lying about the replication of telekinesis, since if he *really* had full control, he should be able to do literally everything including prevent what happened now), since he couldn’t stop the attack. I was on the verge of asking him about that, but...

“Go now. I won’t ask you again,” Spel’s face hardened and he gazed past us, forgetting us, forgetting me. A good thing, for now.

“Let’s go!” I yelled to Veranam and Rho before we began sprinting towards the model Outer Dogma. The three of us fled; Spel floated away from us, transfixed on what swarmed outside the chamber. The lights dimmed again...

I found out that Rho was an absolute monster in terms of speed as she nearly caught up to me before I climbed up the ladder fixed on the wall (the same type as before, albeit more clean). As I dashed up the rungs, Veranam reached the bottom.

“I didn’t know that Spel knew Cotus,” he revealed. “But I’ll figure that out later...” The clangs from below grew in power; something was gnawing at his conscience. Did he doubt himself, after all this time searching for a more realizable and profound truth? Knowing what lay beyond the walls wasn’t enough. He just had to be *sure*.

Unlike the rest of the city, the Outer Dogma was covered by a roof, with a whole metropolis of equipment littered and fixed all over the place. It wasn’t hard to find the escape hatch even with all of these white protrusions. I lifted the cover and threw it aside as Rho and Veranam approached. The latter jumped in as I said, “I’ll close it behind you. Just...” While Rho slid down, I looked around me one more time to see how quickly the facade of the micro-world had decayed, then followed suit.

From below there was laughing. “Shit, we’re fucked.” “What do you— oh. Oh *shit*... How are we doing this?”

“What’s the matter?” I asked as I hit the bottom of the chute. The chute led to a small, dimly lit chamber with a tunnel extending infinitely into the void, towards the direction of Tielm and Rabam, literally aligned perfectly with the border between the two sectors, I think!

The chamber contained a five-person shuttle which obviously looked like it was intended for breaking the sound barrier, and nothing else. I laid my eyes upon a metal sign in the corner, which had a short memorandum on the diagnostics of this vehicle. A bolded group of words saying “**3400 kph average in 7 seconds**” immediately struck a concerning note. Wouldn’t that kill us? I looked around the frame of the thing but didn’t find anything that appeared to say otherwise...

“Dang, that’s like, fifty gravities, right? G-acceleration here is around 9.5, uh, 9.56 meters per second, so that’s...” Rho calculated.

“Dampening,” Veranam pointed out, pressing his hand on the shuttle. “I didn’t think they’d actually do that, but the tech should be developed in the next 20 cycles, new particles, everything.”

I remembered, roughly like half a cycle ago, when I stumbled across a dropped file in the Outer Dogma, titled, “Experimental Acceleration Dispersal Procedure,” containing very unique terminology related to “dampening velocity.” Under regular physics, this shouldn’t be possible, but a rising researcher (who just happened to be from the Land of Towers) who claimed fame no less than ten cycles ago confirmed the existence of the particle for dark matter, the “dense graviton,” which appeared in this file. The dense graviton, or more precisely, its wave function, since it could not be easily observed, could be *manipulated*

to offset the effects of gravity. One specific effect described the means by how acceleration (g-forces) could be negated.

“Wait, we’re good,” I confirmed. “Hop in, quick! Don’t, don’t think about the specs right now.”

Rho grabbed the handle and shoved the glass roof of the shuttle away from us so we could hop into the seats. Veranam, confident enough to attempt to “drive” this thing (the vehicle was on a railway, so it didn’t matter), fit in the front seat, while Rho and I took the two behind him.

“So this thing should work like the other shuttles they use in the Outer Dogma...” Veranam scanned the latticework of diagnostic screens and dials before pulling the lever on his left. “I think. Yeah,” he said, or tried to say, before we began rocketing down the tunnel.

“Holy!” Rho exclaimed as the faint sounds of air zipping past the vehicle grew. But we felt nothing major, other than the light pressure from the front (like someone pressed their hand on you).

“Mach 1.8, 2.1, it keeps on climbing! Veranam, how much is 3400 kph?” I asked.

“Like... a bit more than 2, 2, uh 2 and a half,” he said from in front. “It’s at 2.7 now.”

“Well, even if it’s this fast, we should be out of the city in a few minutes,” Rho commented from behind me.

The glow of the lights that were sequentially spread along the tunnel were suddenly outmatched by a brighter one.

“There’s a *booster?*” Veranam’s face poked out from the left of his seat, then the right, attempting to see the flames. Rho and I also did so, but back there was just pure blue. I swear it was yellow. I saw the speedometer at the front read Mach 5.6 before an uncomfortable push from down below forced us to tense our legs. We were about to be launched out into the air. Wait, don’t tell me we’re going to slam into the Small Ignorance Ordinal Wall!

The propulsion engine gave out, finally. I guess the escape route was not intended to be a two-way trip? But we were still moving fast, and the light was approaching from ahead.

“It’s finally over,” I sighed in relief. We were shaken up a bit as the whole thing lifted off the rail and narrowly edged out of this damn tunnel.

The first thing we saw were swarms of hovercraft. One of them, solid black, spiraled down to approach us.

“Over here!” Veranam yelled up and frantically waved his arms to catch the attention of the object (it already noticed us).

The hovercraft descended, an unfamiliar insignia emblazoned on its side, to our level. The wind from what seemed to be small slots indented procedurally every few feet blew crazily at us until the vehicle landed. A small prism, one that I had definitely forgotten from before (when did I even get that) fell out of my pocket, landing in the grass.

“Crap,” I muttered before picking the thing back up.

Veranam and Rho went up to what I assumed to be the front door of the craft and knocked; the black panel slid open to reveal Aldai waiting for us. How did Aldai get here?

“Yo, Aldai!” I ran over to them, partly because I knew we had to get out of there, mostly from familiarity. I had almost forgotten about his and Vithan’s crew, but from Spelpotatis’ earlier comment, I assumed they were with the Small Ignorance’s people.

“Veranam, Rho, Uni, I surely didn’t expect you all the way out... here? Get in, I’m sure you know what the hell is happening with the city and all that. I was con—”

“We, we’ll get to that later,” Veranam politely brushed past him and into the depths of the hovercraft, and disappeared behind Aldai. “I need you to bring us to the SIS so we can reach the wall sooner than later,” he called from back there.

“Alright,” Aldai conceded. Turning to me and Rho, he said in a discreet tone, “and tell me about what you’ve been doing after *he* was in the hospital. But first, let’s leave utopia.”

Inside the hovercraft were rooms of comfortable seating strapped with elaborate seatbelts, with everything as black as the outside (Was the point camouflage? It was still midday) coatings of paint. Once the door closed behind me, the vehicle decided to list to the side, shifting me towards the seats opposite from the entrance, but my shoe caught on the grooved metal floor and I tumbled awkwardly on the seat. Rho avoided the weird gaps and just sat down on one of the cozy corners rather than slamming into them.

“Oh and, this bad boy doesn’t have the best of places to walk on, but you’re not going to be here for long. Just make sure to not collapse mid-stride else you’re going to end up like...” Aldai pointed to his left (left of the door as well) to another compartment, the one that Veranam vanished into.

“Can everyone just stop making jokes about or alluding to me obtaining a gashing wound on my face yesterday night? I hear it from everyone, including the fucking leader of Absolute Totality!” a mysterious disembodied voice yelled from the direction Aldai pointed in.

“You get my point. Anyways, what is going on?” Aldai finally finished his expository tirade and asked us.

“Well...” I started, pausing to look behind me out a tinted window I didn’t notice before. The shimmering glow of the illusion ring in the peripheral right of my view barely hid the smoke emanating from the Hanum sector.

“Yeah, it surely doesn’t look good from over here,” Rho commented. “It’s the same explosion from the Box doing all of this.” Her face still showed concern, even for a city I thought she never held an attraction for. Maybe I’m wrong. I’m not an expert on her. If only I had that vast array of abilities, I could make sense of her worry. No, she’s certainly concerned about the people, and I do not want to know what she would think if she was inside the city limits.

“The Box did *THAT?*” Aldai came over to the seats and stared at what I was looking at. “Shit, is it that bad?”

“The Box is basically gone,” I said, reminded of what Spel’s Central minimodel displayed. The scene of it crumpling into itself like a soda can replayed in my mind. How, or what could possibly do that? The Box wasn’t a structure (maybe the lattice stuff surrounding it counted?), it was an entire dimension. Sure, the gigantic surface technically served as a “container” and entrance for the interior, but it doesn’t mean that crushing it would do anything. That’s like multiplying infinity by a fraction, nothing changes. Unless...

“*WHAT?*” Aldai burst out, clearly in disbelief. “You’re saying, that— that entire, I don’t know, dimension, is gone.”

I raised my hands up in defense. What was I defending from? “Well, not sure, but it’s a bit more complicated than that.” The interior lights overhead, cast from small white circles, transitioned to a more serious orange. Rho stared back at us before getting up and wandering into the cabin left of the door, murmuring about not having eaten in hours.

“OK, so, while you and I presume everyone with Vithan got mysteriously collected by the Small Ignorance authority for some sort of preservation slash protection mandate by Spelpotatis, which is what he himself told us—” I began.

“You actually met Spelpotatis?” he interrupted before shifting closer. The hovercraft was now turning to the left, which meant I saw more of the wall and none of the city, which blinked into oblivion as it crawled into the window frame’s bottom right.

“Yep, for a brief time, and then we got over here after evacuating. I know there’s a lot of public speculation on what’s inside the room where he actually lives, but the answer is pretty simple.” I turned back to face Aldai after the city disappeared, before continuing with, “He has a whole mini model of the city inside the orchestration chamber, which is important, because from what I believe how it worked the model down there matched Central live, with no delay whatsoever. When we were conversing with him I saw the Box just...” I pointed my hands in both directions to show I didn’t understand how illogical it seemed, “fold in, it was cratered.”

“What? That doesn’t make sense,” Aldai said.

“I know that, but are we not supposed to get used to nonsensical stuff? Remember where we originated from,” I replied. Rho poked her head out of the room she entered before scurrying in Veranam’s direction, her arms full with bags of stuff, probably snacks.

“It’s just a complete disaster. The Nullum glass was shattered, I’m guessing that millions have just been killed, and the rogue Absolutists who used to be just a pain in the ass became the stereotypical bad guy and revolted against the Pantheon.” I finished, turning away from Aldai. “I just want to get the hell out of here and find a new future, something that doesn’t remind me of that cycle, the cycle of being involved in the chaos.”

“Well—you’re right, Uni, but what do you think we’re supposed to do?” Aldai implored. “I know that out here we can find peace, maybe not in Absolute Totality, but—”

“Past the wall, it’s the same thing, over and over and over and over,” Veranam interrupted from the opposite corner of the room from me; he had just entered, and he was certainly eavesdropping on our conversation.

“I expected that much,” Aldai said. “I don’t expect *true* change especially after living through colossal timescales and being promised the bliss of perpetual heaven, or infinite tranquility.” He stood up, shaking his pants and ridding his clothes of dust.

“Another thing, we’re almost to the wall,” Veranam noted gruffly.

With that news I rose up, willing to explore the confines of the hovercraft. “Anyways, what’s in here?”

“No need to go on a hunt. Foodstuffs in the far compartment there, we rarely need the stuff in there anyway, and near the front where the pilot center is is just more seating. You can go ahead and see the whole inner A_0 from the observation deck above but it’s not a pleasant sight anymore.” Aldai explained, as if this object was an exhibit.

So I went up to the observation deck. The room, just larger than my bedroom in Central, provided a complete view of the “Inner” A_0 , just as Aldai had reminded me. Inner A_0 ? I took a peek at the Small Ignorance settlement rapidly approaching, then gazed back at the state of the city. As I registered what had happened on the surface, I instinctively shook my head and blinked my eyes.

“No no, what?” I half-whispered, half-spoke. Then again, “*What?*” I just could not make sense of the sight, even with everything that I went through just less than an hour ago.

This was the second time I had observed the entirety of the real Central from up in the sky (the first was from the fake view inside the pub in the SIS, but I had neglected to pay attention to the metropolitan sprawl). Immediately I knew something was genuinely wrong with the sectors: the entirety of Sebam and some of Tienum was wrecked, Nullum appeared to be a bit darker than usual, and Hanum had this weird smog coming out of it, along with dots roaming around the skies all over. Shit, was there a war going on? And then the Box was—

Exactly as Spel’s underground model had revealed. The luminous, spiral glowing shapes and patterns that were supposed to represent the infinite and spacious depth of the dimension were gone, replaced by solid and mindless black. The gateway to the universe’s pocket had been closed. We were *cut off*.

“Everyone,” I cupped my mouth with my hands and called down through the spiral staircase that led back to the lower decks, “it looks *really* fucking bad in Central! Come and see for yourself.”

Thirty seconds later, Rho and Aldai (the former now devoid of any chip bags) popped out of the stairs to see what I was referring to. Aldai rushed ahead and strode to my side (He had a pair of glasses on this time, which is rare to see anyone nowadays with those), more attentive to what was going on in Hanum.

“I know about the Box, and it’s pretty devastating to see it all banged up, but look at Hanum,” Aldai mentioned, opening a screen out of thin air which displayed a magnification of the sector from our perspective.

“What’s with Hanum?” I asked him, unsure of what he was analyzing. The screen was honed in on a place near the city limits, which everyone knew was the Absolutists’ section. The dots in question were smaller versions of our hovercraft built by Rogues, as the star on the insignia pointed up instead of down. “Oh fuck,” I realized.

“Yeah, they’ve stirred up something menacing,” Rho said. “And it hurts to say this, but... I don’t think Hanum is salvageable anymore. At least, not by us.”

“It’s not the whole faction doing this, though,” Aldai continued, watching for anything that could disprove his hypothesis.

He then moved his hand across the screen in a circle, while simultaneously performing a pulling motion. The chaotic feed faded into a proportional diagram of Hanum’s network of block groups and major streets, white notation bold against a dark blue background, like a stereotypical blueprint. After he finished his grandiose “pull,” the diagram rotated towards a bird’s eye view of the sector before expanding outwards, containing the whole city. The smooth transitions mesmerized me and Rho, but Aldai pulled us back to reality.

“I can still access databases from Absolute Totality, which is pretty good, since the Small Ignorance network is tapped into the system while leaving no trace of its existence. And...” he said while looking at an invisible object, just like Spelpotatis did with his screens. I’m guessing it was personal stuff, because I usually hid any screen I wanted to keep private when others were around. I don’t really know the technology behind that, but it works. I might research it later once all of this insanity rolls over.

“Here.” Aldai provided us with a simple overview of the situation in Central: red areas on the map corresponding to rogue Absolutist control, and everything else, colored the same hue of blue as the background, remained within the grasp of Spel and the Pantheon. A sizable chunk of Hanum, at least 50 kilometers wide, 40 long, and situated along the corner where the axiomatic limit, Hanum and Situm met, had fallen to the Absolutists. The entirety of Sebam and Nullum were a greyish shade of blue, presumably in ruins.

“It looks hella bad,” Veranam, who had silently materialized behind us, commented.

“When did you get here?” Rho was startled by him, but calmed down quickly.

“I was always here. Anyways, we’re almost at the wall, so we can finally leave this bullshit behind and let the Small Ignorance authority deal with them later. Look down, you’re most likely not going to see this place ever again!”

Although I had little to no sentiment for the SIS, and given the fact that I had ventured into that city once, I still remained enthralled by their now homely and strangely familiar expanses of skyline. Just looking back, even tracing an unseeable and probably incorrect path from the faraway entrance to the pub that I first met Rho in, where I divulged

my remembrance for the Land of Towers and linear Hyperology (which had, I must admit, shrunk just slightly ever more in the few days since, which wasn't a good sign as my memory should be perfectly acute), was all I needed to do.

"I hate to see it end like this, but I can't do anything about the rogues now," Veranam honestly commented. On the map, two areas in the crisis zone blinked, where Central and the rebellion exchanged territory, territory that was previously the site of wondrous research projects.

"At least you tried," Aldai said to him. The three of us robotically turned towards Veranam on a nonexistent cue, eagerly waiting for him to get lost in frustration and explode into a...

Veranam blinked. Before he could undergo some mind breaking chaos, Aldai quickly realized, "Crap, I didn't have the pilot get the signatures for docking at the station," and rushed down the stairway to do what he forgot.

Veranam took a deep breath and changed the subject, straightening out his back and addressing me and Rho.

"Now, Rho, you've obviously been out in Large Ignorance because I've met you many times traveling there, but Uni here doesn't know what is outside this wall," he began, pointing to the bluish structure outside, which now aligned roughly with the hovercraft's ft's starboard. I eyed up the wall again but found no new developments in its (supposedly) infinite size. "Oh yeah, there's a lot of stuff to explain first before we get there," Veranam continued.

"Like?" I perked up, wanting to know about those lingering unexplained things.

"First, the wall," Rho answered, noticing my fixation on it. "Ever heard of baryonic matter?"

"Of course," I said, deeply familiar with the subject. Although I was never interested in the particulars of—wait, no, I was. Is my memory messing with me again?

"All research and analysis since... whenever we ever had a compendium for knowledge... never physically classified the counterpart of baryonic matter, I'm not talking about *antiparticles*. There was a brief category, but no definite particle was discovered or theorized. That's when we looked deeper into the workings of the wall." As Rho proceeded to elaborate, Veranam nodded in agreement.

"Once our instruments grew in precision and scope of measurement, a phenomenon that nobody at the time understood, which we now call *force-void*, stumped everyone. The particles of the wall did not respond to literal *physical* forces from baryonic and the prior non-baryonic matter. Sure, they had quarks, but you have to look at spin." Rho reached her right hand out and pushed it forward repeatedly to show that if you pushed on the wall, it would feel like you were pushing on air.

"Spin?" I didn't first assume that it had anything to do with that concept, but sure.

“I won’t get into the details now. Baryonic matter has positive spin, integers and noninteger multiples of one-half. This new state of matter, áthikonic matter, has infinite spin. Technically we could not measure it to a finite number, so we’re just assuming it is that.”

OK, so the wall was anomalous, which was the first weird thing I noticed that wasn’t a result of technological development, like the illusion ring creating an infinite interior A_0 .

Below my feet, a vibration resounded through the entirety of the hovercraft. We had finally docked somewhere, but where?

Rho had to improvise: “Well, I guess I don’t have time to tell you what’s beyond the wall. I mean, does it matter? You’ll get to see it,” she spread her hands and fingers wide open in grandiose buildup, “firsthand.”

I stood outside on the platform with Rho and Veranam, taking in the unusual scenery. With armed guards milling around, the moment was certainly dulled, but you have to believe me when I tell you that it bubbles up some sensation, some longing for the days when I still struggled and appreciated the grueling effort it took to get here. But now? A bitter half-replacement; I’ve been through things like this before.

The milky condensation on the translucent illusion ring’s exterior rippled back and forth, I could make it out from the haze. Below me was the SIS, thus where I stood must have been that place where I predicted the elevator shaft would lead to. I was partially right; it did lead up to a platform, but there was no “elevator,” the object in the scaffolding was a hovercraft eagerly climbing upwards. And the only reason why I hadn’t seen many of *those* around previously was because they were probably sitting in a hangar, underground, or behind the wall, not regularly used. All those stupid grooves on the floor made sense now; who would want to frequent the interior of a hovercraft not intended for an extended stay?

“So what are we waiting for now? I know he got the authorization to dock but it’s getting quite late,” Veranam complained while pacing back and forth in front of the hovercraft’s entrance. Around twelve hours had passed between us landing here, meaning we were well into the degradation of the afternoon. I had just been subjected to a long and exhausting screening of my person, and anything requiring absolutely nothing was all I needed.

“Well, I’m guessing that Aldai needs to reach out to the right people so he can fly the craft straight through the tunnel,” Rho said in response. She was leaning out on the railing of the balcony we were situated on, mesmerizingly steady (From up here, we were light enough for any strong wind to catch us and fling us off, but 1, we were several tiers of platforms away from the edge of the station, and 2, there wasn’t even anything remotely close to a gust). In her hand was an unlabeled bag of blue chips which she routinely plucked one out of and snacked on.

“I hope I don’t fall off and die before he does so,” Veranam strutted behind the craft and out of sight. “Where do they even store the fuel?” I heard him question after, probably inspecting the behemoth.

“So you were telling me about the wall, and about everything past it, you were going to let me find out myself, right?” I asked Rho, turning right to her.

“Basically, yeah, all of that, but it doesn’t help leaving you completely in the dark.” Rho held out the bag of chips to me and I tentatively took one, chewing on it. It shattered in my mouth and brought this funny sensation, a wave of something close to spice, across my tongue.

“So what’s it like?” I took another one of the chips.

“Hmm...” I could tell she was thinking deeply about her experience past the wall. “I’d phrase it like this: it’s a pretty vast world, and there’s a lot of nations out there, many being less advanced than Absolute Totality and the SIS. But a lot of it is consumed in anarchy, with little administration over the land, mainly because it’s still reeling from the aftereffects of an event long ago.”

“An event?” I wondered out loud.

“It was called,” Rho simply put, “Absolutely Everything.”

I went through the word in my mind. Absolutely everything. What would cause someone to run out of words to express a thing and just call it everything?

“What?” I was visibly confused.

“I have no clue about the thought process someone would go through to name it that, but whatever happened at the time caused the current situation, all of this illusion ring, the anarchy, everything. People are so paranoid of being technologically advanced that they start wars to exhaust their resources and lock up everything away, then...” She trailed off and pointed to the city, which I had tuned out while listening to her.

The illusion ring, which earlier seemed to ripple like a barrier, had grown more opaque, and its form straightened out. Blue waves permeated the now clearly visible walls which separated the mundane from the transcendent. This definitely wasn’t a good sign...

“Shit,” Veranam exclaimed, running over to us and beholding that phenomenon. “Where’s Ald— never mind, I’m just gonna scan for his ass.” The same egg capsule drone thing that he used to track the object that attacked the Hyperologists’ tower exploded out of his coat pocket and came to a stop in front of us. Veranam’s screen lit up again, transmitting information I assumed only he could make sense of.

“Wow, it looks like that thing is more helpful to you than we are,” I remarked as the drone rotated in Aldai’s direction, which Veranam helped indicate thanks to the massive profile on him present on the screen.

“Well, for now, but I can’t live without people,” he said before pausing to close the profile. “What is he even doing?”

A pair of guards approached from our right. “You’ve been cleared for takeoff by now, since you’ve been waiting so long,” one of them said. “You’re headed off to where?”

“Outer Dock, why do you think the hover’s here?” Veranam replied in a pissed-off manner. I looked at the wall and noticed the waves had vanished, but I’m no fool to think it was going to end there.

The guard who spoke then addressed the three of us: “Look, if you’re going to take off, the pilot needs to be with you. At least get inside; we’re having the whole fleet,” he pointed at a group of black dots soaring away from the platform to our left, “take off as well, and, uh, there’ll be a bit of a disturbance.”

“There’s no pilot, the traj was mapped automatically by the system on this one. But Aldai, our host for the transport, had to get the destination selected, and he needs clearance to access the LIO routes.”

“Yeah, where’d he even go?” I asked as we were escorted into the hovercraft. A small tear had formed near the bottom of the illusion ring, very close to the spot where I entered a few days ago. But nothing was going through, so— OH MY GOD WHAT IN THE NAME OF ALPHASM IS THAT?

“Beats my drone,” Veranam conceded. “Whatever he’s up to, he better finish quick or else...” He stopped. “Are you seeing that?”

“Wait, they’ll be able to see everything!” Rho exclaimed, pointing to the expanding rift in the ring, which was what I had noticed. ***I am genuinely freaking out right now what the hell is that fucking rift***

“Shit, what?” The sight baffled me. I tried calming myself down with some breaths, since we weren’t in danger.

“Not our problem, because we won’t be here to find out what’s going to happen,” Aldai affirmed, racing toward us from where Veranam’s drone pointed.

“What in the zeroth goddamn reality level were you doing for the last, what, eight hours?” Veranam yelled to him as he met us at the ramp.

“Look, I got the trajectory map for our trip out,” he cheerfully exclaimed, holding up a sophisticated sheet of metal, lights running along it (pretty archaic, given that data could just be transmitted remotely), “but it took me a while to get processed because everyone was trying to get their own—” he tried to explain before Veranam cut him off.

“That’s great, because now I can complain to Cotus about logistics when I come back here in five hundred thousand million billion cycles!” He marched off back into the depths of the hovercraft, Aldai following him. Something about saying goodbye to a shithole facade of a real civilization, one full of Rogue Absolutists. The guards thumbed up to me and Rho and left, probably to watch this specific platform tier in the case of any incident occurring.

“Guess that’s the end of that,” Rho remarked. “Once we’re past the wall, I’m going to take a long and deserved nap and then we’re going to see what’s next on the bucket list.”

“There’s a bucket list?” I asked, going over to the seats I sat on before. Oh yeah, and those stupid grooves.

“Well, aside from getting you and the rest of the tower people to a safe place, Veranam wants to *study* you guys. Here, you want the rest of them?” She offered me the bag as we sat down. It was not much, but I knew she had stocked way more on board when we were at the station. Where do they even get these?

“Yeah, I’ll, uh, eat them. Studying us... sounds like we’re being experimented on.”

“Oh, no, he’s trying something different. Based on how much history your people have, he wants you to go back and unlock your full potential through whatever means you prefer to utilize.”

“Sure, I’ll try that. What is it going to be, ten cycles of training, ‘cause that sounds corny as the ninth ring of hell.”

“I don’t know, probably not what you’re thinking.” She sighed and brushed her hair back.

A shuffling from the direction of the front of the craft reminded me of what we were supposed to do to leave. “So, where’s the way out? I haven’t seen any exit through the wall.”

Rho adjusted her posture before saying, “I don’t remember exactly, but it’s...” She pointed to our right as the hovercraft was facing directly towards the blue, concrete-like texture of the wall. “That way, maybe a bit up, but not too high up. I’m just basing it from my first time entering one of these.”

“How the hell are you even supposed to navigate through that tunnel?” Veranam complained yet again from the front of the craft. I couldn’t see him, but from his tone I presumed he was completely enraged by the lack of leeway when exiting the Λ_0 .

“You’re not the one navigating, it’s the system reading the traj map,” Aldai’s voice said.

“Whatever, I’m done with this place for now. What’s happening with the ring? Uni? Rho?”

Rho and I immediately perked up at the sound of us not laying around doing nothing. I asked Rho, “I think we should check out the observation deck, but I’m pretty scared of that thing. Like, is it—”

“No, it’s gone, if we spent all that time laying around it disintegrated. But why aren’t they sounding the alarm?” Veranam reconsidered.

“Uh, we’ll just check to make sure.” Rho said. The both of us returned to the deck to ensure we weren’t going to be hit blind by some malicious group of aircraft, but I myself trusted in the SIS defenses. On the other hand, the rift...

It was still there, and now considerably larger (but the whole ring hadn’t vanished)—the opening tangent to Tielelem district had ripped all the way up as far as I could tell, leaving

a gash; the airspace, contested between the Central and SIS authorities, teemed with numerous dots, and two distinct fleets wavered back and forth in first contact. To the residents of the city, their whole entire false reality being ripped apart just to subdue a single rebellious faction was too much. To the SIS authority, it was high time they put the stupid Absolutists in their place.

“I can’t imagine what I would be doing if I were trapped in the city limits,” I admitted. Would we evacuate somewhere? For such a miraculous environment, this Λ_0 didn’t have anything remotely close to a natural disaster, because it was literally impossible for such to happen. If some army invaded from the Box (and its infinite subdimensions, which were frankly inaccessible because to get outside the limits of the city on the other side, which I rarely saw from the experimental sectors, much less entered, you had to get clearance from an Acolyte, which was impossible), they would have through the most fortified series of modern defenses to get close to the Box’s exit, so no need for bunkers. And once again nobody ever expected for their whole entire outside sky and monotone grasslands to be a trick. That was an indisputable facet of the world until now, just like how gravity’s ultimate source was unexplained.

“Me too, Uni. But hey, we’re actually going to leave this place behind. You can’t do anything by just worrying, that is the problem of the SIS and the rogue Absolutists can go fuck themselves,” Rho replied. Remembering to tell Veranam about the state of the city, she called down the stairwell, “It’s not actually gone yet!”

“Really? Easier for us!” Veranam shouted back to us before starting up the hovercraft. The floor tilted slightly beneath Rho and I and we crashed into the thick window panes. It wasn’t bad enough to cause an injury, but we had no choice but to stay trapped in the corner of the observation deck before the ground leveled out again.

“Sorry about that,” I heard—faintly due to the growing roar of some engine—Aldai’s voice.

The hovercraft made a full clockwise turn as it flew away from the platform, angling the floor steeper than ever. Rho, who tried to maintain a grip on it, said, “Uh oh,” and slid in my direction, forcing me to climb out of the way.

Couldn’t I just jump there? I wondered, realizing that I still could leap to the railing leading downstairs (given I could literally run 66 km/h, and the rail was like, 15, 20 feet away), and made the jump, making sure not to crash into the thing headfirst. Catching the rail, I swung to the other side to help Rho make it back, but she obviously couldn’t jump as far as I could, having not been subject to the same diminishing circumstances carried over the cessation of a world (If she did, though, her body wasn’t built over who knows how long of a timescale like mine, and she would probably have just reduced to nothing, less than a concept).

She leapt and caught the railing just as I had, completely baffling me. “What?” I asked her in disbelief. She wasn’t like the people of Central who couldn’t even pull off anything more than 55 km/h in full sprint.

“Genetics,” she explained with a grin, before making her way down.

“OK,” I said to myself as she quietly vanished. Attempting to follow her, I heard her call out to Veranam and Aldai about the ring’s situation, and made my way to the undiscovered piloting chamber at the front. Rho was too quick and I completely lost her.

The closer I got to the front, the heat abruptly dialed up until I had no choice but to run through and hope the chamber was cold (It was, fortunately). Slightly sweating, I finally entered the mysterious confines of the room and saw Veranam slumped over on a row of seats facing a central pillar, the one where he presumably inserted Aldai’s traj-map.

“I need to get a break from this, but I’m also bored...” he groaned while rolling around in the seat to find a comfortable position.

“I mean, there’s the couches in the back if you want to sleep,” I reminded him as I drew closer to the front of the room, a 180-degree view of the world outside.

“No, if something bad happens I’d rather be here than over there... Besides, Aldai should be here, he’s the only one out of us who can pilot this model... Where is he?”

“Don’t know. Aldai?” I called back the way I came.

The hovercraft was slowly gliding along the wall to our left, keeping its distance but running along the barely noticeable curve. We were just about to cross over the leftmost fence of the SIS (where the guards patrolled) when I caught the sight of another black dot, a hovercraft headed our direction. I pointed to it in an effort to get Veranam’s attention.

“That’s normal, right?” I asked Veranam.

Out of curiosity, he just barely climbed out of the seat and turned to where I was pointing. “Oh, I see why it took him so long to do anything.”

“It’s because of the other hovercraft?”

Veranam completely sat up. “Well, yeah. The Small Ignorance settlement is large enough to sustain itself but its innovation relies on imports, something that Absolute Totality technically doesn’t need, because they have the Box. The imports arrive in a highly regulated manner, and this stems from the fact that they come in through the only passageway in this wall. That passageway is barely larger than this hovercraft, which forces us to shuttle them through in one direction at a time. And so, if there’s just one craft passing through, the entire queue is delayed by an hour.”

“Hmm, maybe Cotus should install a lift...” I postulated.

“Exactly, and she’s sitting on her ass in who knows where, probably the Large Ignorance Ordinal settlement or whatever. When we get there I’m going to remind her how bad it is over here.”

“There’s a Large Ignorance Ordinal settlement?” Aldai asked; he had been listening in on our conversation along with Rho. “So there’s more to this world than I thought.”

“Yeah, we haven’t been exactly on the same page as you, given you and Rho love to gatekeep all the unknown stuff,” I said, leaning against the central pillar.

“Oh, *don’t worry*, because it makes your reaction to how cool the outside world is even better. Good afternoon, I’m going to take a nap. Remind me when we get to the entrance.” Veranam eased back into his weird sprawl, signaling that was the end of that.

“There he goes, I guess...” I remarked. “So... what now?”

I stood in silence for a few seconds, but I then answered my own question:

“Eh, I guess it’s just a matter of waiting now.”

“Yep, there’s nothing to do here other than check out the...” Aldai attempted to trigger his screens to access Central’s cyberspace and databases, but was rejected, the only thing showing being: “**SIA Notice — Outside Intranet Boundary — Switch to DSEI Intranet to continue.**” The consequences of making it this far are starting to show...

“What the?” Rho seemed confused by the notice, her puzzled expression evident in the pulsing red glow. “I thought we could access Absolute Totality’s system as long as we were inside the wall.”

That was obvious, because I knew that whatever the outside world’s equivalent to the system here was more advanced and sophisticated; it probably wouldn’t be used here where the accessibility could conflict. And besides, nobody in Central needed to know about the world around them, it probably would’ve been better off for them.

“Weird,” Aldai commented while opening up other diagnostics on the side, flooding the area of the room near the entrance with red and blue lights. His focus shifted from one screen to another, his efforts spent trying to reconnect to Central, but it was in vain.

“Don’t bother,” Veranam’s muffled voice erupted (I swear he was dead asleep). “I can’t see anything clearly, but I’m guessing you’re going to have to wait until we’re out for that.”

“At least we’ll have access to better information beyond this place,” I enthusiastically offered. “Whatever we’ve been doing before, we can continue it again.”

What I said made Rho smile, but I knew the reason she did so was of a different purpose, one of reinvigorating proportions.

It was utterly silent up here. The winds, which I expected to grow until the hovercraft experienced heavy turbulence, were absent.

An hour after we left, as Solari’s warm embrace vanished earlier than expected, the borderline flat wall continued on in the distance. It was genuinely an impressive structure, being so high up that you could never even see its top from the surface. On that topic, couldn’t you just... *fly* over the top? Eh, whatever, they know better than me anyways.

After rummaging around in the observation deck and the lower deck of the hovercraft I found useful intel on where we were headed, which I discerned by deciphering

the “trajectory map” Aldai inserted into the central pillar of the piloting room when we left (Thanks, sheaf of manuals).

As stated a bit before, we were headed to this enigmatic site called the “Outer Dock” (not to be confused with the Outer Dogma, some people clearly have no creative spark), which is a resupply site located a tad bit outside the circular wall, but considerably far from the entrance to prevent malicious actors from sabotaging the only known supply route to the inside. Attempts to fly over the wall have failed (all ships malfunctioned around a few hundred kilometers up), and it is impossible to carve another hole through due to its properties; the original hole’s origin is unknown, so the system of resupply is highly important. The SIS authority is actually a branch of its superior counterpart: the Large Ignorance Settlement authority, who controls large swathes of the *Outer A₀*. Crazy, right? The *A₀* is actually split into two parts, the zone with the Central and the SIS being the Inner *A₀*, and, I’m guessing, everything else being the Outer *A₀* and beyond.

To my right, the distant City of Absolute Totality, its lights flickering back on now that the false sky of the Illusion Ring had been replaced with that of the real world (I hope there’s not another one like that even further outside, and so on), continued living on, its citizens, obviously shaken up by the rogue Absolutist rebellion and the vanishing of the endless grassland around it, on their way to rebuild. I felt alone in that realization, that I was swallowed up and insignificant amongst the masses, to live and die unnoticed. But it was also relief, relief that hostile attention was not focused on me.

Peace, one that lasts as long as the world wishes it to last.

I was nearly lost in my idleness when I noticed, in the corner of my eye, a disruption in the wall. I didn’t think of it much at first, but it grew ever so slightly, like those geometric nightmares people keep on talking about where a monotone dot or some other shape approaches them, creeping up, giving the dreamer an irrational and rampant fear. But this was no dot, and nothing to be scared of. We had finally arrived at the exit.

“Hey, everyone!” I yelled down the stairwell first. But I knew that it would be hard to hear me from down there, so I went to the lower deck to see what they were up to.

Before I could cross the threshold of the central compartment, Rho appeared out of nowhere, followed by Aldai, who began with, “Are we at the exit yet?”

“Yep,” I said eagerly, inviting them to follow me up to see the strange sight. I knew Rho had probably seen it before, but from her look it seemed as if she still cared to come observe, as we probably weren’t coming back. I definitely wasn’t, there was no point to do so. Was there?

We returned back to the observation deck for the ten trillionth time, and the hole was there, a random and perfect circle, a bit larger than the hovercraft. Its seamless appearance, the gaping maw leading through at least twenty kilometers of wall (I watched but found no light coming from the other side, it was literally *that* distant), was like a figment of a dreamy, heretical absolution, a demonstration of something so anomalous it was hard

to believe it existed. It wouldn't be any crazier for there to be steps leading up to a door instead.

“So, what the hell is this doing here? I thought it would be more grandiose, given that this wall is also important,” Aldai noted.

“That’s the exit.” Rho confirmed. “I remember that, uh, from my previous travels through the wall, it was supposed to remain a secret to prevent anyone from outside disrupting the people living here, especially Absolute Totality. And you can’t build proper infrastructure around it or carve anything into the wall, because (1) the physics behind it causes all things attached to act as if it never existed, and (2) it’s completely impossible to make the hole bigger. So, if you were to walk through the entrance instead of fly through...”

I thought a bit, and came to a troubling conclusion... “You’d feel like you were actually falling!”

“That’s right! To make it worse, if someone tried to pick you up using whatever emergency equipment or machine they could offer, the object would be instantly crushed due to it trying to negate your fall from the gravitational force,” Rho elaborated.

Aldai visibly skipped a heartbeat, probably because he tried imagining feeling like you’re falling even though you’re on top of a solid surface. How would that even work?

“Oh, we’re turning now,” I said, as I felt the hovercraft swiveling toward the entrance. “What’s number two? Why can’t anyone make the hole bigger?”

Rho lowered her voice just a bit and shrugged. “No one knows. First you have the problem of the wall, and second, it’s impossible to do anything to it or affect it in any way. Back then, there were weapons tests, and everything conventional was used, not anything like antimatter bombs. Guess what happened?” she asked us.

“What happened?” Aldai and I questioned in unison.

“Nothing,” Rho replied.

“Wow,” I was considerably impressed at how the people who built these walls couldn’t even demolish them anymore, because now you have this migraine of a supply route. Wait, no, they didn’t even build them. “Wait, who built the wall in the first place?”

Rho paused for a bit before answering, “The DESI, meaning Dhaxarum Emergency Sustenance Institute. They control a bit of the Outer A_0 from what I remember, and some lands in Dhaxarum, but that place is separate from the Outer A_0 and it takes a long time to get there. Actually, they themselves have no clue which technology they utilized way back then to build and modify the wall. It’s, I’m suspecting, an intentional secret or a lost one.”

“Hey, we’re going inside,” Aldai said, looking straight ahead, towards the hole. It was true; we were accelerating now.

“Oh?” Rho blurted out as we crossed through.

Then the lights of the craft fizzled out and the engine died for a split second before turning on again.

“What just happened?” I asked, slightly panicking.

“It does that sometimes, when you leave or enter. Due to the wall’s properties, signals from the SIS don’t get through, and the internal signals between parts of the hovercraft get cut as well, which is why Aldai needed to get the traj-map plate to restore the data,” Rho said, Aldai nodding in agreement.

The lights returned, albeit a bit more yellow-ish, reflecting off the tunnel’s interior and everything in the observation deck. It felt more restrictive, like we were swallowed up by an esoteric beast, but that’s a very stereotypical way of describing it. More like traversing through a liminal megastructure hostile to anything not of a higher tier lifeform. Maybe that deity-like entity in the Outer Dogma could live in something like that.

“Hey, that’s weird, shouldn’t there be no light coming from the wall at all? Since it doesn’t exert or receive forces.” Aldai asked Rho.

“Don’t know, ask Veranam, he’ll...” Rho’s voice grew distant as I descended down the stairs, only interested in sleeping after a very long two days of chaos. The cushions of the couch never felt any better.

Laying myself down, finally relieved of all the chaos that had been happening, I dozed off into the realm beneath the mind. I don’t know how many hours passed, but eventually I started dreaming of something. Something I should have never dreamt of. I remember it... horrifyingly vividly.

I found myself in the portal leading to the apex of the Land of Towers: The Supremum. It was exactly as I remember it: shades of red, vermilion and crimson, with that magnificent gate leading to Finality—or, at least, what I thought was Finality back then. Alone, with none to dispute it. It was grandiose until I actually tried moving through the portal.

Forward in time; I also saw the effects of the cessation: entire three-dimensional chunks of reality shattering, the entire timeline chaotically rewriting itself as I stood, people teleporting themselves to other narratives (I think I saw Aldai among the crowd too!), the Road to Infinity Organisation taking almost immediate action... all seemed normal; after all, the RTI had made contingency plans for this, just like the Ordinals.

There was a strange gap in that “memory;” I looked back. Everything became blurry. Static. As confused as my mind was when trying to recall what the insides of that tower even looked like. I stood there, watching as the world around me deformed in a way I couldn’t comprehend. And then, suddenly... I woke up, confused, perplexed, overwhelmed and disturbed in a way I’ve never felt since I first went into Lysocognizance-0. Something I knew I’d probably eventually feel sooner than I thought.

“Had a bad dream?” Veranam towered over me like the Supremum; it had certainly been a bit since we had entered the wall. I noticed he had a cloth over his mouth—his voice was definitely unusual. Then I found out I had one laid over my mouth. A gas leak?

“Look, don’t try breathing too hard, the hovercraft system equalized the internal atmosphere for some reason Aldai’s trying to figure out. Something to do with pressure. Less oxygen, there’s tanks in the back.” Veranam looked around for an oxygen tank and disappeared in my peripheral vision.

I lay in wait for a bit before sitting back up on the couch. He was right; it felt muggy and my lungs weren’t entirely satisfied with the way I was breathing. The lights were pulsing between white and yellow over long periods of time—the interior and the tunnel outside looked increasingly more claustrophobic than usual.

“Whoever came up with this system is worse than the guy who tried copying my technology,” Veranam said as he rolled in a massive barrel labeled *Compressed O₂ 31716000 PSF*. “We only have, like, two more of those because Aldai and Rho brought one up to the observation deck.” Searching around its surface, he found a giant metal plug screwed into the top and wrenched it open, letting the air explode outwards. A few seconds later, the murky feeling vanished.

“Better?” Veranam asked me. I thumbed up enthusiastically in response.

“So how far are we?” I inquired. I didn’t know how long I had slept, but considering I’d just experienced a deep dream, I think I should have slept for quite a while.

“Hmm...” Veranam opened a screen displaying a timer ticking up: **1:48:29.19**. “I tried measuring it right to the moment we entered the hole, so we should be out in less than two minutes. We’re not moving anywhere close to fast, since the wall is only around 50 kilometers thick, and the traj map doesn’t want us to slam into the sides here.”

“OK then, I woke up right on time!” I rose slowly off the couch (cramped a bit, since my legs haven’t done anything for a couple hours) and looked to my right, where the tunnel’s exit would be, not far in the distance. Of course, it was obstructed by the indoor walls, so I headed back up (yet again, because where else was I supposed to go?) to the observational viewing station where Rho and Aldai lay in wait. Rho was dead asleep, Aldai sat down with his back to another of those air barrels, watching for a hint of light.

“Look,” Aldai pointed out what I was looking for; the exit. It was so distant that you could put a tiny coin on the inner side of the window and it would obstruct the view. A different hue of purple, barely contrasting against that terrible, asphyxiating darkness, led to another world.

“Isn’t that just great,” Veranam said ecstatically. He had followed me here, as usual for someone who couldn’t wait to explain to me and Aldai the gatekept wonders of the outer A₀.

I almost forgot that Rho would miss out on the sight from up here, and lightly shook her awake. “Huh?” she half-spoke before looking around at us, then she realized where we

were. The four of us now waited in silence, the circle demarcating the end of this tedious endeavor inching closer, and closer, and closer...

Then it consumed us, the scenery beyond the wall.

The strongest sunset, one as vivid as the interior of the Orchestration Chamber, albeit legitimately real, illuminated the infinite landscape around us. The hazy air, the one that prevented me from taking in the entirety of the Inner A₀, was not present here; it was clear, the horizon impossible to detect. Instead of monotonous grasslands, there was texture, valleys, mountain ranges scattered here and there around, kilometers away and below from us. In the far distance, I could just make out a cluster of lights, numerous yet seemingly unreachable; another civilization? We were so high up above the ground that even the slightest perturbations in the surface looked no more distinguishable from the surrounding noise. And behind, the Small Ignorance Ordinal Wall inverted, a truly gargantuan structure containing an interior universe with its own life, one that we had no reason to meddle in any longer.

"I haven't witnessed any landscape as damn beautiful as this in... a bit," Aldai cheerfully sighed through a wide grin.

"People from the Inner A₀ would probably pass out at the sight of a single mountain, hehe~!" Rho snarkily remarked.

"Yeah, ain't this a beautiful sight..." I reflected, remembering what I used to venture through, that previous world, entirely gone. It was bittersweet, knowing that places like these, even physically infinite in lifespan, would one day eradicate itself, an instrument of destruction emerging. But why not cherish what still remains?

"Finally, we got out of that damn tunnel, I was anxious that we were all going to suffocate to death before we got halfway through," Veranam mock frowned while assessing the limitless environment in front of us.

"Really!" Rho laughed and playfully slapped him on the shoulder. "How many times have you gone through this?"

Veranam tried counting on his fingers for a good second. "Maybe infinity. Probably if all of civilization got the brightest minds together they'd come up with a stupidly large number tending towards but not exactly reaching 1 percent of it. Almost like an asymptote, you could say!"

We all laughed, leaving our worries temporarily behind us. Can't we ever just catch a break, every now and then?

A clock ticks forward, not necessarily to an end.

Entry 1

Yeah, this place is very weird, but I've grown to like it. I'm putting everything I know in this journal because I know my

memory isn't as strong as usual, and I want to keep it with me in case something happens.

The City of Absolute Totality, there seems to be a universal order. Sure, all the bustling of the city reminds me of how populous Domain S was, but it's not exactly chaotic. In the tumultuous overload, I couldn't find anyone that I recognized. Oh well, I can do it later, this city isn't infinite, but maybe the Box is. I have as much time as I need, though!

reminder: According to the time system here, it's "Cycle" 1301043. There's 40 hours in a day, 7 days in a week (as usual), but 2000 weeks in a cycle. How long has this place existed like this? I mean, not remotely as long as ours, but still.

I might update or abandon this journal

Entry 508

I'm feeling pretty lonely out here... it's already been over a year and I haven't found anyone like me. Education work in cyberspace it doesn't matter

Entry 1820

Reminder to check out "Veranam," it is said he had something important to do which has nothing to do with the city or the box

How do I contact a veto? I know one lives in like BG382 which is pretty close (well, not really)

Entry 8553

I found them, for real this time. You're probably going to read back on this in like a few cycles and think how funny it was to meet them after being separated for so long but

There's also a gap in my journals, one I never left behind. I know something is off

Veranam's Basic Guide to Hyperology

Introduction

Oh, you thought this was just a story with nothing else attached? Think again, buckaroo! Here, I'm doing what Uni didn't, and presenting a guide to pretty much all the Hyperology you need to have a better understanding of the (mis)adventures narrated in this book. We'll be starting at E_0 , and then working our way up from there utilizing the typical hierarchy of linear Hyperology, exploring higher and higher concepts all the way up to MRL.

Beyond classical logic

Let's go back to times before the Box. Back then, relative to now, everything was incredibly rudimentary and the laws of physics were still the sole ruleset in charge of the A_0 and how it worked. Because of this, in the realm of metaphysics and analytic philosophy, most people used a logical system that was fundamentally grounded in the workings of the reality they knew. In the current day, this system is known as *classical logic*.

Classical logic is a fairly simple system in terms of its metatheory, only possessing a total of three basic laws:

1. Law of Excluded Middle: $x \text{ or } \neg x$ ("Everything either is or is not.")
2. Law of Noncontradiction: $\neg(x \text{ and } \neg x)$ ("Nothing can both be and not be.")
3. Law of Identity: $x = x$ ("All things are themselves.")

For its time, this system worked quite well! It aligned with the mechanics of the world known by the people in the A_0 at the time, and was typically used in arguments. However, once the Box was formed and people began to experiment with it, they were quite quick to notice some... interesting logical anomalies. The most notable of these was an ethereal phenomenon which is now labelled by Hyperologists as E_0 .

E_0 is the least object so vast that it is genuinely too great to be identical to itself. It is genuinely “not itself”: $E_0 > E_0$. The discovery of such a thing was shocking to the classical logicians of the time. If such a thing can exist, then can *everything* exist? Many firmly believed that such was the case; however, some logicians proposed systems that axiomatically prevented that conclusion while still allowing for certain kinds of contradictory objects such as E_0 . These logical systems are termed *paraconsistent*.

Paraconsistent systems seemed quite promising at first, but they didn’t catch on for very long, as eventually, people messing around in the Box would discover a phenomenon so insanely transcendental that its very existence would completely undermine the universality of paraconsistency as a whole: F_0 . To understand F_0 , we must first understand the notion of *formalizability*.

A given thing is formalizable if it can be fundamentally reduced to a string of symbols governed by strict rules of inference. The pre-Box laws of physics, classical logic and paraconsistent systems are all formalizable: they are, in essence, strict mathematical rules that govern over abstract objects. Even something such as E_0 is formalizable; a simple “ $x > x$ ” does the trick!

F_0 is simply the least object too great to be formalizable: *the least completely unformalizable object*. No matter how deep you go into F_0 , it will always be slightly fuzzy on the inside; that is to say, you will genuinely never be able to find its basic building blocks. Its depth is such that there exist no “strict fundamental rules” behind it (there *are* unformalizable logical systems, though; we’ll get to that soon).

This is a greater logical leap than anything anyone had ever seen at that time. You could take a logical leap from 0 to Infinity, then from Infinity to E_0 , then another up to ???, then yet another up to ????, etc., etc., but no matter how many logical leaps you take, you will never be able to reach F_0 . F_0 is fundamentally beyond what logic was even considered to *be* at that time.

Eventually, the people who lived in the A_0 at that time died off. However, in their place, we—as in, the peoples who currently inhabit the A_0 —emerged. At some point, we managed to rediscover our antecessors’ findings (namely E_0 and F_0); inspired by them, we decided to see just how far we could push the Box’s power. And thus, Hyperology was born.

Def-strength theory

Hyperological studies have led us to the conclusion that the logic governing our reality is not an ordinary logical system; rather, it is an unformalizable *metallogic* with two constituents: *individual logic*, denoted as $[i^*]$, and *universal logic*, denoted as $[u^*]$. This model of reality is typically known as *def-strength theory*, or sometimes *H-Physics*.

The $[i^*]$ of an object is the set of all the individual logical assumptions that the object presupposes as true; in other words, an $[i^*]$ is an object's "logical bubble", in some sense. The $[i^*]$ of a given object x is conventionally notated as $[i^*/x]$. $[i^*]$ need not to align with each other, and contradictions between them are actually quite common.

For example, take some object O defined as being "beyond all other objects". Now, imagine we define another object P as being "beyond O ". $[i^*/O]$ and $[i^*/P]$ contradict here: within $[i^*/O]$, it can be said that $O > P$, but in $[i^*/P]$, it's true that $P > O$. And this is where $[u^*]$ comes into play.

$[u^*]$ is the universal logical system governing our reality (including the Box) in its entirety. It governs all $[i^*]$ and is tasked with deciding which $[i^*]$ are considered to be "truer". Taking our O and P example, we know that $[i^*/O]$ and $[i^*/P]$ both exist in $[u^*]$, but we have to find out which of these $[i^*]$ is prioritized under it. To do this, we use a tool called *definition strength*, or *def-strength* for short, typically denoted as $[d^*]$. The $[d^*]$ held by the $[i^*]$ of some object x shall be notated as $[d^*/x]$.

$[d^*/x]$ is essentially the set of all statements provided by $[i^*/x]$ that prioritize x over other definitions within $[u^*]$. O and P are considered to be equal in $[u^*]$, as $[d^*/O] = [d^*/P]$: the two of them only have one single statement, and the statement from $[i^*/O]$ and the statement from $[i^*/P]$ both contradict and cancel each other out, creating a strange state of "conceptual equilibrium" through contradiction.

However, let us now introduce a new object: Q . Q is defined as "being greater than O , completely disregarding the definition of O ". Here, we can see that $[d^*/Q] > [d^*/O]$: while $[i^*/O]$ simply claims supremacy over all other objects, $[i^*/Q]$ claims supremacy over O and completely disregards its definition, giving it more def-strength. Because of this, it is decreed as true within $[u^*]$ that $Q > O$.

It is with the discovery of def-strength theory that we are now able to create phenomena *far* beyond the scope of F_0 . The weakest of these is known as G_0 , an object defined as “the largest object ever”. It is fundamentally unformalizable, allowing it to classify over formal objects, and it can also classify over F_0 and all of its extensions; however, even so, it *does* lack in def-strength, meaning we can still go higher:

- G_1 is the largest object ever, disregarding the definition of G_0 .
- G_2 is the largest object ever, disregarding the definitions of G_0 and G_1 .
- G_3 is the largest object ever, disregarding the definitions of G_0 , G_1 and G_2 .
- [...]
- G_n is the largest object ever, disregarding the definitions of all G_m , for any $m < n$.

This hierarchy allows us to categorize objects based on their [i*]’s claims. For example, an object defined as “the largest object, ignoring absolutely anything” would be equivalent to G_{G_0} (apparently also notated as $G[2]_0$ in the Land of Towers, according to Uni).

The absolute largest object, disregarding and diagonalizing through absolutely *every* level of G_n with absolutely maximal strength, is known as H_0 . Currently, H_0 is the most powerful thing we have ever generated in the Box. However, things beyond it *have* been hypothesized.

RL0 and RL1

Given the capabilities of the Box, it is almost completely certain that it is possible to create phenomena past H_0 in it. However, as you may remember from the first chapter in Uni’s story, Absolutists (those damn Absholes) believe that we will eventually approach an absolute limit to the Box’s capabilities. This limit is known as A_0 , and it is the genuine, absolute supremum of *all* objects, regardless of absolutely *any* conceptual quirk.

A_0 exists beyond any generalization, definition or property, quantifying without fail over absolutely *everything*. It is genuinely unbounded by our conceivability; it genuinely represents the absolute highest extent of “everything”.

However, it is worth it to ask a simple, but fateful question: what exactly does A_0 actually contain?

The domain of all objects that exist under A_0 is known as *Reality Level 0* (RL0 for short). To understand the full extent of its contents, it is necessary to make a distinction between two ideas: *type-1 abstraction* and *type-2 abstraction*.

Type-1 abstraction is what is typically thought of when discussing what it means to be “abstract”. This classifies concepts which are fully nonphysical in nature. For example, the concept of “magnitude” is type-1 abstract, but the concept of “book” is not.

Type-2 abstraction, on the other hand, is a broader notion encompassing all objects that exist as *conceptualizations*—that is, as mentally assumed forms of themselves—rather than in an actualized manner within physical space. For example, the conceptualization of an apple is type-2 abstract, as well as ideas such as the number 2. It should be noted that conceptualizations do not need to be “perfect and generalized” as the first metaphysicians in the A_0 believed; we can have a conceptualization of the general object class “book”, but we can also have a conceptualization of one specific book from one specific place, and both of those will exist under type-2 abstraction.

Now, take an actualized, realized, concrete object. Such an object would not exist in type-2 abstraction, right? At first, you may be tempted to answer “yes”, but we can see that upon thinking of some actualized object, we are actually thinking of a conceptualization which is itself non-realized. “The actualized, realized, concrete book I’m reading” is in some sense still type-2 abstract, as upon thinking of it, it exists within our minds as a mere conceptualization. This inevitable reduction of any “concrete thought” to type-2 abstraction is known as *collapse*, and RL0 is the realm encompassing:

1. everything that does not require collapse;
2. everything that is collapsed.

In a sense, RL0 contains absolutely everything that can be thought of. Anything outside of it would exist in *Reality Level 1* (RL1 for short), requiring “meta-thought” methods to even mentally access. RL1 objects are genuinely beyond the scope of A_0 , something that is made quite evident in the fact that we don’t need to perform any “meta” mind-games to discuss A_0 in the same way we

do for RL1 things. They cannot be directly thought of, so the only thing we can actually do is think of thinking of them.

A_1 is the limit of RL1, being to RL1 as A_0 is to RL0. If we can only think of thinking of RL1 things, then the only way to access things past A_1 would be by thinking of thinking *of thinking* of them. It is, without a shadow of a doubt, a truly unimaginable milestone.

MRL

Wow. You *actually* thought I was going to explain this to you? Come on, I know you're smarter than this.

MRL is actually what lies beyond the cost of his facial hospital bills.

Uni, do everyone in the A_0 a favor and stop vandalizing my fucking guide.

Author Afterword

GMDM

How long has it been since we started this project? 4 months? 5 months? Actually, I think they were 6 months. Regardless, it has been quite a while since I first suggested making Istamtae's absolutely wonderful lore into a book, and I am genuinely over the moon to see that this amazing passion project of mine has finally had its very first stage complete.

What started as a simple cool idea has unfurled into a story where my (and Istam's) imagination can come to life in a way I've never actually done before. In some sense, this story isn't just "a story", but also a gateway into us, as the authors: what we like, what other projects we've been involved in, what social environments we're usually around... all of those influence how we write.

There are obvious clues towards this fact, such as constant nods to Hyperology and Eternal Joke Towers, but some of our other influences (such as the people we talk to and even some of my own emotional struggles, though stuff inspired by that will show up in much later sections) are much harder to actually identify.

I genuinely hope you've enjoyed the world we brought to life through these pages. There is much more to come for our heroes, but don't worry about that for now. Just look at them admiring the wonderful view beyond the wall and appreciate this brief window of peace while it lasts.

I'd like to thank everyone in the TEL server for their patience waiting for this project to finally conclude. As I have already said, I sincerely hope this was worth the wait.

Istamtae

After what seems to have been so long, we have finally finished stage 1! It was certainly overdue for a January 1 release date which spiraled out of control until now.

AQFT Stage 1 has definitely changed a lot since its inception. The stage compared to the chapter 1 draft is in a different league of worldbuilding, and I have made a lot of edits overall to the lore and structuring of the world while still maintaining gamma's view of the story. However, the ultimate result of the first stage, especially in the last few chapters, felt rushed and of lower quality than the more "immersed" and "active" beginning. Although I wouldn't consider it to contain a noticeable amount of plot holes... Also, you might notice some of the writing's tone isn't exactly as formal as mine, that's because Gamma wrote it and they specialize in emotion far more than I do.

I also got some motivation thanks to the existence of *Fictopia Girls Interplanetary Chronicles* (Quirky advisory warning), I suggest you check it out but the format it is written in is very, very weird and certainly not how a person interested in just stories would think a story is written. If you're only interested in the story part, skip the fictional numbers and go straight to the cutscenes, they even have images unlike this one which I don't have the capacity to draw anything meaningful.

I don't really have that much to say, but in the words of the glorious Marcus Terry, "Chill out y'all be patient and you shall be rewarded."

Oh yeah, and by the way, for the girl that inspired me to write Rho, I hope you enjoyed it. This is dedicated a lot to you and your stories definitely inspired me to write one of my own.

Glory to the age of Sheol.

