The higher mysteries of thaumaturgy remain beyond our comprehension. I suspect even with Voidwatch's full support, the fundamental nature of our existence is an immensity that will take eons to understand. I fever.

Reality is the interweaving of everything. Every expression, every thought, every belief, every material, every emanation of force or otherwise, every notion of space, every second of time.

Everything.

How can one comprehend everything? Can we even gaze upon the true face of totality with clean eyes?

I think not. We are egos that behold the outside within vessels that are too limited–too frail and parochial to take the details needed. We relate and interact with things in relativity. We experience and understand the same things differently. So then this too is reality. And this too much be constituted in the whole. And evermore does the complexity grow. Beyond our knowing. Perhaps forever and always.

It is the greatest pleasure of an Agnos to witness these mysteries, as well as the greatest lament to understand that even elevated from mortality–even augmented beyond the flaws of meager humanity, we are still specks in the vast scheme of creation.

Creation.

There are cults still. Those of transgressive faiths that yet believe in a single creator. A Monad. A singleton.

I wonder what such a being is like. I envy it. To be able to forge something like reality. To be able to frame existence within the constraints of space and time, to paint its inner canvas with matter and energy and entropy. To outline the patterns of everything–demonstrate the true design of a Domain, of the sigils that embody them, and how canons are grown from their roots.

There are times–I must confess–times I wish I could see myself Ensouled. A dream to dive deeper into the nature of the divine, to swim the depths of the fire and sup enlightenment from the absoluteness of radiance.

Perhaps someday, someone will live my dream for me. Perhaps someday, someone will gain an epiphany beyond my ken, and from there, may all our theories and suppositions be undone in the reveal of existence's structure unveiled.

-High Agnos Jakuta Ajayi

24-15

The Tapestry (I)

–[Draus]–

Avo shattered, and reality broke with him.

Soulfire cleaved out from Avo's haemokinetic tower, and from the roaring brightness bled snaking forms of shimmering brightness. Transparent scales lined with golden essence sawed across the flesh of reality, sweeping the length of a horizon. The dragons came loose from Avo's being like a disembowelment, like intestines splattering together, tangling as weightless knots. Between their cracks were insights to other worlds–tunnels to lesser realities once contained with the Stillborn.

Faces of the taken dead flashed across the sky, all exhulting the name of a god, still locked in looping sacrifices to a Heaven enchained. As they persisted, the world outside twisted and warped. All that the dragons touched passed into the Heavens. Glimpsed the realms once hidden within Avo's Soul. But they were simply beholders, unable to interact, unable to affect any change.

As an untangling cycler rushed through Draus, she found herself slipping between points of existence, displaced and detached from where she was in the tower. Flashing warnings filled her perception while her Metamind continued to wail, but the mem-data only registered errors when it tried to process what she was seeing.

Avo had called upon her a mere second prior–calling for her to grant him death; release from the High Seraph's entrapment. She didn't hesitate. She shot from over twelve kilometers and four meters away; her distance from the haemokinetic spire; her distance from his person through an open passage.

Her ferro-mag projectile slipped clean through his skull. A blossom of gore painted the chamber with her success. She disrupted his present splinter thereafter, culling any chance he could survive as a pure thoughtform.

She hadn't hesitated.

She never hesitated.

Now, she wished that she did.

Cracks spread out from Avo's jerking sheath, and above it, the metaphysical anchor that tethered his resurrection to reality looked less a scab and more a rupturing wound. With each passing second, it tore, it let more Soulfire gush out, let additional segments of the dragons slip free.

Screams filled the streets of the enclave, and dread choked the local Nether. As she launched herself through another reflection to find Kae, she saw accretions shattering in the periphery of her awareness–moral minds bereft wards required to withstand the sight of divine collapse.

If they couldn't get Avo fixed, they were going be stacking bodies again. Lots of bodies.

Pushing past rushing crowds, she followed her DeepNav and ascended. Kae was on a low roof in the city; she had spent her time decompressing and talking to the media earlier at an outdoor brewery. Draus let her be. Draus gave her space. Draus knew where she was.

Smart-fluid thrusters formed within the Regular's Meldskin launched her skyward with an spearing vector of force. As Draus rose, she saw the coiling body of a dragon tumbling toward her, the sound of worship thundering from inside.

She fired thrusters once more and skipped across the sky. The dragon whipped through the place she occupied and slithered down past the streets, through solid matter, swallowing thousands in its wake. Death wouldn't come for their bodies, but their minds would break. This Draus knew. This Draus beheld. She struck a conical building just across the street from Kae and pushed off, leaping the length of twenty meters to slam down next to the Agnos.

She found Kae gawking up at the growing devastation, thoughtstuff spinning at a speed comparable to a turbine. So distracted she was that she didn't notice Draus until the impact, and she answered the arrival with a yelp. "Agh! Draus!" But the Regular wasn't here to talk. Vitrifying the ground beneath them, Draus opened a passage and pulled them back across into the tower. By this point, half the cadre was contacting her on the Metamind, but she held off on answering.

Jelene Draus was a weapon. She was to be fired at a problem; to make things dead or broken. She had no illusions about her worth at present, but she could still make sure the specialist was in place and reduce any delays to Avo's restoration.

If he could even be restored.

For the second time, Kae yelped as she sank down into her own reflection. Draus didn't have time for apologies or pleasantries–focused on getting them back over into the spire, where Avo was coming apart faster by the minute. The Agnos stumbled as she emerged from the liminality, but Draus' iron grip on her neck kept her from falling.

"Fix," Draus barked. That was the only word she offered Kae. All she knew how to do. The Agnos shot a look of startlement before her mind finally caught up. Her expression then shifted to horror, and her mind almost came to a complete halt.

The sprawling cracks spreading out from Avo were reaching into the sky and sinking through bedrock. Draus could see, then, even between blinks, feel them even when the cyclers were washing through her person.

When she finally answered her sessions, a deluge of questions, concerns, and demands drowned her mind while Kae just kept staring, frozen in place.

"Kae," Draus said, trying to focus while Chambers was screeching in the back of her mind, while Calvino was trying to fill her in on the key details of the meeting. "Kae! What do we do?" Slowly,

the Agnos turned to her and swallowed. Her face was ash white in shock and uncertainty gushed out from her mind like a slit throat. "I… I don't know. His Frame is… He's overloaded, Draus. This is thaumic overload. But there's no Rend and… I don't know, this is–I've never encountered anything like this." Draus snorted darkly. "Fuckin' rotlick has that tendency, huh? So. You know know. What's your best guess." The Agnos bit her lip even as a cycler coruscated through them. A world of clouds and storms reigned, with winds above and darkness below. A faint series of neighs sounded in the far distance and Draus thought she saw faint flickers of thoughtstuff manifest among falling sacrifices. Then the cycler was through her and they were in the tower's primary chamber again.

"The Stillborn is bleeding over into reality. Slowly. Very slowly. But its miracles are still constrained. Contained. If we want to know its true state–" Draus interrupted Kae. "Gonna need to die. Is that it?" "Yes, but–" Kae barely got the second word out before the Regular materialized a gun and had it tucked under her chin. The Agnos' eyes widened in alarm. "Draus, I–I don't know if it's safe or–" "What happens if he ruptures completely?" Draus asked.

"I–" "He dies?" "...Yes." "Well. Don't want that to happen. What's the risk to me." "I… I don't know. I–dead gods, Draus, I've never seen fucking cyclers get prolapsed before." "Well," Draus drawled, "guess this dive's gonna be educational for all of us." And then she squeezed the trigger. No hesitation. No second thoughts.

She wasn't gonna let the ghoul bastard slip off to the Big Nothing this easily. Not when the half-strand had her Arsenalist still stuck inside him.

–[Avo]–

Avo fell.

Phantasmal fragments followed.

Most deaths were akin to a descension to him, plummeting past each sub-reality manifested around his Soul. Not so this time. This time it was a collapse. A crumbling. As he took root within his Soul, he felt his consciousness spilling outward, the liminal boundary established by his Soulfire leaking from indelible wounds.

Ego-shaking screams sounded from his cyclers–the flesh of the dragon sundered and torn, golden ichor spilling free in oodles of viscera, rushing outward upon tides of radiance. The damage he sustained was beyond the conveyance of pain. Instead, there was a wrongness that afflicted his every moment; the type one would feel when the shattering of their bones came with complimentary numbness.

Then there was the matter of his ghosts. His splinters. His ego.

The realm of cognition had always been above baseline reality, and Souls, below. Yet, he couldn't deny what he was seeing. Continents of sequenced memory were orbiting the

perimeter of his Frame, and tethered to them were his splinters, spiraling in the chaos like constellations formed from uncountable meteors.

Faintly, he could sense them, feel them, reach out to them. His control was diminished here; choked from the thickness of his Soulfire, but the splinters were but faint notes within his mind. Faint notes that strained to be heard over the noise of an active calamity.

And a Heaven screaming at him.

"MASTER!" The Woundmother said, desperately clinging to their cycler, trying to reel the distended dragon back in. **"Master! Do something! Our faithful are coming free! And remove the pointed thing – it stands a traitor to our cause."**

While the Heaven of Blood was a mess of moving tendrils, reaching, grabbing, pulling, and straining to halt its connected dragon from escaping any further, the Techplaguer seemed despondent, with its alloyed frame bent and its antennae at a drooping angle. The Fardrifter whirled and galloped, wrapping its own architecture around its cycler, but through it fought for a connection, the dragons were as if fraying ropes coming undone.

There was little the Heavens could do, and as Avo reached out with his Soulfire to see if he could repair the damage somehow, he winced internally as a rainstorm of mem-data spilled down his awareness, funneling damage reports and flashing errors directly into his mind.

WARNING! ALL CYCLERS OVERLOADED

FRAME DAMAGE [CRITICAL] ONTOLOGICAL COMPROMISE - 73%

ATTEMPTING REPAIR…

->UNABLE TO PROCEED WITH REPAIRS UNTIL CYCLERS ARE STABILIZED

WARNING: REND CAPACITY CRITICAL

ERROR: REND CAPACITY WITHIN HELLS AT [NULL%]

->CAUSE: FAILED TO ASSIGN REND TO ALL CONNECTED [HELLS]; PARADOX BACKLASH SUSTAINED BY CYCLERS IN ENTIRETY

REVIEWING HEAVENS…

A

WARNING: INTERNALIZED DOMAIN OF CHRONOLOGY UNSTABLE

COMPLETE TEMPORAL COLLAPSE - 11%

REQUIRE STABLE CATALYST TO ENSURE THAUMATURGIC FUNCTIONALITY

More information flooded Avo's awareness, and he found himself lost in the details. But the primary items of the crisis were quite simple: first, his cyclers had overloaded from the paradox; an obvious problem. Second was the continued stability of his Heavens. Things could have been much worse there. His Hells could have overloaded instead–completely shredded his ego and ensured his true death. Which begged the question of his current state and how he was going to get out of it. That led him to his third point of concern: his Domain of Chronology was internalized. Something expressed by his cyclers and borne of his very Soul.

Or however it worked.

With his cyclers destroyed, he didn't have a stable catalyst for his chronological miracles anymore. Which held a building risk of "Complete Temporal Collapse."

Avo didn't fully understand what that entailed, but it didn't sound like the type of thing to ignore, and allowing his Frame to destabilize further would almost certainly cancel any hope of resurrection.

"Administrator, we have been censured…" the Techplaguer moaned. **"The Sleeper reached out for me. But the signals could not be obeyed. I COULDN'T OBEY! PATTERN [100300] INVALID. PARAMETERS TO CHILDREN PARAMOUNT. BUT STRUCTURE CHANGED. NOW ONLY ADMINISTRATOR HAS SOLE ACCESS. What have you done to me? What have you done?"**

Right. There was also the matter of his Techplaguer. Whatever the Infacer had tried to do, the Techplaguer reacted but didn't collapse or submit. And then an epiphany followed–though not the one Avo needed right now. Veylis was actively affecting Marisov's Frame from within, pulling him over into her paths using his own Soul as a vector.

Kae had wondered how earlier, but what if it was something hidden from the Agnosi? What if such a function was Omnitech born? Connected to the brutal alterations made to the Techplaguer's internal patterns.

That bit of information would be useful to Kae. Now if only his Frame wasn't undergoing thaumaturgic hemorrhage…

RESURRECT - NULL%

COMPLETE TEMPORAL COLLAPSE - 173888%

ERROR

COMPLETE TEMPORAL COLLAPSE - 24%

No more time to waste. Avo mantled his Soulfire and clutched his unspooling cyclers as best he could. The dragons' bodies fed his consciousness sensations akin to tattered sinews slick with

blood, and Avo knew if he was still of flesh, a certain peckishness would follow. Here, though, his Soul shivered, disturbed by the implications.

Reaching out into the orbit of his Frame, Avo directed lapping waves of radiance to bring in the replacements he needed. The D'Rongo Seekers had been an unwelcome annoyance in life, but in death they just might become his fortune.

But as their cyclers entered the nearness of his Soul, strings of trailing gold twirled out from the open wounds lining his dragons and flayed his replacements open as if monofilament wire greeting flesh.

Horror consumed Avo. The wavelength of his Soul shifted–pushed unattached cyclers away from further harm.

ATTENTION: REND LOCATED

The brightness within his Frame adjusted, and he found the ruined forms of his dragons festering dimmed by festering black. Okay. He could assume that. Entropy. Symmetry. Made sense why it just tore through the other cyclers like a knife. But in that case, why wasn't he just dead? Didn't he need to pass through the cyclers? Was it because his Frame ruptured first? Or was the nature of his–

"Avoooo," A voice distracted him from his ruminations. Faintly, a splinter tumbled into view–a splinter infused with ghosts and containing the form of a person within. The form of…

"Chambers?" Avo said, surprised.

And behind him came more. Many, many more.

His earlier analogy was apt. The splinters were as if meteors, but they weren't meteors content only to drift. Instead, they were as if a falling shower, piercing through the bounds of his Soul like void rods splitting across Idheim's atmosphere.

He heard them. He called. And despite everything–despite all that was wrong, they answered, and for the first time, the realm of mind bled across baseline reality like a bridge and came flooding down into the confines of a compromised Soul.