

You do not exist in the future. Not truly. That which is “you” is little more than a ripple imparted on the stream; an impression left on the pattern of Chronology. The future is shapeless. Mere simulation. But it is boundless with possibility and potential, and should one truly understand how to wield history, you can learn to “recreate” yourself at certain points in time—send the necessary actions down stream to shape events in your favor.

See the right people and moments happen because you directed their Paths to be so. Such is the nature behind the god’s prophecies. The gods can never be wrong if a mold is already set upon existence.

-Alysim the Wanderer

26-13
Anti-History

“Let me reintroduce myself,” Alysim said, he patted the ragged clumps of hair protruding from his head back into shape as he sighed. “I am Alysim, the Wanderer. Alysim, Brother-of-the-Pasts-That-Weren’t to my fellow Chroniclers. Alysim the Mad Monk to the unfortunate to encounter me during my long exile across time.” He winked thereafter at Avo. “My deepest thanks for your restoration. Alysim. The Walker-of-Paths.”

And as if to illustrate his newly cemented cognition, the man dissolved of matter, the golden threads composing his body twirling ahead in time, skipping along Avo’s ontology to form the vagueness of his outline eight seconds in the future.

The display was surprising, and Avo found himself prepared to rupture the fool in case they attempted something malicious. But a voice echoed out from time itself, arriving much in the same way Veylis spoke, though with diminished intensity and far less control.

“You are not one under Jaus—the traitor. I sense you are an intruder, in a sense. A new king fighting over the ruins of this fallen kingdom.”

Avo frowned. ***“No. Not king. Never king. That is a thing for men. I am not so lacking. I am not so afraid of choice. Only tyrants seek control.”***

As he gave his reply, he watched as the tapestry shifted, patterns forming in place in the aftermath of his words. ***“Truly?”*** Alysim rematerialized before him, face aglow with excitement. “Then, you surprise me.”

“What did you just do?” Avo asked. ***“Jumped forward in time.”***

The man just barked a laugh. “No. That is impossible. Humanity cannot conceive of such a thing. Only the present truly exists. Only the present. I merely prepared a few specific *routes* to

follow for what could happen—what I expected.”

“Not so different from Zein.”

At the mention of the Godslayer’s name, the mad monk sneered. “Please. There is no need to insult me in such a manner; I will answer all that you wish to know.” He looked Avo up and down, frowned once more. “But before that, may I speak to your true shape again? I do not see the need for you to converse with me using a mortal’s guise.”

A beat of consideration followed before Avo manifested his Overheaven once more. He tasted a scheme leaking from Alysım’s mind—Hysteria captured an intent of subtle deception; aided him in realizing the man was trying to prey on his pride. He was a bit too late for such a tactic to work.

“There you are,” Alysım sighed. “What a remarkable divine I behold. Tell me, does the lineage of your lore spawn from the Nolothe? Have the Hungers finally spawned a creation of their own?”

That earned a laugh from Avo. **“More like an unexpected bastard than spawn.”**

The monk merely nodded. “As are many kings; as are many gods. Now, the things Zein told you...” He made an open-handed gesture. “They were not specifically lies, but she distorts the form of things. As she always does. Something her lover must have shown her, after all.”

A specific kind of loathing sang forth from Alysım each time he spoke of Zein. The cadence of his thoughtstuff held more than personal animosity, but also flavors of *prejudice*.

Alysım continued. “There is still much of me missing—echoes of myself scattered across this ruined world.” He shook his head. “This was *their* doing, you know? All you wish to know of the past, of histories that exist no more...I can show you, but I do not think they will serve you. The world has already been rewritten once—incomplete though it is.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because the Sunderwolds remain,” Alysım answered, quietly. “Even in my madness, I have embarked on pilgrimages to places I used to know—found them absent or displaced. Tell me, have you encountered anything unexpected in your travels across this broken place?”

The Neo-Creationist Heaven flashed into Avo’s mind. **“I might have.”**

“Yes. Results of *incongruity*. There are many things that Jaus and his family did not know, but the histories adjacent to them were altered. So now, much lays adrift, still captured within the confines of time, but dislocated from the broader state of the world. I suppose the only reason I remained undiscovered for so long was because I lingered long in these lost places, being lost myself. The people there... they are savaged of sanity, broken of mind and culture. They cannot

recall who they were for the preceding them no longer exist. But they still do. Even if Jaus and his faithful do not know, the fact of their existence has not changed.

“History was once supposed to embark along nine parallel Paths. That we all agreed on. Each Path something for us to govern and cultivate, to lead our cultures out of benighted savagery, into enlightenment in the aftermath of our Glorious Transgression.”

“You speak of the Godsfall.”

“Yes.” A dark look fell over Alysım. “That is what it is called these days, isn’t it? We are both blind. But the worlds I have no are no more. What use is such a sight.”

“What did you call it. The Godsfall.”

“The Great Revision. For that was what it was. For us to rebuild the ruins of this lost world after the ruling tyrants were shattered. To bestow their remnants on the chosen moral and use them to chart our paths forward to eternity.”

“Didn’t happen.”

“No. It did not. The Paths we governed... they intersect along the borders, and sometimes, we shared canonical events for our coming history. But as things developed, as we built our own futures, our *differences* made themselves known. Though we were allies of necessity during the war, our *cultures* and *lineages* scarred us still. And soon, the way we were became unpalatable.”

“And so one of you changed another’s Path. Like you trying to twist Veylis into ontological enslavement.”

Alysım frowned at that. “Enslavement? Is that how such a thing is viewed? Brother Kalloud was a joyous man—and when the shift was upon him, a stern matron. The girl would have received proper instruction on how to behave, and known joy for once in her life. It is a greater sin leaving her *unclaimed* to her family—as you can surely attest to now.

[What?] Abrel muttered, stunned by the man’s casual admission. [I’m sorry, am I missing something or does this half-strand not hear himself. This whole fated child-marriage thing is kinda fucked.]

{Ah. The inherent discomfort within human norms paired with the ever-present urge for control,} Calvino stated plainly. *{A habit humanity can’t seem to avoid despite all their years of existence.}* The EGI filtered images over into Avo, and he recalled the worlds burning beneath the Dyson Carriers.

Most of his templates found much scorn in Alysım, but the man himself seemed indifferent to his deed—even justified. In that moment, Avo glimpsed the damnation that came when humanity trespassed into the realm of the divine. Most human minds strain to hold to a fixed shape defined by schemas and wants. Against other cultures, clashes followed, and asymmetry bred contempt.

It didn't matter if everyone had the power to create paradise for themselves when one's utopia seemed like a den of raw degeneracy to another. By ego or desire, people yearned to force their beliefs on others, make their yearnings the only truth that could be followed.

What weakness. What desperation to create a prison upon the foundations of existence. If this was the company of Veylis' upbringing, he now no longer wondered why she treated the world like a cage.

The mad monk elaborated what more he could. His mind flowed consistently instead of skipping, but many details were still absent from him. Banished into the void lurked just behind the present. More general facts were solidified in Avo's mind. Of the nine, only Jaus, Zein, the Hungers, and Veylis truly mattered, with Alysım a facet of who he was, fated to die in the coming future.

But during the pause between their speech, Avo spoke to the man in turn. ***“Did you ever ask the others what they wanted? Did you try to understand them.”***

Alysım went still. “Of course. I *know* their desire, it was simply—”

“Do you know how they felt? Did you live their lives?” Alysım's copied ego was still a faint presence compared to the other templates, but with each passing moment, the man grew more present in the Soulscape

Back in the real, his actual self chuckled. “I have gone over their histories numerous times? Beheld their most critical—”

“You watched them. Like spectator using the Paths. Like a voyeur.”

“Like an *Chronicler*,” Alysım corrected. His expression took on an uneasy quality. “I must confess, I do not understand what I have said to offend. I will offer my apologies if you will have them.”

Avo regarded the man, and felt only passing acceptance. ***“What use is it? What use is judgment? What use is scorn? What use when you only glimpse the aesthetics of material existence. A secondhand observer. No true understanding. Just anticipation. Just expectation. Cause. Effect. No intent.”***

Alysım stood silent, uncertain how to proceed. Whatever ploy he had been planning in his mind

was rapidly unwinding; Avo got the sense the man held expectations for him as well—likely from the gods of the past.

“Humanity desires. Humanity expects. I become. You will not do. You will never do.” The Overheaven turned his focus over to the EGIs in understanding. ***“Hm. This was why Jaus wanted to create the Gatekeeper. Part of it. Want made absolute leads to inevitable war between individuals and Guilds. Needs an entity of pure order that encompasses but is unattached to those beneath it.”***

{And even that wasn't enough,} Kant admitted. {Even that. We are trapped, Avo. Trapped in existence with each other. “Hell is other people.”}

“It was going to be *perfect*,” Alysım said, the embers of frustration seeping into his words. Much of him remained confused as to what tension existed between him and Avo. A growing aspect of his mind didn't want to care; yearned to lash out for the disrespect. “The way our lives could exist in parallel with each other, if only—”

“They were more like you.”

“We would have offered concessions.”

“Only easy sacrifices. As always.”

“And it is not for them,” Alysım growled, agitation rising.

“Same thing for them. Same faults. Same flaws. Same mistakes with different stories leading to them. Chains from chains. Flaws from flaws.” A moment of quietude followed. ***“I know enough. I know enough of all there is to know. I must win. I must. No other salvation awaits.”***

The man stepped forward, clenched his teeth as he hissed his frustration. “You did not live the past, you did not see—”

Avo responded by flooding his mind with memories. Memories from entirely separate lives. Memories of daughters struck by fathers. Memories of sons abandoned by mothers. Memories of *consequences* suffered by the choiceless. Memories symmetrical to so many of the present and past.

Memories that Alysım crumbled before almost instantly. The man released a wounded whine as he fell backward, clutching at his skull, muttering to himself. “What—what—what did you just do?”

“Showed you the past. The present. The future. Showed you all humanity will ever be if they act like you. Like Veylis. Your Paths were a mistake. You are trying to grow a future

from tainted soil. You are trying to grow a future without even mastering yourself in the present. But that is fine. I have you now. I can complete your education. But only if you want to learn.

It took some time for the man to stop shaking, but when he was done, he looked upon Avo again and swallowed. “What *manner* of god are you? You shouldn’t be able to... you can’t understand *us*. We created you.”

“No. I am not shaped by the falling trajectory of man’s delusion. I am not decided by a single creation; a single birth. I am nothing more than a dream ascending. Your war is done and lost. Mine will soon begin. Do you wish to make a difference this time? Do you wish to know the truth of history—of the world itself and the ones that make it.”

With each statement spoken, Alysım’s mind rattled, as if battered by a trauma. His brief tenure of confidence and cunning died like an ember falling into a sea. Broken, he nodded, capitulating. “Yes. Yes. What—what will you have me offer.”

“Your body. And the opportunity you present. We will tread the Paths together. Veylis will be expecting me. But she knows nothing of you. I promise you vengeance, Wanderer. But not utopia. Never utopia. That victory is beyond your nature for now. Do you accept these terms?”

“Yes,” Alysım swallowed. The fullness of his shape was seared into Avo then. The pact between them was forged. And suddenly, Avo felt his grasp over the Paths deepen, subtle oscillations of gold forming around him. “Yes.”

INTERNALIZING DEFINEMENT OF [PRE-COGNITION]....

“Good.” Avo poured the entirety of himself into the man, claiming them as a shared vessel. ***“Show me your knowledge of past and future. I will show you everything else besides.”***

And when the merging was done, when Alysım opened his eyes, a storm of *epiphanies* swept through him, and quietly, he began to weep. “Blind... so blind...”

“A tragedy we all share.”

He guided the man out from the mists a few hours thereafter, finding Naeko waiting for him just a few steps beyond. The Chief Paladin took in Alysım and frowned. “Avo? You in there too?”

+Yes. How much did you observe.+

“Most of it.” Naeko’s hands were trembling. A cut was healing along the length of his cheek.

“Good talk with Zein.”

He cocked his head. “Something like that. Almost.”

Each of these conversations were taking much from Naeko, but still he persisted—his spirit learning to endure. **“Come. There are things we need to discuss. People I would have you meet. Call Maru and Kare.”**

“I can’t let you burn her,” Naeko blurted.

Avo paused. **“Zein.”**

“I can’t. I threatened her—and... and I saw how it hurt her, and I liked it but—” Naeko wilted. “I hate her. But I don’t know if I can survive her really hating me. You need more... I can give you more but...”

He didn’t have the strength. Poor, poor warrior. So honed of violence and brutality, so broken of mind and heart.

+*He’s close!*+ Alysimsaid, excitement rising. +*You—you know what to say—you can break him?*+

“No.”

Avo’s answer was directed at both men at once.

“What?” Naeko said.

+*What?*+ Alysimsaid.

“No. You have made your decision known. I will respect it. Until you decide differently.”

The monk was immediately outraged. +*What are you doing! She’s—we can claim her now—*+

“I meant what I said,” Avo said. **“I will come to master all but rule none. I will not fall to your sins. Besides. I will have another use for her when she is freed.”**

+*What?*+ Alysimscreamed.

“What?” Naeko repeated, eyes widening. “What the hells are you playing at now?”

“Expectation. Anticipation.” Avo smiled using Alysım’s face. ***“I seek to shape the future with pieces from the past. All Paths lead to the trial. And it is there where I will sow the seeds of Veylis’ fated mistake.”***