

*People ended up calling this time the last days of the false peace, because that's what it was. A false peace. Sure, the Guilds weren't fighting, but those half-strands were bound to get into it sooner or later.*

*Even without us lighting the fuse, the High-Cuntus... well, she had her designs long before we did.*

*In the end, all I can say is that we weren't the ones to start the fire. We just tried to shape its path so that it would burn the half-strands we wanted it to burn. But what's the thing people say about best laid plans?*

*Shit fills your hand?*

*Well, imagine if the shit was fire, and that some of it jumped on your short hairs and traveled up the hole. Sometimes, the burning gets a little out of control and take something from you, too.*

*When you start a war, not all of your consangs are gonna make it. I kinda thought I knew that as an Enforcer, but I really wasn't ready to learn it again.*

*Not with people I actually cared about.*

*-Aedon "Fuckbringer" Chambers*

27-13

Last Days of the False Peace (I)

**-[Avo]-**

Avo tracked the busts of radiations from after, following the progress of the Omnitech scouting Knot as the golems inched along the threshold of the clashing Sunderwilds. He detected them by pure chance — noticed a discrepancy in the tapestry. They traveled as a stable series of impossibilities upon the Domain of Signals, their intermittent pulsing standing stark against a canvas eroded by entropy.

When disorder reigned, that which held structure was easily separated.

He had been studying Heaven-designation [**TERRAFORMATION MODULE-2994.04.04-Tundra-Mountainous-Christmas Forever Standard**] along the EGIs when he detected their coming. They were still over four hundred kilometers away, but from the paths they maintained, they clearly knew what they were looking for.

Once more, Avo found his suspicion rewarded. When he and Draus secured the Heaven from the enclave, he neglected to subsume immediately. His original plan was to offer it over to Omnitech to use as bargaining for the George Washington. Even then, he was paranoid of the Sleeper, and rightly so.

Calvino struggled to sift through the Heaven's database. The voidship it was bound to remained corrupted in data and thaumaturgy. Avo uncovered just as many flaws within its ontology, uncovering an extremely unstable mythology. Entire stretches of existence were missing from its simulated inner reality. The miracles it possessed portrayed a world of snow, mountains, festive cheer, and strangely a strong scent of ginger, but was also lined with naked rifts: clefts between the metaphysical and material.

Most curiously, when it detected certain deviations across the tapestry, it would respond by attempting to trigger its own phenomena. Small alterations made to existence. Too small to incur much rend, but too unnatural to escape being baseline.

***"It is CALLING the Sleeper,"*** the Techplaguer purred. ***"Connection not found. Connection not found."***

***+But Omnitech can detect it?+*** Avo asked.

***"See. BEACONS ARE MEANT TO BE SEEN."***

The Techplaguer's statement would further be proven when, hours later, a few hundred more instances of radiation jabbed at Avo's attention. The nearest Omnitech scouts were coming in from the coast of Noloth, just before the shattered sea. In the far distance, past fracturing waves of impossible black, the fangs of the Skuldvast rose high, splitting the sky, clouds, and space.

They came in across the waters, traveling along the scar charts where ruptures blunted each other's entropy. The bulk of Omnitech's units were concentrating at an adjacent rupture some fifteen thousand kilometers away from where [TERRAFORMATION MODULE-2994.04.04] was stored.

They used a geometric hurricane as cover, hiding as a budding field of static within the eye of the storm. The turning vectors of the winds bent the world's progression vector to its path, warping the land and twisting even the tectonic plates below into a mangled looking corkscrew.

Avo considered striking them with his **Pattern-Nullification**, dumping every bit of entropy he had over into the Domain of Signals using the Techplaguer's hell. Ultimately, he decided to let them be for now. He didn't want to betray his hand so soon, and formed ethereal watchtowers to monitor their progress.

**EDICT OF \_EXO-PARACOSM\_  
APPLYING DOMAIN OF (MATTER)**

**>CANON: MIND UPON MATTER - THE ARK INFUSES A PORTION OF MATERIAL REALITY WITH THEIR GHOSTS AND PARTIALLY BINDS THE MATTER TO THEIR MEMORY. A PERCENTAGE OF REND WILL RESERVED IN PROPORTION TO THE MASS AND NUMBER OF STRUCTURES INFUSED. THESE STRUCTURES CAN ONLY BE DESTROYED**

**IF THE GHOSTS INFUSED ARE DISRUPTED AND THE MATERIAL STRUCTURE IS DESTROYED AT THE SAME TIME.**

**->MORTALITY: IF THE INFUSED STRUCTURE IS DESTROYED, ARK WILL SUSTAIN MINOR (5%) BACKLASH.**

The watchtowers rose from the land in the shape of faint, flaming chains — near invisible from afar. Between each link was a pulsing Skimmer, projection wavelengths over perception over their respective checkpoints. Avo strategically placed four hundred and fifty of them in critical areas near all his facilities. His enclave, prison, bivouac, and the refugee processing site all fell under additional watch, and through them, he detected additional unwanted guests.

They were coming from all sides. Not only Omnitech now, but Highflame and the No-Dragons as well. Their vanguard came in the form of Knots, but Avo knew Godclads were certain to follow. Dipping into the tapestry, he felt them drain the Rend from critical ruptures and began inserting demiplane through stabilized zones.

Doubtless, they wanted this to be done in the form of an ambush.

The encroaching threat left a sour taste in Avo's mind. Veylis now knew a substantial amount about his operations with Kae's capture, and the path to his current enclave was no great difficulty of the Guilds. Still, the Sunderwilds would slow their approach and buy him time. Such was why he re-stationed his cadre out here. Such was also why the Guilds would find themselves sorely disappointed when they arrived.

If the High Seraph or the Infacer expected to catch him unaware and finish this fight quickly, they were nursing themselves on delusion. Casting the information over his cadre, he got his first response almost immediately.

*+Shit. That was fast,+ Draus said. +Guess they want to knock us off the board before we can even get to play.+*

Avo agreed. ***+Impatience is a poor habit. But they will learn. How are the passages coming along.+***

*+They'll be done by tomorrow.+*

***+Do them by today. Stop shooting people for now.+'***

The Regular responded with a disgusted snort. *+I'm teaching Glass how to be my spotter.+*

That gave Avo pause. ***+You renamed the Simulacra "glass"'+***

*+Full title's a mouthful.+*

***"A gorgeous spray; it was wonderful portraying the scene of your death."*** her Heaven of Reflections said. Avo shifted a fraction of his submind's consciousness over to Draus and found

her firing her projectile launcher through a pane of glass repeatedly. Within the pane were over a dozen portals that opened and closed as Draus directed them about. Smart fluid ammunition snapped across the void where Draus was floating, into the junction of her **Liminal Paracosmos**, before splitting apart into separate projectiles that all zipped forth across random places all over New Vultun — and beyond.

People were dying constantly. A Scaarthian just out of the shower, still humming a jaunty tune, was decapitated. A Highflamer tried to take a sip from a glass of champagne and caught a bullet down his throat instead. A Seeker was jogging over a puddle, enjoying the morning air. A heartbeat later, something skipped through his body and unzipped his insides from groin to throat. A father-son team of hunters high-fived over the bleeding carcass of a dying refugee. That moment of glory became their final forever as a projectile jumped out from a broken window and went through both of their skulls.

The Simulacrae sighed happily, just glad to catch all these scenes in their reflection. The Arsenalist said only one thing.

**“Locked. Firing.”**

Avo hummed. **+Actually looks fun. Focus on completing the passage. Can keep killing.+**

*+Fuck off, rotlick. Don't need your permission.+*

It was ever wonderful working with Draus. **+Just get the passage done. Want to start moving people up as soon as possible.+**

*+Yeah, yeah. Your other selves won't stop buggin' me 'bout it too. And that new Heaven of yours is doin' all kinds of weird shit. Triggered my wards more than once too. You sure you'll be able to stabilize it before the people get up here?+*

**+I'll strengthen their minds. They're going to be living inside it eventually.+**

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Across New Vultun, another submind took in the city he was soon to war over and mediated on the ambiance. For so long, he'd climbed, harnessed power for both his mind and his soul. His journey had started so low, in the depths of the Maw, carried up by cruelty, by sin, and by mercy and chance.

He still remembered rising into the city proper, standing in the lobby of the mega block as Essus wept over his dead son. Holograms depicting a brighter tomorrow danced, casting their flickering brightness over the survivors.

A world that was.

A world betrayed.

A world he now fought for.

Two months felt like lifetimes. He experienced so much, come so far, and when he looked back, a pain deeper than sorrow pried at his being.

This was not the dream. More and more, he knew the feeling of such loss.

His ghosts drifted, observed gutter communities of people just trying to live, listened to the laughter of children, surviving, playing, thriving, despite the desolation that was soon to come. Lurking under the shadow of vast cylindrical structures — structural supports passing through Layer One — the young played and survived, near feral in their bands, but still lost between hyper-alertness and juvenile fantasy.

Humanity wasn't meant to suffer the gutters, but they endured, they lived, they experienced, and from them came color, came expression, came belief; the seeds of divinity.

Higher yet was the spine, buzzing constantly like a hive, bullets flying between pursuing aeros and fleeing drones, ramshackle communities sprawling out around mega blocks ruled by syndicates. Hulking masses of plascrete, glass, and alloy sprawled out into weaving bridges that spilled over into the surrounding scenery like invasive tubes. Avo once regarded these hubs as enemy strongholds, and now found over sixty percent of them under his sway, the minds within overwritten by templates of Chambers, Regulars, and supporting Incubi.

In time, they would become his unseen army, poised for a Second Uprising against the Guilds. Noloth was a fool to think they could make better monsters than men, and Veylis would be foolish if she thought he would spare her Guild a proper starvation.

A stream of holographic advertisements cycled along the smoothness of a bulbous airship. A projective DeepNav highlighted new euthanasia clinic openings.

*+Try the new take-home BlissDream Pill! Drift off into the best sleep of your life! Your death will be dedicated to a Guild of your choice by the Thanatechs, and your family will be eligible for imp rewards and citizen lottery percentage bonuses!+*

The light carried a message of darkness, but the light was also just light for the people below. Just light, the contents ignored. So many still chose to live, despite it all.

Finishing with his mediation, Avo shifted his consciousness and sought Chambers. The man was overlooking a bio-manufacturing hidden two hundred kilometers outside New Vultun. The entire facility was a mesh of glass and flesh, with a few engineering stations and nanofabricators printing weapons and implants.

The man stood at the very top of the facility, looking down through the transparent layers. From one end, thousands of subverted Enforcers trickled in, were stripped of weapons and augs, gradually biologically altered of morphology and even identity.

Avo's overwrote their in layers. On the surface, he replaced the Enforcer's original egos with memories extracted from enclaves. Below, he shaped them to be like Regulars and Incubi, their deeper nature set to trigger when they came under attack. As Chambers directed channels of eldritch fire through each room, he seared new forms into their body, molding their flesh like clay. Many were made to resemble the enclavers post-baptism, and those finished with processing were placed in a final section of the facility where they were made to put on the proper apparel.

In time, these would be the forces waiting for the Guilds at the enclave. Not the scared people they intended to massacre.

"It's gonna be a pretty nasty surprise," Chambers said, funneling another rush of flame across a few hundred bodies in the third level. "Them Color-fucks won't know what hit 'em."

**+That is the hope. How are the Syndicates coming along.+**

"Work in progress," Chambers said. "I casted the Council of Fuck earlier."

**+Please don't call your copies that.+**

"It was agreed on with a vote and a knife fight. Sorry Avo."

**[You did this,] Abrel growled. [You gave this godsdamn degenerate pervert the confidence to become this.]**

All actions had a price.

"We'll be mostly done by the time the trial starts. Shit, you're pumping out so many mes we might be able to start two more Syndicates. Problem remains with Omnitech and Sanctus. The former keeps nulling hundreds of me like they see me coming. Ont-Shift shits all over your subversion for the second. We'll have supremacy in the gutters, but not complete control."

That was about as much as Avo expected. **+Then destroy them first when the time comes. Don't waste resources trying to claim them.+**

"Right. I'll get the bombs and nukes ready." A cast left Chambers, and he delegated instructions to his other selves. They had a system in the Chambers with the smallest penis was the most senior after the original. Otherwise, they were a relative flat organization. The former half-strand still wasn't what Avo would call a good leader, but with all the Incubi and Regulars running support for him, all he needed to make was executive decisions. Target critical weaknesses.

"We're gonna get her back soon, right?" Chambers asked. His mind bore a new kind of resolve. "Give Veylis the ass-fuck of a lifetime."

**+Yeah,+** Avo said, speaking with hope rather than worry. **+Don't think they'll see what we have coming.+**

Chambers chewed on his inner cheek. "Right. Well. I'm ready. More ready than I've been all my life." In his mind, he thought of what Dannis told him, and he kept himself controlled.

**+It is a joy to see you with purpose,+** Avo whispered, compelled to speak his thoughts.

"Yeah?" Chambers chuckled, and stopped his burning for a moment. "Imagine if my old man could see me now."

**+Don't think he would be able to meet your eye.+**

"Yeah. I don't think he would, would he? Ah. Fuck it. Fuck him. Fuck Zein. Fuck Veylis. I'm not gonna lie, it's funny as shit to me that doing the right thing is falling to a monster like you and a freak like me but..." He shrugged. "Jaus couldn't light the wick, maybe it just has to be us: the ones too fucked up to break properly in the first place."

Avo laughed. **+To being fortunate outcast in a sunken time.+**

"To being the cocks for once, and not the asshole."

**[Wow,]** Abrel murmured. **[Regular poetry from both of you.]**

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As the number subverts grew in the bio-processing facility, Avo manifested his Overheaven in the City of Light. Once more, he regarded the people below from his tower, and from them emanated the weight of trauma and shock.

The days had not been kind to them. One crisis after another left them reeling, and the truth of the world was already overwhelming. All the information Avo fed them rendered them anxious, and more than a few had to be drawn back from the verge of madness. But beyond keeping them stable, he left them relatively untouched. Wanted to speak with them as honestly as possible.

**+Dice. Are they ready?+**

The once-girl was standing at the very apex of the tower, and the cat batted at one of Avo's branching ghosts while cursing him mentally. "No," Dice said. "But they will never be. They're waiting for the gate to open. So the dog can come out. So they can stop being afraid and just act."

The perspective left by her past was a twisted one, but even that offered its insight.

**+Are you ready?+** Avo asked.

The girl's mechanical head whined as it turned. "Yes. Death is easy. But life. It's been interesting. I want to go to the void. It's new. I haven't seen it. It might be nice."

Again, the juveniles in the gutters called back to him. Near feral from violence, but still a child somewhere inside.

Accepting her words with a grunt, he extended his sequences across the city, and from them spread tendrils of ghosts and splinters like sprouted seeds.

In seconds, he was connected to every inhabitant still present in this City of Light, and began what was his third formal address.

**+War is coming,** Avo said. He spoke to them directly and saw no point in lying. They should know what potential fate awaited them. They should be offered a clear choice. He channeled his most recent memories, edited to be palatable for mortal minds, and immediately he felt some of them shudder, the suppleness of their cognition recoiling at the Ladder.

"Oh, no, please *no*," a woman whimpered, rocking her newborn close to her chest.

A man simply sat down, curled into a ball, and began to cry.

Dread and despair rose like steam from countless minds across the city. Avo allowed it. These were appropriate responses, and they should know the truth of the world.

But then he continued, for he was not done. And neither were they. **+There will be an attack soon. An attack by powers beyond you. Beyond all your comprehension.+** Avo paused. **+Beyond even me. But I intend to fight. To make a stand here. To see them bloodied and broken from their failed raid. I will fight them using reality and cognition as my weapons. But this is not your war. But this does not need to be your fate. I hear your fear. And I have been making arrangements.+**

**+I understand that none of you asked for this. Whatever your sins, whoever you were, this was not your fault. You are merely caught in the waves of history. But there is no avoiding this. Not when the prize is mastery over every form of reality. Every future possible.+**

Most of them were still listening, though they didn't fully grasp the severity of the conflict. Not truly. Their minds didn't have the capacity to, but they understood. He gave them enough detail to understand.

**+There will be an end soon. Everything will be decided within a year. The shaping of reality that follows will determine the fate of humanity for however long eternity may last. This war is beyond you, but this war concerns you. You cannot escape it. Not fully.+**

**+There are people who believe that they should decide the fates of your children. Decide that you must live in their paradise. Or be punished for rejection. I am not one of these people. I will make that known now. You will be given options. There will be other enclaves made available for you. I will not know where you are. I will not know how to**



***find you. You will be able to go there. Find sanctuary. I make no guarantees that tranquility is certain to follow. But there will be peace. Rest. Respite. At least for some time.+***

***+For those of you who wish to fight, who wish to face the coming end, I welcome you. I will give you all you need to take back your life. To express yourself one final time against the only foe you should ever hate. The truest foe. The highest foe. The tyrant of time. A daughter who deceives all. Even herself. A tyrant that fears another's wants. Who fears a paradise that doesn't resemble hers. Who seeks to make true an unwilling god. Who seeks to control all possible future so the only one that remains will be her.+***

Avo paused and unleashed new memories. He showed them what Veylis could do. He showed them what she took, and what she could do. He showed them the enormity of her sin and the power she wielded.

Jaus was screaming. Jaus was always screaming.

***+There will be no peace when you walk this path. An undignified end may await. But you will know what it means to hold your own fate. To master your own destiny. You will not go with those who choose sanctuary. I will take you to an old frontier. An old frontier once colonized and then lost by humanity. An old frontier in the darkness above. I will build a citadel from nothing. I will grant you power over nothing. And I give you experiences that no one will ever truly understand. You will be first. You will be unique. And you will be Ensouled. Given power over reality. To defend reality. To defend your future.+***

***+I have spoken my piece, if you desire to make another choice, if you desire to make your own choice, then let your thoughts shine in your minds. I will see them. I will respect them. I may not accept them. But I will provide you whatever freedoms I can. I will do my utmost to see you become all you can.+***

A deathly silence gripped the city, and everything seemed still, aside from a certain uplift that was actively trying to boo, though the cat really didn't have the throat for it.

***+The false peace is at an end,+*** Avo said, reminding them of the coming war. ***+There is no avoiding what is to come. Accept. Accept and decide. Accept and choose your own color.+***

And as soon as he finished, he cast the memories over to Marlowe. While the city reeled once more. A breathless laugh came from the thoughtcaster still up in the void. She spent her time aboard the Manta, preparing the planetary ring for habitation. A joy was burning in her, and its resonance wasn't so different from Chambers' purpose. It was life in the moment. It was the thrill to be here in the present.

***+Nice speech,+*** Marlowe said. The hairs along her skin were standing up, and her breath was slightly hitched. ***+This will cut one hell of a promo at your trial.+***

***+I will provide anything else you need,+ Avo said. +But don't embellish. We give New Vultun the full truth. All of it. Make them feel this weight. Not only the enclavers who need to decide.+***