

## XIII

The voidborn leviathan let loose a silent roar as it twisted around and dove through the currents of star dust and gravitational waves, pushing aside wandering asteroids and orbiting belts of ice, all the while the creatures on its vast star-specked hide fought a never-ending war. Within the vast halls of its hollowed-out bowels, the Absolute and his untold millions of servants continued their machinations.

Unlike most others of his kind, he preferred to exist in this manifested reality of his own making, while the majority of Absolutes opted to exist as metaphysical concepts that, despite rarely manifesting into physicality, possessed vast powers over the lives of mortals. But he was still young in the grand scheme of things, so it was impossible to say if his predilection would last.

There was also the uncomfortable truth that, besides himself, the only other two Absolutes he knew of who preferred manifested reality were: the unpredictable ‘Chaotic Convergence’, whose powers over dimensions and reality made him unhinged and bizarre, even by the standards of the Great Ones who were enigmatic by nature; and the ‘Flayed Lady’, betrayal incarnate and the Seeker’s sworn nemesis. Both these figures were untethered from the adherent bonds that all other Absolutes observed, but at least in this the Seeker was unlike the two, as he had pledged his eternal servitude to the Watcher of Worlds.

The newly-Ascended Fleshcrafter wandered the halls of his creation, while directing his constructs towards all the tasks that he had in mind. Within the halls of the voidborn leviathan, he had erected a vast library, housing all the knowledge he possessed and which expanded with every moment that passed; a laboratory that would’ve made his surrogate father weep and within which he performed such magnificent feats of creation that other Absolutes sought his services; an atrium that thronged with seeds and plants of every nature imaginable, most of which were discovered when he wandered the realms or received as offerings from his adherents in the vast universe his reach was spread across; a vivarium full of beasts, humanoids, insects, and fish, all in their own vast enclosures and thriving thanks to his gifted touch; and lastly a ritual chamber that allowed him to cast his intellect outward to possess any creature and allow for traversal of the realms, as well as for summoning specimens to his collection, and also enabling him to humour the requests from those who invoked his name in ritual song.

The Tome Keeper came to a halt within a large ritual circle carved into the obsidian floor of the vast chamber. Its grooves were filled with luminescent crystals that glowed when his aura flowed

across them. He swept out one of his many porcelain arms, activating the spell that allowed him to observe those rituals that beseeched him. He gazed upon one such ritual, wondering if they would reward him with newfound knowledge or waste his time.

From his lofty view, it was as if a collection of bacteria had come together to form a specific shape that caught his eye, but the shape and the bacteria themselves were transformed by his mere observance of them. Perhaps because his gaze opened a gate between the veil that separated reality from the denizens of the void, the bacteria were soon swallowed whole by a tide of abstract monsters, wiping them out before their plea could be heard.

The Seeker turned to observe another ritual. This time it was like looking at a hive of industrious ants, within the depths of which its leaders were plotting to conquer a neighbouring hive that greatly outnumbered them and thus they beseeched him.

Unlike the bacteria, their ritual was done well and he briefly wondered how they had learnt such a thing, but it was no doubt thanks to the Envoys of the Absolutes, who were manifold and spread the names of their Masters across the vast universe to any sentient or semi-intelligent species that might understand them.

The ants rewarded him with a living sacrifice, which was absorbed by the ritual and added to his vivarium, as well as tomes’ worth of newfound knowledge about their world. These acquisitions pleased him, so he provided them with the power they sought. With a single word, he manifested a spontaneous transformation within the invoking ant, turning it into a giant ant-eater. It was not an intentionally-malicious act on his part, but this monstrosity turned upon its own hive and its denizens, before continuing towards their neighbouring enemy.

Though he was now an Absolute, a being of untold power and wisdom, he let out a simple sigh.

“These powers are difficult to control,” he muttered, before training his gaze on the next ritual that sought his aid.

This time it was a lone flea, whose mate had perished and which it wished to see revived. The Realm Traveller was pleased with the perfection of the ritual, as well as the knowledge gifted as a toll, and thus granted the invoker the knowledge of a spell he himself had used while a mortal: the ‘Twinned Heart Rite’ that called upon the power of the Eternal Serpent, whose domain was eternity and who in many worlds were invoked for Necromantic purposes. He was glad to see that this time his gift did not negatively impact his dutiful adherent.

The following dozen-or-so rituals he responded to were all similar to these first three in the type of plea and the outcome of his answer to them. There were a few rituals which were hastily and

incorrectly performed, and he exacted a punishment upon the invokers of these, as to waste the time of an Absolute was a crime of cosmic proportions.

The Tome Keeper was about to exit his ritual circle and return to his laboratory, when a ritualistic plea came from the world he had ascended from. When he beheld the invoker, he recognised them as his own progeny, who shared his blood and who had been moulded by his hands when he was still mortal. He was using a ritual uniquely tied to the Seeker, known as the ‘Erudition Barter’ and was demanding to know if he would die before his foretold destiny would manifest. It was a simple ritual that required a toll of knowledge in exchange for the answer to a question.

Though he wished that he was able to simply tell his progeny, the Sovereign, what carefully-laid plans were unfolding to bring his destiny to fruition, it was not a simple thing. An Absolute could not converse with a mortal in any coherent way and the result was that his spoken words and guidance would take on an enigmatic and cryptic form, often leading to something that was not truly understood until after it had transpired.

The Seeker was frustrated that he could not easily reassure his progeny of what was coming. He wished to inform him of the future events he was certain would come to pass, as well as reveal to him the measures he had taken.

He wanted to tell him of the three Chosen he had picked and how they would stand by his side to evolve the Jealous Spark the Sovereign possessed, but which was killing him from the inside. He wanted to warn him of the Guardian’s Champion who was riding the waves towards the continent, as well as tell him how, no matter what obstacles he put in this Champion’s way, he always overcame them.

There was so much he wanted to relay to his pleading offspring, such as what boon he had gifted his adoptive mother, how much he now understood about the destiny that was in store for Iskandarr, and why the Great Ones had given him the title of ‘Sovereign’.

But in the end, his words became a puzzle, and he felt that his answer to the plea was a disappointing one.

The only way forward was to make certain the events he had prepared would transpire. Though the Tome Keeper’s progeny was opposed to the Champion of the Guardian, he knew that the Guardian himself was not opposed to the Sovereign’s destiny, as the Absolute had its own sinister plans in store for its Champion, into which Iskandarr’s rise to something worthy of his lofty title would play a great role.

The Realm Traveller left his ritual circle and strode down the fleshy halls of his voidborn abode towards his laboratory. He still had more things to create and things he needed to trade with others of his kind to possess.

He had lain his plans carefully, but there was still much for him to do for them to bear fruit.