

“NETHER BREACH DETECTED!”

-The Gatekeeper

25-1

These Flames Above and Below

**ONTOLOGICAL ALTERATION DETECTED
ADAPTING STILLBORN-PATTERN LIMINAL FRAME...**

**ERROR - UNABLE TO ISOLATE SOUL FROM HEAVEN
ERROR - FRAME RUPTURE DETECTED
ERROR - CYCLER CONDITION UNKNOWN
ATTENTION - UNKNOWN ONTOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT DETECTED
->UNKNOWN ONTOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT ORIGIN > USER [EGO]**

UNKNOWN ONTOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT IDENTIFIED AS USER [AVO] EGO

**WARNING - USER [AVO] NOW CLASSIFIED AS _ARK_
->ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE NOW INTERWOVEN WITH COMPONENT ONTOLOGICS**

SOLUTION: MERGE SOUL WITH ALTERED USER ONTOLOGY

INITIATING MERGE... 100%

**ATTENTION: EMBODIMENT CREATED
->(CONCEPTUALIZATION)**

[OVERHEAVEN] CREATED - AVO, THE KNOWER OF TOTALITY (CONCEPTUALIZATION)

**ATTENTION - DOMAIN SHIFTING POSSIBLE – NEW STILLBORN DEVELOPMENTAL
PATHWAY DISCOVERED - [CONCEPTION OF ONTOLOGY]**

INTERNALIZED DOMAIN OF (CHRONOLOGY) MENDED

CYCLERS CONJOINED

REDIRECTING REND...

WARNING: UNABLE TO UNGRAFT ATTACHED ONTOLOGICS

SOLUTION: ASSIMILATE ONTOLOGICS INTO OVERHEAVEN

**ASSIMILATING ALL COMPROMISED ONTOLOGICS UNDER HEAVEN OF
(CONCEPTUALIZATION): [WOUNDMOTHER]; [FARDRIFTER]; [TECHPLAGUER];
[ARSENALIST]**

WARNING: REND CAPACITY RISING...

**ASSIMILATING EXCESS ONTOLOGICS: [STEEL MAGNOLIA]; [RAVAGER OF THE
DEPTHS]; [DAWNGAZER]; [THE CHARIOTEER OF DIRECTIONALITY]; [NIGHTGOUGER];
[SKYGRASPER]; [CENSOR OF DETAILS]; [HEART OF NOLOTH]**

ASSIMILATION COMPLETE

ADAPTION COMPLETE

LIMINAL FRAME STABILIZED

Avo changed, and his Frame changed with him. Memories drifted across his awareness, but also spread through his Soul, extending out from him like tendrils that bifurcated the flames. It took him a moment to realize his Metamind's sequences had been internalized, and another for the haze to fully clear from his cognition.

His Soul remained the nexuses of his perception, but no longer did he linger in a fiery vacuum filled with little more than ontologies, cyclers, and his Soul. Phantasmal architecture rose from the burning waves, orbiting him as the ghost-made continents they were. More than this, however, he could feel his Soulfire suffusing his ghosts, pouring streams of gold into their structures, into his mind.

They drifted upward, and Avo followed their movements—was shocked to discover a beacon of phantasmal fire projected upward from a gaping wound in his liminal border. Threads of ghosts crawled upward toward the firmament, Avo gazed through them, felt through them, *was* them.

Parts of his being were drifting back up into the Nether, were pulling information back down. Or maybe that wasn't the right way of looking at things. Maybe he now embodied an aspect of the Nether itself.

His Frame... it classified him as an ARK now. He felt himself change, but the outcome of his most recent apotheosis remained unexplored.

As he turned his perception outward, he found his Soulfire tinged with a second flame within. The ethereal inferno of his conflagration and the empty space between were filled with places, streets, sensations, and more.

Memories. Memories lined his Liminal Frame. Memories grown from him, born of him, that composed him.

And within these memories were his Heavens embraced. The Woundmother reached out to sink its tendrils into the surrounding architecture, and in the streets below, thousands of templates looked up to take in the Heaven of Blood that now shared their space. Fardrifter sailed over the sprawl, surprised to be alive, surprised more at the changing of this enclosure. The Techplaguer, meanwhile, found itself superimposed upon a phantasmic—its antennae was protruding from atop one of Avo's Auto-Seances, broadcasting reverberations of wisping static.

But even as Avo took in his Heavens, he found himself able to do *more*. Able to feel exactly where they were within him, exactly how they were bound to his skein—his ontological makeup. Each one was tangled by time, such was metaphysical expression that melted them into him as well.

Time. A Domain that allowed him to bridge all his ontologies. A pattern in existence that all others operated within.

[It was like I... momentarily vanished,] the Fardrifter said. As its spoke, he found himself able to see out from its perspective, brush his memories using wind and shadow and time.

[The end did not come. But what is this? What pattern now bolsters my structure.] The Woundmother felt at itself and discovered a ceaseless trickle of ghosts radiating from its blood.

[I can hear so much... so, so much,] the Techplaguer breathed. And it did, for it heard all the other templates, and became as if a satellite for countless streams of communication.

No longer did his Heavens exist as entities separate from him. They were now substructures to his Overheaven, to his very nature. Avo could feel them flowing into him, manifested because of him, manifested as him, and vice versa. They occupied a place within him greater than a phantasmic but symmetrical to a template, and his miracle-infused memories preserved their metaphysical forms.

What changed too was his understanding of their Domains—their ontological roots. Every Heaven embodied something and altered reality's rules within their structures. Countless strings spilled out from Avo, Domains of Blood, Shadow, Lightning, Speed, Perception, Information, Biology, and more.

Each was a pattern unto themselves, but each did not exist in isolation from the others. All patterns were interconnected, and a Domain was compromised when one pattern was woven over others in specificity. One absolute to dominate its lesser relatives. The bridging of two Domains thereafter granted a structure of ontological complexity, and from this was a Heaven born.

The realization flowed with his intuition, and Avo found himself above to sense the currents of the tapestry still. He could part himself from existence more than ever before—easily done

thanks to his persisting connection to the Nether. More than that, however, he could pull at the strings making up his Heavens, and as he did, he felt his ghosts sink into the sacrifices fueling their thaums.

Could he alter them this way? Even change a Heaven's Domains?

His suspicions were distracted by a note of rising disbelief.

[How the fuck do you keep doing this?] Abrel breathed. Her template was sitting on the ledge of a building, staring up at Woundmother slowly growing itself across the recollected district. A level below her, another world unfurled. A Rend-choked reflection of the Woundmother slept in trauma-infested waters, and lower still was the Soul itself. A Soul crowned by a world made from a mental world. **[You stood. You delivered. You pulled another transformation out your ass. Another. Jaus, Avo, what the hells are you anymore.]**

[Your internalized Domain of Chronology—that's why this is possible,] Kae said. The Agnos' template materialized next to Abrel's like a specter. But her shape was truer than mere memory, for now, Avo's memories were entwined with the essence of other Heavens. Blood wove her being into shape and her ghosts traveled like gales in the wind.

She rose to take in his changing mindscape with awe. Arching scales of curling gold swept across Avo's inner world, and as he dissolved the simulated architecture of his memories, Avo found the dragons all interconnected like a nest of strings. Something about the disfigurement made her recoil—he plugged wounds with wounds, and now his cyclers effectively functioned a single ring born from several, each revolution folding into another.

Festering darkness traveled downward into the traumas, into the Hells, and suddenly Avo felt his cog-cap spiking as well. As the strain of entropy built in his Soul, so too did cognitive agony swell in his mind.

Assimilated.

His Metamind wasn't as it was. Neither was his Soul. He was something else altogether once more.

[Your cyclers breaching kept you from dying,] Kae began, watching as aspects of mind and matter were wed within Avo. No longer was lighting but memory, and from ghosts did blood and materials flow. The wind brushed across his sequences, moved to its own across in every mindscape, and his shadows came alive like portals that heeded only the Overheaven's will. **[The dragons did not rupture completely, and breach in your Frame gave you means to cross over without suffering Rend. But it did more than just that. It—it must have allowed the full nature of your mind to pass over; your Metamind to follow after the ego. The connection to the Nether proves this. And... maybe that is how you are now. Your Souls**

has reforged your nature into a god. Because this is how gods were born. You have... no one else has ever crossed this threshold before. I don't think anyone else could.]

"Avo?" Chambers' Soul screamed outside Avo's liminal boundary. +Avo? You alive? You alright? Your dragons are twisting around everything and shit. They're sticking out from your Meta! Hey, how'd you get that to work anyway?+

Reflexively, Avo tried to reach out and thread a ghost through Chambers. Yet, this time, he needed no link to hear what the man was saying. Every thought from the man made Avo's very being tremble with resonance. His Woundmother reacted the same way to blood, as did the Fardrifter with space, or the Techplaguer with signals. He sensed Draus and Dice too, could sup their thoughts as if they were his own.

The sheer intrusiveness left his cognition spinning, but the flash of a sudden warning delayed his consideration of these implications.

INFUSING HELLS WITH TRAUMAS...

WARNING: HELLS APPROACHING OVERLOAD

REND CAPACITY - 87%

RESURRECTION - RESUMING... 4%

Right. He fixed his cyclers. But his Rend was still building, and he needed to get the entropy out of himself before he resurrected or he'd just die again. But how was he going to do that without venting? He was technically dead at present; there was something for his Hells to release their sickness into.

[Maybe not,] Kae's template said. [You are... well, I have never seen a single individual be classified as an Ark by a Frame before—and an idea of an Overheaven... that—we never had that. You're breaking too much new ground for me to properly follow, but I think we can use this to our advance. You can still access the Nether, yes?]

"Yeah," Avo replied, and when he spoke, all his domains and templates spoke through him. Everything he did bore a new weight now. A greater layering of thaumaturgy.

[Good. Now... Let's try to establish a new Hell of some kind—something for your Domain of Conceptualization. You might be able to metaphysically alter minds through that. Maybe you can connect to the other members of the cadre—transfer some of your Rend over to them.]

He let Kae guide him as he began his work. But this time, his Frame spat forth no prompt, and neither did he need simulated options to achieve his desired outcome.

His Soul descended once more and he found himself diving down through a sea of mem-data, deeper yet through a single pattern—his new Embodiment of Conceptualization—as he found himself in the tapestry once more.

He saw himself as he was, but isolated the festering dark within his being. They were stored in the patterns of his assimilated ontologies, triggering inconsistencies that left patterns trembling, threatening to tear. Yet from these patterns flowed nodes that represented his Hells' canons. Ways for him to calm the turbulence that gnawed at his existence. With him parted from baseline reality, he lacked access to most catalysts, leaving most nodes trapped against a dead end.

His pattern of conceptualization, however, was not yet cultivated.

No time like coming death to learn some new rules.

GHOSTS - [100,134,996]
THAUMIC OUTPUT - 144,870 THAUM/c

AVO, THE KNOWER OF TOTALITY
->EMBODIMENT OF (CONCEPTUALIZATION)
->DOMAINS OF ([VARIABLE])

DOMAIN SHIFT ACTIVATED - CONCEPTION OF ONTOLOGY IN EFFECT

And all at once, he found his ghosts guiding his thaums, fragments of consciousness binding temporarily with wills to reweave the very nature of his Heavens and shape his ontology to something that could serve his needs.

Right now, though, his problem wasn't one of architecture but a channel by which to expel his Rend. Thankfully, he still had unused thaums left to spend and with only his Embodiment of Conceptualization and mind flowing free from the confines of his Frame, the choice of his newest enhancement was quite simple.

CANON OF (CONCEPTUALIZATION) - 144,870 THAUMS/c

Avo paused momentarily to take in the amount of thaums that were flowing through his Embodiment. ***"All of them?"***

[Because you are assimilated maybe... your nature is interwoven. Unless you graft an external cyclus, things within you of a conjoined chronology will not be considered separate constructs... maybe? Avo, this isn't the important thing, make a new mind-hell first or you're going to die!]

EMBODIMENT: (CONCEPTUALIZATION) - 144,870 THAUMS/c

->DEFINEMENT: IGNORANCE (IV) - *"I am all you don't know, and all the world does not know. I am the missing detail. I am what goes unnoticed. I am a warmind reforged—made complete through your rebirth."*

APPLYING DOMAIN OF (ENTROPY)

->CANON: UNSEEN, UNKNOWN, UNMADE - THE ARK PERMANENTLY DESTROYS AN ENTITY'S ABILITY TO LEARN SOMETHING THEY DO NOT ALREADY KNOW. REND IS EMPTIED BASED ON THE SPECIFICITY OF THE SEVERED KNOWLEDGE AND HOW MUCH KNOWLEDGE IS TO BE SEVERED PERPETUALLY.

WARNING: THIS ACTION WILL DAMAGE THE FABRIC OF THE NETHER AND INFLICT COMPLETE COGNITIVE COLLAPSE ON A STABLE EGO

REND CAPACITY - 91%

VENT! VENT! VENT!

[Potent!] Kae breathed, [Wait. One more thing. Maybe we can... we can adapt this. Use this. Avo! Apply a Domain of Matter to this canon.]

A new configuration of the canon materialized, but Avo found himself slowly weaving the Hell, guiding patterns that could afflict the material world out from pathways once containing nothing but pure thought. He converted branches from his Woundmother and grew them from his new Embodiment. Kae was no less bewildered than he, but her plan slowly revealed itself, and Avo found numb with anticipation.

APPLYING DOMAIN OF (MATTER)

->CANON: WITHERED MEMORY - THE ARK DRAWS A SECTION OF MATERIAL REALITY INTO THEIR MIND VIA THEIR GHOSTS. THE AMOUNT OF GHOSTS VARIES BASED ON MASS AND SITUATIONAL COMPLEXITY, AND ALL GHOSTS ALONG WITH THE MATTER THEY CONTAIN WILL BE UNMADE BY REND-INFUSED TRAUMAS.

REND CAPACITY - 93%

VENT! VENT! VENT!

[What the fuck,] Corner breathed, trying to understand the canon Avo just cultured within himself.

The newly ascended Ark wasted no more time. He flung his awareness outward from his Frame, pouring his perception outward as he began to take in anything comprised of material substance. Ghosts flooded out from him as they swallowed the walls of his tower, and further did they flow downward like a waterfall. All that they touched turned from matter to memory; it

was as if an unseen presence was unzipping the blood-made spire from the outside. Pieces just vanished upon ethereal currents, slashing wounds spreading to become fissures. With all that went missing beyond, new structures entered Avo's awareness without difficulty.

The strands composing his skein jolted with violence as his Embodiment siphoned existing patterns out of the actual world, but as he cast mentally subsumed mass into his traumas, he sacrificed three thousand memories and flattened the distortion.

And with that, the strain prying at his very ontology lessened, and Rend flowed out from him, injecting his debt of entropic disbelief into to another structure; a sacrifice was found in his stead.

REND CAPACITY - 87%

Inside his mind, Kae began to giggle, then laugh. **[This... this is... we... I have created a masterpiece. I have created salvation. I have created victory. This cannot be possible. But we are doing it. We are doing it. Avo. You're a miracle. You just turned yourself into a *Concept* given metaphysical shape.]**

More of the external reality unraveled. He found Chambers and Dice trying to comprehend the sudden annihilation taking place around him, and quietly, he simmered with growing pleasure.

REND CAPACITY - 84%

REND CAPACITY - 79%

REND CAPACITY - 75%