



A leviathan amongst leviathans swam through the blackness. It was a voidborn creature that had, by conscious effort and prodding, been turned physical such that its enormous corpus might be used. Few in existence possessed the power to perform such an undertaking, but the individual behind it was no mere mortal. To his practiced hands and powerful mind it was a disturbingly-easy thing to manifest.

‘Voidborn’ was how this particular individual referred to the floating consciousnesses that roamed the star-specked demesne of the cosmos. In the same way that tiny specs of water contained a world unto themselves full of tiny microbial life, so did the dimensional-spanning black void contain life, which, when compared to its infinite ever-expanding vastness, seemed microscopic.

The individual was one amongst a few in existence. A member of a veritable pantheon or disparate council, where the only unifying element was their reality-defining powers. One controlled the very element of sight; another held the spark of betrayal and envy; a third was the endlessness incarnate; and many more distinct entities stood amongst them. This individual was a newcomer to their ageless order and was personified by knowledge and the pursuit thereof, as well as elements like experimentation and curiosity.

A pursuit of knowledge was a pernicious thing, for its very definition encompassed all things known, whether large or small. And knowledge had a way of always expanding, like the universe within which it lived.

The individual was already known by many names despite his recent introduction to the disparate order of entities, many of whom were as old as the first spark of light in the universe. A great portion of the order also consisted of ascended creatures, who had become the incarnation of their element. The order was likewise known by many names, but he favoured the term ‘Absolutes’, for it was a simple and clear name. It spoke to the fact that those within the order were the Absolutes of the cosmos and the ever-expanding universe with its countless overlapping dimensions.

Once, this Absolute had carried a simple name, but now he was known by titles such as ‘*Tome Keeper*’, ‘*Realm Traveller*’, and ‘*Seeker*’. Once he entreated with the Absolutes, but now he was considered their equal in many ways. But there were those few who were still elevated above his stature and one of which to whom he owed fealty. These were entities of such power that their very existence gave meaning to the universe and whom he called ‘The Supreme Ones’.

The four who were known by such lofty titles to him were: ‘*The Watcher of Worlds*’, whose very existence meant that the universe could be perceived; ‘*The Eternal Serpent*’, who made possible the endless-and-ceaseless expanse of the universe and promised that, even after all life was wiped from the countless worlds across the cosmos, the universe itself would continue; ‘*The First Light*’, from whom the first spark of life and creation was granted and who in turn personified the light within the living creatures across the cosmos, often referred to as souls; and lastly, ‘*The Void*’, who was the reason for the darkness between stars and their worlds, as well as the strange lightless life that floated there, the so-called Voidborn.

The Tome Keeper had been raised from mortal life to become an Ascendant thanks to his strict adherence to the Watcher of Worlds and its schemes into which he was involved. For despite their awesome power and spheres of influence, many of the Absolutes, even the Supreme Ones, schemed to attain more power and influence. They sought to attain such power by swaying the worlds infested with life, as well as spreading their elements further than their natural states.

For the Watcher, the schemes were carefully-laid and spanned aeons, always seeking to further the sight of mortal life, such that they would gaze up at the stars and imagine that the stars gazed back.

For Ascendants like the individual, such schemes were too long in coming to fruition and thus they sought the more immediate reward in swaying the mortal minds to their adherence. Often, they banded together, as there was little downside to be considered just a constituent part of a greater whole. However, there was one Ascendant, the one personified by the spark of betrayal and envy, who sought dominion, for they would not accept being treated as equal. No, they wanted to be above all others.

The Seeker knew this Ascendant as ‘*The Flayed Lady*’, but they were also known as ‘*Betrayer*’ or ‘*Flayed Lord*’. This maddening entity had even turned away from their adherence to the Watcher, which most other Absolutes frowned upon, for the Supreme Ones were deserving of fealty and an Absolute who showed no fealty was a festering wound in their great order.

In his mortal life, the Realm Traveller had been hounded by her servants and vile spark of betrayal, purely because of his adherence to the Watcher, whom the Flayed Lady sought to undermine at every turn.

Even after his ascendancy, as he worked to grow his library of knowledge and hone his unique craft through endless experimentation, his vessel was always under assault by the monsters born from her realm of blood and envy.

The Tome Keeper wandered the bowels of the leviathan voidborn as it swam through the blackness of the cosmos. He had brought its vast corpus into reality, making it the vessel from within which his powers could be exerted.

Some Absolutes existed only as concepts, such as the Void or the Guardian, and thus required no place for their true bodies. The rest existed in a state of duality: corporeal and living; and incorporeal and spread across the endless universe in a metaphysical state by the countless incarnations of their defining elements. If the Watcher represented sight, it existed at once within every eye of every creature, and even within the minds of those creatures who perceived in alternate ways.

The Seeker was young and still recalled his time as a mortal, thus having a body rooted in something close to a real space was a comfort. Although his body experienced the universe quite differently now, with his sensations tied more to his unseen metaphysical state and his corporeal body lacking such senses as what he had wielded in mortal life. And though he was bipedal like the human he had once been, his body was a far cry from his former state, with a visage like liquid porcelain that altered shape in accordance with his whims.

While touring the halls of his leviathan star vessel, the creations he had constructed moved back-and-forth on either side of him, following the commands they had been given. Quite a number of his constructs worked on repairing the voidborn vessel from within, as the servants of the Flayed Lady kept up a steady assault on his new abode.

Despite being the very embodiment of knowledge and its pursuit, he had not yet learnt if a being such as himself could die, and thus he prepared for the possibility just in case. Quite a number of his servants roamed the exterior of the star vessel, crawling and walking upon the strange epidermis of the hollowed-out voidborn, while repelling the ceaseless horde of invaders.

“You have made quite an enemy in the Flayed One,” observed a voice next to him. The speaker had appeared beside him without notice, but the many creations that crowded them did not seem to notice his presence.

“How do you keep finding a way inside my demesne?” the Tome Keeper asked.

The other Absolute looked at him with a frustrating grin on his face. Although it was uncertain if he had been a human before his ascension like himself, he always seemed to wear the guise of one, with a gaunt and long face, covered in pale skin, and featuring dark dagger-sharp eyes and shoulder-long black hair. He also wore a suit, like the ones the humans of the world known as ‘Earth’ liked to wear.

The Seeker continued walking down the halls of sculpted fleshy walls, while the endless stomping and pitter-patter of his servants echoed through the star vessel as overlapping vibrations. “I have a guess as to how.”

The black-haired man’s grin widened. “It’s incorrect.”

He frowned in response. “You are a nuisance and your presence hurts my productivity.”

“Thank you.”

“Are you here to retrieve your new tool?”

“You have such a crude way of referring to my dolls,” the man replied with an exaggerated frown.

“Do you have my reward?”

The man clapped the Tome Keeper on the back in an overly familiar way. His very touch altered the porcelain skin, turning it into mercury that dripped to the floor in large globules, before sprouting legs and running off.

“Stop that. Have you any idea how long it takes for me to clean up after every one of your visits?”

“I know that you secretly enjoy it, Seeker.”

They came to a stop in an atrium of sorts. The roof here was the literal skin of the voidborn they were within, though it was translucent to the point that the void, bright stars, and multi-hued cosmic dust were visible from within.

Within this portion of the vessel, the Realm Traveller kept his plants, expanding it with every visit to a new world. A forest of unique trees covered a quarter of the room, occupied by specimens that came from many different dimensions, with some neighbours following different laws of reality, but yet able to co-exist within the boundaries of his influence.

“I see that my last gift came in handy,” the visitor remarked. Though he wore the guise of a human, he carried the title of *Chaotic Convergence* with his element being reality and dimensions. Like the Seeker, he was an Ascended mortal who had caught the eye of the Watcher through his extraordinary gift. Strangely, he preferred to be called ‘Gambit’.

“It was not a gift. Remember *what* I paid in exchange for it?”

He replied with an annoying shrug of his lanky shoulders.

The Tome Keeper held out his hand and accepted the doll that a servant had brought to him from his laboratory. Then he handed it to the visitor.

“Give me my reward and then begone.”

Gambit lifted the doll into the air. The Seeker had made it in the semblance of a panda by his request, and it had the exterior of knitted wool, while containing something like clockwork mechanisms within, as well as a shard of sentience the visitor himself had supplied.

“Are you my father?” asked the panda doll.

“That’s right!” exclaimed the mad man and squeezed it tightly.

The Tome Keeper held out one of his arms to accept the pearl he was promised in return. It took a moment for Gambit to hand it over, and, as soon as the pearl fell into the awaiting hand, he vanished.

The Absolute remained standing in place, staring at the spot where the visitor had stood a moment prior, then turned around and headed for his chambers further down the long hall of his vessel.

“Figure out how Gambit continues to find his way in here uninvited, and clean up the mess he left behind as well.”

The nearby servants abandoned their tasks and immediately followed his new command.

With the pearl in hand, he left the atrium and its millions of plants, heading for his ritual chamber where he would make use of the reality-bending pearl he had been given. Though he loathed the Chaotic Convergence for being the very antithesis to his logical mindset, he could appreciate his ability to bend the rules that most other Absolutes had to abide by.

He sent out a signal to his most favoured companion.

“It is time.”