

+And Elder Mwaba D'Rongo's address paints a dire picture of both Guild's internal situations, where loyalists to Highflame and loyalists to Ori-Thaum, true Guild patriots all, come together in traitorous union to kill one of their own for the sake of their Guilds. Truly, this brings tears to my—You guys really believe this shit?

I mean, seriously, I'm about to crack up laughing. Look at this! Look at what they're telling you! I had to betray my guild! I have to work with my worst enemy to murder someone on my own side! In fact, I'm going to recruit the son of the woman who Highflame, Highflame, has redacted out of shame. This is the only just idea I can come up with.

Jaws, what a fucking nightmare. Anyway, here's Abrel Greatling, probably about to admit that she deserves everything that happened to her, and that she's wrong, and that she failed her clan, and that a summary execution would be good for her, and the only proper outcome after failure, yadda yadda yadda, blessed be the worthy.

Dead gods, if only a terrorist attack or something could happen right now. I don't know.+

-Cala Marlowe, The Fateless Thoughtcast

28-9

Behold Your Savior (III)

-[Avo]-

Progressing through Axtraxis Academy made it seem more like a dungeon than an actual educational institution.

It took Avo some time to help Alysिम navigate out from the nest of silicon and vivianite that composed the base of Axtraxis' structure. Ghost condensed massive slabs of loci with their ethereal glow, while concentrated doses of energy flowed through complex material materials veining the inner infrastructure of the academy. Drones and ghosts of all varieties crowded the space, all working to maintain and process the arriving data.

It took the better part of Elder D'Rongo's speech for Avo to guide Alysिम out. The Overheaven reached out ahead using his **Synchronicity**, but rather than fully sinking his will into local minds or lobbies, he kept his touch light and his awareness wide. There were good odds that the Infacer had assets here as well, placed in preparation of a potential Ori-Thaum—or Noloth—assault on Axtraxis.

Avoiding watchers and obstacles alike, Alysım found his way up a narrow platform down a claustrophobic hallway. The space was clearly not meant to be traveled by a person, barely large enough to accommodate the Chronicler's proportions, yet shimmying along his sides and guarded by the presence of **Ignorance**, he inched his way into Axtraxis proper.

Only to be halted by a tech-thaumic checkpoint. A holographic scanning grid swept across the space ahead, while patterns of spatial reality clenched at random spots across Axtraxis' informational nexus.

+Stop,+ Avo cast, and Alysım did as he was told. Holding in place, the Chronicler stared on as a few hundred finger-lengthen drones spilled down the crevice from an open shaft above. A veil of crackling static coated each of the drones as they drew closer. Extending a branch of his consciousness, Avo gazed upon the incoming drones with his **Conception of Ontology**.

A clash of various frequencies and spiking pitches clawed at his mind, and the Techplaguer explained them thusly: ***"Oh. Encrypted ones. They are speaking. Speaking to another SHARD of the SLEEPER. They are here. They are around us..."***

Avo was annoyed, but unsurprised. The Infacer using a Heaven tied to the Sleeper to monitor Axtraxis on Veylis' behalf was an understandable decision. Understandable, but inconvenient. The decision to proceed with extreme care had been a wise one.

Still. Avo wasn't without new tricks. He didn't want to lean too hard on his **Definement of Ignorance** as that just might alert the Infacer, and already he could feel the faint resonance of an existing warmind somewhere near. Instead, he drew upon one of the newest Heaven's he subsumed and modified its canons slightly to engineer a new means of progress for Alysım.

Before the drones could approach the perimeter of Avo's **Synchronicity**, a paper crane manifested around Alysım and began to fold itself over him. The Chronicler barely had time to widen his eyes before his understanding of *informational references* themselves dissolved.

At once, the idea of "Alysım" in flesh, memory, concept, and all was referenced to the surrounding environment. The man vanished from the world—and vanished from himself. Internally, Avo and Kae shared a vicious chuckle as they observed the effects of their newly modified **Enigma** canon in real time. Even a team of elite Agnosi likely wouldn't have managed what they just did.

Effectively, the understanding of Alysım was now regarded as his surroundings. What this canon allowed was one of the most metaphysical acts of camouflage possible—how would one know if someone existed if they were entirely synonymous with their surroundings. However, the canon came at a cost: Alysım couldn't conceptualize himself either, and it was only through Avo's **Ignorance** that he managed to stay aware of the Chronicler himself.

Guiding the self-blinded Alysım onward, Avo repaired the active schizophrenia gnawing at the man's cognition as fast as it assailed him. The entire experience could best be described as an

active existential nightmare — to have a mind but be unable to part yourself from your surroundings — but Avo protected his deeper mental structure from true harm.

After a bit more time to avoid patrolling drones and ghosts, Alysim clambered up narrow steps until finally squeezing out a narrow shaft leading up an incline. Guiding Alysim out from the passage, Avo found himself within a pristine control center. The room was spherical, with projective screens spiraling across its rounded walls. Images of uniformed students manifesting heavens, engaging in battles, or otherwise being gruesomely murdered spun around Avo as if he caught inside an informational maelstrom.

At the center of this chamber was a large pillar. Shards of silicone dotted its outer structure, while its center-most mass remained comprised of vivianite. A persistent flow of electricity and ghosts alike fed the massive slab, and it extended downward into the network architecture below from where Alysim arrived. Connected to the pillar were about fifty different Necrojacks unmoving upon their stations. Avo observed broadcasts of thought leaving their minds, directing different drones and ghosts across the expanse of Axtraxis.

At the far end of the room was a twenty-meter-long bulkhead comprised of multiple layers of reinforced alloy vibrating with the touch of memite. Over the bulkhead, the words *+Data Processing Nexus+* glimmered, infused with active mem-cons capable of knowing anyone with the authority to be here. Well, almost anyone. Avo absorbed the feeble memetic virus as if it was salt sprinkled into a caustic puddle.

Returning Alysim to form, the man managed a shuddering gasp as he looked at his hands. Existential horror stained his mind as he finally could sort himself from his surroundings. Avo kept him spared of outside notice using his Defilement of Ignorance but the man's consciousness remained human.

Too human.

+How did you...? What was that?+ the Chronicler gawked mentally.

+Enigma,+ Avo replied. ***+Heaven of Information. Thank Ori-Thaum. They came up with the foundational idea. I just made it better.+***

+Never do that to me again,+ Alysim said, a golden oscillation surrounding his hand as he fought to keep his ontology stable. *+I'm going to go away someday. My death is ordained. But let me keep myself for now. Let me keep myself, and I will get you what you want.+*

The psychological toll inflicted upon the man had been lessened by Avo. But still, without utterly controlling their mind, a horror of not being able to find themselves, to differentiate themselves from their surroundings, lifting his head, he regarded the fifty individuals manning their stations and let out a breath.

+Why are they just laying there?+

It was times like this that Avo remembered. Not everyone dwelled in New Vultun. Feeding the necessary mem-data over to the man, Avo guided him away from the crevice he squeezed out of before another wing of twelve drones darted down its path.

For a moment, Avo considered dipping his mind into the vast pillar of vivianite, but hesitated as he felt the presence of a warmind entombed within. After that, he kept his distance. The last thing he needed to do was alert the Infacer of his presence. Not yet, at least.

He needed to get deeper access into Axtraxis Academy, compromise more of the students perhaps, but his main goal was finding some way to reach the non-Godclad elites that made up a flame, administrative and logistical arteries and devastate Highflame's critical reactors. To achieve that, however, he needed to find a way out of Axtraxis — and something that wouldn't attract Veylis' attention.

Instead of directly accessing the locus at the center of the room, he instead drowned all fifty of the Necrojacks using his synchronicity. As their minds melded into his, he poured his consciousness into theirs with such delicate subtlety that no one—short of potentially the Infacer or a Famine—could have noticed. In seconds, Avo secured access to drones and knowledge about the academy's systems, personnel, and infrastructure.

Downloading the update into his Deep-Nav, he realized that Atraxis Academy was closer to being a demiplanar dungeon than an actual school. The outer layer of the academy was an easily traversable network of modules that functioned as a panopticon. As this section of the structure was separated from the main core housing the students by a one-way transparent metaphysical wall, the instructors could observe any of their students with ease without being regarded in return.

Meanwhile, the inner structure was separated along fifty floors, with each floor segmented based purely on the performance of the newly Ensouled students.

There was no such thing as a new student or a senior student at Axtraxis. Instead, to get here, one needed to qualify based on a series of simulated tests. Strategy, history, philosophy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, engineering—all these things and more would be tested in full immersion simulations. After this, students would be placed in a high intensity vicarity to judge their mental toughness.

Only after that would an invitation be sent from Axtraxis for a final live-fire exam for the student to earn their chance at a Soul and a corresponding Heaven. There was a saying for Axtraxis: *Seek death, not life*. This was due to the fact that acceptance into the institution came with an Ensouling, and there was no way to pass the live-fire exam without dying first. Hence, those who returned via a phylactery were rejected, while those that remained due to Soul-based resurrection were accepted.

But not all students were accepted as equals. Depending on performance, the starting floor of a newly Ensouled student ranged from first or second depending on their performance and earned Spherage.

The very first floor was filled with five-hundred students. Five hundred exactly, with two recently rejected – Desouled in disgrace. Everyone here had only a Sphere One heaven, barely capable of any miracles, mostly used to ensure resurrection capability.

Another difference, as Avo examined each of the fifty floors, however, he also found that their local environments were drastically different. The first floor was crude, brutal. The dense jungle of bioengineered flora and fauna choked the entire level, forcing the children to live in a vicious, carnivorous rainforest. They were granted no amenities here, made to survive on limited rations every day, and were rotated in loose war bands that constantly fought over said paltry supplies.

The ceiling above them projected a holographic display of time and date every single day. This allowed them to keep track of what classes they needed to attend and what instructors they were meant to face at designated periods. The goal for students here was simple: accumulate two hundred and fifty merits and issue a challenge at the platform of ascension to reach the next floor up. The challenge could be done at any time, so long as the merits were met. But failing to pass would result in one losing all their merits, dignity, and a week of their time, as failures would now be enlisted as disposables for that duration to be used by second floor students as expendable soldiers or test subjects for their Heavens.

Such was a sampling of Atraxis Academy's ecosystem. Filtering through more knowledge, Avo found that they also ran leaderboards for their students. However, there was no overall leaderboard. Instead, everyone was rated on metrics for operational, strategic, tactical, and personal achievement thresholds. This meant that though some students could be at the top of one leaderboard, they could also be at the bottom of another.

Things were simple at Atraxis. You were rewarded for succeeding and punished for failure. Nothing else needed to be said.

It was at this point that Avo's mind found another item of curiosity. Going through the faculty, he found a hundred and eighty instructors on active duty. However, one above all others caught Draus's attention.

+*Mondelles*,+ the Regular said.

Avo found his curiosity piqued as well. Pulling up Instructor Santanando Mondelles' profile, he found that the instrument had been reassigned recently on the basis of necessity. Apparently, they needed someone extremely skilled and experienced in training new Godclads to fill in for another instrument that had gone mysteriously missing. But Avo suspected this was Veylis' means of taking the Instrument off the board without needing to eliminate him. After all, she knew about Elegant Moon compromise, and likely linked her to Mondelles as well.

[But the fact he isn't dead means she doesn't know about the other things he was doing,]
Kae muttered. **[How he was working with Ori-Thaum against Jhred Greatling as well...]**
The Agnos' template groaned.

+*Politics is a real clusterfuck*,+ Chambers agreed.

Marking Mondelles position, Avo zeroed them to the twenty-sixth floor. Presently, he was listed within Axtraxis' system as +*ON-DUTY - CLASS: PLANAR AMBUSHES AND NON-EUCLIDEAN NAVIGATION*+

Jacking into a local drone, Avo saw a net of light extending free from the Instrument as miracles shuddered and flashed within the brightness. Mondelles stood on the bank of a fog-choked patch of marshland. To his back were a thicket of jagged briars worming their branches through the flesh of a dozen dead students.

Death anchors scabbed in place as they began their resurrection process. Meanwhile, Avo's Deep-Nav registered four other cadres approaching the Instrument by folding themselves into the reflection of the nearby lake itself.

An understandable plan, though one that was unlikely to work as their approach triggered unnatural ripples across the surface. Something Mondelles already noticed. More students were going to experience a real-death soon, but that was fine. The juvs were unlikely to reach Mondelles.

But Avo could still find a prolonged use for him. Avo could still learn things from him. And through the students, the Overheaven would find a way to reach every single instructor in the academy, as well as spread over to Highflame's most esteemed families.

[Oh, fuck,] template-Abrel breathed.

+Avo,+ Draus said, noticing Avo reach across Axtraxis' system. +*What're doin'?*+

+***Just want to see what school is like. Just want to put in my enrollment.***+