



They were like red and white ticks upon the star-speckled hide of the leviathan, waging an endless war as proxies for the two Absolutes they served. The hollowed-out voidborn, atop which they made battle, was ignorant to their conflict and the pits and scars left on its hide in the aftermath.

To the Tome Keeper and his creations living within the void-faring creature, the war outside was unnoticeable. At first the Absolute had been bothered by the ceaseless assaults, but now it was but a facet of his existence that he had learnt to handle. Those that fought upon the star-speckled exterior were his children, created by his hands or the hands of his helpers, and he had made them capable, trusting them to always repel the invaders. There were no winners in this war, but he cared not, so long as the integrity of his demesne held fast.

Time had lost its meaning to him as he pursued goals that themselves were not confined by the rules of time. While a mortal man cared about the hourglass and its grains of sand, such a concept was easy to work around for a being of his stature. Time was not fixed nor a straight path for him; it was a coil, where at any point he could look ahead and back, knowing what was to come and what had already happened. He had traversed the coil several times already, and each new journey across it allowed him to alter events and shape them to his liking.

But alas, he was not the only one to whom the confines of time could be manipulated thusly, and as such the game they played against each other for influence and power was manifold and unpredictable. Additionally, he was confined to a timeframe that began at his ascension from mortality and spanned until the inevitable moment in the far distant future where Void and Light came to blows, wrenching apart the fabric of the cosmos at the conclusion of their aeons-long conflict.

However, the Seeker worried not about this Great Game, for he was focused mostly on the effort of aiding his progeny, who yet remained on the world that he himself had ascended from. He had seen countless iterations of the coil of time wherein his offspring had failed, but every new journey through the coil allowed him to influence the events and outcome, until it eventually brought the result he sought. The Watcher had desired this of him, and despite his elevated stature, he was still a pious man beholden to a greater force.

Three of his porcelain arms worked on his newest creation, which he would use to bargain the Disfigured One for a return of something quite dear to him, and which might aid his progeny through counsel and raw prowess.

He looked down at the obsidian beak and the smoke-like tendrils that sprouted from it, appearing and disappearing with a mind of its own, ever-static and changing, just like the Great One that had sought its creation.

The visitation of a fellow Absolute was always disruptive to the logic and order of his demesne, but the Realm Traveller was pleased to witness the arrival of Nharlla within his abode. In her true form, the Lord of Illusions and Transformation was like a mirage of a thousand different figures that all bore some significance to the Seeker’s mind.

As a formless being, Nharlla relied entirely on her perceiver to inform her visage, hence why mortals often viewed her as people from their past and future. The Tome Keeper had once witnessed the Absolute while yet a mortal man, as part of the journey that saw himself become Ascendant. Back then, she had worn the guise of his hated abductor, as well as the mother he had been torn from.

With her very presence in his vessel, the walls, floor, and ceiling changed shape and substance. Many of the careless construct servants that roamed the halls changed into panicked animals or frozen statues, with a rare few becoming like clouds of particles that dispersed and floated away. The clean-up that would follow her visit was sure to be extensive.

“Your work is always immaculate,” she praised him, as he handed her the obsidian beak. The portion of her mirage body that was a face seemed to smile.

His own visage was inspired by Nharlla’s concept of transformation and he deeply respected her power and wisdom. “You will return him then?”

“A deal was made and you have upheld your end. The toll once gifted to me will return to your side. To its rightful place.”

With those words, the mirage creature vanished along with the obsidian beak. The only evidence of her presence was the aftermath of her power’s influence upon his demesne. Left in Nharlla’s place was a stone mask that fell to the floor without a sound, light as a single feather.

It was not the mask itself that mattered, but the soul trapped within it that was essential. Once he had been an important figure to the Seeker, but in their journey to reach the Divinity of the Absolutes, he had sacrificed himself for his sake.

Though he wished for his companion’s soul to find the rest it deserved, he also knew that power was meant to be used. He had a puzzle before him and the soul within the mask was an important piece that he could not so easily replace.

With long striding steps, the Seeker moved through his laboratory to prepare the vessel to house this soul. Arms grew from his liquid porcelain body, reaching out to vats of newborn flesh that would be shaped by his talented touch.

A place was already prepared for the construction of this important vessel. Like anything, the first steps were the most important, so he took his time with these, finding joy in the task. It was almost nostalgic in a way that spoke to the lingering fragments of his humanity.

For the skeleton, he tore off a piece of his ever-changing visage and sculpted it into a shape that was human, though with some alterations that improved upon this natural design and solved a few issues. Ultimately, these changes would not be outwardly-noticeable, but the result was a vessel with unbreakable bones that would be able to endure superhuman strength with ease.

Like a seamster, the Tome Keeper carefully laid the threads of nerves along the frame he had created. Cartilage, tendons, and other connective tissue followed after, then came the muscles that he had carefully grown for this unique body. They were made with such skill that, despite their ordinary and lean size, they would imbue the vessel with tremendous power, allowing for feats of strength normally only reserved for monsters of enormous proportion.

For the organs, the Seeker provided his own pieces of art that improved upon the natural design and were like machines of finely-carved metal. He was unsure if the vessel would understand that its internal structure was abnormal, but his focus was mainly on creating something fitting for the soul that it would house. An extraordinary being required an extraordinary body.

The brain came last, and like the organs, it was unnatural, but for good reason. With his very touch, the Realm Traveller could imbue knowledge and power, and given that this vessel would be sent to the Mundane Plane, it was important that it would not succumb under the straining limits of reality. A brain that bore the touch of an Outer Being like himself would normally be torn apart when it came in touch with reality, but the one he had sculpted was made to prevent such a thing, while also housing much of the Seeker’s own library of knowledge.

Lastly came the flesh, which he moulded onto the skeleton with its organs and tissue like clay. To finalise his creation, he draped a veil of void-spawned fabric over it. It was durable and, most-importantly, protected the body from the many conflicts he knew it would face.

With almost paternal care, he placed the stone mask onto the body he had sculpted and allowed the soul within to flow into its new vessel. As it took hold, its personality and nature shaped the void-spawned fabric skin, turning it into the true visage of the man’s soul.

The Tome Keeper allowed himself a satisfied smile. Then he lifted the body off the laboratory slab and made his way to the ritual chambers.

It was finally time to place this central piece into the puzzle, revealing an image that had remained obscured for a long while.