



Xi-LOOM

A Short Science Fiction Fantasy

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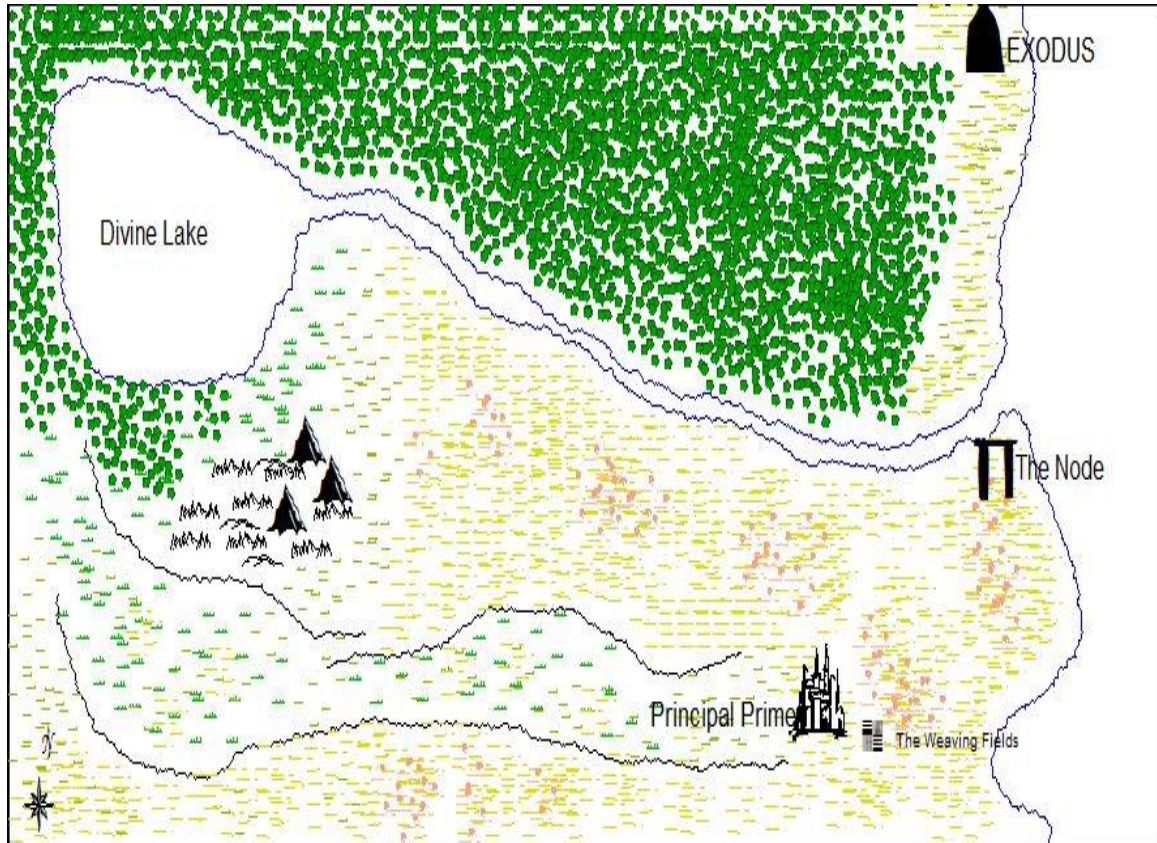
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In Loving Memory of Norma Jean (Colby) Gill,
—*July 1940 – January 2013*

Don't worry about your enemies; guard yourself from your friends.
—*Esther Caddell Smith*

Heroes shouldn't be confused with saints.
—*Walter Mosley*

TENET



Map by Charison R. Gill-Branion

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Sudden Death

Strange, how the warm blood flowed against my cheek as I lay on the bank floor. I watched it travel down the length of my arm fluidly caressing over my fingertips. I was cold...so very cold.

My eyes were the only thing left working. As a matter of fact, they're doing better than usual because I am able to see the little girl I just saved sitting on the floor behind me. Each of her hands pressed firmly against each ear as she cries and screams. Her screams against the background of sirens in the distance are the symphony of what happened.

It was a normal day with the rent due. I came to the bank thinking about the difference of paying rent versus paying a mortgage. There's little difference for me at my age. I'd become old now, and I reasonably signed my barely lived in home over to my youngest son's family who'd lost their overpriced house during the economic collapse. My daughter helped me move into a nice loft downtown. The nightly hustle and bustle of the nearby wharf kept my mind off my wife who passed away just a few years before.

When I entered the bank, I noticed three men wearing the same type of black trench coats at different locations in the lobby. The negative vibe I got from seeing them spooked me. Maybe my police academy training from the distant past or my subsequent federal agent experience warned me of the danger.

I turned around to leave the bank. I'd be too old to prevent a professional bank robbery, and too private to be questioned by cops afterwards.

My adventurous days remained well behind me, or so I thought. As luck would have it, as I turned to walk back out the nicely decorated bronze and glass bank doors, a fourth man wearing the same type of trench coat uncloaked an automatic shotgun and stood in my way.

“Everybody on the ground now!” he said.

I placed myself quickly on the ground. I got rid of my guns a long time ago. My carry and conceal weapon permit stayed as useless as my retirement badge. The only weapons available to me continued to be my wit and my martial arts expertise, which remained difficult to employ at my age. I’d studied several martial arts through the years achieving a strong expertise. If I’d brought my cane, the advanced combat techniques I knew would prove useful.

In the movies, this would be enough against four armed bank robbers with custom automatic shotguns and custom automatic rifles, but in reality, any fool who gave them a problem was a dead fool. I wanted them to get the money and be out of the bank in three minutes or less. Afterwards, I would be able to get on with my life. However, fate had different plans.

A shot rang out and the gunman blocking the tall glass bank door suddenly flew back against it with only half a bloody face. His automatic shotgun tumbled across the floor settling in front of me. The glass of the door cracked but did not shatter. Several screams filled the once silent bank as blood smeared down its front doors following the dead gunman’s body on the ground before them.

A quick look over my shoulder revealed a man on his back in a missionary position firing a handgun between his legs. Perhaps a plain clothes cop or security guard? He behaved like a wannabe cop or scared civilian.

A gunman charged him from behind and unloaded his automatic shotgun three times. Several people on the floor by the wannabe grabbed their bodies where the bullets hit them including the wannabe himself. Chaos erupted. People stood and fled for the doors after the sights of ballistic carnage.

Two gunmen fired into the fleeing crowd heading for the doors. Only a few made it out alive. And, just like that, the game for survival had changed in seconds before my very eyes. If I wanted to live, I had to act! I quickly grabbed the automatic shotgun in front of me, rolled over to the left and fired twice in the direction of the gunman with a custom rifle.

I hit him, but I didn't know how bad and didn't care. I continued to roll to my left again, and fired twice again into the gunman carrying the other automatic shotgun. I hit him, but not before he got a shot off that destroyed a nearby chair. I rolled a third time and quickly scanned for any of the gunmen but none stood prominent anymore. So, I rolled a fourth time and somehow convinced my aging body to come up on one knee.

A quick scan revealed the two gunmen I shot to be down for good. Luck prevailed at that moment. But, the last gunman had switched to a handgun and held it against a very young girl's head. The terrified girl, not older than seven, wore a yellow sundress with sandals and a "hello kitty" backpack. She

continually screamed and appeared to be struggling to reach her dead mother on the floor. The gunman forced her to be his human shield.

“Shut up or I’ll kill you too!” the gunman told the girl.

The girl’s screams quickly became whimpers and sniffles. Now, in the movies this is the part where the hero and the gunman talk it out. But, this real time scenario defied the movies, and my death lingered around the corner. I can tell you from experience that you will sense when it is time for you to die. I certainly did! In situations like this, between two men who are very intimate with combat and murder, words are not only a waste of time, but they’re also an unnecessary distraction. We both realized he had nothing to lose and I had the wrong gun for the job.

I experienced a flashback of sitting with my mother at her bedside in the hospital. She lived a Gospel woman who carried the bible with her everywhere she went. She suffered from breast cancer and she died one rainy night. The doctors revived her after she died for three minutes. Many in my family called it a miracle, but not after she finally passed away just two days later. Regardless, after her revival I asked her what death revealed and what did she see.

She told me, “Be nice to everyone...be a good person because you pay here before you go.”

That’s it. That’s all she would say. She said nothing about God or Jesus or heaven after all the years of taking collard greens to church events. She still

held the bible close and tightly gripped in her southern hands laying there in the hospital bed. Her answer confused me along with her actions.

“Drop it!” the gunman said.

I looked hard at the gunman’s face. He wore the face of a man who drank and smoked. The type you would find on horseback smoking cigarettes. A short man, but a stocky man with a calm indicating he survived tough scrapes before. He aimed to live through this ordeal at any cost. The way he and the other automatic rifleman fired into the fleeing crowd earlier revealed their knowledge of dead people unable to testify in court.

I checked my gut first, and I prepared my body for the worst. The only chance to save the girl was for me to get a clean shot off, but he kept her in the way. I’d have to stand up first and leap forward to my left again. While in the air I would have to wait for the right angle and hope I shot him before he shot her or me... This way, I’d be able to aim the shotgun higher as I fell to the floor and shoot for the back of his head. If all went well, the scatter shot of the shotgun would miss the girl and hit only him. Keep in mind, this isn’t the movies.

I let go of the shaft of the shotgun and I noticed the gunman’s shoulders sort of relaxed a little underneath the trench coat. I held a hand up as if I was giving up, but kept my eyes on the trigger of his gun. I looked nowhere else and as I slowly came to my feet he said,

“Drop it!”

He didn't trust me and prepared for any funny business. I needed a second, just a little time to trigger the movement I needed to perform. My body worked before through several assignments including guarding executive branch personnel. In my later years, the same body worked with architects and engineers on multiple development projects in major cities and counties. Sometimes as an urban planner, other times as a housing and community developer. I'd lived through other wear and tear on my body over time, but the above-mentioned did the most damage to brain and brawn.

Swish...swish swish!!

The sprinkler system turned on, and just like that, I had the time I needed. Maybe the cops outside saw the standoff and gave me a helping hand or maybe something else happened. I didn't know and I didn't care because the moment it happened I moved.

I took three steps forward at an angle and leapt hard into the air sideways before he got his head around from looking at the ceiling sprinklers. As I coast past a large potted plant the perfect angle I needed came into blessed view. But, this gunman shot fast; so fast he let go of the girl and shot me three times before my first trigger pull fired the shotgun once. The excruciating pain blasted through me as I landed on my side hard with my arm laid out still holding the shotgun.

I lay there, bleeding out, the last gunman missing the back of his head sprawled crazy on the floor and the young girl saved. The pain went away as

fast as the cold set in; and before long the screams and sirens faded into nothingness along with my vision.

Self Assessment

“Michael.”

Someone called my name and I quickly awakened. My body locked into place; unable to move. I looked down to find my feet set upon some type of large arcane metal sundial. White glowing archaic symbols pulsed on its surface. I appeared to be somewhere in the middle of outer space. Blackness with twinkling stars swirled all around me...

Approximately 30 feet across from me stared a man like I’ve never seen before. His muscular naked body covered in blue and silver flames as he stood on the same disk; his feet upon one extraordinary symbol. His eyes fired a bright series of flaming colors. Every word spoken by his voice breathed utterly profound richness to my soul. I understood, yet only heard a foreign gibberish from his lips.

“You are going through a transition. You are becoming something else. As you undergo this process keep in mind that everything you’ve done in life has brought you to this very moment. Now, look inside your heart and tell me, what your life wants you to become,” he said.

And just like that, we both stood on a green grassy plain. A vast mountain range caressed the horizon to the southwest. Oak tree woodlands aspired immediately to the east. A beautiful lake reflecting our surroundings rested an airfield away to the west. The picturesque sight of two planets hung like portraits in the clear blue sky across from a brilliant yellow sun on the

opposite side of a green sun. One planet with rings similar to Saturn and the other planet like Venus.

The man spoke a foreign language. How I understood his gibberish eluded my understanding. The sundial vanished, outer space disappeared, but the flaming man remained. His flames contained to himself, not interacting with anything else in the environment. He seemed surprised to see his surroundings, but he also seemed pleased. He looked about with a smile.

I ably moved now with the certainty of my youthful prime years. I looked at my fit arms and hands, shocked to discover, my lean muscle with smooth skin. I ran my hands over my head pulling down long curly bangs of jet black hair before my eyes. Needless to say, my endowed male body had grown much taller too. The elation of my appearance reflected in my big smile.

“Yes, I can see you are pleased and you should be...you’ve chosen very wisely. Extremely well, for a human,” he said.

“Who are you?”

“I am your teacher. And, before you ask any more of the obvious questions, please allow me to clear up a few things. No, I am not God or any other type of divinity. I am called many things by many sentient cultures of various species. Although, the closest human word to describe me is angel, I am not an angel and the word is not a correct definition of what I am.”

“What are you?”

“Ah yes, another obvious question; I am an intricate part of the infrastructure of existence, and that is the best way I can describe it in your tongue.”

He stood there looking at me prepared to answer any question I asked. It reminded me of my martial arts instructors. He had a talent for anticipating my questions.

“Is this a test?”

“This is your life,” he said.

“I don’t understand.”

“Michael Hunter, why do humans always need to place everything in a tidy box? You cannot use a single word or phrase to describe this process or explain the functions of the multiverse. You are but a very small piece of an infinite whole that is extremely complex and too complicated to be confined to numerous languages or numerous thoughts.”

His logic blew me away. I didn’t expect the answer, yet it made so much sense. Again, the foreign language he spoke remained gibberish to my ears, but profound to my soul. I believed he spoke the truth.

“What do you teach?”

“I teach you about you.”

“Why?”

“Finally you ask the correct question. I started to think you’re not ready for this process,” he said.

He sternly looked and gestured for me to sit down upon the grass. I did so in full lotus. In this body, I was much more flexible. He sat down in front of me the same way.

“Metaphorically, think of your lifetime as a human the same as a caterpillar’s. Currently, you are in a chrysalis and soon you will become a butterfly,” he explained.

“Earlier you said you were speaking in my tongue, but the words I hear coming from you are foreign to me.”

He laughed. He found great enjoyment in what I said.

“Not all beings only use their mouths to communicate. I am speaking to you with my mind, my body language, and my spirit as well. Another sign of your human heritage is your limited openness to the obvious.”

“What happened or is happening to me?”

“Good, you learn quickly. Life forms are spiritual energy. The important thing to remember is the energy part of the equation. You have learned as a human that energy cannot be destroyed. And, before you ask, the creation of energy is far beyond your understanding.”

“So, my spiritual energy is going through a process called—transition.”

The teacher came to his feet. He laughed and clapped his hands repeatedly. He emitted happiness with enthusiastic energy. Again, he looked around and took in the surroundings. I stood up too.

“No human has figured it out as quickly as you. Surely, you belong here and I believe things are going to change for the better in this part of the realm.”

“What do you mean realm?”

“There are many realms Michael. There are some on planets, some off planets and some in different places. Humans sometimes call these places dimensions and parallels of existence, but their comprehensions are far from the truth.”

“Where am I now? Is this the future or the past?”

He laughed again. I will never really understand why my questions amused him so much.

“Now... It’s amazing how even in transition humans refuse to let go of the concept of time. Currently, you are in both the physical and spiritual realms of existence and please try to be open to the fact your understanding of such things is limited.”

I stared at him for a long time and he stared back. I went over everything he had said in my mind very carefully. And, I spoke after careful deliberation.

“I’ve noticed you’ve only asked me one question. It seems my questions and answers dictate what happens next. So, I am going to ask that question. What happens next?”

“Bravo,” he said.

With a wonderful smile on his face; he gestured for me to sit back down again. I did so the same way as before.

“If there’s only one human child left in all of existence, and you bestowed the child with four powers, what would those four powers be?”

I contemplated the question and found myself remembering my role playing games from the past. I remembered my favorite archer/ranger character from my favorite role playing game. My mom declared the game a satanic device and threw out all of those books. But, that did not stop me from playing other similar games whenever I could.

In those years, I attended comic book conventions and as an adult they became my vacation resorts. These places gathered role playing games and crowds of geeks like me playing several sleepless nights straight, strung out on soda and addictive junk foods. So, my teacher's question did not bother me in the least. I can't tell you how many times we geeks argued for several hours straight this type of question. What are the best powers for a character, the best armor, and the best sword?

Of course, these discussions went much deeper than that! We would argue channeling powers versus mental powers or magic powers versus genetic powers...etc. And, a whole array of different categories and subgenres and distinctions between powers, abilities, attributes, strengths, weaknesses, talents and/or gifts. These thoughts brought me to another question.

"Why give the child only four powers?"

He looked at me with disappointment. As if I had somehow strayed away from a proper course.

"The number is not random. You saved four lives in your lifetime."

His answer disturbed me. Surely, I had saved more than four lives in my lifetime. Several fellow police officers would be dead without me there to save them. The same went for several fellow agents who would've surely died.

"But, I saved more than four people! I can tell you the names of colleagues who would have died without me there."

"Can you?"

"Yes, and I can tell you about at least three times I saved fellow agents under fire."

"Are you sure?"

His replies had an air of sarcasm that irked me. I saved more than four lives and had the gunshots and knife wounds to prove it.

"I'm sure."

"How can you save a life that has pledged itself to sacrifice its life for a patriotic belief, a religious purpose, or a moral cause? Is that life YOURS to save?"

I think I sat there for hours going over the questions the teacher posed. Night came before I spoke again.

"You're right, which lives did I save?"

"A single father who got mugged and got forced to dress in the criminal's rags that mugged him; he asked you for money and the use of your cell phone, but you did not believe him at the time."

"Oh yeah, I remember him."

“The father quickly called the babysitter with your cell phone and she alerted the police who came to the house and thwarted the criminal who would’ve killed her and the man’s son.”

“I saved two lives that day?”

The teacher ignored my question with obvious frustration and continued.

“You travelled on the subway and sat next to a depressed and abused woman you found attractive. She planned on committing suicide where she used to play at a playground as a child. You told her some jokes, complimented her several times, and asked her for her phone number.”

“Yes, I remember her; she had bright red hair.”

“She left her abusive boyfriend that night. Moved in with her older sister in another city and eventually became a college professor at a university,” the teacher disclosed.

“And, who’s the fourth life?”

“The little girl in the bank you just saved. However, you saved three lives through acts of kindness, generosity, and humor. In your entire lifetime, and only at the very end; did you save a life through an act of violence,” the teacher said.

I looked down at the grass, ashamed of thinking my life amounted to so little; disappointed I failed at being more of a good person. In all my years, I only managed to save four lives, yet I had dedicated much lifetime to helping or protecting others. Where did I go wrong? I looked back up at the teacher who looked at me with compassion, but he said nothing.

“These are the four powers the child should have,” I said.

“Go on.”

“First, all the powers must be bound to function as one by a natural innate reflex for the child. They must be passive, always on, and working in concert. If the child needs time to activate them, then they would be useless against any extremely fast threat.”

“You have described a trait across each power not a power in and of itself. However, I do understand your point and have no problem with the child’s powers possessing this natural reflex trait,” the teacher confirmed.

“Very well, then the first power must be true healing.”

“Healing powers are a terrific choice.”

I wanted to explain to him what I meant by true healing, but I believed he already knew. So, I continued.

“Second, the child must be a true elemental.”

“That’s better.”

“Third, the child needs to be able to use true teleportation.”

“A poor choice,” he revealed.

“Do you understand what I mean by the term true teleportation?”

“Please assume I understand better than you do.”

I paused for a moment wondering where I went wrong with teleportation. Afterwards, I just wanted to get this exercise behind me and moved on.

“Last, but certainly not least, the child’s fourth power must be true multiverse awareness.”

The teacher stood up. He looked at the planets hanging in the sky. I stood up again. His flickering flames did not burn the grass or exude any extreme heat. And, as the flames waved in the night he eventually turned his fiery gaze back to me.

“Powers usually have a power source,” I stated.

“A power is merely a cause with an effect.”

“I’ve always believed them to be more complicated than that.”

“Yes, humans often set things within the boundaries of how technology works. It’s much easier for humans to digest complex concepts this way; again, the habit of placing things in a tidy box.”

His answer annoyed me, but I did understand what he meant.

“True powers do not need energy to turn on or off. They do not need fuel to start or stop. Their origins are not rooted to a source. All of the powers you described can be obtained by opening a series of portals. A being’s thoughts, spirit, and heart are the key,” the teacher educated.

“Okay.”

“Do you remember your answer to my first question?”

“I didn’t answer you.”

“Not verbally, but your heart answered. You’ve experienced combat and your martial arts training teaches you to be in tune with your mind, body and soul; to listen to your gut. So, I’ll ask you again, do you remember your answer?”

I thought about what he said, and I remembered standing on the archaic sundial, thinking about my childhood dreams of being a hero when he asked me the question.

“I want to be a hero.”

“Ah... Not just any hero.”

Manifestation

Suddenly, water pounded into my body from all directions. My ability to breathe stopped! I flailed my arms and legs desperately trying to find something to hold onto. There was no way up or down. Blackness conquered all directions as water filled my lungs. I kicked and clawed in search of anything to grab hold of, immense pressure squeezed me like garbage in a trash compactor.

And, just like that, the pain subsided. My ability to breathe returned. The pressure faded away. I floated in blackness breathing water, perhaps at the bottom of the nearby lake. My ears rang and my lungs ached. I looked where I believed the up direction to be, but found no tranquil beams of moonlight piercing down through the wavering water.

I wondered what the hell just happened, when the blackness filled with light. I floated there frozen with terror as I followed the light to the source of two gigantic yellow serpent eyes dead in front of me. They matched the size of football fields. The light emanating from the eyes revealed the watery depths floor. A floor filled with bones from all manner of sea creatures.

A low-pitched voice with a booming grave-tone filled my ears. The same deep voice seemed to push my thoughts right out of my head. I heard only the voice and thought only the words of the voice.

“What’s this?” The voice questioned.

I assumed the incredibly immense creature before me spoke, but the way it communicated left me with doubts making it impossible to determine a gender of the voice, as my confusion grew; overrun by the voice in my head.

“It’ll probably swim away like the others. It’s too small to eat, but I am hungry,” it said.

My terror turned to instant horror at the thought of being the creature’s next meal. I looked where the lights from his eyes would allow me to witness no end to the immeasurable watery creature. I observed its reptilian skin around the colossal eyes and the one mammoth claw not covered by incalculable bones. Its head fanned like a cobra’s and its body wore a shell similar to a turtle’s that reflected the light coming from its eyes.

“Please don’t eat me,” I said.

Only bubbles came out of my mouth, but the creature understood every word.

“You speak? That’s the first time anything has done that,” it said.

“You’re hunger scares me, so I figured I better speak up.”

It laughed; a long drawn out baritone laugh that caused a great multitude of bubbles to rise from the watery depth floor.

“I get your point. What are you?”

“My name is Michael. I am some sort of humanoid now.”

The creature stirred. Murky debris kicked up where the bubbles used to be.

“What is name, Michael, humanoid?”

“Well, a name identifies someone.”

“I don’t have a name.”

“You don’t? What do you want to be called?”

“I have no idea, give me a name.”

Tom came to mind first. So, I just went with it.

“How about Tom,” I suggested.

“Tom...sounds pretty good. I like that name. Thank you for giving me a name Michael Humanoid.”

“Well, humanoid refers to the type of physical being I am.”

“Oh! I’ve seen two others like you, but did not understand what they were.”

“You did?”

“Yes, but they swam off in a hurry. They’re too small to eat, much like you.”

“I understand their reaction completely.”

“Why?”

“I understand because you resemble some sort of reptilian cross between a cobra and a turtle.”

Suddenly, my brain ached from a migraine. The pain of a cold pike dug around in my head. The pain hurt so bad my eyes crossed and ears went deaf for a moment.

“I thought no others like me existed, but it seems your world has others like me too. I apologize for extracting the information from you, but your form of communication is very crude,” Tom said.

“Apology accepted.”

“So, this teacher is the reason you are here.”

“Where is here?”

Tom laughed kicking up bubbles again. I wanted to keep him laughing. However, I did wonder how he found out about the teacher. It seems he extracted more than information about cobras and turtles.

“It’s hard to explain to a being like yourself, but this is a dimension of water extremely far from where you and teacher are.”

“Are? Why did he send me here?”

“He didn’t. You sent yourself here.”

“I did?”

Three bubbles the size of plates formed about ten feet in front of my face. Inside the first bubble pocket a yellow flame formed. Slowly it transitioned into a red flame, then a blue flame, and finally a very bright white flame. The flame held steady inside the pocket of the bubble surrounded by the depths of water.

Inside the second bubble pocket dirt appeared to form and slowly transitioned into rock. The rock turned jet black then crystallized. Afterwards, it slowly became as clear as a diamond. In the end, a perfectly set multifaceted gem rest in the center of the bubble.

Inside the bubble pocket of the third bubble a miniature tornado appeared and slowly transitioned into fluctuating arcs of electricity. The arcs of electricity soon transitioned in to the shape of a tesseract rotating on a single axis in the center of the bubble.

Afterwards, the bubbles and their center pieces merged as one right before my very eyes. In a flash, they meshed together perfectly forming a reptile-like scale similar to Tom's shell. Without warning my arms flung out wide and my legs brought together as if being laid upon a cross. The scale drifted through the water attaching to my chest. I experienced no pain, but witnessed the coloration of all my skin turn a tint darker.

"You wanted to be a true elemental," Tom continued.

I controlled my arms and legs again when the process finished. The painless affair ended; not something I expected after witnessing the extraordinary event.

"Am I one now?"

"Well, there are billions of elements in the multiverse, and it would take you thousands of lifetimes to learn how to use them all, but you're on your way."

"Thank you."

"It's only fair. You gave me a name. So, I gave you the secrets of all elements."

There was a calm moment of stillness between us. We were both looking at each other; I was smiling, and I think he was pleased. And, just like that, Tom along with all the water disappeared.

The pain returned to my lungs, only this time the pressure seemed to come from inside of me as if all of my blood and bones wanted to burst out of my skin. My soaking wet feet nestled snugly on a plush grassy ground, and my compromised vision blurred my surroundings. I fell to my knees with my hands against the soft grass; puking water, coughing, gasping.... It seemed water flushed from my ears and nose too.

Soon, oxygen refilled my lungs with air again. The pain went away and my vision returned. I looked directly down upon remnants of mossy pieces and other murky things on the ground where I regurgitated. I came to my feet to see a beautiful yellow sun in the sky above the cliff edge I stood upon. Plush green grass adorned the incredible vista of the valley plains below with freckles of gigantic trees sparsely scattered throughout.

I heard music coming from behind me and turned around. There, floating in the air, resided a fascinating fairy-like being the size of a panther. She had purple eyes, the antennae of a butterfly and the ears of an elf. Her pink translucent wings vibrantly illuminated. She wore a white tunic belted at the waist. She boasted smooth golden radiant skin and her hair flowed with a curly copper. The music seemed to be coming from her antennae.

She floated towards me with a big friendly smile. I held out my hand to shake hers and give a proper greeting. Swiftly, she jetted towards me with

adept accuracy and maneuvered to viscously bite me on my right side. She took a huge chunk of flesh and bone out of me and jetted backwards like a humming bird! The shock of the attack left me abruptly weak and I stumbled backwards grabbing hold of my side.

She floated there with many blue stained teeth and chocolate meat in her mouth. Blue liquid also stained her face and dripped from her cheeks and chin. She tilted her face towards the sky swallowing the flesh and bone in her teeth whole with a gulping jerk.

When she finished she hovered towards me again, but a sudden look of worry crossed her face. She quickly grabbed her stomach as her wings and skin turned the color of her hair. She plummeted to the ground writhing as I continued to uncontrollably stumble backwards. I looked at my side; pouring out a radiant blue liquid, down my side and legs. It was my blood!

As a high pitched shrieking scream spirited forth from her, my feet no longer secured themselves on the friendly ground. I was unable to determine if I was falling in a dream and getting ready to wake up in a hospital bed; or if eventually I would hit the grassy valley plain below.

My eyes bravely opened to observe a wooden-skinned woman with her hand grafted against my side somehow. The peculiar merging of wood and flesh interacting together fascinated my curiosity. The pain of the grafting resembled being shot by a bullet.

“Don’t move,” she commanded.

“But...”

“Be quiet!”

I looked around lying on a bed of large green leaves and appeared to be inside of a huge hollow tree. Streaming rays of sunlight poured through natural round tree knots serving as windows. Splendid wooden furniture along with beautiful plants decorated the organized place and the smell of gardenia filled the air.

“There, that should do it,” she said.

“How bad is it?”

“You’ll heal, but there will be a nasty scar.”

“What bit me?”

“A plicque bit you.”

“What?”

“A plicque... They have a nasty bite because their saliva is composed of a liquid anti-matter,” she explained.

It struck me that this wooden-skinned woman, dressed in an Amish-like black garb, spoke perfect English. Her hair consisted of leaves similar to the bed I lay on and her eyes were similar to a Siamese cat.

“You speak English?”

“Yes, a human woman taught me ages ago.”

“She did?”

“Yes, her name was Air.”

In moments my damaged flesh began growing back together on its own. The regenerative process mesmerized me to watch until the wound somewhat healed. The woman left the room returning with a cup filled with something.

“Drink this.”

“What is it?”

“Drink this!”

I put the cup to my lips and drank the stuff down. It tasted like the green dandelions my grandmother would make me eat whenever my stomach ached. My grandmother employed all sorts of natural remedies. The woman smiled at the sour face I made after drinking the stuff.

“So, there are other humans here?”

“No, I tended Air’s wounds on a spaceship in another galaxy a few light years away.”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Druid Dryad.”

“That’s an interesting name.”

“Air gave it to me.”

“I see.”

She placed some bronze colored wood chips with vine-weeds against my wound.

“Lay still.”

“Do you know why I am here?”

“Yes, a teacher is responsible. When I connected to heal you, I learned all.”

She clasped my hand with hers and placed it against her bosom. Her hands caressed like flesh, but looked like wood. She looked at me with compassion as she smiled.

“Listen, a true healer stops, alters, or advances the changes all living things experience when, regenerating, deteriorating, procreating, injured or dying. Do you understand?”

“I think so.”

An emerald green light sprang from both of our hands and beamed against the bronze wooden chips with vine-weeds transforming them into a pretty plant growing from my body. She let go of my hands and pluck the plant from my side causing the roots of it to fall out of me covered in blue blood. Yet, I felt no pain and the wound closed almost instantly.

“All of nature is a tool for medicinal remedy, but the many spectrums of light are by far the greatest life sustaining instrument. For example, certain black lights can instantly heal frostbite or in this case of anti-matter injury, do great harm. Forms of purple light can remove the pain of burns.”

“How long will it take me to learn these things?”

“When we connected, my knowledge and abilities passed onto you. The rest will come with experience; however you will be able to regenerate from these forms of injuries now.”

I looked down to find the scar of teeth upon my skin and nothing else.

“Thank you.”

“We are true healers. Gratitude is not expected or demanded to sustain a life, but you’re welcome nonetheless. Please remember all life is precious and even things we determine to be evil have valid reasons for the things they do...such is life.”

I lay there thinking about the things she explained to me and admiring her bedside manner. The impending stillness crept in the air with a strange calm, but my willingness to leave passed. I quickly asked another question.

“So, tell me more about this Air.”

“Her name was Air Heart. She said she was a pilot.”

And, just like that, I was back standing in front of the teacher by the lake. It was as if we never moved from our locations. I wasn’t exactly sure of what I experienced, but I did understand my questions and answers triggered certain types of events. I stood there back in the moonlight looking at him for some time before I said anything.

“Are you sending me to learn about the other powers next?”

“You’ve already experienced them.”

It was obvious I already experienced elementals with Tom. And teleportation; it was a lot worse than I imagined it would be, but I didn’t understand how I experienced the other two.

“I experienced multiverse awareness?”

“Yes. The last two powers you chose for the child are missed opportunities. However, the multiverse has rules all must abide by so I cannot change your choices.”

“How did I experience the awareness?”

“You were able to perceive and communicate with Tom. Most beings cannot. Multiverse awareness has many facets including linguistics, constant mass calculations, telepathy, precognition, probability, statistical foresight, and deduction.”

“This is different than I imagined.”

“Such awareness will allow you to understand the parameters of the multiverse and communicate with all beings, but being aware of all things in existence and having the capability to hold infinite knowledge doesn’t include the wisdom to effectively use it. Said knowledge must still be explored, researched, and experienced.”

“I thought teleportation was the poor choice.”

“It is, but the innate reflex trait connecting your other powers along with multiverse awareness allows you to travel better than many other beings with the same ability. Even so, as you’ve experienced, it’s a wrenching form of travel that initially disorients its user, especially when teleporting into a hostile environment.”

“So, I am going to become a child?”

He laughed and looked back at me without saying a word. He waited for me to figure things out.

“I am the child.”

“No, you are not the last child in existence. However, you are a child in relation to everything else existing.”

“But, I’m old.”

“Stop being a slave to time. Time is an ideological tool like the symbol pi in mathematics.”

“I don’t understand.”

He pointed to the moon and then back at me.

“What time is it?” the teacher annoyingly said.

“I don’t know?”

“You are very far from Earth now, but you are also still inside the very second of your death at the bank.”

Somehow I started to understand what he was saying. The more he explained, the more I understood.

“It is best for you to think of order as destination points. You never moved from the point where you lie in the bank, you are still floating in front of Tom, you’re still with Druid at your bedside.”

“How is that possible?!”

“The multiverse is in constant flux. Existence constantly moves. Stay stationary at one point and all locations in existence will pass through where you stand. Stay stationary at any point and existence will deliver Egypt 1500 BC right to you as well as every point of Earth in the year 9780.”

The information translated and somehow I understood perfectly.

“So, teleportation is not me moving, it’s allowing everything else to move to me until I find the destination point I want to be at?”

He smiled, placing his hand on my shoulder. The look of compassion returned slowly changing into a look of concern.

“Are there others like me?”

“All humans undergo a process of transition upon their death, but the type of transition and the types of processes vary tremendously. Not everyone wants to be a superhero. No one being is the same as another... It’s very important you remember that.”

“When will this transition be complete?”

“There you go with that time thing again.”

And, just like that, he was gone. The suns were high in the sky and I stood in the same place by the lake. A small injured woman, light green, dressed in a tan tunic with white trim lay at my feet unconscious. Her hair was long bleach white, spilling over her bloody shoulders while draping her bloody forehead. But, what unnerved me the most was the great triple horned beast charging at me full speed.

Rebirth

Ghostly mist fired out of the beast's black nostrils like fumes from a car exhaust revealing the frosty cool air of the early morning. Wrestled grass mixed with clopped soil flew from the rhino-like beast's dark hooves as if it discharged from the sides of a lawnmower. Its ivory horns bore down upon us with deadly intent, as something else happened.

My intuition honed, all my senses heightened, and my vision switched into a calculating optic with extraordinary dimensions. X-ray vision allowed me to see inside the beast; ultraviolet vision enhanced the spectrums of my surroundings, and to my surprise a divination sight permitted me to see the spiritual echoes of beings who once roamed the area.

My perceptions amplified together into a working real time scan. I became instantly aware of what to do. I held a hand out in front of me standing fast.

"Stop," I said.

The beast appeared to be an exotic cross between a bull and rhino with no tail. It reared back on its brown-skinned haunches immediately; contorting its body to insure it would not run us down. The beast's hooves braked deep into the ground coming up to us like a baseball player sliding into home plate. One of its largest horns nicked my outstretched hand in the center of the palm. As I put my stinging hand down the cold red staring eyes of the beast stayed center on my pupil's.

"You talk?" It said.

“Yes.”

“My land...my water...you leave,” it said.

“Okay.”

It struck me, as I hoisted the woman up over my shoulder in a fireman’s carry position that I didn’t know which way to go...

“How do I get out of here?”

“Follow creek...that way.”

The beast turned its hulking body east towards the densest part of the tree line. I moved cautiously in the direction of where the running wet creek bed originated from between two large trunks with roots deeply breaching into the ground. As I moved my feet rustled orange and green leaves, similar to those from an oak tree, strewn across the long green grass.

As I crossed into the tree line, my awareness paid attention to the beast, still watching me while standing in the same place. I guess it wanted to be sure I wasn’t coming back. And, I wasn’t. A few more yards into the wooded area and a small clearing presented itself next to the creek. I lay the woman down there to examine her injuries. I moved her dove white hair to get a better look at her forehead. The wound was a small cut atop a large bruise.

My abilities bestowed the knowledge of what to do within my thoughts. I gathered three orange colored leaves and covered the wounded area then reached into the creek and wetted my hand. That’s when I noticed the palm prick from the beast’s horn already fully healed. I put my hand on top of the leaves on her forehead and looked at the suns. I was sitting there, looking at

the green sun through the branches of the tree, wondering how Druid made the light shine. And, just like that, an emerald strand of light pierced the tree top canvas of the woods, striking my hand to heal her wound.

I turned her over to review the injured shoulder. My senses seemed to analyze the wound by itself. Through-and-through above the breast, but below the collar bone the bloody hole set. Again, like a reflex, my abilities figured out what to do. I gathered six leaves and with three leaves in my right hand and three in my left I placed the leaves on her wound; clasping her shoulder from front and back in both hands. I looked up at the tree tops and the emerald strand of light returned striking the shoulder. The inclination to stare into the creek was irresistible, and when I did, a channel of water piped into the wounded shoulder ushering past my hand and the leaves. Sunrays danced across the water's surface.

She gasped, as if stress relieved. As she slept nestled in autumn leaves her wound completely healed. I noticed light brown freckles kissed upon her apple green skin. Sleek white eyebrows adorned her eyelids; framed by a comely smooth complexion. No blemish, pimple, or mole corrupted her visage. Her full red lips completed the perfect face.

She awakened slowly, but as she regained her senses, she was more and more startled. Her purple eyes were hypnotic. Even so, she was too weak to make sudden movements or to withdraw far from me, which was obviously what she wanted to do...

"You're the statue," she said.

Her language was foreign to me, but I understood her words. Her tone was pleasantly melodic.

“What statue?”

“The statue of Xi-Loom near Divine Lake...”

“I didn’t see a statue there.”

We were able to understand each other; my awareness allowed me to perfectly communicate. However, the words coming out of my mouth were in her language, not my native tongue. This led me to believe I would have an easier time communicating with beings similar to humans.

“Are you sure?” She said.

“Yes, I’m sure.”

She looked into my eyes with a piercing gaze as if she were searching for something. At one point, our eyes locked and a distinct inkling inside recognized her to be one I’m destined to meet.

“You are not it,” she said.

“I’m not what?”

“You are not the one I am looking for.”

“What are you looking for?”

“A killer...”

She pushed her hands down on the nearby leaves and waterbed rocks next to the stream as she came to her feet. I detected a slight yet steady vibration echo out from where she pressed down. Like a stone being thrown into water, the vibratory echo emanated out from us for a few seconds. The

rocks and leaves, where she pressed, mysteriously seemed to merge into the stream bank.

She rose with an acute finesse. She was a vision of pure fitness as if she worked out in a gym every day of her life. No muscle was out of place or ill proportioned. No sinew or vein too long or too short.

“Are you referring to the beast?” I inquired.

“What beast?”

“The rhino-like beast, with a huge triple horn on its forehead, near the lake...”

“Oh, you mean the cattle. No, cattle cannot harm me.”

She gazed at me again intensely. I perceived I offended her with my question.

“If the cattle didn’t harm you then...”

“Do you always walk around naked in the woods?” She interrupted.

And just like that, I blushed.

“I ...I don’t have any clothes here.”

“I have some nearby you can use. Follow me.”

I chose to be quiet as her body language and gestures suggested I stay walking in front of her. I wondered if she was checking out my behind or figuring out what to do about a pervert in the woods. Yet, I discerned she was a well trained fighter with a great knowledge of security methods. Her behavior suggested she was an officer of the law here, after all, who else would be looking for a killer.

Before we walked west, we walked back east towards the cattle, the rhino-like beast she referred to as cattle had vacated, but we stayed inside the wood line nonetheless. I spied her eyes looking in the direction of a low marble platform just visible over the grass. I assumed that was where the statue she referred to once stood. She had me turn around and we walked for about twenty minutes until we came to a fresh dirt mound at the foot of a tall oak tree. She held her hand over the mound and the mingled grass and dirt excavated off to the side as if by magic. An opaque colored backpack, with peculiar symbols on it, lie where the mound once was.

“How did you do that? What is that?” I pointed.

“My provisions...”

She opened the backpack pulling out a sleek black pair of pants and long sleeve top. It looked similar to a jump suit. The torn pant legs had blood on them.

“Here!”

“There’s blood on them.”

“Most men would appreciate wearing my clothes,” she scoffed.

“I apologize if I offended...”

“I will not offer them to you again.”

I took the clothes and put them on. The fabric appeared to be a mix of cotton and polyester. The top was tight fitting; the pants, not so much.

“I’m wearing your clothes and I don’t even know your name.”

“Excuse me?”

“My name is Michael and you?”

“How dare you ask me my name, just who do you think you are?”

And, just like that, I grasped the need to defend myself as the surrounding ground opened in various places. Trees parted open too with apple green women warriors clad in white tunics covered by gold breastplates. They emerged carrying short golden spears in their hands, bows and quivers slung across their backs, and golden swords dangled in scabbards at the hips. Other women warriors sprung up from the ground like popcorn.

“Stranger,” the apparent leader yelled. She was the only one wearing a golden helm.

“No,” cried the woman who led me here. The others attacked with leopard like precision. Spears struck me from all directions; sparks and lights flashed as the weapons hit their mark, causing me to flail in all manner of directions, yet no attack produced pain and not one pierced my skin. The clothes I wore were not so lucky.

When they realized my invulnerable conditions, they protectively circled the woman whose clothes I wore. She looked at me bewildered as did the others.

“Are you okay, Matrix?” The leader concerned.

She ignored the leader and kept looking at me, her facial expression softened, she was still.

“Matrix,” the leader queried.

“I am...I am alright,” she said.

My awareness presented me with several realizations; my obvious invulnerability to physical attacks and I experienced the pulsing readiness of electricity, fire and cold energy wanting to race through my very veins and fire from my hands during the onslaught. I came to understand I possessed the ability to attack with elemental energy in any of these forms. And, apparently, other capabilities would eventually emerge. There seemed to be no end to it. Surely, Tom bestowed upon me an incredibly tremendous gift.

Also, their ability to manipulate the land and its constructs seemed to be a type of binding transference of energy, as well as, a geographic communication. My vision switched into some type of calculating optic detailing all sorts of mathematical observations and scenarios as they happened in real time. It was a marvelous thing to have, but I didn't understand what all the things I witnessed meant. My thoughts raced back to when Matrix pressed her hands against the ground. Perhaps it was a signal or alarm of sorts. Spears and arrows remained pointed in my direction; prepared to strike or fire at any moment.

"Is this the creature?" the leader asked.

"No," she said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"How do you know...?"

"He saved my life."

The leader stood astonished staring at me as other women lowered their bows, swords and spears. They too looked at me with some confusion.

“Unusual, and why is he wearing your clothes?” the leader asked.

“It’s a long story,” Matrix said.

“I’m all ears.”

“We need to get back to Principal Prime.”

“You heard her stranger, hands behind your back!”

The other warriors looked upon me with a glint of fear in their eye; wondering if I would comply or fight. Yet, they remained steady, like true warriors. I turned around placing my hands behind my back. I did not resist and said nothing. It seemed every time I opened my mouth I only made matters worse.

She clinked on complex handcuffs binding my fingers to the opposite one on the other hand. Pinky to pinky, fore finger to fore finger...etc., but she did so very swiftly. At one point, I had the strong desire to absorb all the handcuffs raw metal into my body, but I decided not to... Her spear jabbing me in the back pointed me in the direction of which way I should walk. The sound of twigs crunched by warrior boots and my bare feet proved to be the most sound made until a few miles passed and one of them whispered.

“He’s brown.”

“I know, he’s rustic, I’ve never seen anything like it,” another warrior murmured.

“Quiet,” the leader barked.

And, I'd never seen anything like them. They reminded me of amazons with a behavior befitting the antiquity of old. They were all apple green, but their skins varied in tint, as did their eye colors and hair. Their raven-haired leader stood close to my height. Others were blondes, brunettes, and red-heads with hazel, blue, brown, and even purple eyes. The leader seemed older, but all of them were as fit as gladiators.

We came to a large dirt road and before I set foot on it...

"Stop," Matrix warned.

I froze in my tracks.

"What are you doing?" the leader asked.

Matrix stayed silent.

"What's wrong with you?" the leader questioned.

Matrix looked at me and then towards the others, but said nothing.

"You know the law," the leader spouted. She looked at Matrix angrily.

"Move," the leader said, as she jabbed me in the back with the spear hard shoving me unto the road. I stumbled a little forward then caught my balance with my bare feet. I stood on the road and turned to face them. Shock was the look on their faces.

"He..." one warrior uttered.

"Silence," the leader interrupted, but as she did the other warriors already put away their swords and slung their spears into harnesses unto their shoulders. The leader walked over to me and turned me around taking the handcuffs off with a wave of her hand.

“Consider yourself lucky stranger; the road to Principal Prime does not accept foreigners of any stock upon its land,” the leader revealed.

“He is no longer a stranger; he is welcome,” Matrix said.

Matrix placed her left hand on her lower right side and waved it across to the lower left side of her body as if sprinkling seed into a flowerbed garden. The other warriors followed suit. Still, I was in front with the leader directly behind me, Matrix fell in behind her with two columns of warriors to her left and right. There was enough room for many more columns to fit comfortably on the road, which matched the size of two one-way expressways next to each other.

“Go,” the leader said.

As I took a step forward my awareness alerted me again; the land moved with me as if we traveled on a conveyer belt at an airport. I figured we were moving close to 15 mph; the sensation travelling such a way proved to be an exciting experience. I watched the landscape against the morning suns and distant planets in the background as we moved by.

More miles passed and a great city unveiled itself out in the pristine distance. As it grew closer I witnessed a humongous expanse of buildings and structures varying from ancient human architecture to human modern day. However, it would take all of humanity working together to build such an incredibly massive multicultural mix of architecture on such a gigantic scale.

“Behold, Principal Prime,” Matrix said.

“Home,” another warrior whispered.

More miles passed and the land slowed down to a standstill as we continued to walk up to the city gates. The walls and gates were modern looking and taller than any prison walls I've seen, but upon close observation I noticed the wall was constantly shifting becoming varied substances of smooth rock or metal all the time. Matrix walked out ahead of me as the rest of us stayed in place.

"Welcome home, Matriarch", a heavier clad woman guard announced.

I realized that Matrix was not her name after all, but rather a shortened title, a nick name of sorts, perhaps only used by those closest to her. Matrix waved the same way she did earlier and the guards responded in kind. They parted; allowing us to pass inside the gates. The land slowly began to move again only not as fast this time.

Residents inside the gates stopped what they were doing and stared at me or waved. Children stopped playing and gawked. No one, not one, was the color of a human. Yet, our physiology seemed to be the same and the residents came in all shapes and sizes just like humans do. From what I examined, as we passed by, only the warriors were obviously fit. However, it dawned on me after a few meters that men were not of the same station as women. None of them were guards and most of them were tending to the children.

It pleased and amazed me to peruse through a functional city with no street signs, no numbers on buildings, no cars, no horses with carriages, and absolutely no advertisements. From the road, no visible electrical forms of technology, telephone poles, or street lights cluttered the neighborly setting.

There weren't gigantic smoke stacks pumping smoke into the air and we didn't pass any landfills the entire trip. There were water wells in various locations along the way with some obvious man made waterfalls.

Buildings didn't abut up against one another with zero lot lines. And, no fences were to be found. Every building had plenty of space with a full green yard in the front, back, and on the sides. I liked the perfectly aligned setbacks of homes alongside public sidewalks and other easements. No materials existed to identify or indicate which buildings were homes, businesses, or farms. All roads were public and all sidewalks were public too. There was no graffiti, nor any alleys, and I didn't witness any pets.

Eventually, we all came to a great building of vibrant colors, apparently made from a type of glass or crystal. Its colors changed depending on where you looked at it in relation to how the sun's rays glazed against it. We were let inside in moments and soon came to a long room reminding me of a giant church auditorium.

However, it seemed to function more like a city council chamber. The dress of many, who were on either side of the marble stairway leading up to a luxurious platform, was futuristically regal in nature. Upon the platform five raised pew seats rest, similar to seats at congressional hearings you see representatives use. In front of them an archaic jewel encrusted throne; which seemed outdated and out of place.

The stares and pointing were getting to me even after we stopped. Men in the room huddled against their wives as if needing protection. Although I

felt the urge to quickly resolve my situation, there was an unexpected comfort with the fact there were no clocks or watches. The chatters and whispers of the throne room began to build into a crescendo.

Suddenly, an extremely gorgeous tall woman carrying a flamboyant scepter, dressed in the most extravagant silver clothes, emerged from a side corridor. She gracefully walked up the steps with a party of five men in various colorful robes, towards the lavish throne. The men resembled ancient magicians from a fantasy novel, taking their seats behind her with staffs in hand. Utter silence befell the entire room.

She stood directly in front of the throne and looked down upon us holding the scepter at its neck. She raised her arm with the scepter and stamped the bottom of the scepter against the top of the steps floor.

THOOOM

A deeply loud hollow sound echoed throughout the room. Everyone bowed, but me and the woman looking down at the crowd.

“What’s this?” she said.

“Divine, I found him in the forbidden glade where the Xi-Loom statue once...once was,” Matrix explained.

“So,” the divine expressed sharply.

“Divine, doesn’t he look familiar to you?”

“What would you have me believe child?”

“He’s...he’s Xi-Loom.”

The entire room erupted in laughter. The men behind Divine took great amusement with what was happening. It was as if they waited a very long time for this embarrassing moment to occur. My deductions indicated a hidden expression of strong worry within Divine, and the same worry from Matrix.

Divine rushed down the steps with scepter in tow. She grabbed Matrix by the chin with her empty hand and looked into her eyes amidst the laughter.

“Have you lost your mind?” She whispered.

The apparent leader of the five men stepped forward from his seat behind the throne. His robes were of the blackest night with purple trim. He looked back at the other men who held wry expressions of enjoyment as he did so.

“With all due respect my Divine, she has broken the law, unequivocally,” he declared.

Divine turned around and began to walk back up the steps towards the throne. Her thinking wheels were turning; trying to figure out what to do next. The robed man continued to speak; perhaps unaware he was giving her the time she needed to come up with something. He pointed to the leader of the warriors who stood behind me holding my left arm tight.

“You there, Alpha, what happened?” he said.

Alpha stood in a military attentive manner and spoke.

“Lord Precept, they were together when we arrived.”

“Why didn’t you kill him?” Lord Precept questioned.

“We tried but...but our weapons were useless,” Alpha explained.

The crowd laughed no longer and their growing interest in me began. Captured random thoughts from the chamber assimilated inside my mind detailing political intrigue all around me. The facial expressions of the men on the stage were stoic. As Divine was about to reach the top steps, the lord precept pointed to a stationed throne room guard and snapped his fingers. The guard immediately hurled a spear at my head.

I put out my hand, and the spear stopped in mid air. Mastery of my abilities was increasing rapidly. I pointed my finger towards the lord precept and the spear pointed towards him in-kind. The men behind him left their seats taking steps backwards, but he stood absolutely still. He was not afraid. Their customary way of life eluded my comprehension as I tried to grasp where all of this was leading. Obviously, Matrix placed herself in jeopardy when she assisted me and any violent acts would only make matters worse. I impatiently awaited my turn to speak as I let the spear fall harmlessly to the floor.

“Strange...what else happened? Tell me everything,” the lord precept commanded.

As the Divine reached the steps, the Alpha explained all she recollected. The lord precept moved back with the other men.

“We stopped fighting because she claimed the stranger saved her life,” Alpha said.

Mumbling and whispers started up again. The stares came more from men than women now.

“She warned him before he set foot on the road to Principal Prime, but the road welcomed him nonetheless,” Alpha continued.

I wasn’t angry with Alpha for telling what she knew. One didn’t need my awareness to understand she was dutiful and hated lying. She liked being a warrior for the greater good and served justice well. But, Matrix wasn’t happy with Alpha’s testimony.

“Alpha,” Matrix snapped.

“Continue,” Divine ordered.

“She said...she said...,” Alpha stuttered.

“What did she say?” Divine asked.

“She said she gave him her clothes,” Alpha said.

The throne room erupted into conversations from every corner. It sounded like listening to a crowd of people talking on their cell phones at a packed football stadium.

“Mom, I...,” Matrix cried.

THOOOOM

The entire room shot back into silence and many fell to their knees or kneeled very low. The stamp of the scepter against the floor seemed to shake the room, as well as, delivering a thunderous echo abound. It was a wonder the staff didn’t shatter into pieces.

“I am the Divine Feminine! You are the sovereign empress of this continent; the Matriarch of this civilization!”

Divine looked down upon Matrix with angry resolve from the top of the steps. Matrix remained silent and bowed her head low. Her beautiful white hair fell over covering her face. It was then I realized only she had effervescent white hair; no one else in Principal Prime had the same.

“You’re the only one who has seen it and lived. So, I ordered you to hunt it down, kill it, and bring it to me...,” Divine continued.

Divine paused only to move back and sit on the throne. After she did, the council chamber audience and the robed men with Divine stood back up, but remained quiet. Matrix stood up straight.

“I did not tell you to be saved by a strange man...to warn him of our defenses, explicitly breaking the law. And, I certainly did NOT tell you to give him YOUR clothes!”

Divine regained her composure, as she did the lord precept tried to say something else, but Divine gave him a look able to slay a thousand men instantly with heart attacks. He shut his lips tight!

“So, this is the one you have chosen? He is the one you have wrought without counsel, signatory, or advisory?” Divine questioned.

My acute observations zoomed in on the subtlety of Divine’s fidgeting fingers and her eyes moving side to side. My extraordinary analysis traced the sweat running from her brow, marked the pulse of her vein on the temple, and mapped the adjustment in her body’s posture. The combination of these indicators conveyed to me that Divine was trying to save her daughter with the

question and hoped her daughter was wise enough to recognize it. Moments passed and then Matrix said...

“Yes.”

The people proved stunned, including the lord precept and his robed pals.

“Seize her,” Divine said.

“But Divine Feminine...,” the lord precept squawked.

“Confine her to her chambers; there she shall remain until coronation or execution,” Divine declared.

Alpha and her warriors seized Matrix immediately. They put the handcuffs on her swiftly. One warrior on each side of her grabbed an arm and whisked her away with Alpha leading the party. Matrix looked back at me with the same persistent searching look. And, just like that, she was gone.

Purpose

“Guards, take him to the labyrinth,” Divine ordered.

“My liege, please...he isn’t one of us. He doesn’t belong here,” the lord precept said.

“She has chosen him, the road has welcomed him, and he must walk the path.”

“At least give this man a proper welcome,” the lord precept begged.

I observed Divine’s struggle to keep the corner’s of her mouth at bay to prevent a smile. The way skin between both eyebrows crinkled, and the relaxation of her shoulders. Her plan succeeded the way she anticipated. The lord precept, somehow, played into her brilliant hands. I assumed the rest was up to me.

“As you suggest, but this process will move forward and mind well your duty to your office,” Divine directed.

The guards reached me; one was on each side, but they didn’t handcuff me like before. Divine stood up from her throne.

“Are you confused?” She asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“What are you confused about?”

“Well, this all seems rather ridiculous. I healed her, she gave me some clothes, the road didn’t hurt me...what’s wrong with that? These were all acts of kindness, not malice.”

I will never forget the look on her face. She smiled so big and I sensed she wanted to laugh. She found great amusement in my words along with others who obviously grew more curious. The silence in the room no longer propelled itself by enforcement using the stamping of a scepter. It was pure curiosity allowing silence to dominate the space.

“Are you confused about her giving clothes to you?”

“Yes, I mean, you can buy clothes at any local store. I’ll give them back if you want me to. She did nothing wrong.”

Gasps filled the room and I swear several men fainted on the spot. Divine was obviously caught off guard. The men onstage huddled together whispering.

“Giving clothes back would be a great insult here.”

“Oh, no one told me that before. Pardon me please, I don’t mean to insult anyone here.”

Divine blinked several times. This time several of the men fainted along with a few women in the crowd too. Divine looked at me in the eyes like Matrix did, searching for something, but I didn’t know what they were looking for. I imagined she finally understood why her daughter gave me the clothes.

“You claim there are storage places with clothes?”

“Yes, everyone here got their clothes from somewhere, they didn’t magically appear out of thin air,” I exclaimed.

“You claim people buy them from these places?”

“Sure and other things too, food, water, toys...”

“Buy them with what?”

“Buy them with money!”

“What is money?”

“It’s usually a precious metal or a note; meaning special paper, that people agree is worth trading for or with.”

“So, you exchange money for clothes at stores?”

“Yes.”

“How do the stores get their clothes?”

“They purchase them from manufacturers.”

“Where do manufacturers get them?”

“They make them with machines.”

“That’s absolutely absurd, machines can’t make clothes,” the lord precept interjected.

“Stop, I’d like to see these...stores, take me to them,” she said.

“I can’t,” I said.

“Why can’t you?” She asked.

“Because they aren’t here,” I explained.

“Where are they? Where do you come from? Who are you?” She asked.

A pressure swamped my mind and a sour knot filled my gut. My intuition reacted prompting me to not answer those questions. It was clear this society didn’t make clothes like we do. I was becoming more in tune with knowing when to keep my mouth shut. I remained silent.

“He is allowed a delta, as the Matriarch’s chosen, this will help him understand and perhaps answer your questions,” the lord precept offered.

“True, make sure he has one at once. Delta guard’s take him to the labyrinth.”

Divine turned and began walking down the steps towards the corridor whence she entered earlier. Her facial expression was one full of serious thoughts. The audience began to leave in a cloud of whispers.

“Thank you, for allowing me to explain,” I said.

Everyone stopped; my misspeaking was putting my foot back in my mouth again, but Divine turned facing me from the steps.

“You are welcome,” she said.

She mimicked the same gesture as Matrix did earlier; everyone in the room did the same. Afterwards, the guards escorted me outside walking north for a while. Soon, we headed towards a giant observatory building. At least, that’s what it looked like. The guards inspected me with curiosity.

The guard on my left radiated a dazzlingly beauty. A voluptuous fitness with confident posture and walk imparted her signature impression. The strikingly elegant guard on my right wore her armor more like an evening gown. She wore the armor; the armor did not wear her.

“He’s more of a man than Matrix deserves,” the dazzling guard said.

“Oh yes, all this trouble over her is for nothing,” the striking guard agreed.

“Some women here would appreciate such a strong and powerful man,” Dazzling revealed.

“I certainly appreciate such men,” Striking disclosed.

Both women chuckled haughtily, instead of the giggles or girlish laughter I’m familiar with on Earth. Certainly, they wanted me to hear every word of their conversation and I found it delightful to be flirted with in light of what was happening. There were a few more unveiled flirtations before I was standing in front of a brass doorway to the giant observatory.

A crowd had gathered and Divine was not present. The lord precept and other men formerly in the council chamber seats stood in their robes off to the side near the city street. They talked amongst themselves first; then the chubby man in bright red robes with yellow trim came forward, until he stood facing directly in front of me. He instructed the guards to leave; the commotion of the crowd along with the distance from us to them, gave him the privacy he needed.

His hood blanketed his dark curly locks of hair. His obscure facial scowls remain covered by a handle bar moustache and chin strip beard. Hooded eyelids, roofed by bushy black eyebrows, hung above intense blue eyes. He was about my height, so he looked me squarely in the face mumbling low where only I heard him.

“I don’t know who you are or where you’re from, but your journey ends here stranger,” he whispered.

“Is that right?”

“That’s right.”

“Who says so?”

“I say so, lord precept of workmanship!”

“You’re who...or...what?”

“You really are ignorant aren’t you? You have absolutely no idea of what’s going on do you?”

“No, I don’t and thank you for recognizing it.”

“Why do you say such things? Do I look like that kind of man to you?”

“Say what things, what are you talking about?”

The lord precept of workmanship looked back at the lord precept in dark robes with purple trim. I think he wanted to run over there and talk to him again. His facial expression validated my suspicions something’s wrong, but cold glares from his colleagues changed his mind.

“Inside the doors to this Labyrinth are unspeakable horrors. Many men and women have tried to pass this test for centuries. You will find their bones after you enter and most likely rest forever where they do. However, if you walk through, and come out on the other side, you will have completed the first part of the path. Fare thee well, stranger.”

He walked away back to the others and as if by magic the building’s doors opened. However, this time, my vision witnessed him use his staff as a focus to open the door. I looked inside to see no light and the outside day only revealed a dust dirty concrete floor. I moved forward bravely because no dangerous premonition occurred.

Once inside the doors behind me shut quickly. Spiritual echoes of people dying came into sudden view then quickly vanished. A few moments later light filled the area. There, a long narrow concrete walkway about two feet wide proved to be the only route. I quickly looked behind me over my shoulder towards the doors only to see them about two car dealerships away. In front of me, I made out what appeared to be an open doorway at the same distance. Gadgets, mechanisms, and other sorts of apparatus moving all around churned like I inhabited the insides of a giant clock.

Breezy wails from gusty winds whispering air tickled my ears. Cranking whines of precision gears beat their drums. Soon, my equilibrium disorientated; right seemed left, down seemed up, everything was moving. Especially the narrow concrete walkway, it remained solid but seemed to turn as a whole, moving this way and that way.

Clearly, trusting my naked eyes placed me in danger, so I closed them as I fought to keep my balance. And, it was a good thing too, because my guided minds-eye revealed to me an entirely different view. The inside functioned as a huge gyroscopic construct and all its parts, including the walkway, were moving. Now, I beheld broken bones and tumbling tatty clothes rolling against the inside walls, like egg whites in their shells. I thought about teleporting, but I liked this challenge. My lack of fear derived from living beyond death and I trusted my new powers and abilities.

With my eyes closed, I guided myself to the only doorway open. I elementally controlled the air around me to be steady. I took ten steps right to

remain on the walkway without falling, four hops over mechanisms to the left to avoid tripping, nine hand springs backward to dodge the sweeping beams, until finally stepping out of the gyroscopic construct. I opened my eyes to the sound of crowd applause and the surprised faces of five angry men.

The lord precept of workmanship wasn't too happy and he made no attempt to hide it. He marched up to me like an angry little boy who wanted to take his ball and go home. He waved his clenched fist back at the resident crowd while coming forward and the applause snuffed out.

"I don't know how you did it, but you will never finish the path and I will never bow to you," he screeched.

"I don't want you to bow to me."

"So pathetic, it's a wonder you were able to pass two tests."

"I only passed one test."

"Idiot, the road was the first test and this was the second," he explained.

"Get on with it!" the lord precept yelled standing far off in his black robes with the other three men who I assumed were also lord precepts of some status.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," he said.

"Why?" I asked

"No one has passed all six tests in over 10,000 years."

"What does that mean?"

"It means all the constituents I represent are yours to command."

He pulled a golden rod about the length of a ruler out of his robes and handed it to me. It had carvings similar to hieroglyphics carved into it. My linguistics translated the carvings, “Do No Harm”, it read. He continued the formality by holding his scepter at its neck, raising it in the air, and stamping its bottom against the ground before me.

THOOM

This time the familiar booming noise lingered with the ground rumbling a little as he finished. Many residents in the crowd bowed low, but others remained standing as if this particular ritual did not pertain to them. My intuition signaled those bowing were his constituents.

“Inertia,” he proclaimed loudly.

“What just happened?”

“My title is Work. I am no longer the lord precept of workmanship.”

He walked behind me; stationing himself off my shoulder to the right. Whispers and chatter started up again along with a lot of fingers pointing. The guards came back with huge smiles on their faces.

“Don’t think you can hide behind him?” Striking asked.

“You have no title to protect you now.” Dazzling said.

They both grabbed him, one arm each and started to drag him away towards the surrounding crowd, which was growing bigger now after my success. Only the women who clapped and cheered earlier stepped forward to meet the guards. Evidently, he was in trouble, but I didn’t understand why.

“Stop,” I said.

The guards stopped in their tracks and turn around. The women coming to meet them also stopped.

“Are you protecting him now?” Striking asked.

“What has he done?” I inquired.

“He has done anything and everything truly terrible!” Dazzling indicted.

My perceptions revealed revenge on their faces as Dazzling removed her breastplate, letting it plummet to the ground with a thud. Afterwards, she pulled back her blouse-like garment at the shoulder revealing a grievous scar from a terrible old wound. As if a tiger clawed into her, when she was younger, leaving a mangled mess of grossly healed skin today. She raised her blouse to reveal a similar wound on her stomach. Striking did the same, revealing similar wounds, and then another woman from the crowd and another.

“I’ve prayed for this day. This day has finally arrived,” Dazzling said.

“We will have our justice,” Striking declared.

“If I heal you, will you spare him?” I asked.

The guards looked bewildered as did the women from the crowd who now moved in closer towards the former lord precept. I walked up to the guards and more residents came closer. The remaining lord precepts followed suit.

“Why are you willing to save him? He wants you dead. You know that don’t you?” Striking asked.

“He’s a monster, probably even the monster we’ve been looking for...he’s done bad things...horrible things,” Dazzling informed.

I believed the guards and the women in the crowd who pointed and yelled at him for his atrocities. All of them were angry holding stick, stones, and shaking their fists. All of them were vengeful, expressing their desires to rip him limb from limb. The truth blatantly evident, as the hopeless expression of the weeping man in red robes on his knees before them, became desperate begging's for mercy.

My awareness kicked in and I listened to a guidance that delivered more than intuition or my gut. I became in tune with something far beyond feelings and emotions; a meaningful multiverse faith more than teacher, mentor, or instructor because it always knew exactly what to do. All I had to do was carefully pay attention. Open my mind, listen with my heart and take a deep breath. I held up the golden rod and read the words from it aloud.

"Do no harm," I said.

"Ha! You delivered him to us, now deliver justice," Dazzling said.

She let go of him and stepped back. I walked up to her asking her to turn around and she did. I kneeled down grabbing healthy black soil from the well kept grounds of the observatory. I noticed how perfectly edged the grass was along the sidewalk leading to the building. I stood back holding the soil. I pulled down her blouse at the shoulder and started rubbing the soil into her skin at the wound.

The people abhorred me doing such a thing and clearly touching her naked shoulder is wrong, but when they watched my hands take on a bright glow and the wound disappeared; they finally understood.

“It felt warm,” Dazzling said.

She inspected where the wound used to be, stretching her neck looking over her shoulder with help until all agreed the wound no longer existed.

“Why have you done this?” Striking asked.

I immediately remembered Druid Dryad’s explanation when she passed on her healing ways, “Please remember all life is precious and even things we determine to be evil have valid reasons for the things they do...such is life”, but certainly neither the guards, nor the crowd would understand the explanation.

“Do no harm,” I repeated.

“Again,” Dazzling demanded.

This time she raised the blouse in front again showing the other wound on her stomach. I repeated the process only to be asked to do it again by Striking and many women in the crowd with similar wounds. Some of them were teenage girls with several wounds. By the end of it all, I wanted to kill him myself. Again, my awareness kicked in; so I removed the red robes off the man with the handlebar moustache and gave the clothes to the guards. I now understood how important professional titles and clothes were in this society, which reminded me of many problems on Earth.

Women in the crowd cheered as the guards raised his red robes high waving them like a victory flag. Men in the crowd looked at me with a venomous anxiety in their eyes. The other lord precepts looked on at the whole situation awfully unhappy. I grabbed the former of their ilk up from the dirt with one hand by his neck looking him in the eye.

“If you ever hurt another woman I’ll kill you myself,” I threatened.

“Women do bad things too...women can be monsters too...women rape too!”

My deductions made it clear he told the truth and I wondered. Was he a victim or a vigilante, or a sadistic opportunist using women rapists as an excuse to employ his wickedness? My insight indicated he was once a victim who chose to become something horrible.

“That’s no excuse,” I decreed.

I let him go and he walked off. The crowd parted like he was a leper letting him leave unharmed. I never saw him again. Work’s departure immediately preceded my instincts alerting me to danger, but no one aggressed towards the guards or I who now stood together. As my instincts increased warning of incoming harm I took a defensive posture.

“What’s wrong?” Striking asked.

My internal alarms ceased no sooner than she asked the question. A man emerged from the crowd moving through the people with more difficulty. It seemed people were more concerned about me than him. He scurried up to me panting and out of breath. He bent at the waist with his hands on his knees.

“I’m the delta assigned to be your advisor...,” he said.

“You’re the one who will answer my questions?”

“Yes, after I catch my breath for a time.”

“Pathetic,” Dazzling vexed.

“Hey, not all of us are warriors; some of us are scholarly advisors,” he said.

He was bald with a slender build. A blonde trim extended goatee with moustache draped his top lip and jaw line. Deep-set blue eyes with barely there blonde eyebrows charged his facial demeanor with confidence. He wore a tight fitting long sleeve jacket resembling seal skin and a gold kilt-like garment belted at his waist that covered the thighs.

The guards shook their heads in disgust and took position behind me allowing him to squat by my side. I relaxed noting they no longer held my arms under arrest. Healing their wounds earned me a privilege not expressed with a verbal thanks or other gratitude.

“Are you going to make it?” I asked.

“Just needed a few seconds,” he said.

“Interesting...,”

“What’s so interesting?”

“Never mind...”

“Take him to the weaving fields,” a lord precept yelled.

The black robed man angrily flailed his hand forward with visible disgust in the fingers. His surrounding crowd became fewer as my surrounding crowd increased. However, the people in the crowd stayed at least fifty feet away. I started walking with the guards and my new advisor.

“Well, the fields are far away so it’s going to be a long walk. I should’ve brought something to eat. Regardless, there’s plenty of time to answer your questions now,” Advisor said.

“You’ve referred to time twice already and no one else here has.”

“Well, I’m from a small town on another continent. There, we talk about time, all the time.”

I watched and listened examining his darting eyes, the way he crossed his fingers, and the restless way he kept checking his clothes. All signs telling me he was hiding something. Yet, my perceptions indicated he told the truth. Even so, the guards close behind us scoffed whenever he spoke. There was no love lost between them.

“Tell me what these titles mean...Alpha, delta...etc., and, tell me who these lord precepts are...”

“Okay, Okay, slow down, one thing at a time. You really don’t know what’s going on, do you? First, the titles you mentioned are an alphabetical order of distinction,” he interrupted.

“What kind of distinction?”

“The titles distinguish who among us in society is a master in at least one pathway to enlightenment.”

“How many pathways are there?”

“Well, there are five pathways with oversight from the lord precepts and one innate pathway without oversight,” he explained.

“What innate pathway without oversight?”

“The land takes care of its own and destroys intruders. The first pathway is being able to survive here.”

“Do you mean here at Principal Prime?”

He laughed along with the guards behind us and a few onlookers who went to great lengths to eavesdrop on the conversation while remaining many feet away. We were travelling past the eastern cusp of the city into what appeared to be suburbs during his explanation.

“No, I mean to say, here on this world, Tenet. There are places here, like the road, which defends this planet from intruders or strangers like you. If this world considered you a threat, it would work to destroy you instantly.”

“I see.”

“Luckily, you survived the first pathway, but then again, all babies born here do.”

“What are the other pathways?”

“The pathway of healing and teaching is where we are headed now. There are also the pathways of exploration, justice, and governance,” he explained.

“What is the purpose of the pathways? Why are they so necessary to reach enlightenment? Is this your religion?”

“This is our way of life, not a religion, those types of belief systems died out long ago. The purpose of the pathways is to fulfill the meaning of life.”

“What is the purpose of life?”

“The purpose of life is to give back to life, all life, everything that lives and exists. The only way to fully do that is by mastering the pathways to enlightenment.”

“I’m still confused about how the alphabetical order relates to the pathways.”

“I figured you would be; I brought this chart to help you understand.”

Symbol	Title	Pathway(s) Level Value	
		Expert	Master
A α	alpha	3	3
B β	beta	5	2
Γ γ	gamma	5	1
Δ δ	delta	4	1
E ε	epsilon	3	1
Z ζ	zeta	2	1
H η	eta	1	1
Θ θ	theta	5	0
I ι	iota	4	0
K κ	kappa	3	0
Λ λ	lambda	2	0
M μ	mu	1	0

Symbol	Title	Pathway(s) Level Value	
		Novice	Journeyman
N ν	nu	1	5
Ξ ξ	xi	2	4
Ο ο	omicron	3	3
Π π	pi	4	2
Ρ ρ	rho	5	1
Σ σς	sigma	5	0
Τ τ	tau	4	1
Υ υ	upsilon	4	0
Φ φ	phi	3	1
Χ χ	chi	2	1
Ψ ψ	psi	1	1
Ω ω	omega	1	0

He handed me the chart and I reviewed them as I walked. My guard's curiosity about them led them to peer over my shoulder as we marched ahead. The charts proved confusing.

"This chart shows only three pathways of mastery. What about the other three pathways?" I asked.

"Very few can become experts of all six and fewer still can master them."

"Ha, that's a male chart. Women can master them all and we usually have more expertise than men," Dazzling bragged.

"Yep, make sure you tell him everything," Striking insisted.

My guards bothered my advisor, but he continued to answer my questions.

"I was getting to that...now where was, oh yes, women seem to be more attuned to the pathways and have managed to master them more often."

"Seem to be?" Dazzling balked.

"Managed to master?" Striking questioned.

"Look, I'm his advisor, not yours, and we men are entitled to our opinion."

"Okay, never mind that for now; tell me about these lord precepts."

"Alright, every lord precept is an Alpha, which is very rare for men, and each of those men also passed the testing ritual for at least one of the pathways."

"Testing ritual?"

"Passing the six testing rituals is the necessary step to become Xi-Loom."

“What does Xi-Loom mean?”

“Xi-Loom is an acronym. Each letter represents mastery of one of the six pathways of enlightenment. The first letter is the symbol for the number ten and represents our planet, Tenet. The second letter is the symbol for inertia and represents work energy in physics.”

“And the others, what do they represent?”

“It is not my place to tell you before the tests are completed.”

“Why? I don’t understand.”

“These tests are administered during early childhood and once as an adult. They help determine one’s place in our society. They are highly regulated and there are laws to insure they’re conducted fairly.”

“I think I understand.”

“Unfortunately, the Matriarch has chosen you for herself; therefore you must master all six tests. It’s a very daunting task. Normally, a series of tests would be taken before taking the ones you are scheduled to endure now.”

My insight picked up on his disappointment of the Matrix’s choice. The curl in the corner of his top lip and the intensity in his hawkish tone at that moment disclosed his displeasure; a sense of danger returned.

“Aren’t there any other male Xi-Loom?”

“There’s only been one and he left over 10,000 years ago.”

“He left? Where did he go?”

“Somewhere amongst the stars...”

“Why did he leave?”

“Legend states we are supposed to follow him.”

“Are there women Xi-Loom?”

“Yes, but they aren’t called Xi-Loom, they are the Divine Feminine, who is the executive president of our world, and five matriarchs, who lead our five nations with the help of the five lord precepts,” Dazzling interrupted.

“The five matriarch’s vote on which one of them will advance to become the next Divine Feminine. Of course, you know who she is now. Regardless, only the female line of enlightenment has remained consistent throughout time. The male line of enlightenment broke when Xi-Loom departed,” Striking historically detailed.

“Why am I forced to master all six tests? What happens if I don’t?”

“Matrix is not allowed to bond with any male who isn’t Xi-Loom. So, you must take the tests. If you fail, you’ll probably be dead because the tests are extremely difficult. And, Matrix will be put to death for choosing an inferior bond even by male standards!” Advisor informed.

“That’s putting it mildly to say the least, however, the clothes you wear now did belong to her initial male bond. Men just can’t hack it,” Dazzling said.

“Yep, men are weak,” Striking jabbed.

“Is he Xi-Loom?” I asked.

“He’s dead. Matrix and her bond were recently ambushed by a beast we’ve been hunting. Only she survived,” Striking said.

“He wasn’t Xi-Loom. However, he followed the laws and was naturally progressing through the testing rituals. He passed two rituals before his untimely death,” Advisor said.

“This is crazy, all we did was help each other, I don’t even know her name,” I said.

“What is it with you having affections for everyone? You flirt with men and women,” Striking asked.

“I haven’t flirted with anyone.”

“Yes you have, you flirted with the Divine in public, telling her thank you,” he said.

“You put on Matrix’s clothes, no one twisted your arm to do it,” Dazzling said.

“You thanked the lord precept of workmanship too. What do you like about him?” Striking asked.

“I was just being polite. I wasn’t flirting and I love women, not men.”

“Ahem, you should be careful with your graces and politeness. We are not accustomed to strangers flaunting them so carelessly. Also, a person’s name is a very close personal thing, only shared with those who you truly love. Usually, only your mother, father, and the one you choose to bond with will know your name. It is uncommon for your children to even know your name before you die. After death, it is customary for a parent’s name to be presented to them as a token of memory,” he explained.

“Stop,” the lord precept ordered.

We arrived at a great field with wandering animals similar to bear, leopard, elk, buffalo, rhino, fox, mink...etc. All of them wandered around the field without attacking each other or us. Far off caverns enclosed the field ensuring only one way in and one way out. Various types of plants similar to cotton, hemp, flax, and ramie were also abundant.

As I looked around, I wondered about time. I ignored my compulsion to acknowledge time before my advisor mentioned it; and food. I surprisingly wasn't hungry. In fact, my full stomach relaxed, but I hadn't eaten a thing. Perhaps all of my powers allowed me to feed off my surroundings, however, I sensed being a true healer afforded me the benefit.

The suns were both still shining and there's no telling when they would set. I remembered the Teacher pointing to the moon and asking me to tell him the time. I put my attention back on where I was at the field. Our crowd was now smaller, many didn't make the journey, but there were others at the field. They appeared to be classes of young children standing in line and led by an adult. Some of the classes of children wore proper clothing. Other classes of children were in small bathing suits and they stood at the edge of the field.

The harlequin green with black trim robed man parted from his colleagues and gracefully walked towards me; my scholarly advisor and the guards moved quickly back into the distant surrounding crowd. He was a tall man with bright red bushy hair and thick red sideburns. He appeared older yet honorably distinguished and held his scepter with steady hands having red hair sprouting from his knuckles.

“Well, you’ve proven you can heal the most egregious of wounds,” he said.

His voice rasped deep reminding me of a southern preacher.

“So, no one can make clothes out of thin air?” he asked.

“I’ve never seen it done before and it certainly isn’t common,” I said.

“This test should be over rather shortly then,” he said.

He waved at a woman holding the hand of a young boy. She led the boy into the field amongst the plants and animals. She talked to the child for a moment showing him how to place his free hand on top of a three foot tall cotton-like plant. The woman found a plant near her and did the same. They both closed their eyes and things started to happen.

My vision switched and now I could see fibers of cotton floating in the air towards the child. Hair follicles from furs along with small pieces of animal hides bound together to form clothing. These resources of plants and animals provided the materials necessary for clothing. Some of the materials came from dead animals or vegetation hidden by the tall stalks of plants and bulky animals in the field.

Gently, all the materials met weaving to become one on the child. Soon the boy wore a leather belted kilt-like gold bottom and a skin tight blue shirt. Sandals appeared on his feet along with a small green cape that draped over his shoulders.

“Those who can, do, those who can’t, teach. You must choose a girl and teach her how to dress in the field,” he insulted.

“Okay.”

I went to move past him towards where the nearest children stood. But, he grabbed my arm tight and stopped me in my tracks.

“Just admit you can’t do it so this folly can be over.”

“Are you afraid I will do it and you will lose your robes?”

“Fool, a little girl’s life is at stake here. If you upset the balance, the cattle and the field will turn against you. Both of you will die and there’s no way I can stop it.”

I searched my abilities for answers. Can I make the clothes, will the cattle remain calm, and is the land with me? I made him let go and I continued towards the children. I reached out with my mind to the children connecting mentally with a little brown haired girl with freckles and the connection allowed me to see through her eyes. I saw rainbows, flower bouquets, kittens, and puppies instead of cattle. The boy in front of her didn’t hold her hand like all the other children were doing. I chose her.

“She’s an Omega, she can’t do it,” another boy snickered.

I took hold of her hand and led her into the field. The situation was already uncomfortable for everyone and I tired of these traditional rituals. However, I recognized not only was the life of the little girl in my hands, but Matrix’s life as well.

We walked into the field mimicking the actions of the woman and boy before us. I could tell she was nervous. At the moment, I believed I earned the

right to my newfound abilities and life after death proved to be more exciting than anything else I ever experienced.

“Don’t worry, we can do this,” I said.

She said nothing, while placing her free hand on top of the cotton plant which was slightly taller than her. I closed my eyes remembering my daughter. I remembered my wife giving birth to her at the hospital. I remembered running off to the store to buy a stroller with detachable car seat to bring her home. I’ll never forget my wife holding her in the wheel chair when the nurse brought them both out to the car.

I remembered strapping my baby girl into the car seat and the quiet smiles my wife and I shared on the way home. I recalled the baby clothes our friends and family sent us and the ones we bought ourselves. Most of all, I remembered buying my daughter her first dress for kindergarten school. The dress was cherry red and my wife insisted my daughter wear black shorts underneath.

My wife also bought a blue, light knit sweater, with tennis shoes to perfect the matching outfit. I remembered taking her to school that first day. I recalled buying her a class ring when she graduated from high school. I got her a necklace with pendant when she graduated from college. And, I got her a bracelet with our family tree when I gave her away to her husband at their wedding.

And, just like that, something compelled me to open my eyes. Animals surrounded us and it seemed like a cotton gin worked its way through our part

of the field. I looked down to find a freckled girl's beaming smile shooting back at me. She held onto my hand tighter now; wearing similar clothes I bought my daughter for kindergarten, with the addition of a simple diamond ring, a simple diamond bracelet, and a simple diamond necklace. I inspected myself to discover my clothes repaired with a matching pair of leather boots.

"I'm a Psi now," she said.

"You'll be an Alpha someday," I assured.

We turned around and headed back towards the edge of the field. The gathering animals and tall stalks blocked our view of the crowd and classes. However, when we started walking the animals dispersed peacefully without any fuss. Soon, we came to the edge and only the black robed leader of the lord precepts maintained a sour face. The rest of the crowd was visibly pleased, including the lord precept over the test.

"Why did you make the jewelry?" he said.

"I like jewelry," I said.

"Well, it's a waste of resources for a child. Especially, since she will soon outgrow them and have to set them aside."

"Can't she give them to another child once she's outgrown them?"

"You don't just give away your clothes. Nonetheless, you've successfully completed the test. My title is Director. I am no longer the lord precept of academics and medicine."

He pulled out another golden rod piece about the same length as the first from his robes and handed it to me. It shared carvings similar to hieroglyphics

like the first rod piece. My linguistics translated, “Evil Can Exist in Light, Good Can Reside in Darkness”. He continued the formality by holding his scepter at its neck, raising it in the air, and stamping its bottom against the ground before me.

THOOM

“Inductor,” he announced.

He quickly took a station behind me off my right shoulder and twice as many people bowed than before, but this time the crowd wasn’t angry and the guards didn’t approach him with malice. There were three remaining lord precepts symbolizing three more tests I had to complete. Their leader was visibly furious, but I sensed I was winning over the other two and the crowd. People were starting to believe I could complete all the tests and the faces of the guards and my advisor reflected their confidence.

“L is the symbol for Inductor and represents a substance that promotes an equilibrium reaction by reacting with one of the substances produced,” Advisor explained.

Discovery

“Guards, take him to the outpost,” the lord precept ordered.

Again the guards led the way and again the crowd followed. This time we went outside the city walls heading northeast. Those with me were quiet now. The guards just looked at each other, they kept exhaling worrisome gasps, and the Director kept looking at his scepter as if his life depended on it. My precognition indicated a perilous obstacle in the near future.

“I’ve been training for this testing ritual for years,” Director said.

“How long have you trained?” I asked.

“Twenty five cycles, give or take a couple of revolutions,” he said.

“So, when you say revolutions, are you referring to war or the revolutions around your suns?” I inquired.

“The latter and we haven’t had war here in over 10,000 years.”

“That’s around the same time Xi-Loom exited, right?”

“Yes, he led us to victory and peace.”

“And, just like him, I’m impressed by the way you handle each ritual test,” Advisor complimented.

“Thanks,” I said.

“This proves men can do anything a woman can do,” Director agreed.

“Oh please, passing a few tests doesn’t put a man into the class of womanhood,” Dazzling slighted.

“Well, it’s still awe inspiring for a man to pass the same tests as the Divine,” Advisor retorted.

“That’s blasphemy! You better watch your tongue delta before it gets cut off,” Striking threatened.

“Maybe we all should calm down,” Director said.

“Regardless, you are a role model to men and I hope we can be friends someday,” Advisor hoped.

“I could use a friend,” I said.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Dazzling loathed.

Eventually, we came to an incredibly large encampment about twenty miles away from the city filled with women warriors of all types; scouts, cavalry, archers, and heavily armored knights. Their mounts resembled Pegasus and dreadfully large tigers. The winged horses didn’t have a horse’s tail; instead, there was a large feathered tail like a hawk’s in place. The tigers camouflaged rapidly into their surroundings like a chameleon.

Warriors watched as their comrades denied the resident crowd from moving towards the stone walls on the opposite side of the encampment. Eventually, I travelled up some stairs to a walkway resting atop the walls. I looked out beyond the walls to discover human-shaped robots wandering aimlessly about a metallic landscape.

The land was smooth and circular in some places, yet irregular with sharp corners in others. A stream appearing to be liquid mercury flowed north instead of south. There were no trees or animals. The robots bumped into each other every once in a while, or sat down then stood up again. Some made quick turns and walked, others ran then stopped. Some stood absolutely still.

This footprint of land and its robotic occupants carried on this way for about a two mile circumference. In the middle of all of this was a tall metallic tower and its base was as big as a high school.

“The war ended here,” Advisor said.

“You fought against robots?” I asked.

“We fought to bring the natural sciences, social sciences, and spiritual sciences together, but a faction of technology objected,” Director explained.

“These robots are remnants of a small portion of weapons used by technology to fight that necessary change,” Dazzling informed.

“What necessary change?” I inquired.

The green and white robed lord precept brushed aside the guards by rudely walking in-between them, making sure he bumped into each one. They fell back several feet along with my advisor, but the Director remained by my side. He looked at the Director, obviously annoyed, and then looked at me; with his scrawny finger pointing towards the tower. He was an elderly man, short and feeble. His long white beard with charcoal whiskers hid his lips and teeth.

“You will take all of them with you. You will go to the node. You will make it stop these robots. You will return here,” he commanded.

We moved outside the gates and made our way through the warren of robots towards the node.

“Will the...they attack?” Advisor stuttered.

“They shouldn’t attack and no one has witnessed anything unusual since their return. It appears there is nothing controlling them,” Director said.

“What do you mean, since their return?” I inquired.

“About a cycle ago the land and the node appeared overnight. Neither was here before, so we set up camps and a perimeter to monitor everything. Other than a few additional robots showing up here and there, nothing’s happened. We destroy some regularly to keep their numbers down,” Dazzling reported.

“Whenever we try to get close to the tower they all start to converge towards it and arm themselves. The lord precepts ordered us to let them alone and figure it to be a malfunctioning underground node long forgotten, but...,” Striking divulged.

“They’re not attacking anyone and this faction of technology is our history! We cannot lose this history again. History is important and should be preserved,” Director interrupted.

“Is there any correlation between the robots and the deaths or other coincidences?” I asked.

“Only one, after their return, the beast murders became more frequent,” Dazzling indicated.

“Please describe the murders to me,” I said.

“The murders are unusual. They started about five cycles ago, and have gradually increased. At first, only elderly people, but recent victims include children. We have found some bodies without their skins, others without their

heads or arms. We've discovered charred bodies burned crisp; frozen bodies in blocks of ice, bloodless bodies drained dry, and a few missing all of their bones," Striking accounted.

"These murders started and remain here at Principal Prime. In the beginning, there was one person murdered in a secluded area and then another after a long lapse. Now, up to ten people at once in broad daylight, and there's never a witness left behind," Director concerned.

"I got to make a movement," Advisor barked.

"You have to do what?" I asked.

"He has to relieve himself, you know," Dazzling said.

"Men can never hold it," Striking grunted.

I didn't hunger or experience being tired and ever since reincarnation, for lack of a better word, I didn't have to use the restroom either. My internal investigation concluded my body fed off of my natural surroundings at a rate fast enough to nourish, but slow enough to completely metabolize everything consumed without waste. My body lived in perfect entropy.

"Oh, well there are some trees over there," I said.

"I'll be right back."

He darted off behind a bunch of trees and we waited for him amongst roaming robots.

"How did Matrix see the murderer?" I asked.

"The creature attacked and killed her Alpha, ambushing them both at Exodus," Director said.

“How did she survive?” I asked.

“Now, that’s the right question,” Dazzling said.

“Some assume she’s the murderer,” Striking explained.

I started to ask another question when all the hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up. My instincts alerted me to incoming danger. And, just like that, the Director’s head exploded, and a salvo of laser blasts knocked me off my feet backwards. I hit the ground hard! By the time I tried to get on my feet robots tackled me down. They pummeled away—stamping me into the metallic terrain like a coin press.

Although the robots hammering incapacitated me, the guards remained in my field of vision. Striking knelt down placing her hand against the metal ground similar to Matrix in the forest, but I detected no communication. This landscape blocked her calls for help. Dazzling immediately pointed towards the nearest incoming robots while dodging fire and drawing her sword. Both women gave each other a look revealing they were closer than any two sisters ever born.

And, just like that, they met the wave of robots head on together. I fought to get out of the pile. But, for every robot I tore apart or ripped into another took its place. I furiously tried to lift them all off me, but more continued to pile on. A glance at the guards revealed they had decimated the first wave not on top of me, but the second wave crashed ruthlessly into us all.

I saw the Advisor running for his life out of the trees dashing towards the tower. Somehow, my instincts synchronized with my powers and I knew what

to do. I clawed my hands into the pile of robots and spread my fingers. A storm of electricity flooded the entire area arching from robot to robot destroying them all. Afterwards, my fingertips had a thrilling sensation when I rubbed my fingers together.

I crawled out of the metallic pile of scorched parts to witness a grizzly sight. I burrowed down through many robots to reach the guards. I threw the robots off Dazzling and launched the robots far away into the air off Striking. My guards lie dead underneath. Their remains stomped into the metal ground by their attackers. If I was more in tune with my powers, they'd still be alive. I blamed myself for their deaths. I ran past the fried hunks of littering metal to find my new friend huddled against a corner wall just inside the node entrance.

"What did you do to make them attack us?" He asked.

"We didn't do anything they just started firing," I said.

"We probably got too close to this node. Where are the others?"

"They're dead."

"Oh no, we have to get out of here, we have to go back!"

"Not yet, I'm going to figure this out."

"Are you crazy? There are robots all around here, we must leave now or we're dead!"

My vision switched again. I could see the power grid to the facility and make sense out of the buildings' circuitry and wiring. My vision guided me to a control panel in the middle of what appeared to be a factory. Although the script and symbols in the facility were foreign to me, I understood them.

Somehow, I was able to see the floors below where we stood. There were many robots, only these robots were building other robots and awfully organized. They were maintaining the factory and like my advisor suggested, other robots headed our way fast.

I grabbed the control panel and carefully directed the electricity of the power grid to short circuit main components of the facility. Eventually, I fried out the power grid itself making sure the facility could never be used again. The entire building became dark and quiet as machines shut down and lights faded out.

“What did you do?”

“I shut it all down.”

“How did you do that?”

“It’s hard to explain.”

“We better get back in case you missed some of them.”

We carried the bodies of the guards back to the encampment. My advisor explained the Director’s body wouldn’t be received well by the women warrior’s and said he would send an appropriate party to get him later. I felt bad leaving him there, but I was still new to all of this society’s rules. I figured it was best to follow his advice.

No one was happy with the outcome, especially the green and white robed lord precept standing in front of me with grim disrespect. Yet, he did his duty.

“I am no longer the lord precept of exploration. My title is Pioneer,” he said.

He pulled a golden rod out of his robes and handed it to me. Its carvings read, “Senses Can be Fooled, Facts Can Be Deceiving”. He continued the formality by holding his scepter at its neck, raising it high into the air, and stamping its bottom against the ground.

THOOM

“Infinity,” he said.

The Pioneer removed his robes and threw them to the ground in a huff. He threw down his scepter too. He vacated the encampment heading towards the node. I never saw him again.

“A circle is the symbol for wholeness, unity and infinity. It is without ending or beginning,” Advisor said.

“Follow me,” the lord precept ordered.

We travelled back to the city council chamber, two guards and a few lord precepts lighter. I stood where I stood before in front of the Divine’s throne. The black robed lord precept now on the steps leading up to it with Matrix brought back to the chamber bound, but with a smile. Divine sat upon the throne waiting for the beginning of the last two lord precept’s ritual tests.

“You will do as I do,” he said.

He let go of his staff and it floated in front of him. He stretched out his hands to the side and began to slowly fly up around the room like a feather

caught on a breeze; he then came back to his staff and settled down on his feet. The staff floated back into his hands.

My calculations analyzed everything he did and just like him I did the same without any staff. I summoned control of elemental air using the winds at will. He grew upset as I performed the act, but proceeded with the ritual test.

Guards brought two large marble stones the sizes of a refrigerator to the floor near us. He made a fist and struck one making it shatter into pieces. I summoned my elemental command, extended my pinky finger; hardening the composition of its density, whilst softening the density of the remaining marble stone at the same time. When I tapped the marble stone it turned into powdered dust.

“This is absurd you’re nothing more than a stranger with a bag full of parlor tricks,” he said.

“Are we finished with this test?” I asked.

“No. Look at my hand; see how I make the fire dance in the middle of my palm. Now, change the color of the entire flame to yellow,” he said.

“Like this? The entire flame is yellow and dances in my palm like yours,” I said.

“Change the entire flame to blue,” he said.

“My flame is blue.”

“Change it all to red like this.”

“It’s red now, just like yours.”

“Now, finally, change it all to black.”

He changed his flame to black, but I couldn't do it. The warm heat from my flame brushed my skin the whole time, but from his flame there was none. My analysis alerted me not to change the flame to black because if I did, everyone in the chamber would die. So, I stopped. I worried that I had failed the ritual test and started trying to come up with a way to save Matrix.

“I cannot do it.”

“Why don't you change the flame to black?”

“If I do, everyone here will die.”

He looked behind at Divine and then looked around at the filled council chamber. He closed his hand snuffing out the flame.

“Correct, that is what would happen with true flame. I am no longer the lord precept of magic and governance. My title is Politician,” he said.

He pulled the fourth part of the golden rod out of his robes and handed it to me. Its carvings read, “Trust No One; Accept Beings as They Are”. He held his scepter at its neck, raising it high into the air, and stamping its bottom against the ground.

THOOM

“Omnipotent,” he said.

He walked away through the crowded council chamber; as he relinquished his station, the last lord precept removed his brown robes with white trim, handing his scepter and a rod piece to Divine. He followed his colleague with his head held low. All of the women were smiling bright; the

men expressed mixed emotions, some verbally. Divine arose from her throne obviously pleased. She looked at Matrix heartened.

“You’ve chosen well, Matriarch,” Divine declared.

Divine turned to the crowded chamber and me.

“Stranger, you have completed all the rituals and succeeded every task,” she said.

“What do I have to do next?”

“Hear me citizens of Tenet, you have witnessed every act, viewed every success. Is he worthy?”

“He is worthy,” the people said.

“So say you all?”

“We do!” They affirmed.

“You are no longer stranger. You are now Master,” she said.

She pulled out the last piece of the rod. It was the headpiece shaped like an exploding star. The carvings on the headpiece read, “Expect the Unexpected”. Divine raised her scepter high into the air, and stamped its bottom hard against the ground.

“Xi-Loom,” she thundered.

THOOM

Matrix ran towards me with open arms and jumped into me almost knocking me over. She hugged me so tight that she possibly hurt herself. She whispered into my ear.

“Thank you,” she said.

“It was the least I could do for the clothes,” I said.

“Unfortunately, there is no time to rejoice. There is still a beast who murders our people loose upon the land. You two will find it, kill it and bring it here,” Divine said.

Destiny

“No rest for the weary,” Advisor said.

“I’ve heard that before,” I noted.

“I haven’t, what does it mean?” Matrix asked.

“It means we should at least get plenty of rest before heading out to look for this thing,” I said.

“Why, are you tired?” Matrix asked.

“Surprisingly, I’m refreshed like I just woke up,” I said.

“You should be, it’s not every day a man achieves the highest rank a male can attain,” Advisor said.

“Where did you last see this thing?” I asked.

“It ambushed my Alpha and I at Exodus, far to the north,” she said.

“It killed him?”

“Yes.”

“But, it didn’t kill you, why?”

“I don’t know. It withdrew leaving me unconscious at Exodus. When I woke up I brought Alpha’s body back home. Later I tracked it to the Divine Lake where it ambushed me again. After that, I met you.”

We continued to walk through the city, some applauded as we travelled. Others smiled or pointed with happy expressions. A few nice men bowed as we passed by. Soon, we passed the gates and finally both suns had set. We embarked on our journey from Principal Prime at night under the cover of darkness.

“We need to go back to Exodus,” I said.

“Aren’t we heading to the lake? That’s where the creature was last,” Advisor said.

“Yes, but the pieces of this rod are pulling me to the north. I’m sure it wants me to go to Exodus. What is Exodus?” I asked.

“Exodus is an abandoned spaceport. It is where the Xi-Loom before you, advanced to the stars,” Matrix said.

“Will we find the creature there?” Advisor asked.

“I don’t know,” I said.

“It’s difficult for me to return there after what happened,” she said.

“Did you love him,” I asked.

“Don’t be silly, we didn’t have children,” she said.

“What do children have to do with love?” I asked.

“You can’t have children without love,” Advisor explained.

“What are you talking about? Having children involves copulation and nothing more. Plenty of women have children alone,” I said.

“Not here! We do not have children without two parents. And, those parents cannot have children without love,” Matrix snapped.

“What does love mean to you?” Advisor asked.

“It means I’ll die for you. I’ll risk my life for yours no matter what. That’s what it means,” I said.

“So, to save me, you would’ve died for me, even though you hardly knew me?” Matrix asked.

“No, that’s not what I meant...,” I said.

“But, that’s what you said,” Matrix interrupted.

“And, that’s what you did by completing the ritual tests,” Advisor said.

“Alright, look it’s more complicated than that, but I can see why you are asking me these questions and coming to those conclusions,” I said.

“So, you don’t love me?” Matrix inquired.

“I’m confused and want to talk about something else,” I evaded.

“You’re so strange, but you are a kind man,” she complimented.

“Thank you,” I said.

“You two are going to have some kind of marriage,” Advisor joked.

“Marriage...what do you mean marriage?” I asked

“We are betrothed,” she said.

“When did that happen?” I asked.

“When she chose you and you became Xi-Loom. Weren’t you paying attention?” Advisor asked.

“Don’t worry; we didn’t build Principle Prime overnight. We will have to build our marriage. I have every confidence you will figure it out,” she said.

“I’m starving and my feet hurt. Let’s make camp here for a while,” Advisor said.

We nestled down near the riverbed leading to the lake. We would cross it in the morning on our way to Exodus. There was a familiarity with the way my Advisor ate, burped, farted and snored. He gobbled down the rations like a

glutton. He was constantly reading in a tome he brought along. And, he had a talent for doing the least work possible.

“So, did you figure out what Xi-Loom means?” Advisor said.

“It means the numeral X representing this planet; the letter I is the first letter in the word Inertia representing work energy. The scientific symbol L for Inductor represents equilibrium or balance; the circle symbol resembling O is for infinity, and O is the first letter of the word Omnipotent while M is the first letter of the word Mastery,” I explained.

“Correct, I’m glad you figured the rest of it out and I’m glad we’re friends,” he said.

“It’s strange having an acronym as a name,” I said.

“It’s not an acronym or a name. Xi-Loom’s who and what you are. How can that be strange?” Matrix asked.

“It’s not my name,” I said.

“You are the oddest man I have ever known. You have a natural aversion to being what you are,” she laughed.

“No I don’t.”

“Yes, you do. When I met you, you were naked, but you seemed surprised when I questioned you about it as if you did not know you were naked. And, you obviously resemble the statue Xi-Loom, and you completed the rituals proving you are him, but you claim it strange to be called that,” she explained.

“I see your point,” I said.

“Are there any other questions?” Advisor asked.

“Yes, there are many beautiful animals around. I’ve noticed people here don’t keep pets. Why?”

“Pets...there’s no such thing as pets. There are only slaves. We abolished slavery ages ago and it will never return,” Matrix affirmed.

“I’m going to get some sleep,” Advisor stated.

It wasn’t long before my advisor was snoring loud enough to wake the nearby dead. Matrix and I tended to the small fire, paying attention to our surroundings, and each other. It was amusing to see my advisor sleep so soundly after displaying so much fear at any possible danger he perceived to be close. I hoped he didn’t have a nightmare because I assumed he would wake up screaming.

“My name is Ava,” Matrix whispered.

“So, you are willing to tell me your name,” I said.

“Quiet...come closer.”

“Okay, I’m closer.”

“I just don’t want him to hear.”

“Why don’t you want my advisor to hear?”

“He’s yearned for me for an awfully long time.”

“Oh, he never told me that.”

“Well, it’s not uncommon for men to want the Matriarch. I received gifts, love notes, flowers, and promises from many men since my appointment to this station.”

“So, most of the men on the planet displayed their affections?”

“The men of lower means absolutely demonstrate the purest sentiments. But, the Alpha’s and the former lord precepts, they’re an entirely different matter. They are gropers, fondlers, blackmailers...etc.”

“Oh, so the Alpha’s and men of higher status pursued and stalked you for themselves?”

“Yes, also your advisor was in the hottest pursuit for my hand in marriage. He hated my Alpha I chose because it publicly embarrassed him and put off his advances.”

“How did it embarrass him?”

“My Alpha did not complete the ritual of omnipotence. He was working his way up to complete that ritual. Unlike you, he received approval under advisory council of the lord precepts and the Divine Feminine. Thus, they provided him time to complete the rituals when he was ready.”

“I don’t understand. What’s the big deal about completing the ritual of magic and governance?”

“You and your advisor are the only two males to complete that ritual since Xi-Loom vanished.”

“I get it now.”

“Most male Alpha’s usually achieve the principles of Tenet, Inertia, and Inductor. Your advisor skipped the first three rituals and completed the omnipotence ritual elevating him to delta. This action made him the best

choice for me, but I didn't like him so I chose someone else before he became an Alpha."

"Why don't you like him?"

"I am bred to lead our people. I am a trained warrior and aristocrat from the best academies. I discerned how he stopped at nothing to get me, and cowered from harsh responsibility."

"Don't worry; a warrior like you has nothing to fear from him."

"I do not fear him. I do not trust him."

"Do you fear the beast?"

"I should, but it let me live twice."

"Most victims know their attacker, maybe it's not a beast after all. What if it's a person? What if it's a male who likes you?"

"Odd you should say such a thing. You see, both times I fought the beast, it changed itself."

"What do you mean?"

"At one point it looked like cattle. Another moment it looked like a big hairy creature never seen before, and then it changed again. It changes its form very quickly, but its eyes never changed. That is how I track it in any form it takes; those haunting blue eyes."

"So, if it is one of our people; who is it?"

"I've never seen anyone else with those haunting eyes."

"My guess is the former lord precept of magic and governance."

“It is not him, my Alpha was his son. He would never kill his own son and he is one of the few males who never mistreated me. That is one of the reasons I chose his son to marry in the first place.”

“So, he is your former father-in-law, which is why he hated me so much.”

“He doesn’t hate you. He’s sad his son is dead and you won his daughter-in-law’s hand so soon after the murder,” she explained.

My intuition alerted me in a panic. I jumped to my feet and my vision changed. I looked all around, but saw nothing anywhere close to us. The vein on my neck throbbed, my heartbeat raced, my breath paced fast. Matrix came to her feet and drew her sword.

“What is wrong? What do you see?”

“I don’t see anything, but something is telling me we’re in danger.”

I looked at the snoring advisor. My intuition noted the slobber running out the side of his mouth and his crumby hands from eating. He was dead asleep and not about to wake up. The sensation soon passed. We sat back down.

“I apologize if I scared you,” I said.

“I understand such actions; I often go with my gut too.”

“That’s why you gave me the clothes, isn’t it?”

“Yes, trusting you comes easy for some reason.”

There was a pulsing in my chest. I can’t explain it, but it guided me to do something.

“Give me your hand.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know how, but I am able to do something that will let me know where you are at all times. Also, it will provide you some protection. I don’t know what kind of protection, but it will give you some.”

“I understand.”

She gave me both of her hands clasped together. I embraced her hands and held them to my chest. Her hands were hard, like a warrior, but yielded to my handling. A deep happiness inside me began to build and I sensed it envelop us both. The sensation permeated togetherness. I never wanted to let go of her hands and as it continued to build she leaned into me. I don’t know how long the crescendo of joy climbed. All I know is it ended with a loud bang, and made the nearby small fire tower into a pillar of flame, and then quickly die back down. My advisor sprang straight up out of his sleep in a fright.

“What did you two do? What are you doing?”

“We’re not doing anything?” I said.

“Then what was that huge boom and what lit up the sky?”

“And, you’re going to help us kill the beast?” Matrix asked.

“Hey, I didn’t ask to be here. The council made me his advisor.”

“Do you want to go back to Principal Prime?” I asked.

“Are you crazy? Go back to the capitol alone at night with a beast wantonly killing anyone that crosses its path! No thank you,” he said.

“Let’s get going,” Matrix said.

“Yeah, let’s get out of here. If the creature is near, he now knows exactly where we are at, thanks to you two.”

We made our way north on the road finally arriving when the suns were starting to break through over the horizon. The land had carried us for many miles to the foot of Exodus.

“These are gigantic metal doors on the side of this mountain. This is Exodus?” I asked.

“Yes, this is where my Alpha died.”

“So, the beast attacked before you could enter?”

“No one can enter Exodus without your rod pieces,” Advisor informed.

“Oh, I assumed you and your Alpha were inside here when the ambush happened,” I said.

“Only one who has passed the rituals can enter and lead our people to the stars,” she said.

“I’m confused, why did you come here if you couldn’t enter?” I asked.

“The beast led us here, we followed it.”

“Why did it lead you here?”

“Maybe it found another way in and this is where it lives,” Advisor said.

“That’s possible. Maybe you tracked it back to its lair and it ambushed you because you got too close,” I said.

“Let’s find out,” Matrix said.

Matrix drew her sword at the ready. My advisor took a big gulp and prepared his hands as if he was going to box the beast. I pulled out the rod

pieces and they flew from my hand up into the air. They combined themselves together. Afterwards, a white globe of energy surrounded the rod and it floated towards the great metal doors. The doors opened. The rod returned to my hand. We could see sophisticated lighting throughout Exodus from outside.

“Let’s go hunting,” I said.

We searched the amazing facility, but found not a living soul. Instead, spiritual echoes of those who once frequented the spaceport filled the place like a busy airport. Eventually, we came to an exotic platform next to a machine the likes I’ve never seen before.

“This must be where Xi-Loom cast away from,” Matrix said.

“Are you certain?” I asked.

“This machine maps the stars. I have studied a newer one similar at the academy,” she said.

“So, you can work this machine?” Advisor asked.

“Yes, the one at the academy can only transport you around our planet. However, with this one if you move this here and press this button like this,” she said.

“Wow, I couldn’t tell that was a monitor over there. It’s integrated so well into the face of the machine that, it’s hard to tell it’s there, if it isn’t on,” I said.

“Are those stars on the monitor?” Advisor asked.

“Yes, and if we move this here like so and press these we should zoom in on an inhabitable planet,” Matrix revealed.

“Inhabitable? You mean this can find suitable planets to live on?” I inquired.

“Yes, let’s see, if I do this to set parameters, and focus like so,” she said.

“Oh my, that’s a beautiful planet,” Advisor said.

“It’s the nearest inhabitable planet to this one,” she said.

“How would we go there?” I asked.

“We have to insert the rod here to synchronize. Afterwards we stand on the platform and use the rod to trigger the transfer,” she said.

“I’ll take that!” Advisor snarled.

By the time my instincts triggered incoming danger I was off my feet in the air flying backwards through machinery on the opposite side of the platform. I came back to my feet in a hurry with icicles falling away from my torso. The attack didn’t hurt at all. I charged towards my advisor as he clutched the rod in hand and a mass of tentacles formed in the air behind him.

Matrix jumped into the air with her sword in front. She came down upon him hard, but he blocked the sword with his forearm as the blade sliced deep. Suddenly, the blade turned into ice and shattered. Still, she pressed him pummeling with accurate kicks and punches as she drew her javelin from her sheath. By the time I reached them she effectively used it like a Bo Staff against him.

“Watch out for the tentacles,” she yelled.

I entered the fray with my hands full of glowing energy. My advisor focused more on me than Matrix. She busied herself spearing away into the

mass of tentacles, thereby pulling pieces of tentacles off. The creature growled an unholy howl as she worked. She easily dodged the bulk of its blows and ignored the ones that landed.

I teleported in and out finding openings to strike him and landed several hits. I hurt him, but it also pissed him off as the tentacles continued to amass from some green misty portal behind him. A shock wave making the sound of a sonic boom knocked me back across the platform again through more machinery, but no pain came from it. I crawled out of the metal rubble coming back to my feet while being pelted by a volley of fire and lightning. I moved through it without a scratch, but he destroyed my clothes forever.

A forceful jet of water shot from his hand knocking me back again before I could teleport to him. It didn't hurt but was difficult to avoid. He was fast! He transitioned from attack to attack with blinding speed constantly moving. That's when I started to see him change into something else. Some type of hairy horrid creature I've not seen before in reality or fantasy. His claws became engulfed in green misty flame and hit with a bull's-eye!

God did it hurt! The pain was unfortunately familiar. No different from when the Plicque bit me. I grabbed my stomach and looked down. A huge hole gaped in me with blue blood pouring out. My muscles froze, preventing me from moving. I heard the sound of cracking ice as a crystalline cocoon formed around me. At first, I assumed my advisor encased me; then my restorative nature determined a healing process in action.

The advisor and the tentacles focused on Matrix; eventually overpowering her attacks. They disarmed the javelin as they bound her with one tentacle wrapped around her face to where she couldn't speak. My failure to handle my advisor gave them the opportunity to capture her. I lay there staring at Matrix dangling from the tentacles in the air helpless on the edge of the platform.

My advisor walked towards me changing as he moved. He clutched his bleeding forearm and winced. Now, he had black jeans and a ratty tan t-shirt on. He was a bald Caucasian with a trim blonde Balbo beard and those haunting blue eyes Matrix mentioned. He wore a black trench coat with the collar up. The kind you buy in high school that you hold on to because you're too fond of it to throw it away.

"Whew, that was some fight! Look at this thing you're inside. That's some trick. This thing feels pretty solid. Is it glass? How does it work?" Advisor asked.

I was unable to move as the wound healed slowly. But, I was able to speak through the pain and crystal cocoon.

"Why?"

"Why? What do you mean why? You're human like me right? We can do what we want."

"I don't understand."

"Oh yeah, I almost forgot, you just got here. You don't really know everything yet; do you...um...um, what's your name?"

"Michael."

“Michael, I’m George Talbot, Doctor George Talbot, pleased to meet you.”

“You’re a...a doctor?”

“Well, I have a PhD in Physics. I was a university professor in my former life.”

“You...you’re a professor?”

“You’re a cop aren’t you? I can tell you’re a cop because my sister married a cop from Boston. He’s a total asshole, unlike you, but he’s still a cop. I hate cops.”

“Unh...it’s never quite the way you think, is it?”

“I know right, I fooled you pretty good. You never suspected me, not once. I was a little surprised. I mean obviously you’re capable and intelligent, but after the magic trial I knew your secret.”

“What secret?”

“You’re susceptible to magic. That’s why you couldn’t turn the flame black. To be honest, I didn’t turn the flame black either. I just created the magical illusion it was black without anyone harmed and everyone believed it. Like you believed I was an Alpha from this world.”

“It was all a...an illusion?”

“No, not all of it was an illusion. Remember when the walkway started turning in the middle of the first ritual test? That was me. It doesn’t normally do that, but I thought at the time you were a threat so I tried to kill you. And, the robots, well let’s just say I’m the one who turned the node back on. I believed I might need an army in the future. I’m sure you understand.

Fortunately, I failed at killing you both times and now look! I can leave this god forsaken planet.”

“You believe that because we are human we can do what we want?”

“Sure, humans don’t die; we come back doing what we want to do. I’m sure your master explained this to you like mine explained it to me.”

“I see.”

“How many did you get?”

“How m...many did I get?”

“Powers, how many powers did you get? I didn’t get all that I wanted. I only got three, but as luck would have it, I only needed one. Do you know what you get when you ask to have every power imaginable? You get magic, because magic can do anything! That’s what I asked for, I asked for every power imaginable as my first choice and my master gave me magic! He said it was an excellent choice. My other two choices became big bonuses.”

“So, I...I have a weakness to magic...”

“Well, not all magic. I developed an analysis spell during my time on this planet, but it didn’t work on you. Most of my attacks didn’t work against you. So, it’s clear that certain manifestations of my magic you are able to defend against. However, raw magic energy hurts you and magical illusions deceive you. I’ve been walking around dressed like this the whole time.”

I remembered the Plicque biting me and recalled what Druid Dryad said about their saliva. I assumed raw magic must be composed of antimatter and that is why it hurt me. Illusions must be composed of antimatter too, which is

why I couldn't detect them. Obviously, my intuition was trying to warn me moments before my advisor arrived, and again at the fire with Matrix when he slept, and again before the robots attacked.

"That's my other friend, I call him Henry. I know it's not really a fitting name for a monstrosity of tentacles, but he's one of the big bonuses I mentioned."

"Don't do this, it's not necessary."

"I was just about to tell you the same thing. Look, we shouldn't be at each other's throats over this. Besides, I doubt I could kill you if I wanted to. You would probably come back as something stronger and you might be the type to of cop to hold a grudge. Let's be friends."

"You still w...want to be my friend?"

"Absolutely, I got to tell you that when I first saw you walking around I was very happy. I hadn't seen another human for a very long time before you arrived. I've been here about forty five years. That's ten cycles. As you've most likely already noticed the days here are seventy two hours long. By the way, your skin gave away that you're human."

"We're the only humans here?"

"As far as I can tell, but the universe is a pretty big place. I know there are others of us out there among the stars. But, what do you say, friends?"

I lay there looking at him in pain. I didn't answer because I knew better than to accept an offer from someone like him. I looked over at Matrix to make sure she was okay.

“Don’t worry, I won’t hurt her, I’ve been after her for a very long time. At first, I thought the Exodus doors would open for her. That’s why I lured her here the first time, but I was wrong. It seems only winning the pieces of the rod can make it work. I was going to take them, or win them, but then you showed up. I’ve come here many times trying to open these doors with my magic, but something about this planet interferes with my power. Isn’t that strange?”

“That is strange if magic is every power imaginable; why didn’t it work?”

“That’s what I said! See, we think alike, which is why I want you to know I’m going to be a good man to Matrix. I’m sure you understand a woman like her is too precious to walk away from. I’ve never met anyone like her on Earth or here. She reminds of a red head student I used to date long ago.”

“So, you’re going to just take the rod and take Matrix?”

“Pretty much, but don’t take it personally. Remember, I saw her first. Besides, there’s no such thing as right and wrong. There’s no such thing as good or bad. There’s only existence and non-existence. Human morality we’ve bound ourselves to is folly. The universe couldn’t care less about what humans think, believe, and feel.”

“Then why do I still have inalienable feelings of right and wrong? And, why do these people here exude the same type of morality in their rules and laws?”

“Where are you from? You sound like a Republican. My dad was a Republican and boy did he give me some headaches. There’s no aspirin on Tenet.”

“I grew up near Hyde Park in Chicago.”

“That explains why you fight like that. I’m from North Philly. I grew up on Westmoreland Street. Ever hear of it? Man, I sure do miss Philly cheese steak sandwiches, hamburgers, pizza and I’d give everything for coffee. I sure do miss coffee.”

“Philadelphia, that’s why you fight like that, probably read a lot of comic books too.”

“That’s terrific insight, but I’ve always read many books. Including science fiction and fantasy horror; which brings us back to my original question, how many powers did you get? You didn’t ask for every power imaginable, did you?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“You missed a great opportunity. It’s too bad you failed to see the big picture; but like so many students before you, many people look a gift horse in the mouth. You don’t trust me do you? You’re not going to accept my offer, are you?”

“Let me guess, you want me to be your sidekick. You’re super Alpha and I’m Mr. Omega. I’m the sidekick because you have every power imaginable and you kicked my ass. And, you get the rod and the woman because you won the fight? Am I right about how you want this to all work out?”

He laughed out loud with an echo filling every corner of Exodus.

“You know, my master said you would be my enemy. I waited ten cycles for you to get here and during that time I grew lonely for human contact. My master said I must kill you the first chance I got. But, where’s the fun in that? I like having a nemesis and I know you’re going to follow me and do the good guy thing. It’s what cops like you do, right?”

“I am Xi-Loom, it’s who I am, and it’s what I do.”

“Maybe so, but you also lost the woman and the rod. I think this planet will prove very difficult for you to leave without the rod. I don’t think you asked for the right powers and I don’t think you have that many. It seems you are able to manipulate the elements, which is why they don’t harm you. And, you are able to heal people and yourself. Perhaps you possess an ability to slightly manipulate time and space, which is what I just witnessed during this fight, but nothing I can’t handle.”

“You seem to have all the answers.”

“No, I just have a healthy head start. Do yourself a favor; stop believing in heroes and villains. Moralities are the chains binding the ignorant to false hope. Haven’t you noticed successful leaders and rulers of Earth are free from these chains? They do not abide by morality. Morality will only hold you back. By the time you are able to leave this planet my powers will be unstoppable. I already have ten cycles of practice using them.”

“You mean killing with them.”

“That too, now you be sure to follow because by the time I see you again I will want to talk to another human who understands me; whether you like me or not doesn’t matter. I’ve grown to like you and consider you a friend.”

“Leave Matrix, there’s millions of planets, most likely millions of women out there. Surely, you could find another woman, and this planet needs her.”

“I’ve spent a lot of time pondering about it and I don’t believe there’s another woman like her in the entire universe. I think you should take your own advice and find another woman. I’m not a fool, I know she doesn’t care for me, but she’ll have to depend on me for survival out there and as time goes by, whom else will she have?”

“I will find you, I will save her, and I will stop you.”

“You’re welcome to try; we can do whatever we want. We’re human! But, my money is on me. So, in a nutshell, I win.”

“Not in this fantasy horror.”

Dr. Talbot laughed again and walked back towards Henry. He put the rod in the machine activating the platform then removed it. He and Henry moved to the platform’s center with Matrix in tow. I still couldn’t move and although much of the pain had subsided, my injury stopped me from doing anything.

“You heal quickly, but that’s still a really nasty wound. Make sure you get someone else to look at it, you hear?”

A hum began to build and my deductions told me none of the damage to the machinery from the fight was going to interfere with the transport as I

hoped. Suddenly, there was a sensation in my chest inclining me to look at Matrix. She was letting me know she was okay. She knew I would follow and get her when possible. The sensation building between us surged in unison with the machines humming to a great crescendo. A flash erupted and they were gone, but the rod lay at the center of the platform.

I lay there impatiently, and Druid's words came to mind again, "Please remember all life is precious and even things we determine to be evil have valid reasons for the things they do...such is life". Finally, the crystal crumbled away freeing me and not even a scar remained. My healing capabilities proved to be extraordinary. I walked over and picked up the rod wondering why it didn't leave with my advisor. I examined the machine unable to figure out how it worked. That's when I sensed him.

"You don't need that," Teacher said.

"My advisor, Dr George Talbot, said you're my master."

"I have told you once, but I'll say it again. All humans undergo a process of transition upon their death, but the type of transition and the types of processes vary tremendously. Not everyone wants to be a superhero. No one being is the same as another... It's very important you remember that."

"He claimed there is no right and wrong. There is no good or bad. Is that true?"

"What do you think? Keep in mind his references about a master, and his references about a universe. I am a teacher and I've explained the

multiverse. Again—the type of transition and the types of processes vary tremendously.”

“I know there is right and wrong. I believe there is good and bad. I don’t think it’s just a human thing.”

“Good, never lose that truth. Once you do, you are lost forever.”

“How do I defeat every power imaginable?”

“He doesn’t have every power imaginable. He has magic. Magic can do a great many things, but it can’t do everything. It couldn’t kill you and it couldn’t get him off this planet.”

“Well, it sure put me down for a while and he was able to leave.”

“Magic hurt you here, but who’s to say what will happen somewhere else.”

“The Plicque bite hurt and raw magic hurt too. I can’t see past his magical illusions. As long as he has antimatter, my job is that much harder.”

“Not necessarily, antimatter is an element and you are a true elemental. As you move on about the multiverse you will come to know the principles of antimatter and how to use it. Don’t forget, it was you who requested an innate reflex tying all of your abilities together; allowing them to work fully, regardless of your state of mind or being. You have only a small idea of everything you can do or will be able to control.”

“I see.”

“Do you?”

“It’s about balance in the multiverse. I must exist because he exists. Can you believe he’s a professor?”

“It’s not about balance. You’re here because you chose to be a superhero. It’s never quite what you think, huh?”

“I’m worried about Matrix.”

“You know where she is. Make sure you take the rod and put some clothes on.”

“Will it go with me?”

“It’s my rod and I decide where it goes; you just follow its precepts all heroes must know.”

“You’re rod; then you’re the real Xi-Loom!”

“Not anymore—citizens of Tenet undergo a process after death which is similar to a human’s “transition”, but not the same. Think of it this way, if existence were a building, humans would be the bricks, and we are the steel girders. Together, we complete a wonderful multiverse.”

“Was your experience as hard as mine?”

“Harder.”

“What happened?”

“I became a teacher, and you became Xi-Loom.”

“Yea well, Xi-Loom just got spanked.”

“Spare the rod and you’ll spoil the child. This isn’t the movies; this is real life, and real life is hard! I’ve taught a multitude of beings. I cannot presume to understand why many beings do the things they do. And, there are

a far greater number of things I have yet to learn. But, there is one thing for certain. You are a superhero. Go get him!!”

He vanished as quickly as he appeared. I summoned resources and dressed myself in stronger clothing laced with the rare metals of Exodus. This made a durable outfit able to withstand extremely harsh environments. I set the rod into a specifically designed holster I made at my waist. My teacher spoke the truth; I didn’t need the machine or rod to follow them. I sensed Matrix’s location and I’d perfected my ability to teleport wherever I wanted to go.

I abandoned Exodus spaceport filled with the haunting of spiritual echoes. I stood outside underneath the starlit sky with my hands cupped together like a monk, closed my eyes, synced into my perceptions; and commanded my teleportation. Soon, the winds gust hard as lightning flashed against a thunderous boom. And, just like that...

THE END

GLOSSARY

Alpha: A male or female citizen who is an expert in at least three, out of six paths of enlightenment, and has mastered three out of six paths of enlightenment in Tenet Society.

Ava: The true name of Matrix who is the Matriarch-Elect of Tenet society. She is also the daughter of the current Divine Feminine and voted to ascend to her mother's throne.

Delta: A male or female citizen who is an expert in at least four, out of six paths of enlightenment, and has mastered one out of six paths of enlightenment in Tenet Society.

Divine Feminine: The female executive president of the planet Tenet. Her will and rulings cannot be challenged by the Lord Precepts, the Five Matriarchs, or Xi-Loom. Her position can only be passed by due process to another female who has mastered all six of the paths of enlightenment.

Divine Lake: A great lake north of Principal Prime where the Xi-Loom statue used to stand before Xi-Loom's return.

Druid Dryad: A sentient being made of wood who is a true healer. She resides on a planet in a far distant sector of space.

Exodus: An ancient spaceport far north of Principal Prime.

Five Matriarchs, The: The five female governors representing the five nations of Tenet society. One of these women will be elected by their unanimous vote and ascend to the throne to replace the former Divine Feminine.

George Talbot, PhD: Dr. George Talbot is the former advisor (Delta) assigned to Xi-Loom. He is also the great beast hunted by Matrix. He defeated Xi-Loom at Exodus. He kidnapped Matrix and fled to an inhabitable planet amongst the stars.

Henry: A sentient monstrosity of tentacles and guardian of Dr. George Talbot.

Dazzling: A courageous woman warrior assigned to escort the stranger (Michael Hunter) to and from the ritual tests. She was violated and abused in the past by the Lord Precept of Workmanship.

Lord Precepts: The five male Alpha governors representing the five nations of Tenet society. These men are the overseer's of the ritual tests for the six paths of enlightenment. Each possesses a rod piece from the former Xi-Loom.

Matriarch: *See Ava and Five Matriarchs*

Matrix: The nickname of the Matriarch-Elect, aka Ava.

Michael Hunter: A former law enforcement officer who chose to be a superhero after his untimely death.

Multiverse: The multiverse is the set of infinite universes, including the historical universes we consistently experience, comprising everything that exists and can exist in the entirety of space, matter, spirit, time, and energy, with the physical laws and constants that describe them.

Multiverse Awareness: This extremely powerful perception permits the user to know by intuition and/or examination experiences in existence as they

happen, happened, or will happen. This sanctions a god-like knowledge of infinite universes upon the user in the form of communications, inklings, detections, deductions, premonitions, senses, and other unusual consciousness.

Node: A factory relic of Tenet technological history; capable of manufacturing robots and other technology with self sustaining function.

Observatory: The location of the ritual test of Inertia.

Omega: A male or female citizen, usually a child, who is a novice of one of the six paths of enlightenment in Tenet society.

Plicque: A carnivorous sentient resembling a winged elf with many teeth and antimatter saliva.

Principal Prime: The capitol city of all Tenet society where the Divine Feminine rules.

Striking: A stunning warrior charged to escort the stranger (Michael Hunter) to and from the ritual tests. She was violated and abused in the past by the Lord Precept of Workmanship.

Rod of Xi-Loom: The key to Exodus whose pieces are guarded by the five Lord Precepts. Each piece has a precept of enlightenment carved into it,

1. "Do No Harm"
2. "Evil Can Exist In Light, Good Can Reside In Darkness"
3. "Senses Can Be Fooled, Facts Can Be Deceiving"
4. "Trust No One, Accept Beings As They Are"
5. "Expect The Unexpected"

Sovereign Empress: The formal name of the Matriarch-Elect. *See Ava and Five Matriarchs*

Teacher: An ancient sentient being who is an intricate part of the infrastructure of existence.

Tenet: A very large super-earth class planet populated by a Utopian peaceful society under Matriarchal rule.

Tom: A great turtle like sentient being who is a true elemental residing in a realm of water. He can only be perceived by other elementals.

Transition: A variable process humans undergo after death.

Weaving Fields, The: A great field of animals, plants, and crude resources used to make clothes out of thin air.

Xi-Loom: The acronym title assigned to the male citizen able to master the ritual tests for the six paths of enlightenment in Tenet society.

1. **X:** The numeral ten representing the planet named, Tenet.
2. **I:** The first letter in the word Inertia representing work energy.
3. **L:** The symbol for Inductor in physics representing equilibrium.
4. **O:** The circle representing Infinity; without beginning, without end.
5. **O:** The first letter in the word Omnipotent.
6. **M:** The first letter in the word Master.