

ATTENTION: DOMAIN OF (SPACE) DETECTING [5,838,332] SPATIAL DISTORTIONS

SPATIAL TUNNEL DETECTED

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SPATIAL TUNNEL DETECTED

VOIDWATCH VESSELS MARKED “TESTAMENT” IN MOTION

VOIDWATCH VESSELS MARKED “ONLY WAY TO BE SURE” IN MOTION

VOIDWATCH VESSELS MARKED “IF ON A WINTER’S NIGHT” IN MOTION

DIVERTING MEM-DATA TO MIRROR “BOSUN”

MEM-DATA RECIEVED

+What... are you firing at?+

-“Voidgazer S394” (Or-Thaum Void-Facing Observation Golem)

28-6

All the Roads to Scale

[Mirror “Bosun”]

It was a truth universally acknowledged by all Voidwatch-facing observers, that when a few million voidships start firing relativistic projectiles at a yet-detected entity, then a Godhunt might be soon to come.

This was evermore the case for Bosun. She might just be the longest-serving Voidwatch observer among the Mirrors. She stayed on even as century-old comrades applied for periods of extended retirement, accepted promotions, or simply met their untimely ends during one of the many Guild Wars. Here, in the Rend-scarred expanse, she, the Unwhere, and Voidwatch were the only true constants. Maybe she could include some of the other observers as well, but to her, they were only tourists.

Whatever Guild they were from, whatever new golem they piloted, they would be gone with the passage of years. Sooner or later, it would just be her, the nothing, and the voiders again.

She preferred it that way. Found this meditative solitude the finest pleasure any individual could possess. Few others shared in her peace, after all. Away from the gunfire. Away from the war, the death. She remained disconnected from the broader Nether while she worked as well, only

firing updates during her scheduled dips over New Vultun's orbit. But those check-ins had been reduced even more by the Paladin's lockdown. Just as well. Bosun didn't much like the Nether. She didn't much like her mind cluttered with noise.

No. She just wanted time to think. To watch. To be.

And for years and years, that was how things were.

But then there were the times when Voidwatch was active. There were the times Voidwatch did respond. Targeting some manner of unseen threat. Opening stabilized singularities to tunnel across space as they avoided an incoming outer god or another. Bosun had enjoyed those moments as well. She, more than any other Mirror, knew about the *remnants* that lurked beyond their star system.

The Nullstar kept the worst of the *remnants* at bay, but every now and again, some host of horrors would make their approach, governed by some ancient directive still ruling their *thuma-virtual* husks, twisting the fabric of reality unnaturally as all the lives they contained within them screamed.

There was a reason why most Mirrors left this post eventually. Why Bosun was one of the few that stayed. There were *things* in the dark. Things from a time before. Things that slipped over from somewhere *beside* reality. They weren't like the Godclads. They weren't even really like the gods, though they shared some traits. If Bosun were to describe them, she would call them *aberrant*, sporting shapes that didn't fit, singing in notes that clawed at the human mind, assailing existence by existence alone. It was less that they were ineffable, and more that they were incongruent. Things can't be. And faintly, there were always cries from within them. Human cries. And the cries of other *beings* that could think and remember.

Those voices were the hardest to endure.

Nonetheless, Bosun searched the darkness, used her void-sequenced Phys-Sim to track the shots. Her golem was imbued in the curvature of Idheim's planetary horizon. Its Heaven of Geometry allowed her nigh instantaneous movement along the bend of any edge—even planetary ones. As she shifted ninety thousand kilometers across the stretch of Idheim following the missiles, she kept her mind focused, searched for any spikes of Rend or metaphysical distortions.

Her golem's telemetries were stable at first, then a slight tremble bled from its systems into her Metamind. Then, something caught her attention. Through the augmented suite of visual sensors, the outline was *something* was isolated from coiling strands of entropy stretching from the void down into Idheim.

DESTABILIZATION: DOMAIN OF (SPACE)/(TIME)

As the ghosts in her golem compiled observed variables into mem-data. Bosun's thoughtstuff stilled as she watched a patch of...

This horror wasn't so hard to describe. It definitely wasn't like most other *remnants*. It held the shape of a massive winged creature with a single burning eye. Rivers of burning ethereal essence formed its titanic outline, and the substance of its body was the emptiness of space coated by a veil of specters. Then, there were the tendrils. Tendrils not so unlike the strands of entropy. Tendrils, like blackness and circulating phantoms. Tendrils sprouting out from the creature, snaking fast across impossible distances in an instant, swatting at the incoming shots.

A wreath of ghosts poured free from the *remnant's* body, and as it moved, Bosun an impossible presence pull at her very thoughts. Her Metamind shuddered, and her sequences displaced themselves. Her Phys-Sim and a half dozen other phantasms simply stopped working. Her wards, thankfully remained, but when she regarded them, they were only operating at twenty percent efficiency, with her maximum cog-cap reduced.

It was hard for her to comprehend the immensity of its size. Its dimensions were constantly changing—mercurial, like thought itself. But with each passing second, she felt her own mind ache, like a sea was being poured over her, the pressure grinding upon her consciousness getting heavier and heavier...

This...

She didn't know what this was.

She had encountered genuine horrors—horrors she couldn't endure facing even with her augmented Quicksand. But for something to displace her Metamind? Across over twenty light seconds of distance?

Just what was—

“Not what you think I am.”

A spear of cold terror punched deep into Bosun's gut. She shifted her golem across the axis of Idheim again ran simultaneous diagnostics on her observation platform and herself. The voice didn't speak again—that deep, mind-shuddering voice. Strings of mem-data unfolded across her cog-feed. Sequences were clean. There was nothing in the golem. There was nothing in her. Then how could she—

Her golem suddenly jolted to a halt. A mental command surged across her Ghostlink, demanding that it move. But it didn't. But it just held there, hiding in a curve along the planet.

“Nothing wrong with you. Nothing wrong with your golem. A good platform. Sphere Two. Very impressive. Ori-Thaum's efficiency continues to impress.”

Her breath came hitched as Bosun tried to... tried to...

There was a thought there. There were a sequence of things she should have done if she was ever compromised. She had done it before. There was training...

But she couldn't recall. And suddenly, she wasn't so afraid anymore.

Faintly, an ethereal membrane came aglow with ghosts beyond her sensors, and she saw limbs of void-black and Soul-bright burrowing through her golem, burrowing through her.

Bosun's throat ran dry. It hurt to swallow. She needed to drink more water. She needed to—
“What... are you?”

Just then, a second salvo of slow-moving missiles passed four light minutes away from Idheim. Her golem marked them in bracketed tags, and judged them to be **[Memetic Scramblers]** from the thought-static they emitted.

“Don't need to worry. Not going to kill you. Need you to deliver a report for me.”

Something strained inside Bosun's mind. She was... why couldn't she remember how she was supposed to respond. ***“You're not going to remember this conversation. Not until tomorrow. But the world will know me by then.”***

Part of Bosun calmed. She stopped struggling. This was beyond her control. If this... thing wanted to kill her—

“Kill?” The entity said. ***“No. Not that. I just need you to bear the proper memories. Must admit. Would have never noticed you if I didn't have Ignorance. Curious as to how many more Incoged observers are up here.”***

Bosun wanted to ask something else, but then—

Bosun snapped out of her sudden lapse and thought and saw a tendril of darkness pulling what looked like a voidship in half. In the distance, massive chains composed of what the golem identified as **(Blood)** and **(Fire)** detonated, shredding through additional Voidwatch assets while thoughtstatic seemed to evaporate from their shells.

The observed blinked as she tried to process what she was seeing. There was... this was...

She arced along Idheim's curve over New Vultun and made her descent. She'd seen enough. They had a system breach. A Godhunt was upon them. Voidwatch was sustaining casualties from fighting a *remnant*.

A broadcast for help was going to come in soon. And Ori-Thaum was going to know before anyone else.

Bosun grinned. And then there were times like these that she remembered why she never wanted to leave this post. Nothing like greeting the dark. Nothing like it at all.

[Shotin]

The rains of midnight fell harder than normal, hammering down on New Vultun in a savage tempest. Lightning parted the skies above the tiers, and the light they cast splashed over the countless golems holding position outside the ambassador's office. Their frames were like those of folded birds, and text spilled free from them alongside the downpour. But where the rain stopped against matter, the metaphysical text from the golems continued to spread, washing over all that was information, veiling the district in clashing ciphers.

Shotin glared outward over the descending staircase of vivianite and alloyed bunkers that composed much of this district—and much of the other districts connected to it in this section of the Tiers. His bond-brother's office was now filling with a whole collection of Guilders. And most of them were glaring at him.

There was Reva Javvers and her Bloodthanes. Her default expression was to glare, it seemed. One of the "*uncharmables*," Shotin decided. She probably had no interest in sex or relations, with all that Bloodthane grimness radiating from her eyes. She occupied a standing position with the rest of the cadre while her superior, a Stormtree Longeye called named Empty Grave, stared out at Ambassador Kitzuhada from the insides of a vivisected Scaarthian torso.

Along the other side of the room was taken up by the considerable bulk of Fatalist Maharata of Ashthrone, clad in a Rendskin so choked with entropy that he would probably rupture Shotin and every other Godclad in the building should the Fatalist trigger his dead-man's switch. Theirs was a face shrouded behind an armored skull, and hulking mechanical limbs laden with entropic weapon hung by their sides.

Shotin wanted to ask his bond-brother why he couldn't call a less suicidal Ashthroner, but promptly realized that might be too much to ask for.

Then, there was Navigator Hosul of Sanctus. A white-uniformed woman (for now) with golden ports sprouting from her flesh and the outline of her titanic chronoframe traced around her body and passing through the walls. She glared at Shotin the most; he just did his best to ignore her existence.

Their meeting had been one of "mutual displeasure." Hosul was interested in love. Shotin was just looking for someone to "fill his time in" during his diplomatic tour after the Four Guild War.

Only one of them had gotten what they wanted, and then there was the matter of her younger brother...

“Thank you all for coming on such short notice,” Ambassador Kitzuhada said. The man had his spectacles back on, though his face was still wrinkled from stress. “What I am about to tell you pertains to the trial we are all obliged to attend come dawn in a few hours, and a volatile situation within Ori-Thaum.”

“We noticed,” Fatalist Maharata deadpanned. “Your little ‘civil war’ isn’t nearly as quiet and civil as you might assume. Please do me a kindness: Tell me we aren’t gathered here under the auspice of conspiracy to scheme against Clan D’Rongo.”

“No,” Valhu said casually.

“Good,” Maharata.

“We are scheming against Clan D’Rongo as a preventative measure against conspiracy.”

Maharata went still. His armor hissed as he lowered his head. “Explain. If you fail to do so, I will simply detonate my Rendskin to spare us all the trouble being labeled as traitors.”

+*That will not be necessary.*+ The thoughtcast emanated directly from a locus hovering just above Valhu’s table. Within it, a session was active. A session connected to an Inner Council Mirror. A session that the ghoul disappeared down five hours ago and didn’t come out.

Shotin tried not to swallow at that. The situation around the trial, around the D’Rongos, the Famines, Veylis, Zein—*fucking* everything, was pure chaos. It was like the world was unending chain of dicks trying to fuck each other to death, and the only way for some dicks to achieve said death-fucking was to fuck a hole through another dick mid-fucking another dick to fuck the dick they actually wanted to fuck at the cost of some collateral fucking.

And when a situation had too much fucking in it for Shotin Kazahara, then there was too godsdamned much fucking. Period. No further questions.

“Forgive me,” the Longeye said, her voice low and creaking. “To whom are we speaking?” The withered face and the empty eyes of the Longeye emerged from the wound lining the corpse’s torso. From the gap between her neck and the darkness within, Shotin caught the glimpsing eye of a colossal Woundhound staring at him. He sneered back. He didn’t know why the Longeyes still did this cultural charade of being “wise old crones hidden in vessels of death and destruction.” Everyone already knew that each triplet of Longeyes manifested themselves as Mothers of Ruin.

She wasn’t a frail old Scaarthian any more than Shotin was a supple virgin.

+I have no title. I represent the Inner Council.+

The crone immediately receded into the wound, and a thunderous growl tumbled out from the many wounds lining the dismembered torso, carrying with it flashing lighting and tumbling flecks of frigid snow. *"Ah. No need to hold to deception. Well met, allies to the coven. Speak your will. I will carry your words—"*

+We would appreciate it if you didn't,+ the Mirror said. *+We have no idea how far the compromise runs. Effective as of now, Clan D'Rongo is considered to be an accessory under Noloth.+*

A triangular set of dots composed the Fatalist's helmet. "Explain yourself."

+They have not been classified as traitors due to their compromise being rooted in subversion and top-down hijacking. They likely are not aware of where their new orders have been coming from. Only that there are new orders. Only that these new orders paint Clans Kazahara and Kitzuhada as potential traitors in another perspective. Further more, we suspect that Noloth is also in league with Highflame and Omnitech.+

Shotin was following along until that point, whereupon he did a double-take at the locus and Kare—who had been standing quietly beside her father, burst out: "What?"

The Mirror continued on without any change to their affected. *+A classified source offered us new intelligence. The potential identities and locations of Nolothi nodes taken from an Omnitech informant.+*

Shotin had a feeling he knew who this classified source was: once-ghoul and the newest and strangest cock to enter the fuck-fest. *+Avo. Avo. Cast you, you baby-eating half-strand cocksucker. What the hells did you tell them? What is this? You've been in that locus for hours—what are they telling you? Avo? Avo?+*

A quick reply came back from his new "benefactor." ***+Obtained some new intelligence earlier. Had to share. Think the 'consang' I got the mem-data from will appreciate this maneuver.+***

+What? What consang? Avo? Avo? Answer me?+ The ghoulish didn't. *+Yeah, fuck you too. Godsdamn...+*

Shotin stopped his fuming when he caught Reva and a particularly large Scaarthian with a tiger-tail staring blankly at him. "Anxiety," he said.

"Interesting set of expressions for anxiety," the tiger-tailed Scaarthian muttered. "I would have guessed violent anger or moron trying to take a shit in his pants. More the latter."

+Whatever the case, you are not to contact anyone outside this room about this information. All details are to remain restricted. In the next few hours, Elder Mwaba D'Rongo and Instrument Abrel Greatling will be returned to Idheim. The trial will formally begin. And a series of uprisings will explode across New Vultun. It is our suspicion that the Saintists will use this opportunity as cover to coordinate with Noloth and their assets toward a common goal: the destruction of the Heaven of Truth.+

“Ah,” a low snarl came from the Longeye. “That sow Veylis is making another attempt, I see. And you wish for us to guard the Heaven. Even against our own.”

+That is the hope.+

[Avo]

+That is the hope,+ Avo said, shaping the situation how he could. He would have preferred it if the Inner Council actually responded to the ambassador. But after hours of waiting, time running short, and without the possibility of a reply, he had to take things into his own hands.

The Inner Council would understand. Either through reason or logic, or when they were subsumed. Whatever the case, other subminds were doing as he was right now, turning additional assets to his favor in case anything went wrong.

Naeko and his Paladins were still a considerable force, but they would need every advantage they could get if anything drastic happened. Furthermore, he needed to strip away any potential advantage the Famines might have. They were bound for Scale too—were minutes from arrival in the form of Uthred Greatling, his son, and Green River.

Day one of the trial was arriving. With everything ever-changing, his task now went from predicting problems to shaping the chaos, however he could, and by whatever means he could. Which was why he was throwing the Infacer into the Maw, using their gift of goodwill against them.

Which was why he intended to also trigger a shooting war between the Meritocrats and Chivalrics by the Alysims finished making his way out of Axtraxis Academy.

In some regard, Avo agreed with Shotin. The city was a nest of deception and clashing interests, but he had something to add himself: In a kingdom of dicks trying to fuck each other to death, the one who guided the direction of the cocks was going to be the chief fucker of them all.

[Fuck yeah,] Chambers nodded.