

The crimson that once pulsed through the stone like living flesh was no longer present. The walls of the Derma layer bled with a blue glow as the sound of mechanical churning reverberated through its walls. It was the heartbeat of a Heart, beating like the guttural groans of an ancient machine.

Cogs and gears too large to be a component of any machine were embedded into the distant walls. They moved with only one purpose; to turn endlessly for a Heart not belonging to their own. Smaller gears the size of humans littered what was a mechanical cityscape, where the gears accumulated into hundreds of thousands of spires, each with topped with a giant gear that glowed with a bright blue light.

A two-kilometer column rose in the center of the world that seemed to stretch endlessly. The width of the column was easily close to a kilometer. A thick, blue haze smothered the skies, concealing the very tip of the column where double-rod pendulums swung. Attached to the ends of the pendulum was an instrument similar to that of a needle.

It collided with the side of the column, turning the gears on the outer shell seemingly arbitrarily. They moved in rhythm to the heartbeats of the Heart that resided within – a Complex Heart consisting of four nested gears surrounding a ball of flesh. The colossal gears turned with each beat.

The soil was replaced with steel flooring. But upon closer inspection, those were in fact the remnants of people that had been fully converted into gears and cogs for the Sect of Gears. Entities with gears as heads roamed this city. Many retained the qualities of their old self, only that gears could be seen turning from various areas of their body like they were a perversion of body piercings.

They would lay their bodies against one of the spires at seemingly random intervals, allowing those gears to influence the complex movements of thousands of gears. Some were assimilated into the spires, leaving behind their bodies to rot and join the pulp that made up the ground.

Highly decorated entities from the Sect of Gears floated in this dystopian hellscape. They hovered towards the great, glowing gears of the spires and connected a giant gear protruding from their backs like the spines of a dinosaur.

Energy was transferred to the robed entity in the form of a blue light. Their many hideous limbs contorted irregularly as they were wrapped around them like a straitjacket. They then proceeded to float towards the central column of gears all at once.

For a split second, one could see a string attached to their heads as they entered the blue mist. There was order in the chaos of the gears. The nonsensical movements were necessary towards the production of an intended outcome, just as how one would draw an owl from a circle.

Their world was in a perpetual steady-state for each component served but one purpose – to turn.

The entities soon attached themselves to a shoulder where the pendulum met with the column. They hung from the top like gargoyles as the column itself now began to wind, contracting like the coil of a watch.

Somewhere deep within the column was brilliant chamber decorated in the same blue gears, save that it was far less drab than the rest of the world. The architecture was gothic inspired, exhibiting many arches, halls and wings that seemed to stretch endlessly.

Servants of the Sect of Gears stood at every few meters in these hallways holding a glowing gear to illuminate the pathway of an already brightly lit area. It was nonsensical, but again to such meaningfully things were the way of their life, for when the cogs turned and demanded – they obeyed.

It was in the dome-shaped chamber where figures could be seen seated across a round table. In the center was a manifold of gears where a single cloaked figure extended a deathly pale, mechanical arm towards it, absorbing its blue light as he muttered to himself incoherently.

“Terrent will be arriving soon. His mission was successful. A Moon was Corrupted. Amalgam troubled.” A mechanical chittering accompanied his terribly hollow voice as a single blue glow could be seen from within the dark of his hood.

The figure’s pale robes were riddled with the symbol of blue gears. A small, gear halo hovered just above his head, and another behind his back like the winch of a wind-up toy.

This entity was a High Winder – A being responsible for controlling one of many installations belonging to the Sect of Gears. He could only speak in short sentences, for his lungs could not provide enough air.

“Completed order. Gears turn strongly. Calces is sated. We will wait for Terrent to. Join us.”

A dozen other figures joined him at the table made from the cogs of inferior people far too small to serve a purpose in the grand scheme of things. Yet they still spun with a purpose greater than what they previously believed in.

“Impressive. The Fractured Nilhim aren’t all talk.” A Librarian spoke arrogantly, surprised that they were able to succeed in the first place.

This woman was an Expositionist and was here to receive her tales to share back to the Heart she came from. And she was not alone. Two more Expositionists were present, as well as a Scraper who read through a tiny, pocket-sized book of a tale regarding the symbolism of a violin and piano.

That book belonged to another woman dressed in a tailcoat tuxedo like she was a performer. In her hand was a conducting wand, and her head was hideously misshapen into what vaguely looked like the mouth of a tuba. It was as if her face had collapsed into itself, and her mouth grossly extended from the crated all the way around her head like a zipper.

“A shame. Shame shame shame. I would have liked to take those Moons as instruments. The Monkey Brothers must be rejoicing now.” She spoke in a high-pitched, squeaky tone that

hideously pierced the ears. “The Sect of Gears has no available instruments. Were all the denizens used up?”

“All were given a purpose. They are living better lives.” The High Winder claimed. “The fortunate ones fall from the Subderma. Without the Blood Festival. We would have to rely on. Raids on the Epiderma.”

“And that’s not possible with Act X.” Another Fractured Nilhim member was present in the form of a shadow. They were not a Disciple, but rather a sapient form of the Specter born from when a person truly resonated with the Heart that beat for the Fractured Nilhim.

They were called the Fractured, and they made up a sizable portion of the Fractured Nilhim. They operated like one collective consciousness, whereas the Specters and lesser entities operated purely on instinct derived from the Heart.

“Indeed.” The Expositionists answered for the High Winder. “Act X has near total reign over the blue haze in the Epiderma. So long as the Derma Layer cannot be penetrated then we have the advantage. Also, it’s rare for another one of us to invite a competitor into their abode.”

The Scraper then continued:

“Let alone for multiple high-ranking ones to meet like this. So close to the core of your Heart. I find it disgusting.” She flipped through the pages, carrying little for what the others had to say. “Purpose in the gears? How laughable when we can be described by an endless library of words.”

“And not music? We’re all instruments just disguised as bags of meat. It’s a shame shame shame that not everyone is here.” The musician threw a small tantrum. “I would’ve loved to see Infect Rot and the Memento Mori.”

“Has anyone seen the Broken Thorn before?” The Scraper wondered, but no one responded. “They’re all just rumors at this point.”

“If they were then it would be quite the conundrum. The Broken Thorn were the ones we tended to avoid in the past, much like the Fractured Nilhim, Memento Mori and Infecta Rot.”

The latter of the four were on a different level compared to the other Impuritas Groups. The Broken Thorn on the other hand was beyond even that of those three. They were an enigmatic group, although, the upper three were also quite mysterious in their own right.

“Let’s get this over and done with.” The Scraper shut her book with a loud clap. “The Disciple will bring back a piece of the Amalgam’s fear. And a Moon will be broken down. Is it still wise to keep angering the Amalgam when we’re aware that emotions are what strengthens them?”

“It is also what will break them.” The High Winder confidently claimed. “It’s unfortunate that they had somehow. Returned from Corruption. It won’t matter. We must continue the disruption until. The others locate. The Piece of the Fallen Star.”

“They are also seeking that Advent. A clash is inevitable. Do not forget how they eliminated a Heart of the City in the blink of an eye.” The Fractured ominously reminded, showing glimpses of the flames that had destroyed so many on that day within his body. “The Amalgam does not care who gets in their way. As we have seen in the City of Spades. They very well may feed on the living like the Crimson Hunger.”

“It is possible. The Amalgam is the one who. Will set this world. Alight.” The High Winder spoke. The Librarians and the Maestro of Flesh representative silently agreed.

The Fractured Nilhim on the other hand did not believe in such tales like the lesser five Impuritas Groups. The flame brimming within the Fractured disappeared, revealing nothing but a vortex of darkness.

“The Memento Mori are more concerned whether or not the Amalgam is a devourer of the Stars. The Amalgam also poses a threat to our Hearts. Whether that tale is true or not matters little... Furthermore, the Ateliers have seemingly united.”

“I’ve heard of that. You Fractured are able to relay information like a hive mind.” The Expositionist hummed. “It is indeed another problem. All of which is solvable so long as we follow the orders of our masters.”

The Expositionist placed a golden Seed onto the table.

“Then even we can ascend. While they aspire to become Stars, we can become Moons of our own.”

“We came together because the Brightest Star showed us that we can reach new heights. That we demented musicians that were outcasts can be appreciated by so many. Just like the stars of the skies. Shame shame shame that we can’t become Corrupted!” The Musician flailed her conducting wand around, poking at the air as though someone’s eyes were there. “The Piece of the Fallen Star still hasn’t been found! How much longer will take you gear heads to figure it out!?”

“When the Fate Mechanism decides. That it is time. The more pieces we add to. The machine, the faster we. Can realize it. Act X has a powerful hold. But they are weakened. The Amalgam has likely. Set limits. As long as we can avoid. Interference by he who calls himself. The Director.”

The Scraper sighed disrespectfully.

“The Amalgam limiting Act X will be their downfall. But I find it odd that Act X would comply. If you knew then you would have already told us. Remain cautious. Let sleeping dogs lie. Like Inflow Direct. It would be problematic if they were to ramp up their efforts.” She with a sinister grin. “Everyone remembers the Liquidation of Midas Company. But history has erased the War in Heaven.”

“One hundred and fifty years ago. Two hundred years Post Advent.” The Expositionist added, adjusting a feathered pen that sat in his breast pocket. “So much information has been lost from that time. Even we Librarians struggle to look past the haze to understand its gravity.”

Then, the other female Expositionist continued with a foreboding tone, as if she was reciting an urban legend.

“Inflow Direct played a major role. Both in the War in Heaven and as far back as the very conception of the First Advent – the Eternal Library. A time we call the Incipit. We Librarians have roots to that wretched period. The Ateliers will crumble. But I digress. Fractured. When is this Disciple coming?”

“Soon. The Disciples of Nilhim have consciousnesses of their own so they cannot relay their findings as freely as us. It prevents our contamination. If he went to acquire the Amalgam’s nightmare then we would suffer catastrophically were we to see it. That is of course, if the Disciple is incapable of handling it. It should be no problem for one trusted by the core of our Hearts.”

“The Amalgam’s nightmare. How powerful do you think it is? Will it be of use to use against the Amalgam?” The Scraper wondered. “It could make for a good Book material.”

“It depends on whether it can be wielded or not.” The Fractured further explained as the High Winder stood from his seat.

“The Disciple arrives.” He uttered, moving towards an empty space in the room before Terrent finally concluded with:

“What matters is that we are not exposed to it –!?”

He was barely able to finish his sentence before a horrific crunch resonated from the direction of the High Winder.