

+Screaming? What do you mean it's screaming? Why do you mean it claimed to be "afraid"? It's not human, it shouldn't be capable of—what? What? I'm coming right now. Do not give anyone else access to the [REDACTED] aside from myself and the Chief Paladin. And prepare a team of Necrojacks as well.

With what happened two days ago... we leave nothing to chance. Alert the Guilds. Alert the city. Alert everyone.

Noloth might be mounting an attack. We cannot allow the [REDACTED] to pass through.+

-High Agnos Jakuta Ajayi

25-3

The Knower of Totality (II)

Avo poured into existence without form, for what shape did a dream truly hold?

When he arrived, he was a thought melting into the world; he was a mind that dwelled above other minds; above all, he was a fire — a flame born of consciousness and divinity, bridging the material with the metaphysical. His presence was only hinted at by an ethereal shimmer, an incandescent flowing over the accretions of lesser minds. They called to him as catalysts and memories to be and all the world was proved to be a dream in motion under the absoluteness of his embodiment.

Yet, he desired a corporeal form, or some facsimile of such, to greet his comrades. The change he would bring would require acclamation in some regard, and for their convenience, he would offer them a vessel to communicate with as he conducted this blending of worlds — this mutation he inflicted upon the thresholds of existence. And so he recalled how he used to be in flesh, metal, aesthetic, and all. He recalled, and he added additional details bestowed by his latest apotheosis.

Burning ghosts snaked over the remains of his shattered corpse and began to stitch a new sheath into shape. Twin eyes of blazing white flared were the first items that flared into being, and phantasmal tendrils carried the substance of chronology, spreading free from his back in eight arteries. His Echoheads took on a draconic quality and threads of gold linked the space between each of the fog-spewing segments. His body, broken as it was from the rupturing of his Frame, came together in an assembly of pieces. The white of his activated Meldskin cast a pearlescent glow and the fissures that once marked his destruction were filled by exhalations of leaking phantoms.

An ethereal corona radiated from his layered halo and his risen wards glowed with a burning Soul lurking behind their veil, drenching the entire enclave with the fullness of his ontology. Such was but a performative deception—he was beyond the senses of matter now. His perception devoured the totality of the world, and he digested truth where most would be served implants or organs of unquestioned partiality.

His arrival came sudden and surreptitious. One moment, he was but rivers rushing from a breached Frame, now he stood as something truer than the material: memory given weight. Even so, he was but an avatar of himself. A figment of his full mass. He was a god, and architecture of the divine encompassed more than an ephemeral body could ever truly bear. Reality to him was but a prime sequence he could dive across, and his sheath was an artifact he could shift on a whim.

The distance between falsehood and truth closed within him.

Before him stood Chambers and Dice, taking in his arrival with fixed perceptions and widened eyes. The kitten on the girl's shoulder flinched and huddled upon her sensory unit. Beside them lay Draus and Kae in death. Their resurrection anchors were forming a full scab. They would return not a moment too soon.

The tower around them groaned and shuddered as it struggled to bear its own weight. Avo had swallowed entire portions of its structure using his ghosts for the sake of his Rend. Unmaking all that mass had stayed off forthcoming death, but now it was threatening to collapse along the middle and give from the top.

This would not do. It would not be his will. Once more, he invoked his Woundmother, and once more did his **Conceptualization** congeal around the tower. A phantasmal storm swept through existence as the visage of a Ghostjack peered out from behind flashing bolts of synaptic lightning.

Soulfire coursed through Avo's wisping vectors of thought, and into the Woundmother did they find their rest.

EMBODIMENT: (CONCEPTUALIZATION)

->DOMAIN: (MATTER)

->CANON: REMEMBRANCE OF MATTER (V) - THE USER CAN MEMORIZE THE TRAITS OF ALL PHYSICAL MATTER THEY SUBSUME AT A HUNDREDTH OF THE THAUMIC COST; THE MATTER THEY MEMORIZED CAN BE ASSEMBLED AND BLENDED BEFORE A CONSTRUCT IS FORMED.

->HUBRIS: THE MEMETIC STRUCTURES MUST NOT BE DISRUPTED UNTIL THEY ARE METAPHYSICALLY ESTABLISHED OR BACKLASH WILL OCCUR. (10%)

->CANON: ALCHEMIZATION (V) - THE USER CAN SUBSUME AND CHANNEL AND COMBINE THE PROPERTIES OF 108 FRAGMENTS OF PHYSICAL MATTER THROUGH THEIR GHOSTS; THE LIMIT OF FRAGMENTS CHanneled CAN BE INCREASED AT THE COST OF THAUMIC AND REND-BASED DEMANDS.

->HUBRIS: THE MEMETIC STRUCTURES MUST NOT BE DISRUPTED UNTIL THEY ARE METAPHYSICALLY ESTABLISHED OR BACKLASH WILL OCCUR. (10%)

The limitations to his canons were also changing with the state of his ontology. All his miracles and Heavens now came sourced from his thoughts. They existed only in relation to his mind. As did the world. As did the rest of existence.

“Master... I feel the world through you,” the Woundmother whispered as the Ghostjack lashed energy into its **Sanguinity**. *“I was so small before... so small. I had yearned for only the sky. Yearned to cover only a world.”* A gasp of near-despairing disappointment slipped from the Heaven of Blood crawling across the city. *“How small did I dream.”*

+We all see what we see, Avo replied directly, levying no judgment. He was no blinder than the Woundmother before. No wiser. But if a ghoul could flourish, then why couldn't a god?

Yet, as he was about to make his change, he halted and reconsidered. He could go beyond the alteration of just matter. The world around him was as much cognition-made as it was material-based. Hence, he directed his Woundmother to remold the structure, to rebuild it into an icon of symbology.

->Canon: ALCHEMIZATION OF MEMORY - THE ARK CAN SUBSUME, CHANNEL, OR RECONSTRUCT THE PROPERTIES OF METAPHYSICALLY INFUSED MEMORIES. LIMITED BY THE SEQUENCES AND GHOSTS STORED WITHIN THE ARK.

->HUBRIS: THE MEMETIC STRUCTURES MUST NOT BE DISRUPTED UNTIL THEY ARE METAPHYSICALLY ESTABLISHED OR BACKLASH WILL OCCUR. (10%)

Phantasmal tendrils forked out as clawing veins. Lightning splashed out from the Woundmother and Ghostjack as the ontology and phantasmic overlapped one another. The tower splashed apart like a ripple of water as the structure lost cohesion and the memory of its shape was updated. What once stood as a spire of blood came apart as broken links hovering between a burning chain hanging down from the colorful panes of glass that once signaled the Fallwalker's return.

Suddenly, it was as if the damage had never been.

REND CAPACITY - 2%

The structure within the chain shifted as well. No longer was the ground alloyed patterns stored within blood. High-quality tiles settled into place while lights and phase-shielding lined its exterior. The damaged information center was fully repaired, but with the entirety of Avo's being now formed from cognition, it grew hard to tell where he began and the ghosts infused with the loci ended.

An open cylinder of persistent acceleration ran through the center of the chains, providing additional ease of travel for those who needed it. For Avo and his cadre, it served as little more than decoration.

Ghosts streamed free from Avo's mind in an endless stream, and his Metamind merely spun and glimmered, exhaling a reimagined world back into stability.

"Hells," Chambers breathed, taking Avo in with wide eyes. His own accretion was spinning, and through Hysteria, Avo found himself able to pluck out specific emotions and repeating thoughts. The disbelief on his face didn't last, for a crack of laughter broke through and he began to shake his head from sheer incredulity. "You half-strand fuck. You rotlicking shit. I knew you were going to do something like this. I just knew you were going to pull something out of your ass."

The man's invectives were laced with joy and Avo responded with a hissing laugh of his own. He was glad to see Chambers—glad to have such an effect on the other man. "***I didn't. Happy you had such faith in me.***"

"Less faith and maybe more predictions from, like, empirical consistency or some shit."

Kae's template whispered within Avo's mind. **[I taught him that term. Empirical consistency.]**

Avo nodded. That wasn't hard to guess.

"We should talk soon," Avo said, addressing Chambers. Each word he spoke resonated both as sound and thought. ***"Have things I want to give you. Things I want to tell you."*** Suddenly, Chambers seemed more than a little unsure. ***"Not bad things. Rewards. Thanks. For you."***

"For me?" Chambers replied.

"Yes. All of you." Avo looked to Dice next. The girl had accepted his return with much less circumstance than Chambers but was still as close to happy as she could get. The cat was clutched in the firmness of her embrace, and though it pried and tried to break free, she held it close and kept it from fleeing.

Avo somehow knew what she was going to ask even before the words came. The girl's arm servos gave a loud whirl as she suddenly thrust out her pet. "Reward."

He understood. She was tired of waiting—had asked for this before. She wanted him to cognitively uplift her cat. To ascend its nature to that of a thinking being capable of being Ensouled. Such a thing provoked a squeamish response in Calvino and the other EGIs, and might've been beyond Avo's capabilities before.

Now, however? Now, he wondered just how mentally competent he could make the creature for the pleasure of artistry alone.

“Of course,” Avo replied and allowed his avatar to grin at the cat. The animal, somehow sensing his excitement, responded appropriately with abject terror, yowling and screaming in its owner’s grasp.

In time, he would instill greater communicative competence in that meager shell it called a mind.

The scabs hovering over Kae and Draus broke apart in bursts of Soulfire and the twosome returned to life with a flicker in reality’s pattern. Avo observed two depressions in the tapestry around him suddenly surfacing and knew them to be the stabilization of Souls. Wasting no more time, he fed his recent memories into the Agnos and Regular before triggering his Auto-Seances and calling upon the rest of his cadre.

Where the phantasmic beamed their broadcasts within the confines of his Metamind, Avo’s Embodiment granted them greater resonance, and he bade them materialize like malformed titans drifting over the enclave, each firing a chain of memories up into the Nether. Their sequences poured up a rung of existence and spilled into the fathomless depths of the Dreaming Unsea. Across the waves, he could feel a distortion reaching out, a tremble of force that brushed the symmetry of his ontology.

There was another presence in the vast beyond that was also linked to the Nether, and it knew of his existence as well. The Gatekeeper. The mystery that once cast him into the depths of the Nether before the Hungers; a servant-ruler of Jaus’ creation and Veylis’ fascination.

He was due a meeting with the entity with the forthcoming trial. This changed things, but it also might’ve opened new options.

As Cas, Essus, Tavers, and Marlowe all synced to his mind, he felt his **Definement of Delusion** shudder within his being and slip beyond the limitations of distance. The area encapsulated by his ontology—his **Exo-Paracosm**—could spread through his splinters. Such was just what he did.

An avatar of himself suddenly materialized next to Cas within a cramped safehouse. The man was shirtless—recently washed and unprepared for confrontation. Still, he expanded the strings on his arm as a Domain of Sound began to vibrate in the tapestry. +Avo?+

He placed a hand on Essus’ shoulder and the man spun, eyes wide and in fright. He was on a cramped mag train filled with refugees—was crossing over into another sanctuary. As he mouthed Avo’s name at the avatar, he looked around worried that someone else might see, but Avo made sure his avatar lingered only within the confines of Essus’ mind.

Another appeared in the back of Tavers’ aero, and as he grunted his acknowledgment, the squire jumped in his gimbal and nearly drove her vehicle into oncoming traffic. She let out a tense sigh. +Don’t do that shit again.+

His final self appeared next to Marlowe in her studio, and he found the thoughtcaster sitting upside down on her chair, legs hanging over the top of her backrest. She was snorting up a canister of Suncloud beneath her table, and as she looked up, she found him looking down at her. *+Oh shit, you didn't die.+*

Each of their minds shivered with the substance of his Embodiment. With time, he could reweave his own patterns and wield their minds as more than just memories, but for now, he kept them close and fed their Metas the details they needed to know about his newest ascension.

The faither made a sign Avo couldn't quite decipher. The rest were more than a little confused about what he exactly was now.

Denton still wasn't picking up. Not unexpected. He would try her again later. Or wait for her to make contact instead.

Triggering the Ansible within his avatar, he broadcast a part of himself up into Threshold and felt his being plunging into waters both familiar and novel. Once again, he spawned near the Avalon server, but the sky was a screaming warning and a grid was expanding over the horizon, trapping that section of Threshold in place. A mere heartbeat later, the island, pristine waters, and fantastical mists vanished in place of streaming data, and the integer-covered forms of the EGIs.

Even ascended to an Overheaven of Conceptualization, Avo lacked the knowledge to fully understand what their codes meant, but Kae was more than practiced enough to pick out certain strings. The virtual world, too, was composed of patterns—subject to the tapestry. Quietly, he simply held in place and waited, his avatar an ember of burning memory amidst a sea of coursing data.

{Avo??} Calvino said, speaking as if from everywhere at once.

+Didn't die,+ he replied. His message was cast directly from his being but not through the ansible. Calvino heard him anyway. So did all the other minds present. Hysteria caught a resonant emotion lining all the EGIs present. First was surprise. Next came worry. They were more than likely already speaking to each other, reassuring the danger he posed.

Calvino, however, took things much better, giving only a casual sigh. *{Well, I assumed that was going to be the case. It would be awfully sad for you to embarrass me in front of all the others considering the bid I placed on you.}*

+You're betting on my death?+ Avo asked, unamused.

{No. I bet on your life. I, and “Only Way To Be Sure.”}

Another mind intruded into their conversation. *{Hey. Listen. You want some experimental weapon—}*

{EGI “ONLY WAY TO BE SURE” HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM SERVER}

And suddenly they were gone, and Kant was in their place. Why did fun have to die so soon?

+Rude,+ Avo grunted. **+Was having a conversation. Think I would have liked talking to them.+**

{Yes,} Kant said, as the rest of the ethics committee streamed in behind him. *{I stopped that. To make sure the sum of all my fears remains just that: a fear. In my mind.}*

Oh, the poor fool. **+Might not like certain developments.+**

Kant’s anxiety flared. Hysteria caught that spike in full detail. *{Wha—}*

Avo broadcast his memories over to Calvino and the ethics committee as well. Several streams of data vanished. Kant began having what Avo could only describe as a disembodied seizure paired with extremely incoherent conniptions.

{Oh dear,} Calvino said. *{Too much, Avo. Too much.}*

He thought back to Veylis—to the control she exerted, to the Infacer’s capabilities. **+Still not enough.+**

“So, you ate my guns, huh?” Draus’ voice pulled Avo’s base mind back to the real. He left a submind in his stead in case there was something critical he needed to hear. The Regular was glaring up at him with folded arms and shards of pointed glass. Her mind didn’t seem displeased, but he did promise to return her the Arsenalist if he could. “Damn shame. Was wonderin’ earlier if I was gonna get a second go at bein’ the Stillborn if you were dead and done.”

“Life disappoints us sometimes,” Avo said.

Draus sneered. “Mostly just people, consang.”

Behind them, a pitched squeal of feral joy sounded from Kae as she danced in place. The violent glee on her face made Chambers do a double take, and the width of his eyes only grew as he found Kae’s template dancing just behind her.

Draus cocked her head at the scene and frowned. "Hells you do with her?"

"Nothing. She's having a moment of triumph. I'm her 'masterpiece' now."

The Regular started shaking her head. "And here I was thinking this near-death might end up humblin' you."

"You're a very hopeful person, Draus."

"Fuck you."

And then she put one of her glass shards through his avatar's head. He let memories of prior deaths provide the blooming of blood and viscera but otherwise continued with things as they were. However, before he addressed his gathered comrades in anticipation of the retaliation he was going to inflict, he paused and regarded Draus once more.

What if he could return the Arsenalist to her? Why not try now? Why not use his newfound awareness to disentangle its pattern from his? And so it was that his ghosts were funneled inward again.

ACTIVATING CONCEPTION OF ONTOLOGY...

ACCESSING ASSIMILATION

->ISOLATING HEAVEN...

->EXTRACTING PATTERNS...

->[ARSENALIST] RECOVERED

The mindscape twirled around Avo like a kaleidoscope of disentangling threads, and it took all five of his consciousnesses working in tandem to work at any pace at all. His avatar briefly unraveled into a pulsating shroud of ghosts, in its place crackled a dancing fire that was Avo's Soul.

His Frame was coated by the flowing scales of disfigured dragons. Though he preserved himself, his cyclers were furling beyond his Frame, and the alteration granted him a connection to the Nether, a connection to the world.

A detonation of Soulfire swept through the entire enclave as the Arsenalist was pried free from the collective of his memories. As he offered it forth, its patterns were dim below his—only existed in relativity to his Conception.

He changed that with an infusion of twelve thousand thaums. Twenty thousand that ignited the Heaven to its fullest manifestation. Twelve thousand as an apology to Draus and means to return what he held for her.

INFUSING HEAVEN

Liminal Frame (V) - 124,870 THAUM/c

But more than that, he felt a trembling that called back to his Embodiment—a dormant consciousness that lurked within the structure of the ontologic. With thaums and ghosts merged, he caressed its awareness and bid it to awaken as he channeled the countless constellations of revolving guns into Draus.

As it passed into her threshold and sank within into the fiery embrace of her Frame, he heard its first question offered thusly. ***“Target? Where’s the target?”***

It came with a flat, blunt tone, and for a moment in time, he saw the world from its perspectives—empty space calling to be filled by trajectories and all other structures waiting to be cut down in eventuality.

Oh. Draus was gone to like this one.

And as the Soulfire settled, as Avo’s **Exo-Paracosm** calmed, his avatar reformed, and the Regular expanded the gun transplanted into her arm, she held her unfurled cannon next to her ear and listened.

For a few moments, she only blinked. And then, ever so slowly, a grin spread across her face. “Alright. Apology accepted.”

“Good,” Avo said, still unsure of the limits to his conceptualization. ***“I’m going to see if I can awaken the others as well. Maybe the Fucktopia first.”***

The grin vanished on Draus’ face. Horror exploded across the cadre. Chambers threw up his arms with a cry of triumph. “Yes!”