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COMMON ETERNITIES

By

Aaron Wallace

Accepted in Partial Completion
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Aaron Wallace

November 2nd, 2012

COMMON ETERNITIES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Aaron Wallace
November 2012

Abstract

Common Eternities embodies a conglomeration of forms and concepts pooled from my interests as a board game aficionado, a long-time consumer of science fiction, and a student of literary conventions and style. In doing so, *Common Eternities*, demonstrates the power progressive storytelling can offer.

Set in numerous time periods and surroundings, *Common Eternities* strikes at the purpose of life and how all living objects are connected to one other. Anthelion and the Darkness, the two main god-like characters, find themselves constantly entangled in the span of five chapters as they discover their own identities, their surroundings, and the implications of their actions. Within each section, questions relating to the deity figures are answered while others remain until the ending. *Common Eternities*—utilizing the experimental approach in which it asks the reader to consider the chapters in alternate orders—combines a myriad of narratological perspectives, twists on literary conventions, and obtuse imagery showcasing a new way to tell a story.

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Critical Abstract

Since the inception of the written word, there has existed debate over what constitutes meaningful or great writing. Many experts such as Henry James, author of several novels, essays, and scholarly articles, have stated that the requirements for a successful piece of writing are too numerous to list or even consider. He writes, in his article “The Art of Fiction,” that: “The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting.”

More modern case studies further examine the issue. Having written such diverse publications as comic books, newspaper articles, screenplays, novels, and more, author Michael Chabon produces a wide array of literature spanning diverse demographics. In *Maps and Legends* Chabon illustrates the difficulty of pleasing audiences, including how one classifies “entertainment or pleasure.” (Maps and Legends 15) He continues on with a defense of genre writing (such as science fiction, romance, fantasy, etc.) by pointing out the fallacy of staying too involved with conventions or rules. Chabon states, “Make writing/reading a two-way street again” shortly after he stated his purpose for writing was to entertain (17).

If one agrees with the views held by James and Chabon, the imperative to break, or remake, traditional storytelling becomes almost mandatory. In constructing *Common Eternities*, I strived to intertwine the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible, in an effort to draw out literary meanings that may otherwise be unthinkable. For example, in the first two chapters taking place in outer space, I focus on omnipotent figures and sentient

comets/lights, new forms of life circumstances that showcase a similar, but different existence to our own. The Gods, in their pursuit to understand themselves and their environment, steadily change with experience, much like humans adapting to new situations. In contrast, surviving on a more human-like level, the comets and light focus on survival and maintaining spiritual enjoyment.

Tampering with the rules of the cosmos or delving into the bizarre as demonstrated by this thesis occurs in many forms of fiction. For example, in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the plot centers on a needy, failing salesman named Gregor who morphs into an insect. Kafka adds tension between a failing person and his life by inserting an innovative plot twist: typical events, such as the main character's boss checking up on him, or his relatives being nosy, take on the additional strain of the discovery of his ailment. Despite Gregor's condition continually worsening, the emergency never takes center stage. Kafka uses the abnormal happenstance as a tool, not a crutch. The extraordinary feature of Gregor losing control of his body and image allows readers to be more connected with all of his woes.

Common Eternities also utilizes perversions of reality to build its broad horizons. Sampling scientific studies on antimatter and its implications in the universe, *Common Eternities* casts the extant substance in a new light while molding its significance to a elevated level by associating it with the Darkness and the creation of the universe. In a similar way, the long-lasting mendillion lifespan of three to four centuries plays with the traditional concept of mortality. As readers identify the familiarities of the fictional world, they might begin to question their own reality as well.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* author George Orwell combines realism and fantasy when

he piggybacks the ideas of communism, governmental secrecy, and totalitarianism to assemble the overbearing society dominating the novel. Within the far-fetched occurrences in the story—such as all historical documents being destroyed and recreated daily; children reporting their parents to the police as a matter of patriotic duty—*Nineteen Eighty-Four* invokes the horrific possibilities of a dictatorship.

The use of blended realities comes to the forefront in film such as *The Matrix*. Like *Common Eternities*, the film provides readers with mind-numbing, world-altering ideas that beg its audience to think differently about the basics of life. *The Matrix's* main character, Neo, introduces the concept of the Matrix, a vast assortment of machines designed to entertain the human mind while the body is being drained of its resources. At first, he cannot believe that such an elaborate ruse to fool all humanity can be possible, and even after accepting the truth, he still has trouble comprehending the ramifications something so immense causes. Throughout the story Neo (as do the viewers) constantly relearns commonplace explanations such as the existence of déjà vu or gravity in accordance with the matrix.

The same handling of life's composition found in *The Matrix* exists in *Common Eternities* as well in its exposition of a story. *Common Eternities* spans five distinct chapters starting with the beginning of time and ending with a present-day feud between two businessmen. By segmenting the story in this way, readers sample specific pieces of the story while absorbing a comprehensive, subtle meanings by the story's end. For instance, the reader doesn't know when Anthelion is first introduced as a shapeless, mysterious entity that it will relate to Anthelion's world creation in the third chapter. It is only with the fifth

chapter, where all information has been dispersed, that a reader can fully understand all parts of the text.

To study the effects of creating a progressively-designed piece, we can examine board games, specifically *Settlers of Catan*. Previous to *Settlers of Catan's* revolutionary game design on the industry, board games did not feature interchangeable boards that alter every game. Winning numerous awards, but more importantly, being a fan favorite, *Settlers of Catan* changed the creation of board games forever by making the interchangeable board a default. Adapting this concept to *Common Eternities*, I chose to write the five chapters so that may be considered individually, in a grouping according to page order, or—to gain alternative insights from the text, from the last chapter to the first, chronological order according to the piece's time line, or in a randomized fashion. This process of reading provides a new way for readers to interpret the text and enables new interpretations to emerge.

Common Eternities embodies a conglomeration of forms and concepts pooled from my interests as a board game aficionado, a long-time consumer of science fiction, and a student of literary conventions and style. In doing so, *Common Eternities*, demonstrates the power progressive storytelling can offer. All stories can—and should—embark on an adventure to be different, to be the first to establish mainstay traditions.

Opening

In the beginning, there was not the word, nor worlds or any physical lifeforms. Blank, black space known as the Darkness embodied the entirety of the universe's nothingness. Eons upon eons of antimatter, covered the empty blanket of the cosmic drawing board waiting to be born. Consequently, the cosmos lay dormant with rampant inactivity mired in its inept ability to produce any mass, energy, or chronological momentum (time). The Darkness, a spiritual entity composed of no physical or energy particles relished in the quaint, quiet atmosphere on a hollow throne.

The Darkness only gained consciousness to preserve or monitor antimatter; It did not travel around a physical space, wonder about an uncertain future, or express itself in any form. The Darkness was confined to maintaining levels of antimatter throughout the universe. And due to the Darkness' enormity of its gaseous self paired and lack of senses—save faint feelings of objects nearby, it was condemned to be everywhere all at once with what we can only imagine as a series of fragmented personalities. It would only awaken from its maniacal stupor whenever a small particle of mass or energy would spontaneously appear somewhere along the vast regions it covered; at which point the Darkness impulsively moved to dispel any disorder to its functioning system.

All change under all circumstances meant a weakening of the Darkness' existence. The Darkness held no memory or feelings making it impossible to know when and how it was created, but it knew that its ability to concentrate and to conceive of itself as a singular, concerted being was once unfathomable. The Darkness expanded its powers and reached around the borders of the universe by simply believing that it existed. It understood that

random debris of energy and mass were creations of its own mental devices, and that this dazed reality could be stopped if its parts could become one singular entity. There was nothing to live for, but its cursed existence prohibited death. The Darkness' every moment was a twitch, from one irritated moment to the next.

The Darkness woke one day to feel a draining grip on its consciousness. A foreign sphere composed of both energy and mass suddenly appeared in part of the densest areas of antimatter, erasing a significant portion of the universe-numbing substance. Within seconds, the transient object willed itself to change form into a sentient, physical being: taking shape with its mass occupying space, expending energy, and creating a shrieking noise as an orb-like creature began to take life. The creature's brightness eliminated all antimatter surrounding it; The creature flailed; The creature took existence's first breath; The creature experienced existence's first feelings, and then it was gone, swallowed by antimatter. Shadows of blackness began to reclaim the Darkness' now exposed domain, zillions of miles long by zillions of miles deep and wide. A seemingly infinite amount of space.

The creature lost to the Darkness' instinctual wrath, known as Anthelion, lost his foothold into existence, but the aftereffects of his presence remained. A physical ripping of the universe's fabric which could be felt, seen, and smelled kept back the otherwise plain black landscape, invisible to the ever-present, but glazed Darkness. From this gushing, something from nothing but Anthelion's remnant spirit, small droplets of light bred themselves repeatedly, drawing power from remnant mixtures of mass, energy, and time. The lights spread far and wide, diversified their components in both color and shape, until they themselves became relevant like the opening, like Anthelion.

The Darkness felt no pain, loss, or remorse that instance for it could not experience

complex thoughts such as feelings. However, a transition in the Darkness was evident. With a large amount of its rejuvenating and orienting antimatter eliminated, the Darkness ability to visualize itself weakened. The twitches causing mental discharges became less frequent, less clear, and took shorter spans. The Darkness therefore decided to replenish its supply of antimatter, and to further its demented livelihood in the barren, unexplored reaches of existence. The Darkness, now operating with a purpose, commanded its mind to irrevocably quash any carbon-based creature inhabiting its domain.

The universe was no longer silent. It had become a haven for violent explosions, gigantic hunks of physical deposits, and piercing sounds and corrosive smells. The Darkness restored itself to past levels by infiltrating more of space's surface area as the lights and now solid objects began their ascension into existence. The universe was plentiful enough to contain both sorts of entities—spiritual, gaseous creatures and solid, finite creatures. As comets and lights gained feverish cognizance akin to the Darkness (but granted by Anthelion), their perspectives emboldened them to realize that ends to their lives existed, and furthermore, a constant challenge to remain alive. The Darkness, building a memory, centered on his general mandate to exterminate enemies. Preserving his king predator status, the Darkness ravaged lights and comets unlucky enough to escape the bindings of its denser or faster-moving antimatter deposits.

Operating for thousands of years, the universe composed of the Darkness, the lights, and the tear, evolved existence to new levels. The Darkness lost its absolute sovereignty to the lights and comets which had now began morphing into stars and even planet-sized boulders. In addition, the degradation of life, what we know as time, began to occur as massive amounts of energy and mass filtered through weak antimatter connections, creating a

solar system. Despite the triumph of galactic productivity spearheaded by Anthelion, the universe was still incapable of housing sentient life. Whenever a living cell formed be it a plant, an animal, or a bacteria, it felt the Darkness' harsh treatment still strangling all of the universe's advancement. Whenever a new lifeform emerged, its energy would be vacuumed before being used or its mass would be crushed, incinerated, or taken away under the cloak of the antimatter.

The new signs of life surrounding it triggered The Darkness' memory. Anthelion existed in the constantly altering mind of the Darkness as a myth, but no longer was the past behind him, instead it was a mirror into the reality that could and would be. The lights' ability to whip through space while illuminating sections of the antimatter could not be explained other than by the influence of Anthelion. Additionally, with the larger comets able to withstand one, even a few antimatter bombardments, whereas in a short while ago they could not, The Darkness knew the nightmare in his mind, Anthelion, was as real as itself.

Seeing the new lifeforms as an immediate threat, The Darkness viciously destroyed and regrew itself in a desperate attempt to quell their advances by abandoning sections of its former self. The new envisioning of itself allowed the Darkness to better focus upon the stronger and more efficient parts of the antimatter for better combative capability. While the primary mission was to preserve the antimatter by eliminating other creatures, its new goal required all resources be spent to create a antimatter formula in an effort to assimilate non-darkness molecules into new antimatter legions. By assimilating the creations of Anthelion into new pieces of antimatter instead of ordering their destruction, the Darkness could sway the sides of war in its favor.

The Darkness' procedure of adapting itself from an apparition to a tangible object

required much study of Anthelion's embodiments. But after the finale of several adaptations to its mind, an actual physical avatar representing the Darkness in a physical form emerged. Resembling a hybrid of a shadow and gust of wind, the dark master could now personally threaten the universe mimicking antimatter. Utilizing its greatest and only advantage in this plane of existence, its mental capacity, the Darkness constructed its body into a flat, sleek rod with two perfectly sharp ends. One point, a larger one, would be used to amass antimatter whenever the Darkness needed to accumulate more power. The other tip of its new elusive self had a narrowing point that extended two feet and had no more than three inches of diameter in any given place. The Darkness could still use its mental qualities upon other creatures or the universe, but now it had physical implements to seek out its vision as well.

The change in the Darkness marked the ending of the first two time periods of the universe, the recurring cycle of instant life and death of all living matter and the era of the Darkness frantically hijacking light and mass. They were long-lived ages, six or seven thousand eons combined before the balance of the universe changed again. The rebirth of Anthelion marked the end of the Darkness' dominance of the cosmos. This time entering existence as a fully-operational living creature, equipped with senses, moving appendages, and a fully functional and self-contained body, Anthelion challenged the Darkness' sovereignty.

Anthelion, creator of all existence and the detractor of the Darkness, sought to amplify and maintain the transitions previously orchestrated. Using his newly acquired eyesight and smell, Anthelion searched throughout the universe for the largest concentration of antimatter. Anthelion's quest led him to a antimatter-diseased planet stretching out to cover roughly one eighth of the universe. Unbeknownst to both Anthelion and the Darkness,

this bastion of inactivity was once the tear that Anthelion used to ignite all life. As he did before, the reincarnated Anthelion, the virtuous rival to the wicked Darkness, would puncture one of the Darkness' greatest monuments to invigorate the universe, removing its dull drift that spread wickedness throughout the cosmos.

By far the universe's biggest planet, the brown, desolate wad of mass served as a Darkness' beacon overthrowing many would-be light revolutions. After thousands of years of manipulation of the tear, it was molded into a breeding pool for antimatter that slowly formed into a ball. The effects of the Darkness' assimilation imprisoned the planet in place while being fully immersed in a oil-like sludge, a derivative of the original antimatter, the essential ingredient needed to corrupt non-antimatter objects. As Anthelion neared the black clump, Anthelion bellowed a thundering pledge to reconquer the black, inert planet.

“Be gone, Darkness. Your tarnishing of this mass is no more.”

Hearing and feeling the crash of audio ripples in one of its vital antimatter embodiments, the Darkness instantly brought its entire consciousness to supervise the event. Since the Darkness did not solely rely on his newly created physical representation, but mostly upon his mental form, the ensuing conflict would have an unpredictable outcome. While the Darkness was virtually invulnerable to any attack from Anthelion due to the massive quantities of antimatter, the Darkness could only sense Anthelion's aura due to a lack of physical senses, making it difficult to successfully injure the archaic incantation that had haunted his dreams and world.

Uncaring for its defenses, the Darkness began shifting the antimatter encompassing

the planet and two nearby encampments searching for Anthelion. All emitting from the Darkness' physical emissary, grasping vines, spiraling squid-shaped objects covering large areas, and bullet fast globs all made of antimatter scattered around Anthelion, but his powerful sense of smell and hearing warned him of each attack. With eight moving limbs and countless air holes all over his body used for momentum, Anthelion's speed allowed for him to dodge all antimatter assaults and the narrow blade of the Darkness. Knowing that his increased activity would further alert the Darkness' awareness and that his ability to evade was finite, Anthelion darted three miles away from the conflict to replenish his energy reserves.

Now away from the antimatter, Anthelion took a moment to steady his mind and calculate an attack worthy of his ethereal and celestial heritage. In this time of peril, he pondered whether his knowledge and fate were bestowed to him by destiny, instincts, or by his environment. He also recounted his inception from his first birth when he started his existence. There were so many questions without answers, but for now, answering questions took backstage to the justice he needed to serve in the name of the universe's advancement. The Darkness' disservices to universal well-being offered enough motive to take action against it. Anthelion needed to set forth a chain of events that would topple the magnificent beast.

Mirroring the Darkness' oblivious actions towards its well being, Anthelion rammed the antimatter-diseased planet, simultaneously splitting his body's atoms and transforming the pieces into fast-moving energy shards. The kamikaze action robbed Anthelion of his lifeforce once again as he fell victim to the surrounding antimatter. He however did not fail in his task. The former particles of the planet absorbed the small entities of bright energy

causing the conglomeration of energy, flesh, and mass to rematerialize into the sun.

Anthelion's sacrifice furthered the campaign to produce more energy, sound, and movement into existence. The sun not only replaced the coldness and shadiness caused by antimatter, but its heat and nutrients enabled life to find a suitable environment. As a the prime agent of light and energy, the sun levied a strong campaign to eradicate all elements of antimatter by shining without rest for as long as it contained life. Unfortunately for the sun, due to the constant struggle with the ever-present antimatter and its harmful nature to physical matter, it would be destined to a life of solitude. But Anthelion, the artisan of eternal bliss, transferred no higher intellectual properties to his protector, ensuring the Darkness' affliction of a cursed existence remained unique only to it.

As Anthelion's and the Darkness' battle changed with their respective forms, so would the products of their actions. The universe did not suffer from its ordeals with change, but it did evolve into something new. The Darkness did not fade into the antimatter nor did Anthelion truly disappear into abyss. The seedlings of life had now been planted upon the great field of outer space, an arena ripe with endless space, littered with amendable mass, and fantastic stores of pure energy. The building blocks of an unknown understanding, perhaps serving or dismissing the old forces, would soon emerge to erase this old one. Another step forward caused by two steps backward.

Closing

With the absence of Anthelion, most lights and comets had no choice but to violently dissolve into antimatter. Without a constant source of energy and mass provided by Anthelion, many primordial creatures did not think to recharge themselves with aid from the sun. Only three sentient creatures survived the Darkness reign: two comet siblings named Rhan (male) and Mishla (female) and a first generation mono-colored light named Luz (no gender). These young entities were considerably weaker related to Anthelion's first living concoctions: less-equipped with instincts vital to survival like the sun, and unlike the tear, much lower amounts of energy, mass, and carbon. However, since the Darkness never neared the sun's wrath, these new souls were able to flourish .

Rhan became an energy farmer around the sun. Every thirty-two minutes, when the sun's rays would fluster a bit more than normal, he rose to full consciousness and extended his tail towards the sun, capturing energy flowing from the outburst. His movements reflected the sun's orbiting around the galaxy, so his path was not his own, but Rhan took solace in cultivating the environment as its steward. Despite his dutiful life, Rhan took splendor in the discipline and predetermined calculations regulating his life. In contrast, Mishla's outlook on the meaning of daily life was sporadic as evidenced by her adventures away from the sun and her talks with Luz.

Rhan, preparing to slumber again after an energy harvest, caught a glance of Mishla and Luz circling each other in the distance. Luz as a light could move much faster than her, but Mishla, a comet like Rhan, demonstrated more control of her flight. Rhan watched them as they taught each other the knowledge they possessed or they simply played in the ever-

changing galaxy. Rhan did not have a companion, but the sun's differing rays throughout his harvests sufficed as entertainment.

Mishla, the constant ballerina, made a figure eight in place in a horizontal orientation and then proceeded to make the same shape in a vertical manner. Luz discussed his ideas of her feats by using a combination of lights and vacuum-like noises created by siphoning orphan antimatter particles around their bodies. This system of communication worked since antimatter was still scattered in most places of the universe, but even if not, the flaring or dimming of their outer bodies could express the simplest messages such as a distress signal or a feeling of joy. Mishla and Luz had become particularly great communicating partners; They practiced everyday since they took refuge in the sun's energy, starting fourteen and a half years ago.

Smiling, Mishla hovered over antimatter debris.

“You see, Luz, it's really quite easy. You focus on the shape and just do it. I really don't see what your problem is.”

Studying her movements closely for the third time today, Luz was still baffled and amazed by the ease at which Mishla could maneuver. He however did not put himself down for not reaching the same achievement. It realized that light creatures were held in esteem from a long tradition: the purveyors of the flash and kaleidoscopic carneys of flight, but most importantly, dancers over the Darkness. He didn't need to fly in fancy ways or escape from looming antimatter predators of the old days. It was simply enough to have survived the passing of Anthelion unlike his recycled brethren.

“I don't think you understand, Mishla. I don't want to be as nimble or pretty as you, my place in this universe is more noble.”

Mishla flicked a piece of antimatter at Luz. The contorting black jelly covered half of its body in a splatter, but since the Darkness was not around, the antimatter was inanimate, a piece of space debris posing no danger. Luz shook his body nonchalantly removing the antimatter from itself. The creature of light took its time shrugging off the unwanted material from his body, uncaring about its appearance or the discomfort caused by the black material. Luz drifted away from Mishla, now far away from Rhan's view, behind part of the sun's gargantuan shape. Mishla pursued.

Luz, now fully separated from antimatter, advanced towards Mishla so that both of their faces connected. Luz began to communicate with Mishla via energy transfusion. Even though the creatures' facial features were undefined, they could focus energy on different parts of their masses to deliver important messages. Transferring and letting off heat on the right side of the face meant a positive message, while doing the same on the left side of the face expressed a negative message. Additionally, focusing energy on the top of the face designated a command, whereas any energy activity on the lower face provided information.

Positively responding to Luz' attempt to use energy transfusion communication, Mishla stood still as if receiving a kiss or a hug. This moment was powerful...emotional, like all times this form of messaging occurred. The process to align two separate entities' energies together required great concentration. If done incorrectly, energy losses occurred causing exhaustion, and in the worst cases, death. Unknown to Mishla and Luz, the same process was used by the Darkness to absorb and transform creatures like themselves into antimatter, a fact they would hopefully never know. They would always sneak away from Rhan so that he wouldn't scorn them for participating in the act.

Feeling each others' energy patterns and becoming in sync with one another, the two

celestial creatures' ideas and feelings flowed freely between both vessels as if they were one. Luz enjoyed Mishla's jovial take on life while Mishla scoured through Luz' vast information banks. Their souls were sealed together; No petty distraction would wake them from their mutual trance. Mishla tickled Luz by sending rays of light from the front of its body to the back and then the reverse. The intertwined duo could now peer into each others' thoughts. Good memories of energy consumption, the first time they met, stories of the Darkness, antimatter, and secrets they did not willingly choose to reveal.

Mishla's caressing of energy waves down Luz' body abruptly stopped as she discovered Luz' feelings for her. She came to understand how the memories they shared were kept closer to its mind and conscious than other thoughts. She felt something that would resemble love, but being only two of the three living beings they knew, they could never fully grasp onto the idea. Mishla wondered if she should be offended or scared of Luz' thoughts, to which Luz quickly urged her that it was a giving and sincere gesture, and so she finally rested her judgment on it being a positive improvement to their relationship.

Luz, completely immersing itself in the space where Mishla's mass rested, allowed itself to meld within the confines of Mishla's energy signature. The creature of light surrendered itself completely to the whim of the comet for the first time. Reciprocating the actions of her companion fulfilling a new, unexplored role in her life, Mishla lowered her mental and physical defenses as well. The two took turns feeling, sensing, and thinking for each other as one singular creature. Particles of the former comet and light creatures laid in disarray forming one pile of rubble, energy, and light.

Days upon days passed as Mishla and Luz stayed interconnected as Rhan systematically gathered more energy from sunbursts. The sun's perimeter where they camped

remained unchanged as the emptiness of space became colder as its orbital forces intensified. The ancient, mind-oriented entities, The Darkness and Anthelion, did not emerge as the three younger creatures partook in normal daily events. The Gods of yesteryear faded into their memories, barely existing as specks of thoughts anymore.

Rhan skated past a series of asteroids, narrowly dodging the pursuing antimatter at his backside. The antimatter expended no energy, held no individual thoughts; It wouldn't be long until the orchestrated enemies of new creation caught the century-old comet. He had survived the great blackout that conquered almost the entirety of existence's free-willed species, the first wave of black antimatter genocides carried out by the Darkness, and so this event was nothing. He mentally readied himself for the inevitable long pursuit ahead of him. The Darkness was not known for collecting defeats, only reformed mass that could be altered into copious amounts of antimatter. This process that leaves the mind of the being still intact, but taking its free will was a horror enough in itself to panic Rhan.

A few splatters of antimatter could be heard on the sides of Rhan as he continued navigating through the rock formations. The antimatter surrounded him now despite him never resting, although he did lose some of the larger pieces of antimatter in the chase. Antimatter was everywhere in the galaxy where the Darkness was always looming, waiting to capture more noisy, bright morsels born from Anthelion. Although Rhan and the rest of his cohort, his comet sister Mishla and the light known as Luz, had never encountered the Darkness previously, his constant chanting infiltrated their minds almost daily ever since they began exploring the universe apart from the sun.

The Darkness had been bested by the sun, but its sinister mission to reconquer the

universe, to again submerge existence into the antimatter transpired despite Rhan's ignorance. At the beginning of this excursion, as the Darkness first learned of Rhan, it reformatted its current agenda to eradicate all forms of Anthelion. The Darkness did not despise, even acknowledge, Rhan as another being; He was just a speck of dust needing to be consumed and transformed for the universe's well being. The Darkness, being the first and only creature in existence according to its point-of-view, instinctively sought nothing more than to continue its goal of restoring the universe to its original state.

Rhan torpedoed himself from asteroid rock to asteroid rock, a method of momentum he learned from Mishla. With each of Rhan's quick, pin-pointed movements, he brought himself closer to the ever-protecting sun, an embodiment enriched with Anthellion's molecular structure that fatally disintegrated all antimatter upon touch. Once Rhan reached the sun, the antimatter would be forced to retreat, unable to overcome the sun's overpowering harshness to its kind of substance. The Darkness would need to wait until Rhan would venture out into deep space again, and at that point, finally stealing back those elusive cosmic components corrupted by Anthellion.

Rhan's life path differed from the Darkness' in more ways than just constant trials of survival. His mind wandered to places such as the future, the developing camaraderie between his sister and Luz, and the areas beyond the sun's reach. He felt with his body, not only with his mind; his purpose to living was only partially scripted. While he lived to harvest and consume the sun's energy, he also chose things for himself. One example being to care of his sister Mishla allowing her and her chosen companion, Luz, their freedom to take control of their lives.

The movements of antimatter seemed to move faster and more erratically than it had

ever done before. Typically, antimatter moved as Rhan had known the Darkness to think, without spirit or individualism, only calculated, automated movements. Perhaps the Darkness had changed Rhan thought to himself as antimatter actually raced past him to beat him to the sun. He was quickly surrounded by antimatter, but all he wondered was how the antimatter, would be motivated enough to not only jet past him, but to actually want to capture him. Rhan had antimattered many potentially fatal antimatter episodes in the past, but never did any true danger exist.

Rhan felt emotions pouring out of the antimatter itself with angry, frustrated, and hateful messages. The antimatter wanted Rhan to feel its multifaceted pain: the hatred it had for all things not itself; the unfilled desires of bonding, consuming nutrients, and never growing old; but most striking about the antimatter's mind, the knowledge of knowing it existed. antimatter acting like this was an impossible happening, the Darkness was without emotions, a purpose—a mind really. Rhan's conceptualization of reality failed him. He thought back on the day he met the ever-present and powerful Darkness to ponder this unpredicted change. Perhaps with a better understanding of the antimatter's master, he could outwit the antimatter long enough to reach the sun.

Rhan always harvested energy from the sun, but before the day he met the Darkness, there was no reason to fear leaving its side. With Rhan's energy storage capabilities, he could travel without the sun or another constant energy source for thousands of years. This particular day Mishla convinced him to leave the sun while she took over his normal duties. He would explore some of the universe, something he wanted to do for years, but his sense of duty always won over his sense of adventure.

Rhan traveled about a thousand kilometers forward from the position of the sun over

the course of three weeks passing two planets along the way. He also noticed non-sentient star and light formations, the newer breed of life not enchanted by Anthelion's lifeforce that would someday form new galaxies throughout the universe. While his trip was very convincing of its usefulness in aiding his charting of the universe, it was lackluster in bringing enjoyment. He met no new lifeforms nor witnessed any miracles of life.

Circling back at end of the one thousand kilometer mark as indicated by his energy supply, Rhan noticed a flickering of light and shadows behind a cluster of newborn stars. The stars, being lifeless, were mysteriously inert and quickly disappearing into a cloud of dark space. Never seeing a patch of celestial matter vanish before his eyes, Rhan took glee in his recent discovery as he approached. Drifting closer and closer to the new phenomenon, the comet creature felt its tail of energy slowly pulling faster towards the blackest spot in the star cluster. Rhan's alarm relating to the situation overrode his desire to move in closer as he began to retreat from the unknown cosmic occurrence.

Reversing his position from the star disappearance site, Rhan felt his abundant energy draining from his least protected outer layer as the Darkness in the nearby area became more apparent, the stars seemingly evaporating from the space horizon. The pulling intensified on Rhan as well, his tail expended energy faster as his pace of movement remained the same. He felt a coldness that he had never felt before as he succumbed to the surrounding absence of space.

For an unknown amount of time, Rhan had blacked out and soon found himself inside a prison of nothingness, what he and his companions would later call antimatter. His energy levels were low, but he could see in the distance a smattering of stars, comets, and planet bits ripe with energy. He feasted on the energy tendrils emitting from the objects with precision

and haste. He did not forget his capture and his current lack of direction. With each parcel of power consumed, he felt stronger, but strangely, he was still weak despite being full on energy.

Within a time period of less than a second, the articles of orphan energy floating around the piled celestial objects became extinguished. Rhan felt another living energy source, but he could not feel or communicate with it any way. Billions of tiny strings began probing and protruding Rhan's body, active pieces of antimatter commanded by the Darkness present in the vicinity. Rhan became irritated with the protruding foreign objects, but bound by the antimatter, he was unable to move. He heard noises for the first time that day as the Darkness' piercing voices penetrated his inner core. Replacing the static noises of a virtually empty universe with intimate, close messages from another being was both shocking and appealing.

The Darkness did not actually speak, he communicated telepathically through its mind, interpreted by Rhan. Since the Darkness was composed of no physical matter at the time, this was the only form of interaction it could have with the universe besides antimatter. When the creature spoke, multiple versions of the same decrepit voice shuttered throughout Rhan's being. Despite no intentions of harm from the Darkness, its speech soon became unsettling, then irritating, and eventually painful. One voice was high-pitched, masculine-sounding while another voice was barely audible with a sound mirroring a cat's cry. The most evident voice however came off as monotone and far louder than the other voices. Each time this voice spoke, the last voice in the series of three, Rhan's innards shook with fear in response to its stoicism.

“Who are you? Tell me about your energy. Give me your knowledge.” the Darkness

did not give Rhan a chance to even flinch before it continued.

“Do you know of any others? I have time to spend with you. I demand an answer.”

Rhan quivered sending an inadvertent message to his captor. Rhan, without using words, only thoughts, expressed sorrow, dissatisfaction, and despair all centered on this situation and the creature holding him.

“Am I hurting you? I'm just holding you here while we talk. Do as I say.”

The Darkness, never actually conversing with another creature before, held little control over its outer thoughts and speech. It was equally surprised at what its expressions. Through its preliminary, automated screening, it determined that this was not the same lifeform it encountered in the past, the one that harmed it. The one that made it seek out a way to negate change.

The Darkness continued to speak in a series for days as its antimatter feelers absorbed the energy from the celestial objects. As the process of draining energy continued, Rhan was able to accumulate orphaned energy that the Darkness left floating in space. Rhan soon became comfortable with the situation, releasing positive and productive thoughts. The Darkness interpreted them as words.

“I am physically okay, surrounded by a magnificent creature without knowledge of the harm he could cause me. He will soon let go and let me go home.”

The Darkness understood feeling physical harm since his encounter with Anthelion, but he did not understand the concept of knowledge or home. The Darkness drifted in space accumulating information as it encountered objects in the universe without ever resting. During its down times, it was unconscious, and at the very most, halfway engaged in its consciousness. At this point, the Darkness was still focused on recovering energy from the

physical fragments in front of it, twenty two thousand areas in which antimatter was spread, and how it felt pain from the first time it met another active being. Feeling a bit overwhelmed with these new ideas, the Darkness focused all of its energy and consciousness on utilizing the antimatter surrounding Rhan and other nearby areas to the Darkness to accelerate this process.

Rhan, now able to move freely as the Darkness' motivations changed, flew away from the Darkness and towards the sun. The Darkness considered decimating or perhaps assimilating the creature escaping from its whims, but for the first time in its life, a choice was made. Here was a tiny morsel of life swimming away from it that minutes ago instituted a new life orientation. The Darkness could control the comet, but in doing so, it would destroy the fabric of its design, mangling the product of its curious life until it was useless. The Darkness decided it was more interested in learning more about the parts of the universe it did not control and not ruin its chance to develop new mindsets. There would be other opportunities for the Darkness to seize this drifting vessel without consuming it in one sitting.

Rhan's excitement to be far from the Darkness was minimal relative to the celebration of his power to stay collected and logical in a time of great stress. If Luz or his sister found themselves in the same situation, the outcome surely would've ended differently. Luz, too intense on reasoning, would've perished to the unemphatic cloud of hate. Mishla on the other hand, a naive, inexperienced patron of conflict, would've mentally crumpled after the initial entrapment. The trio was lucky he represented the group in the tragedy, although he was resistant to share the information with them for fear of their reactions. Perhaps they would want to never abandon the sun. Or worse yet, Mishla would be too afraid to continue with

her life, knowing that an unstoppable predator could strike at any time. Rhan would diligently explain the villain he met during the trek, but only in the right circumstances.

Rhan quickly snapped out of his memories feeling the antimatter suck away his surface level energy. The mindless pawns of the Darkness were sloppy, but still efficient. Their vast numbers ensured their victory over the comet under certain circumstances, however this was Rhan, the one living being that had met and survived their master. He garnered a special weapon they could not predict, faith in himself.

As Rhan had done with the Darkness years ago, he began to envision himself breaking free from antimatter despite their innumerable numbers surrounding him, the odds. The pain was great; Energy seeping from Rhan's side was no different than blood being extracted from a human body. It was attached to him and then not, severed violently by leech-like antimatter. Rhan imagined the Darkness as a functional being creating and transforming matter from unwilling subjects, the positivity of Luz, and the playfulness of his sister Mishla. Rhan did not spontaneously generate great amounts of energy from his body or morph into another form as Anthelion could, but he did project a sense of duty into the antimatter.

Antimatter, inert without a master to control it, mirrored the Darkness' thoughts and therefore fell to this weakness once again. Their inquisition this new thought, positivity, handicapped their attention, captured their will to mutilate such an enlightening creature. Some antimatter resisted the urge to release Rhan, as some of the antimatter was more in tune with the Darkness, the once trumped being that had since mentally overcame such concepts as feelings and emotions. The failing antimatter however was too much of a downfall; Rhan was able to struggle, wiggle, and eventually escape the antimatter smothering him.

The antimatter, one and all, quickly pursued their prize as they all now knew the spell, the ruse cast upon them. By this time and place, about a minute of confrontation spanning three out of the thousands of quadrants of the universe, the Darkness had picked up Rhan's overcoming of antimatter. Quicker than the speed of light, in fact, by the speed of thought, the creator of antimatter emerged, quickly gathering surrounding antimatter to gather its senses. The mind-dwelling creature recklessly accumulated its tools, it did not want to another folly affiliated with such a minor being.

Beyond the first thought of owning the mass and the energy of the nearby elusive comet, the Darkness came to the realization that there may be other physical creatures around. The Darkness had very little concept of spatial properties, but as antimatter kept increasing in the cosmos and as its ability to interact with all things became greater, it realized that sometimes it was surrounded by different objects. Now seeing Rhan race away from it and nearby antimatter, the Darkness learned about distances and locations. He could now picture memorable areas in his mind, allowing him to move to known locations at will. He remembered objects too, like the sun that forebode him its energy nectar through resistance, its biggest cache of energy where it first met Rhan, and even Anthelion, in all its forms.

The Darkness' mind, its entire being, was focused on something other than antimatter for the first time in its existence. As it thought about the things or places, the black cloud creature inadvertently teleported to each place or the location the object was found without expending energy or time. Rhan, still stretching his ability to soar through space to his highest levels, watched as the dark ghost behind him blinked in and out of space. At this point, Rhan removed his thoughts from the unfathomable Darkness. The Darkness' unreal

capabilities beckoned the steadfast Rhan to question if his effort in this plausibly futile chase. The Darkness garnered strengths and abilities he could never match. Unwilling to let his mind wander, Rhan reengaged his faith in himself and simply blocked his vision from anything except for the forward-sitting sun.

As the Darkness shifted locations feverishly, Rhan lost continuously lost track of him. Despite not feeling the siphoning of energy from his pursuer any longer, Rhan's dedication to finding safety in the sun did not lessen. Rhan's conviction to his own survival was paramount, but not his sole reason to rush back home. He had not seen Mishla for seven months now. His mind wandered, ever so slightly, that his sister had fallen to the sun's awesome energy, or perhaps some other creature like the monster haunting him extinguished her flame. Rhan's thoughts on his sister were short lived, as the Darkness suddenly appeared behind him once again, but this time directly above, poised to deliver a damning blow through his center.

As the Darkness struck Rhan, the younger, more fragile, less able collection of elements forming a life twitched as mounds of his front soon drifted aimlessly about space. He felt his consciousness fade as his ability to create momentum ceased. With less than one hundred feet from the sun to travel, Rhan could only control his faith. He considered his sister, his duty to the sun and energy harvesting while silencing the thought of the shadowy assassin now silencing him.

Nothingness. Emptiness. This was all Rhan felt for an eternity. He could no longer sense others' energy forces, nor rock formations or clusters of space debris. Not one ounce of substance or hint of change was near. Rhan could not feel his flame or his rocky center, he was no more.

Rhan's sister would need to live forever without her brother. Perhaps Luz would be a willing and able replacement for the comfort only a brother could seemingly offer. The sun could be a suitable home for the two companions, but perhaps they would travel to another energy source—even become nomadic, mapping out the entire galaxy. But there would always be the Darkness and antimatter. They would always need to fear him. The Darkness would always interrupt their thoughts. Without question, the Darkness would always be part of the equation, subtracting or dividing whatever they possessed.

After what seemed to be several millennia in this airy, but constricting area, Rhan felt another's presence. He could not see anything unfamiliar, only vast blackness as he had before. Without warning, the visitor abruptly communicated. Despite not consciously understanding how the creature was talking with him (for Rhan no longer had a body), the voice and message were so clear, as if the creature was speaking directly to the essence of Rhan's lifeforce.

“Greetings, new one. I am the one no existing creature could ever know. The one that spirals into the storms as I see fit, making them my own. I am the Darkness. You have come here to join me, and you will be here forever.”

With great alarm, but no way to even conceive of moving his matterless body, Rhan shuddered. The dark space around him suddenly became lit while his mind solidified into a round object that he could identify as part of his body.

The Darkness countered.

“Stop that! What are you doing? This is not how you should act. Stop that! You are free now.”

Now adorning a circular-shaped head with no other discernible body parts, Rhan

could see and feel the Darkness' physical body, its limbs, attempting to hold him. The light coming from Rhan and lighting the surrounding area flickered and changed colors as the Darkness detrimentally affected the resisting Rhan. In the excitement of lights and uncontrollable urges, Rhan's ability to stay awake once again emerged. A blanketed warmth surrounded his face, which soon became a burning sensation. Rhan closed the eyes of his new face as the pain intensified.

Rhan opened his eyes as he reentered his former body, now fifty feet from the sun. Massive amounts of energy burst around and inside Rhan's body as Mishla, positioned halfway between the sun and Rhan, received energy from Luz. Luz, connected to the sun, directly pulled energy, heat, and light from the sun in this improvised manner to provide Rhan with the life essentials needed to survive.

The Darkness lay helpless to fully deplete all of Rhan's lifeforce as the comet moved closer and closer to his lighted sanctuary. Rhan's spirit urged him to pull forward, to purge the negative thoughts the Darkness still poured into his soul. Rhan now knew that no force would corrupt him or deteriorate his body any further. As he met with Luz and Mishla under the protection of the Sun, they knew they forever was near.

Rebirth

I awakened into life in a free fall from the sky as celestial dust particles and tattered energy through a broken visage. Instinctively, I realized I mission or a purpose to accomplish not yet clear to me. The words scrawled on my mind's eye spelled out “Anthelion,” a namesake bestowed to me before my first moments on a surrogate planet, for this place was clearly not my place of origin. Outer space, the stars, the sun, that vast entirety, all of it, was my beginning destination.

The newness of this planet coincided with the birth of my earth-dwelling body. The landscape, bare like my mind, slowly forged itself into something great, becoming disfigured then reconfiguring their respective corporeal and metaphysical properties. Visions came to me as I morphed from a stardust visitor into a permanent resident of flesh, bone, and brain. Over the course of many years and much concentration, this process occurred without the influence of tools or teachers. I saw lights, clouds of smoke, time passing...it did not make sense to me. I knew all of the how's, but none of the why's.

Searching for biological excitement on this desolate planet had almost become maddening. The rocky layers dominated the earth's floor as I slithered along. My freshly assembled, bodiless head of a organic structure creating as much snake-like momentum as possible. Miles and miles I scavenged simply wishing for a plant, miracle, or small organism to study. I felt empty noticing only rocks with varying shades of brown while anticipating a game-changing event. My mind grew loudly as my feelings became stronger as solid matter and energy is generated. Commanding the seen and unseen aware to me, my will alone cast ripples of change to any of reality's properties deemed unfit.

What was once my feeble body, a meaningless cosmic mess combined with earthly elements, demonstrated the true extent of my reach upon existence. I had legs to carry me farther and faster along the world; limbs to better touch the environment first hand; a torso to hold the other pieces together while also serving as a storage area for building materials I gathered. My head was the only portion of my body unique to any creature ever conceived on this place. A transparent, bowl-shaped sphere, it did the impossible: displayed and contained the intricate, advanced workings of my mind. As my mind and its thoughts composed of fleshly particles contorted and contemplated, scores of vivid colors, sounds, and solids played within the top of the playground which was my body. Akin to how my cosmic role felt natural, *presque vu*, I knew soon I would master this fertile realm.

Water erupted from beneath the rocks pushing upwards under my feet. Grass, moss, small bushes, and even three story trees spouted spontaneously blocking my entire panoramic view. The air's smell altered, filled with nitrogen, oxygen, argon, and other elements absent before. I couldn't focus enough thought to realize what exactly had happened, but light seemed to overshadow darkness as opportunities for growth came forth.

I continued my journey as my evolved self while my mind simultaneously learned and constructed new thoughts and thus possibilities. I pondered vitality and abundance as one section of the planet turned to a luscious rainforest. Thoughts concerning the purpose of life and my origin created mountain peaks and valleys. When doubt or a pause occurred in my thinking, water—sometimes in the form of snow—or deep crevasses would submerge me into its depths, a reminder that even I was fallible. All the shards of my metaphysical psyche orchestrated a new phase to eternity, as evident by the compromising of the geography before me. I marveled in my abilities to create such a diverse environment of plants, geographical

structures, and atmospheric tranquility, but there was something missing.

On the day no untamed areas of the planet remained, I took a deep breath absorbing with all of my senses the new frontiers present in the world. Unlike the mortal humans that would live off borrowed time in the future, my capacity to sense, nay know, the infinitesimal sub-workings of existence allowed me to see all the world's events at once. The actions I took thereafter started the cycle of life that made humanity, all life, possible. The experience of manufacturing new life had not taken place yet, but I felt as if it was the millionth time it had happened. This one thought blistered amongst all others as its chief, to the point that I felt compelled to populate earth with free-living beings like myself.

Albeit that I had the capability to peer into the entire world's happenings at one time, it was another feat to withstand that power. While delving through this newly acquired knowledge, I felt the fiber of my entire being shattering in disarray. All appendages I once used to interface with the world deflated as natural disasters took place within my mind and the planet. Next my memory vanished, as hurricanes powerful enough to topple mountains ripped terrain all over the world; tsunamis combined with molten-rock bombarded trees, softer rocks, and hills like silly putty; Thunder and a black rain filled with acid scarred and boiled the newly paved earth. The catastrophes clashing with the planet mirrored the ones in my head. At the apex of nature running amok, I lost my mind as unexplainable vast, limitless, confusion ran inside my soul as I attempted to temper this amazing gift.

I do not know how long my mind, body, and earth quarreled with itself, but my consciousness alerted me that there was a future. As I eventually regained control of my senses, thoughts, and powers so had returned my motivation and a world lusting for rewarding struggles. Not only did I regain my past abilities back, but also a vision of my

legacy. As order rose from the chaos, I realized that death and reincarnation were part of a larger cycle set place long before I was created. With my memories, mind, and abilities successfully realigned in a time with a thriving planet, the time was ripe to create my brethren, built from earthly resources, that would be able to mimic this same cycle.

Tense Exits

Before prehistoric earth many civilizations of organisms shared meaningful lives as humans would in the years to come. The mendillions were earth's first humanoid creatures: organisms able to think above instincts, hold memories for longer than a few years, create and maintain civilizations through many generations, and ones that worked in unison to become more powerful than their individual selves. Mendillions cultivated earth in its earliest creature-bearing years seeing it through arduous times.

Mendillions, like modern mammals, lived in both water and land environments. They had the height of children, the width of hippopotamuses, and stood on two feet like humans. Nomadic and social in nature, they would travel from environment to environment, periodically exchanging members of one group for those in another tribe. There was no centralized head of mendillions, but no wars or any dangerous predators subsisted to cause conflict. Mendillions struggled for nothing except to preserve life and a civilized structure. Although no single mendillion ruled over any other, Faka of Moorn was the most revered influencer of the entire mendillion race.

Faka of Moorn presided over a small encampment of about eighty mendillions depending on the season and geographic location of his camp. He told fictional stories about mythical creatures and times; tragedies and comedies; riddles and poems. These tales alone did not garner Faka of Moorn fame. It was his tattered, vivacious history of three centuries showcasing the thrills and downsides of adventuring. These stories he told to perfection, word by word, thought by thought, placed his listeners beside him, allowing them to gain the knowledge from his experiences. Tonight he was telling the story of the Great River.

Faka, although being over three centuries old—at least a century older than the average elder—would still stand during his stories like the younger mendillions. Faka's energy was exceedingly high tonight. Whenever he would hit a peak of the story, his baseball-sized eyes would light up as they opened wide. The crowd of about twenty young children of various genders took glee in the master orator's tale.

“You see, the Great River's width is enormous—over one mile long, but that's not what makes it so great.” Faka bit his lip, bobbed his head, then lightened and widened his eyes through a dramatic pause. “It's the fact that the water's surface seems to jump up at you when you cross. Nevermind the typical grip of the current pulling you down. The water propelled by the momentum to get to the other side of the world, that is what you should fear.”

A young mendillion boy aged about a half of a century raised his hand to ask a question. This was Faka's specialty. In his estimation, all great novelists, communicators, and storytellers must be improvisation experts. To craft, remember, and deliver a successful speech, you show an appreciation for the art of discussion. But to mold the mutual experience around all that are participating, that takes a true genius.

The boy was timid with his question, but luckily for him and the greater audience, he was able to utter the entire question.

“Sir, um sir, why did you cross the Great River? Why did you want to cross when you could just live where you were, avoiding danger?”

Faka understood that a boy was asking the question, but he also respected such an unobvious question; one that questioned motive, getting a reward for a great feat, and seeking one possible motive for living. If there was one thing Faka tried to explain to every one of

his listeners, it would be that great people are not born, but opportunities to become great exist in everyone's lives. Only the mendillions willing to risk their most valued possessions—health, stability, and ego—would become true masters of their lives.

“The reason why I crossed the Great River is the same reason that another mendillion would pursue another mendillion romantically, or an artist would lock himself in his own home for years while crafting his masterpiece, or on the other hand, why a thief scouts out his victims looking for patterns and vulnerabilities. The value of the reward is only worth the effort to get it.” Faka stood up on a table in the civic center, parents and previously uninterested patrons whipped their heads in his direction to see him now.

Faka raised his hands like an attacking animal and boldly spoke, “Go out and see the world. Do not just listen to others, read stories in town squares, or take pleasure in the trinkets and foreign customs around you. We are mendillions. Born to live, born to think, born to play, born to live, born to die. We might as well be trees, rocks or grass if we're just going to live life in the same place in the same way.”

Everyone clapped as Faka made his retreat out of the door. He was quick to leave since his son, Byr, was waiting at home to see him. This was Faka's first night back in Moorn in two months when he began this storyteller's conquest. The children and other spectators would want to talk to him, but they'd have to catch up with him later. Faka wanted to stay and chat longer but he knew that his boy would be worse off for doing so. This common trend after a performance once centered Faka's life; A life before doubts.

Faka exited the back door of the civic center traveling behind the houses, off the main road, making his way home. The main road, like the Great River in his story, was mired in obstacles and dangers. He did not want to be pestered by street merchants, tempted by night

dwellers, or even admired by pedestrians. Faka took the solitary back road to his destination because he enjoyed the social rejuvenation restored after the commotion. The excitement of his performances always had a lasting effect on him—a trembling hand, a loss of names or phrases in conversations taking place within an hour of the show. He was secretly exhausted of being on top of the speaking populous, but he wouldn't spoil the gift for everyone else.

Walking casually but swiftly to the front of the residences of Moorn, Faka released the latch on his front door and entered. He was immediately greeted by Byr who apparently had been waiting for a long time. Faka noticed a nervousness in Byr, probably caused by their reconciliation he thought.

“Father, you're home. How was your trip?”

Faka noticed a few leaves on his son's back and sweat on his brow.

“My trip was good, Byr. What have you been up to?” He answered quickly.

“Just hanging around, nothing interesting.”

Faka brushed the leaves off of Byr's coat then positioned himself in front of his fourth generation son.

Byr told Faka how much he had missed him and how he'd traveled to the civic center to catch him. Faka tried to be disciplinary or upset, but he couldn't find a good reason why the boy should have been at home. The boy's deceased mother, his passed on wife, would've found a reason perhaps, but Faka wanted Byr to be himself. He figured the boy was fifty now and able to make his own decisions.

Faka and Byr sat in the living room to continue the conversation. The space, just like all mendillion domiciles, had walls of rocks pasted together with dried mud. The floors were natural, comprised of sand, shrubbery and rocks formed in ornamental patterns. Since rain

did not bother mendillions much, the least amount of emphasis was placed on the roof, where there sometimes was nothing except flattened leaves from the multistory bing trees found around the village. It was common in mendillion homes to have wind drafts coming in and out of the house, but since mendillions had manes like modern day lions, the cold air's breath was soothing.

Faka told Byr what his decision to leave the house without permission meant to boy's life. The father explained that there would be no punishment, but things had now changed between the two of them. It was customary in mendillion culture to become independent somewhere between the ages of fifty to one hundred years, but not until the child exhibits patterns of independence. Byr was not alarmed at his father's announcement of how life would soon turn a page since he was greatly anticipating the future possibilities.

“Father, it's like you were saying about the Great River. We can choose a passive, non-rewarding life, or we can control our destinies by taking chances and exploring the unknown or more dangerous aspects of life.”

Faka pondered his son's words. The mendillion sitting in front of him was the product of his life's work, a fixture of a past self. He considered telling his son about his current doubts regarding being a public figure or taking on so much as one individual. Perhaps he didn't have to explain all of those new philosophies, maybe just tell him about the back alley walks home or sitting in cold, dark places secretly waiting for his body to finally succumbing to time. The two were paused for a minute as Faka thought to himself and Byr waiting in anticipation for his iconic father to speak again. But, the boy, ready to prove himself, took the initiative. The elder mendillion's sour mental state found itself outgunned by a younger, weaker, but more energetic mind's drive.

“I've been talking to Mishla about tree mining in the far east. She says there's a spot for me, given your approval of course. I know you two had your troubles in the past, but there's no reason why I can't make that industry a part of my life.”

Faka stalled into a position of mute thinking, but retorted shortly after.

“Why would you be so cruel to deal with the person that I struggled with for most of my life? What redeemable qualities or opportunities can she really present?”

“Dad--,” Byr was cut off.

“Mishla took me off my first job as a sea patrol officer, she bought the house that I always admired and discussed in my stories, she tried to separate your mom and I when Mishla fought against working females, she recorded, produced, and sold my greatest tales all over the planet for immoral profit, and now she wants to take you away from me.”

“But Dad--,”

“She is a sole creator of everything terrible with the world. She is the queen of destruction. My time on earth isn't the only one worse off because of her meddling.”

Byr took a step towards his sitting father. His head was above his father's as he spoke.

“She's giving me an officer's position. I am the only mendillion to ever qualify for the role without actually putting in a year of tree mining. No labor training, no risks involving heights or the heavy tools, the mace hammer or tree drill.”

The father found himself at a loss for a response for the first time in years. He wanted to tell his boy not to take part in the adventure due to his most recent change of heart regarding individual conquest, but he also wanted his heir to learn follow the internal lessons cherished by his own character.

“If this is what you want to do, Byr, then be sure you understand the path and proceed.”

Faka realized that Mishla probably had planned to further hurt him or perhaps place her detrimental grips on a more prized target, his son. He wouldn't warn his son though, he could've been wrong about Mishla's intentions.

The conversation ended without resolution seeing Faka and Byr going into their respective corners. Byr left early the next day to begin immediate transport to Mishla's tree mining operation taking place halfway across the world. Byr would be far from Faka, but not completely out of reach.

Faka did not speculate or ponder on the results relating to the departure of Byr. He instead began to reflect again on himself. Recollecting his adventures with the Great River, the tortuous peaks and canyons of Hurricane Mountain, the camaraderie of the forest elves of all the tree-based communities he visited, so many diverse mendillion cities based off of different ideals, and a long list of longtime traveling and storytelling allies. Beyond the expeditions themselves, Faka remembered vivid dreams; emotions ranging from horrid fear to absolute joy; smells, sights, tastes, and feelings; all from his three hundred year life. Each situation shared not only uniqueness, but a badge of completion evident and useful in the present.

Struggling feverishly to find comfort on his stone bed, sifting through his memoirs, Faka was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of his collected memories. He wondered how it came to be that a mortal creature could do more, be more, than he could physically, mentally or spiritually withstand. Living over three hundred years was too long. His body and mind demanded rest from this fantastic ride that's allure of freedom, creativity, and possibility had

long since past.

As Faka's eyes penetrated the blank night sky, a strong wind crept through the fragile roof composed of leaves. Small circles of dust and debris spiraled through to the corner of the mendillion bedroom. Feeling the warmth or aura of another creature, Faka sat up to decipher the strangeness, but he saw no person and no change in the night sky to explain the bizarre phenomena just witnessed. Becoming unsure of himself or his current surroundings combined with the mental pain caused by his son and questionable past, Faka became frightened of what came next.

Without a rational reason Faka could surmise, his mental and physical ills faded away. He was surprisingly calm and alert. Across from Faka, on a bench carved from a log (a gift from his late wife), he noticed a slender, taller than tall mendillion figure. It sat motionless in a area of the room covered with shadows from the leaves above, although it appeared to be constantly shifting due to gaseous properties. The mysterious visitor began to speak, but again, it did not advance from the corner in which it occupied. The voice entered directly into Faka's mind. The sound inside Faka's head was persuasive, vitalizing, and poignant, all at the same time.

“Faka of Moorn, it is a pleasure to meet you. I have never met a more distinguished, strong-minded traveler and storyteller. I am Anthelion. A traveler and storyteller myself.”

Unaware of his new house guest and the mayhem to reality now evident, Faka's curiosity of the situation hijacked his wits relieving him of any internal alarms. He was euphoric, but not unfocused as if he was in a psychedelic trance or drugged. Faka leaned against the coarse wall while Anthelion, a entity far more powerful, knowing, and older than himself spoke.

“I have been to many places during many times seeing all sorts of events in the cosmos. These voyages happened on this planet, and in places not even fathomable by your mind. I however have great need for someone with your perspective to assert your opinion to me and others in this world.”

Anthelion's dark figure began to burst with light where his eyes should have been. Faka felt a sense of urgency in his mind as Anthelion's tone changed.

“There is another being similar to myself that I believe has long since been poisoning your world. I hope for you to become an agent to detect this foreign element here in this time and place. It's imperative that we remove this living plague from this plane of existence.”

Faka paused for a moment, scared of what he felt he should, what he wanted to, say. Taking hold of his fears and chancing his well-being, Faka emotionally exhaled his next words.

“You know, I'm not right for this role. I've been having doubts about my entire life. I haven't been myself for a long time. I wish to just lie down, become frail, and wither away.”

Light from the night sky fell into the humble, tiny hut of Faka. Anthelion's silhouette shined profusely like a firecracker as it collected the light from above. Anthelion harnessed and harbored the light and energy into his frame turning into a solid akin to a mendillion's. Instantly appearing next to Faka, moving the speed of light, Anthelion put his hands on Faka's broad shoulders releasing energy.

Faka's mental, physical and spiritual clarity of the entire situation reversed itself as his body began to become stiffer, stockier, and more slender, reverting back to a hundred year old mendillion's body.

“Faka, of all the beings I have crossed or created, you have always stayed truest to the

standards and tasks put before you. I have full faith that you will accomplish this duty. Now, return to your bed a new mendillion and tomorrow you will begin your grandest adventure as a galactic herald blessed by the stars.”

Before Faka reacted, Anthelion and the light he brought in vanished.

Faka woke up the next morning without motivational ailments. His body, stimulated by Anthelion, was younger, faster, stronger, and smarter than ever before. A problem existed though for Anthelion's newly acquired scout: where to start his search. Realizing that the answers would come to him in time, Faka returned to the civic center where a story the night earlier might reignite his creativity. The venue would be virtually empty, but perhaps some person or object would give him a clue or an idea.

As he entered the community building, he saw a mendillion father, daughter and son playing stack-on, a common mendillion childhood game where the children take turns climbing on top of their parents or their siblings. Because of the sturdy bone housing of mendillions, holding a lot of weight on one's body and falling down causes little harm. Watching the family play the game reminded Faka of Byr when he played with him long ago. Of course, when his son was that age, he was already older than most fathers, being a father to four generations of children. He couldn't play such physical games with Byr when he was a child.

Moving into the center of the civic center, Faka looked to the stone seats filled with people last night during his storytelling and stage from which he gave his speech. There was nothing there but grass and rock, natural materials for the mundane world in which he lived. He had never seen the civic center so deserted, but he knew that the seats would be full for the next event. Always the performer and never the spectator, it had been years since Faka

sat in one of these rock chairs. The last show he watched was the Klunky Trio, a dance group whose spirited slaps, spins, and struts were intended for youthful audiences. Byr was with Faka when he saw the musicians; they were his son's favorite band.

Trying to shift his mind from something other than his son no doubt aboard a transport cart now, Faka left the civic center, taking the main road that he dodged yesterday night. Unexpectedly, the street was relatively calm. There were no mendillion children, parents, city officials, or cultural enthusiasts to hound him during his important walk.

Only a few digrock birds—the creatures called digrock birds for their diamond-like skin and ability to dig into the ground—vying for a few earthworms, making noise plundering for their food and a mixture of fire rain filled the street. The combination of the two typically annoying elements of city life made for an interesting pair to the storyteller in Faka. The fire rain's crackling overtook the obnoxious sound of the rock bird's burrowing into the ground, allowing the old mendillion to forgive the fire rain for leaving burn marks on his rough skin and jacket. He usually worked odd pairs like this into his stories, but his mind was no longer thriving for recording history, he had become history from the moment Anthelion entered his domicile.

Faka attempted to banish his son from his ideas and thoughts but to no avail. If he couldn't remove the images and memories constantly triggering in his mind with thoughts alone, he would take actions as well. He would set out to find his misguided son corrupted by his dangerous occupation controlled by the worst meddler he knew. Only after liberating his son from his future mistakes would Faka be able to fully concentrate on the pursuit of the dark power Anthelion described to him. With a stride faster than twice the speed of Moorn's quickest sprinter, Faka headed towards the closest transport station. He would find Byr soon.

After a day of transport cart riding, Faka found himself on the outskirts of his son's last known location, Far East City. Protected by large iron gates to keep away unwanted animal intruders, this industry town was a one-trick pony with its only purpose for creating profit. Entering the economic mecca would be easy since residents would think he's an incoming miner—being both stronger and faster than most due to Anthelion's powers—as a valuable, recently acquired tribe member. Faka's newfound appearance and physical skills would be quite appealing in his current community, a place honoring a strong work ethic, speed and strength.

Inside Far East City, Faka was amazed at all the new-age gadgets scattered around this city full of machinery united with economic trade. Mishla and Byr involved themselves in Far East City's largest trade, tree mining, but stone masonry, fancy furniture production, even pet products were produced here. When Faka was younger, he purchased a cage and a leash for his pet digrock bird, Renny, one of many life forms that he outlived. The idea of commerce was foreign to Faka back then, like it is to most mendillions. Most mendillions never appreciate a joy for personal wealth, ego, or time. Most things are communal, it is only with the advent of newer towns like Far East City that new cultural values based on the individual had developed.

Faka started his search in the center of town, the most populated area, since he did not know where the tree farming site was located. Mendillions of all types were moving up and down, left and right, slow and fast, walking and climbing over a series of walkways, vines, transport carts and bridges. Mendillions truly were masters of their environment, but now, with all of these devices designed to improve travel, they as a society could place the best mendillions in the most important jobs within short periods of time.

Faka attempted to stall or stop people to ask for directions, but no one would answer. The attitude within this transportation hub was one of independence mixed with speed. Faka wasn't treated any worse than the other newbies to this city, but no one seemed to care about anything but their current objective, time taken to get there included. Tired of being ignored and bumped into by every fourth or so passerby, Faka managed to push his way into the center of the hub. He saw there a map of Far East City. It suggested that the tree mining operation took place in two parts of town, the north and the south.

According to the informative map, the southern tree mining station employed over a hundred workers making it the largest, most attractive area for Faka to look first. Once he arrived, he had noticed that the horizontal movement of the station had turned primarily to vertical, making his ability to scan the area so much more difficult. This task would take longer than he initially expected, having to search through two campuses, moving up and down larger than life trees, and avoiding being ousted by any mendillion deeming him as trouble.

The strangely small in diameter, but eerily dense yutta trees dominating Faka's view intimidated most mendillions with their sight alone, not to mention the ticks or the tops of the trees that cannot be seen from the ground level. Also among the yutta trees stood fur, apple, and grape trees, all of which had their unique features, but nothing as daunting as the great yuttas. Fur trees, seemingly made for all living creature's benefit, puffed out twice every year with leaves resembling fur, a simple and lucrative product to be sold. With the apple trees filling themselves only once each season, they were easy to maintain and sometimes serving as the main foodstuff for Far East City's workers. The grape trees were a bit harder to upkeep since nature seemed to play a trick on its inhabitants. The grapes fell at

random times throughout the growing season, becoming inedible after a few hours of sitting on the ground until the advent of spinning catchers, an ever-rotating plate that would preserve the supple fruit's goodness until being consumed.

Artistically and strategically satisfied with the tree mining station's broad view, Faka began to move to the largest yutta tree's climbing area. Equipped with a mendillion-made climbing strip with hand placements, ascending into the tree was no problem for young, healthy mendillion tree miners. With finally a bit of good luck, it seems that Faka chose a good time to investigate the southern tree facility as he noticed fewer tree miners than he expected. He could hear machinery and yelling from afar in all directions, but he wouldn't worry about anything loud enough to make a ferocious sound until they were closer to him.

Faka climbed over ten stories of the bunched yutta trees before seeing another platform intended for travel, a wooden bridge made of yutta branches across the a large living yutta branch. Being in a playful mood and not necessarily staying on task, Faka stepped onto the horizontal bridge. As he carefully walked along it—since all mendillions knew the risk of poorly protected and built yutta tree structures—he noticed nothing familiar, nothing pointing in the direction of Byr. After looking down to the ground, and remembering his trials of the Hurricane Mountains, Faka connected back up to the main climbing strip.

Only two stories higher from the area Faka walked on the platform, he encountered three more platforms, three new areas to explore. There practically was no visually discernible difference between all three paths, so Faka arbitrarily picked one. Nothing of interest except thousands of blubberfrog nests in the neighboring yutta tree could be seen. The blubberfrogs chirped, screeched, and even hummed from their oversized mouths as Faka ventured by. Despite only weighing less an ounce each, blubberfrogs numbers and fantastic

pouches allowed for the most interesting sounds a mendillion could ever hear.

Taking about fifteen minutes each to safely reach the end of the other two platforms, Faka discovered nothing important and was equally unimpressed of the displays of nature. Returning to the platform, Faka heard a noise below him, on the ground. Both curious for himself and in his goal to find his son, Faka began walking down. Louder and louder the noise became when he lowered himself rung by rung. The sound soon became clear, a woman shouting. Somewhat reluctant to find out who was down there, and a little more reluctant to give away his presence and location, Faka kept his eyes below him, still continuing down the climbing strip.

Now only three stories above all of the action, Faka could make out two rows of miners assembling a fortification around the set of yutta trees in which he was standing. All carrying pick axes, hammers, and mud pits with mud slingers, they were mud manipulators, waiting for their orders. The men moved efficiently, without social interactions except when the woman gave them a command. Faka, tilted his head through some branches to get a better look at their leader.

Before Faka could see the female captain's face, she already was locked onto his eyes with those piercing black eyes that he always remembered her having. Faka remained calm, hoping that Mishla, the woman he scorned over a period of three human lifetimes, could not make out his appearance albeit changed by Anthelion. Despite his new appearance and being at least a hundred feet above her in the air, Faka respected Mishla's uncanny abilities. He however barely identified out her face with the enhanced senses granted to him by Anthelion.

Mishla released her scope on Faka's direction and continued instructing the miners building the fence. Faka was safe from her irritable, insatiable wrath constructed from a love

of her own ego for the moment, but he would have to climb down eventually. Faka's hatred of Mishla through repeated interactions bounced through his head. These dreams of the past were too numerous and vague for him to remember, but they pained him nonetheless. She made him think of worse times, the mental clearing he enjoyed from his son and Anthelion, and then to the monster Anthelion enlisted him to find.

Centering his entire essence on Mishla, Faka lost all of his senses except for the ones focusing on her. She was the one who had tortured him so heavily throughout his life and had now taken his son to mold into her own image, to ravage beyond a point that his own father would recognize him. There was no recourse for those like him and Mishla at this stage in their lives, Faka thought. They had lived a hundred or so more years than most other mendillions with a lifetime to build their legacies, personalities, and souls. Deep within Faka's mind, he knew Mishla was the evil one Anthelion spoke of.

Faka awakened from a temporary lapse of consciousness. He remained next to the yutta tree, two stories above Mishla and her underlings, but he had drifted away from the climbing strip. Floating in the air, every shadow he noticed resembled Anthelion. He heard a voice in his head.

“I sensed your active mind. I'm giving you the opportunity to move in closer.”

Not only did Faka float and drift through the air as he pleased, but his body was transparent, invisible, and numb to all environmental stimuli as well. With his newfound powers, Faka descended down to Mishla. Like a voyeur child stalking an unsuspecting playmate, Faka studied Mishla very seriously, despite his biases against her. After completing managing the miners, Faka followed her on a transport to the other tree mining facility.

Being only a few inches away from Mishla on the transport, Faka could see into her mind, another mysterious affect from Anthelion. Delving through her thoughts, Faka looked for the evidence that would pinpoint her as the villain, the pawn of a sinister figure. The one that Anthelion described and hoped Faka would find. There was only one problem. As the two neared the other tree mining facility, Faka only took issue with the memories he remembered from the past where Mishla had mistreated him. There was no ghastly influence on her, she was acting on her own volition.

All the times that Mishla treated him badly, she was actually hiding a fact from everyone, including Faka. She relished the way he lived: when he was younger, the way his bulky shoulders and stringy hair shook; the sound and words that emanated from his mouth; and best of all, the way he got back up after each defeat he suffered from all the extraordinary challenges he picked. She loved him her entire life, but was unable to say anything due to their constant conflicts.

About six miles away and an hour away from the northern tree mining site, Anthelion's effects on Faka wore off, revealing him to Mishla. Surprised and afraid at first, but soon able to listen to Faka, Mishla learned about Anthelion and what Faka was sent to do. Faka then told Mishla about his mutual feelings towards her as the transport began to stop. The doors unlatched and the former foes turned allies began to exit the transport cart.

“Faka, I just have to give a few orders to some people here. Your son should off work shortly. Wait here for he and I.”

Mishla turned around and began walking towards the tree mining site's entrance. Faka watched her as she disappeared into the dark horizon, a few paces away from the iron gates. Before being able to enter, she was intercepted by a group of disgruntled tree miners.

Faka ran to save her. He heard the miners shouting and saw them waving sticks above their heads. Closing his eyes to increase his velocity and reach Mishla sooner, Faka focused purely on the sounds of the skirmish. A loud booming noise erupted, causing Faka to open his eyes.

Feeling the pain of loss over any other emotion, Faka looked down at his long time acquaintance, a woman of many different shades to him, but always a spirited, capable fighter. Faka wept three giant mendillion tears, the size of his baseball-sized eyes, onto the bloody ground. His consciousness faded above and below him as he looked up to see the group of raucous mendillions. He felt sticks crushing into his ribs, legs and forearm as the images of Anthelion appeared as reflections in his glob-shaped tears. He fell down on his back, with partial vision intact. In Faka's last glimpse of the world, his fourth generation son wielded a yutta tree far up above his head.

Common Eternities

A man in a suit sips his third cup of black coffee this hour. The southern waitress working in this New York City rathole asks him if he's ready for his check. He just sends her off, without words, with just a simple gesture of his right hand. The midnight sky shows no promise of light as the moon appears to be missing from its view. The man sips his coffee again, one teaspoon of the dark liquid, exactly forty-four seconds from the last time his mouth touched the mug.

No one enters or exits the establishment. The cook and the waitress make out in the kitchen while a night janitor cleans the mens' bathroom floors, listening to rock music on his audio-playing device. After forty-four seconds from the his last coffee ingestion, the man in a suit drinks a teaspoon of his black coffee once more. The man in a suit's upper right cheek begins to twitch as he thinks to himself *late again*. Other than the twitch, the man in a suit's body remains perfectly still.

A young, jovial couple fresh out of a movie peep inside the diner's window, fixating their sites on the man in a suit's sunglasses. They pause. She asks him if he wants pie and he shakes his head. The man wearing a suit takes another swig of coffee. The woman asks the man if he wants a piece of pie if she'll buy it. The boy smiles. They pause as they enjoy each others' presence, satisfied in the perfect moment while staring into each others' eyes. The boy kisses the girl on the cheek, she sends a playful screech into the blank air. They run away into the night while the man in the suit remains perfectly still.

An hour passes in the diner. It is two thirty-two in the morning now. The suit-wearing man enjoys his coffee another time, one teaspoon's worth, forty-four seconds after

the last time he committed the same action. He sighs quietly, but other than that, the man in a suit's body remains perfectly still. The southern waitress glares at the man in a suit as she refills the man's glass for the twenty third time.

The diner door swings open releasing a splash of whistles and ringing, a sound resonating throughout the near empty room. Another man in a suit enters Piggy Wiggy's Diner wearing a smile evident by each crease in his youthful face. The original man in a suit stands up, places his sunglasses on his head, and sits down.

The new patron wearing a suit plops himself on a stool, the closest seat from the door, and waits for a greeting. The waitress asks him what he wants with her southern accent, her voice being more monotone now than before.

“Yes Ma'am. I will take a coffee at my friend's table there,” the new patron points at the original man in a suit, “and make sure to bring lots of cream.”

The new patron sprawls down across from the sunglasses-wearing man. The sunglasses-wearing man pulls out a black briefcase from under the table.

“I have your item right here, Mr. Star.”

The new patron cocked his head and ran his hand through his hair.

“No, no, no. This won't do, call me Scott.”

The sunglasses-wearing man grimaced.

“That name is a bit casual, don't you think?”

Scott shot the sunglasses-wearing man with a golden smile.

“No I don't, and I think your name should be Scarlet Sue.”

The sunglasses-wearing man grimaced with a cracked mouth with no teeth visible.

“My name is Mr. Black. The terms in which we agreed to conduct this negotiation

stated my name as Mr. Black and your name as Mr. Star, but I will yield my power over that section of the decree and now refer to you as Scott.”

Scott winked in Mr. Black's direction. Mr. Black's facial expression remained unchanged.

“Scott, have you brought your item? I didn't see a briefcase with you when you entered.”

Scott stood up halfway in the booth and began to search the numerous pockets all over his body, flipping the pockets inside out. Of the three openings in his suit, nothing was found, but Scott eventually flipped a wrapped lollipop from his top pocket onto the table.

“Not in the suit I guess.”

Mr. Black blinked hectically as Scott jumped out of the booth to search his pants' pockets. Squirming to get access to entire wardrobe including the hidden spaces within the suit's interior, Scott splashed a dime, crumpled piece of paper, and six-sided die on diner's grimy floor.

“Here it is,” Scott proclaimed as he set the contents of his pants on the diner's table.

Mr. Black stood up with crossed arms and blurted out his words directly in Scott's direction.

“I will not tolerate this inefficient bumbling around while we discuss the settlement between our two sides. We have tried conflict for years, sometimes even peace, but even in our infancy we offered more mutual respect towards each other. If you want to rescind your offer of ceasing all forms of aggression, no conniptions will be uttered by me.”

Scott stood up on the table, mirroring Mr. Black's stance. Scott released a booming voice as the waitress re-entered the lobby with a menu for the new patron.

“Do I have to remind you that I was the one that arranged this session? If I wanted a lecture from a fool, someone hellbent on their own power, I would go see Byr.”

Mr. Black sat down as the waitress ran back into the kitchen. She was frightened by Scott's unusually loud voice.

“Very well, Scott. You are correct.”

Mr. Black wouldn't usually be calm in this sort of this situation, but Scott was correct. This trade was important. For so many years he had desired light molecules in their solid form. Unlike water or carbon atoms, light particles were so much more rare and difficult to mold. Scott had controlled them all these years, throughout the course of both of their existences.

Scott also sat back down.

“Okay, no need to act uncivil.”

Scott also had a huge stake to be gained from this transaction. It was clear to him that Mr. Black had been seeking his longtime advantage that he held over him all these years.

“Mr. Black, what do you plan on doing with the light once you obtain it?”

Mr. Black knew his opponent well, and he also knew that he was not easily manipulated or tricked. His reasoning needed to be realistic and mutually beneficial, but in line with his aberrant character as well.

“I'm considering building a new race of creatures on the moss planet. It's been a long time since one of us a created a new species. They could grow moss for me, and yes, maybe antimatter eventually too.”

Mr. Black snickered in the back of his mind. He knew his cover story was believable. Scott would detest the fact that Mr. Black would breed and spread antimatter around the

universe again, but under previous agreements, he would be powerless to stop him.

“Mr. Black, you know how I despise antimatter, but what you do with this power is up to you.”

Scott pondered his last statement. He was going to easy on his longtime rival.

“Actually, Mr. Black, I cannot in good consciousness provide you with the means to further damage existence--”

Mr. Black's actions cut off Scott's words. Smoke began to flow out of Mr. Black's business suit as his eyes turned solid black as if no eyes, eye sockets, or even the space in that vicinity existed. In that diner lied an endless, deep hole for anyone upon looking in the direction of Mr. Black's face.

Scott silenced himself and moved whisper distance away from his conversational partner.

“Not here. Not here. It is too soon. We can't be outed by the humans. It would ruin both of our plans.”

Mr. Black calmed his senses while reverting back to a more familiar state. Luckily for the two of them, no one saw Mr. Black's true form. The two of them sat back down at the diner booth. Mr. Black opened his suitcase to remove three files.

“Scott, as you can see from our past litigation, we've moved past beneficial and detrimental, good and evil...” Mr. Black put a faded, yellow file in front of Scott and pointed to a sentence marked “Section 4b. Part C: Moral Judgment.” “You can't tell me what I can and can't do. We've already scripted those rules, and here too.” Mr. Black set another file in view of Scott. “It states that 'under no circumstance will one master be in control of another master.' So you see, you can't tell me what to do.”

Scott stood silent as his lifelong adversary laid out his predictable argument.

“Yes, Mr. Black. You are correct, but I don't want more incidents like we've been having in outer space for the last thousand years.”

Holding back his pure enjoyment of the thoughts alone, Mr. Black did not dodge the statement.

“What do you have against black holes? They are far from most lifeforms. Your precious earth dwellers at least.”

Scott perpetuated the argument further, continuing to distract Mr. Black from his true intentions.

“I'm not talking about black holes, I'm talking about the eclipses. You know how much the sun means to me and the cosmos. You empty the life of everything you influence, just to satisfy your vapid impulses. It is with this tepidness that you exhausted such lives as Rhan and Faka.”

Mr. Black let out a wide smile corresponding to the look Scott provided when he entered the diner, but his sunglasses covering his eyes made him look artificial.

“Look, Scott. We can stay here all day reminiscing about the past or we can look to the future. We were going to work together, remember? Perhaps if we build a planet together, one with resources tapping both our powers, we will come up with something new. A new legacy of changes for the universe and for us.”

Mr. Black only looked towards the future. A future he would mold without the influence of an equal or his insipid, fragile creatures trying to discover their place in the universe. He had long waited to seize the day and the night from his eternal enemy. He would finally make his final move towards his black destiny, finally covering the universe in

antimatter once again.

Scott pondered the creations he'd made in the past and how they had changed him. Purely a creature living in his own mind in his mental creation, Scott had matured into an ascended being composed of physical properties capable of free will, emotions, and awareness of others. It would be a welcomed vacation from the bindings of Mr. Black if he would actually stay true to his willingness to work together in a world's creation.

“Do you recall, Mr. Black, in the beginning where we didn't even realize what the universe was, life or existence either? We were as blind as the ones that we create except we had unlocked abilities that slowly came about. It was only by watching our creations with their limited powers that we could truly express and care for ours.”

Scott knew Mr. Black did not share the same sentiment as him regarding other lifeforms. It was unclear to Scott if Mr. Black even cared for himself. The strides Mr. Black has made since the beginning of known time mirrored his own except for one major distinction. Mr. Black only cared for evolutions involving harnessing more power or causing setbacks to others. Scott however had cherished all transformations he'd experienced that made him a more balanced being.

Mr. Black interjected, “I remember the creations, most of which being yours, Mr. Star. Those frail elements unleashed upon the harsh universe, unable to survive. And you took your turns in the abyss with them. Constantly falling from consciousness, failing to overcome the weaknesses of mortality.”

Mr. Black had exposed himself, he needed to take a step back; He didn't want to reveal his ulterior motives, but more importantly, he did not want to be infected with the affliction of feelings. He calculated this event as he did each one before this. All the

dominoes were set in place now for the final expected result.

Scott catered to Mr. Black's arrogance, limited view of himself and existence, feigning ignorance. If the events of the next few hours were carried out correctly, he conceivably could rid existence of this otherwise unbeatable scourge.

“Now I never understood how you managed to survive all ages of existence without dying once. How is that possible. Surely even your mind must stop at some point.”

Pausing for dramatic effect before answering, Mr. Black casually retorted.

“You have the ability to create and control light and energy while I have the power to control darkness and antimatter. What power do you think is actually better?”

Scott focused on the word “better” and his dislike for comparing items for the sake of judgment, but he allowed Mr. Black to continue with his speech.

“It's only fitting that the better superpower gets to live forever, don't you think? It would be strange if you, the one that always perishes, could suddenly live indefinitely, immune to all of time's elements. Speaking of time, my creation, don't you think it's about time we conclude this meeting?”

Simply considering the thought of meeting with Mr. Black disgusted the usually peaceful Scott. And in this meeting, he had to play along with the vile creature just to ensure the trade would be successful. But now, after insulting his position in the universe's hierarchy and taking the credit for time, Scott, or as he was most often called, Anthelion, could stand it no longer.

“You created time... Mr. Black? You, the emptiness in every creature's heart, you the destroyer of everything positive or living? You always dying, only the lifeless Darkness would say that.”

Mr. Black took a moment of glee watching his nemesis crumble with emotion. So much so that he didn't feel the need to retaliate in any way.

“Time is the motivator of all life to evolve, think, and prosper. How can you just decide that you created time?” Scott said.

Mr. Black countered, “All things eventually succumb to time, one of the agents at my disposal such as antimatter or darkness. Time deteriorates otherwise indestructible or incorruptible objects like water or stone. Time works in secret without being seen as are all things claiming me as their starting point. But most importantly, time affects the most elusive creature to ever exist, you. With all of your perfection, creativity, durability, and constant energy, time still tracks you down as its prize.”

Feeling layers upon layers of rage pile onto his human face, Scott concentrated hard to simply use words in case any spectators were present. In his human form, it sometimes was difficult to act proper, like the god or elevated role he usually played.

“I created time when I ripped through your inner layers of antimatter. I defeated your antimatter clusters and splattered your backbone to success. There is no other possible interpretation, explanation, or event that could point to the creation of time.”

Scott's anger had simmered to point of self-recognition. At this point, the waitress, cook, two diner patrons, and a mailman watched a gathering sea of emotions revolving around the two mysterious guests. Upon noticing their audience, Mr. Black and Scott feigned a sense of completion and compassion towards each other with various exchanges of smiles, handshakes, and nervous laughter.

Still under a handful of eyes, but no longer the center of attention as the restaurant resumed normal business, both men placed their right hands on the table's center. They both

eyed each other as they produced their specialty product. No sounds did they make, nor facial expressions, or even a thought between the duo. After a few unsettling minutes, they both traded hand contents and left the establishment.

Mr. Black left the diner first happy with the success of obtaining his prize for next to nothing, knowing that antimatter was no longer functioning anymore due to the amount of light, energy, mass and transient, physical creatures now roaming the galaxy. He would now study his opponent's niche in existence and soon make the enemy's tools obsolete. Having argued with Scott further proved to Mr. Black that his earlier hypothesis that Scott must be eliminated for the sake of all existence was substantiated in the last five hours. An all-powerful, all-knowing entity would never willingly hand over his one power in the world, casually conduct himself as a common creature, and would never allow his greatest obstacle, himself, to coexist in the same universe.

Scott sat in the diner filling himself up with two orders of pancakes, two sausage links, an order of macaroni and cheese, a dinner biscuit, three glasses of water, half of an apple pie, half of a blueberry pie, two soda pops, one side order of Swiss cheese, and a root beer float. Scott did not gorge himself, but instead took solace in the last meal in this body. For the first time in this life, and the first time in this makeup of existence, he acted as Mr. Black, deliberately and without doubt. He covered both his bill and the neglected balance left by his longtime partner giving the waitress a tip equal to double of the total amount owed.

In his apartment in a low-income neighborhood, Scott removed the antimatter encased in glass from his pocket to study it. Like a boy inspecting a model airplane, Scott played around with the invaluable, delicate object. He shook the casing, rolled it around on his bed,

analyzed it from all sides, and then set it down on the floor near his broken TV. Scott laid on his bed staring at ceiling dreading his next action.

Exactly twenty-two minutes after his incursion with the other celestial being, Mr. Black turned on the lights, computers, lasers, and self-automated robots in his science lab underneath his Manhattan condo. Before sitting down, Mr. Black meticulously placed the raw, solid light molecules from the specialized plastic bag in his pocket into the biochemically-protected safe. Satisfied with the order maintained in his laboratory, Mr. Black took four seconds in front of mirror to center his belt in front of a mirror.

Walking next to the safe that he just locked, Mr. Black opened another safe. He pulled out a paper containing the formula to create antimatter and a partially-completed formula to create light molecules. Studying his prior work, Mr. Black considered the universe and existence without Anthelion. He would be free to eliminate all signs of complicated, physical existence, starting with all living creatures. Without any life, light, or time in existence, he could revert himself back to his old form when he could relax without the infinite, non-ending interruptions caused each second by every nuance of a vibrant galaxy. He wanted to be rid of progress, he wanted to keep the universe at a constant standstill as it was so long ago.

Scott, still laying on his bed, wondered if the Darkness would ever give into his own feelings. The Darkness, always the purveyor of absolutes and certainty perhaps could never adapt since changing requires the acceptance of new ideas. Whether living as Scott the human, a mendillion, a carnivorous plant in the time of the dinosaurs, a light as outer space developed, or a simple sphere of light, Anthelion's mind constantly changed throughout his interactions with the Darkness or the lifeforms he created. Scott hoped for prolonged

positivity, happiness, laughter, and bravery in the universe, but it couldn't even last that long in a mendillion lifetime. He would try again, hopefully attaining a different outcome next time.

Mr. Black knew everything to know about antimatter regarding its physical and metaphysical properties; its unique ability to be living, energized, or inert; the way it appears with senses including infrared vision and supersonic hearing; how it causes him to be conscious, regenerates his mental form, and in great doses, provides him with supernatural powers. Anthelion, on the other hand, knew very little of the substance since his rebirth cycle always caused his memory to be wiped and antimatter, as it had been for a very long time, had been virtually wiped off the universal map. The only advantage Anthelion championed involved his instincts, providing a secret known only to him.

Mr. Black sipped his black coffee retrieved by his automated helper in between analyzing microscopic pieces of solid light molecules. Befuddled with the process of creating, using, transforming and destroying solid light molecules, Mr. Black calmly took more drinks of his coffee as hours and days passed by. If Mr. Black had an ounce of patience or any feelings or emotions like all other life on the planet, he would have been mad to continue on with this pursuit. But Mr. Black would never stop, and no universal force, not even time, would end this endeavor.

Mixing water, dish soap, popcorn, and bleach into a giant bowl to create a brew drawing from vague sources in his mind, Scott's instincts now controlled him. Filled with memories of a similar time, place and activity, Scott was able to surmise being in this position before where he had obtained antimatter, used it as an ingredient in a mixture, and created an effect far beyond his or Mr. Black's normal abilities. Beyond the reach of his

imagination minutes ago, but common knowledge now, he realized that he was finishing the temporary end of a never-ending repeating occurrence. This would be the fourteenth time that Scott had brewed the primordial ooze of the universe. The fourteenth time the universe would become new again. If he was lucky, this potion would exclude the accompaniment of the Darkness.

The particles of solid light when viewed in a microscope, tested in a heating room, or fired upon by a laser supplied no new answers or even mysteries to Mr. Black. Keeping his mind on his work, but retreating to his bedroom, Mr. Black took a hiatus after a seven day session. He rested his head on his pillow staring up at a ceiling. Shadows and flickering of lights passed by his sight as the two large ceiling fans above him spun through the air. The industrial fans, metallic and with diameters of twenty feet each, were enormous, shaking the room as each second went by. Mr. Black admired the fans' dangerously powerful and fast movements, but moreso, he enjoyed the precision that was necessary when he installed them in his room.

Hearing an abnormal hiccup in one of the fans, Mr. Black floated up in the air of his large studio mansion and began inspecting the moving fan blades. Under the windy conditions of the fan's airspace, Mr. Black flinched and pushed against gravity more than usual to stay in the air. Uncaring of his safety, Mr. Black morphed his hand into a pick, poked his hand between the moving fan blades, and flicked a dead fly away from the fan's center in less than a second. The fan's effectiveness was returned to normal, allowing him to consider his work once again. Realizing that his body, not his tools, was the best device to study or manipulate the solid light material, he returned to his lab. Within minutes of testing antimatter particles with the light, Mr. Black was able to change a portion of the solid light

particles into the more common light property that quickly faded away.

Adding the rarer of the materials, the antimatter and solid light molecules, into his new universe, the knowledge of knowing that the Darkness had always been on the other side frustrated Scott. Despite being victorious over his opponent once again, his reward would land him in the same situation just to feel the same sorrow, pain, and disappointment again. Drawing from his instinctual cues, Scott gathered that once he enacted the process of creating the universe, his only advantage would be to insert in each version of that universe's Anthelion the necessary memories to reconstruct this situation once more. Why would the Darkness always follow, would he always have to carry that living, untouchable ball and chain with him forever?

Now able to change solid light particles into the common light particles, Mr. Black realized that there was still more to this job's completion. Creating a circumference with various high-powered lasers, industrial lighting equipment, telescopes and radio equipment, Mr. Black focused massive amounts of energy and light in the center of his lab. The conceptualization of this scientific masterpiece alone took over three hours of the well-learned man's time split between his laptop, desktop, calculator, a seismograph, and a light and sound detector. As their master worked, the robots assembled the vast array of mechanical devices within a five minute time period.

The only element missing in the middle of the man-made mayhem was Mr. Black himself. He entered the generated tube consisting of lights, lasers, and sound without incident. Without warning, he suddenly had the urge to gyrate, causing all the transparent molecules in his wake to be solid. The body of Mr. Black disintegrated due to the expanding of physical mass in the finite space occupied by both he and the elements. Reappearing

within a few seconds as a new Mr. Black, suit and all, the super creature turned scientist placed the hardened laser, light, and sound elements into a beaker. He had beaten his opponent twice: through mastering the natural world created by his foe and by discovering the secret of his gift.

A mini hurricane, swishing around the brew of materials, had developed in Scott's room. All elements were present for the universe to unravel itself and put itself back together in his image. Despite the racket of empty soda cans and thousands of rubber bands colliding against themselves and the apartment walls, Scott could still overhear his neighbors. Old Aunt Carrie fed her cats while young Betty and Marie held hands watching the sunset. Across the street in an abandoned house, a massing of disgruntled auto workers discussed strike plans as another group, young gang members, tagged the same building. Scott hesitated entering the primordial pool as he listened in on others' lives.

Taking two seconds to celebrate his accomplishment over Anthelion, Mr. Black had an omnipotent recollection capturing the time period before he met Scott in the diner to the present, a mental characteristic common to his Darkness form. Delving into the mind of Scott, Mr. Black conjured a mind fragment from his enemy's human element determining why Anthelion desired seemingly useless antimatter. Systemically calculating the passage of time with Scott's capabilities using the same elements controlled by Mr. Black, but without his scientific know-how and equipment, Mr. Black foresaw that it would be only seconds before Scott unexpectedly would pull the universe into itself to start anew.

Mr. Black disemboweled himself creating a blinding, deafening, and intoxicating display of light, physical chaos, spreading darkness caused by antimatter, and smells too complex for humans to articulate. With his true form the Darkness constructed a beacon of

common light particles infused with antimatter, solid light molecules, human tissue, and laser beams. The Darkness needed now only to cross into the highly unstable light to pass himself onto a new universe. A realm in which he would gain an advantage instead of Anthelion; the inability to lose consciousness, to remain as he is now.

The spiraling of the elements captured set forth to both destroy and manufacture universes wept wildly in both suitor's rooms. Anthelion's faith and tradition equally rivaled the Darkness' knowledge and purpose. Despite being carved from different backgrounds and using dissimilar methods, no one entity present possessed damning powers over the other. Anthelion's enhancements granted by all living, growing, or moving embodiments perfectly matched the undying resolve of the Darkness. Within an incalculable, unpredictable, unforeseeable, undetectable, time period would this contest be decided.

Far away from Anthelion's and the Darkness' ruckus, a young girl throws her favorite teacup composed of fine china above her head, not realizing that time and gravity will cause it to shatter as it lands. Her dad across the table rushes to catch his daughter's prize possession until he's stopped by a mystifying, unexplainable disturbance. The teacup spirals above the incapable father and the uncaring daughter, pushing air molecules downward as the toy's ascension changes to dissension. The one capable creature enters a new phase in its life as the universe for the child, the father, and whomever else implodes for the first time...again. For a moment caught between light and thought, unbeknownst to both father and daughter, the teacup reassembles itself giving credence to the concept of hope. The teacup and gravity do not exist. The daughter and father do not exist. Anthelion and the Darkness do not exist. Antimatter exists.

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