

I. THE OMNIVERSE

"Everything is connected... Light both repels and nestles within the Infinite Dark."

— *Tome of the Old Cosmos*

The Omniverse. This is all reality: the substantial and insubstantial, planes of existence both great and small; what is seen and unseen. It is all connected universes, multiverses, dimensions, worlds and realms. All of the Omniverse is linked and also separated... by the veil known as the Infinite Dark.

To understand the Omniverse and the Infinite Dark is to understand that some things are beyond comprehension of the mortal mind. Why did the Omniverse come into being? What is ever-expanding space? How does one understand a force outside of time? Like shining baubles in a black ocean, each universe floats as a beacon within an unseen darkness that claws hungrily at reality. Both the number of universes and the veil between them expands eternally, growing at an incalculable rate.

Most universes have life, no matter the form it takes. Whether lowly bacteria or a shining demi-god, a living creature or a spirit of the dead, what is common to all these realities is the physical and metaphysical life that dwells within each of them. For time immeasurable every realm and the life within them co-existed, unaware of their universal neighbours.

It is the Infinite Dark that separates and conceals countless realities from each other; an endless zone where malevolent lifeforms dwell in unending hunger. This spatial ocean is both a wall and a prison; a veil of darkness that keeps universes separate but is also a realm in itself... an integral part of the Omniverse that it holds together.

Over the aeons, there have been civilisations within many a universe that have discovered the Infinite Dark and the realms beyond their own. Sometimes rifts to other universes would spontaneously appear; a rip in reality that could be crossed by any daring enough to try. Often these rifts would disappear as randomly as they appeared, creating confusion and intrigue by those who had witnessed it.

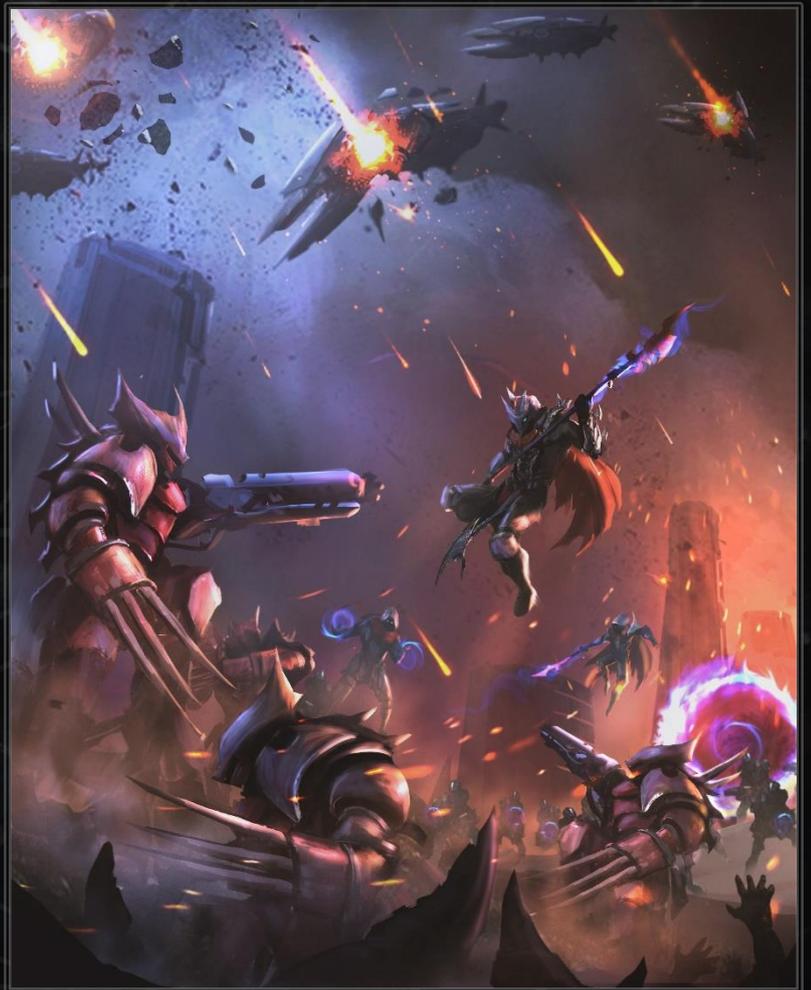
In some cases, after a civilisation discovered a rip in reality, they would soon commence research on how to recreate it. The truth that a civilisation was not alone on a dimensional level often brought curiosity, excitement or fear. Curiosity for the unknown. Excitement for potential possibilities... and also fear of what lurked beyond the void.

Eventually, after careful research or by natural occurrence, a universe would cross into another and worlds would meet.

Though often innocent at first, misunderstandings or the greed of nations inevitably took place. One mistake or a covetous race of lifeforms is all that is needed to create conflicts that lead to the deaths of thousands. In addition to rifts that occur naturally, technologically advanced and magically gifted races would construct gates into other worlds to explore and learn, or to wage war and conquer.

The arrival of rifts, portals and gateways brought greater ambition and bloodlust for the denizens of the Omniverse, and with it a bellowing war cry echoed across reality. The Old Cosmos was no more; instead a new era of insanity and violence had dawned, which was to be known as 'The First WARSURGE'.

As the discovery of interconnecting realms spread further and further, countless universes entered a new era filled with destruction. Though warfare was nothing new to many cultures, it rose to new heights after the Omniverse became largely traversable. Many realities that did not know bloodshed were met with the sword. Warlords had countless new realms to seize. Civilisations clashed while entire worlds were destroyed or disfigured beyond recognition. The relatively peaceful isolation of the Omniverse was gone, replaced with constant fighting and vigilance for emerging rifts.



There also exist rifts that act as gateways to the very same place but at a different time, or to a parallel, virtually identical reality. In one incident a lone scientist created a machine that allowed for single, one man 'space-time jumps'. Using this technology, he eliminated a key figure in history, a tyrant who would influence the world in his pursuit of war. Upon returning, he found history had not changed. Instead he discovered he had created an alternative timeline where this tyrant did not exist. Seeing the potential, and perhaps uselessness of the machine, he returned to the 'new world' he had created, to observe and research what he had really done.

The very nature of a rift or portal itself is difficult to grasp. Essentially, they are rips in the space-time continuum and extraordinarily challenging to research. Most civilisations don't bother to discover 'what' they are, but rather 'how' they occur, and what common factors contribute to their synthesis. What has been determined of their nature, however, is that they can be powered by a number of sources; they are very versatile in this aspect.

Artificially constructed portals tend to be the most stable. Most cultures use electricity in some form, while others have developed alternative energy systems, whether from nature or unnatural sources. In some barbaric cultures, witch doctors and heedless sorcerers have created rifts and portals through blood sacrifice or arcane means. Apparently, the collective death, anguish or even 'souls' themselves can create a rip in reality. Necromancers for one have been known to harvest the souls of the dead to power archaic gateways, while some cultures have merged several of these practices.

When a rift or portal appears, they remain open for an unpredictable period of time. Some even seem to be perpetually self-sustaining. When under controlled environments such as with constructed gateways, a portal can be held open for an indefinite period of time. However, a lapse in power to an artificial gateway or a sorcerer's portal can cause a premature closing. Sometimes the last desperate act of a besieged world is to commit an all-out attack to close a rift.

No matter how or why portals function, there is more mystery to the nature of interdimensional travel. One such mystery is how those who make the journey through portals can experience unforeseen side effects.

Some of the most notable side effects have been observed from armies invading new worlds. In one case, a world of savages had been attacked by a great legion of cyborgs, teeming with weapons and advanced technology. Yet, by some miracle, the savages with cunning, toughness and strength, repelled the invaders. It didn't make sense to the cyborgs; their commanders debated for years afterward as to what went wrong. One explanation was that travelling through the portal weakened their invasion force physically to the point of being easy prey. Another suggested theory, backed by their researchers, was that the realm of the savages consisted of different elements and core components that were 'denser', making them more difficult to slay. Whatever the case, the cyborgs were forced to abandon that world.

In another case a group of knights had been pulled through a rift unwillingly, into a world filled with gigantic monsters and deceptive demons. The knights were somewhat outstanding in their own realm; mighty heroes and spell casters. When they observed the denizens within, they felt they would surely die. Much to their surprise, when the inevitable conflict began they found themselves not only surviving the onslaught but actually winning, if not thriving. It seemed like they were augmented upon passing through the portal; everything they did was superhuman.

Interestingly, such side effects rarely occur when one passes into a reality similar to their own... or if they do, the effect is only minor. This begs many questions: is there some intelligent force governing the rifts? An unseen entity directing the tide of time and balancing all of existence? Was life, death and everything in-between nothing but a game for some twisted gods?