

# I. THE NATURE OF POWER

*"The quick path to power always comes at a price. Sometimes it is others who pay for it."*

– Proverb from the Book of Rebirth

Through the ornate window of her library, Lucille's eyes followed a light that shot briefly across the black canvas of unending space. It eventually faded, where it came from or where it was going, she had no clue. Her guest, the void creature known as a Seeker, was divulging much about the nature of her universe, the Omniverse, as well as the power she knew as magic.

"So... we channel power from other worlds? Didn't you say universes are no longer interconnected?" Lucille asked.

"Yes, though it is more complicated than that," the Seeker responded.

"The Infinite Dark is an eternal echo of all knowledge inside each universe: past, present and future. Thoughts, dreams, memories and even subconsciousness drifts here as intangible data. This information is collected by those such as I, or may find its way into minds from other realms. This may occur through inspiration, dreams, nightmares or the whispers of creatures born in this space."

"You're saying the Infinite Dark is the way we discovered spells, powers and the magic we use." Lucille stated.

"Precisely." Spoke the Seeker. "As for how this knowledge can still travel between universes... and why it only draws to Novus... that is the consequence of the machinations from the one you know as Creaos."

Lucille clenched her fist, raging in silence.

The Seeker, maintaining the form of an owl-like creature, flew over to the top of a bookshelf beside a window. It stared at the energies and currents swirling in the darkness before speaking. "As for your lack of power here, only focused points of reality allow consistent use of magic. Let us speak in terms of electrical technology: channelling power from another realm is like a current of electricity that goes from one place to another; a circuit if you will. There is a source universe that begins the circuit and there is a destination universe to disperse the energy. The caster is the outlet of power, and the Infinite Dark acts as the conduit. In this enclave that is not rooted to your universe, you have an incomplete circuit, no substantial destination to be an anchor. With this, the results of your efforts are nothing."

The Seeker blinked it's eyes slowly then continued, "A universe has order, tangibility, clarity. The Infinite Dark on the other hand is chaotic; insubstantial and shifting. Universes are a focus; the Infinite Dark is indistinct and acts merely as a conduit. It is because of this that you cannot focus any of your powers."

Lucille was satisfied with the explanations she was receiving for now, though it was suspicious as to why this creature would bother explaining this to her. What was it after? Did it have some motive or agenda?

"Seekers and other void creatures may reach out and teach a desperate mortal some knowledge, for we seek to know and sometimes share or... trade. Curiosity such as ours is like an insatiable hunger; it is what defines us. We seek knowledge and devour it. Some more literally than others." The Seeker answered as though it was reading her mind.

"Without a doubt, you know my thoughts." Lucille stated in a calm tone, which even surprised herself given the situation. "So, answer me this Seeker... if I cannot channel the power I once knew, how is this enclave still intact? And is there a way to repair the 'circuit' you mentioned earlier?"

Gesturing with one of its owl-like 'wings', the Seeker continued. "This enclave is in is a small pocket of order, being held by your thoughts and understanding. What you believe it should be is sustaining it; thanks to a tiny fraction of your native universe: you. My power is greater here though, for I on the other hand was formed by pure, unadulterated chaos. I was birthed by the nightmare of a mortal from long ago."



"You seem orderly to me, mostly." Lucille said with an insecure smile. She then continued, "Actually, speaking of long ago, I've lost track of time. How long have I been here? It feels like weeks have passed."

"A decade has passed in your native universe since you arrived. . . your gate was also your anchor for the passage of time." the Seeker replied, eagerly awaiting the reaction of Lucille.

Lucille muttered something inaudible to herself, her eyes widened with disbelief.

The Seeker turned into something akin to a fox, leapt down off the shelving then sat, looking up at her. "Does this surprise you, Novan? Surely you know the Infinite Dark defies the logic of your kind. That said though, I have something to ask of you."

Lucille was still unresponsive; her mind was recovering from the shock of the time that had passed. She hadn't shown signs of aging and her food supplies had not wasted away. Was this Seeker telling the truth?

The Seeker spoke again, "In truth, time in your universe went backward by three months in this enclave before it went forward a decade. Who knows where it will be when you return?"

"Wait, return? How? Please tell me!" Lucille's shock quickly turned to desperation. She was almost maddened by these revelations; caught between hope, the fear of deception and the sheer horror of her predicament.

"I can offer you a way home, but as I said before, I have something to ask of you." the Seeker said.

Doing her best to cast her fears aside, Lucille regained her composure to speak, ". . . I . . . I would definitely be interested. Though, what could I possibly offer you?" Lucille inquired.

"There is someone I would like you to teach the art of alchemy: the process of exchanging and transmuting both matter and energy." requested the Seeker.

"I do not know this 'alchemy' you speak of." Lucille replied.

"Actually, you do. Most of your kind – the Dark Artists – have been doing this inadvertently when you cast spells. You draw upon power from one universe, exchanging resources to produce a result. You facilitate this exchange through the Infinite Dark; using it to commune between realms and transfer energy before manifestation. In full, it is Omniversal Alchemy and the price of the exchange can be taken from a number of sources. . . but I'll educate you more about that later."

". . . But that would mean. . ." Lucille was lost in her thoughts, not completing the sentence.

The Seeker explained it once more, though with a different angle, "You can wield the power to alter and transmute materials, conjure physical objects and energy, manipulate and convert native elements of a universe. Some universes equate it to sorcery or science; in truth it is both, but on a much deeper level." Said the Seeker. "With it, reality and time itself can be subjugated, even creating new universes."

Lucille's eyes widened. "Please, share this knowledge with me."

"You also wish to go home, I presume?" questioned the Seeker.

"Yes. . . I. . . want to go home." Lucille didn't wish to convey that she felt conflicted, though the creature could sense it. She greatly wished to return home, but knew the importance of learning Omniversal Alchemy and the powers that lay beyond.

The Seeker seemed pleased. "To send you home, I'll need to permanently implant my knowledge within you, to make you wisdom incarnate. You will never be the same. . . will you agree to this?"

Lucille thought for a moment. The situation was bleak, there was no denying her predicament. The decision shouldn't be rushed especially when dealing with a creature that was only recently acquainted, but yet there are times when one must seize an opportunity that lies before them, to take destiny into one's own hands. There was nothing left for her here. With limited food and supplies, with no connection to her 'native universe'. . . the odds were bleak at best. It was only a matter of time before she faced death.

"Decide soon, Lucille. There are others like you trapped this way. I can ask another 'artist' who is equally as learned as you." The Seeker for the first time showed signs of irritation.

". . ." Lucille hesitated, then after a moment of contemplation answered.

"Yes, do whatever you need to do." Recognising the creature's tone and concluding that her situation was hopeless, Lucille was in agreement. With only little time for thought, she took the Seeker at its word; the bargain was made.

"Excellent." the Seeker formed a mouth containing dozens of needle-like teeth, irregularly sized and nightmarish. Even more disturbing was the smile upon its face.

At first, Lucille felt a sharp pain in her chest as she began to change. It was the sensation of her ribs breaking, reforming and the shifting of organs in her body. Being drawn inwards, her frame was being crushed and changed at the same time. In agony she screamed as her mind and body was being shaped into a tome. As the transformation was nearing its completion and her face was reforming over her new 'body', she desperately tried to speak.

With her last coherent words, Lucille asked. "Why...?"

The Seeker's mouth disappeared and then it shrugged, saying, "No reason in particular. I just want to be entertained."

Turning into its original octopus-like form, the Seeker collected the book of warm flesh then vanished in a violet cloud, reappearing outside the enclave with the tome held tight in a shadowy tendril. The void creature opened the book, Lucille's formidable knowledge already taking form as a chapter within its pages.

The Seeker ripped out a few pages that were inaccurate, causing the tome to howl, then began scratching words into blank pages of dried, leathery flesh. The book moaned and sighed with the mixture of pain and pleasure that the inscribing of knowledge brought upon it. The Seeker could sense the anticipation of the living book, the desire to gain knowledge.

Gazing once more on Lucille's enclave, the Seeker watched as it fell apart, the pieces and debris floating into space without a focused mind willing to maintain it. With its anchor to Novus cut off and no other corporeal being to sustain its existence, it was impossible for the enclave to remain coherently in the Infinite Dark.

After making a strange sound like that of a chortle, the Seeker then disappeared with the tome into the void beyond.

