

# IV. THE ARCANUM CONFLICT

*"Power always comes at a price, and payment comes in many forms. There are times when others must pay for it, sometimes with blood. If you do perish this day, your sacrifice will not be in vain."*

– Grandmaster Elzakaius, before facing a Novus Empire assault with his coven

To understand the Arcanum Conflict, one must first delve into the past of the Dark Artists and the Novus Empire.

The Dark Artists practiced various crafts together as covens scattered across the cosmos. Yet despite their secrecy, their numbers still grew; new generations of citizens born over the years steadily joined the ranks of the 'cults' nestled inside the shadow of the Novus Empire.

Existing members of a coven introduced potential initiates to the bizarre and wild powers they wielded. Only those with the intellect, mental capacity and sanity to comprehend such things were deemed worthy of invitation. Displaying one's mastery of the arcane proved to be very appealing to a prospective acolyte. With no laws against such pursuits, the invited were keen to join, learn extraordinary 'magic' and explore the mysteries of the Infinite Dark.

Eventually congregating as a legion of sorcerers, the Dark Artists built pocket dimensions and hidden enclaves inside the Infinite Dark to safeguard their knowledge. These vaults and safe havens were accessible via constructed gateways which served to protect their vast arcane collections and wealth. Before long, they had built up enough strength to be a potential threat to the dominion of the Novus Empire itself, if the need ever arose. Though significantly lower in numbers, they had powers to be respected, even feared.

Despite their obsessions, the Dark Artists lived peacefully inside the Novus Empire until an incident involving an acolyte and a disgruntled merchant occurred. The Dark Artist was accused of stealing with no concrete proof; in truth the merchant had a history of disliking this particular client. After the dispute escalated between the accuser and accused, Peacekeepers were deployed to apprehend the suspected offender. The Dark Artist resisted arrest and in desperation, unleashed powerful magic upon his assailants, killing them instantly in a blast of negative energy. Though the killing was unintentional, the Dark Artist fled into the streets and disappeared rather than surrendering to authorities.

With that incident, the Dark Artists had been revealed to the public eye. The Novarch authorised the Peacekeepers to begin investigations into the event and the mysterious sorcerers. Before long it came to light that there was an occult syndicate lurking in the heart of the Novus Empire.

When the cults were discovered, Creaos himself returned and warned the Novarch of the danger the Dark Artists and their practices. Any offenders were to be incarcerated and 'persuaded' to desist if they continued. As a result of this persecution, the Dark Artists retreated further from society, continuing their studies within hidden vaults. However, some were discovered and eventually infiltrated by undercover Novus agents and Peacekeepers. With this, the Novus Empire gave their final warning to desist or be forcefully removed and imprisoned... which then brought the oppression to a crux. Would the Dark Artists oppose the empire and start a war of sorcery against science? The answer was a unanimous 'yes'. Thus began the greatest period of death and destruction the Novus Empire had ever seen: The Arcanum Conflict.

The strongest of the Dark Artists openly rebelled against the Novus Empire, taking the fight to them on several fronts and igniting battles of a spectacular scale. Peacekeeper fought against Dark Artist, warship fought aether dragon, gun and knife against enchanted blade and sorcerous energy. Striking hard and fast, the students of the Infinite Dark began to claim whole planets in the name of their cause. As a result, the Novus Empire was beginning to divide into two. The Dark Artists were triumphant, however they would not stop there. They intended to conquer the Novus Empire and secure their freedom, rebirthing it into an age of freedom and enlightenment.



However, in their arrogance the Dark Artists made a severe misjudgement. Creaos was watching from afar... and he was not pleased. When the Novus Empire was failing against the rebellion, the creator of the Novus universe joined the fight. The power of Creaos – whom many had assumed was a myth – far exceeded what any of them could have imagined.

For the Dark Artists, what began as a war of independence quickly declined into a one-sided slaughter when Creaos joined the fray. In the face of such overwhelming power, the students of the Infinite Dark didn't stand a chance. Systematically, Creaos and the forces of the Novus Empire took back every world taken by these sorcerers, annihilating all who opposed them. They slaughtered every Dark Artist they found; there was no mercy.

Most of the Dark Artists were destroyed in the counter-offensive, though some survived and hid themselves away among the most secret of their enclaves within the Infinite Dark. Others also managed to escape from the vengeful Novus military, dispersing back into society.

With his might, Creaos ended the Arcanum Conflict by vanquishing his traitorous creations... yet he felt great remorse in the act. These memories would haunt him over the years to come, resulting in many changes that shaped the modern Novus Empire. New measures were put in place and laws were introduced forbidding the practices of the Dark Artists. Breaching the new laws had severe punishments; even speaking of such things warranted disciplinary action. Creaos felt this would ultimately prevent bloodshed in the future.

In addition to the laws, new educational systems and subtle psychological conditioning protocols were introduced to society. From an early age, children would be trained and controlled to have no interest in things that lead to the occult.

In the aftermath of the Arcanum Conflict, there was still a silent purging taking place against the Dark Artists. The safest were those hidden in the pocket dimensions, the grand masters who were capable of creating and sustaining a refuge inside the Infinite Dark. The gateways to these places were virtually impossible to detect even with the technology of the Novus Empire. They were only found through strokes of luck and when discovered, they were destroyed. This would trap any survivors into the incorporeal reality of the Infinite Dark for all eternity.

As for the less renowned Dark Artists, they simply destroyed their research materials and blended into society. Those who were recognised as acolytes of the Infinite Dark were hunted down, then publicly executed for their treachery against the empire.

In the end, peace eventually returned and the Arcanum Conflict was all but forgotten in an age of development and mental suppression. Truth faded into legend, legend into myth, becoming little more than a frightful tale for children. Now there was only one absolute in the universe – the Novus Empire reigned supreme.

Creao was aloof and quiet after the Arcanum Conflict. He was no longer able to see the joy in his creation and departed to a realm beyond space and time. The site of his departure was the Eternal Pillars, where his plan to stabilize the Omniverse first began. These strange pylons halted the savagery of The First WARSURGE and continued to hold the universes separate to each other, though they had been damaged by the Arcanum Conflict. They were showing signs of stress and contained tiny microfractures. Creao mended the pillars then departed into the Infinite Dark itself, seeking answers to the questions that tormented his heart.

For the Novus Empire, the sacred realm of the pillars remained hidden, even to the Novarch. No one, not even the most powerful of the Dark Artists had known of its existence.

The war had ended for the Novus Empire, though for the Dark Artists it continued in a different fashion. Many were trapped, lost or hiding, learning to live in a universe that did not want them. Others lived in the Infinite Dark trying to survive... for them it would never be over.

One particular Dark Artist survived the Arcanum Conflict, a woman that had been separated from the Novus universe when her rift gate was destroyed. Alone, she studied in her library, seeking answers to countless questions.

Many generations would pass before the sparks of change would ignite once again.