



Yssantis

PROLOGUE

2049



Most of the fires started during the attack had since been put out. Yssantis made his way through the narrow rows of houses, his cloak whipping around him in the strong wind. Lampposts and uprooted trees lay strewn across the streets, and a number of walls had collapsed. Some of the city's inhabitants were clearing the debris bit by bit, but they worked slowly, as if out of deference. The chaos had quietened down - just the lone voice of a city guardsman could be heard now and then, barking out orders and instructions.

It was already getting dark, but no one seemed to be paying any attention to Yssantis anyway. Even so, he made every effort to remain unnoticed, welcoming the shadows lengthening between the houses as he silently walked through the rubble that was lying everywhere. He cursed inwardly when a piece of smoldering wood got caught in his cloak and singed it.

The streets were steeped in the blood-red glow of the setting sun, and most of the townspeople were seeking out the safety of their own homes, fearing that the unknown attacker would return.

The empty street ended in a large square. Yssantis came to a halt, pausing for a moment to take in his surroundings. He had almost reached his destination. The hood of his cloak kept slipping down, and he pushed it back slightly from his face with his scaly hand. Although it limited his view, he had learned in the past that anonymity was more useful than comfort.

He'd arrived at the market square. Usually vibrant with activity, it now resembled one of the many ghost towns in the outer districts. The harsh wind whistled through the alleyways and eerily swept dust across the square. The statue in the center of the square had survived intact and sat enthroned in the last rays of the evening sun. Yssantis turned from the scene with a sigh and disappeared down one of the side streets to his left.

He continued on his way, passing more piles of rubble that attested to the battle which had taken place just a few days before. Three guardsmen glanced in his direction but, seeing no cause for concern, they returned to their conversation as they loaded a few barrels of beer from the ruins of a shop onto the back of a pick-up truck. Some distance away Yssantis could make out the sign of an old hotel - he had reached his destination. He wondered to himself whether the person he was hoping to meet

would make it on time despite the unrest. Yssantis wouldn't have been there at all if the attack hadn't happened. He had made the journey because he wanted to help his old friend understand what was really going on.

Yssantis stopped in front of the steps of the hotel and cast his eyes over the exterior of the building. The red clinker-brick facade of the multistory building was decorated with small, round basket awnings above the windows that were trimmed with brightly colored valances. Originally the same color as the facade, the material had since faded. Some of the windows filled the entire height of one story, with ornate iron balustrades in front of them. The bedrooms of the former hotel were situated on the upper floors, while the first floor stood out from the rest of the building, with large windows flanked by anthracite-colored pillars, behind which was a bar. Most of the hotel was in darkness but from the windows of the bar shone a dim, warm light that Yssantis found particularly pleasing. He went up the steps to the entrance and noticed a small flag bearing the coat of arms of the city of Konstantinopol, which was hanging above the doorway and flapping energetically in the wind. Behind the door was a heavy velvet curtain, which Yssantis pushed aside with a casual flick of his hand. The bar was pleasantly warm, and the smells coming from the kitchen made Yssantis almost forget the grave nature of his visit.



"Yssantis!" The voice resounded from the far-right corner of the room. "Nice that you could make it on time despite the state of the city!"

Giving no visible reaction, Yssantis moved towards the cheerful voice. It belonged to a man of middle age with an unusual, if not extravagant, dress sense. He was wearing an open jacket with broad shoulders that was trimmed with fur along the collar and hem. The shirt beneath it hung down loosely over his hips, with just the front tucked into

his trousers to show off the buckle of his belt, which boasted a striking coat of arms. His black trousers were made of padded segments of fabric stitched together, and on his feet were a pair of sneakers.

"It might surprise you, Konstantin, but I asked myself the same question about you on the way here. And I have to add that I'd prefer not to announce my presence to the entire town."

Emperor Konstantin gave Yssantis the once over and pointed in amusement at his singed cloak: "I see that you didn't survive the attack completely unharmed, either."



Yssantis made no response, instead sitting himself down in an armchair diagonally across from Konstantin. As usual he sat with his back to the wall, so that he could observe what was going on around him and enjoy the atmosphere of the old, rustic bar. Along the walls of the main part of the room there were cozy alcoves with well-upholstered sand-colored armchairs and round chestnut-red wooden tables. In the middle of the room, directly across from the entrance, there was a long stone bar with tall bar stools in front of it. To the left of the bar a door led to a back room and the kitchen, from where the clattering of pots and pans could be heard. On the right-hand side the room extended back a long way, to where a stairway leading to the upper floors could be made out in the shadows.

Elaborate hanging lamps were the source of the warm and cozy light, and a large wood-burning stove against the back wall kept the bar at a pleasant temperature. Tall shelves crammed with antiquities were positioned between the alcoves to provide some privacy, and the walls were hung with exquisite paintings. Konstantin had managed to acquire some of these treasures in his earlier life and the rest after the Upheaval of the old world.

He had grown up in a wealthy family in the city then known as Istanbul. Konstantin had been involved in his father's business dealings from a young age and had successfully established a network of contacts that had been of great benefit to him in various situations throughout his lifetime. After the Upheaval of the world, he hadn't hesitated for long before seizing the opportunity to fill the power

vacuum and create an exclusive place of refuge in his hometown. He renamed the city 'Konstantinopol' and gave himself the title of Emperor.

"You're now in my private quarters, so to speak," explained Konstantin. "No one will advertise the fact that you are here - for that we have enjoyed each other's friendship too long. And that's also the reason why I know that, while your visits may be infrequent, they are usually of great relevance! I can hardly wait to hear what you have to tell me today!"

Yssantis signaled to the bartender to bring him a beer before answering: "You'll have to contain your excitement, Konstantin - it's not going to be an easy evening for you. I'm here because I heard of the attack on Konstantinopol. I thought that you'd want to know what caused this destruction and how you can better prepare yourselves for something like this in the future."

Emperor Konstantin was clearly upset by his words. "So, it's going to happen more often now? We were lucky this time. There seemed to be only one, and just a few streets were destroyed during the attack."

"That's true," replied Yssantis. "That product of extremely bad taste on the market square - your statue - seems to have survived intact."

Konstantin laughed. "Every person has their foibles, dear Yssantis."

"You forget that I'm not human, dear Konstantin."

The server who was bringing over Yssantis's beer overheard this exchange, but it seemed to make no impression on her, and she walked away unperturbed.

Not much of Yssantis was visible anyway. His upper body was covered in a grayish-blue fabric that was held together by a silver brooch and that also formed the hood. Beneath this cloak he wore a long brown robe with a dark hem. Several belts were fastened around his chest with small pouches that contained various prized possessions obtained on his travels. A mysterious pattern appeared on his lower arm when he stroked it with his other hand. His most remarkable feature, however, was his face - although his expression was almost impossible to read. Its pointy shape, the scaly skin, and the yellow, shimmering eyes made him look like a reptile, which could be somewhat disconcerting for anyone not expecting such a sight.

Yssantis looked down at the well-formed foamy head of the beer spilling over the edge of the glass and asked intently, "Were you able to see it properly, Konstantin? I mean, with your own eyes? And were you able to destroy it?"

A dark shadow seemed to cross Konstantin's face, and his demeanor suddenly became unusually serious.

“That creature could certainly take a lot. A few attacks like that and our ammunition depots would be completely empty. Its appearance ... it was terrifying. It moved without making a sound, and it had an aura that seemed to absorb the light. Everything around it was shrouded in complete darkness while it shone ever brighter, emanating a blinding golden glow, almost like an ...”

“Like an angel?” interrupted Yssantis.

“Yes, that’s exactly the right word. We wanted to examine the damned creature when it was finally lying motionless on the ground, but it shot into the sky with a beam of light, towards that ... colossal ‘thing’ that has been in Earth’s orbit for two years now.”

Yssantis slowly pushed back the hood of his cloak and began to tell his friend the whole story.



“This ... ‘thing’ that you’re talking about is only indirectly connected to the Angel. Although both the Angels and the thing in the Earth’s orbit share similar origins, what they do is completely different. The Angels come from an extremely advanced civilization that lives close to the center of our galaxy. If you were to rate it using the Kardashev scale, it’d probably be somewhere between a Type II

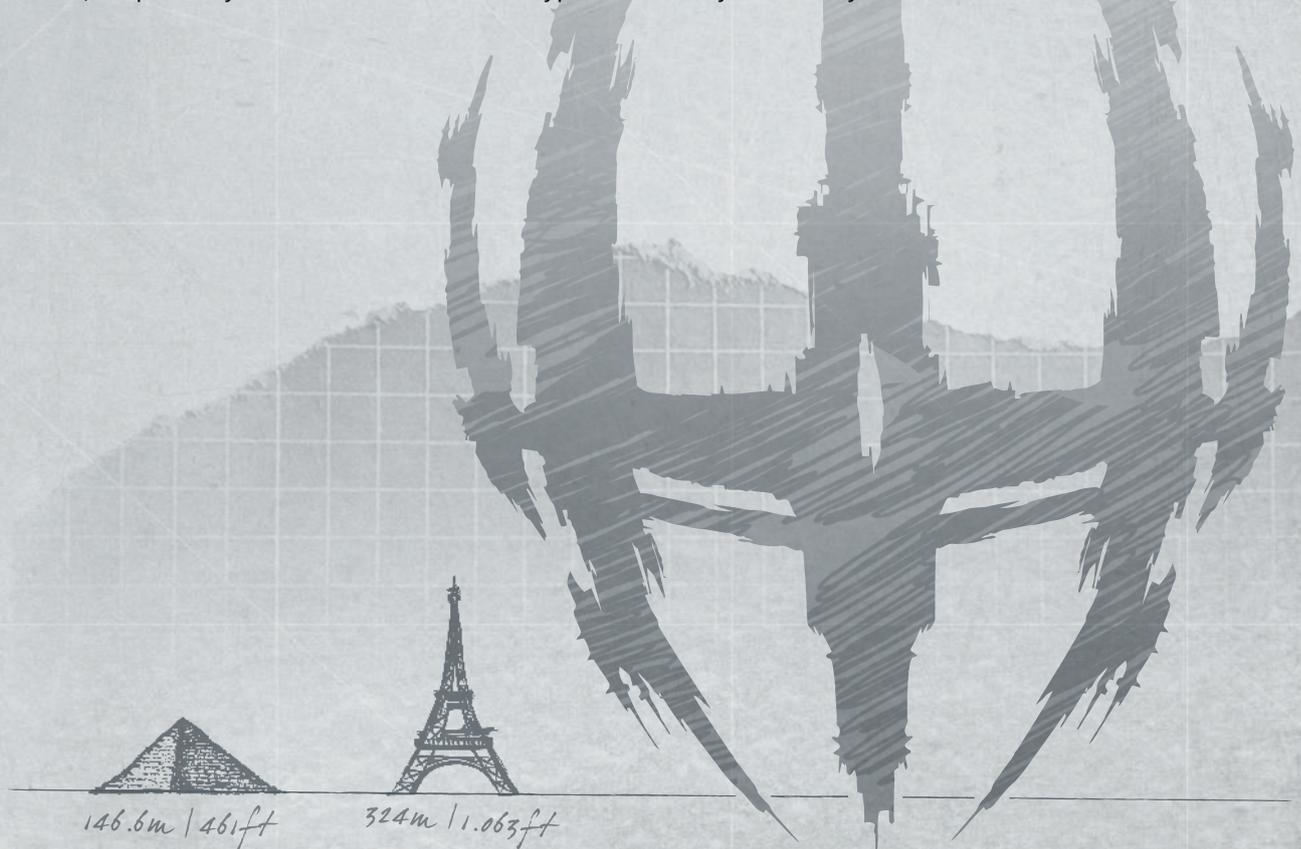
and a Type III. That doesn’t tell us much about how truly advanced it is - I only mention it to give you a point of comparison.”

Konstantin took a sip of his beer; the extent of these words had not yet fully sunk in. “That’s almost inconceivable. Despite colonies on the Moon and on Mars, humans are still far from being even classified as Type I. The amount of energy generated by those colonies is ridiculously small in comparison, and we haven’t yet managed to find a way of making it available to the people on Earth as well.”

“Imagine a civilization that consumes ten billion times more energy than humans did even two years ago,” said Yssantis. “Imagine the environment in which this civilization must live. I can’t tell you where exactly in the solar systems of the Milky Way it evolved - the Lhon’Dar didn’t provide any further details - but what we do know is that the closer you get to the center of our galaxy, the greater the exposure to radiation and the forces of gravity. The stellar density is so high that there’s no such thing as night there - or, at least, there’s nothing like night on Earth. It’s always light on the habitable planets of those solar systems.”

“That has to mean that they struggled with these factors from the very beginning of their evolution, Yssantis,” said Konstantin, continuing his train of thought. “You just mentioned someone, the ... Lon ...?”

“Lhon’Dar,” Yssantis said helpfully. “They arrived on Nibiru and Earth at the same time, in 2017. They’ve been hunting the Angels for about 10,500 years. What I’m telling you today, dear friend, I know from them. And, by the by, evolution and life always find a way.”



"I often heard that saying in my childhood," said Konstantin, momentarily lost in thought. "But I can't quite remember where ... 2017 ... that's over 30 years ago. I had no idea back then how my life would turn out. Don't you miss your home at times like today?"

Yssantis thought for a moment. "32 years to be exact. And you seem to have forgotten, dear Konstantin, that I was born on Earth and have lived here for some years. I was telling you about the opening of the Eiffel Tower some time ago because you were planning to disassemble it in Paris and rebuild it here in Konstantinopol. You certainly inherited your father's megalomania!"

Konstantin gave a brief smile at the mention of his father.

"I don't know if it was megalomania. But it cannot be denied that he passed on his boundless ambition to me. Without it, I could never have built all of this here. But, please, I interrupted you - where were we? The Lhon'Dar fought the Angels, but if the Angels are now attacking Earth, how can we defend ourselves against a civilization that is so much greater than ours?"

"The Angels *are not* actually part of this civilization - the Angels are just one of its tools," explained Yssantis. "We don't know how many Angels there are or how big the civilization is that created them. But I'd better start at the beginning."

Yssantis reached for his beer glass, which was still almost full, and took a generous mouthful. Out of the corner of his eye, he surveyed the inner section of the bar to ensure that they didn't have an unwanted audience and relaxed somewhat when it became clear they were the only guests. Reassured by the fact that his words would reach no one's ears but Konstantin's, he went on with his story.

"I don't know the actual name of this civilization, but I've got into the habit of calling them 'gods.' I think the name is quite fitting, as humans invested so much time and effort in the past searching for the great and all-powerful in the universe. You're unlikely to find anything greater in the Milky Way than this civilization. Just as your esteemed father was markedly ambitious, the gods felt a similar urge to continually expand. They made it their mission to explore other galaxies. Their curiosity cost them dearly, however. They brought a contagious disease from the Andromeda galaxy back with them that was able to spread unnoticed throughout their civilization for quite some time. When the disease finally came to their attention, many planets had already been contaminated. It was too late for even a partial quarantine.

"The pandemic couldn't be stopped, but they soon developed a medicine that could curb the progress of the disease if taken regularly, hoping

that in the course of evolution a natural immunity would develop. In the worst case, that can take millions of years though. The medicine that the gods developed was based on proteins."

"How does that work?" interjected Konstantin with a laugh. "They just built an enormous laboratory and then flew to all their different planets with tankers to distribute it to everyone?"

"I have to ask you to take this more seriously, Konstantin," warned Yssantis, slightly irritated by the naivety of his counterpart. "I assumed you'd urgently want to hear this story."



Konstantin held up his beer glass as a sign of conciliation. "You're right of course. The scenario was just so surreal and, at the same time, exhilarating. How did these ... *gods* get hold of such large amounts of raw materials, and where did they come from?"

Yssantis narrowed his eyes, giving Konstantin a critical look, but then raised his glass to acknowledge his host's friendly gesture and began to answer his question.

"Most suitable, of course, were living organisms with DNA that closely resembled the DNA of the gods and could be cultivated and harvested without too much effort. They bred such organisms specifically for the purpose of processing them into medicine. Habitable planets with no dominant species were completely taken over so that they could produce enough medicine to supply such a gigantic civilization. To accomplish that, the necessary machinery had to be automated too," explained Yssantis. "And that's why the Angels were created. They were divided into different fleets and tasked with transporting these organisms to the planets, observing the populations, and later carrying out the harvest. But the disease continued to spread at a faster rate than that at which they could cultivate organisms from which to make the medicine. The logistics of this endeavor went beyond anything that had ever gone before, and they began to run out of suitable planets. The gods had reached a crossroads. They could either divide their own populace into a class system and only make the

medicine available to the upper classes or find a way to optimize production so that everyone could receive it. The division of society into classes would have resulted in civil wars and the destruction of their own civilization. The gods knew that the cornerstone of their civilization's existence and progress was unity."

Konstantin burst out laughing. "That certainly explains why humans will never go beyond Type I. I can just imagine what decisions would've been made here on Earth." He'd finished his beer in the meantime and evidently wanted another because he beckoned for Mara to come over.

"Tell me, Yssantis, could I interest you in a hookah? I always find that smoking goes well with a good story."

"I can assure you Konstantin, I've seen quite a bit during my time here on Earth, and I'm convinced that humans wouldn't even be able to choose someone capable of making a cohesive decision for the entire planet. And if you put a hookah in front of me, I'd be delighted to try it out. Different cultures and their customs have always interested me."

"What can I bring you?" asked Mara with a charming smile when she came up to the table.

"Would you be so good as to fetch a hookah for me and my guest? And fill up our glasses again, please."

Mara refilled the beer glasses and then disappeared into a back room, returning with two tall hookahs made of crystal and richly decorated with gold and sapphires.



Konstantin turned his attention back to Yssantis. "What measures did the gods take to ensure the survival of their civilization?"

Yssantis watched how Mara removed glowing coals from the stove and carefully placed them on top of the hookahs. He helped himself to another large mouthful of beer before continuing.

"As I was saying, dear Konstantin, in order to meet the immense demand, the gods had to resort to using planets that were essentially habitable, but whose ecosystems and climatic conditions were unsuitable for cultivating the organisms that had been used so far. Instead, they had to rely on finding planets with indigenous species that would be suitable for harvesting after carrying out some modifications to their DNA. This could only be achieved by exploring countless potential planets in the Milky Way. We don't know whether the gods contemplated using planets in other galaxies too. But considering the crisis began because of their exploration of other galaxies, it seems unlikely."

Konstantin thought about the effort involved in providing for his own city, even though it was considerably smaller now than it had been in the past.

"It must've been a mammoth task to manage that many planets ... But tell me, what do you mean by ... harvest?"

"Are you familiar with the term 'Dyson Sphere'?"

"Yes, I've heard it before. Doesn't it have something to do with harnessing energy from stars?"

"Exactly. The gods used a sphere for the harvest, a similar process as is used to harness energy from a star. Two intersecting rings encircle the entire planet and collect all of the available materials. The only condition is that their genetic makeup makes it possible to extract the right amino acids needed for the protein chains. The Angels usually orbit the planet in their own spaceship while this is happening but don't actually have to be present as the sphere works completely autonomously."

Konstantin choked on the smoke as he suddenly understood what Yssantis was saying.

"That's what you meant before, Yssantis? That thing up there in the sky is one of these so-called spheres?"

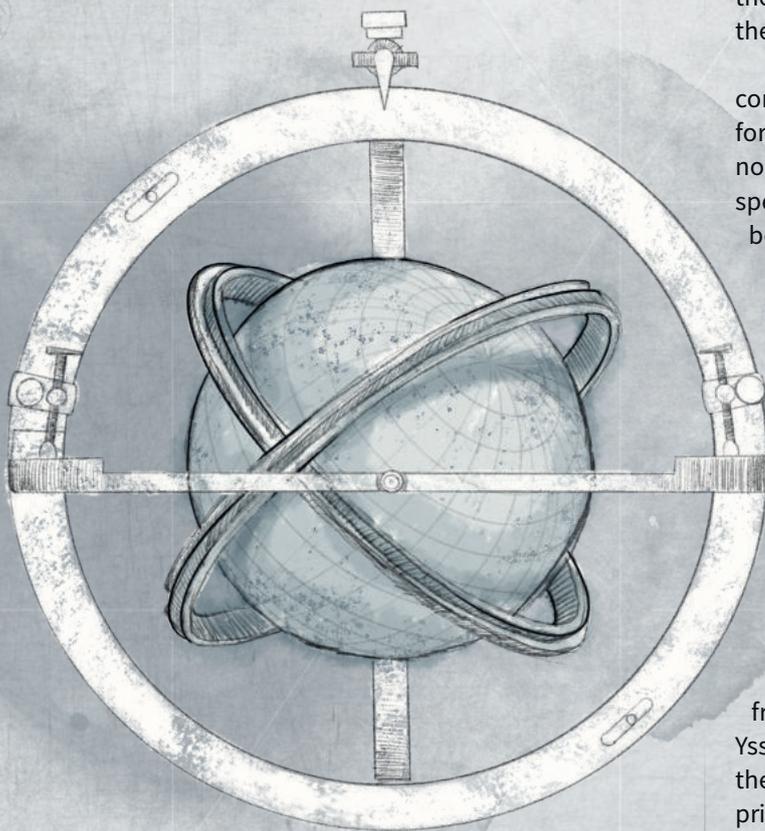
"Yes. But the Angel that you defeated was transported back up to its spaceship and is now being repaired. You can be sure that it'll soon make a second appearance. And it will most likely not come alone. The Angels follow a strict hierarchy. The captain of the spaceship, the archangel, commands a unit of Angels. These Angels have no free will of their own but can carry out tasks independently when instructed. We haven't been able to study the Angels' hierarchy yet, but it's probably safe to assume that there are a lot more levels, each assigned different responsibilities within the civilization of the gods."

"Another good reason to enjoy this tobacco while we can, dear Yssantis. We're probably not going to be around much longer," said Konstantin gloomily.

“Don’t write humanity off just yet, Konstantin. The New World Order and the Vrill, for example, are building armed defense systems at the moment to protect the large towns from invading Angels. I’ve brought you the plans and you’d be well advised to acquire these weapons too.”

“The New World Order and the Vrill have resources that I can only dream of. But I will do whatever I can to set up these defenses - I owe it to the people of Konstantinopol. If I can come up with a plan to bring the Eiffel Tower here, then I should be able to manage this,” laughed Konstantin. “The people here trust me and know that I’ll always do everything I can to ensure their safety. I’m deeply grateful to you for your help!”

Konstantin seemed to have regained some of his confidence, and his eyes sparkled. He was clearly happy to have a reason to search the abandoned outer districts of Konstantinopol and the Mediterranean coast for treasures that could finance the new defense systems.



Yssantis didn’t want to waste time and proceeded with his history lesson without responding to his friend’s expression of gratitude.

“There’s more, Konstantin. The cultivation on other planets began by preparing the mostly undeveloped living organisms indigenous to the planet for harvest. This involved treating a selected

species with a mutagen that spread through the planet’s atmosphere and transformed sections of the creatures’ DNA. Before they were ready to harvest, however, these creatures were of course at the mercy of natural enemies and climatic fluctuations as they grew to maturity. The Lhon’Dar also reported that there were planets whose yields were apparently negligible. As demand for the raw materials rose, the workload of the fleets of Angels increased exponentially, too, as they had to take care of the existing stocks and simultaneously establish new populations.

“Because of that, the gods continued to optimize their methods. Instead of leaving the development of the chosen species on these foreign planets to chance, the mutagen was altered to additionally boost the growth process.

“This was all undertaken with the aim of creating an organism on the planet that could feed and care for itself without the fear that it would be killed off by other native species.”

“A blueprint for world domination ... Do all of the species that are treated with the mutagen look the same?” asked Konstantin.

“The mutagen only needed to alter the composition of the DNA enough to make it usable for the gods. The appearance of a species does not necessarily have anything to do with it. Every species has to go through a convergent evolution before it can form an intelligent society.

“In turn, the ‘New Seed’ resulted in much larger populations that were able to look after themselves without much intervention. The automated fleets of Angels and ‘Harvesting Spheres’ then only had to process them into the desired medicine.

“Just a small percentage of the population remained on the planet afterwards as ‘unusable material.’”

“What does ‘unusable’ mean? Can’t every organism be used somehow?” objected Konstantin.

“The gods can only use specific raw materials from the population for producing the medicine,” Yssantis answered. “Over time, mutations appear in the DNA of every organism. That’s of course the basic principle of evolution, but it also creates organisms that can no longer be recognized by the automated harvesting systems and are thus left behind. This remnant of the population is once again treated with a mutagen, the population recovers, and the cycle repeats.

“The gods were eventually able to build up adequate supplies of the medicine and simplified the logistics involved considerably, thus guaranteeing that everyone would get the medicine they needed.”

“So we’re these leftovers of the population on Earth – the unusable material,” concluded Konstantin. “But why are we being attacked by the Angels then? Wouldn’t it suffice to just wait until the mutagen transforms us back into harvestable material, and let the sphere do its job again?”

“Before the reform, that’s exactly what would have happened,” explained Yssantis. “But with the Lhon’Dar, the gods created something that made the harvesting process far more complex. That began 60,000 years ago.”

Konstantin had clearly not expected the story to stretch so far back into the past.

“60,000 years ago?” he asked incredulously. “How old is this civilization of the gods, then?”

“We don’t know,” Yssantis replied gravely. “We actually don’t even know whether it still exists. Normally, the Harvesting Sphere disappears as soon as the harvest is finished. Although the fact that it has remained in Earth’s orbit unchanged for two years is the work of the Lhon’Dar, the gods have made no attempts to reclaim the sphere so far. And the Angels have only just turned up here, two years after the Harvesting Sphere first appeared. For these reasons, we can at least assume that the automated processes are no longer working as well as they were supposed to.”

“What have the Lhon’Dar got to do with it? It felt like the entire world was firing at that sphere back then when it first took up position in the Earth’s orbit,” said an indignant Konstantin.

“That wasn’t exactly a success though, was it?” commented Yssantis with a somewhat sardonic undertone. “Because of that, vast areas of the Siberian tundra and Australia are wastelands today, and you still couldn’t prevent the harvest. What an accomplishment! The Lhon’Dar have already tried to stop the harvest on other planets. And with more success than they’ve had on Earth so far.”

The two friends smoked in silence. Mara had discreetly refilled their beer glasses as if she sensed that it was going to be a long night.

Yssantis opened his robe and pulled out a notebook from an inside pocket. He leafed through it quietly as the thick smoke from the water pipes settled over the table.

“So much technological progress and we’re back to paper,” said Konstantin huffily as he shifted impatiently in his armchair.

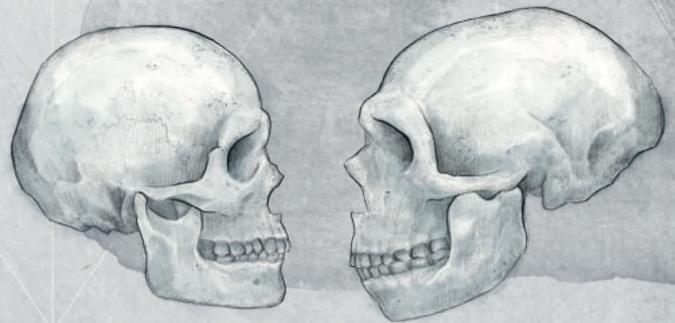
“You should be happy that we don’t have to resort to cave paintings, dear Konstantin.” Yssantis found the entries that he was looking for and started reading:

“The ‘New Seed’ was used in the galaxy for the first time 60,000 years ago, in the 167th cycle. It was introduced as an airborne mutagen here on Earth,

where many very promising life forms had already evolved. Other planets were similarly transformed, including a planet that humans discovered in 2017 and named ‘Luyten b.’ This swamp planet is about 12 light years away, and the ‘New Seed’ was distributed there through the water – and that is where the civilization of the Lhon’Dar formed.

“On Earth, the various hominid species seemed best suited to being converted into usable material, and the mutagen thus brought about the transformation and advancement of the Homo sapiens, which lead to them becoming the dominant species on the planet.”

“Until now I’d assumed that Homo sapiens had been the dominant species on Earth before then. That was obviously a fallacy?”



“Homo sapiens had already evolved 300,000 years ago but was far from being the dominant species, and there were in fact several human species at the time. The modern human would barely stand a chance in a one-on-one fight with a Neanderthal, for instance. They were more robust and much stronger than the modern human, and they were nowhere near as primitive as you might think. They cared for each other, made tools and early adhesives, and even communicated through spoken language.”

Even though Konstantin had said he was interested in how the mutagen worked, he suddenly felt as if he was back at school and said to Yssantis with a grin, “What is this, my dear friend, a lecture in biology?”

“Don’t you find it unsettling that I seem to know more about your species than many humans do? I am trying to explain to you why it is that you can lounge here in your armchair today and smoke in comfort.” Yssantis paused briefly, only to add one last edifying comment: “And it’s called anthropology, not biology.”

Konstantin rolled his eyes – his old friend’s tendency to lecture was what he liked least about him. But he raised his hand and made a circular movement to indicate that Yssantis should continue, which he did.

“The Angels probably chose Homo sapiens purely and simply because of the size of the population at the time they visited. The Neanderthal population was smaller and more sparsely distributed across the large glacial regions of Europe and the Middle East.

“From a human perspective, you were simply lucky. Aside from your sheer numbers, which had increased in the warm African climate, there wasn’t much in your favor. I could just as easily be having a wonderful conversation with the descendant of a Neanderthal right now.”

“And yet you’re not. I personally prefer it that way.”

“I’m sure you do. The Angels released the mutagen into the atmosphere to benefit you, and it did what it was supposed to. The Homo sapiens experienced a surge in their development and intelligence, which led them to become more adventurous, to leave Africa, and to settle all over the world.”

“Curiosity as the impetus for the expansion of an entire species,” added Konstantin.

“It went far beyond mere curiosity. The mutagen resulted in the cultural revolution that changed the course of human history. The modern human could talk about the future and was able to develop an imagination and artistic sensibility that became the foundation of societies and towns. The Neanderthals existed for more than 200,000 years without making any significant progress. What humans achieved in a quarter of the time was undeniably more impressive than sitting around the campfire making wooden spears with glued-on tips.”

Yssantis paused for a moment and looked at Konstantin before making a joke, which was very out of character for him: “Without the gods you would still be living in caves with the Neanderthals and fighting a cougar over the entrails of a mammoth.”

Konstantin grinned at the image. “I guess I’ll have to thank these gods, if I should ever meet them one day.”

“For that to happen you’d have to first deal with the Angels.” Yssantis hadn’t fully grasped his friend’s sarcastic tone. “The Neanderthals ultimately disappeared from the planet 37,000 years ago, and for about 30,000 years now there has only been one human species on Earth. Through the Angels, the gods had successfully created a dominant species here and ensured that no one else could endanger your survival.”

“Let’s hear it for the gods!” cried Konstantin, with a sneer still in his voice but this time raising his glass boisterously as well. Some drops of beer spilled onto the table as he swung his arm, landing dangerously close to Yssantis’s notebook.

After a moment of shock, Konstantin visibly reined in his euphoria and reverted to the tried-

and-tested tactic of guiding Yssantis’s focus back to the story and thus away from the narrowly avoided obliteration of his precious records. “How can it be that a civilization would still need medicine after so many thousands of years?”

“At times humans can be extremely arrogant in their presumption that they’ve already learned everything there is to know about the universe. Do you think you can even conceive of the horrors that are lurking out there? Diseases that attack your own genome cannot be cured with a few days’ bed rest. Not to mention the fact that, so far, humans haven’t been able to find cures for many of the illnesses that plague them, either. How many tens of thousands or millions of years do you think it will take until evolution blesses us with an immunity that allows us to enjoy the hookah without worrying about the possible consequences?”

“Hopefully not too long. Perhaps we should steal some of the mutagen from the Angels,” laughed Konstantin.

“I’d assume that the gods’ medicine acts like a suppressor, and that’s why it has to be taken regularly. Maybe they’ve even discovered totally different uses for the harvested materials - we can only speculate here. After all, biomass can be invaluable to a civilization after all - for the production of new organs or whole body parts, armies of artificial organisms and workers that don’t have their own consciousness. Or think of the Harvesting Sphere. It’s even possible that the gods lost the battle, but the automatism is continuing unchecked. Whatever the situation, the fact is that the Harvesting Sphere has the majority of the human population on its conscience and almost completely wiped out my ancestors on Nibiru.”

Konstantin was visibly upset by Yssantis’s words. He knew little about his friend’s home planet and its inhabitants as he almost never mentioned them. He decided it was better to say nothing than risk opening any old wounds.

Seeing Konstantin’s awkward expression, Yssantis quickly changed the subject: “But let me return to the history of the Lhon’Dar.

“In the year 11,512 before Christ, the population density on their home planet had reached the point where it met the conditions required for harvest, and the gods’ machinery did its job. The survivors were treated with the mutagen as planned so that the population would recover in a few thousand years and be ready to harvest again.”

“From your tone of voice, I think I can guess that it never came to that? And why are you giving the dates in years before Christ?” Konstantin tried to work out the total number of years since then.

“I am basing it on your calendar, Konstantin. It would seem that everyone picks up a few bad

habits over time. And anyway, your calendar was not only important for the course of human history, but played a significant role in the history of my own species too. And no, the Lhon'Dar weren't ever harvested again. The advantages of a civilization that can develop independently is simultaneously a disadvantage: they tend to start thinking for themselves sooner or later. Around 10,500 years before Christ, the population of the Lhon'Dar had recovered somewhat. Even though they couldn't possibly know exactly what had happened to them a thousand years earlier, they remembered that an alien species from deep space had come to them and was responsible for their ill fate. Motivated by thoughts of vengeance and the determination to find this alien species and destroy it, they channeled all of their energy into technological advancement and the development of interstellar travel."

"Interstellar travel ... you mean, light speed?" asked Konstantin, fascinated that the science fiction stories from this childhood seemed to be coming to life.

"Considering the size of a galaxy, the speed of light is still unbearably slow. Just to cross our solar system, in which the Earth and Nibiru are located, from the borders of the Oort cloud would take over two years at the speed of light. The Lhon'Dar can travel at immense speeds, but they haven't yet managed to reach the speed of light. The Lhon'Dar took a different approach and adjusted their biology to long interstellar journeys. Luyten b is not far from the Earth in astronomical terms, and a few years here or there won't prevent the Lhon'Dar from taking action in this part of the galaxy. But they're not able to cover really vast distances."

"Clearly, the gods must have developed other strategies for space travel, then, if they were able to make it to the Andromeda galaxy?" Konstantin suggested.

"We can't even imagine what energy and forces prevail in the center of our galaxy. What we have been able to observe to date is that the Angels' spaceships and the Harvesting Spheres are able to materialize in space in areas with high gravitation and afterwards only make short journeys with conventional aeronautics. It's conceivable that the gods knew how to make use of the curvature of space that's created by objects with a large mass."

"So, they had to materialize directly beside the sun, then?"

"It doesn't have to be the largest mass in a solar system or even a star. The mass of Jupiter was evidently enough for the Angels - that's where we noticed the Harvesting Sphere in the solar system for the first time. But I'm straying too far from the point, my dear friend," Yssantis said with obvious

irritation - he hadn't actually intended to go into such detail.

"I did ask," said Konstantin apologetically. "And, anyway, we have the whole night ahead of us! The beer isn't going to run out any time soon."

"I'm sure it won't, Konstantin."



Konstantin knew his guest's snippy comments only too well and didn't allow himself to be put off. "If the Lhon'Dar didn't manage to develop technologies for space travel equal to that of the Angels, what chance of success did their plans for vengeance have?"

"Although they couldn't pursue the Angels, they were determined to find out more about their attackers. They initiated a guerrilla war with the fleets of Angels that were deployed closer to them.

"The Lhon'Dar attacked the ships of the Angels that were looking after the planets and through these attacks they gathered an increasing amount of data on them. That's how they found out about the existence of the gods, the Angels' purpose, and the genetic composition of the matter needed for harvesting. They weren't, however, able to discover the coordinates of the gods' planets. And even if they'd managed to, those systems would've been located so far into the inner regions of our galaxy that the Lhon'Dar wouldn't have been able to get there. To help them track down the Angels, they developed a means of searching habitable planets for organisms suitable for harvesting. In doing so, the Lhon'Dar came across a planet that was supposed to have been harvested around 10,238 before Christ. When they arrived at the planet, the Harvesting Sphere and the archangel's ship were already in orbit. The Lhon'Dar were able to take out the Harvesting Sphere, but it still managed to escape, together with the Angels' ship. Thanks to the new data, however, the Lhon'Dar learned how to change their own DNA so that they would no longer fulfill the criteria required by the gods for the harvest."

“How did they achieve that? And the Lhon’Dar actually prevented the harvest on that planet? Then why didn’t they do it on Earth as well?” Konstantin wanted to know.

“I’ll explain the ‘how’ when I tell you more about the Lhon’Dar.” Yssantis turned a few pages in his notebook and continued: “The harvest procedures took longer at that time. It was only after the Lhon’Dar’s sabotage that the gods saw the need to accelerate the process. Whereas it once took them about a day to harvest a planet, it only took six hours to harvest Earth. Another change that the gods introduced in response to the Lhon’Dar’s opposition was to further develop the Angels into the military units that they are today. These deadly Angels first appeared after the Lhon’Dar’s attack on the Harvesting Sphere.”

“Why did the Angels have to be developed for that purpose at all?” wondered Konstantin. “Could the gods not just have dispatched whatever armies they already had to protect the harvesting machinery?”

“No doubt that could have been possible, but we can do nothing but speculate because in all this time the Lhon’Dar have never encountered any other military troops associated with the gods. Moreover, it contradicts the very idea of automatism to deploy armies of one’s own kind to protect harvesting processes that were designed to coordinate themselves. It makes a lot more sense to use their custom-made Angels for this purpose, who were already familiar with the processes and close by. But back to the historical facts: about 23 years later, 10,215 before Christ, the Angels attacked the home planet of the Lhon’Dar. With Samael’s help, the Lhon’Dar were able to win the first battle and the Angels were forced to withdraw from the planet’s orbit.”



Konstantin frowned - he was sure he’d heard the name Samael many times before, in the theological texts of his own world. “Samael? I associate that name with Lucifer.”

“Lucifer is the name that he gave himself.”

“Ah, I see ... And how were the Lhon’Dar able to win?”

“They were only able to withstand the attack with Samael’s help,” Yssantis repeated, not giving

much else away. “And even though the Angels had been developed for combat, the technology had barely been tested in practice at that time. The Angels reach their full potential the closer they get to the center of the galaxy, where radiation and light deliver significantly more energy. Earlier, you described the Angel as absorbing all of the light around it. Your observation is indeed quite accurate. According to what the Lhon’Dar have been able to learn, radiation and light are the Angels’ main sources of energy. The gods had to keep extending their search for new inhabited planets ever farther into the outer regions of the galaxy. If Earth and Luyten b weren’t located here in the outermost region of the Milky Way, that one Angel would have been able to wipe out all human life within a radius of hundreds of kilometers at once.”



Konstantin reflected on Yssantis’s words and looked out the window. It was dark outside - night had long since fallen. Only the pale glow of the moon penetrated the blanket of clouds. Although the moonlight cast a cold, blue light over the surrounding streets and buildings, Konstantin felt safe and protected for the first time in his life in the dark of night. At least his home planet offered him protection, thanks to its remote location, which was responsible for the dark and cold of nighttime, yet had clearly saved them from certain annihilation too.

“Are you hungry, dear Yssantis?” Konstantin was always attentive to his guests’ needs, whether his visitor was a soldier from the New World Order or an old friend. The Prowler were the only ones he would gladly be rid of.

“I don’t want to bother Mara again tonight. But you could perhaps tell me instead about the gadget over there in the corner - I’ve heard about something like that before.” Yssantis pointed to an old arcade game from the late 20th century. It was set up in the farthest corner of the room, which underlined even more the aura of mystery that surrounded it. The machine itself was pretty unremarkable: a black box the size of a person with a built-in CRT monitor and a few operating elements. The name ‘Polybius’ was written along the top of it and that’s what had caught Yssantis’s attention.

“That thing?” Konstantin was clearly uneasy talking about it. “Not long after the trouble began and I took over this city, an envoy of the New World Order knocked on my door. From the outset, it was no easy feat to maintain the neutrality of this city, but at some stage, people finally realized how useful it could be precisely *because* of its neutrality. From then on, I was mostly left in peace, apart from a few plunderers and recently, of course, the Angel. After I arranged a meeting between the New World Order and the Vril, the envoy owed me a favor. We’d spent a few evenings together discussing today’s world, and he obviously became aware of my interest in rare and mythical objects because he later went and organized this arcade game for me from the repository of the old North American government. Whether the rumors associated with it are true or not I really can’t tell you. Call me crazy but I’m rather attached to my sanity and would rather not gamble it.”



Yssantis nodded, although from his expression it was apparent that he had hoped for more from the answer than what Konstantin had told him. He decided, however, not to pursue the matter and simply said, “I understand, my friend.”

Konstantin had signaled to Mara to fill up their glasses again and once she was finished, Yssantis returned to his report on the war between the Lhon’Dar and the Angels.

“At any rate, the gods of course heard about the rebellion started by the Lhon’Dar. From their point of view, a civilization that was capable of independent thought would always bring unforeseen complications with it. In order to

cultivate the ‘New Seed,’ the complete crop would have to be monitored constantly, as ultimately each civilization was supposed to keep growing and not decimate itself or others through wars. That would’ve meant abandoning automatism, however, and they’d have been back at the same crossroads as before – not enough medicine for the entire civilization of the gods and at risk of a civil war. The gods were forced to go back to the drawing board and reform the harvesting process.

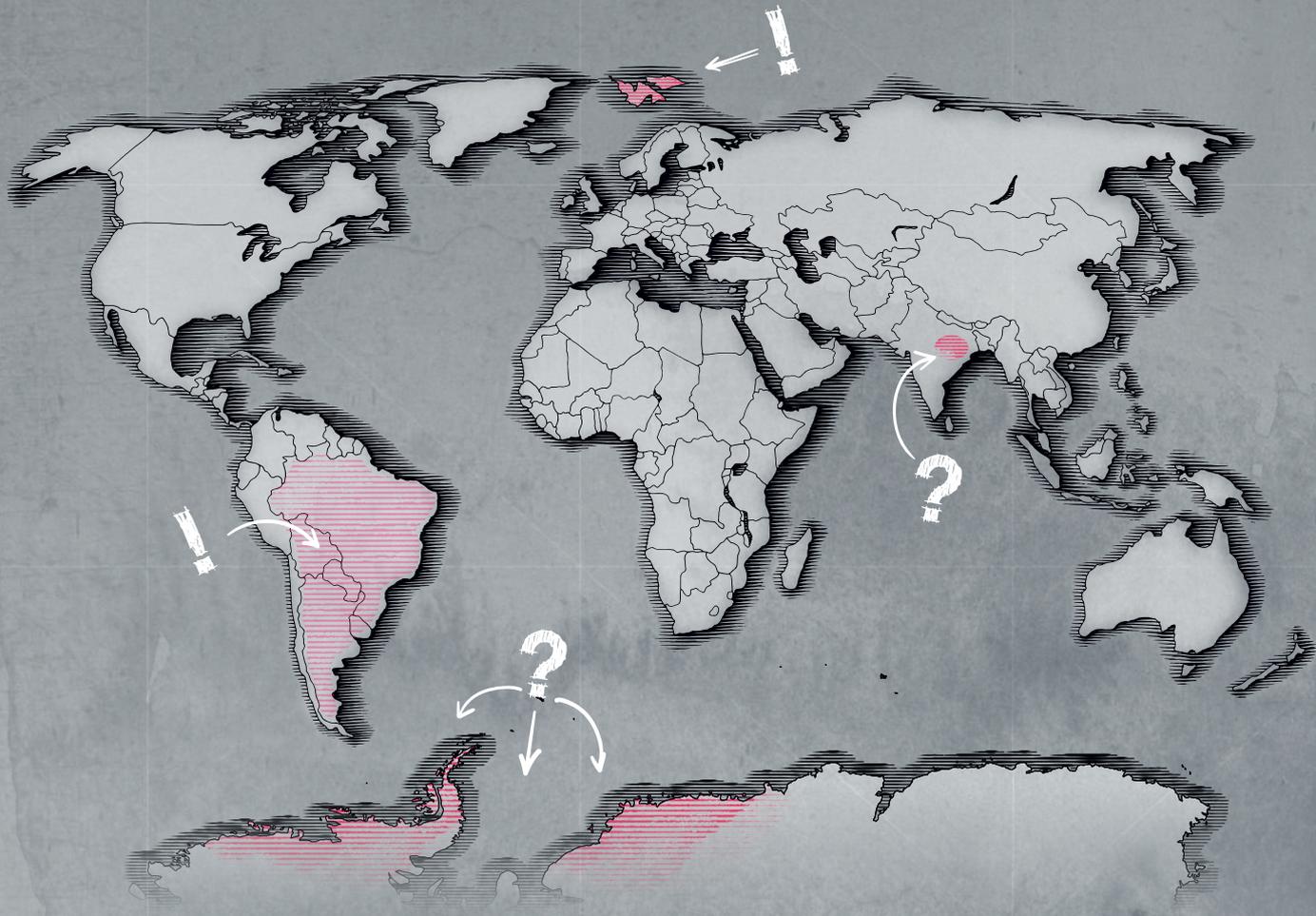
“Up until then, they had only visited and observed the ‘seed’ at intervals of several hundred or thousand years. After the mutation had produced the required materials, they scheduled the harvest to be carried out a few thousand years later, based on the planet’s projected population growth. The disadvantage of this method was that the developing civilization and its populace were not under constant supervision.

“This automatism had to cease but without increasing the amount of work involved in looking after the stocks. To achieve this, the entire process had to be able to monitor itself and develop autonomously. Sporadic visits from the fleets of Angels to check how the civilizations were developing would still be necessary, but in comparison to the previous method their scope wouldn’t be any greater.

“An integral component of the reform was assigning the Angels the task of observing during their visits the various civilizations that were emerging on a planet and then identifying the most advanced and appropriate group among them for a new role. The Angels would give this group the job of monitoring the rest of the planet to ensure that the harvest would be successful and its inhabitants wouldn’t pose a problem for the gods before then. As soon as the population of a planet had grown large enough, these ‘Wardens’ would transmit a signal that it was ready to be harvested.

“The remainder that couldn’t be harvested were now to be exterminated. The risk that another civilization like the Lhon’Dar would evolve was too high. Cleansing the planet of any remaining traces of the dominant species was another duty assigned to the Angels, in addition to sowing and harvesting. A new population was cloned from the DNA of the harvested species and, a few centuries later, it was resettled on the cleansed planet. A new population was then able to grow without any knowledge of what had happened on the planet in the past.”

The full extent of what this manual cleansing of the planets entailed had not hit Konstantin quite yet. “Why go to so much trouble? Why don’t they just bombard the entire planet at once with orbital weaponry? That would render the whole Angel army obsolete!”



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Yssantis wasn't fazed by the question. "I've spent so many years among you, and yet the naivety of human beings never ceases to amaze me. A blanket orbital strike would affect the flora and fauna of a planet in ways that cannot be foreseen, rendering it useless for repopulating for perhaps millions of years. They only need to destroy the species that evolved from the seed. The planet's ecosystem has to remain intact so that the same species can be settled on the planet again. If the environment was altered too much, the evolution of a new species would, in the worst case, have to be started again, from scratch, and that would waste millions of years. The loss of a planet and an ecosystem that had already been successfully integrated into the harvesting process would be too great. To ensure that the cleansing goes as smoothly and quickly as possible, messengers are sent in advance by the Angels. The messengers take on the appearance of the respective populations on each of the planets and are meant to keep them united and prevent wars. A peaceful civilization without weapons can be much more easily controlled by the Wardens and make the purge less complicated for the Angels."

Konstantin was shocked by this information and, lowering his gaze, he mumbled, "So living in peace leads to punishment." A minute later his curiosity got the better of him. "How can a species in the early stages of its development as a civilization even take on the role of Wardens? How can they monitor the whole planet?"

"It's true that it's not easy at all, but it's not necessary for every last corner of the planet to be monitored. Before the Wardens were created, when there was absolutely no supervision, it had sufficed to have a rough idea of how the civilizations and populations were developing. Really, the only new objective was to prevent another civilization from rising up as one against the gods. The Wardens were instructed to observe the populace, build landing platforms for the Angels' spaceships, and to develop the world."

Yssantis started turning the pages in his notebook again, and Konstantin attempted to sneak a look at what was written there but couldn't make anything out. Yssantis finally found the passage he was looking for and began to read to himself.

* * *

Disappointed that Yssantis had interrupted the conversation just when it seemed to be getting particularly interesting, Konstantin tried prompting him to continue the story: "Surely they must've had to give the Wardens more knowledge than just how to make fire, if they were to carry out these assignments, right?"

"Indeed. Although actually, humans taught themselves how to use fire 2.5 million years ago." Yssantis hadn't looked up from his book as he'd answered. "But yes, the Angels create a portal system for the Wardens on each planet, with concealed access points in lots of different places. It's called Agartha."

"Agartha? I know that name - how is that possible?" Konstantin couldn't contain his curiosity any longer.

"Have you never asked yourself how it can be that certain names and events come up in the Bible and in other ancient texts that humans couldn't possibly know about? You should've asked yourself that question when I mentioned Samael."

"I assume the Angels had contact with other civilizations on Earth and these writings evolved from that over the course of time?" Konstantin mused.

"Partly right, but actually the fact that these ancient texts were distributed throughout the world had more to do with the downfall of the old civilization of Atlantis, in Greece."

"The stories about Atlantis are true then? Where was the city?" The excitement in Konstantin's voice was palpable.

"You'll be surprised to hear that it wasn't that far from here, in the Aegean Sea." Yssantis gestured towards the southwest with his hand.

Konstantin grinned again at the thought of all the possible treasures awaiting him. "Right in front of our noses all these years ... It's high time we made a submarine seaworthy again."

"Don't bother - you won't find anything there today. The city was originally above ground like any other, by the way. But let's not get sidetracked by minor matters. As I was saying, the Angels establish the Agartha network on each planet. At the center of Agartha is a city, and in this city it's possible to exist completely concealed from the outside world. Humans wrongly assumed that the city was in Tibet and gave it the name 'Shangri-La' after a mountain pass in Central Tibet."

"Shangri-La ... so many explorers and adventurers have searched for that legend."

"Pointless," said Yssantis as he turned his book around and pushed it across the table so that Konstantin could read it. It was opened at a page containing a sketch. It depicted an object that resembled a large gemstone. Its surface consisted of multiple asymmetrically positioned facets, the contours of which were, however, very sharp and exact. Just looking at the sketch gave Konstantin the feeling that a pulsating energy was emanating from its inner core and taking hold of his mind.

Yssantis started talking again, jolting Konstantin out of the gemstone's thrall. "Agartha can only be accessed with a relic from the Angels. One solitary light prism that was given to the Wardens."



Konstantin had collected his thoughts again. “So the secret society of Wardens lives in Shangri-La?”

“No, not at all,” answered Yssantis. “The Wardens aren’t supposed to abandon their own civilization. They have a city here on Earth too. It was hidden from the rest of the human population with the help of the Angels’ technology.” Yssantis raised his head slightly and gave Konstantin a mysterious look out the corner of his eye. “Maybe I’ll take you there some day.”

Konstantin smiled faintly. He knew that Yssantis rarely made jokes and this suggestion was thus meant seriously, but he wasn’t particularly eager to meet a people that was in close contact with his most recent enemy. “Why don’t the Wardens live in Agartha permanently and just leave it when they have to?” he asked instead.

“Why do you have guards patrolling the streets of your city rather than putting them all in one room with hundreds of screens to monitor everything?” rejoined Yssantis, remembering the guardsmen that were more interested in a barrel of beer than the lampposts lying on the ground. “Even though your city guard could probably benefit from more discipline, it still fulfills its purpose. It’s important to show your presence in world affairs. It’s true that you don’t age as long as you are in Agartha, but there’s little point in whiling away your days in exile. Time inside Agartha passes at the same speed as outside.”

“Why were the Wardens entrusted with only one key?”

“A single artifact is easier to protect than many - it’s regarded as a divine treasure. No one but the Wardens are allowed to have access to the

Power Stone. The Wardens also have to be able to control who uses Agartha and for what purpose. As I mentioned before, this system introduced by the gods was still very new - in fact, the Lhon’Dar still haven’t been able to find out everything about it. I would happily let you take the lead if you would be willing to personally research the rest,” Yssantis proclaimed. “I’ll tell you now, though, that the Wardens will always be able to locate this stone if it ever goes missing.”

Konstantin ignored this last remark. “Would I ever have heard of this light prism before?”

“That depends. The Wardens on Earth just called it the ‘Power Stone.’ But you may have actually heard of it because it was in Napoleon’s possession for a while.”

“Napoleon? How did he get hold of the stone?”

“Relatively easily, in his case. Much more interesting is the story of how the Wardens lost the stone in the first place, but we will have many opportunities to discuss these old stories when I next come to your city in search of somewhere to stay.”

“You are always welcome here, dear Yssantis - you know that. But the Wardens ... were they given weapons as well?” They had finally got to the point in the story that interested Konstantin the most.

“Weapons are necessary in case other civilizations on the planet rebel. The Wardens were given the technology they needed, but if you’re expecting overpowered weaponry, I’m afraid I have to disappoint you. The Angels wouldn’t trust the Wardens with any weapons that could pose a threat to the Angels or the gods. But they were perfectly adequate for the rest of the population.”

Konstantin listened to Yssantis’s words intently. The possibility of extraterrestrial weaponry made the offer of visiting the mysterious city of the Wardens seem much less intimidating. “So who were the Wardens here on Earth?”

“When the Angels came to Earth 3,512 years before Christ to choose whom to appoint as Wardens, there were two highly developed civilizations: Atlantis and Icnun. They initially gave the technologies to both of them, as a sort of test. The Angels monitored their progress through frequent visits as the method was, of course, still very new only, having been introduced during the harvesting reform. They had enhanced human development before that, too, by passing on knowledge of irrigation techniques and agriculture, as well as rudimentary information about architecture and engineering. Technology accelerates the development of a planet and produces a larger population more quickly. In 3,114 before Christ, the Icnun were finally named the victors of the selections process.”

Slowly but surely, Konstantin began to grasp the interconnections and tried to piece it all together: “Earlier you mentioned messengers that were sent to the planets by the Angels to unite the civilizations. There were many prophets on Earth - I guess the Angels weren’t responsible for everything. Much is explained in human mythology itself. Could you tell me who the Angels sent to Earth in this role?”

“It’s moments like this that remind me that your astuteness is the reason why you were able to build all of this here ... and is why I decided you were the person with whom I wanted to share my knowledge, Konstantin. Humans call this prophet Jesus. His mission on Earth was not particularly successful, though. And, by the way, neither was the Wardens.”

“Whether his mission was successful or not hardly matters anymore, I’d say,” remarked Konstantin indignantly. “The vast majority of the human population was still taken ... sucked up by that Harvesting Sphere in Earth’s orbit.”

“‘Raptured’ is the word you’re looking for,” replied Yssantis, without letting himself be affected by his friend’s emotions. “At least you humans have documented this word in your mythology. And, besides, you took out an Angel. Be happy that your civilization is used to fighting. And, of course, you must have profited personally.”

Konstantin calmed down as Yssantis’s words sank in.

“Indeed, the irony of the human race,” he joked, cheerful again.

They both stopped talking when the heavy velvet curtain at the entrance door was pushed to one side and two figures entered the otherwise empty bar. Mara scurried out of the backroom, where she had been changing the beer barrel.

The two newcomers crossed the room and

sat down at the bar. On their backs they each carried long firearms which were held in place by invisible fastenings and which hung down below the bar stools. Their armor shimmered in a grayish-blue, and a pale orange glow emanated from in-built energy supply chambers on their backs and forearms. As they removed their helmets, with obvious relief, Mara brought them two freshly poured beers.

Konstantin noticed Yssantis’s watchful look. “Don’t worry, there’re a few soldiers from the New World Order here but they’ll be leaving again tomorrow. They actually helped us defend the city. But tell me, where are the Lhon’Dar now? And you haven’t told me what they look like yet!”

“I think we’d better end our conversation here for today, my dear Konstantin. You must, however, have heard in your youth of a very unusual asteroid called Oumuamua. That’s how the first Lhon’Dar contingent came to Earth and Nibiru while their mother ship remained just outside the asteroid belt. The reason for their visit was the signal giving the go ahead for the harvest, a signal that the Wardens had transmitted in 2012 and that the Lhon’Dar listened in to.”

Yssantis leafed through his book one last time, removed a few pages, and placed them in front of Konstantin. “I’ve picked out a few more of my notes for you. Read them when you have time. And thank you kindly for your unfailingly excellent hospitality.”

With these words, Yssantis stood up from the table and made his way across the room towards the stairs that led to the upper floors, where a bedroom was always kept ready for him.

Konstantin was so captivated by the illustration on the piece of paper in front of him that he said nothing as his friend left. The picture of a demonic figure had stunned him into silence.

