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Chapter 1: Main

Chapter 1

Volkr, somewhere near the Belmont Wall

"Yokiv, take a look at this lad."

Driver Dex was a good driver and a good man. Every time I needed a drive to my parents he always gave me the latest paper. One could hardly guess how he or anyone could afford such a thing but I always took great excitement in reading the news. It was the only time I could, and he knew it. I was his only friend and likewise.

He was an old white man, his eyes were pale brown, so such so they looked almost completely black. He wore dirty oil stricken overalls and a worn brown hat, which he never took off. His left eye was covered with a driving lens, as he was nearly blind in that eye without it. This time his poppy voice carried more cracks of disparity as he handed me the paper. My heart still beat fast as the Bolden Letters and print sharpened my soul.

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PLAGUE STRIKES JALISCO

By Samuel Resko

(Sept. 20) 1819

(Jalisco Port) - Republican police and doctors are finally investigating the coughing that has reportedly claimed over 70,000 missing person cases in the neighboring industrial perishes. In the past six cycles, over 500 businesses and 70 factories have been shut down prior to the authorities wearabouts. Many have called for renewed contacts with old Axis states but some are saying that is too slow a response and renewed strikes into the outer wall are needed.

Chelsea Altov of the Reporters Media Center has called the connection "war mongering", "a natural loss of workers and businessmen in a cycle should not cause the Republic to squeeze so easily on old world sentiments."

Regardless, hours have plummeted and some dead are piling on the streets. "Plume smoke of grey", say Artov Mondelev, a hydro-magnetic engineer at Solod, "is that of the dead, burning in the coal fired drums that were once used for fuel."

When asked if he was personally affected by this, "I have friends whome I've known personally, that have left and are not in contact or are missing. My fellow workers have their hours cut or have been fired. I have had an 80 hours per cycle increase, but with sickly work I cannot speak of. I can only hope President Saratov and her Republican Guard can step in to do something. Where are they!?"

p.10B

AUTHORITIES WARN OF INTER-WALL TRAVEL

By Samuel Resko

(Sept. 22) 1819

After Several days of deliberation in Parliament, an official statement was released regarding inter wall travel following fears of the severity of the plague. Parliament Leader Mikiv Rilo said early today, "Entries into the Belmont Wall are forbidden for 2 cycles until Engineering has fingered out a solution to the sickness. If you are sick, please report to your nearest Republican checkpoint in your Perish. If you see illegal entry, report it. If you are unable, Civilians and the Public are authorized to use lethal force in defense of their Republic."

p.11A

MERCHANT SHIPS DENIED ENTRY

By Celistia Cortov

(Setp. 30)

Gondola Heights - Thousands of Businessmen and workmen are camping in front of the Capital Castle Rampart demanding answers from parliament as TWO Vector Class Merchant Hydrogen Ships carrying 4,000 metric tons of Magnetic Copper were denied entry into Gondola Port. "While we care about safety, denying us essential materials will kill us faster than this so-called Plague. This is ridiculous! Do they know how much we paid for these shipments? Can they please just let them through this once?"

Currently there has been no response from the president or parliament regarding the businessmen's demands.

The two merchant ships have been seen a few kilometers from the wall in stationary hover. Rumors from Kiliv Perish report 4 (Four) Republican Interceptors are deployed in the skies and are circling the VCMs. It is unknown if or what will happen if they are low or run out of fuel.

"You didn't read this before you handed this to me, did you Mr. Dex?"

"Oh what's that? Ah yes, uh well I suppose it's a good thing you chose today to see your mum and pop."

My parents lived on the West side of Volkr. It was a quiet neighborhood. I was 28 and they were now in their 50's. Mum was into hypothecary and pop was into building very small mechanical planes that could fit in your hand. Small little things, but proven useful for delivering items around the city.

Every few months I went to check up on them. They were retired, growing old and sick from hard labor in their youth. When I was younger they pushed hard for me to fly ships for the Republic military or become an engineer. After reading that paper I became desperately worried and Dex saw the panic that flustered over me. Without saying a word he stepped on the gas and the wagon almost flipped over the stone roads. I did not care. I needed them to be safe.

Mum did not purchase a large home. It was settled with many neighbors. The gears and golden light were slower than usual. The city was running out of fuel. When we arrived the sun filled the evening with a red burn. I felt afraid. The door looked cold and stale and the wagon's rumble was the only sound in the street. I sat there, stared

for what felt like an hour at the door. Dex let out a huf and dragged his large body out of the wagon. The rumble stopped and I could hear Dex strapping his pistol on his side.

"Okay Yok let's go. I'll walk ya to the door."

"Something doesn't feel right about this place, Dex."

"I know. That's why I'm coming with you."

Twenty steps felt like 100. I let out a breath and knocked a few times. Nothing.

"Are they even home, Yok?"

"They have to be."

"I'll check around back."

I knocked twice more. Nothing. Finally I tried turning the door handle. It felt jammed. After a snap it propped open. A wave of cold air rushed over me and my heart began pounding. It was pitch black.

"Pop!?"

Nothing.

The place looked completely abandoned. Where had they gone?

After a few steps in I heard a coughing voice.

"Yokiv.."

"Mum is that you?"

"Throw coal in the stove so I can see you dear."

I rushed handfuls of black char into the stove. It was smooth and grimy. I shut the grate and cranked a lever on the side. After what seemed like an eternity the creaking noise of the gears slowly turned and a small light illuminated some of the house.

I quickly turned to my mum who was lying on her chair. She looked almost like a corpse. Her skin was pale and she let out a painful cough. She threw her arms out and I hugged her.

"Mum, what has happened? Where is Pop?"

"Haven't you read the paper dear?"

"Yes I have mum! Are you sick?"

"Yes I am. And your father was taken somewhere."

"Why haven't you written the police?"

"Cough Cough. They aren't coming. Nobody has heard from anyone for some time."

I frantically searched the house for anything that would give me any more answers. Half of mum's plants were dead and a few rats had made their way up from under the floorboards.

In their guest room were old pictures of me. I hated those photos. I took some down along with two of pops planes and stuffed them into a bag.

Where was Dex?

"Yok! There's a man here!"

I scurried back to the living room.

"Mum, that's the driver."

"I haven't found your Pop. In fact there's not a soul outside this night. What's the matter she 's sick?"

"Yes."

He placed his hands over the stove.

"She can't stay here."

"What if Pop returns?"

Silence.

"We'll have to get her to your place. When we do we'll have to see where the nearest checkpoint is. Maybe your Pop went to one."

"Cough. Take some of my plants with me."

"Yes we can do that."

"Mum, do you have any magnetic copper or steel Pop left behind?"

"Any weapons too?"

"There should be some in the closet in the guest room."

After an hour we filled the wagon and left. I wrote to my Pop that Mum was sick and we look her to East Volkr. The night's veil descended over the dying city. It was half as bright as usual.

We set her bed in my upstairs guest room. The plants were properly lit and we administered what medicines I had. We fed her and gave her water but she still looked pale and dying. The pain of seeing her this way really started to hit. I couldn't handle it. I cried into Dex. The pain of Pop's missing was also overwhelming. First time I really cried as a grown man.

I passed out from exhaustion on the sofa downstairs. The daylight crept through the windows and I eventually woke with a burning sensation in my chest. I cooked breakfast, meat with eggs. Dex had left earlier.

"Now what?"

There was a note on the table.

"Yokiv, I left but I'll keep my good eye open for any help nearby, Dex."

I couldn't really leave for work with my mum here. Perhaps Sarah could watch her.

My neighbor Sarah was a woman I really enjoyed company with. Never married her but she and I occasionally worked on projects or danced. Surprisingly she was home. She lived across the street, and was happy to come

over, but not happy with the news.

"Oh my heavens , this is awful! Are you sure this is all real?"

"When was the last time you've been out of your house Sarah?"

"Not but a cycle."

"Listen, I'll pay you, just.. can you watch over Nichole while I find help?"

"Uh yeah I guess I wish I could come with you."

"Oh just take the girl out, cough-cough, I won't die yet. You never gave me grand children Yokiv." She yelled down the stairs.

"Ha I guess it's just you and I now."

I hated asking her for favors for she is a very attractive woman but I could not marry her. Something about her personality just didn't sit right.

She was real skinny but was built for projects. When she wasn't at the factory she was at home building something. She wore orange pants and long sleeves with a black coverall. She was also my age but a little more wealthy.

We called another driver into town. That was a mistake.

The Perish Church was overwhelmed with people lined up into the streets. Wagons were parked side by side.

"This is far as I'll go you two be safe."

In the distance were the huge towers of Jalisco some 90 kilometers away. Airships were crowded not in their usual traffic. They were clumped over the city. In our town, officials in the center in and across the church were piling fuel for what looked like an auction. Police were frantically keeping folks away.

"What is happening?"

"Is this one of the checkpoints they were talking about?"

"No it can't be..."

A massive crack in the sound barrier deafened the entire region and all the way to Jalisco. We stood in shock as one of the VCMs I saw in the paper slammed nose first into the ground some distance away.

"There!" A Sarah shouted.

A huge plume of smoke, rubble and Hydrogen engulfed the sky to the North. 3,000 Metric tons of Material and gas had smashed into the ground at free fall speed from at least 6,000 feet in the air. That VCM must have ran out of fuel! It was like someone had dropped a magnetic fusion bomb on the Republic. A shock wave was rushing out in a diameter that was imploding every parish it touched.

"Run!"

She grabbed my hand and we threw ourselves back into the wagon. She pushed her pistol to the driver's neck and told him to gun it. Sure enough we high sped back west back to our neighborhood. The anxiety was unreal as we stopped at my house. We ran inside and threw mum and ourselves under the floor boards. Seconds later we were buried under 10 feet of rubble.

Chapter 2

A salty mist engulfed the lower quarter sometime ago. One day, Oliver lost his dog astray to it. Never returned. It's safe to say that working in engineering was never an easy thing.

"On the organic function of mechanical levers, applied IV." is perhaps my favorite in the series. Frederick Stilt revolutionized our magnificent work with these papers. It wasn't for sale and our plant staff, including I, are forbidden to reproduce it for the market, upon punishment of the Bastille.

I was lucky enough to find work on the project. It paid enough per cycle to stay out of the middle and lower quarters.

The wind blew stiff and I had to fold the manuscripts back into its proper folder to keep the wind from leaving me without work.

The conceptual framework involved grew more dense. On our hand, it can be generally accepted that all matter is organic - Its direction and motion determined by the motion of other conscious matter. What is abysmal is the old millenia idea that we were the only ones. My work involves creating organic sections of the project. We would build a metal machine, but, thanks to 50 years of economic depression, no such luck getting the materials.

There has been talk amongst the government of "vaults to the heavens". Perhaps they're using what's left of us to open it.

In the distance a red sunset drenched the scorched and scarred lands. My patio, the outskirts view, incurred a daily reminder of the perils that still plagued New Milan and her Castilian daughters after nearly 100 years.

75 miles to the East, lies a vast ocean littered with caracases of molten machines once proud and proper. Jalisco and our Kingdom drew swords and guns to the bloody end. Repayments of the war debt ran the banks dry and still do today, sending my countrymen in untold hardships.

What's left are the vaults. The last repayment of debts owed. That is the faith of the new found order. We pray we will reach salvation.

To the West, are the great Black mountains towering so vast. It is above them in clouds where the vaults lie. It is there we will ascend.

Behind me, are the likewise towering metal super cranes of New Milan. We dig deep into the dirt, so heavy, so rich. The King is but the most noble of Kings. Empowered with a Knightly fever that has matched no other King.

Once a year on the telescreen, he plays an Angelic tune of strings atop Mount Wul. His long black hair flowing from under his thin golden strip crown lightly drapes the thin metal armor. After the sky has calmed he then draws his sword to heavens and a streak of green light penetrates the black clouds where the vault doors sit beyond. It is quite the spectacle.

They do not open for his tune or for his sword.

Chapter 3

The way up was shut. I found an iron bar and dug myself out for hours into the topside of the backyard. The air was thick and hot from the burning debris. I stumbled until I was clear of the cul de sac the air cooled and I rubbed my eyes. Much of the neighborhood was leveled and fires and smoke engulfed the area. Bleak sirens could be heard but little signs of life. I was able to grab Sarah and get her out but she was unconscious from the blast wave. I laid her down behind a tree and jogged to a clearing. The huge stone wall was visible and I thought to see if I could make it there. I picked up Sarah and slowly walked us to the shore.

"You there, Stop!"

My heart jolted and I nearly dropped her. There were at least 6 armed men in black overalls that emerged from a crevice in the wall.

"Take them."

"Wait, who are.."

"You only have a few minutes, guy, before that gas kills everyone in the area. We have a boat ready."

I collapsed and they dragged us to a small Token steamer. There was at least 10 others on board all civilian looking.

"What is your name?"

"Yokiv."

The men swam us about 20 feet to a ladder and I sat rested on the side of the boat. Everyone else was standing or sitting looking exhausted and dirty. Sarah was in the cabin on a medical board. The rusty engine cranked away and boat began a slow Maneuver. The night sky grew gray with smoke and dust and little beams of golden light streaked the sky.

I awoke frightened. There was an annoying tap on my head by an old woman.

"Hey you awake?"

I spit out sea water.

"What in the world?"

"You've been out for hours, young man."

The daylight was blinding but I did see clear skies. I could barely stand before she grabbed my hand.

"You don't seem too roughed but least you can do is see the priest."

She looked sad and pale. Her eyes were blue-grey and her hair the same. She wore brown coveralls that were charred and ripped. Behind her were others either sleeping or lightly chatting. On the back of ship was one of the armed men watching the stern. His attire looked strangely new. I couldn't make out from the fatigue but is that a bronze cross?

"Hey, he's awake, good. Come here we have to do a medical exam."

A large force of hand nearly crippled my already numb shoulder.

"Back away."

The old woman swiftly stepped to the side, almost tripping over a wooden plank.

He took me to the entrance of the cabin. There were others like him inside, one standing, the others hunched over on the controls. There were weeps and screams of pain from a side room.

"In here."

I was quickly plunged into a metal seat next to someone else. The thick metal door closed and a man in a purple robe began quickly checking my heart beat.

I see it now. The bronze cross with a silver gear. Kingdom of Milan.

"Who are you?"

"I am Hosar Del. Lower Bishop of the Apothic School of East Latic. Your shoulder seems to have a torn tendon. Take this yellow crystal."

He handed me a small yellow rock that I choked down with water. It immediately began to warm my body and much of the pain began to cease. The man next to me was out of consciousness.

"Haha you've never tasted our medicine have you Jaliscoite?"

"No but I need to know where you're taking me."

He opened the metal door, his robe glistening.

"Not my place to talk. Now get, the captain wants to talk to you."

I felt like a new man. There was a strange energy pulsating through me. The pain in my shoulder was gone. I needed to find Sarah.

"Wait. Put on these."

The priest threw down a pair of white and red coveralls on the bench next to his altar. He shut the door again and filled his altar pool with a liquid.

"Clean your skin, your face. I'll be tending to your brother in the seat next to yours so my eyes will be away."

I felt cleaner than I ever was even back home.

"Okay. I'm done."

"Good, now go talk to the captain."

From the Cabin I could see the front of the ship. The ocean was still vast as we were most likely still miles from land. There were only four crew in the cabin hovering over the controls. Another two entered with another patient, moaning in pain.

One of the men stopped.

"Hey you have another ready captain!"

"What is your name, Jaliscoite?"

He was a towering man. Clean face, looked young with short black hair and red glasses. His coat was a warm gray and bronze with multiple Insignia.

"Are you taking me prisoner?" I fired back.

"No. You were saved from the disaster unfolding. I see you were with a woman no doubt?"

"Sarah! Where is she?"

"She is fine. Waiting for you outside. What is your name Jaliscoite?"

"Yokiv."

"Yokiv. Yokiv we are 30 miles from Port Felix. You are free once you are there."

"Who are you then? Are there more of us?"

"Well.."

"Sir!."

The boat slammed, knocking us to our knees. There were yells and screams from the starboard.

Loud shots rang and as I steadied myself up a large chrome mechanical claw cracked the bridge window sending glass and sea water in all vectors. On the bow of the boat, a chrome mechanical head appeared. Its eyes black and mouth covered in a metal beard. The monstrosity was attempting to crawl itself onto the ship. The weight of the Monstrosity plunged the bow into the water and the Milan troops began shooting at its long chromatic arms. I slid and hit the back of a control panel. The sounds rang my ears and I crawled my way back to starboard where everyone was holding onto dear life, some were tossed overboard.

I saw Sarah holding onto the side and attempted my way to her.

"Yokiv!"

"Sarah!"

She grabbed my arm and I secured myself next to her. As I turned to the bridge a Milan trooper fell, dropping his weapon. The monstrosity was over the bridge cabin sinking the boat now straight down into the water but not fully.

"Grab it!" Yelled the fallen trooper.

It was a short 2 foot rifle. I held down the trigger and golden packets of energy burst from its muzzle sending a shock through my body. A few rounds hit the monstrosity in the

face sending it rolling off the cabin into the water. The buoyant force jumped the ship almost completely into the air and back down into the water. The entire starboard was drenched in sea water. The air was still with no wind but a blazing sun. A deafening yell, a choking roar came from that thing as if it were drowning in the sea. I stood and fired two more rounds at its mechanical arm flailing in the water.

A cracking intensified and the ship moved forward at a quick pace. Everyone on starboard was out laying on the floor choking and moaning. Out from the cabin came two troopers drenched and bloodied.

"Where are we?" I screamed, aiming the rifle at the captain's head. They stood in shock, eyes wide open towards mine with their hands up.

"Whoa, whoa, easy there we just got attacked boy."

"Old machines from the war are still hunting the waters lad. Now put the gun down!"

"Not to interrupt yall but look I see landfall! It's a fort!"

I quickly eyed over to the right and sure enough there was a small piece of land with a concrete tower. It must be hundreds of feet away.

"Look, Yokiv, we'll let you go here. We're not your enemy lad. What happened back in your home in Jalisco was not our fault. Beyond the fort's path you'll discover the truth even we are trying to figure out! You may be the destined one Yokiv!"

I lost consciousness. I was hit in the back of the head. The last thing I heard was screaming. I saw visions of the black eyes of that monstrosity. It's metal claws and arms tearing away at metal and wood. Then I saw Jalisco and my home burning. A cold, sad empty feeling engulfed my mind until I awoke.

Chapter 4

I awoke on a sandy shore. The night had come and the wild tide was pushing my lifeless body up to the grass. 20 feet in front of me was the dark brick of the fort. I regained the strength to crawl up the wall and sat facing the sea. The boat was gone. I closed my eyes taking in the surrounding winds and pains in my body. I stood and collected a bag that had washed up shore. It contained a pistol and small golden coins. The pistol had a purple glow in the chamber and was light enough to store in my pocket but I kept it hoisted. The bag also contained a dry, light brown shirt and pants that I changed into quickly. I guess this was my going away gift. They were nice enough to give me food that choked down. I threw the bag on the ground and made my way slowly down the wall. The fort was small. Only about 30 feet high and probably 30 by 30 feet. Around the corner was a torch lighting the entryway. Perhaps they ditched Sarah here too? I could barely make it out but there was a narrow ground path that extended eastward. On all sides were the ocean but the fogged horizon did give hint to a mountain range.

To the right of the torch was a wooden market stand. Various items and items were left drenched. I grabbed a few coins from it and a black knife. The entrance was dark but open. I grabbed the torch and threw it into the doorway. I walked in and pointed my gun but a winding staircase led to the second floor. I slowly walked up it to find the second floor was lit behind a wooden doorway.

I pushed open the door. It was a large room with a fireplace directly in front of me. On all sides were desks with papers. On the walls were paintings of various men in Armour and machines. Next to the fireplace was a man sitting in a chair. He wore a black and bronze jacket.

He looked dozing off with his cigarette still burning in his mouth.

"Who are you?! Don't move!" I yelled.

The man nearly jumped out of his chair.

"My god you scared me in my sleep. Who let you in?"

"I woke up on the shore from a ship."

I slowly approached him and he was still sitting down startled, staring right at me. He was an old man, white hair, beady gray eyes holding a metal poker. The fire was warm.

"Is there anyone else here?" I asked him pointing the gun at his head.

"No."

"Have you seen a woman here?."

"No, no young man. I haven't had visitors in months. Why don't you put that gun down so we can talk?"

I lowered the pistol and backed up a few feet.

I asked him, "what is this place?"

He grunted, poking the burning logs, "why don't you take a seat?"

I grabbed a wooden chair from one of the desks and placed it opposite from him. He reached over and grabbed a book frantically thumbing through its pages. I looked behind me in case there was anyone else.

"Okay well, you are in an old war ocean fort watch tower called Angliv. The Kingdom you preside in Milan. I take it you are from the East?"

"Yeah, Jalisco suburbs."

"I see. Behind the great wall."

"The suburb I was living in was..."

"Destroyed by a VMC, yes I know that. Word has reached far. But not too far I hope."

"How do I get out of here?"

"You saw the path did you not?"

"Yes but what's beyond that?"

"The town of Angliv. Though I can't be certain if it's still there. You'll find out for yourself."

"Why what's going on?"

He coughed in some sort of sinister laughter.

"You think your Kingdom was the only one to suffer?"

"Where is your King?"

"He has nearly abandoned us. Taking refuge in his vision to a vault over the mountains."

"This better not be a joke."

"It is not. You say you were on a boat?"

"Yes, it was attacked on the way here. They dropped me off here and the boat went elsewhere. They took Sarah and others with them to some Port. Can you be certain of this? Where does this port lie?"

"I'm afraid there are two that they may have gone to. Your best bet is to follow the path and head south along the coast."

"How do I get past the security in the towns?"

"Wear this."

He stood up and burned the Milan Insignia on my arm with his hand. The red hot pain gave way to a blackened Cog and Cross with a bronze outline. I was also fitted with heavier blackened clothes.

"Beware not of the people but of the residue of the war. Those machines in the water also make houses of the air and the ground."

The night still carried on. The old man sank in his chair once again. I grabbed a few more coins and made my way back outside. Along the path I eventually saw lights from the town. It was less than I expected. It didn't look Abandoned but didn't look full either.

The town of Angliv was situated below a hill to a mountain range that followed the coast. It was small, its foundations were old stone brick and metal. Its roads were dirt and there were few lights emanating from the building. The technological advancement was way less than I expected. The entrance was an abandoned gate. I

slipped past and made my way to a tavern. The people there were quiet and few. I bought a room and slept until the morning.

I overslept my stay by hours. There was long knock followed by the door frantically opening to a women yelling.

"Pay us more, yes?"

The town streets were just as quiet as they were in the night. The sun was beating and fog has dissipated. beyond the shore the open sea was met with the tiny dot that was the fort.

"Oh shit."

My heart beat ran frantically as an APC entered from the main road from the south stopping at the abandoned entrance. I slipped behind one of the buildings and eyed its movement. The back lowered and six large hulking men in silver and bronze armor exited the back. They drew swords of chrome and one had a red metallic rifle. He wore a golden head piece. The leader pointed in many directions and four of the soldiers began walking down the town roads, with one in my direction!

I quickly walked in the opposite direction and stumbled into a crowd of people. They were surrounding a food stand. I could hear the metal clanking but I kept my head toward the women cooking sea bass. One of the crowd folk turned around.

"Hey! What are Cylik's men doing here at this cycle?"

I slightly turned my head to see and the soldier stopped directly in front of him. The man was no more dressed in peasant rags but that didn't stop him from glaring into the silver plated face.

"Tell your lord Cylik we have been starved of flour and electricity for months!"

The soldier did not say a word and walked to the right of us down the street.

"That was close." I said.

"Yeah. They do no harm but sometimes I wonder why they even come out here. Say I have never seen you before."

I tried to lie.

"My name is Tylox. I seek the ports south of here."

I showed him the burned mark on my arm.

"Hmm. I've never heard that surname in my many cycles in this Kingdom. You won't find any but 50 miles from here. You mind buying me some bass and I'll tell you the road?"

"Ah That's good. Now follow Interstate 20 along the coast. I don't know who you are but we cannot save you from Cylik. He reigns this region."

"Thank you."

"It's God Bless, young man."

"God Bless.."

"Hmm."

I traversed more buildings until I was able to see the road that led to the interstate. It was mostly empty and I decided to walk up near the foot of the mountains. The soil was dark and rocky. There were red pine trees and rocks that gave moderate cover. For days I walked, not seeing a single vehicle and nearly exhausted I stopped to rest. The ocean was calm and still.

The entire area was not what I had expected. There was an odd sense of optimism among the people here. Many of the townsfolk wore the same attire, worn ragged clothes and an unruly stench. Back home, these people would have been thrown into the eastern Jalisco quarters and left locked with the key thrown away. Regardless of their status, these people seemed to be oddly hopeful, with Blessings and gifts by their King. However much attention was put on their warriors. The Republic Army wouldn't stand a chance against these guys. Luckily for me, there was a decent supply of fresh water from the rain, though, a little salty. Food was my main issue as there weren't any animals. On the plains beyond Jalisco, hunting cycles lasted to infinity. Here, whatever scarred the mountains must have decimated the wildlife too.

On the nights, one could watch as the two moons ascended and perched themselves high above clouds. The light gave great speed to wandering nobles and things alike. One was smaller than the other, a pale blue and one a violet from the red sun. The pale blue was called, "Bella", the Violet one, "Yoyem." Those were the Republic's names. Out here, who knows. The stars in the sky weren't too visible. It was said that only three were used in the Republic's history to Navigate. The rest were blocked by the light of the moons. There was rarely a time when the two moons were never together, and on those days were great gatherings to watch the spectacle. Tonight was no exception. Both were lighting my way.

After what felt like an entire cycle, I finally came upon a lighted building perpendicular to the highway. It was a medium sized wooden structure, although with no vehicles parked. I entered to find an old man sitting in the corner behind a table. He was selling many procurements. There were paintings of the sea, monuments erected of stone, sigils of gears and the like on the walls. On the desk were parchments of scribble, tomes of ancient ideas and probably magic. He sat with light clothing, a long white beard and glasses. It was strange to me that nobody here was equipped with the latest inventions or technology. It was fashionable back home and more importantly necessary to at least buy yourself a coal generator or light chasms.

"Do you have any food?"

"Take what you want and leave the money here."

There were cans. Steel cans of meat that looked more than enough. I grabbed three and threw most of the coins I had on the table.

"Have you looked at any of my art, young noble?"

"Yes, very fashionable. But uh you mind if I look at one of your parchments sir?"

"Very well, the ones there I have had long in my family."

"What do they do?"

"You are not familiar with the schools are you? Very rare you'd get a piece of their sorcery anywhere but here. That one you're holding in particular is very powerful. It shows the whole shape of the Earth, its geometry intertwined."

"Why would anyone want to know that?"

"Hahaha why young noble that is part of the very power of that parchment. I can see it is already drawing your eye. Knowledge is a very fruitful but deceiving thing. Long ago our scholars drew the minds of many from kingdoms beyond by simple theory. It challenged their views and drew them into our hands like a magnetic spell."

"So if I read this too long.."

"It may not matter to you but you would not unsee what words have designed, even in a thousand years."

"Okay, what about this one?"

"That particular one, if I'm looking at it right, belonged to the Seventh Daughter, Kyla. She was or still is the Castilian Noble of Wellby. Its lore contains the description of the sky and the ground, both converging in the horizon."

"Wait, what? How or why would that be important for a queen?"

"Many like you have wondered the same. But careful young noble, I am but a feeble old man. There are many younger, stupider and stronger that would befool your head to a blade for heretical questions."

"I don't mean offense. I'm curious."

"Then why not make a purchase?"

"Okay, this one seems like the right one."

"Are you not going to buy the other?"

"Are they synonymous?"

"You will see when it is done. But be warned again, young noble, what one sees in the works of the great Leviathan, one cannot unsee."

"I'm sure I can handle myself, sir."

"There are many more. Why not relax yourself in the whole work?"

"It's an entire series? I'm afraid I'm low on coin."

"Not a series. It's a manuscript. Its entirety 'The Great Leviathan'. Tell you what, you finish those two I'll have you borrow the rest. But you must recite the meanings of those texts to me when we meet next."

"Yeah sure."

The old man threw a leather bag on the table and carefully wrapped the parchment in the top compartment with the food in the other. The parchments were thick but seemed capable of a quick reading. There was another matter I needed to attend to. Where am I to sleep?

On the foot of a cliff overlooking the sea there stands an old cabin. I rummaged through and called it my own. I filled my belly with meat and sat outside and began reading the first parchment titled, "From my window, lies the road the Sky travels."

From the Tower of Vylcia, the Sun and Moon march, its stars are soldier servants

Albry Kyla of W.

Before the War, In my youth, I recall the fine felt blades of grass. Much of it blush, much of it dead but its numbers were strewn in an infinitesimal line in the ground of our realm. As far as the Kingdom went, beyond the other lands, were armies of blades seemingly standing still. What purpose did they fulfill in a halted formation? It's as if, I wondered, the highest King gave them an order to halt, as if they were marching when he first created them. A King of men would never order his men to stand still for eternity.

Into my later years, I began to rise into the Kingdom of Wellby and now I sit atop the tower Vylcia watching the evermoving sky. I now know, and hereby transfer my wisdom to King Felmore, that there is no inherent difference between the blades of grass and the stars. Why has the highest King given an order to the stars to stop marching? I can see now. That they have not. They too are indeed moving. Marching onto the vault. The sky and the soil converge into the horizon. We as humans, much like the stars and the grass, march onto the vault. The sun and moon have not opened it, for they are too high. The grass and the servants have not opened it because they are too lesser, too low. It is only as it is known, that the truth lies in the middle, that we, the true Nobles will open the vault.

All things will follow behind us.

That must be their religion. But surely no sensible man would ever follow such a belief. I imagined the sky and ground converging. It was almost unbearable. My hands shook as I slipped the parchment back into the bag. I had to get to the port and find Sarach and my way home before I became fully stuck here.