

# A WALL FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLES IS NOT ALWAYS SO FLAT

They had cleared the luminescent enclave in the club because that was the best space to really visualize things in. Sigmund had had to gather together whatever Fortu he could find. With all of the crises exploding in the world the population was spread thin. Strategists were most in demand to make sense of the chaos around them and Alastair was the only one who had still been unattached to someone's control center. He now stood in the center of the floor of the large room as a different form of chaos world in orbit around him.

The enclaves in the club were six tall domes which flanked either side of the main hall. Domes was not an accurate term because their shapes were more like eggs and their height made them almost towers. The front two were filled with small rooms for private meetings but the other four were single spaces almost 30 meters in height with an upper part above ground and a lower part below. Each area was attuned to an element. The enclaves of water and nature extended both above and below. Air was above dark and light above earth. It was the last in which they were now. Earth formed a flat floor 20 meters in diameter. From it's edges the alabaster shell of the walls reached up and merged overhead in a crystal skylight that glowed with bright Marden sunlight, even at night. Normally the walls of the air enclave were covered in flowing tapestries and nets hung about for aerial creatures to rest in, but today that had all been cleared. The room was barren.

Alone Alistair<sup>S</sup> stood in the center, muttering to himself. Also on the floor were Jahain<sup>M</sup> and Tareka<sup>P</sup> gesturing as if moving a great weight for in fact they were. Huddled in one corner were three research Fortu<sup>R</sup> completely immobile, acting only as storage for Alistair<sup>S</sup> who was loaded well beyond capacity. It was from Jahain's and Tareka's hands that great glowing panels seemed to emit filling in the room in layer after layer of silking transparent tapestry. But the tapestry did not flutter in the breeze, instead it glowed with blue and purple and green light as runes and sigils and data flowed across its surface colliding and collecting in pools of dark meaning. It was within these sheets of moving data that Sigmund<sup>D</sup> and Peter<sup>M</sup> hung, suspended, levitating in the air. High up on one of the many balconies of the large space Ozzie<sup>M</sup> could be seen looking down, also gesturing to maintain the constant flow of data. Other than Alistair, who most believed only mumbled to himself as an affectation, the only sound in the room was the hum of power emanating from the great rune panels.

As Sigmund moved to another angle the sheets of moving data transformed from a busy map of currents to a sinusoidal undulating membrane with spots of color. From this angle Sigmund was viewing the aggregate emotional response of the sentient beings where space represented distance from a functioning gate. The conversation was intense and spirited but entirely conducted over a tight network also maintained by one of the research Fortu. I am seeing some patterns but I don't know if they have meaning other than that people are afraid, said Sigmund. We are still not getting nearly enough data to operate at full efficiency, have you located patterns

to the data disruption yet Peter? I have, Peter replied, but many are the obvious weak points and the damage is already done. I am not sure that we can get more actionable intel out of them. Still, there is something that is nagging at me about this whole thing. Lets remap the space again and pick a new set of attributes to look at.

There were two guardians in the room merely because this many Fortu in one place, who were so absorbed in an activity was a liability. They looked around the room staring right through the panels of information as if they did not see them. D'Jan would sorely have liked to be here but it was too soon after the episode in Valhalla and his system could not handle the level of intensity required by this room.

We need to think differently, exclaimed Sigmund in frustration, using the same tools, no matter how much power we push into them, will not produce different results. What can we try? Several suggestions flew immediately on the links connecting the small group but none seemed like they would add to the situation. Perhaps we should try something which should not work, Tareka volunteered. Reality is fragmenting and perhaps we are too much part of it to see. Sigmund knew this was dangerous and if taken too far could propel further the very thing they fought, but there was an appealing logic to it. Time! He called, let space represent time and the attributes will evolve as I supply the data. Alistair, you should concentrate solely on presentation, let the information flow through you and Peter and I will interpret. I will provide the source data now while Ramon and Sasha act as a buffer for the volume.

Sigmund settled into a deeper level. He knew that time was not a place that he would go to or a linear progression of actions that you could move forward and backward through. Instead time was a conversation about causality and inception. Where did the source come from, why did the change manifest, who can feel the difference and who sees it as having always been. The temperature in the room seemed to drop though the Fortu did not care. Smells of deep damp things that should have remained covered and a crackling prickling sensation became apparent to creatures with neither the sense of smell nor sensation of skin to perceive them. The data on the panels blurred and changed but it also seemed to disappear and became nothing more than the waving hands of Jahain, Tareka and Ozzy, and then it was not even those but an endless sea of the worlds which it represented. Sigmund heard a cackling laughter as if someone somewhere were deriving great glee from his choice of tactics. He knew that beyond this doorway was fraught with danger, and he should not go through it but just open it and peer a bit on the other side. It was dangerous to look outside of what was, because that could sometimes be an opening for things to come back which had been expunged.

The Fortu in the room developed wavy shadows. There were images floating around them of other eldritch wills. Things they might have been in another life, another past. Some were expected and some were not. There were times in the past when the world was much more connected and viewable. Some recent and some not. Sigmund was careful to stay only within the pasts of his own experience. He carefully sifted through the waves of assertion that were trying to alter him, sorting them by which had tried to build on the assumption of other ones. He tried not to judge or analyze, just report on the data objectively. Who pushed, how successful

were they, who resisted, who compromised and who just turned away. Do not get lost in the sea of gentle waves. Do not go through the door, just hold tightly onto the doorframe and peer through, but for a second. But the door opens on to a vastness. The waves are crashing above threatening to capsize the door and then receding back revealing a great abyss to the trough of the wave until the next wall comes towering towards the door. And then Sigmund's leg gives away, or at least that is the feeling as something snaps and his perception tilts sideways. He has a sensation of falling... vertigo as he manages to pull back, shutting the door. Closing off the possibilities that can never be completely banished from the mind except by retreating back into the primal cave and hoping the fire makes the darkness outside disappear.

Perception of the world began to return to him and Sigmund realized he was missing something important. His body. In the blocking out of the world he seemed to have transformed into one of the energy forms and was inhabiting the screens themselves which were hanging in the air. Hanging but not glowing in the same way they had before. Some areas were intense with a dark brilliance that was painful to look at etched in runes and symbols he would rather not see, and others seemed dull and almost burnt out. Sigmund realized that one of the guardians was applying stasis to the research Fortu Sasha who seemed partially charred. Sigmund wondered if he had done something very bad. He could tell that she was still alive, but all of the research Fortu seemed to have incurred injury of some sort. Peter also seemed to have incurred some sort of injury but in his case it was only manifest as a steady stream of curses.

Well, this was a setback. Time to collect the data, give everyone a break to recharge and apply some healing to Sasha and then regroup and perhaps try something less costly, unless Peter's curses were because the data that had been revealed was something they should pursue.