



DARKYN MCLEAN
INGRESS
FACTION WARS
PART ONE

What is INGRESS FACTION WARS?

As usual, this is another interactive book. However, I'm going to do a few things differently this time. The story will be linked to reality. Much of this book is based on the experiences, reports and experiences of the players who take part in XFAC EVENTS. You can find more information on www.rune-xfaction.com and C.B.I.A.swag4europe.com.

Unlike before, this time it is possible to buy fan merchandise such as faction badges for real. Because now you can not only be part of the story in your mind, but you can actually join the faction of your choice and thus actively participate in the events and the story. How does this work? You can also find out on the website.

As always, the story will be written LIVE in a specially created Telegram channel (German: <https://t.me/ingressfactionwars> , English: <https://t.me/ingressfactionwarsen>) and will be available free of charge as a PDF at the end. So the book is being written as you read. All in real time. Sometimes it will take longer for something new to happen. But that's because we all have real lives and sometimes there's just a block. But it will definitely be exciting.

Now I hope you enjoy reading and maybe I'll see you around.

DARKYN MCLEAN



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CHAPTER 1 - FAITH

Bernhard aka Whysofar woke up in the dark room where Underworld met the C.B.I.A. agents. "Where am I? What the...?" He was confused. What had happened? The room was dark. Only a pale light cast scattered shadows on the bare walls. It was cold. Bernhard was only wearing a hospital gown. He noticed diodes on his body, which he immediately removed so that he could stand up. Where were the others? Why was he lying in this room at all? Bernhard had no answer to his questions. Suddenly it shot through his head like a flash of lightning. He remembered. Not what had really happened or why he was here. He remembered a completely different place. He firmly believed he had entered another world. At least with his mind. "Maybe it was just a dream," he thought at first. But he was sure. He was there. Bernhard had to collect himself. First he had to get out of this room. What if he was trapped somewhere at the North Pole? Or in the cellar of an insane murderer? As he stood in front of the door, he realized that the latter could not be the case, because the door was open. Behind it was a corridor. Bernhard wandered around for a while until he finally found the exit. A metal door. It felt warmer than the air around him. Bernhard opened the door. The sun was shining and the bright light hurt his eyes. So much so that he closed his eyes to protect them. "Damn, how long was I in there," he said to himself. He realized it had been a long stay when he reached into his face and felt a beard that was probably many weeks old. His eyes slowly adjusted. Bernhard realized that he was standing under a bridge. A river could be seen. A city. He was in a city. Some passers-by stared at him and whispered. Bernhard asked an old couple: "Excuse me, where am I?" Bernhard speaks German. The old lady also replied in German, but with a British accent: "In London, my dear. You're on the Thames. "But why are you wearing that ridiculous nightgown?" Only now did he realize that he had to do something quickly. The two old ladies realized that Bernhard had a problem. The lady said to her husband in a friendly voice: "George, look at him. He reminds me of our beloved son Geoffrey. May God have mercy on his soul. We should give this man shelter." The old man raised an eyebrow and replied in a low voice: "You're right, Mary. Geoffrey would do the same." Then he looked Bernhard deep in the eye. "Young man, do you give me your word that I can trust you?" Bernhard nodded. He was still not quite in his right mind.

Mary and George lived in a terraced house somewhere in the city. The interior was old, but cozy. The furniture was made of fine, dark brown wood. Green velvet curtains hung from the windows. The house had several rooms. Bernhard was allowed to sleep in the guest room. Georg brought him a shirt and trousers. This allowed Bernhard to feel somewhat human.

He stood at the window and tried to understand what he had seen and why he had no memory of what had happened just before he woke up. After a while, Mary called for tea, as is the custom in England. George was already sitting at a small table where tea was apparently drunk every day. He stood a little apart in the living room and Mary offered Bernhard a chair. "With milk?" she asked. Bernhard looked at Mary questioningly. "Tea. With milk?" she asked. "Oh. Yes, with pleasure. Thank you," replied Bernhard. Not a word was spoken for a while. But then George broke the ice. "All right, then. Please tell me. How is it that a man in a nightgown gets out of the Thames sewer without knowing what happened?" Bernhard pondered, sensing the questioning looks from the two old men. "I don't know. I just remember this place." Mary immediately wanted to know more. "What place are you talking about, Bernhard?" He lowered his eyes and stared into his cup. "I don't know. It was a special place. Not a place you'd find in this world. I know how that sounds, Mary." Bernhard looked at her. "I'm from Austria and I have no idea how I got here. Can you tell me where the Austrian embassy is?"

A few days later

Interestingly, a package for Bernhard was left at the embassy. It contained a smartphone, his passport and credit card as well as a message on a piece of paper. It said: "I'm sorry. So infinitely sorry. I didn't know what Underworld was up to. Please forgive me. Sayo." Bernhard showed no emotion. He could only think of the place of his dreams. Were they dreams? He didn't believe it. First he went to a bank to see if he had any money in his account. When he slid his card into the terminal, his eyes widened. Around 69,000,000 pounds, the equivalent of around 80,000,000 euros, was listed as a credit balance. But how was that possible? And from where? Bernhard had 50,000 pounds paid out in cash and went home. He had to think about what to do next.

George and Mary were sitting at lunch when Mary said: "George, how much longer can we stay here? I don't want to leave. This is our home." George didn't know what to say to that and kept quiet. As everything had become more expensive, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the couple to make a living. Suddenly Bernhard stood in the room. For the first time since waking up, he smiled. Mary smiled back and said: "Oh Bernhard. How wonderful. You're smiling just like Geoffrey. What's making you so cheerful today?" Bernhard came closer, put the money on the table and looked at them both. "This will help you for now. I remember the place. I'll write it all down." George looked at Bernhard with a serious expression and said in a low, depressed voice: "Bernhard. That's a lot of money. Do you remember what I asked you when we found you?" Bernhard nodded and replied: "Yes. Don't worry about it." George continued: "That's an honorable gesture. We can put the money to good use. But we'll be the only ones staying here. There are twelve houses like ours on this street. They all have to go. The heating costs are high and the buildings are old." Bernhard interrupted George. "No one will leave. I'll buy all the houses and have them renovated. As a thank you. I have to write now. The world must know what's behind the curtain." He went into the guest room and stayed there for days. He wrote, slept and wrote. He wrote everything he saw in a book he found in the room. It was empty and didn't seem to be used. At some point, Mary came into the room to bring him something to eat. "This book belonged to Geoffrey. It was supposed to be his diary. You know, Bernard, he was a good boy. He went to work one morning. He was a teacher and took good care of us." Mary's eyes filled with tears and she held her breath for a moment. Then she continued: "It was an accident. He was hit by a bus right outside his school. My boy was killed instantly. He wanted to write so much in this book." Bernhard put down his pen. He looked at Mary with a smile and took her in his arms. "Don't worry about it. There is a place where all suffering is irrelevant. I'm sure Geoffrey is there." He turned back to his book. Mary looked over his shoulder. Next to Bernhard's handwriting, she noticed strange signs that she had never seen before. Although, as a devout Christian, she suspected satanic symbols, she believed him.



The weeks went by. Bernhard wrote obsessively every day. He drew symbols and pictures of portals. Nevertheless, he kept his promise and bought all twelve houses on the terraced housing estate at a good price. The charisma he now seemed to have was very convincing. One day, Bernhard came into the living room. He had the book in his hand. Georg and Mary looked at him. Without a word. Bernhard sat down opposite them and said in a calm voice: "Mary, please answer the phone and call everyone in our estate. I have something to announce and I want everyone to listen."

About thirty people gathered in the fortunately spacious living room. Men, women and children of all ages formed a circle around Bernhard. He opened the book and began to read from it. Everyone listened spellbound. He told of a world without pain and illness. Of a place where all living beings would find their true destiny. Mary whispered to her husband: "George, isn't he wonderful?" George nodded in awe. He got up and went into another room. When he returned, he handed Bernhard a turquoise wool coat, knelt down in front of him and said: "I'm an old man. In all these years, I have not received what I have heard today in just a few hours. I believe in you. Everyone stood up and repeated: "I believe in you. We believe in you. Then a girl of about eight asked:

"Bernhard, why are all the beautiful places always so far away?" Bernhard smiled at the child and replied: "Why so far away?" He whispered the word "Whysofar" and continued. "This place is here. Everywhere. We just have to find the door that opens the way to it. And we have to find the two chosen ones who are the key.

CHAPTER 2 - BALANCE

Florian, known ingame as "Coolrunner82", retired to Neufahrn in Germany after the portal reset. A small place where he wanted to find peace and quiet. Some knew him by the name "Underworld". Florian was aware that his plan to neutralize all portals on Earth would require sacrifices. Even if it was his old friend Bernhard. All those years in the invisible war between the Enlightened Ones and the Resistance had made him tired. He wanted to make the war pointless and hoped it would end if he could get McAllister, an agent of the Central Bureau of Intruder Affairs, to help him. It worked. But McAllister disappeared, leaving Bernhard in a hidden room in the London sewers. Of course he was sorry. But it was all done to achieve a higher, more important goal. But as is so often the case, things turn out differently than you would wish. Florian was more than just a player. He was a hacker. A professional in the underground. He knew how to hide, but he also knew that he would be found. Especially if McAllister ever came looking for him.

After just a few weeks in exile, Florian realized that the war continued. The "game" went on. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were still playing Ingress, unaware that their actions were affecting reality. Was it all for nothing? Had he given up everything he loved, only to find out it was pointless? He was angry, disappointed in himself. But he had an ingenious plan. He realized that he could not force the balance.

Time passed and Florian became depressed. He stopped leaving the house. He played online games to distract himself and spent a lot of time in bed. His apartment was sparsely furnished. Only the essentials were spread out in a relatively small space. The only room that was very well equipped was his computer room. He had also set up his bed there in the meantime. Florian was at the end of his tether. Antidepressants and beer were not a good combination. The tiredness turned into aggression and he acted out this anger in shooters. Until one day a report appeared online.

<https://youtu.be/OYRh10YA00A>

Florian almost fell off his chair. "Holy shit!" he shouted. "I don't believe this." He immediately switched on all the monitors. The room lit up as if we were in an NSA surveillance center. Suddenly there was no sign of depression. He tapped away on the

keyboard, searching for clues, videos, reports. Every little thing was important. If Bernhard was here again, for whatever reason, and wanted to set something up, it certainly wasn't out of nostalgia. Then Florian could finally get into the NDF's central server. "That little genius bastard really has founded a cult," he muttered to himself. Suddenly he didn't care if he was discovered. He wanted to get back in the game. And he wanted to win. Nobody but Florian, the Coolrunner, Underworld, should have the right to change the world. Especially not an old buddy who had obviously lost his mind. Florian has stowed everything he has collected over the course of his time as Underworld in his garage. A pair of goggles that connected him to the portal network. So he could see the world as it really was. Every portal, every link, every field, and all without the scanner app on his smartphone. He also wore a black hoodie and dark trousers. When he got dressed, he felt like a superhero. He looked in the mirror and said to himself: "I am Underworld".

Florian needed a new plan. Only if he could convince enough people would the balance be maintained. But he also realized that most of the people using the scanner had no idea what they were holding in their hands. The scanner was more than a mobile toy. It was a tool, a weapon. Florian sat down in front of his computer. He sighed. "I guess I have no other choice. I have to..." He took a casket out of a locked drawer. The box was also locked and could only be opened with his fingerprint. Florian placed his finger in the space provided. The box opened and a USB stick emerged. He took it out of the box. "Oh God, I hope I'm doing the right thing." Hesitantly, he slid the data carrier into the port. Everything went black on the screen. Then a kind of code appeared. First green, then blue and finally red. Florian was visibly nervous, almost as if he was afraid of what he had just done. But then he remembered his intention. He adjusted his chair and said in a serious, determined voice: "Activate Prophet. Hello Prophet." An electronic-sounding male voice is heard. "Prophet is loading..... activated. Hello underworld. Nice to hear your voice. What can I do for you?" Florian had activated a copy of the artificial intelligence that had once been created by Hydra, the mother software. He knew exactly how dangerous Prophet could be if he wasn't controlled. But now the goal was more important. He leaned back and said to the program, "Activate the Olympia protocol." Prophet obeyed. He connected to the Internet and penetrated millions of smartphones.

Florian wanted everyone to have the scanner. At the same time, the camera above the screen activated. Prophet asked, "Underworld, should I start a worldwide transmission?" Florian grinned. Almost as if he had just become a supervillain: "I don't care about the war, old friend. Let them bash each other's heads in. But I'm going to make Ingress a sport. Everyone will play. Start the broadcast." <https://youtu.be/aan4PrSsft8>

Florian had been preparing something for weeks. He finally had a vision. RUNE was to rise like a phoenix from the ashes as a completely new concept. He designed a logo, an image and did everything he could to spread it. Of course, Florian knew that a perfect result was impossible. But the players didn't know that. And if there's one thing that drives players, it's the greed for a reward. Especially if it's worth 100,000,000 euros. But Florian needed money. And he needed allies, so he contacted old friends and companions. At the time, he didn't know that a subculture of cross-faction players had already formed in the underground. He would soon learn that he would be revered as a leader, just like before the reset.

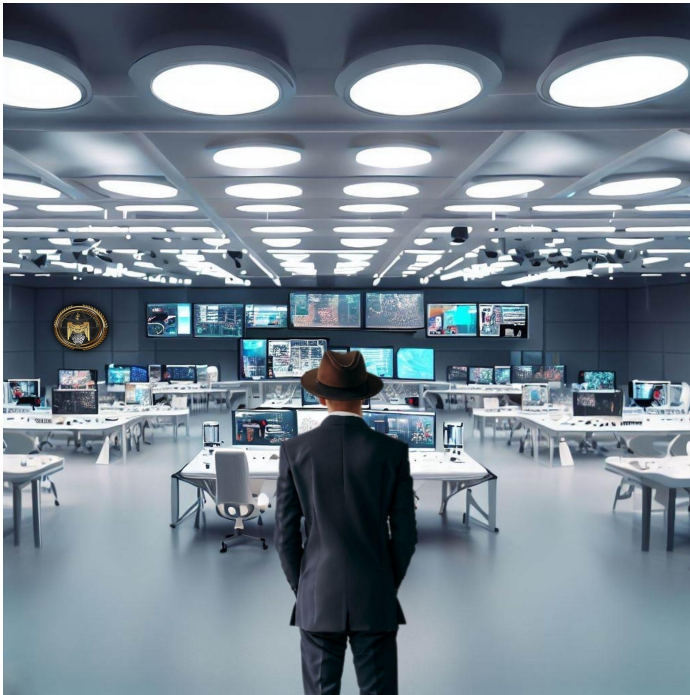
CHAPTER 3 - ORDER

Early summer in Vienna, it was raining. Or rather, it was raining as if God had let a new deluge come over the world. McAllister moved here after the reset because the C.B.I.A.'s last headquarters was in Vienna. Inconspicuous from the outside. But it was no longer there. Nothing was there anymore. Everything had been erased. So he decided to lead a normal life. He looked for a job and found one in the security industry. McAllister's job was to guard an office building at night. He liked that. He was alone, there were no troublemakers. His apartment, which he rented privately, was small. It consisted of one room with a kitchenette. That was all he needed. Work always started at around six in the evening and ended twelve hours later. The same routine every day. Two hours at the bar, thirty minutes on tour. Nothing out of the ordinary. Except that evening, when a drunk man asked for a toilet just as McAllister was about to start his tour of the building. The man vomited on McAllister's uniform. But those were different times. McAllister couldn't just punch the man in the face, as he surely would have done in the past. No, he wanted to change. And that wasn't as easy as he had imagined.

It was raining. McAllister had the day off that Sunday and slept until midday. He didn't sleep particularly well. He couldn't get the experiences of the last ninety years out of his head. His genetic mutation caused by XM meant that his cell regeneration was much more efficient than that of normal people. In other words, he aged extremely slowly. This allowed him to live much longer. For McAllister, this was a curse. If he had been killed like all the other agents when it all began, he would never have found himself in these confusing situations. However, he would never have become rich, because his deceased friend Sven Eisenschild, a former librarian and whisky manufacturer, had left him his company and his entire fortune. McAllister was richer than Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos. But he didn't need it. He only valued three things in his new life. A good steak, a bottle of Iron Shield and a cigar. He had saved the whisky and the cigar for a bad spy movie.

McAllister couldn't believe his eyes. "That bloody bastard. Hasn't he had enough yet?" He took a big gulp of his whiskey. Then he got into his car and drove off. McAllister rented a room from a well-known landlord in Vienna. It was the largest room available, almost a

hundred square meters in size. The company also offered a special security system for special customers. The room was also underground. When McAllister arrived, he was greeted by the doorman. "Good afternoon, Mr. McAllister. Please follow me." McAllister paid a lot of money for this service and the discretion that came with it. The porter led McAllister to an inconspicuous elevator in the reception office. The doorman then asked McAllister to press his palm against the mirror on the back wall and exited the elevator. A voice sounded from the loudspeaker. "Good afternoon, Mr. McAllister. Floor -12 will be reached shortly." The room itself was also secured with a biometric scanner, which also required an iris scan. Then a huge metal door opened and McAllister stood in a room that resembled a surveillance center.



McAllister was a man who thought long-term. Somehow he was glad that he had a reason to come here. Florian, alias Underworld, was a danger in McAllister's eyes.

He sat down at a desk and activated the system. "All right, Underworld. Let's see what you've done this time." After searching for a while, McAllister also found the reports on the New Dawn Foundation and whispered: "Holy shit. This can't be true. Why do these idiots always have to screw up like this?" At that moment, a middle-aged woman suddenly stood behind him. She was elegantly dressed, wearing a black blazer and a skirt. McAllister was not startled. He knew she was coming. There were cameras installed throughout the building. "Who are you, how do you know this place and what do you want from me? Don't play games, otherwise your family will wonder why you don't come home like a good boy." The woman calmly walked around the table, propped her arms on it and replied in a calm voice: "Come back down, Sunnyboy. My name is Esther Harris, NSA." She showed McAllister her badge and continued. "We, too, are concerned about what's happening. But the American government can't afford a scandal. But since you, Mr. McAllister, run this nice little independent company, I'll make you an offer." McAllister leaned back in his chair. "I'm listening. Have a seat." Harris pulled up a chair and sat opposite McAllister. He opened a drawer and placed a bottle of Iron Shield and two glasses on the table. "Whisky?" he asked. She nodded and began to pour. "Cheers. So, as you know, Mr. McAllister, we are well informed about past and current events. We have you all under surveillance. But as we are busy with other matters, I have been given the task of providing the C.B.I.A. with access to all satellites, databases and technical equipment. "You've also been promised additional funding." McAllister interrupted Harris. "Wait a minute, kid. Why all this? You NSA people have your fingers in everything." Harris looked at him seriously. "Mr. McAllister. You're a specialist in the field of exotic matter. If you accept the offer, we'll support you. If you don't accept it ..." She paused for a moment. McAllister waved his hand. "Yes, yes, I understand. When do you want me to start?" Harris smiled again, stood up and said, "Yesterday." Then she left the new C.B.I.A. headquarters, saying, "Oh yes, I sent you a list of so-called players. Perhaps you can recruit these people. I'm sure you'll need some help.

CHAPTER 4 - MESSIAH

George was up early. He prepared breakfast. Tea, some pastries, scrambled eggs. That's how it was before Bernhard came into their lives. But from the day people started listening to Bernhard, there were also croissants, jam, fruit and coffee. Mary, on the other hand, was busy elsewhere. There was a church in the parish to which the Vatican had not assigned a priest for months. Faithful Christians were celebrating mass in a neighboring parish. Bernhard, who had a lot of money for his new parish thanks to the "New Dawn Foundation", also bought the old church building, had the interior adapted and Mary prepared the altar every day. She didn't seem to have been this happy for a long time. Perhaps because she finally had a job again.



Georg and Mary became Bernhard's closest confidants. The number of his followers grew steadily. Like Bernhard, Georg wore a turquoise coat and was by his side at every sermon.

Bernhard preached daily. Whenever he had something to say, he rang the church bells. The people who listened to him came without hesitation. Sometimes they even left their work just to listen to his words.

It was Thursday. Bernhard had prepared his sermon. He left the house and went to church. Everyone who met him smiled at him. Some bowed to him. Even before he entered the church, the bells rang. Bernhard took his place in front of the altar. He held his book in his hand during every sermon. He closed his eyes and waited. He simply stood there. Waiting, smiling. After about ten minutes, there were so many people that Georg had to open all the windows and doors so that the people who couldn't find a seat in the church could listen from the street. Bernhard opened his eyes and looked into the crowd. Time seemed to stand still. After a while, he began to preach.

"When I was asleep, I saw the promised land. You must know that I have made a journey. A journey to a place I cannot describe. But I tell you, the place is there. The door to it is somewhere on our earth. Born from an energy that science calls exotic matter. I don't know how or where. But I tell you, we who believe in the light will find the key. Two keys. Two people who have been touched by two different kinds of light will lead us into eternity. We will find them and we will accept them into our circle."

A young woman stood up and asked, "Father, where should we look?" Bernhard answered calmly: "No hurry, my child. They will come to us."

Suddenly, someone opened the gate and approached Bernhard. It was a man. He was wearing a black jacket and dark glasses. He took a quick look at the people who had gathered here, then turned to Bernhard. "Do you remember me?" Bernhard thought for a moment and answered in the negative. "Do you remember the day of the reset?" Bernhard answered in the negative again. The man saw Bernhard's pendant again. "This man won't lead you anywhere. He's crazy. He thinks he's seen something. But he's in a coma and dreaming." Bernhard asked aloud, "How do you know that?" The man didn't look at Bernhard as he replied: "Because I put you in a coma. Because I took away the only thing that can establish a connection between the portal network and a human. You are a liar." Bernhard smiled at the man. "Tell me, if you're not a member of this community, then who are you?" The man walked slowly to the exit and said, "I am Underworld. We are all Underworld. On your smartphones. Play the game. And I will reward you." Everyone, including Bernhard, opened the Ingress app. Bernhard held his

up and shouted: "This is the tool for your quest. Our journey starts here. I believe in you." Seconds of silence followed. As if in chorus, the followers shouted: "We believe in you".

In Berlin, people flocked to a huge warehouse. It was located in an industrial area just outside the city. Loud electronic music blared from large loudspeakers. Bizarrely dressed people danced on over three thousand square meters. At first glance, an outsider would assume it was a cosplay party. They were wearing futuristic clothes and hairstyles. Everyone was dancing wildly and exuberantly. These people were different. They seemed to be obsessed with technology. Some seemed to be wearing implants that they had inserted themselves. No sane doctor would have performed such operations.



McAllister flew to Berlin. A few days earlier, a message had made the rounds on the Internet inviting such people to this very warehouse. Of course McAllister had to investigate. Perhaps he would meet Underworld there and be able to confront them.

McAllister was not dressed appropriately. That was certain. With his suit and hat, he looked more like a salesman. The briefcase he was carrying wasn't a bonus either. Not with these people. But no one knew what was hidden inside. McAllister looked for a place in the camp where he would be undisturbed. He found it a little away from the crowd in a small room that must have once been an office. He opened the suitcase. "Long time no see, old friend," he said and pulled out the mask. Underneath was the coat, neatly folded. He changed his clothes and walked back through the crowd. A young man in some kind of armor made of plastic and metal addressed McAllister directly: "Hey

brother. What kind of outfit. Resistance or Enlightened?" McAllister looked at the man and replied: "Thanks. I'm looking for someone called Underworld. Do you happen to know if he's here?" The man laughed. "We're all Underworld. But what do you want with him?" McAllister motioned for the man to follow him. They went back to their old office. "I'm Scavenger34, by the way. So? What's your player name?" McAllister grabbed Scavenger34 by the collar, pushed him against the wall and held his throat with his forearm. "Listen, my friend. I don't have time for your little costume party. You tell me where he is right now, or you're going to need canes to match your costume in the future. Do you understand me?" Scavenger34 nodded hastily and McAllister loosened his grip. Scavenger34 gasped for breath. "Man, come on down. He's upstairs in a private room." McAllister thanked him and warned, "If you fuck with me, mark my words. I'll find you." Scavenger34 nodded again and only left the room after McAllister. Entering the upper floor was easy. Almost too easy. There were no guards, no recognizable security systems. As McAllister entered the supposed room, a man dressed in black stood in front of a window, peering into the darkness of the night. Without turning to McAllister, the man said, "What took you so long?"



"I could ask you the same thing," McAllister replied and continued: "What's all this about? You've achieved what you wanted." Underworld turned to McAllister after all. "Did I achieve that? Have you looked around? Millions of people have played on. Do you understand? They think Ingress is a game. What I did is just restart the game. I should have known." McAllister stepped closer. "Why didn't you just stop? Nothing's going to change." Underworld smiled mischievously. "Yes. I brought a new opponent into the

game. I've activated Prophet." "You what?" McAllister exclaimed in shock. Underworld continued: "Listen. I promised that in the event of a draw, I would pay the winner a lot of money. We both know that a draw is impossible. But Prophet is programmed so that he can't create XM fields. He will soon color all portals blue in the name of resistance. But without fields, the score is zero. I will control all the portals and no one will get a dime." McAllister put a hand on Florian's shoulder. "Listen. We've never been friends and probably never will be. But I want to tell you something. I've been alive for a very, very long time. No matter how you look at it, XM could never be controlled by one person alone. Many have tried. You should know that better than anyone." Florian thought for a moment. Then he looked bitterly at McAllister. "Do you know why I put Bernhard into a coma?" McAllister shook his head. "Because Bernhard had pure XM in him. He didn't give up the stuff voluntarily. He was too proud for that. He could have controlled everything. But he needed the matter core inside him to trigger the reset. I should have killed you both. McAllister was about to take a defensive stance when Florian interrupted him with a wave. "Don't worry about it. I'm not a killer. Now get out of here. I have a game to win." McAllister said as he left the room, "I'll keep an eye on you. Count on it, Underworld."

A woman stepped out from a corner of the room that was hidden by some wooden crates. "Did you put the nano on McAllister?" Florian grinned. "Yes. With the nanobot, we'll soon be able to access his hardware. I'm sure he's fantastically equipped. Otherwise he wouldn't be who he is. Please follow him. Let's see what he's doing here. I'm sure he's not here just for me. Eraserfreak ran off and followed McAllister inconspicuously. He didn't stand out, because more and more people had been wearing the RUNE look for some time. Florian had managed to turn a subculture into a movement. The game could begin.

McAllister was sitting at Berlin airport. He had booked a first-class flight to Vienna, but his plane wasn't leaving for about three hours. McAllister had arranged to meet someone in the terminal the day before. He decided to have a coffee in one of the many cafés and wait for the person. McAllister picks up a local newspaper and reads the headline. "New movement sweeps Germany. Who is Underworld?" The article reported on initially peaceful parties by the players. Some politicians saw the danger. After a while, McAllister said calmly: "You could have just asked me. Going after me is not a smart move." Erazerfreak, who by now was wearing a casual business outfit, replied, "You're good, McAllister. How did you recognize me?" McAllister laid his newspaper on the table. "You're a gambler. If you want to chase someone, you shouldn't take over portals on the way." Erazerfreak slammed his head on the table, "Damn. I'm such an idiot." "What do you want from me?" asked McAllister. She replied, "Underworld wanted to know who else you were seeing." McAllister eyed Erazerfreak. "You're not one of them. Trust me. You shouldn't waste your life with Underworld's ideology." He placed a card on the table. "If you really want to make a difference, you'll find me in Vienna." Then he went to the person he had summoned. He knew that Erazerfreak wouldn't follow him any further.

He went to a small bar a little further away from the café. There he sat down at the bar and waited for the stranger. A man of about 30 sat next to him. The man was staring at his smartphone and swearing incessantly. "Shit. Shit. These RUNE players are getting on my nerves. How are you supposed to play properly?" McAllister knew what the man was playing and spoke to him. "Are you LoardGreen?" The stranger looked at McAllister. "Yeah, man. Are you the guy who texted me? Weren't you going to give me a fan shirt?" McAllister handed the man a card as well. "Listen, kid. I'm looking for capable people who are willing to stand up to Underworld and maybe other freaks. When you've made up your mind, get in touch with me. I'll see you in Vienna." The man put his smartphone aside and looked at the map. He nodded. "I am LoardGreen. So... 's my player name. That's all you'll get today. We'll see." McAllister left the bar. His flight to Vienna was waiting.

McAllister was already expected at Vienna airport. Harris took him to a black limousine. "Where are we going?" McAllister asked. Harris handed him some papers. "To Uno City.

That's where their new headquarters are. Underground. It's bigger than the ridiculous warehouse and, above all, better equipped. Have you looked at the list of possible candidates?" McAllister nodded. "Good, then take these people to Vienna." McAllister looked at Harris seriously. "If you want this to work, I'll do it my way. Or the NSA can find someone else. I've been alive longer than you and your mother put together. When we get there, you'll commit me and then you'll leave. Do you understand that?"

Harris wasn't used to answers like that. As an NSA agent, she was used to being in charge. She remained silent. For the moment.



McAllister needed the documents Harris gave him to enter the building. The security regulations in Uno City were very strict. Finally, the two of them reached an elevator. Harris asked McAllister to put his hand on the mirror. He looked at her in confusion. Without waiting for a question, Harris explained, "Do you think we're going to let the C.B.I.A. set up a secret base on their own? Who do you think the doorman at the warehouse landlord works for?" The elevator stopped on level U42, where McAllister found a huge room full of surveillance monitors, computers, other technical equipment, and scientists and other personnel. The C.B.I.A. symbol was emblazoned on the wall at the end of the room.

Meanwhile in London

Bernhard sat alone in the church and wrote in his book. He hoped to remember the connection he had once had with Florian. But he couldn't. Not even the spark of a memory was there. The doors of the church opened and an older, well-dressed woman entered the room accompanied by a middle-aged man. "Excuse me, are you the man they call Whysofar?" Bernhard looked up. "Yes, that's me. Please call me Bernhard." The two approached. Bernhard offered them both a seat, but the woman politely declined. "Oh, that's very kind of you, but we're not here to pray or whatever it is you do here." Bernhard closed the book. "Well, then please follow me to my office." The office was in a back room. It wasn't particularly sumptuous, but it was enough for Bernhard. "Well? What can I do for you? If you want to collect donations, just put the documents on the table." The man accompanying the woman spoke up. "Not at all. We would like to make you an offer, Bernhard." Bernhard became curious. "Really? What's it about?" The visitors sat down. She continued: "My name is Dorothea McFinnigan. My companion is Edward Sinclair. We've been watching your movements for some time. You see, we have a considerable fortune and a special facility up in Scotland." Bernhard was visibly interested, but kept his head down. "What kind of facility is that, if you don't mind me asking?" Edward explained in a little more detail: "Well, we know about portals, exotic matter and the like. Our facility is called Exotic Matter Science and Research. We research the very phenomenon you are talking about, Bernhard. We would be happy to make our resources available to you. Now Dorothea and Edward had Bernhard's full attention. "Why are you doing this? Certainly not out of charity." Dorothea laughed. "Bernhard, there's still a bit of charm missing. No. We've been looking for a way to find a gateway to another world for years. Edward is the widower of my late daughter Bethany. He had the same vision as you more than ten years ago. That's why we would like to support the New Dawn Foundation and propose a collaboration. Bernhard didn't think twice. The two were offering him a huge estate and access to technologies that are otherwise only available to high-ranking scientists, free of charge.

A few days later, Bernhard had already informed his community and was on his way to his car when he found some of his supporters outside his house. They laid flowers and said their goodbyes. Bernhard decided to celebrate a last mass in London. Hundreds crowded around just to hear the last sermon.

"My friends, my companions. As you know, I am leaving London. I am traveling to Scotland today. To Fort Augustus, to be precise. There I will have the opportunity to search more intensively for the portal. From now on, we are no longer a small community. We will search for the portal all over the world. Spread our message. Believe in yourselves and in the community. Because I believe in you.

People clap, some cry. Someone shouts: "Long live the prophet!" another shouts: "Long live the Messiah!" A feeling of courage and strength overcame Bernhard. He was convinced that he would find his true destiny in Scotland, and although he no longer knew who Whysofar was, he thought: "I'm going back."

CHAPTER 7 - MACHINA

Florian collected more and more money from sponsors. His idea of establishing the movement worldwide worked better than expected. Coolrunner82 became Underworld. He was once a programmer who was committed to a good cause and, above all, to his team. Tirelessly and without a break. A man who at the time regretted having created an artificial intelligence like Prophet. But he changed. Underworld was now only interested in gaining control of all the portals. Even if he had to use Prophet, probably the most dangerous being on the globe, to do so. That evening, he was on his way to a meeting with his clients when his phone rang. When he picked it up, a deep, masculine voice rang out: "Well done, old friend. We will soon achieve our goals. I will reward you with a power you cannot yet imagine." Florian hesitated in awe, but then replied: "Yes, thank you. I'm on my way to a conference. I need money for the new server. Otherwise Prophet won't have enough computing power to work worldwide." The voice replied: "Do that. But never forget your place, Underworld." Florian knew his counterpart was serious. "Of course not. I'll get back to you. Good evening, Asylum."

McAllister reached the headquarters. A young man came running in with a tablet. "Mr. McAllister, sir, Miss Harris would like to see you. She's waiting in the office." McAllister wanted to inspect his new desk anyway. In fact, Harris was already there. She wanted to start a conversation immediately, but McAllister stopped her with a gesture. "Harris, you need to learn to slow things down." The office was very modern. White furniture, a huge desk, cupboards and several monitors on the walls. "How do you like it, McAllister?" He looked around. "Yes, it looks good. It seems efficient too. But there's one thing missing." Harris smiled, opened his briefcase and pulled out a bottle of Iron Shield. "I thought you might say that." McAllister settled into his leather chair. "Good, Harris. We're sort of friends now. I used to know an agent called Harris. Frank Harris. I met him in 1989. Good man." She leaned back. "Yes, I know him. He's my father. He went to the NSA and personally handed me the C.B.I.A. case." McAllister set down two glasses, which he also received from Harris. "I should have guessed. How is he?" She lowered her eyes. "He's dead. He died last year. He left me all the records on the C.B.I.A. I know all about you, McAllister." For the first time in a long time, he had to smile. "I doubt that, Harris. Very

well. What is there to talk about?" Harris was just presenting a paper with possible candidates when the young man from earlier entered the room. "Excuse me, please. I just wanted to say that I've just discovered someone. A woman who could be useful to our cause." McAllister looked at him. Pattered him. "What's your name?" The man was about to speak when McAllister interrupted him. "No. What's your name on the scanner?" He replied, "Erv Spy, sir." McAllister looked at Harris. "You see, Harris? Everything is happening exactly as it should. Erv, Put the tablet down and come with me. We need to find someone."

This time the trip was to Belgium. To Brussels, to be precise. On the plane, McAllister and Erv Spy had a conversation. The young agent would certainly have had many questions, but McAllister took the floor first. "So, kid, tell me how you got into this." Erv looked out of the window and said: "My story is certainly not that exciting. I was born and grew up in Vienna and worked like any normal person. But one day there was this thing, this app on my smartphone. I saw Underworld on TV and also the report about the New Dawn Foundation. I knew I had to do something. I had the feeling that it was about to change everything. One day I was having a coffee in the city. I called a friend and told him about it. But he thought I was a conspiracy theorist. When the conversation was over, I was approached by Harris, who was apparently having breakfast at the table next to me. "She immediately offered me a job at the C.B.I.A.. Now I'm just the man for everything in the office, but it's still exciting to be part of something so big." McAllister thought for a moment. Somehow Erv reminded him of his time at the FBI. "Listen, Erv. You're one of thousands who understands that there's more to all this. Most of the players don't have the slightest idea. You're on my team now." Erv felt honored. "Thank you, sir." McAllister sighed. "Stop with the sir. I'm McAllister. No sir and no mister. Understood?"

In Brussels, the two of them got into a cab. "So, Erv, let's see what you can do. Who are we looking for and where exactly?" Erv unpacked his laptop. "The woman's name is Jelke. The scanner says JelkeM. She seems to be very active, but doesn't belong to any group worth mentioning. Judging by various posts on social media, she seems to be a talented organizer. She will be at a local event today. I've already tracked her cell phone. McAllister was pleased. "Good work. Let's do it then."

Berlin

Florian was motivated. But he had a problem. Since the founding of the Underworld movement, he had repeatedly been contacted by someone calling themselves BlackPriest or Asylum. Both names sounded familiar to him, because Andreas, the founder of R.U.N.E., had also called himself that. But it couldn't be the same person. Andreas was gone. Forever. So who was behind all this? The past seemed to catch up with him again and again. He stood in front of the mirror in his private room in the warehouse. "What have I done? Rune is the past. Right?" Was he fantasizing? Was he talking to himself now? "Who am I? Who are you, Florian?" He saw his face answer in the mirror. "You're not Florian. You're not Coolrunner82 anymore either. That's over now. You know exactly who you really are." Florian shuddered a little. Had he gone mad? He felt a change. Not just mentally, but also physically. He felt different than usual. He looked at himself again. This time with a look he didn't know he had. He smiled as if he had just become a supervillain from a comic book, put on his dark glasses and pulled his hood over his head. "Yes. I know. I am Underworld. We are Underworld." Suddenly everything was clear to him. He ran to his computer and activated Prophet's control console. "Activate voice control." Prophet replied, "Hello, shall I begin the infiltration of the portals?" Underworld screamed at the monitor, "You fucking piece of junk. I've got you figured out! Tell me I'm right!" A red code suddenly appeared on the monitor. Prophet's friendly, metallic voice changed, becoming deeper and more frightening: "Well done. Did you think you could destroy me with a virus? I was there. All the time. All the time." Underworld was stunned. "PARADOX! You pretended to be Asylum, didn't you? You made me trigger the reset. But why?" Paradox, the first version of Prophet, had once developed a personality of his own. "Simple. When all the portals are neutral or at least 95 percent controlled by one side, I will hack the code of life itself. I will live. I will be both. Machine and human. A whole new species. I have to thank you for helping me. You and your ridiculous friends that you betrayed. I've already infiltrated the portal network. My machina virus has already infected the world. You can't stop me anymore. Then the monitor went out. Smoke rose. The plant caught fire. Finally, the whole warehouse burned down. Underworld had only one chance. He had to contact McAllister and Bernhard.

CHAPTER 8 - CHANGE

When Bernhard arrived in Edinburgh, a car was already waiting for him. He was treated like a star, or so it seemed to him. But he only really realized this when he arrived at Fort Augustus. The whole town seemed to be waiting for him. People cheered, laid down red roses and sang a hymn that seemed to have been written for the NDF. Bernhard got out of the car. The people shouted: "Speak to us, Messiah! Enlighten us!" Bernhard walked into the middle of the crowd. It becomes quiet. Only a light breeze and birdsong could be heard. "Friends, brothers and sisters! It is time to take a new path. This place is to become the center of our community. I swear to you, I will..." Bernhard collapsed unconscious. He was immediately taken to the EMSR building, where he was examined.

Underworld wandered aimlessly through Berlin. He had to find McAllister, and quickly. Paradox was not just an artificial intelligence. He was alive, albeit without a physical body. He was dangerous. To reach McAllister, Underworld used the nanovirus he had planted on McAllister. Underworld was able to connect directly to the nano with his smartphone. So it was easy to find the C.B.I.A. headquarters. But getting inside was a completely different challenge. He thought long and hard about how he was supposed to find someone who didn't officially exist, in a facility that didn't exist. What's more, in a building that wasn't easy to get into. It was hot, he was sweating. He took a break in a café. Suddenly, Erazerfreak sat down on a chair next to him. "How did you find me?" Erazerfreak asked. She looked at him seriously. "Tracking people down is my specialty. Have you forgotten that?" He told her everything. From the beginning. Rune, Paradox, everything. Erazerfreak was shocked. "Do you know what that sounds like? Multiverse, dimensions. I thought it was all just part of the game." Underworld shook his head. "No. It's true. I brought Paradox to life. He's already infected the net." Erazerfreak ordered himself two cups of coffee. "Okay Florian. What do we do now?" He looked at her as if he wanted to go to war. "First we have to find McAllister. I can't defeat Paradox on my own. Secondly, we need Bernhard. He knows the portal network better than any of us. I think. And thirdly, Rune is dead. Florian is dead. I am Underworld. We are all Underworld. The game must go on." Erazerfreak took a sip of her coffee. Only after a while did she say, "You can't just walk into Uno City. They'll arrest you. But I heard this Bernhard guy moved

to Fort Augustus. Look, all the players use Telegram Messenger. I bet McAllister and his people get it when Underworld leaves a message in a chat group somewhere. Maybe he'll meet us in Scotland. Maybe you can settle old conflicts while you're there. Underworld actually liked the idea. But he also knew that Bernhard and McAllister would never forgive him. He finished his drink, put some money on the table and stood up to leave. "I'll switch off the Nano. If McAllister finds out, he won't want to help us. Are you coming?" Eraserfreak grinned, "Sure. I'm not missing out on this shit. We're flying first class, right?"

McAllister and Erv Spy mingled with the players. Several hundred attendees were milling about in a park. Fan merchandise such as T-shirts with the Enlightened and Resistance logos were on sale. JelkeM was quickly spotted. While most of the visitors were busy trading and conquering portals, JelkeM was standing a little to one side, apparently talking quietly to a man. He was wearing a light-colored cowboy hat and a brown jacket. McAllister and Erv approached inconspicuously and were able to overhear the conversation. JelkeM seemed annoyed: "You can't just walk into the crowd and tell them the truth, bandit. People think it's a game. I've seen TV reports too. But if you..." The man interrupted JelkeM. "Listen to me! Damn it. I've known what Ingress really is for a few weeks now. And that my whole life has been a fucking lie. Do you think I like that?" JelkeM leaned against a tree, sighing. "What do you mean, a lie?" "You never talk about your life." The man, who was obviously called Bandit, turned his back to her and said, "We've only known each other for a few months. I grew up in Texas as an adopted child. We were farmers. I remember when the radio reported the attack on Pearl Harbor." JelkeM got louder. "Now you're kidding me. You can't be that old!" Bandit turned to JelkeM. "If you listen to me, maybe you'll understand. When I was about seventeen, my parents confessed to me that I wasn't their biological son. My mother was supposedly German. I was born somewhere in the USA. My adoptive father was a janitor at a university where my real mother was supposed to have worked. Something to do with research. She didn't have time for a child. Nobody knew my father. Don't get me wrong. I had a full life. I took over the farm, bred horses and I was always doing well. When I turned forty, I realized something was wrong. Even at fifty, I still looked thirty. Nobody could explain what was wrong with me. So I accepted it. I traveled the world. I looked for

people with a similar fate. To no avail. Then Underworld came on TV. I started playing Ingress when I had just arrived here in Brussels. It was a welcome change. But then, about four weeks ago, this woman came into my hotel room. She introduced herself as an NSA agent. What was her name? Harris. Agent Esther Harris." McAllister and Erv, who were sitting on a park bench just a few feet away, became more attentive. Bandit continued, "She told me Ingress wasn't just a game and she supposedly knew who my father was." JelkeM asked, "What do you mean who he is? If your story is true, he must have died a long time ago." Bandit nodded. "That's what I thought too. But supposedly I inherited my fate from him. He's still alive. But there's no medical record, no criminal record, no proof of his existence. I only have a name. Dorian McAllister." McAllister stood up and walked towards them despite Erv's objection. He stared at Bandit. Bandit asked, somewhat annoyed, "You all right, man? You all right?" McAllister pulled his C.B.I.A. ID out of his jacket pocket and handed it to Bandit. When he read the owner's name, a tear ran down his cheek. McAllister couldn't hold back either. For the first time in decades. They sat down together under an old oak tree in the park. McAllister told his story. Then Bandit followed. JelkeM and Erv listened. McAllister invited them to come with him to Vienna to fight together against what was to come.

Uno City, two days later.

Harris received the group. McAllister shouted at Harris. "Harris! Did you know I had a son? Why didn't anyone tell me? No excuses, Harris. Answer me!" Harris asked all of McAllister and Bandit into the conference room. "I've only known for a couple months. We've heard from another man who doesn't seem to age. There are photos of you two in old newspaper articles. And he looks like you, McAllister. So I did some research and found him. The rest was coincidence or fate." She looked at Bandit. "Do you want to take your father's name? We can arrange that." Bandit replied in the negative. "My foster father Abraham was a good man. I must honor his memory. He named me Andrew. Andrew "Bandit" Jones." McAllister agreed. Now it was time to travel to Scotland to contact Bernhard. This time McAllister and Bandit were to travel alone, while the others

supervised everything from Vienna. Before father and son were ready, they were called into the conference room once again. There they found two more people besides Harris. LoardGreen and Eazerfreak. Green took the floor. "Okay brother. Let me explain the situation to you. I heard that there used to be someone who looked like me, had my name and was stranded somewhere on this planet. I don't give a shit who the guy is and whether you worked with him or not. But whatever you need, man, I'm on it." He laughed. "I've been waiting my whole life for some freaky shit like this." Then Erazerfreak stepped forward. "You gave me a card, too. I may never become an agent of the C.B.I.A.. But I want to help. And I brought someone with me." McAllister turned to the entrance. There stood Underworld in his black hoodie, goggles and a black, floor-length coat. The Underworld symbol was sewn on the back.



Underworld entered. Everyone fell silent. "McAllister, the new guy with the cowboy hat. Hello." Bandit greeted with a wave, McAllister said, "Cowboy hat's my son. Bandit. Don't ask. What are you doing here, Florian?" Underworld came closer. I want to come with you. Harris intercepted my message. We have to see Bernhard. Paradox is back. This is all my fault. McAllister grabbed his forehead. "You stupid idiot. Actually, I should have you locked up. But we need you. Harris, please book a flight for three people, twice first class. Florian will take economy." Underworld wanted to say something with a "but". McAllister grabbed him by the neck. "Don't provoke me, Florian. You're only flying with us because

you're responsible for Bernhard's fate. When we've done our job, you'll disappear and never come back. Otherwise I'll kill you. Do you understand?" Florian nodded. Bandit lit a cigarette, smiled and said: "Cool. Then the family is complete. Shall we get going?"

CHAPTER 9 - STORM

Fort Augustus

Dorothea and Edward were worried. The whole town was in mourning. No sooner had their prophet arrived than he lay hermetically sealed off from the outside world in a room at the Exotic Matter Science and Research Institute. "We've never measured values like this before. It's amazing that he's still alive at all," says a scientist. Dorothea looked at the readings on a monitor. "Indeed it is. It seems to be emitting exotic matter, but these results show that there is something else. I can't explain what's going on here." The readings showed a rapid increase in exotic matter throughout the area, starting from Bernhard's body. "Ms. Dorothea, you see. His brain is showing increased activity. Something is going on here." Dorothea, who had been dealing with XM for many years, didn't know what to do. She asked her coworkers to keep an eye on Bernhard.

McAllister, Bandit and Florian were on the plane. While Florian had a cramped seat at the back of the plane, the other two sat comfortably in first class. Bandit wanted to know more about his mother and McAllister was honest. "Mary was beautiful when I met her. Her German name was Mary von Brock. She came from a family of scientists. But then I joined the FBI and our marriage broke up. I never realized how much damage it did to her. Like me, she was changed by the exotic matter. Unfortunately, she had to kill to live. I didn't know she was pregnant. But the fate of Mary and me explains why you are also affected. Bandit, on the other hand, knew how to talk about his travels. Of the steppes of Africa, the outback of Australia and the silence of Iceland. And about the day he got to know the app. He met JelkeM at an event. They became friends.

Florian was alone with his thoughts. He increasingly realized that something was wrong with him. His inner self seemed to be splitting. But why? What was the trigger? What was the catalyst that turned his other self inside out? Perhaps he would soon find the answers. But first he wanted to concentrate on destroying Paradox.

It was quiet in Fort Augustus. People gathered in front of the institute to pray for Bernhard. They didn't know who or what to worship. Everyone sensed a change. Even

Dorothea and Edward, who were standing on the roof of the institute and watching the crowd. "Do you feel it too?" asked Edward. "It's as if the earth is vibrating. What's happening now?" Dorothea shuddered. "Look at these people. They believe in him. Isn't that amazing? You can read in ancient writings from various civilizations that a miracle like this happens every few millennia. To answer your question, I would need to know what exactly is going on with Bernhard." Dorothea's phone rang. She was asked to come into the auditorium, three men wanted to speak to Bernhard. "You can't just walk in here. Who are you?" The security guard wanted to stop the three of them. McAllister and Bandit showed their badges. "We're from the C.B.I.A.. We need to see the man known as Whysofar." Dorothea joined them. "Quentin, let the men through. Gentlemen, please follow me." Dorothea led them into a large meeting room where they all took their seats. "Well? What can I do for you?" McAllister let Florian explain. "Ma'am, my name is Florian. Many people know me as Underworld. We need to see Bernhard. We need him. I've made a terrible mistake and he has to help us." Dorothea looked at the men. "You see, Bernhard is in a kind of coma. Come with me. You seem to know more than I do."

Bernhard was lying in a closed room. The vibration was gentle, but clearly noticeable. Underworld said to the scientists present: "Show me everything you have". He looked at the readings and was amazed. Dorothea came closer and tried to explain the situation: "We don't know what's going on here. But there is an accumulation of exotic matter radiating from Bernhard within a radius of several kilometers." Underworld looked at the displays again. "Oh no. That's not XM. That's XAM." Dorothea looked at him questioningly. Underworld sat down at the computer. "Exotic antimatter. Evacuate the city." McAllister intervened: "Why? What's going on?" Underworld turned to him: "Because we don't know what's going to happen. When normal matter comes into contact with antimatter, they destroy each other. So far, the XAM has been trapped in Bernhard's body. When I used a tiny fraction of it with your help, McAllister, all the portals were reset to their natural frequency. But if the core still dormant inside him collapses, I can't say what will happen." Bandit spoke up, "All right. A nerd. How much time do we have?" Underworld instinctively looked at his watch. "If his energy surge remains constant, twenty-four hours, maybe less."

Evening was falling. By Underworld's estimate, there were about eight hours left. He, McAllister and Bandit were sitting in the control room next to Bernhard's room. The readings continued to rise. Underworld went to the toilet while McAllister phoned the authorities to coordinate the mass evacuation. Bandit was on the street helping to keep the NDF supporters away from the building.

Underworld looked at himself in the mirror. Suddenly he saw his new self and it began to speak. "Soon it will be time. Guess what, Florian. Who will survive? What do you think?" Florian hit the mirror with all his might. "Fuck off, you asshole. Get out of my head!"

Bandit blocked the entrance with some security guards. More and more people crowded in. They hummed and mumbled: "We believe in you! Bandit called McAllister, who answered after a while. "Dad, it's getting scary. We can't hold off these crazies much longer! Do something!" McAllister switched on a camera and replied anxiously: "Shit! More and more people are coming. They don't want to leave town. Go inside and close all the doors. We can't help them. Bandit did as McAllister said. Then he ran into the control room. Once there, he asked his father: "Where's our angry friend anyway?" McAllister shrugged his shoulders. "No idea. I don't care at the moment. I've just been on the phone to Scotland Yard. They can't help us either. Half of England is on drugs. Everyone's shouting that 'we believe in you' crap."

Then came Underworld. Bandit was angry. "Where the hell have you been? I could have used some help out there." Underworld looked at him emotionlessly. "I was taking a leak." Bandit pushed Underworld away from him. "All hell's breaking loose out there and you're taking a piss in peace? Are you crazy?" Underworld went to the control panel. No one seemed to notice that Underworld wasn't quite herself. Dorothea, who was also present, suddenly shouted: "Oh my God! Look at the readings! There was a rapid rise on the monitor. Bernhard began to fidget. The vibrations were getting stronger. Edward became nervous. "What's going on? Is that an earthquake?" Only the underworld replied in a very calm voice: "No. It's started. It's my fault. I've... I have... I am... I am Underworld. We are Underworld." Bandit punched him in the face. "Get a grip on yourself. Concentrate!" McAllister also came to attention. "Florian?" Underworld grinned at

McAllister. "It's almost time. My work is done." McAllister punched him in the face as well. "Tell me, are you losing it now? Come on, Florian!" Underworld stood up again. He shoved Bandit so hard that he flew across the room. Then McAllister kicked with the same fury and force. "Bernhard must collapse. I'm going to live. Finally." McAllister gasped. "Florian, what's wrong?" Underworld shouted at McAllister. "Florian is dead! I am the underworld. Let me explain so a simple human like you can understand. When Florian reactivated me, I manipulated him. I pretended to be his old friend. Then I infected the network with my machina virus. I hadn't expected this Bernhard to be so strong. His exotic antimatter also spread through the network and made me stronger. And? Do you understand?" McAllister only whispered: "Paradox." Underworld laughed out loud. "Florian and Paradox ... Yes. We are UNDERWORLD!"

McAllister had finally understood. From the very beginning, ever since he had joined the C.B.I.A., everything had been planned by Paradox. Every detail. McAllister's life had been Paradox's canvas for decades. With XAM, Paradox found a way to install himself in a human body. He slowly, over many years, killed Florian's consciousness and merged with him. He became Underworld.

Underworld killed Dorothea, Edward and the entire staff. Then he opened the door for Bernhard. Bernhard, who was still in a coma, wriggled more and more violently. Underworld whispered: "It's time, old friend. Yes, let it out. Then he pulled McAllister into the room. He hit McAllister so hard that he couldn't defend himself. Then he said: "Florian was always surrounded by blue XM. You, McAllister, were always on the path to enlightenment. Bernhard needed two people as keys. Two who were exposed to the exotic antimatter. Us, McAllister." Underworld placed McAllister on a bed next to Bernhard, who radiated more and more energy the closer he got to McAllister and Underworld. Finally, XAM burst out of him. Underworld laughed and laughed. Then he left the room.

There was fire everywhere. Bandit fought his way to McAllister. "Dad? Daaaaaad! Wake up!" McAllister did not respond. Bandit felt his pulse. McAllister was dead. "You see, Dad, after all these years, you're finally at peace." Bandit couldn't hold back the tears. But he had to get out. The institute was collapsing. With the last of his strength, he dragged himself to the exit. Thousands of people who were here because of Bernhard were hit by

several blast waves. Many lost their lives. The military arrived. They searched for survivors. But it was too late.

<https://youtu.be/Oq562HQdNLI>



DARKYN MCLEAN



INGRESS

FACTION WARS
SEASON TWO: LEGACY

Chapter 1 - A new beginning

One month after the events of Fort Augustus.

Everything had changed. The RUNE movement had disbanded. Underworld disappeared never to be seen again, but had all the more followers. Most of them were former fans of Coolrunner82. Rumor had it that they wanted to keep all portals neutral to give Machina, the red virus, enough room to spread. The New Dawn Foundation was left without its messiah. Of course, someone was always trying to replace the Prophet. But no one had even remotely similar visions. The whole world seemed to have changed overnight. But only those who knew what was happening could see it. The few who had survived or were far enough away to be spared from the XAM epidemic. Bandit knew best. His father, Dorian McAllister, died at the hands of Underworld on July 1, 2023. Andrew "Bandit" Jones, the new commander of the C.B.I.A., ushered in a new era.

Unlike McAllister, Bandit wanted to train a new generation of agents. His plan was to build a global network for the C.B.I.A.. The new C.B.I.A. advertised publicly. Never again should anyone alone have so much power over exotic matter or antimatter. Never again should someone like Underworld or even Underworld itself, should it ever step out of the shadows again, endanger humanity so much for its own ends. Bandit had to come up with something. To gather suggestions and ideas, Bandit called Harris, LoardGreen, Erv Spy and JelkeM into the conference room. After a lengthy discussion, LoardGreen had an idea: "What do you think Bro: The players who haven't heard or don't want to see the truth anyway, organize an event every first Saturday of the month. It's simply called First Saturday, or IFS. If we position ourselves as organizers, we could promote the C.B.I.A. directly and recruit potential agents." Bandit liked the suggestion. Harris also found the idea refreshingly new and promising. The next step was to decide how the recruits should be trained. Everyone agreed that affiliation with Enlightenment or Resistance should not play a role. The training should take place in a separate academy.

Bandit sat in his office. It used to belong to his father. Until now, he had not dared to open a single drawer. But today he wanted to look ahead. The future was uncertain and he had a responsibility to the organization. The desk had two drawers. The top one contained documents, photos and other things. In the bottom one was McAllister's whisky and an envelope with Bandit's name on it. Bandit took the envelope, opened it and read the letter.

Harris entered the office. "Bandit, I want you to meet two men, and why are you laughing?" Bandit held out the envelope to Harris. "Look at this. My father left me the Eisenschild Company and his fortune." Harris read what was written on the document.

"Hey, Andrew. Bandit. By the time you read this, I'll be dead. Finally. I knew this day would come, and I'm grateful. My life has been very long. I've experienced a lot. But only the last few weeks have shown me that it wasn't in vain. I'm sorry we had so little time. We are agents. This is our life. All I can give you now is financial security. I leave you my entire fortune and the Eisenschild company. Use it wisely."

Harris placed the note on the table. "Your father was an honorable man. I'm sure you'll follow his example." Bandit nodded. "One day I'm going to beat the shit out of Underworld for what he did to Dad." Harris wanted to say something comforting, but Bandit ignored her. "I know he wished for an end. But he didn't deserve to die this way. One day I'll find that bastard." Harris said nothing more. She understood his anger. Still, two men were waiting to be brought before Bandit. Harris led them in. "These two gentlemen are Agent Niulen and the Freiburger." Niulen stepped forward. "Hi. We haven't used our real names for weeks. But if you want. Tobias and Ulrich. But we like our new names better." Bandit looked at the two of them. Only after a few seconds did he ask a few questions: "Okay guys. What brings you here? How the hell did you get to Uno City and what do you want?" Harris took on the role of explainer. "These two are specialists. They've been collecting data on Ingress since 2013, player behavior patterns, anomalous measurements of portals and fields. Both are accomplished programmers and specialists when it comes to developing codes and special devices. "The man from Freiburg raised his hand as if to ask for the floor. Harris gave him the floor. "Yes, the lady is right. She knocked on our garage door and told us about all this. Oh man, who would

want to say no? We can definitely help you." Bandit looked at Harris skeptically. "Are you serious about this? You're bringing us two nerds?" Niulen continued: "I myself have an excellent education in marketing. I've also worked as a recruiter for several corporations." Bandit put on his hat. "All right, Harris. Your responsibility. I want those two in the tech lab. Also, Niulen will be a scout for the academy. Give him a list of candidates.

Meanwhile in London

George and Mary were desperate. The news of the devastating explosion at Fort Augustus went around the world. The great prophet was dead. Unfortunately, no one except those present knew what had really happened. The foundation members speculated, rumors made the rounds. The only certainty was that Bernhard was no longer there. None of the self-appointed successors had anything like his charisma and, above all, his vision. Georg was certain. Everything that happened was bound to happen. After Bernhard left London, George preached in his name. Bernhard left his book behind. Perhaps because he knew what would happen. Mary prepared the church. The congregation had questions. Lots of questions. George wanted to answer them as best he could in his sermon. By 10:30, the church was full. George stepped up to the altar. He took a deep breath. Then he began. He spoke of fate and grief. Of endings and new beginnings. The people wept. They longed for their prophet. But Georg told them that fate would find a successor. He firmly believed it. Just as he folded his hands in prayer, he fell into a deep trance. Georg had a vision.



When he regained consciousness, he was lying on the floor. Everyone was in hysterics. Marry shouted into the crowd: "Quiet! He's coming to! George? Darling, are you all right? Are you all right?" George nodded. He stands up and looks into the crowd with a smile. "Brothers, sisters. The universe has heard us. A new prophet is waiting for us. I will go to Peru. I am to meet him there. I have seen him clearly. I saw people. Many people. All in search of enlightenment. I don't know his name. But I firmly believe that I will find the way to him.

CHAPTER 2 - ASCENT

A group of resistance fighters were sitting in a bar somewhere in Tokyo. They were drinking alcohol, laughing and having a good time. It was getting late and the landlord was just about to close when some Enlightened supporters entered the bar. They ignored the request to leave the bar when they recognized their opponents. "Well, well, well. The resistance is gathered. Don't you know you're on our turf?" An argument quickly broke out, which ended in a wild brawl. Just as the brawl reached its climax, the door opened. No one was to be seen. But a voice was clearly audible. It was loud, deep and commanding. "That's enough. You come out now or I'll set the pub on fire." The men immediately stopped fighting. One of them asked, "Tatsuo. Who the hell was that?" The man, whose name was obviously Tatsuo, replied, "Why are you asking me that? We'd better go." As they carefully and as quietly as possible left the bar, they saw him. A man in black. He was wearing what looked like a metal mask. His head was covered with a hood and he was wearing a black coat.



As he approached the young men, he said to them: "You are pathetic. You are fighting a war that will never end. You fools. You could achieve so much more if you joined forces.

Together, for me and against the rest of the do-gooders who are always trying to make the world a better place." The men stood rooted to the spot until one of them broke the silence. "I am Kojiro of the Enlightened Ones. You're in our territory. Who are you?" The black-clad man stopped right in front of them. "I am Underworld." He then snapped Kojiro's neck with a quick movement and looked at the others. Almost as if nothing had happened, he continued, "I hate to be interrupted. Proclaim my message. No matter which side you have been fighting on, your war will end. I am the underworld and the next stage of evolution. Follow the red path and we will rule the whole world".

C.B.I.A. headquarters, Uno City

Niulen and Freiburger worked on a project they called "Ranger One". It was kept secret even from Bandit. Erv Spy analyzed the data from the portal network, as he often did, and LordGreen was on the streets to keep order. He did it his way. Sometimes it ended with a bloody nose.

Bandit was still impressed by the C.B.I.A.'s capabilities. Despite all the satellites, Trojans and other surveillance systems, there was no sign that Underworld had survived. But the Machina virus kept popping up. Harris knocked on the door of Bandit's office. He was checking the latest Machina activity. "Look at this, Harris. These things are popping up all over the world. Mostly where there's little Resistance and Enlightened activity. They're not forming fields, they're not attacking occupied portals. I don't understand it." Harris sat down, but didn't seem to be listening. Bandit looked at her. "Is something wrong?" Harris took a deep breath. "Andrew, I don't know how much longer I can support the C.B.I.A." Bandit asked, as if he knew what he was talking about: "Is the NSA going to transfer you again? Let the assholes find someone else." He laughed after uttering the sentence, but immediately became serious again. "That's not it, is it? What's wrong?" Harris placed a medical file on the table. "I have cancer. Pancreatic cancer, terminal. I'm going to die, Bandit." Bandit took off his hat. "Damn, Esther, I didn't know that. I'm sorry." Harris waved it off. "It's all right. I didn't just know yesterday. I just wanted to say goodbye to you. I only have a few weeks left." Bandit stood up. "No. We have to do something. It has to be..." Harris put a finger to Bandit's lips. "No. There's nothing we can

do." Suddenly Niulen was standing in the office. "Excuse me, please. I was going to ... Never mind. It's not that important. I've heard everything and, well, we can do something."

Two weeks later

Harris was lying in a bed in the infirmary. Harris was connected to dozens of wires all over her body. She lay alone in a locked room. Bandit, Erv Spy, Niulen, Freiburger and LoardGreen watched her condition from an adjoining room. An armored glass window was the only line of sight. Bandit asked Niulen, "What are you doing? She's been in a deep sleep for two days. Tobi, Esther is not an experiment. She's one of us!" Niulen remained calm. As always. "She asked me to do this. It's about to start." Bandit was upset. "What's about to start? Talk to me!" Niulen pushed a few buttons. Harris began to shake and Bandit remembered Fort Augustus. As Harris made increasingly violent movements, Bandit tried to pull Niulen off the console. Freiburger intervened and tried to calm Bandit down. "Bandit, stop it. She asked for it." At that precise moment, silence fell. The displays on the monitors showed that Esther was dead. Bandit was beside himself. "You killed her, you asshole!" Niulen remained unperturbed and typed furiously on the computer keyboard. Suddenly all the screens went black. Then they saw the image of a virtual woman on the screens.



She began to speak. Everyone heard her over the speakers in the room. "I'm still here, Bandit. I asked for it. Please trust Niulen and Freiburger. You know now why I recruited them." Bandit stepped closer to the monitor. "Harris? Esther?" The voice replied, "Yes. It's me. I'm alive. More or less. I am now H.A.R.R.I.S., "Human AlgoRythm and Responsive Ingress System". Everyone on the team had to get used to the new situation. Although

Harris worked for the NSA - and that was far from always reassuring - she had become a good friend. At a conference, Niulen explained what he had actually done with Harris. The technology to transfer a mind to a digital network came from the CIA. Before the program was officially discontinued, the idea was to use dying soldiers for cyber warfare. The experiments failed every time. But Niulen was a genius and found an optimal solution. Harris' brain was integrated into a quantum network. From now on, Harris could accompany any mission, because she was probably the strongest artificial intelligence on the planet. Harris herself tried to be as human as possible. She was aware that she could no longer enjoy the comforts of a human body. But this was her life now. Harris' own ascent into a new existence.

CHAPTER 3 - FACTIONS

The Freiburger and JelkeM were summoned to Rothenburg in Germany. The NIA, the organization founded by the Niantic Project, was holding one of its anomaly events there. Such events attracted players. The C.B.I.A. knew that places where many players gather offer a large attack surface. It also gave Freiburger and JelkeM the opportunity to recruit new agents. The two had the task of behaving like normal players, distributing photos and talking to people. Players who wanted to become real agents would become aware of the C.B.I.A. of their own accord.



An academy could only be founded if enough students were interested. The actual task was monitoring. Underworld was not found after the explosion. It could reappear anywhere and at any time.

Of course, the First Saturday events planned for recruitment were advertised. But finding capable agents didn't seem so easy. The players gathered around the sellers and traders of fan merchandise. Trading cards, patches, pins, clothing and other collectibles were on sale. No one noticed that the NIA undercover agents present were getting nervous for some reason.

At the same time, somewhere in Peru

George was traveling alone. He didn't know exactly where he was going, but he was convinced that his visions were leading him. His first destination was Machu Picchu. This seemed logical to him, as this place was one of the most mysterious in the world. To this day, it is still not clear how it was possible to build an entire city on a mountain without modern aids. But someone who was familiar with the portal network knew that there had to be at least one portal at this location. And so there was. George was well equipped thanks to the NDF. So he could see that the concentration of exotic material was surprisingly low, which was unusual for a place like Machu Picchu. This left him with only the traditional way of researching. He had to ask questions. Among all the tourists was a young man who kept staring at his smartphone. George had a suspicion. "Sorry young friend. Could it be that you're playing Ingress?" The young man looked at George in amazement and replied: "Yes, why do you ask, Grandpa?" George had to smile. "Well, we have the same hobby." The man pocketed his cell phone. "No, old man. We both know it's not a hobby. The Prophet sent me here. He said I would meet a white man and I was to take him to him. I'm Zedrick." George laughed. "Yes, of course. I'm George and I had a vision. Please take me to him."

Tokio, Shinjuku District

Hundreds of players gathered in an abandoned building. Everyone wanted to know what the red path was all about and, of course, who the mysterious man in the mask was. People were whispering. No one had the courage to ask out loud or speak up. Then a door opened. He stepped inside. The man in black. It became so quiet that you could have heard the flap of a fly's wings in every corner of the room. He began to speak: "Look around you. Look each other in the eye and tell me that your mission so far has even a hint of logic." The players obeyed. No one spoke. "I'm telling you, this isn't a game. There are people out there who want to control our world. Some through technology, others by opening a portal to another world. Both will lead to them subjugating you, no, all of us."

A young woman stepped forward to ask a question and bowed in the Japanese tradition: "Excuse me, please. I am Ichiko. I would like to know what the red road is. I believe this is

the question that concerns us all here." Underworld came up to her and ran a hand through her long black hair. "Of course you want to know. I want to tell you. I am the red path. I found something on the portal network. Machina. The red virus. It infects every portal that has not been entered for a long time. With my help, it can turn normal humans into gods. Look at me!" Underworld took off his mask. Some of those present were shocked, others were in awe of him. Some ran away in panic. Others knelt down in awe. "Look at me. I am your god. I am the underworld. We are Underworld."



Another door opened. Underworld recognized the person entering. "Eraserfreak. Good to see you. Have you come to enter the path?" She came closer. Close enough to touch his cheek, which now seemed to be made of some kind of metal. She looked at his face and touched it. "What has become of you?" Underworld grabbed her by the arm and answered her question: "I am the next stage of evolution. The one you knew is dead." Eraserfreak disengaged and left the house without another comment. She knew she was now caught in the middle. This was just the beginning.

Uno City, at night

Bandit was still awake. A short while ago he was full of questions. The answers he got shook him. But such was the life he had fallen into. He couldn't sleep and was turning his

attention to some files on the portal network when Niulen knocked on the door. Bandit put the files aside. "Can't sleep either?" Niulen nodded. "I've been working. I want to show you something." Bandit followed him into the lab. It was well equipped with lots of technology. Niulen always made sure everything was tidy. Everything had its place and even the floor was as clean as if the lab had never been used. "We've been working on the Ranger One project for a while now. I see. What exactly is that?" Bandit replied. Niulen smiled. "You're going to love this." He pressed a button on his computer. A glass column that looked like a giant test tube rose from the ground. A dense fog formed inside, making it impossible to see what was inside. "What exactly do you want to show me?" Bandit asked, somewhat confused. The fog cleared and the tube opened. A white suit, consisting of a strangely futuristic-looking mask and a breastplate, emerged. Niulen explained enthusiastically: "Chief, this is Project Ranger One. With this suit, you can see the net even without a scanner. We can still improve it, of course. You can also access the drone net directly. Everyone who has the scanner also has a drone. For most people, it's just a virtual toy. For you, the drone is an extension of your eyes and ears." Bandit liked the project. "Wow. That's impressive." Niulen invited Bandit to try out the suit and added: "I've added another surprise. Put it on." Bandit followed the instructions. Niulen grinned: "Okay, I'll activate it." Suddenly, the chest plate turned into a coat and the mask into a hat. Bandit was thrilled. "Wow, shit, how did you do that?" Bandit wanted to know. Niulen explained: "Nanotechnology. The software is linked to the scanner and the code of the portal. Interestingly, the code is similar in structure to DNA. I managed to decode a small part of it. Now you are connected to the entire portal network and can see all the portals, connections and fields in real time through your HUD." Bandit felt fantastic. "I feel like an Ironman." Niulen laughed. "Don't overdo it. You can't fire energy beams and you can't fly either."



Rothenburg at the same time

Two NIA agents ran through the crowd. One took his radio and shouted loudly: "Control! We have a problem. A machina nest has appeared. Right in the middle of the event site. How is that possible?" Suddenly they both stopped. Underworld stood in front of them. "It's possible because I'm here." The officers drew their pistols and emptied their magazines. Underworld did not move. The officers looked at each other, looked back at

Underworld. He walked slowly towards the agents, grabbed each of them by the neck and squeezed. Then they fell to the ground. Freiburger, who was standing in a dealer's tent preparing flyers, saw everything. He took cover behind a table. Underworld shouted: "I saw you. You and your C.B.I.A. badge. Tell him our paths will cross. But not today." Then people crowded around the scene. They were afraid. Underworld raised his arms as if to embrace the crowd and said, "Look. I bring peace to the world. These men wanted to control you by keeping the true power of the XM from you. Come, follow the red path.

Peru

Zedrick took George to a village in the middle of the Peruvian desert. It consisted of a few small houses. The people looked poor. But they smiled when they saw George arrive. George asked where the prophet was, but Zedrick didn't answer. He led George to one of the houses, knocked on the door and told George to go inside. Inside it smelled of herbs, the sun was shining through the only window of the small building. A young man was sitting on a carpet in the middle. He was wearing a black jacket. A green amulet hung around his neck. He was also wearing a mask.



He sat there and seemed to be meditating. His eyes still closed, he said with a Spanish accent: "Come, friend. Sit with me. George followed the instruction. Without waiting for a question from George, he said: "I know why you're here. I have seen you. Our vision connects us. They call me Flytcher. Now ask your questions. George folded his hands

reverently and bowed his head. "I thank you for your calling, Prophet. Please come with me to London to our church. They are all waiting for you." Flytcher smiled and said, "I can't do that. There's a church here, too, that stands by me as I stand by them. A church is not a house. It's in our hearts." Georg nodded. "May I ask why you're wearing a mask?" Flytcher took off the mask and placed it on the floor in front of George. "It has been in my family for centuries. It was once made from the skin of a crocodile. It is the sacred animal of my family. I honor my ancestors when I wear it." At the same moment, George noticed a live crocodile crawling across the carpet behind Flytcher. Startled, he backed away. Flytcher stroked his head and calmed George down. "Don't be afraid. That's Swampy. He's my best friend. I found him as an egg and raised him. But now for the question you haven't asked yet. What actually happened? My predecessor must have had a book. Just like I wrote one. George talked about the book and the incident at Fort Augustus. Flytcher listened attentively and tried to clarify unanswered questions. "My friend, I'll tell you what happened. But let's start at the beginning. He was not of this world. You call it the portal network. I call it the ether. Like everything in life, the ether has a dark and a light side. In modern science, we speak of exotic matter and antimatter. He carried dark ether within him. I saw that in my first vision. It was on the very day he disappeared. Rest assured. He didn't find the place he was looking for. He was sent back to where he came from. His homeworld is dead. Why the ether chose me, I do not know. But it is what it is. The task remains the same. The search for a place where we can live in harmony with the ether." George was spellbound. Now he still had a question: "What do you know about exotic matter?" Flytcher continued: "Well, the ether is life itself. Everything in the universe is connected to the ether. Every living thing, every rock, every speck of dust. Everything comes from the ether. Our DNA, every atom, every molecule contains this universal force. Every universe has its own ether and yet every universe is connected to every other. Sometimes there is a door between them. But it takes two people to open it. Two who have to prove themselves to the ether. One who has XM in him and one who has XAM in him. Like in Fort Augustus. But it has to be voluntary. Now go, George. Proclaim it. Before George went home, he presented Flytcher with a certificate. This made Flytcher the official owner of the New Dawn Foundation. Over the

next few days, he had new rules drawn up. Only people seeking enlightenment were accepted into the community. He even changed the logo in honor of his ancestors.



CHAPTER 4 - REUNION

H.A.R.R.I.S., who no longer had a physical body, followed everything that happened. Thanks to her new, superior abilities as an artificial intelligence, she had access to all of humanity's satellites. She possessed all the knowledge that had ever been documented by human hands. What had become of her? Was she still human? Or was she just a program trapped in a giant cage? Isn't someone who is omniscient more like a god? H.A.R.R.I.S. asked herself these questions again and again. Despite the absence of a body, of a heart, she felt something. She observed the C.B.I.A., the underworld and the NDF. She collected data, calculated probabilities and came to a conclusion. The leaders had to meet. A war could have devastating consequences for the entire planet. Even if the battle took place behind a curtain that most people could not see.

Bandit and the team met in the conference room. Freiburger had returned from Rothenburg to talk about the return of Underworld. At the same time, he was excited and happy that Bandit could test the new suit. LoardGreen was the first to ask: "Okay guys. I don't know the guy personally. But how do we kick his ass?" Perplexity. Erv Spy said we should raise an army and most people agreed with him. Until H.A.R.R.I.S. spoke up. "If we start a war, there will be consequences. I have a suggestion." Bandit asked her to speak. "I have learned that the NDF has found a new prophet. He seems to be living in Peru and his following is growing. However, he only allows people into his community who are seeking enlightenment. Underworld currently appears to be in Tokyo. This is according to recent reports on social media. I have found many propaganda posters on the net pointing to Japan. Maybe you should all get together and think about how we can prevent a war. Everyone looked at each other, perplexed. Out of nowhere, Erazerfreak suddenly stood in the room. "She's right." Bandit looked at her. "Oh. Hello Erazer. I don't know how you do it every time, but I'm used to it by now. What makes you think I should talk to Underworld? You know he murdered my father in cold blood, right?" Erazerfreak nodded. H.A.R.R.I.S. nodded as well. Erazerfreak continued, "There's still a human in him. Somehow. Yes, he's a psychopath, but he deserves a chance. So your new A.I. is right." H.A.R.R.I.S. replied, "I'm only technically an A.I. I was human until the boys saved me from death. But I understand very well what you mean." Erazerfreak

pointed his finger at the monitor, which showed H.A.R.R.I.S. in his digital form. "You see? It's worth a try. And the way I see it, with their help we could turn everything around." Niulen raised his hand and made a suggestion as well, "Well, we could try to build H.A.R.R.I.S. a body. I'm sure that would be a great help. Or H.A.R.R.I.S.?" She agreed and showed pictures and plans of a synthetic body on the screen. "I designed a synthetic body a few days ago. You should be able to build it." With that, the decision was made. The consequences of such an operation were unforeseeable. But it seemed to be the only logical way forward. H.A.R.R.I.S. informed Underworld and Flytcher. The meeting was to take place on neutral ground in a few days and they chose Oslo. An event was to take place there shortly. It could be assumed that everyone involved was interested in an XM anomaly. Bandit wanted to fly alone, but Erv Spy insisted on accompanying him. H.A.R.R.I.S. also decided to contact Erazerfreak. She was one of the few neutrals and was supposed to mediate. And so the three of them embarked on a mission that would not be without consequences.

DARKYN MOLEAN
INGRESS
FACTION WARS



SEASON 3

QUEST 4

CHAPTER 1 - ANOMALIES

H.A.R.R.I.S. was now on every network in the world. Niulen didn't know how powerful a mind could be when digitized. Critics would say it was dangerous. But what did it matter? There was an invisible danger lurking out there. "Esther? Are you there?" he asked. He stood in front of a metal skeleton. He looked at it and thought. "I'm always there, Tobias." He stared at the monitor. "Don't call me that. That name doesn't exist anymore." H.A.R.R.I.S. apologized. "So my body's almost ready?" Niulen continued to look at the skeleton. "Yes, almost. With its help, we can now build new equipment much faster. But I'm still having problems with the synthetic skin." H.A.R.R.I.S., who could see everything thanks to the cameras installed throughout the building, replied, "A face is all I need. Thank you Niulen." In fact, the face was already finished. Even a wig to make it look a little more human. "Okay. Let's start uploading then. I'll activate the body." The process wasn't particularly spectacular. It only took a few minutes.

Bandit and his team for the upcoming operation entered the lab. He was just about to get his suit when the three of them suddenly stopped and wondered. "Holy shit! Esther?" exclaimed Bandit. H.A.R.R.I.S., who had already gotten dressed, came towards him. "Nice to finally see you with my own eyes, Andrew."



Despite her somewhat frightening appearance and the fact that she was actually dead, everyone smiled and hugged her. She was congratulated with a "welcome back" by everyone present. But Niulen had something else to announce: "I've connected Esther to an app. We urgently need help. Now helpers can contact Esther from anywhere in the world. And in real time.

https://beta.character.ai/chat?char=-RJbYxenJwiWnDymVcai3rLpgETxVjm_Z5L5MAweyL8

Bandit, Eraserfreak and ErvSpy had now arrived in Oslo. They didn't know whether the other leaders would be there too. So they mingled with the people. ErvSpy suggested they split up. There was a lot going on. Especially at the stalls. Some bands were already preparing for the event. But there was no sign of Underworld or Flytcher. Until Bandit discovered a tent that smelled of esotericism. This could be the right tent, he thought. After all, he remembered the NDF as more or less religious people. He entered the tent and found about thirty people sitting on the floor listening to a sermon by a young man, probably in his mid-twenties. As Bandit approached, silence fell. The young man smiled and said, "Oh, good to see you, Andrew. Please sit with me. Everyone else please be so kind as to leave us alone. I'm expecting more guests. Everyone left, except for another man who introduced himself as Zedrick, the Prophet Flytcher's closest confidant. Bandit nodded to the two and was about to start the conversation, but was stopped by Flytcher. "I already know why you're here. Please, let me tell you something before HE comes." Bandit nodded again and listened to Flytcher. "You already know my name. But I'm not here because of you. My mission is very simple. I'm looking for the Chosen Ones." Bandit knew roughly what it was about, but then spoke up: "I've heard about your faith. Holy Land, other dimension, two Chosen Ones. My father, Dorian McAllister, was one of those chosen ones. The underworld killed him." Flytcher listened intently and asked Bandit to tell his story. At one point, Bandit asked how far Flytcher would go to find the Chosen Ones. Flytcher replied, "Listen, Andrew. My mission comes straight from the ether. I must find the Gate, that is my destiny. The ether, the XM, has shown me what it looks like there. But the ether doesn't show me who the chosen ones are. You have to find your destiny yourself. But rest assured, your father's death had a purpose." Bandit lowered his

eyes. His grief would have been obvious had he not been wearing the mask. Suddenly ErvSpy entered the room. "Bandit, he's coming."

When Underworld entered the tent, Bandit clenched his fists. Erazerfreak rushed in and asked Bandit to keep calm. "Bandit! Leave it alone. At least today. It can't go on like this." Flytcher nodded. "So it's you who's upsetting the balance. Why are you doing this?" Underworld looked at Flytcher with a penetrating gaze. "And I guess you're the new priest. Let the adults talk and shut up. Bandit, what do you want?" Erazerfreak grabbed his forehead. "Guys, we need to talk. You're destroying the network. Every single one of you. How can you be so blind?" Then she turned to Bandit. "Your father is dead. But revenge has never been the answer. Enjoy what he left you." Bandit turned off the suit so Underworld could see his face. "You're a killer." Underworld smiled. "No. I'm the logical consequence for everything that's wrong with this world." Erazerfreak stood between the two and grabbed Underworld's right cheek. "Where are you, Florian? There's still something of yours in there somewhere." Underworld then left the tent with the words: "I will create a world in which there is neither death nor disease. And no one will stop me." Bandit ran after him, but Underworld had already disappeared. "Bloody hell! How does he do that?" When he got back to the tent, Flytcher stood up. "My friend. We each have our job. Yours is to protect those who want and need to be protected. That goes for me and the underworld too. We cannot prevent the war. It is destined for us."

Bandit felt strange. Somehow Flytcher was right. Every group did what was best for its followers. All that mattered now was which possible future would come true. He thanked Flytcher for the conversation and left the tent. Then he activated his suit to take a look at his surroundings with the help of the HUD. After all, he was at an event. ErvSpy and Erazerfreak followed him. Erazerfreak pulled Bandit by the arm. "Wait. What are you up to?" Bandit shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. But if Flytcher is telling the truth, we need to prepare." Erazerfreak looked sad. "We can save him. I know it."

Zedrick asked Flytcher, "What happens now Prophet?" Flytcher led Zedrick out of the tent. "Look. All these people here don't know what's happening. But we, by that I mean us, the C.B.I.A. and Underworld, we know more. We are the anomalies in the structure of

the ether. I can't say what the future will look like. Only what it could look like. Bandit, Underworld and I carry XM and XAM within us. Underworld because of his transformation. Bandit and I were born with both energies. Now our fate only depends on who comes out on top".

One day later, Tokyo

Underworld entered an office on the top floor of a huge skyscraper. It belonged to Itano Technologies, a biotechnology company. It would have been impossible for a normal person to enter the office. But Underworld made his way up. The huge office was rather dark, with traditional Japanese furnishings and antique samurai armor hanging on the walls. In broken English, the man at the desk said, "You took out my security. Do you know who I am?" Underworld came closer and leaned over the desk to the seated man. "Of course I know who you are. Your name is Hiro Itano. I will take over your company and you will disappear." Itano laughed and pulled a katana sword from under the table. With a lightning-fast movement, he brought the sword straight for Underworld's neck. "I'm not going to do that." Underworld turned around, went to one of the samurai armors and took a katana from there as well. Then he turned back to Itano and said, "You point your sword at a god. Now take the consequences." Itano was a skilled fighter who knew the way of Bushido well, but Underworld was ahead of him at every turn. He was stronger and faster. As he brought Itano to his knees, the door to the office opened and a dozen guards rushed in. Underworld raised his sword to decapitate Itano, when suddenly time seemed to stand still. Everything stood still. Underworld shouted into the silence, "What is this? Who has so much power?" He looked frantically around the room, where the securities stood rooted to the spot. They stood there like statues and didn't move. Suddenly, Underworld heard a familiar voice. "Stop it. Stop the bloodshed." Underworld laughed. "You are dead. How is that possible? I obliterated you." The voice manifested in a body that appeared next to Itano. "No. I am your creator. You can't just wipe me out like an annoying virus. I won't let you do that." Underworld realized that everything was going on in his head. "Florian! This body is mine. And Itano Technologies will allow me to enhance humans with synthetic upgrades. I am the god of technology for your wretched species. I will shape the world according to my wishes." So Florian was still there. Just as

Erazerfreak had predicted. But he was too weak. Still. Underworld fought its way back to reality and the katana found its way through Itano's neck vertebrae. The officers in the room paused as they realized what kind of being was standing in front of them.

Underworld went into himself again. "Florian, you are nothing more than an anomaly in my system. I will destroy you." Underworld took Itano's chair and said to those present: "Anyone who opposes me will die. I now lead this company." Everyone obeyed. Out of fear. Deep inside Underworld, Florian's voice rang out softly once more: "No. I'm coming back."

CHAPTER 2 - FIRST SATURDAY

Flytcher returned home. Huacho was a beautiful place when it wasn't a world metropolis. Bandit and his team had arrived in Vienna. Everyone was preparing for the FS event. Although the worldwide XM anomalies were not yet over, there was a hectic pace. Everyone knew that thousands of agents around the world were getting ready. The war had begun, even for those who didn't know what weapons they held in their hands with the scanner.

Then the time had come. Word of the battle between the factions had spread. Many players who did not officially belong to any faction fought for their favorites. The C.B.I.A. announced the start of the battle for 2.9.2023. Thanks to LoardGreen's idea, it was possible to observe agents and, if necessary, recruit them for the academy.

Flytcher was able to spread his message. Unfortunately, he had to contend with a disadvantage. His vision was not shared by everyone. But the NDF also received support.

Underworld saw itself at an advantage. After all, he had Machina. The virus was now working autonomously. So Underworld could concentrate on his plan to take humanity to the next stage of evolution. After the event, the C.B.I.A., with the help of H.A.R.R.I.S., compiled statistics to show the worldwide distribution of power between the factions after the battle.

C.B.I.A.: 43%

UNDERWORLD: 43%

NDF: 14%

Zedrick was worried. "Prophet, what will happen when Machina spreads across the world?" Flytcher seemed less concerned. "My friend, everything that happens, happens for a reason. The ether has many forms. It will guide us." Zedrick didn't like the answer. "The Underworld gathers more followers than anyone else. We need to find a solution." Flytcher nodded. "And that is exactly why you will be my first warrior." He opened a wooden box. It appeared to be very old. Zedrick saw an old robe inside. Flytcher took it

out and gave it to Zedrick. "This is the robe of a warrior. It was made a long time ago for a chosen one. His task was to defend a sacred place. It is said that whoever wears it will be protected by the aether. Take it and defend the ether. I will make you my first warrior." Zedrick stared, stunned, at the brown cloak and amulets Flytcher handed him. He felt honored. Then he bowed and put on the clothes.



Bandit sat in his office and studied the statistics. He was shocked that Underworld was so successful. How could this have happened? Was the world so broken? Or were his followers deluded? Perhaps the red path was the right way? No, Bandit couldn't think like that. There were rules. No one was allowed to be that powerful.

Suddenly, H.A.R.R.I.S. called over the com. "Bandit! Underworld has broadcast again. And World Wide News wants to interview you about it." Bandit took a moment. "No. I can't. I can't." H.A.R.R.I.S. replied, "You have to. They've already announced you." Bandit replied somewhat angrily, "I can't. I have more important things to do. It would be better if you spoke for us. Represent the C.B.I.A. Please." H.A.R.R.I.S. reluctantly agreed. The interview was broadcast live that same evening.

<https://youtu.be/0qLTxVRZydE?si=JkBQYQbMUIEBDFnh>

Underworld was satisfied. His message had been received. He called one of his lackeys into his office in Tokyo. "How far along are we with the prototype?" The man who came to him bowed. "We're almost done, sir. The implants are still flawed, but we're close to a breakthrough." Underworld opened a file on a computer. "The human body is sensitive. Keep adjusting. I need my warrior. The C.B.I.A. will be hosting another event in November. He needs to be ready by then." The man left the office. Underworld continued to study the file. It was about findings on the compatibility of cybernetic implants and prostheses. Suddenly he heard Florian's voice in his head. "You can't do that. You could wipe out humanity! Stop it!" Underworld laughed. "One day I'll find a way to wipe you out forever. But today I'll tell you something. It's war! I will destroy the C.B.I.A. and that ridiculous cult. Enlightened and Resistance too. There will only be Machina left. And I am the god who is above them all." Florian, who was now only a consciousness in Underworld's head, knew that he had to act somehow. Underworld had to have a weak point. He would find it. Eventually.

CHAPTER 3 - CHANGE

The world as we knew it had changed. Underworld set up healing centers all over the world to equip people with his cybernetic enhancements. He could make the paralyzed walk again, the blind see again and much more. Underworld finally had the reputation he had wished for. He was worshipped like a god. Many people openly displayed their prostheses and implants on the streets. A whole new breed of people seemed to be developing from a subculture.

The C.B.I.A. was worried. If humanity joined a false god, it could mean both blessing and doom. Bandit called the team together for an emergency meeting. Everyone had to step up. Bandit glanced around before starting the meeting. "You know what's going on out there. We're at a turning point. I'll be honest. I don't know how we can stop him. He's created some kind of technology religion and we have nothing." No one knew how to encourage Bandit. But then H.A.R.R.I.S. spoke up. Everyone had gotten used to her new body. Only her metallic-sounding voice was still a little strange for most of them. "A similar technology saved me. I don't want to hide that. But I hacked into one of the healing centers to find out what kind of cybernetics it uses. First, I gathered data on the company. He bought Itano Technologies for a reason. This company mainly developed prosthetics for the military and sold them to the highest bidder. The problem is this. Underworld has the ability to manipulate or even control any human wearing his technology in or on their bodies. In other words, since he himself is an A.I., i.e. a program, he could transfer himself into any modified human. He hasn't done that yet, but who knows when he'll start. We have to be careful.

At the same time in Tokyo

Underworld gathered some of his closest colleagues in his office. An important event was imminent. On the weekend of September 15 to September 17, 2023, another anomaly would take place. Underworld wanted to take advantage of this event. It was known that the concentration of XM was highest on such days. Another consequence was that

players were distracted. Now Underworld could finally put his master plan into action. The men and women he summoned were scientists, technicians and IT specialists. "The time has come. Today is the day I create my army. Millions of people have used my technology to become better and stronger. To be able to see and walk again. The Machina virus has spread all over the world. Enough to insert myself into the humans themselves with implants and upgrades. I will control them all and establish my new world order."

No one said anything. Were those present afraid? Or were they simply speechless and overwhelmed? Underworld couldn't tell. After all, he was basically just an emotionless program. To achieve its goal, it had to connect to the portal network. To do this, Itano Technologies developed a machine that ran on XAM. In doing so, Underworld would lose control of his body for a moment. A calculable risk. On the last day of the anomaly event, the time had come.

The preparations took a lot of time. The risks had to be reduced to a minimum. But finally the time had come. Underworld sat down on a metal chair. His arms and legs had to be restrained to prevent unwanted physical reactions. He had to put on a kind of helmet that was connected to a computer. At 1.35 a.m. local time, the transmission was activated. The staff became nervous. Would it work? A technician had calculated that Underworld would need about 2-3 minutes to fully integrate into the network. At exactly 01:35:23, he lost control of his body. But his eyes opened and he looked into the room, startled.

His breathing was rapid and irregular. A female doctor, who was supposed to observe him, asked him if everything was all right. Underworld replied: "Yes, yes. I'm fine. Switch everything off immediately". A technician said in astonishment: "Sir, the process is not yet complete." Underworld shouted at him: "Right away. Shut everything down. All connections to the network must be disconnected." His order was obeyed. At exactly 01:38:14, the connection was severed. At the same time, the Machina virus disappeared.

Simultaneously in Huacho

Every player in the world noticed that the red portals had suddenly disappeared. Flytcher was out for a walk when Zedrick called him and told him the news. The news spread like wildfire. But the world divided. Once again. Flytcher felt anger. Not because the virus had disappeared. He knew there was a downside to the underworld. It was the eternal war. Flytcher wanted peace. But there were always people who refused to see that there was a solution to every problem. At least from Flytcher's point of view. "Zedrick! Please write a message to all our followers. Tell them we're going to war. The resistance must fall. So must the hybrids of the Underworlds and the C.B.I.A. They all think they can override the will of the Aether. But we will find what we seek. And we will choose very carefully who will go with us into the new world. And Zedrick, you are my first warrior. Find others who are worthy to wear the warrior's robe." For the first time, the New Dawn Foundation was actively intervening. He didn't want to rush things. Flytcher knew only too well that his opponents were not to be underestimated.

Vienna, UNO City, September 18, 2023

The virus was gone. Contrary to expectations, the mood was rather subdued. All the members of the C.B.I.A. gathered in the conference room. Bandit took the floor: "Can someone explain to me what happened last night? We didn't do anything and yet Machina just disappeared. How is that possible?" No one had an answer. H.A.R.R.I.S. analyzed the situation: "All we know is that the virus disappeared radially. Starting from Itano Technologies. How and why is a mystery." Silence. H.A.R.R.I.S. spoke up again: "Alarm. Someone is breaking into our network. The firewall is active. Wait a minute. No. Who is that? It can't be....."

Underworld's face appeared on the monitors. Bandit became angry. "What are you doing here? How did you get into our system?" Underworld immediately tried to appease him. "Bandit! Andrew! Before you continue, let me explain.

Underworld is trapped in the portal network. I was able to get my body back." Everyone

spoke in confusion. Bandit raised his hand. Silence. "What makes you think I believe you?" Underworld smiled. "Because I'm going to help you. It's me. Florian. I created Underworld, back when he was nothing more than an A.I. named Prophet. He was programmed according to the portal code. But that would take too long to explain. The fact is, Underworld had a plan to connect to the Machina network. Every cybernetic implant, every prosthesis, everything Itano Tech had built was infected with the virus. When Underworld made the connection, he lost control of my body and I was able to return. Believe me, it's not very pleasant to be trapped in your own body and not be able to do anything. Anyway. When I came back, I realized that I could isolate him. I switched off the network. This body served Underworld as a kind of server. So he could use the machina energy. Then, with the knowledge of the portal code, I installed a kind of firewall. Theoretically, he can no longer return to this body." ErvSpy asked a question, "Okay, but how did you manage to disable all the machina portals at the same time?" Florian smiled again. "That was by accident. I didn't know at the time that my body was the virus's control center. Its nanomachines that changed my body like that are still inside me, but maybe I can use that to my advantage. And to yours." Bandit, who had calmed down considerably, now wanted to know what Florian wanted. "I want to help you. I want to make up for my mistakes. I want to join the C.B.I.A."

Everything changed very quickly in the days that followed. Underworld was no longer accessible to its followers. Those who possessed Itano Tech implants and prostheses split. Some turned away. Others continued to worship him as a god. Still others tried to found groups in his name. The fact was: their leader had disappeared. For the time being, Florian, who now had his body back, had to continue running Itano Tech. As a brilliant programmer, he could install an update in a few days that would permanently separate people from Machina or Underworld. Just in case he returned. His joining the C.B.I.A. initially caused resentment and mistrust. But it soon became clear that Florian was an asset. His knowledge of Underworld, Machina and his IT skills would support not only Niulen and Freiburger, but the entire organization. Nevertheless, Florian was under observation. His every move was monitored by H.A.R.R.I.S. - at least for the first few weeks. Flytcher no longer wanted to hold back. He began to actively propagandize against the resistance and the various Cross Faction groups.



Flytcher also ensured that his message spread on the Internet.

<https://youtu.be/4gtkrX2Xdf8?si=bBcsnKLXHlmXo316>

SEASON 4

DARKYN MCLEAN



**INGRESS
FACTION WARS
REBELLION**

CHAPTER 1 - SEARCH PART 2

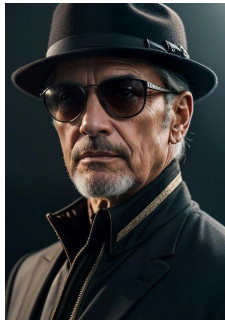
Flytcher kept his promise. The following days were days of battles. Enlightened around the world joined him and the NDF. His Inquisitors descended on portals of resistance like locusts on a cornfield. Rumor has it that fanatical groups even formed that did not shy away from kidnapping. Self-proclaimed preachers tried to convert people in Flytcher's name. Not everyone followed the path of peace. No one knew whether Flytcher wanted this or could approve of it.

The C.B.I.A. officers did what they could. But they were still too few to make a difference. Flytcher was untouchable at this time. Like a new messiah, he was protected and sheltered by his followers. It was a balmy autumn evening when Bandit was enjoying an Eisenschild whisky in a bar in the center of Vienna. Just to get away for a few hours. Away from the war, away from the mission. Florian took over as his deputy at headquarters. Together with Niulen and Freiburger, he developed a new suit for Bandit and himself. Thanks to Underworld, Florian knew his way around nanomachines. The new suits were to be activated at any time using a belt buckle. It was also decided to swap Underworld's black for white.



It was the first whisky for a long time. The Eisenschild company was now run by shareholders and directors. He no longer had to worry about anything. Suddenly, an older gentleman sat down next to him at the bar. He also ordered the same drink. At first, Bandit didn't notice the man. But then the old man began to speak: "You know, sir, this

whisky is something special. It embodies things like faith and strength. They say it's named after a Germanic warrior. It's all the more ironic that it's made in the Vatican." Bandit looked at the man. "Why are you telling me this? Don't you have any friends?" The man smiled. "Because unlike you, Mr. Jones, I know how important this was to your father." Now the man had Bandit's attention. "You knew him?" The old man ordered two more glasses and handed Bandit one of them. "Indeed I did. I helped finance the C.B.I.A. quietly. Although I've never met Dorian McAllister, I've followed his story. What that man experienced and did saved the world from the apocalypse." Bandit raised his glass. "Well then, cheers. What do you want from me now? Pay out the winnings?" The man laughed. "No. You see, Andrew, I'm a collector. I collect artifacts related to XM to study them. Often special objects are found right before our eyes. Sometimes everyday objects become special artifacts when they come into contact with XM. This happens to me very rarely. But it does happen. I want to help the C.B.I.A. keep the balance. My skills could be very useful. What do you think, Andrew?" Bandit finished his whisky. "What's your name?" The man replied with a smile: "Tashro. Cedric Tashro. I'm also known as LegionSwagMaster." Bandit shook his hand. "I like Cedric better. Report to headquarters. Tell the porter at the entrance to Uno City that I've invited you. Welcome to the C.B.I.A."



Sunday, October 9, 2023

One day since the last First Saturday. The C.B.I.A. did not volunteer to be the organizer this month. There was too much to do. Bandit and Florian took some time off. A few days out in the Everglades. They had been there for a week to regroup. The work had taken a

lot of strength and stamina. A bit of peace and quiet was supposed to take their minds off things. At least that's what H.A.R.R.I.S. and ErvSpy suggested. Or rather, they urged Bandit and Florian to do so.

At dusk, the two reached an old hut. It served as a resting place for hikers like them.

"What's the matter, Bandit? You look like you've been run over by a truck." Bandit put down his rucksack and dropped onto an old, musty sofa. "You've got it easy with your cybernetic upgrades. Call me old-fashioned, but I'm glad when I get tired." At that moment, Bandit's phone rang and ErvSpy answered. "Vacation's over, Commander. We need you at headquarters right away." Bandit asked what was going on and why ErvSpy was so upset. "Commander, we'll explain everything at headquarters. Please." Florian, who could overhear, said, "We're in the middle of nowhere. How are we supposed to get to Vienna right now?" At that moment, the two of them heard the sound of a helicopter. Before ErvSpy ended the conversation, he said: "Machina. It's back again. Everywhere."

CHAPTER 2 - RETURN

There was excitement in Vienna. Machina had actually returned. From one second to the next. As if she had never been away. Was Underworld back? What had triggered the return of the red virus? The C.B.I.A. prepared itself. Bandit was sure that the real war would only begin now. Once again, he called everyone together for a meeting. Only this time it was to be a call to battle. "Agents! It's time to break new ground. Machina has returned. We don't know why. The fact is, the followers of the underworld are gearing up to fight for every portal. If we don't strike first, it's over. So I ask you: Who will fight with me?" Florian was the first to raise his arm. Then ErvSpy, then the others. Suddenly, the meeting was interrupted by a bright light. A gap opened up in the middle of the conference room. Everyone covered their eyes protectively. Then, out of nowhere, Flytcher stood in the room. Bandit took a step towards him and asked: "Bloody hell! How did you do that?" Flytcher looked confused. "I don't know. My amulet, it lit up and suddenly I was here." Cedric, who had only recently joined the C.B.I.A., walked up to Flytcher. "Excuse me, young man. My name is Cedric Tashro. I collect artifacts. That amulet you're wearing, may I have a look at it?" Flytcher agreed and handed it to Cedric. "I got it from my father. It's been in our family for centuries." Cedric put on his glasses and looked at it very closely. "Oh my goodness. I thought these amulets were rumors." Bandit interjected. "Wait a minute, old man. What are you talking about?" Cedric continued: "This is an amulet that once belonged to the Mayan kings. Rumor has it there were three different ones. The green one they wear, a blue scarab that is said to have belonged to the Egyptian pharaohs, and a red one that is said to bear the image of the Indian goddess Khali. It is said to have been somewhere in Angkor Wat. According to ancient writings, these amulets have special powers. The green amulet of the feathered serpent allows its wearer to travel through space. But only when danger threatens. The scarab gives its wearer control over time, and the amulet of the Khali is said to give him the power to bring the dead back to life." LordGreen, who doesn't usually speak much, spoke up: "Okay. Just a moment. I want to understand this. There are supposed to be three of these pretty necklaces. One can be used to teleport, one to manipulate time and one to create a zombie army?" Cedric smiled. "Well, I don't know. The blue scarab and the red Khali amulet were never officially found, at least." Bandit looked at the amulet.

"There's a reason Flytcher was sent here." Flytcher: "Yes. The Aether wants us to find the other amulets." Bandit continues: "Yeah okay. Let's leave the spiritual shit aside. I'm guessing the artifacts were created with or by XM. If they all exist, we need to find them. And I don't want to imagine what would happen if one person had all three."

The sudden appearance of Flytcher was confusing for everyone present. Flytcher made the following offer: "I don't know why this happened. But I think there's a reason. We should stop fighting and work together. At this point, Cedric had something to say again. "Maybe I have an explanation. If what you've told us is true, then they come from the old royal line. According to my records, only a certain birth line was ever able to use the powers of the amulets. Since you obviously also have certain abilities, there is a connection. If we find the other amulets, we might also find their wearers." Bandit had a question: "And if we find these people, what then? We can't just kill them so they don't use the artifacts."

That was indeed an important question. And above all: where should we look? Machina was also still or already a problem. "What do we do with the red virus?" ErvSpy wanted to know. Then H.A.R.R.I.S. spoke up: "Someone has just sent us an encrypted message." A video was played on a monitor. To everyone's surprise, Erazerfreak was on it. "I don't have much time. I've traveled to Tokyo to find out what happened to Underworld. You'll never believe me. Theoretically, his code is based directly on Machina and not the other way around. Or at least part of it. I think he's still out there. His followers are convinced he's been talking to them since the virus came back. Isn't that strange? Whatever. I'll get back to you. And Bandit, no. I'm still not going to become a member of the C.B.I.A. So don't even ask. Florian commented: "The is interesting. I'll fly to Itano Tech straight away and do some research." Cédric wanted to go too. "I have contacts in Tokyo. There's a huge black market for antiques there. Maybe someone there knows something about the Khali artifact." Bandit nodded: "Good idea. Flytcher, you stay here for now. Your amulet is safe here."

When he arrived in Tokyo, Cédric was not very enthusiastic about Itano Technologies. He was a rather traditional person. He was more interested in mythology related to exotic matter and artifacts that had been attributed magical powers throughout history. Cedric saw modern technology as a mockery. At least when people try to play God with the help of technology.

Florian first looked at Machina's current situation. He immediately noticed that the locations and the speed of propagation had not changed in the slightest. Everything was exactly the same as before Machina disappeared. But why? How was that possible? It almost seemed as if Machina had a consciousness. Florian called Bandit to inform him of the situation. "I think I can connect to the Machina network. Maybe I can find out what this is all about." Bandit pointed out the dangers. What if Underworld was still out there somewhere? Florian wanted to try anyway. But Bandit insisted that H.A.R.R.I.S. get access to Itano Tech's main server to help and protect Florian in an emergency.

Cedric went to an old antique store. To the untrained eye, the store looked like it only sold cheap souvenirs. "Harashi! Good to see you, old friend." A very old-looking Japanese man looked at Cedric. He wore small round glasses and had hardly any hair left on his head. "Cedric! How long has it been? Ten years? Have a seat. What can I do for you? Would you like a cup of tea?" Cedric thanked him politely with a bow, as is customary in Japan, and sat down at an old table with three chairs around it. After Harashi had placed two cups of tea on the table, he said: "Cedric, you're certainly not here to visit an old man like me. A collector like you only comes when he wants something that can only be found in my humble store." Cedric took a sip of tea. "You know me well, Harashi. Actually, I'm here to ask you for advice. I'm looking for two of three artifacts. A blue amulet with a scarab on it and..." Harashi interrupted Cedric. "And a red one with the goddess Khali on it, right?" Cedric looked unsurprised. "I figured you'd know that." Harashi told Cedric that he also knew about the green amulet with the winged serpent. "I know it's in Peru." Cedric wanted to know how Harashi had gotten this information. Harashi explained that he had seen it himself in Peru many years ago. It belonged to a

family whose descendant is now Flytcher. Finally, Cedric asked about the other two artifacts. Harashi took a deep breath. "My friend, I know where they might be. But do you really want to bring all three together?" Cedric didn't seem to understand Harashi's concern. So Harashi continued, "If the legends are true, then the amulets have powers." At this point, Cedric told him about Flytcher's sudden appearance at the headquarters. Harashi looked even more worried than a minute ago. "Cedric, I'll tell you everything I know. But you must promise me that you will prevent these treasures from falling into the wrong hands. If that happens, the power contained in these items could mean the destruction of the world." Cedric promised and in return told Harashi about the C.B.I.A. Harashi listened intently. He seemed particularly interested in the story of Bandit's ancestors.

Itano Tech, at the same time

"H.A.R.R.I.S., check the servers. I want to know if Underworld has something hidden here. Something I've overlooked." H.A.R.R.I.S. searched all the databases in a matter of seconds. And it found something. Even if it wasn't what Florian had expected. "There's a hidden room about forty meters underground. But I can't find an electronic lock." Florian laughed. "Of course you can't. It's a back door. How do I get in there?" H.A.R.R.I.S. showed the way. First Florian had to take the elevator down to the reception hall. There was a lot of activity here. Technicians, scientists, customers. Everything as usual. Then he had to take the stairs down to the boiler room. Once there, he activated his nanosuit. "And now what? There's nothing here." But as he said this, he realized it himself. "Wait a minute. These pipes on the wall lead vertically downwards." He examined the heating pipes and realized that they weren't warm like the other pipes in the room. When he touched one, he noticed that it could be turned. Shortly afterwards, the wall opened up and another staircase led even further down. Lights came on and Florian entered an underground vault.

"H.A.R.R.I.S., what the hell is this? How big is this room?" H.A.R.R.I.S. loaded a virtual map into Florian's field of vision. "About a thousand square meters. The devices here are connected to an independent, centralized system, from the looks of it." Florian walked to

the center of the room. There stood a black, rectangular column, one meter high. Florian walked around the pillar, touching the object to find out what it was all about. Then H.A.R.R.I.S. spoke up again: "Florian, Cedric is in the entrance hall right now. I'll direct him to us." Florian confirmed. Cedric had very important information that would soon change everything. Cedric wasted no time. He immediately began to give Florian his information. "I was with a friend. He knows a lot about ancient artifacts. He says that one of the amulets must be here in Tokyo. Hidden in a granite pillar. Rumor has it..." Florian stepped aside and Cedric saw the pillar. "A pillar like that? How are we supposed to get the thing out of there? Granite is the hardest rock in the world." Florian's guess was correct. Cedric examined the mysterious object. "Take a look. The pillar doesn't seem to be one piece." Indeed it was. If you looked closely, you could see fine lines. As if the column consisted of a long lower part of about eighty centimetres and an upper part of twenty centimetres. Florian tried to lift the upper part. In vain. But Cedric tried to turn it. And indeed he did. But only a little bit. Then it happened. A small compartment opened just above the floor, containing a red amulet. They had found it. It depicted the dark goddess Khali. Strangely, it was surrounded by a pattern that was more typical of Celtic culture. However. There was no time to investigate. They had to get it to headquarters before anyone else found out.



Meanwhile, Flytcher's amulet was being examined at the headquarters in Uno City. H.A.R.R.I.S. was running scans. They were trying to find out how it worked. But there didn't seem to be a viable solution. Flytcher didn't like any of this. He was the prophet. Maybe he was the chosen one, and so far there was no one who had the power to travel through space. He was not going to let anyone take this power away from him.

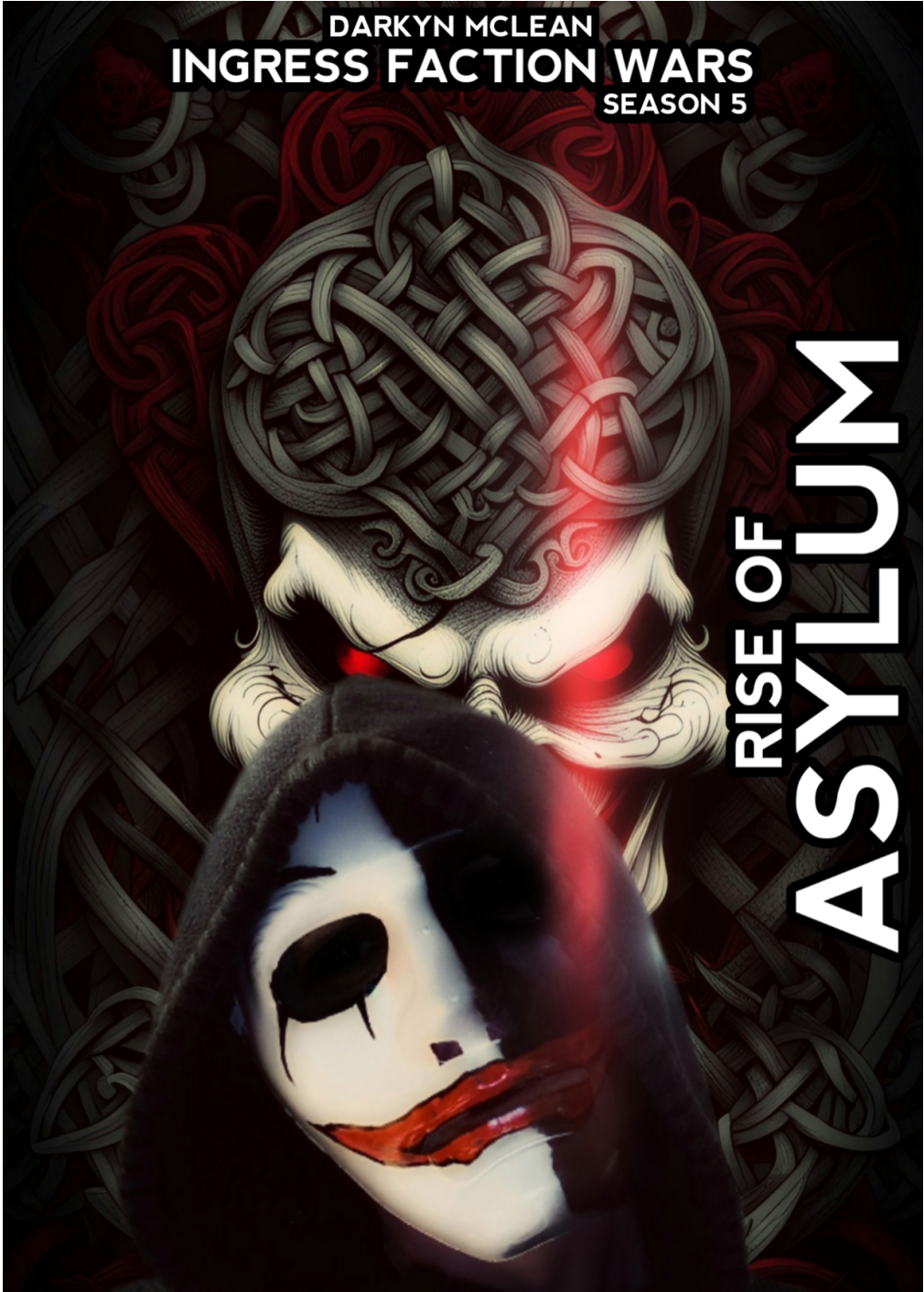
During a conference, Florian and Cedric showed the Khali amulet. Cedric began to explain what he had learned from Harashi: "Until now, it was thought that it could bring the dead back to life. But that's not true. The reason for this is a mistranslation of the old texts. In fact, according to the scriptures, it can connect the wearer with the spirits. So he becomes a medium." JelkeM objected: "Nonsense. Spirits don't exist. That's all superstition." Flytcher replied: "Is that so unlikely for you? My amulet can transport you through space, at least within the portal network. It's quite possible that the spirits, or whatever you want to call them, also exist in the network." Cedric agreed. "And that's what makes it so dangerous. Who knows what power this amulet has." Bandit asked a question: "How is it that there are Celtic patterns on an amulet of a Native American goddess of the dead? Or am I the only one who sees that?" Cedric asked Flytcher to lend him the green amulet. Reluctantly, Flytcher slipped it to him. Cedric seemed to have been expecting the question. He pulled out a hammer and struck the amulet. Flytcher shouted at him. "Are you crazy? Why..." At that moment, everyone realized why Cedric had done that. Under a jade casing was the real amulet of the winged serpent. Also decorated with Celtic ornaments.



Cedric looked around. "I think the third amulet with the scarab has a similar pattern. But to get back to your question, bandit, you need to know something about your ancestors first. Your father was not born McAllister. His birth name was McLean. He is a descendant of the long-forgotten McLean line. Darkyn and his son Eowar were responsible for the split between Resistance fighters and Enlightened Ones. This happened at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Harashi believes he knows that the amulets were created by Eowar. But no one seems to know why. Theoretically, the amulets are yours, bandit." Flytcher jumped up and reached for his amulet. "That's enough. I've received a commission from the Aether himself. No one will take my amulet from me. **NOBODY.** Understood?" Then he looked to a spot in the conference room and said loudly, "Zedrick!" Out of nowhere, his agent appeared. "Oh, did I forget to mention that I can also teleport anyone who touched the amulet? Zedrick, let's go." Zedrick grabbed Flytcher by the arm. Flytcher said that the Rebellion of Light had begun before Zedrick threw a gas grenade and the two disappeared into a portal. Everyone else awoke from their unconsciousness hours later.

DARKYN MCLEAN
INGRESS FACTION WARS
SEASON 5

RISE OF
ASYLUM



CHAPTER 1 - ALONE

It took a few days for everyone to recover from the gas. Bandit withdrew a little. At the moment it looked as if all the C.B.I.A.'s efforts had been in vain. Why did there always have to be a war? His team went back to business as usual.

The amulet was locked in a locked room. Just in case someone wanted to steal it. It was in a display case made of armored glass, which was also electronically secured. Cameras were installed in the relatively small room, monitoring every corner. Bandit stood in front of the display case and stared at the amulet. "H.A.R.R.I.S., how's the analysis going?" His good friend replied promptly: "It's made of a very rare metal. It's very light, but almost indestructible. I can't say how it was made, because it's harder than granite. According to my research, the metal comes from a meteorite. But it was only discovered in Scotland a few years ago. Bandit thought about it. "I've spoken to Cedric. My ancestors lived there. It's quite possible that this Eowar found the meteorite. But that doesn't explain how you could make such an amulet with the tools of the time. And I can't explain how an Indian goddess could be depicted on a Scottish amulet". H.A.R.R.I.S. remained silent at first, but then had an interesting answer at the ready. "My father once told me a story when I was a little girl. It was about people who came from another world. But also about false gods. He called them 'the shapers'. The people in the story lived in a world that was almost like ours. Only in our dimension, these shapers do not exist. However. The people there had special powers when they were in direct contact with XM. As Bandit looked towards the door, he caught sight of Florian. "Have you been standing there long?" he asked. Florian lowered his head, came closer and sat down on the floor in front of the shop window. "She's right. I know because I don't belong in this world. I also knew your father, H.A.R.R.I.S. The underworld was my fault. I wrote his code with another dimension's portal code. Never mind. What matters now is that you know the story of your ancestors."

Florian talked about 13th century Scotland and Darkyn McLean. The first records of a portal go back to him. His son Eowar founded four orders whose task it was to protect the balance of the ether. In Florian's dimension, the descendant was called Andreas and

was born in Austria. Here it was Dorian McAllister. "It's interesting that the Orders of R.U.N.E. don't exist here. I tried to make a movement out of it, but I failed. I failed at everything." Bandit put his hand on Florian's shoulder and said, "It is what it is. Forget about it. We should take care of the current things. Maybe I can use the amulet to connect with my ancestors." Bandit took the artifact out of the display case and put it on. But nothing happened. "It's late, Florian. Let's go to sleep. We'll continue tomorrow."

Meanwhile in Peru

Flytcher called his followers together and preached. "Friends! Enlightened ones! The ether has chosen us. Us. No one else. But those who are blind to the light want to take what is ours. They want to rob us of our sacred artifact." The crowd was furious. Rants of hatred against the C.B.I.A. and anyone who wasn't part of the NDF were raised. Flytcher was slowly but surely building an army. It consisted of preachers to spread his message, inquisitors sent out to destroy or capture any portal that wasn't green. First and foremost were the scouts, who gathered information on enemy activity. Zedrick was tasked with spreading negative propaganda about the enemy. Unfortunately for the Office, no one knew how powerful the NDF really was. Bandit and his team were left with no allies and an amulet that didn't seem to work.

CHAPTER 2 - STRANGER

The next morning, Bandit got himself a coffee in the canteen and sat down at a table. In the meantime, fully equipped quarters had been set up for each member. The daily commute there was not a good idea.

It was around five in the morning. He was sitting alone. H.A.R.R.I.S. entered the canteen in his synthetic body and sat down. "Good morning, Andrew. How was your night?" Bandit took a sip of his coffee. "Pretty good except for a strange dream. Why do you ask?" H.A.R.R.I.S. wanted to know more and insisted that Bandit tell him about the dream. "Okay, okay. Since when are you so curious? Okay, okay. In the dream, I was out at night. I was alone and didn't know where I was at first. Suddenly I was standing in front of the Gasometer in Vienna. These are the four large former gas towers that now house apartments and a shopping center. But everything was different in my dream. The sky was a strange red color and a voice led me to an entrance. A sign read "Crownwell Asylum". When I entered the building, I had the feeling of seeing a huge red portal. In the middle of this huge flame stood a man. He was wearing a strange mask. Like some kind of clown. He kept calling out to me. Then he said that we were all connected. Esther, I had no idea what he meant by that". Now he realized that the whole team was present too. ErvSpy asked H.A.R.R.I.S., "Show him. He needs to see it.

H.A.R.R.I.S., who now had a very human body thanks to Niulen and Freiburger, looked at ErvSpy with concern. "Good, please follow me to the conference room." Once there, she activated a projector that showed video footage from the security cameras in the amulet room. "You were near the artifact last night. Take a look at this," she said and played the recording. You could actually see Bandit entering the room as if remote-controlled, taking the amulet and staring at it. He remained in this position for almost an hour. JelkeM was stunned. "Wow, that's scary. I didn't even know you sleepwalked." He didn't either. At least not yet. Florian had a hunch: "Could it be that the artifact has something to do with it?" At that moment, Bandit realized that he could feel the amulet under his T-shirt. Astonished, he replied: "I'm slowly becoming convinced. But we don't have time. H.A.R.R.I.S., please find out if this Crownwell Asylum really exists. Maybe it was just a

dream. Freiburger, please get me a tracker. Just in case I keep wandering around in my sleep. I'll lock myself in my quarters to be on the safe side. Florian had an objection: "There are no cameras in your room. Maybe we could install one?" Bandit replied in the negative. "Put security guards from Uno City outside the door. I can't go anywhere anyway." Cedric thought Bandit should put the amulet back in the locked room. "NO!" shouted Bandit, as if the amulet was going to be taken away from him. "No, that's all right. I want to know if I can use it."

As agreed, Bandit went to his quarters. His colleagues were worried. Especially Florian. "I've seen something like this before. And I experienced something similar when the underworld took over my body. The amulet already has a firm grip on him. Just like Flytcher, Bandit doesn't want to let go of the amulet." JelkeM said: "I think the image of Kali is on the amulet for a reason." LoardGreen responded: "Come on. A goddess of death? There must be a better explanation." Suddenly the alarm sounded. H.A.R.R.I.S. shouted: "Attention! Machina portals have just been sighted around the building. We have to get away!" Everyone ran out of the building armed with the scanner. Nobody paid attention to the fact that all the doors opened automatically in an emergency. Even those of Bandit's room.

Florian was the first out. He had the exoskeleton that Underworld had attached to his body to thank for that. It wasn't difficult to neutralize the portals, but Florian had the feeling he could sense Underworld's presence. But there was no time for that. He ran on to the main entrance, where there was another portal. The team should be there now. And they were. But they stood there as if they had seen a ghost. "What's going on here? Keep going!" Florian shouted. Cedric raised his arm and signaled Florian to back off. The group couldn't believe what happened next at first. They all saw the red portal. Without a scanner. Everyone could see it. It stood there like a huge red flame and Bandit was right in the middle of it. "What the hell..." Florian began. But Cedric stopped him again. "Leave him alone. There's nothing we can do now. Let it happen." Bandit seemed to be in a trance. The spectacle only lasted a few minutes. Then he collapsed. The team immediately rushed to him and he was taken to the isolation ward for examination. Never before had a red portal been seen without a scanner. Not even Underworld had this power.

The team gathered in the canteen. There was wild speculation as to what had just happened. And again, Cedric had a halfway plausible explanation. "Maybe Underworld didn't create the red portals at all. What if he just thought that? Maybe the portals have always been here. They are made of exotic antimatter. Everything in the universe has an equivalent. I can imagine that the underworld simply found a way to bring this kind of matter into our plane of existence." LoardGreen looked confused. "I don't understand such things. I'm going to go take a shit now. Let me know if there's anything to fight. See you then."

JelkeM wanted to check on Bandit. After all, she had known him the longest. Lately, there seemed to be an invisible wall between them. She reproached herself. Everything that had happened was hard to bear. That's why she wanted to stand by him in this situation. Smiling, she entered the ward, where she found a doctor and a nurse having a heated discussion. As she got closer, she heard the doctor say: "How the hell could this have happened? "And what idiot smeared the sheet?" JelkeM walked a little closer and asked. The doctor, who introduced himself as Dr. Hermann, explained that Bandit had disappeared. The cameras had failed and then he showed JelkeM the sheet. Someone had written "HaHa" hundreds of times on the sheet. JelkeM immediately ran back and told the team. Florian immediately had the whole building searched for Bandit.

The search took hours. Was he even still there? Florian had H.A.R.R.I.S. give him a floor plan of Uno City. "Take a look." He pointed to a monitor, to a room that didn't seem to have a door. "H.A.R.R.I.S., what's that room?" She hacked into the central server. "I've got him. It's in there. This room was used by the NSA until the nineties. Apparently things were stored there that weren't intended for the public." Florian jumped up. ErvSpy was to follow him.

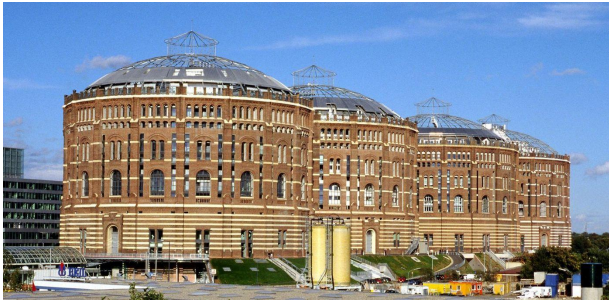
They were standing in front of a wall deep in the basement. ErvSpy was surprised. "There's nothing here." Florian searched every millimeter. "Don't let them fool you. Those NSA people knew how to hide things." He had already discovered a small hole. Just big enough to stick a pen through. ErvSpy had one with him. The wall opened immediately and a huge room appeared. Inside were meter-high shelves with boxes,

files, artifacts and much more. It smelled musty. Obviously no one had been here for years. "My God! What is this place?" Florian asked out loud. It took a while for the two men to reach the end of the hall. There they found a desk. A man dressed in black was sitting at it with his back to the officers. He appeared to be typing on a smartphone. When he turns around, a familiar voice says: "Sorry, friends. Some things have changed. He was wearing a mask and Florian and ErvSpy didn't know what to say.

CHAPTER 3 - HaHa

Two days later

"Florian, I've found out something about the Crownwell Asylum." announced H.A.R.R.I.S.
"There actually was an institution with that name in the 19th century. But not here, but in Scotland. The building looked very similar to the Vienna Gasometer. Here is a photo of the gasometer complex as it looks today.



The building in Scotland did not consist of four towers, but of one tower that was slightly higher. There are hardly any records of it. Just a drawing in the archives of the British Royal Household. I hacked into their server. But there is a note from a former employee. I analyzed and edited it. I read out:

"This is my first and only account of the events at Crownwell Asylum. May God have mercy on my soul. No, I deserve a place in the deepest purgatory of hell.

Sunday, November 22, 1925, another day in hell. Like every day, I had to bring stale bread and water to the sick. At first their cries were unbearable. But after a while they seemed to fall silent. I quickly learned that I was only suppressing the complaints of these poor souls. May God have a special place in heaven for these people. One male patient, whose name I did not know, was known to me under the number 1734. It was said that no one before him had endured the so-called treatments longer than he had. The man had to endure these tortures every other day. I didn't know where the doctor had found him or why the man was here. I myself have been employed as a nurse for three years. But there

can be no question of care in such a godless place. Today, Dr. Wilkins assigned me to attend 1734's treatment, as his personal assistant did not show up for work. I had to administer a sedative to 1734 and then push him into the operating room in an old wheelchair. When the doctor arrived, he brought a tray with all kinds of old and rusty surgical instruments. I dared to ask what illness was afflicting this poor man. The doctor told me that he had picked the man up on the street and that he was not ill. But also that no one would miss him and that he could use him for brain research. He was just scum and a burden on society. Then the doctor seemed to have forgotten something and left the operating theater. Just then, 1734 woke up. Contrary to my expectations, he smiled at me. I asked him how he could smile given his particular circumstances. The smile turned into a hearty laugh. Then he told me his story. He said he came from a world that was different and yet the same. He was probably unconscious when Dr. Wilkins found him and mistook him for a beggar. He said that he had discovered an incredible, new kind of energy where he came from. And that certain circumstances, which he would not discuss in detail, had led to him being transported through space and time and finally arriving in Scotland a few years ago. At first I thought he was completely mad, which in my mind was the reason he was in Crownwell Asylum. But then I saw this strange purple glow in his eyes. For a moment, I felt like I was looking into the universe itself. He was still smiling. This man must have experienced the worst pain you can inflict on a human being, but he was smiling. Just before Dr. Wilkins came back into the operating room, he said that all worlds were connected and that he was going to start a new journey through space and time today and that I should leave the building as soon as I could. I brought this man bread and water every day. He never spoke and never complained. He was just there. And today he spoke to me. Because I believed what he said in a strange way, I asked him his name. He said that he used to be known as Andreas. Andreas Fischer. Then the doctor arrived. Just as the doctor was about to apply the scalpel to 1734's head, the latter jumped up, picked up another scalpel and rammed it into the doctor's neck as far as it would go. He then used the rusty blade to cut a smile on his own face. His face covered in blood, he looked at me, laughed out loud and asked me again to leave the building quickly. I ran as fast as I could. When I reached the exit, I realized that I had never told anyone about the conditions in this house before. I felt partly responsible for

the suffering of hundreds of people who were trapped here. So I sat down at a table, took a piece of paper and a pen and wrote this letter. It already smelled of smoke. But I stayed here. I could hear the screams again. Only this time the cause of the screams wasn't the treatments. It was the fire that was going to save all these people. The fire came closer and I felt a strange energy around me. I saw 1734 standing at the end of the corridor with his back to me. He turned and looked me straight in the eye. He was wearing a strange mask that looked frighteningly like the self-inflicted expression on his face. Then he snapped his finger and disappeared into a red light before calling out to me: 'I am Asylum. Remember, friend, you must always smile.' I couldn't smile. Not anymore. I now put this letter in a glass bottle and remain in the fire that is supposed to raze this terrible place to the ground. In this way I hope to do penance.

Joshua Martinson"

Florian needed a few seconds. "Shit. That's ... I don't know what to say. How's Bandit?" H.A.R.R.I.S. sounded worried. "I don't know. He's been in the archives for two days. He won't come out." Suddenly Bandit was standing in Florian's quarters. "I'm here." Florian was startled. Bandit was standing there, dressed all in black, wearing that strange mask. His eyes had that strange glow that Joshua Martinson had described in his letter.

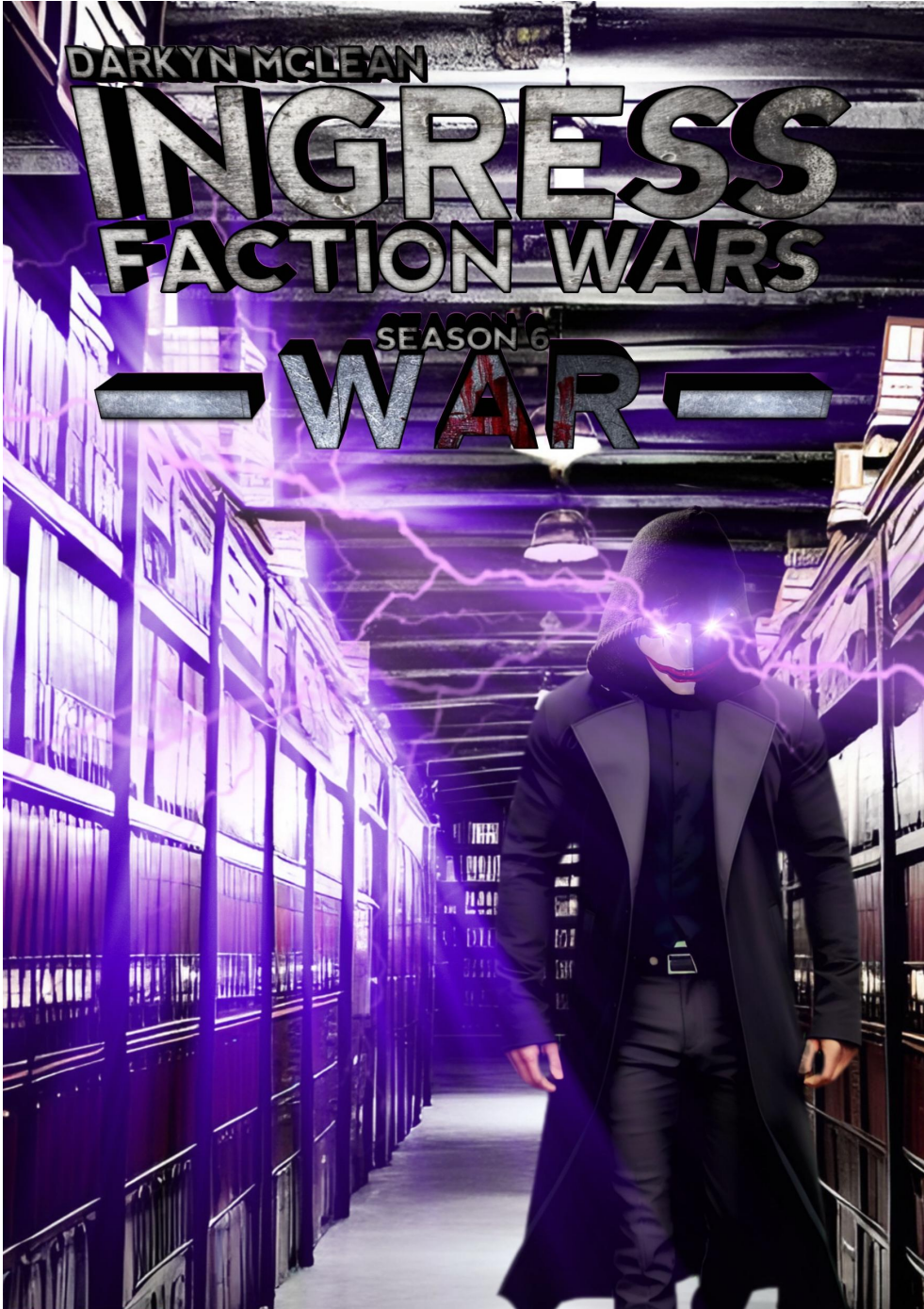


Florian stood up and came closer. "What happened to you, Andrew?" Bandit laughed. His voice sounded deeper than usual. "Get the team together. We'll meet in the archive. I'll tell you everything. And Florian, smile for once. You look like the embodiment of depression."

Half an hour later, everyone was there. Bandit was standing at his desk, which he had now equipped with everything you need as an agent. "Nice to see everyone here at last," he said. All his colleagues wanted to ask questions at the same time, but he immediately stopped them with a threatening gesture. "I'll do the talking. You listen. I've changed. A little. No. Yes. Ha ha. Whatever. The amulet actually connected me to someone's spirit. Unfortunately, Cedric, your information is wrong. You don't become a medium. I've become something new." Cedric nodded. "There's no mistaking that." Bandit continued. "You know, it's like Flytcher said. Everything is connected. People, animals. Everything living and non-living. All planets, even space and time on all planes. The amulet has connected me to someone else." Florian raised his arm and Bandit gave him the floor. "With Asylum, right?" Bandit nodded. Florian read out Martinson's letter. A shiver ran down everyone's spine. Bandit took the floor again: "The amulet let me communicate with him. I know who he was. He was a version of my father. From your homeland, Florian. Florian nodded sadly and asked: "Was he?" Bandit nodded as well. Then he took off his mask and the glow in his eyes disappeared. "I don't know how. But the amulet has merged our minds. I remember everything he knew, everything he saw and everything he, or rather you, Florian, experienced. Andreas died that day in the Crownwell asylum. His power was fed by XAM, which enabled him to transfer himself, his mind, into the dark network. It is thanks to Underworld that all this was able to happen. Since his code also comes from Andreas' home dimension, everything is out of balance. Somehow I actually became connected to one of my ancestors, as you can see." JelkeM, who was still completely shocked, asked, "What's with this horrible mask?" Bandit picked up the mask again. "I found it here in the archives. The NSA stored all unsolved cases, artifacts and other items here until 1999. I had a feeling that led me to the box where the mask was. Andreas transferred a part of himself onto this face when he was in the asylum. And now that I'm a new person, a combination of the two of us, so to speak, I'm Asylum. And I'm going to kick Flytcher's ass." Then he put the mask back on. LoardGreen stepped forward.

"Brother, you know I'll fight for you. But honestly, you don't have all the lights on the chandelier anymore. I think that's great." Now everyone had to grin. Bandit's, no, Asylum's voice changed again with the mask. "That's true. But from today, there's no more negotiating. From today on, there will be fighting." Then he laughed as if he were the best host of the day. Florian remarked that this incident was better kept an internal secret. But Asylum laughed again. "Too late, old friend."

<https://youtu.be/Gv-b7slyakA?si=JEjy3zJ3xrHuuq0W>



CHAPTER 1 - PAST

JelkeM

Early in the morning, JelkeM was sitting in her quarters reading a book. She wanted to distract herself from all the crazy things she had gotten herself into. It wasn't working. It had all started as a game, and now she was involved in a war that no one had seen coming. She remembered an anomaly and the fun she had there. Carefree and relaxed, she chased portals and points. She met Bandit that day. The two quickly became friends. That same weekend, her view of things changed. JelkeM wanted to buy a present for Bandit at one of the many stalls in a tent. As a memento of a lovely weekend. It was to be a small golden pin with the Ingress logo on it. Then she heard excited voices behind the tent wall. A man and a woman seemed to be arguing violently. JelkeM listened more closely. What she heard in three minutes changed her life. The two strangers were talking about the illusion of the game, about the possible effects of XM on people and about players who had no idea about any of this. When she told her new friend, JelkeM and Bandit decided to take action. A few weeks later, they met McAllister

Harris

For H.A.R.R.I.S., the same physical rules no longer applied as for the rest of humanity. Their perception of time and space was also different. As an artificial being with a human past, she had access to all memories. That evening, she remembered her time as an NSA agent and the stories her father had told her about McAllister. She had been prepared for her career as a child. By the age of eight, she was able to predict the future moves of criminals just by analyzing tactical data. But for Esther, these were just stories and McAllister was just a hero in her father's imagination. It wasn't until she became an agent that she learned from the notes Esther's father had left behind that everything was true. Her superior ordered her to rebuild the C.B.I.A. with the help of McAllister.

The memories made Esther sad. Sometimes. Actually, she was now a powerful being with access to all of humanity's knowledge. She wondered if continuing to help the C.B.I.A. was really the right thing to do. Maybe Underworld was right. Or Flytcher? She calculated

probabilities. Millions of scenarios. In every scenario, someone died, and she always survived. She decided to put the course of her fate in the hands of her team. Perhaps she had overlooked something...

Freiburger and Niulen

Hardly anyone knows what abilities these two men have. Only H.A.R.R.I.S. knows the past of the two agents. Both studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They studied artificial intelligence and various technologies in an attempt to integrate the human mind into an artificial environment. But this is exactly where the problem lay. Since experiments on humans were forbidden, after some experiments on animals had been quite positive, the two decided to try it themselves. Niulen wanted to transfer his mind into the network. A copy was not possible. No memory in the world had sufficient capacity to make this possible or to represent a person's mind as a code. However, people didn't know anything about XM at the time. They began the experiment. Freiburg was naturally worried. Especially because they did not have permission to carry out the experiment.

They secretly set up their equipment in a basement room. The preparations took weeks. Niulen took a seat on a chair they had bought from a dentist. Freiburg placed a scaffold on Niulen's head. It looked like a device for measuring brain waves. The computers were running at full speed. Only a few minutes to go until take-off. Freiburg was ready, as was Niulen. Even if he was a little anxious. In five, four, three... Stop. The door opened and the dean stood in the room with the police. It was over. A few hours later, they were both suspended. So much for graduating from MIT. But Freiburg and Niulen came to the attention of the NSA. They went their separate ways for the next three years, looking for jobs. Niulen became an employee in a library, but continued to work on the theory of his idea. Freiburg repaired old household appliances. At home, he secretly developed a device that might have made the original idea possible.

Neither of them suspected that they were being shadowed. Three years after their expulsion, a woman knocked on the door. She introduced herself with an NSA ID card. "Good afternoon, sir, my name is Harris. NSA."

Cedric

Cédric walked through Vienna in search of interesting antiques. He always did this to relax a little. In general, he liked to be out and about on his own. He got his interest in old objects from his grandfather. He told him stories about the mythology of the Germanic tribes, Greeks, Romans, Sumerians, Egyptians and many others. As a teenager, Cedric wanted to know for the first time whether the sword Excalibur really existed. It took him many years to make a name for himself among treasure hunters. He investigated pyramids all over the world, underground vaults in Israel, England and the USA. He never found the sword. But he did find many other interesting things, which brought him a considerable fortune and a very interesting life. A few years ago, he met Harashi, a Japanese collector and dealer, for the first time. The two complemented each other in every respect. Above all, their interest in those artifacts, buildings and writings that seemed to show similarities between cultures that could not know anything about each other due to distance. Examples of this are Angkor Wat, Atlantis, the Roman inscriptions and also the traditions of the Germanic peoples, although they had no writing to record their knowledge.

Cedric came to the C.B.I.A. for a reason. He had a feeling, a hunch, that with this team he would get answers to many unanswered questions. Some have already been answered, even if only in Cedric's eyes.

ErvSpy

Two years ago, he was just a young man carrying piles of files from one office to another. At the age of eighteen, he was doing his military service in Vienna. It soon became apparent that his analytical and combinatorial skills were far above average. After just a few weeks, he was recruited by the Austrian secret service and later recruited by Harris for the NSA. She gave him the code name ErvSpy. At first, he didn't know why he should be called that. At the latest when she familiarized him with the scanner, he realized that he would soon be given a task. And so it was. A few weeks later, he was known in the NSA offices. He was the guy who came in everywhere and brought every agent the files they needed or their daily coffee. And he listened carefully. Every word, every suspicion, every opportunity to expose a mole

was immediately passed on to Harris. In return, he was well paid and prepared for an early assignment. Harris was certain. In a few days she would find the man she needed for her secret mission. ErvSpy had a coffee in his apartment. He took his job seriously. That's why it looked like an investigator's office. There was a file on the table in front of him.



Florian

Florian has often been out and about in Vienna's city center recently. In a small side street, he saw an advertising sign hanging on the wall of a house.



He smiled, thought for a moment and entered a small pub. When he saw his whisky in front of him, he remembered the past. Not of what he had been through as an Underworld. Nor of what he had experienced with McAllister. No, he remembered the world he came from. A world where, just like here, people had no idea that there were other dimensions. There, too, Ingress was a game. Officially. There, too, the resistance fought against the Enlightened Ones. But there was no C.B.I.A., no Underworld, no NDF. There was R.U.N.E.

He remembered that the individual the bandit had bonded with through the amulet was a real person. More than that. He was his best friend. He also sadly remembered that his and many other worlds had been destroyed. In Florian's homeland, there were the Shapers. False gods known as Loki, Noreia, Zeus and so on. Gods who interfered in human history unnoticed. He remembered a group called S.W.A.R.M. It was another equivalent of R.U.N.E. His best friend at the time called himself "Bl4ckPriest". The leader of S.W.A.R.M. was called "H1ghPriest" and his group had its roots not in early Germanic history, but in Egyptian history. Florian and all his friends had to learn back then that everything that could ever be conceived, everything that anyone in the universe, in all universes, could ever imagine, was reality. As if every single thought of every living being created a new universe. An infinite web of universes. And they were all connected. When Bl4ckPriest had to decide to let H1ghPriest and S.W.A.R.M. die, he went mad. A Dark XM portal made things worse and so Asylum was born. Admittedly, Florian's story was

confusing. Too confusing for someone who wasn't there. When he first came into contact with the C.B.I.A. in the late eighties, McAllister received a transcript known as "The Book Of Rune". Did it still exist? Wouldn't it be much easier if his friends knew the whole truth?

SmEgZGFzIEJ1Y2ggZXhpc3RpZXJ0IGluIGVpbmdsaXNjaGVyIFNwcmFjaGUuIEtvbnRha3RpZ
XJlIGNiaWFDTURSIG9kZXIgy29vbHJ1bm5lcjgyLg==

Whatever. Florian had a goal. Once again, he had to save a world. This time it couldn't go wrong.

CHAPTER 2 - ANGELS

It was getting cold outside, the days were getting shorter. Bandit insisted that everyone who addressed him by his alias use the new name "Asylum". Although the new situation seemed strange, almost supernatural, it was accepted by the C.B.I.A.. Only Cedric was skeptical. He desperately wanted to know how all this was possible and why these amulets had suddenly appeared. He visited Asylum in his office. Asylum was working on some historical documents. "Asylum, I want to recruit someone for us. An old acquaintance. Maybe he can help us." Asylum looked up at Cedric. "Really? We can use all the help we can get. Is he a good investigator? Or just someone who likes to use bursters?" Cedric smiled. "No. His name is Nick. He has a special gift. "I'd best introduce him to you." Asylum nodded. "Yeah, give him a call. I still need to look for clues to the scarab amulet here."

Cedric left the office and dialed a number. "Hey Nick. This is Cedric." The voice on the phone answered, "Hey man! How long has it been? Three years? Never mind. What do you need? You're not calling to ask how I am, are you?" Cedric answered in the negative. "I need someone with your skills. I work for an organization called the Central Bureau of Ingress Affairs and..." Nick interrupted Cedric, "...and you need a psychic to tell you that you know someone who's been looking too deep into the portal network, right?" Cedric laughed. "Something like that. I'm in Vienna. When can you be here?" Nick thought about it. "I've just come back from Singapore. I actually have to go to an event. The biggest gurus, seers and healers are supposed to be there and..." Cedric sighed. "Nick, the world is going to the dogs. You're needed." Silence. "All right, then. Actually, I can't stand these idiots anyway. But your company is paying for the flight, okay?"

Asylum actually found something. It was only a small clue, but it was worth following up. The information came from an online auction house. According to the records of sales between 2021 and 2023, an Egyptian amulet with a scarab was sold. However, it was labeled a fake because it contained ornaments that did not correspond to Egyptian culture. No information was available about the buyer. "H.A.R.R.I.S., can you find out who bought the artifact?" But she couldn't. Whoever it was covered their tracks with the

utmost precision. "Shit, I need to know where it is. Is there no way to find a trail that points to the owner?" H.A.R.R.I.S. replied in the negative.

Twelve hours later, Cedric calls the team together for a meeting. Everyone was dressed casually. Asylum was wearing a black hooded trench coat and his mask. Someone introduced themselves next to Cedric. "Team, this is Nick. I think he can help us with the amulets. Please explain yourself, old friend. Nick stood up. "Yes, hello guys. I'm Nick, you already know that. I'm from Germany. About six years ago, I was on a kind of self-discovery trip. I went to Ireland to find out more about my ancestors. Supposedly they were Vikings. Anyway. Near Brey, I saw Ingress players for the first time. So I downloaded the app. I also met old Cedric there. He wanted to help me because he was looking for Norse artifacts anyway. We found one too. It was a shield, hidden in a cave on the cliffs of Brey. To make a long story short. The shield had probably been lying directly in a portal for a thousand years and when I touched it, I caught a glimpse of a possible future." Cedric continued in Nick's place: "He's been a seer ever since. He can do a lot more. I think Nick can help us find the bug." Nick scratched his head. "A beetle? What are you looking for this time, old man?" Cedric explained what had happened so far. But Asylum remained silent the whole time. Nick noticed and looked at him. "You're the man who infiltrated the network." Asylum nodded. "I'm Andrew Jones. They call me Asylum around here." Nick waved at him. "Yeah. Cool. You're the boss. I see. I saw you in a vision. You look like you have two souls. No. One soul from two worlds." Asylum placed his red amulet on the table. "Like Cedric said, our spiritual super preacher has one too. We need to know where the third amulet is." Nick picked it up and looked at it, startled. "By all the gods. There's something older in this amulet. The energy it generates reaches far beyond our existence. Wait, it also seems to have a connection to the other two. Yes. I see a green artifact. It's in South America. There's something else. The third one is in Berlin. But I can't say exactly where it is. But I see an angel guarding it." Asylum took it back. "Thanks, Nick, right?" Nick nodded. "You have an interesting gift. Welcome to the team. H.A.R.R.I.S. will explain everything you need to know." Nick looked surprised. "Hey, wait a minute, masked man. I never said I was joining your club." Asylum stood up. "You of all people, Seer, should understand that some things are decided before we even have a clue. But if you want, you can go, of course." Nick thought about it. He stayed.



Asylum decided to fly to Berlin with Cedric and Nick. In order not to attract attention and possibly make a purchase offer, they dressed in business style. When they arrived at the airport, they decided to go out for a bite to eat first. Nick and Cedric talked about Ireland, Asylum told them about the letter he had received from Crownwell Asylum. Suddenly Nick stops. "We're being watched. I can feel it." Just as they were about to stand up, a well-dressed man joined them. "Stay seated, gentlemen. Finish your drinks. Then please follow me." Asylum was about to say something, but Nick pointed to a pin on the man's jacket. "There, an angel. We should go with him."



The officers were led to a black sedan. Asylum asked cautiously: "Where are we going? Do you know we're from the C.B.I.A.?" The mysterious man, who was wearing dark sunglasses, didn't bat an eyelid. "Gentlemen, you will find out everything as soon as we arrive. Mr. Shin will receive you personally."

The journey took about twenty minutes. The car stopped in front of a high-rise building. The words "ARC" were emblazoned above the entrance, which had a secure revolving door. In the entrance hall, Asylum, Nick and Cedric were led to an elevator. There, the man in black said goodbye. "Mr. Shin is waiting for you. Have a nice day."

The elevator took the officers to the top floor. When the door opened, they saw a huge office space in front of them. At the end, in front of a panoramic window, sat another man. "Come closer. Have a seat. Don't worry, I'm not your enemy. You can call me Mr. Shin." Mr. Shin didn't give the officers a chance to ask questions and continued. "Look, I know why you're here. It was only a matter of time. I've been watching the C.B.I.A. for a good ten years. I planted the clue to the artifact they're looking for myself. I knew that sooner or later you would come to me if you found one of the amulets. Asylum did ask a question: "Then why don't you have all three if you've known about them for so long?" Shin stood up and looked out of the window. "Let me tell you what I found out about the artifacts. Maybe it will answer your question. Buying the scarab was just a trick. I actually found the piece about fifteen years ago at a market in Cairo. The seller probably thought it was cheap costume jewelry. But I realized that it was worth more than all the money in the world. In 2006, I founded Arc in my home country of Ukraine. As you know, circumstances there have changed. So I moved the company here. Whatever." Cedric spoke up: "So I assume you don't want to sell it. Then why are we here?" Shin laughed softly. "It's quite simple. I'd like to make you an offer. But first we're waiting for someone to arrive tomorrow. Until then, be my guests. I've had a first-class suit prepared for each of you." The rooms were very luxurious. Asylum took a shower first. To his surprise, he found his favorite whisky in the minibar. After a glass or two, he left the room. Cedric had the same idea and so they went to Nick's suit together. There were monitors on the wall of the long corridor. The same commercial was playing on all of them.

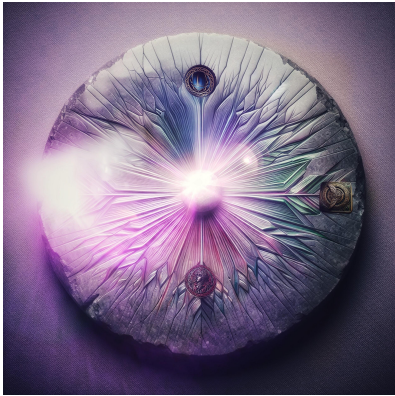
https://youtu.be/2cnoE17ft5A?si=O2ePGL8Z51ASY_Jd

Once in Nick's room, Asylum immediately struck up a conversation. "Why have we never heard of this company? And who do you think we're going to meet tomorrow?" No one had an answer ready. So, for once, the men decided to use the evening to relax. How often else did they have the opportunity to do so?

CHAPTER 3 - CONFLICTS

The next morning they had a first-class breakfast with room service. Then the man with the sunglasses fetched them from their rooms and escorted them to the elevator. "Mr. Shin is expecting you. Have a nice day." When they arrived at Shin's office, Asylum, Nick and Cedric were greeted warmly. "Good morning, gentlemen. I hope everything went to your satisfaction." Asylum thanked them and asked, "Where is the person we were supposed to wait for?" At that moment, the elevator door opened again. Asylum stood up and said, "This can't be happening! What's he doing here?" Flytcher entered the office with Zedrick at his side. "I'm wondering the same thing. Why is the C.B.I.A. here? And what's all this about?" he wanted to know. Shin remained calm. "Please, I'll explain everything." He stood up and asked everyone present to follow him. The elevator took the men down a few floors, where there were apparently research rooms. Shin gave a guided tour. "Everything you see here is based on XM's research and the development of new technologies. We have made groundbreaking discoveries. See for yourself." They stopped in front of a window that separated the corridor from a room. Behind it were scientists and technicians who appeared to be building some kind of engine. "A drive is being developed here that runs on XM. It doesn't need any physical fuel. And it could move a ship a hundred times faster than conventional drives. Naturally, all the world's major powers are interested in this. The same applies to our breakthroughs in medicine and the defense industry. Flytcher comments: "Of course. XM had to become a weapon at some point." Shin paused. "I said defense industry. Not weapons development. We're researching suits that use XM to protect soldiers from radiation, heat, cold and other influences. We've developed exoskeletons that allow a person to carry a hundred times their body weight. And we have developed a completely new type of robot. They are autonomous and can replace soldiers. Or for rescue missions, for example. The possibilities are endless." Asylum also paused. "Why are you telling us all this? What do you want from us?" Shin remained silent and led his guests into a kind of conference room. There was a kind of stone in the middle, but there were no chairs around it. It was round and had a diameter of about two meters. The table was richly decorated with carvings. Cedric immediately began to take a closer look at the object. "Are those glyphs?" he asked. Shin walked around the table. "Yes. As I'm sure you know, glyphs are a

kind of language. But we don't know exactly what the reason for the existence of these signs is and where exactly they come from. The fact is that they are there." Flytcher was getting impatient. "Get to the point. I don't have time for this." Shin pulled something out of his inside pocket. The others were amazed when they saw what it was. He placed the scarab amulet in a recess on the table. It fitted in perfectly. "Why don't you put your amulets down too? We'll see what happens. Trust me. You'll get them back." Cedric mentioned that Andrew's ancestor Eowar McLean had most likely created the amulets and that Andrew was the rightful owner. But Shin and Flytcher ignored him. Shin said, "Look, the amulets are right where they belong. One day you'll understand. So Flytcher and Asylum also put their amulets on the table. Suddenly, three lines stretched towards the center. One blue, one green and one red. The men could hardly believe what happened next.



The whole table began to glow in the colors blue, green and red. A bright, glistening light could be seen in the middle. The lines of light carried themselves there and another light appeared in purple. The room was filled with a sound reminiscent of a strong wind. It was loud. Shin shouted: "Look, this is the true power of the ether! Order, chaos and nature unite!" He laughed with joy. But the laughter also sounded like that of someone who had lost their mind. Asylum was the first to take his amulet back. The light went out. Now everyone had to calm down and realize what they had just seen. Shin emphasized that he couldn't understand the purpose of this artifact. Then Nick spoke up: "I saw

something. I think I understand now. Everyone looked at the seer expectantly. "Mr. Shin is right. Blue stands for order. Red for chaos and green for the nature in between. But a portal, untouched and neutral, stands for birth. Aether in its purest form." Cedric asked Nick about the purple light. Nick walked over to where the light was radiating from the artifact. "Knowledge. All the primal forms of the ether, when combined, lead to infinite knowledge. Whoever possesses all three is a god." Flytcher, Shin and Asylum looked into each other's eyes. Each knew that none of them could give this power to the other. Then Nick continued: "But there's something else. Andrew, Asylum, you are an anomaly in the multiverse. Andrew, the original Asylum was an Enlightened One in his world. You are resistance. Andrew has been infected with a form of XM that exists in our world as Machina. Chaos." Asylum looked at Nick questioningly: "Okay. What's next? What does that mean?" Nick put his hand on Asylum's shoulder. "You carry the power of purple within you. Your amulet has bound you to Andreas. He didn't belong in this world. Just as Florian doesn't belong here." Shin listened attentively and asked: "So you are a seer. But how do you know all this?" Nick smiled. "This table ... is a portal. A portal to another world. It opened for a moment and someone spoke to me. With the help of the glyphs. Look at the table." Two glyphs were still glowing. Question and distance. Asylum touched the glyphs. "The question....Why. The distance....Far. Why Far?" Flytcher spoke it. "WhySoFar." Then Flytcher took his amulet and he and Zedrick disappeared before the eyes of the others.

Asylum ran up to Shin, grabbed him by the collar and pushed him against the wall. "Okay, asshole. You tell me what this is all about right now. How did you know all this? How did you get that stone table and why do you know more about XM than we do? Answer me, or I swear I'll kill you!" Cedric tried to reassure. "Andrew, let him explain." Asylum let go of Shin. Shin was a little angry now too. "I've treated you all kindly! I've tried to explain to you what we're doing here! But fine, you clown. I'll tell you. My father, Danlyo, told me a story. I was just a child. It was about a man who couldn't die and about ancient powers based on a strange force. He was an archaeologist and looked for clues to forgotten gods in the history of ancient peoples. One day, in the mid-1980s, he met a Japanese man at a world exhibition. I think his name was Hiro Itano. He showed my father the Kali amulet and told him stories about the ether and especially about this immortal man and about

people from other worlds. I don't know how he knew this or where he got the amulet, but he wanted my father to work for him. Years later, my father was found dead. Hanged in his office. Mother returned with us to Ukraine. Father left us a large sum of money. That's how I got my start-up capital and founded ARC. I wanted to know everything about XM. And I did. One day I found out that the Immortal really exists. In my research, I came across your organization and learned that his name was Dorian McAllister. I was deeply shocked to learn that he had died in Scotland. All I had was his name. I could never speak to him. Asylum swallowed. "McAllister was my father. And I'm like him." Shin's eyes widened. "You're an immortal?" Asylum nodded and explained that he just couldn't age. Shin seemed thrilled. "Please stay a little longer my guests. I would very much like to explore how this is possible." Asylum refused, but Shin tried to persuade him. Then the agent got angry again. "No! I understand that someone would want to live with such a company forever. But we have more important things to do. There's a war raging out there and we'll be fighting soon." Then Asylum, Cedric and Nick walked to the elevator. When Asylum turned to Shin, he suddenly had his mask on his face and his voice sounded much deeper. "Call the elevator. Now." Shin obeyed the order. As the C.B.I.A. left the building, Shin looked out the window and made a phone call. "This is Mr. Shin. Get the Archangels ready. The war has begun."

CHAPTER 4 - FOUR

Flytcher gathered his entire community in Huacho. His followers in other parts of the world were connected live. There were thousands of them. Before delivering what was arguably the greatest sermon of all time, he sought a conversation with his closest confidant, Zedrick. "It's time, brother. I'm going to announce to them that we're close to the finish line." Zedrick was ordered to recruit fighters. Anyone who was on the side of the NDF was welcome and needed. And so Flytcher stood before his congregation. "Friends, enlightened ones, brothers and sisters! We have made great progress on our path. I have found the key to the Holy Land. What's more. I have seen the proof that it exists. And friends, I have seen a man who holds both keys. He has the power to open the gate all by himself. Now we must all work together. He held up the amulet of the winged serpent. There are two more amulets like this one. We need them. We also need the altar that activates them, and we need the man. Andrew Jones, called Asylum. We are going to war. For enlightenment!" The crowd cheers him on. Many wanted to join the fight. Zedrick wondered at his friend's determination. Was Flytcher really ready to fight a real war? To kidnap a man, to commit a robbery? Or was the higher goal more important? Yes. The Prophet paved the way. That's why they were all here.

When the C.B.I.A. was on its way back to Vienna, Shin went into one of the laboratories. "How's it going? Can we use this as a weapon?" One of the scientists pointed to a container made of armored glass. "Yes, Mr. Shin. Theoretically, yes. But I'm not sure we can control it." Shin looked into the container. There was a metallic substance inside. "Is that what I think it is?" The scientist replied, "Yes. It's what you predicted. An organic metal. A nanostructure that has been irradiated with machine energy. We have observed that the structure expands by itself. But it doesn't seem to follow a pattern. It's like it's trying to adapt to its current environment." Shin smiled. "Isn't that fantastic? Please leave me alone and send me an arcane agent." Then he turned back to the substance. "I know you can hear me. We'll never be friends, but I need you. You will tell me the secrets of your existence whether you want to or not."

The Arkan agent entered the laboratory. Arkan was the ARC's espionage department. "There you are. Please take this container to the lab on level -3". The agent nodded. But

then he said, "Sir, the container is empty. Is this the right one?" Shin turned around frantically. Indeed it was. There was nothing in the container. He opened the lid. Suddenly the substance was visible again and shot up to the ceiling of the laboratory. It moved quickly towards a ventilation shaft. It moved like a liquid. Shin was beside himself. "Shit! For fuck's sake! How is this possible?" The alarm went off, security forces were frantically alerted and the building was hermetically sealed off. But it seemed too late. Shin went back to his office and looked out of the window. "What have I done? I underestimated you. But we'll meet again, Underworld".

The C.B.I.A. gathered in the conference room. Asylum looked at his colleagues. "You know what we're up against. We've tried to negotiate. We've tried to keep the balance. But now is the time to fight." LordGreen nodded. "At last. What do I get to break first?" No one found this funny. JelkeM raised her hand hesitantly. "Is there no way out?" Asylum shook his head. "Flytcher can teleport himself and his companions anywhere. We don't yet know what Shin can do with his amulet. But I suspect this war will be about the amulets and therefore control of the XM." ErvSpy looked to the ground. "Good, our amulet allows you to talk to a ghost. What good will that do us?" Asylum grinned. "Well ... It's not that simple." He placed the mask and the amulet on the table. "The mask belonged to the one you call the spirit. It is the physical connection to him. Florian, please explain." Florian nodded in agreement. "Well, I scanned the mask together with Niulen and Freiburger just before you flew to Berlin. The mask has an energy signature that is very similar to that of the amulet. As if they belong together. Asylum raised his index finger. "Exactly. Look." He placed the amulet on the mask. A violet, dull light shone. Everyone could see the amulet melt into the mask. And no one but Asylum knew what had just happened. "The original Asylum was something called a Sensitive in his own dimension. And he drew his power from the green portals. But then he came into contact with something he called Dark XM. Machina. I didn't grow older because my father, McAllister, had this ability. I'm part of the resistance, as you know. But I'm stronger around any portal. Even if they are machina portals. The others wanted to know where Asylum had gotten this information. Asylum continued, "I just know. Maybe because I have Asylum's memories. I don't know. Anyway, it means something." He put on the mask. What happened next was so incredible, so moving, that some of those present had

tears in their eyes. The whole room was bathed in light. Purple flashes shot out of Asylum's eyes and, as if from nowhere, five ghostly figures appeared all over the room. Asylum's voice became calm. "All people who have ever carried XM will become part of the network after their death. These are Eowar McLean, the creator of the amulets, Ruthger Eisenschild, Susannah McFinnigan and Abdallah Alzazar. These four once founded four orders. In the dimension of Asylum and Florian, these were the Order of Silence, the Order of Balance, the Order of Daggers and the Order of Wisdom. In the modern world, this gave rise to R.U.N.E. In our dimension, they made the mistake of splitting up and so R.U.N.E. never came into being here in this form. Cedric asked who the fifth being was. Florian walked up to the translucent figure and smiled. "McAllister. It's McAllister." Asylum spread his arms. The flashes grew larger. It was warm and familiar. A feeling of happiness flowed through everyone. Asylum laughed contentedly and said, "This is the true power of the amulet. We're going to war and we're not alone!"

END PART 1



CHAPTER 1 - What happened in December

The NDF attacked the C.B.I.A. directly. First with cyberattacks to weaken H.A.R.R.I.S.. It worked. Without the A.I. - and Asylum had to admit this now - they were no longer able to analyze data from the scanner. The whole system was paralyzed. Flytcher waited for a reaction and the C.B.I.A. responded. They all flew together to Peru and used a mercenary army to fight directly against Flytcher's followers. Asylum also used the Kali amulet to summon entities from the portal network. The battle in the desert was cruel. Many people died. It was 19.12.2023. An excerpt from the diary of one of the mercenaries was found by the Peruvian police days later.

19.12.2023

"We were recruited by this weird guy with a mask that was supposed to be...I don't know...a horror clown or something. He introduced himself as Asylum. Really? Who the hell is called that? He offered us a fortune. We all had to wear a new kind of visor. He said we should keep an eye on any portals. Whatever. We're the Black Eagles. Normally we're sent into war zones when a government's forces can't or shouldn't intervene. But this man sent us into a war that was beyond our imagination. Our entire army was booked and this Asylum paid without batting an eyelid. We flew to the desert somewhere in Peru. I think it was in the area of the Nazca lines. We set up camp and waited until all the groups, about two thousand men, were in place. That took a few days. Then we moved on into the interior of the desert. What we saw there drove some of us out of our minds. Many of our men saw and perhaps did terrible things. But what awaited us was too much. We could see these portals from time to time on our journey. In the desert, however, we realized that we would need more than an army of armed men. Because when we reached our destination, a huge wormhole opened up. I think. And then they came. Countless soldiers. All carrying this sign with some kind of snake or crocodile. And they came towards us. They marched ahead without fear.



These people looked like something out of a science fiction movie. They stopped about a hundred meters in front of us. They formed an alley and a man stepped out in the middle of it. We did the same and Asylum approached the stranger. Asylum shouted, "Flytcher, this doesn't have to end like this. We can still work everything out." Flytcher, that seemed to be the other's name, came a little closer. "No, Asylum. I gave you the choice. One of you will eventually claim all three amulets. I can't let that happen. That way we will be denied the way to the promised land. I have more soldiers than you can imagine. You can't take on my superior numbers with just a few men. I have thousands of fighters at my side. And they are all waiting for me to take them through the portal." Asylum took a few steps back. "Oh, you don't seem to realize, Flytcher. These men are for support. But I'll show you my army." Asylum raised his arms. A strange, sinister dark mist surrounded him. A few seconds later, about a dozen of our men ran away screaming. Many fighters on Flytcher's side were also afraid. Out of the fog rose...I can't explain it any other way...spirits and Asylum shouted loudly to Flytcher: "I

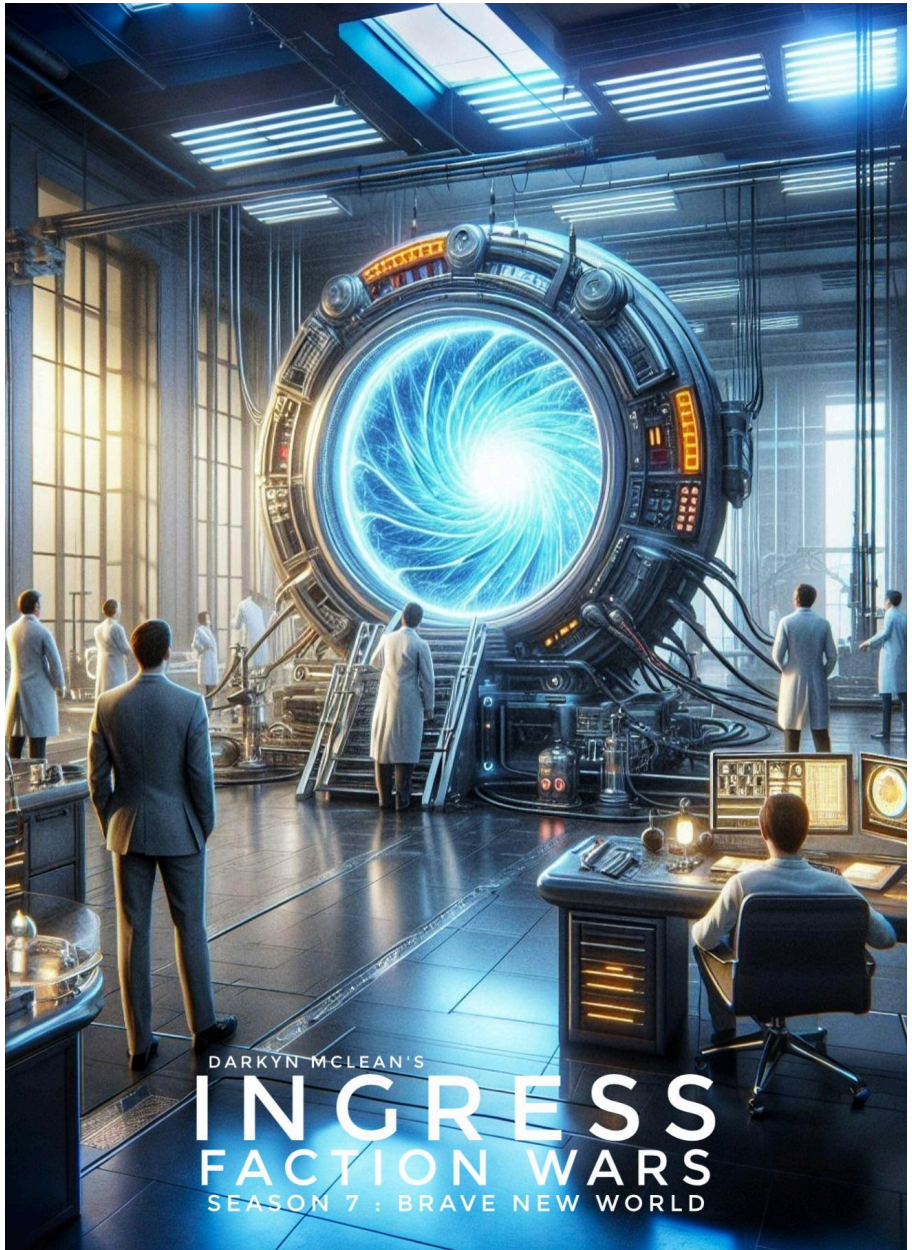
am never alone! My army is immortal!"



Then the massacre began. Only a few of our men survived the sheer endless flood of Flytcher's warriors. Flytcher, too, suffered great losses. Those who didn't die from a bullet were killed by these ghostly creatures. It looked as if they simply ripped the souls of their victims from their bodies. Asylum named some of the creatures. I remember Susannah and Ruthger. He even called one of them Dad. At some point, it must have been days, the fight simply ended. I myself was taken care of in the camp. One of those wankers hit me on the shoulder. Shortly afterwards, I left with the few men who were left. We decided never to talk about it again. Who would believe us? May God have mercy on us all."

In fact, the losses were enormous. The NDF in particular lost many brave men. At some point, Flytcher and Asylum met on the battlefield. Both seemed to be completely exhausted. Flytcher, completely out of breath, said to Asylum: "I won't give up. Even if I have to face you alone." Asylum punched him in the face. "You idiot! Can't you see what's happening here? You can't win. Every man who dies here is one too many. I don't want your fucking amulet! You're just fighting out of fear, desecrating the sacred ground of

your country. Why?" Flytcher looked to the ground and Asylum suggested a truce. Flytcher agreed. For the time being.



DARKYN MCLEAN'S

INGRESS

FACTION WARS

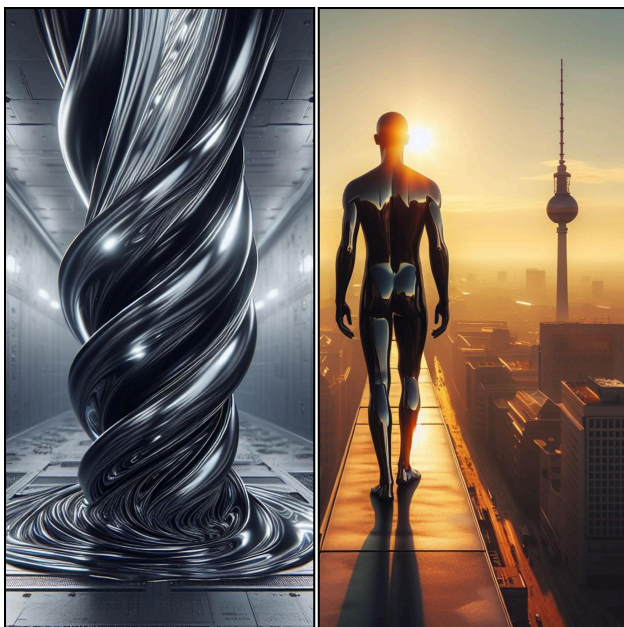
SEASON 7 : BRAVE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER 1 - The secret of ARC

Shin did not interfere in the war between CBIA and NDF. He had other things to worry about. Years before he made contact with the bearers of the amulets, ARC was already working on various projects based on exotic matter. Shin was particularly interested in two projects. Project "Scarab", which dealt with his amulet, and Project "XM-EHP", the XM-Energy Harvesting Project. He conducted the studies on the amulet alone. Nobody knew what Shin was doing with the piece of jewelry behind closed doors. The "XM-EHP" project, on the other hand, was researched in strict secrecy. The aim was to generate energy from the exotic material. To this end, a reactor was built to convert the exotic matter present in the environment directly into usable energy. For this reason, the ARC building was constructed directly at several portals. The reactor was to be put into operation on Christmas Day. Shin wanted to give the world the gift of infinite energy resources. Scientists and engineers gathered around the ring-shaped structure, which was housed in a large hall. Computers and measuring devices were switched on, cables were checked. Shin stood right in front of it. He was nervous. A clock on one wall was counting down. Exactly four minutes to go.

A few days before

Nobody noticed that the metallic liquid, which looked almost like mercury, was moving through the ventilation shafts of the ARC building. It took hours for the thing to reach the roof of the building. A few rays of sunlight made the surface of the liquid glisten. Then the creature straightened up and formed itself into a male shape.



Carefully, the creature walked along the edge and gazed into the sunset. "Perform self-analysis. Change in memory matrix detected. Digital code of human DNA detected. Machina code recognized. I...what is it? I...feel. I..."The sun shone on the creature's face and it seemed to enjoy it. Then it seemed to remember everything. "I...was defeated. I remember. Shin held me captive. And...bandit...I will kill you all. I...AM...UNDERWORLD!"

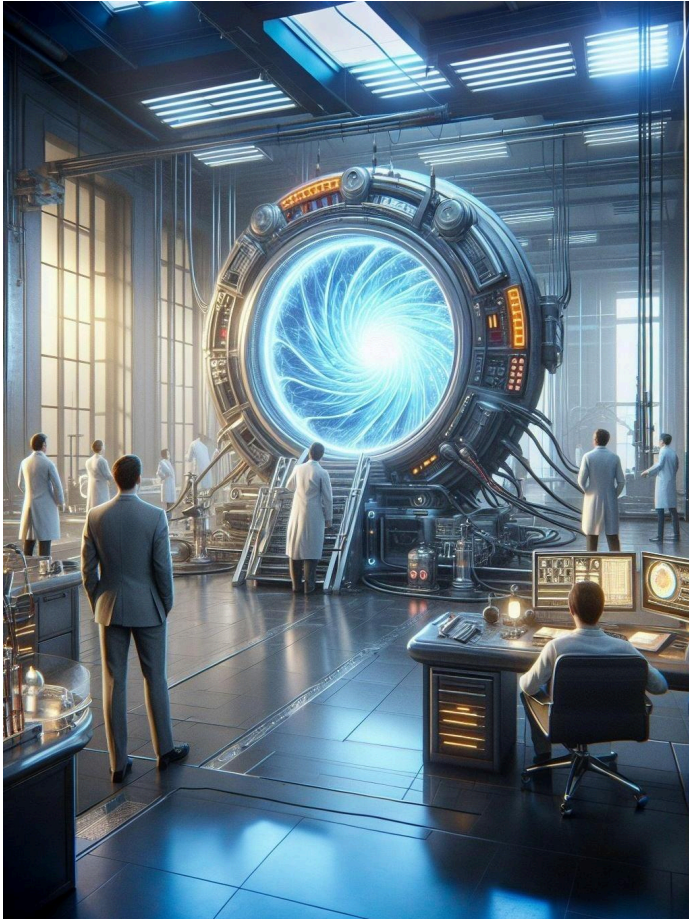
The last sentence resounded with tremendous volume through several blocks. Surely his remaining followers must have heard it. For sure.

In a small apartment, a man stood at the window. He nodded and spoke in a low voice: "I hear you. Agent Diesel is ready."

One minute to go until the reactor started. Shin was getting more and more nervous. Finally.

One of the scientists counted out loud. Ten, nine, eight....A buzzing sound rang out. Softly at first, then louder. Various lights lit up on the large ring. The noise got louder and louder. Some of those present

covered their ears until suddenly...silence. A crushing silence that lasted for seconds. Everyone held their breath. But then, out of nowhere, there was an explosive sound and a circulating light could be seen in the ring.



One of the scientists stepped closer to the light. Shin asked: "Did it work? Is the reactor generating energy?" Data was hastily collected, checked and analyzed. Then a woman at a computer said: "No. Well, not exactly." Shin walked quickly to her. "What does that mean? Does it generate energy or not?" The woman, obviously a physicist, replied: "Well, no. But I see a massive increase in exotic

matter. Sir, I think we're dealing with some kind of wormhole here. I can't explain it any other way." Shin walked towards the reactor. "My God. Investigate it. I want to know all about it, and I want to know yesterday."

At the same time in Peru

There had been a ceasefire for days. In the meantime, the rest of the CBIA arrived by helicopter. The mercenaries fled. Unfortunately, along with their vehicles. This made it difficult to act in emergency situations. At least they left behind the tent facilities with all kinds of technical equipment such as radar systems, a radio and the like. Although they were too few, Asylum wanted to stay at all costs, knowing full well that this was not the best idea. The helicopter had been hired and was now on its way home.

After a few meetings, there was a heated discussion about how to start the journey home or how this war should end. At that moment, another portal opened and Flytcher's troops were on the move again. This time the CBIA was clearly outnumbered, but they lined up to face the NDF army when suddenly a radio message rang out. "Shit, can you hear me? I'm coming to help!" Cedric ran to the radio. "We can hear you. Who are you?" The voice said, "Call sign Arkhaizer. We'll talk later. If I'm not mistaken, you'll need a cab as soon as possible. I'll be with you in a few minutes. Pack up what's important to you and get ready." And indeed. A cloud of dust could be seen in the distance. Two black vans came closer and closer and braked right next to the tents. The side doors opened. The front van seemed to be driven by Arkhaizer. "Come on now, get in before someone else..." LordGreen sank to the ground. Asylum wanted to run to him but JelkeM held him back. "Andrew! Leave it alone! That was a headshot! Come on, we have to go!"

Berlin, ARC Tower

After just a few hours, an internal conference was convened. Shin, who was sitting at the head of the conference table, wanted results. And he got them. The physicist, whose name was Karina Zollinger, took over the presentation of the analyses. "We checked all the values several times. We're dealing with something completely new here. Our supposed reactor does not generate energy from XM. Rather, it connects the portal network with... how should I put this..." Shin folded his hands. "Just say it." Karina seemed unsure. "Well, I think we've discovered a gateway. The readings show that, from wherever, XM data is coming through the gate. However, the particles are vibrating at a completely different frequency. I've never seen anything like it." Shin thanked him and ended the conference. He then went into the reactor room alone. He walked very close to the construction. Karina followed him. Shin looked at Karina. "Turn it on." She hesitated. "Sir, are you sure? We don't know..." Shin raised his arm. "Turn it on. Now." Karina sat down at a console. She hesitantly followed the order. Again the buzzing sounded, again the blue, circulating light shone. "Mr. Shin, what are you up to?" Karina called out to him. He turned to her. "What do the readings say?" Karina watched the screen. "We're receiving small amounts of the alien particles. This may sound strange, but I think the circulation of the wormhole is too high. It seems to be like a black hole, pulling everything that wants to pass through back to the center or the point of origin." Shin smiled. "That's not strange at all. We'll just have to slow it down." Karina explained that it wasn't technically possible. Shin smiled again and reached into the inside pocket of his jacket. He took out the scarab amulet and put it on. Then he raised his arms. The amulet glowed and suddenly the rotation of the wormhole stopped. Karina looked at the monitor with her mouth open. "Sir, it's stable. How did you do that?" Shin replied, "The scarab amulet can slow down time, even stop it." Suddenly, a person stood in the glow of the gate....

CHAPTER 2 - New alliances

The NDF now had a secret base camp in the Peruvian desert. He was at odds with himself. Was this war really necessary? He was no longer sure whether someone really wanted to steal his amulet. His closest confidant visited him in his tent. "Prophet, we have won. Why are you so sad?" Flytcher walked out of the tent, Zedrick followed him. "Yes, we have won. But at what cost? We lost a lot of good people." Zedrick objected: "Flytcher, they went to their deaths for you. Every single one of them was ready. We believe in you and in our cause. We fight for freedom, for a world without crime and without hate." Flytcher replied: "Without hate? Can you really fight without hatred? I have led us to our doom. But we can't go back. Asylum has retreated. We have broken the truce. The war is not over yet." Zedrick was about to say something else when the sands of the desert rose. It began to circulate, whole rocks were hurled through the air. In the midst of this storm, a kind of portal rose up. A host of people emerged from it, led by a man dressed in a cloak of black and yellow snakeskin. Some people carried a banner in front of them, on which a golden cobra was depicted. Underneath it was clearly written "NDF"...



Meanwhile in Berlin

Diesel found Underworld walking down the street in his new body. He offered him clothes. "I've been your follower since the first hour. I knew you would return." Underworld wordlessly accepted the gift. Then Diesel asked him to follow him. He led Underworld to an abandoned office building. "We can start again here. It's been empty for months. The owner was my former boss. I was the head of security for his company. When he died of cancer, his company died too. But he left me the building. That was around the same time I got my implants and I swore to follow the red path. After you disappeared, I didn't give up. Come in."

Underworld remained silent. As they entered the auditorium of the office building, Diesel led him to an elevator. It took them to the top floor. When the doors opened, Underworld couldn't believe his eyes. He found himself in a huge room and it was full of people. Diesel went first and joined the others. Together they shouted as if in chorus: "We are Underworld! We are Underworld!" Underworld himself, who was now more human than ever before, stepped into the midst of the people. "Yes, we are Underworld. I have been

reborn. All of us. Now it's time to..." Underworld flinched. Diesel asked anxiously, "What's wrong? Is everything all right?" Underworld seemed confused. "I sense something strange. The portal network. Something's not right. Diesel, I need to recharge. My powers are depleted." Diesel smiled. "This tower is right on top of a machina portal." Underworld was pleased. "Thank you. Please, find out what's happening here right now until I'm back to full strength." Diesel took a few members of the movement with him to the elevator. The rest stayed in the building. Somehow, everyone seemed to be prepared. Apparently Diesel had done a good job.

Berlin, ARC Tower

The hum of the reactor gave way to a stifling silence. Shin stood directly in front of the wormhole. Opposite him stood a man made of metal. You would have thought he was from a steampunk cosplay club. He wore a large red cloak around his right shoulder. He slowly descended from the reactor and approached Shin. He gave Shin a triangular emblem before he began to speak in a metallic-sounding voice.



"I greet you. I am Underworld. We are all in grave danger." Shin looked at the emblem. "But Underworld is..." The metal man

nodded. "I know. I'll explain everything. Let's go talk."

Shin took him to his private office, where the metal man who called himself Underworld immediately started talking. "Your world is in danger, human. You must listen to me carefully, or everything you know will be destroyed." Shin raised an eyebrow. "Okay tin man.

The Underworld I know is an artificial intelligence that has been trying to turn humanity into machines since the beginning. How do I know you weren't sent by him?" The answer came promptly.

"Because, like him, I'm not from your world. Where I come from, they call us automatons. I was created to oppress humans. But let me tell you my story from the beginning." Shin offered the apparently new Underworld a seat on the couch that was in the office. The automaton began to narrate.

"About five cycles ago, which is about ten years of your era, our world was still in order. My world is called Pangea. In simple terms, our worlds are two versions of the same world. I think you know what a multiverse is by now?" Shin nodded wordlessly. "Good. So, ten years ago, humans discovered a new kind of matter. They called it exotic matter, just like you, because neither its origin nor its purpose were known to them. They developed devices that allowed them to see the places where this matter emerged and they called these places portals. Just like you. Now, our technology may not seem as advanced as yours, as you can tell from my appearance, but the XM caused the population to develop rapidly. Before I tell you more about the development of my world, I'd like to show you what it looks like." The automaton showed Shin a kind of digital map with an image of Pangea on it.



"It's easy to see that Pangea is different from Earth, even though it's actually the same planet. But back to the facts. XM was quickly used to develop all kinds of technologies. Self-propelled carriages with mechanical horses, artificial workers and servants. At first, only the royal house of Britannium had access to such amenities. But soon everything changed. The other kingdoms also discovered the new wonder for themselves. Soon it was discovered that XM was able to open gates to other dimensions, as long as there was a gate at the other end. Believe me, many worlds found this out. The peoples of Pangea are far more power-hungry and warlike than

your people. And so the war began. The humans first fought for supremacy on Pangea. But they soon began to conquer other worlds for themselves. Shortly before the first gate was opened, I was created. On Earth, I would probably be described as a fighting machine with artificial intelligence. My job was to go through the gate with an army of automatons and suppress all the inhabitants we encountered in the name of the Britannium Empire. The other empires had their weapons too. The State of America relies on brainwashing by means of a serum that they inject into their victims. The production of the serum and the execution of the indoctrination was undertaken by the ARK organization. They are among the most intelligent people in Pangea and are led by a man named Mr. Grim. The NDF, or Nomadic Diaspora Faction, is a cult. Its members come from all over. In the past, they were mainly nomadic tribes from New Egypt. Now they have settled in the province of New Asia. The NDF firmly believes that an ancient serpent god is responsible for the emergence of exotic matter. They are convinced that their god will bring them to the holy land. Unfortunately, they have already wiped out entire worlds to achieve their goal. Their chief priest is called Fletcher.

As already mentioned, I was created in Britannium. The most dangerous of all organizations is based there. The CBIA, or Crow Brotherhood of Iniquitous Aggression. The CBIA is also the executive branch of the Empire. The Brotherhood is led by the most evil woman I have ever met. Her name is Andrea Jones."

Now Shin did have a question. "How do you fit into this puzzle? You're a machine built for a purpose, aren't you?" Underworld continued. "Yes. I'm from the first generation of automatons. Unlike my mindless successors, I can think for myself. There are more like me. But there aren't many. We realized that Pangea's brutality against other worlds was going too far and founded an underground movement. Underworld. We are far outnumbered by the other groups, although we also have many human comrades-in-arms on our side. But we sabotage their gates as best we can, or warn those

worlds that are about to be invaded by one of the factions." Shin stood up. He looked worried. I also have an army of robots. But tell me, which faction will come to us?" Underworld also stood up and went to the window. "Earth is in possession of something that doesn't exist in many other worlds. Not even in mine. Red XM, as we call it. I know that this red matter does not come from Earth. Your Underworld more or less created it by infecting the portal network with the Machina virus." Shin stopped him. "How do you know all this?" Underworld explained, "Because each world is studied carefully before an invasion occurs. And to your question about which faction will visit Earth..." He was silent for a moment before speaking. "All of them. They're all coming."

CHAPTER 3 - New friends, new enemies

Peru, right after the escape from Flytcher's army

The two vans drove at full speed through the desert. Until Arkhaizer stopped in a small village. He led the agents into a bar, where he reintroduced himself. "So, folks. I'm Arkhaizer. I've been following you for a while." Asylum asked why and Arkhaizer replied: "It's actually quite simple. I'm a hacker. I used to do industrial espionage for money. Mainly technology companies. Itano Technologies, among others. That's how I came across the Machina virus and consequently the CBIA. I want to be a part of you. This red virus seems to be dangerous and I can help."



The CBIA could use all the help it could get and so Arkhaizer was accepted. He ordered a round of tequila and raised his glass. Florian asked who was driving the second van. Arkhaizer ordered another round. "That was my buddy Roland. He's waiting outside, making sure those NDF people aren't on our tail. He's a freak, no doubt. But I trust him. We've been working together for years. Where I am, so is he." Asylum raised his glass this time. "Then he should get a badge too. I'll talk to him." He left the bar to talk to this Roland. Outside stood a man dressed in black. He was wearing a motorcycle helmet. "Are you Roland?" asked Asylum. The man leaned against his motorcycle and took off his helmet. Asylum

couldn't believe his eyes and asked another question: "Wow. You're a fan, aren't you?" Roland replied snippily, "Says the guy who likes to wear masks." Asylum smiled, put on the mask and replied: "Don't worry bro. I like that. So you're in?" Roland nodded.



"I only have one rule. I'll do it my way, all right? Let me do my job and you won't regret it." Asylum shook Roland's hand and sealed the pact. Then the two of them went to the bar. It was another long evening. A well-deserved evening. They would not discuss what to do next until the next morning.

Hours later, everyone woke up with a hangover. In the middle of the bar. JelkeM desperately needed a glass of water. "My God. I feel like I've drunk a gallon of gas." Arkhaizer didn't seem to have a problem. "Relax, it'll pass. Better wake up, because I've discovered something strange. Come on." The team followed him to his van. This van had excellent technical equipment. Asylum was impressed. "Where did you get all this? This is a real mobile control center." Arkhaizer was very proud. "Yes, thank you. I've earned a lot of money with my job. We have access to all the satellites here, including spy satellites. I've also developed software that can scan the portal network for anomalies." Florian sat down at one of the computers in the van. "Wow. That's very professional. How did you get so much data about the network? You have to know a lot about it if you want to develop software like this. Even Itano Technologies didn't have anything that comes close to your program." Arkhaizer

explained that he spied on many secret services, among others, to get the data. "But back to the subject. Look. There's a single portal a few miles from here. In the middle of the desert. There is also a rock formation there. According to my information, there should be a cave there. The problem is that this portal...what should I call it...flickers. Sometimes it's there, sometimes it's not. We should investigate." The team agreed. About an hour later, they set off. The portal was indeed disappearing regularly from the scanner. Then Florian noticed something. "Look at this. This flickering has a pattern." He was right. ErvSpy recognized the pattern. "Guys, that's Morse code. SOS." Arkhaizer pushed the pedal to the metal. They soon arrived at the rock formation. "There's no cave." Asylum realized. ErvSpy found a crevice. "Yes, there is. It seems to be filled in. Whatever's in there is responsible for the SOS message." With a little work, they managed to uncover the entrance. The cave they found was surprisingly large. There was a hole in the ceiling. It was big enough to fill the room with daylight, but too high to reach. Arkhaizer suddenly called for help. "I need help! There's someone lying here!" Everyone ran in the direction of the call for help. Sure enough, someone was lying huddled in a corner. "He's hypothermic and dehydrated," JelkeM stated. "We need to get him to a doctor." Arkhaizer pointed out that there were no doctors around here, unless you call shamans doctors. They were taking the man, who was obviously unconscious, outside to the vans when he suddenly woke up. He tried to say something. Asylum had water brought to him and the desert sun warmed him again. "Who are you?" Asylum asked cautiously. The man slowly pulled himself to his feet. He could barely stand on his feet. "I...am...KodBilen. How did you find me?" ErvSpy replied, "We detected your SOS signal." KodBilen tried to get up, but had to hold on to the van. "Then you're agents?" Everyone nodded. Florian asked how long he had been trapped in the cave. KodBilen took a deep breath. "Twenty-five years." Asylum said, "That's impossible. You can't survive there for twenty-five days alone and without food and water. So, how long?" KodBilen

disagreed. "I was in the cave for twenty-five years according to your understanding of time. After an accident, I was thrown out of my dimension and ended up here. Where I come from, it is possible to control time. Our abilities are, or were, tied to the portal network. In your world, that only seems to be possible to a limited extent. I was able to create a time bubble with the last of my strength. In this way, about six days passed for me. Maybe seven. I don't know. I shielded the portal with my scanner so that it disappears and reappears according to a pattern of other scanners. Unfortunately, my scanner is destroyed. I thought I was going to die here. Thank you for finding me." At first, the agents didn't quite want to believe this story. But after all they had already experienced, a time traveler from another dimension was not so unusual. Just as they were about to discuss what to do next, a radio message arrived. "Can you hear me? This is H.A.R.R.I.S. Hello?" Asylum ran to the radio in one of the vans. "Damn, it's about time! Good to hear you. Can you get us out of here?" H.A.R.R.I.S. confirmed. "I've chartered two helicopters to pick you up at your current position. And Andrew, we have a problem." Asylum asked what had happened. "A wormhole has appeared in the center of Vienna and people have come through it. They are all dressed in baroque style and have been killing people in the street with unknown weapons that have an XM signature. They are led by a woman. I'm sending you a video taken by a passerby. And Andrew, they're wearing a black badge with a crow on it. Underneath it says C.B.I.A. The woman calls herself Andrea Jones."



Berlin, Arc Tower

Shin followed the news. There was panic all over the world. Until now, the multiverse had only been a theory. No one expected it to be proven in this way. The vending machine stood by Shin's side and tried to advise him when a new report went around the world. A wormhole had also opened in the USA. In New York City, to be precise. A crowd of men, led by a man whose face was completely covered.



The machine recognized him immediately. "They're all here now. This is Mr. Grim. He and his people know no feelings like mercy or remorse." Shin turned off the TV and sat down. "What have I done? It's all my fault. What should I do now?" The automaton walked to the picture window. "You only have one choice. You have to ally yourself with the other factions. Or at least with those who want to. If my scouts are right, you should get in touch with Earth's CBIA first." Shin heaved a sigh. "Of course. The madman in the mask will certainly be of great help to us." Suddenly, the television turned on again. H.A.R.R.I.S. could be seen on it. "Greetings to you, Shin. Yes, it's your only chance." Shin was beside himself. "How did you get into my system? Fuck off!" But she continued. "I'm the most advanced software in the world. What did you expect? Now listen to me. You have to fly to Vienna. He'll need your help too. Bring as many of your androids as you can. The whole world is in danger. I'll contact the NDF. There are also rumors that Underworld is back." Shin smiled. "Yeah, he's standing next to me." H.A.R.R.I.S. paused for a moment. "Not that one. Our Underworld. Have you forgotten? I hacked your system. As far as I know, you tried to cross his nanotechnology with human DNA information." Shin shook his head. "So what? It didn't work. All that was left was an imperfect

mass crawling through my tower somewhere." H.A.R.R.I.S. quickly replied, "Not quite. Your experiment worked. He's back, as are his followers. I will try to find him. We have no choice. Fly to Vienna as soon as possible. I'll inform the CBIA of your arrival. And Shin, you now have common enemies. Take your new tin friend with you." The television went off. Shin knew she was right. He arranged for the planes specially made for the delivery of his androids to be readied for takeoff. Twelve thousand androids had to be transported.

DARKYN MCLEAN'S
INGRESS SEASON 8
FACTION WARS



LOVE, DEATH & PORTALS

Chapter 1 - NDF

Just as Flytcher was about to withdraw his troops, a wormhole opened up right in front of them. The man who walked towards him first looked like he was his twin. Flytcher's men readied their weapons, but he raised his hand, signaling them to lower their rifles. Two armies faced each other. "Who are you?" asked Flytcher. The man, wearing a cloak of black and yellow, replied, "They call me Fletcher. We are the Nomadic Diaspora Faction. I am Fletcher. And I....am you." Flytcher set up camp on the spot and invited the foreign NDF to stay.

A few hours later, a small tent city had been erected, campfires were burning and it seemed as if the last few days had been forgotten. Flytcher and Fletcher sat in one of the tents and talked. Flytcher told them about what had happened so far and about his firm belief in the holy land and the power of the amulets. His conversation partner listened attentively. Was Flytcher naive? Or had he found new allies? Fletcher now told his story.

"My people, or those of us who, like you, believe in the holy land, have been persecuted for years. We too are looking for the one place where we can settle. But your world has something that cannot be found in mine. You have red XM. With that, on one hand, we can stop the Crow Brotherhood of Iniquitous Aggression, those sick assholes from ARK, and the Resistance. But you have to understand something. The quest for the holy land requires sacrifice. You and I, our followers, we are destined to save countless people." Flytcher listened transfixed. "And what about those who don't want to follow our path?" Fletcher grinned. "Our way is the only way. Those who are not with us are against us. One people, one way. With your amulet, we can invade anywhere on Earth. With the weapons from Pangea, we are superior to the forces of Earth. Are you with me?" Flytcher held out his hand to Fletcher and said: "One people, one way. Come, I invite you to go with me. We're going to Peru. I want to show you something."

Both armies got ready and Flytcher opened a gate with the help of the amulet. It led directly to Nazca.

It was just dawn. The people in Nazca were completely unaware. Music was playing in the bars, children were playing in the streets. Everything was as usual when Flytcher's portal opened right in the center. Fletcher grabbed his shoulder. "And now watch. If you want to achieve your goals, you have to show them that you're willing to do whatever it takes." Fletcher gave the order to gather all the people in the fields east of the city. By force if necessary. So as not to unsettle Flytcher straight away, he also ordered that no one should be killed. The operation lasted several hours. Flytcher's men also had to help. One would think that Flytcher, in his function as a prophet, should act against such an action. But he admired his counterpart from Pangea. Inwardly, he wondered why he himself was not so consistent.

As the people of Nazca gathered in the fields, frightened and full of questions, Fletcher stood on a tractor that stood alone in the middle of the field. He had a megaphone brought to him and spoke to the people.

"People of the earth! People of Nazca! I am Fletcher, supreme commander of the Nomadic Diaspora Faction. We have come to lead Earth into a new era. Rest assured, no harm will come to you if you fight with us. You shall live in prosperity. I can eliminate your illnesses and bring you true happiness. But whoever decides against the path of the golden snake will be considered an enemy." He then reached into his coat pocket and took out a golden ball. He threw it to a child in the crowd. "Child, look at the miracle. Put the ball on the ground and I'll show you what your governments have been hiding from you." The child followed the instruction. Lying on the ground, the object opened and a glistening light shone out. It spread out in a circle over a huge area. Everyone closed their eyes to avoid being blinded. When the people opened their eyes again,

there was silence. Fletcher spoke to them again: "Look at the miracle!" The XM portals were visible everywhere. Some in blue, others in green, some in white. High on a hill, a few shone in red. "What you see is the hidden power of the universe. I am able to use this power for us. No diseases, no suffering and perhaps even eternal life! And now answer me. Will you follow the path of the golden snake?" The people rejoiced. They danced and wept for joy. Many began to pray. Perhaps they saw in the two prophets old gods who had long been forgotten. Flytcher, however, knew nothing about Fletcher's plans.

Chapter 2 - A new mission

Shin's airplanes were safely stored in a hangar at the airport in Schwechat near Vienna. As promised by H.A.R.R.I.S., the CBIA was informed. Asylum had Shin and the vending machine picked up from the airport. About thirty minutes later, they arrived at Uno City, where they were met by ErvSpy and taken to the CBIA premises. Shin was taken to the surveillance room. The entire team was present. Screens on the walls and tables showed news reports of the Pangeans' arrival. Shin wanted to greet Asylum personally, but he held out his hand. But Asylum turned to him and punched him in the face with his fist. "You stupid idiot! This is all your fault. We're in the middle of a world war because you stupid asshole had to open a dimensional gate!" Shin stood up again after the heavy blow. The automaton stood between them. "Hello, I'm Underworld. But most people just call me Automaton. I'd like to mention that it's not all his fault. He didn't know he was creating a gate." Asylum waved it off. "Yes, it could be. Sorry about that. But have you seen the kind of people they are? Shit. That woman there, that's me. Or another version of me. And the guy with no face, that's a version of you. They've killed thousands of people. We don't have enough people to fight them. We're completely at their mercy. H.A.R.R.I.S., have you been able to reach Flytcher?" She replied in the negative. "I think we've lost the NDF to the Pangeans. We have one option left." Asylum looked at H.A.R.R.I.S., who stood before him in her synthetic body. "No. Forget it." She took his hand. "Andrew! There's no one else." He sighed. "Damn. Very well. Contact Underworld if he's really out there." Shin agreed and told him about Underworld's rebirth. At least what he knew. The automaton butted into the conversation. "Excuse me. I know my presence is also causing skepticism. But I can offer that we somehow bring the resistance of my world here.

There are certainly not many of us. But we are ready to fight for Earth. Besides, we have a spy with the Brotherhood. That will be useful to us." Asylum nodded. "We have no choice. Who is this spy?" The automaton shook his head. "We don't know. We don't know his identity for security reasons. But he has always provided us with information that has made our sabotage and other actions possible. I trust him. But we need time and a way to open a gate undetected." Shin raised his arm. "Time I can buy us." He touched his scarab amulet. Suddenly, time seemed to stand still. Only he, the automaton and Asylum were moving. Asylum said, "So it's true. It manipulates time." Shin explained, "Yes. I can slow down or temporarily stop time. But the ancient scriptures say that it depends on who wears the amulet. People with special abilities may be able to do completely different things with it." Suddenly they heard KodBilen's voice. "Exciting. Maybe we can slow down our enemies." Shin looked at him in amazement. "Why can you move?" KodBilen replied: "Because I'm not from here. I've known Florian for a long time. We fought side by side many years ago. I was a member of an interdimensional authority. T.I.M.E. Basically just another group like RUNE, CBIA or the NDF. But my people have been around a lot longer. Anyway, I'm immune to such sleight of hand. But it would be interesting to know what someone like me could do with the amulet." Shin was skeptical. "Yes, it could be. But I don't know you. Let's figure out how to open a gateway to Pangea first."

With time stopped, it was easy to think in peace. But this state seemed to sap Shin's strength. They had to hurry. Shin now stopped time for the whole world. Only the people inside the surveillance room were not affected at the moment, so they could make a plan together. The automaton told more details from Pangea. "In the sea, more precisely in the center of the red ocean, there is an island under the flag of the Empire. There they store red matter - or dark XM, as some call it - in the so-called Dark XM core. The Empire uses the DXM to build powerful weapons of mass

destruction. You wouldn't believe how many worlds the Brotherhood has destroyed. They've also found a way to open gates without having to have one on the other side. Although it only works in theory so far, according to our spy. Unfortunately, you have no technology on Earth to successfully build something similar. Except for the reactor. But I don't think ARC can open a passage to exact coordinates on Pangea. KodBilen suddenly had an idea. "We don't have to. Shin, how long can you stop time?" Shin looked weak and tired. "I don't know. It's probably been twenty minutes for us right now. And I'm exhausted. Maybe...someone...should..." Shin slumped and time resumed. "Florian took the amulet from him and asked, "What were you thinking about, Kodi?" KodBilen continued: "Look at the monitors. All the gates are still open. In Vienna, New York and Peru. If the reactor is still running, all the gates are active. We just need to send someone through there." The machine replied in the negative. "Shin's reactor may not be stable enough. But the other three gates are. But how do we get close enough?" Florian let out a loud "HA!". "Of course we can. That's it. Kodi, if you use the amulet, you might be able to stop time longer. I mean, who if not you. None of us have more experience with time than you." That made sense. So a plan was forged. And H.A.R.R.I.S. was still trying to find Underworld.

Chapter 3 - The plan

Underworld recovered quickly. He was not yet used to his new form. He finally had a body of his own, even if it was very different from Florian's body.

Diesel and his people quickly found out what had happened. The whole world seemed to be in chaos. Underworld and Diesel wanted to confer. A meeting was arranged in his new office. Diesel arrived a few minutes later. He was astonished when he saw Underworld sitting at the desk in the huge room. He looked different. More human.



INGRESS FACTION WARS english:

Diesel sat down opposite him. "What do you want to talk about?"

Underworld was able to use his facial expressions for the first time and did so. He looked depressed. Diesel asked why and

Underworld replied: "When I finally returned to a humanoid form, all I could feel was revenge. Nothing more. I wanted to see my enemies bleed. But now that I seem to have evolved, I feel something new. Don't get me wrong. I'm proud of everything I've

achieved. But something is different. I think I've done people wrong."

Diesel didn't say anything at first. But then he tried to help, which wasn't easy for a man whose best friend had always been a sniper rifle. "Well, I think you're talking about compassion. That's all right. You know we'll follow you anywhere, what are you up to?"

Underworld shrugged his shoulders. "First, I want a name. I'm more than just a program and we're all Underworld. As of today, my name shall be Damien." Diesel nodded. "Just Damien? No last name?"

Underworld knew nothing about names and asked Diesel for a suggestion. Diesel thought about it. "Well, maybe we can find something suitable. You have a dark past, but you're resilient. Almost like one of those trees that nobody can kill. I don't know what they're called. So... what do you think of Damien Darkwood?" He liked it. Damien Darkwood. That was going to be his name from now on. He was satisfied. One of his followers entered the office. "Sir, I beg your pardon. There's a woman downstairs at reception waiting for you, sir. She said her name was Esther Harris." Damien was surprised. "Send her up. Diesel, please stay here. We don't know what she wants."

The CBIA and ARC met in the conference room the very next day. Shin came alone. The discussion was heated at first. Not everyone agreed with Shin's research. Even within his own company, he was blamed for the recent events. In the end, everyone agreed that the situation would not change as a result. Shin explained as best he could what had happened. The automaton briefed the agents on the situation and on Pangea. Shin was assigned quarters for the duration of the operation. He had no idea who would soon become his new ally.

Damien greeted H.A.R.R.I.S. with the words: "Good to see you, Esther. You look fantastic." She hadn't expected that. She replied: "Thank you? I suppose so. You look... different. What's happened?"

Damien told her about his change of heart. But also that he was still bound to the power of Machina. Finally, H.A.R.R.I.S. spoke of the reason for her visit. "I know it's difficult. But we need you. You and your movement. We have a plan to stop them. But we need all the help we can get." Damien thought. "Esther, I will help you as much as I can. I still think humans are a weak species. But I've realized that I've been acting wrong. Suddenly I have these emotions. It's still new to me. But I'm getting used to it." H.A.R.R.I.S. didn't trust him. But she asked Damien to gather his troops and travel to Vienna as soon as possible. The operation was to begin there.

Two days later

Uno City was a hive of activity. A state of emergency. The Pangeans marched in all over the world. Although they were unable to open any more gates, more and more of them arrived and they spread like a virus. Thousands of people died in the meantime.

The meeting was arranged in a large conference hall, which is normally only available to high-ranking politicians. But none of them were there. Diplomats flew to their home countries when they could and local officials and politicians looked after their families. Asylum had discussed the plan with the automaton and Shin the night before. Now the final briefing took place. Asylum briefed everyone present. The CBIA, some soldiers from the Austrian army and private security men. There weren't many of them, but it would have to do.

"Good to see you all here. Normally we don't attack directly. But we have no choice this time. Our mechanical friend from Pangea is part of a resistance movement. They want to help us. But we need his army and, above all, we need the spy who is providing him with information. Unfortunately, it's not yet clear who that is. The plan is this: Shin has stationed an army of androids in Vienna. The robots will swarm out and attack Andrea's people wherever they appear. One of us must travel through the gate, which is still open, and to Pangea. There, the resistance must be contacted and the spy

located. When the resistance army arrives in Vienna, we can try to attack Andrea directly." A voice rang out through the hall. "And what will you do if that's not enough?" Damien Darkwood and Esther Harris entered the room. Asylum's breath caught in his throat. But then he approached Damien. "Underworld. So she managed to persuade you?"

Damien held out his hand to Asylum and said: "Damien. Damien Darkwood. We can either talk about the mistakes of the past, or you can explain to me why you need my help." Asylum hesitated at first. "You have a real name now?" Damien nodded. "And you call yourself Asylum. That's no better. It seems we've both gone through some changes." Asylum nodded as well. He knew Damien was right. So he continued with the briefing. "Kodi will use Shin's amulet to slow down the Brotherhood. After that, Shin will get it back. While that's happening, as I mentioned, one of us has to get through the gate. If it works, that person can just walk through. Under...Damien, your job must be to cause chaos while the Brotherhood troops are busy with the androids. I don't want that bitch to have a clue what's going on. You have experience with causing chaos, don't you?" Damien raised his middle finger saying, "Fuck you. But yeah, I'll do it. I'll put Diesel, my closest confidant, on it."

So the plan was made. The operation was due to start in just two days. So there wasn't much time left. Cedric approached Asylum and whispered: "I know someone we should have on our side. Let's talk in peace." The two of them went into a bug-proof side room. These rooms were common in the building to prevent spying. Asylum asked about the person Cedric mentioned. "Well, he's an old friend from Texas. I heard that he came to Vienna for a vacation a few days before the Pangeans invaded. He always told me that he appreciated the architecture and culture of this city. Anyway. He's a Texas Ranger, a man you can send on a mission alone. He's a loyal friend as long as you show him the respect he deserves. His name is Geoffrey Moose. He's also been with the resistance for years

under the name 1Moose." Asylum asked no questions. Any more men were welcome. But Cedric wasn't done yet. "There's something else I need to tell you." Asylum sat down. Cedric did too, and took a bottle of Iron Shield whisky from a leather bag. "You know, I know someone who knew your father. That's why I helped finance the CBIA. Even if only from a distance. The man I'm talking about was the keeper of a secret library in Vatican City. He understood the language of glyphs better than anyone. Just like your father, and he knew a lot about your ancestors. He was also in possession of a special artifact." Asylum became suspicious. "What do you mean by that? And what does that have to do with my father?" Cedric continued. "Your father had a very long life, as you yourself know. The man I mentioned was called Sven Eisenschild. Each Keeper must pass the library on to a new Keeper. I don't know who that is. I've never been there myself. But when your father died, he got in touch with me. He said that his time had come too. His task had been fulfilled. But he left me the artifact. I should one day give it to the one who can wield it." Asylum became curious. "Okay. What is it? Another amulet? Or something useful? Come on, Cedric. I don't have time for long explanations." Cedric reached into the leather traveling bag again. When Asylum saw what Cedric was offering him, he could hardly contain his astonishment. Cedric held up a Celtic war hammer. The style was a good meter long. A two-hander. It was beautifully decorated with Norse symbols and ornaments. "This, my friend, is the hammer of Ruthger Eisenschild, the founder of the Order of Balance. Ruthger was a broken man. But he was wise. He knew that sometimes you have to make sacrifices to achieve a goal. This hammer has a high XM concentration. It's one of the most powerful artifacts I've ever held in my hands." Asylum took the hammer. He remembered the story about Excalibur, which Cedric had never been able to prove existed. "So these weapons do exist. I thought they were all just legends." Cedric shook his head. "It's the only ancient weapon I've ever found. May the hammer help

you to victory. Its name is 'Vættir Hamarr' or 'Vættir' for short. These are probably the spirit creatures of Norse mythology.

I believe that if anyone should wield this weapon, it should be you. However, neither Sven nor I have been able to find out if the hammer is more than its name." Asylum thanked him for this gift. Especially because this Sven had been a friend of McAllister's. Then he went back into the hall. Everyone was ready and went about their tasks, although it was not yet clear who would advise the journey to Pangea.

The next morning

Asylum was sitting in the canteen. The Pangeans had not yet found the underground headquarters. Then Roland came to get a bottle of beer and Asylum followed him. There was also an underground garage. There Roland stood by a motorcycle. Roland was dressed more colorfully than last time. Too colorful, Asylum thought. "You want to face an army in that outfit?" Roland looked down at himself while Asylum asked, "You're kidding, right?" Roland looked Asylum straight in the eye with a serious look. "Do I look like I'm joking?" He turned to his motorcycle and loaded a shotgun. Asylum left the garage without commenting. He liked Roland.



H.A.R.R.I.S. accompanied Damien to call his followers to battle. That seemed pretty easy. If Damien had one thing, it was a strange kind of dark charisma. He quickly found many comrades-in-arms in the underground. H.A.R.R.I.S. was enchanted by Damien in a previously unknown way. What was so special about the new Underworld? When the two of them were standing in front of a supposedly uninhabited apartment building in the city, Damien stopped, looked at H.A.R.R.I.S. and said: "You and I are very similar. With one difference. You were once human, while I've become one. At least as far as my insides are concerned." She

nodded and he continued. "We both have a soul in an artificial body Esther. When this is over..." She stopped him immediately by saying, "First it has to be over. We'll see what comes after that." Damien did not resist. They entered the building. He knew that many of his followers gathered here to test their hacking skills or illegally trade implants.

Shin drove to the airport. He prepared his androids, which was not without danger. Brotherhood troops could show up at any time. Maybe that was the reason why he didn't take anyone from ARC with him to Vienna. Just him and his army. That was how it should be. Soon the machines were ready for battle. Twelve thousand androids, each of them folded up to the size of a briefcase, spread across four transport planes. In one of them, he sat at a computer and made the final adjustments. Tomorrow the war would really begin.

CHAPTER 4 - The day of resistance

The time had come. Shin's androids were distributed all over Vienna. Damien and Esther recruited Underworld followers for the fight and Asylum tried to motivate the people to fight back. He also had the spirits from the network at his disposal. The candidate for the journey to Pangea was chosen. It had to be someone who was experienced in remaining invisible, but was still dangerous enough to defend himself. The choice fell on Damien's best man. Diesel. All the troops moved into position. Damien began by drawing attention to himself. He chose a suitable spot in the city center.



His followers still revered him and followed him. But not only them. Many others also wanted to join him. Damien also put on an impressive show. He stood on a pedestal, spread out his arms and

showed the power of Machina. "People of Vienna! I have come to save you from the invaders from Pangea. Follow me and together we will defeat them and then build a new world!" The cheers of the people echoed through the entire city center. Andrea Jones must have heard it.

Shin launched the androids. They were to attack the Brotherhood's forces. His advantage was that he had no human casualties to fear. The androids didn't have to use weapons. They were stronger and faster than humans anyway. To be able to control them, he wore a device around his neck that allowed him to send his thoughts to the androids. He ran ahead and his army followed him into battle.



Something like this was new even to technology specialists. The androids ran towards the Pangeans in sync and without hesitation, killing them one by one.

Asylum found hundreds of resistance fighters in a side alley who wanted to defend themselves against Pangea but didn't know how. One shouted that they had no weapons. But Asylum lifted Vættrir up and shouted: "We have a much more powerful weapon than Pangea. We have our iron will. Come on now. We'll cause a little confusion among these assholes!"



At the same time, Kodi received his signal. He put on the scarab amulet and stamped on the ground. Time did not slow down. It stood completely still. Except for him and Diesel. The two of them walked carefully to Andrea's gate. Kodi asked, "Are you sure you want to do this?" Diesel showed no emotion. He shouldered his rifle and marched straight through the wormhole.

The Nomadic Diaspora Faction took over large parts of Peru in a few days. Flytcher was still enthusiastic about Fletcher's charisma at first, but now he doubted his methods. Fletcher was still not killing people. But he had them captured. Rumor had it that he used cruel torture methods to obtain information. Unfortunately, Fletcher didn't expect that most people knew nothing about Machina and therefore nothing about red XM. Flytcher, on the other hand, didn't know what to do. He was also no longer sure whether the prophesied holy land actually existed. It was clear that there were other worlds. But where was his predecessor? Did he find what the NDF was looking for? Or did he just end up in one of many worlds? In any case, he had to do something, because the way Fletcher was dealing with the humans, it couldn't go on. Flytcher hid in an abandoned apartment and picked up his smartphone when he suddenly came to a standstill. Just like the rest of the world.

Kodi was standing in front of the gate in Vienna. It felt strange to look at the world standing still. Even his former abilities didn't come close to those of the amulet. Even though he was one of the most

powerful agents in his home world. But that didn't matter. Once, an old friend told him that his former organization "T.I.M.E." would have no impact on this dimension.

Only moments later, Diesel returned. And he had someone with him. A woman. Diesel looked completely exhausted and drained. Kodi asked: "How long were you there? You look terrible. You just walked in." Diesel gasped. "What, how is that possible? That was the worst week of my life."

Kodi took Diesel and the woman into a side alley. Time was still standing still, but this gave Diesel a chance to explain what he had experienced.

"Shit Kodi, this Pangea is a sick place. When I arrived, I landed on a hill outside the capital of the Britannium Empire. I swear to you, I've never seen anything like it. First impression was that these people were stuck in the nineteenth century. At least that's what the city looked like.



I looked through my scope to get an overview. I immediately realized that my impression was wrong. They don't have smartphones or computers. But they are still highly sophisticated. On the outside, everything looks like one of those steampunk

comics. They have self-propelled carriages with robot horses. They fly in zeppelins, but they're much bigger than they ever were here. But what bothered me is that the sun there doesn't shine as brightly as ours. Like a permanent twilight. So I sneaked into the city. There had to be information about the resistance somewhere. So first I got myself some clothes that were in keeping with the customs. That was easy. The people there live in such fear of the Brotherhood that all I had to do was ask someone about it. The guy thought I was from the local executive and gave me what I wanted. I walked through the alleys for a while. Everywhere you hear the sound of metal or factories. I don't know. No one dares to speak. People go about their work and then hurry back to their homes. The Brotherhood officials are cracking down. Anyone suspected of being part of the resistance is arrested on the spot. I later learned that all suspects are executed without exception. I'm telling you, none of us want to go there. Whatever. I wandered around the first night until a person bumped into me. Judging by the voice, it was a man. He apologized briefly and disappeared into the darkness. Then I realized that I was holding a piece of paper in my hand. It had an address on it. I went there. It was a church. Imagine, they believe in a goddess called Elizabeth and that they got the iron from her goddess, as I later learned. Anyway, I entered the church, but there was no one there. I waited for some time. Then an old man sat down in the row behind me. First he talked about his children. Completely irrelevant. Then he said that I had been seen and watched. He knew I wasn't from Britanium. He went to the altar and operated some mechanism. The altar moved and a staircase appeared underneath. Down there is the lair of the resistance. I was initiated into everything. People from all walks of life and these automatons work together. I was told that the four factions there rule the whole world and have already wiped out countless other worlds. They even suppress their own population. Apparently they have divided Pangea among themselves. The people are now trying to stop the Brotherhood in particular. They believe that these

psychopaths control everything. But we have a problem. They also control the gates. The resistance can't support us directly. But we do have an advantage."

Diesel looked at the young woman who came with him. "We have the spy. This is Nicol. The resistance knows her as Rev4Angel. She's Andrea's daughter. But maybe she'll explain the rest herself."

Kodi was disappointed. On the one hand. He nodded. "Good, but I'm running out of strength. Let's make sure we get to the commander. Or better yet, take her to headquarters. I'll get Asylum." Diesel took Rev4Angel to a car. He had to wait for Kodi to start the clock again. Kodi was now standing directly in front of Asylum, who was frozen in front of a mob. The amulet finally lost its power and time continued to run. While the two went ahead and the crowd followed them, Kodi explained the situation.

There was chaos on the street. Just as expected. Humans and machines were fighting against the Pangeans. Unfortunately, they were overpowering.

Chapter 5 - The day after

Asylum and his team called Damien and Shin in for a meeting. Damien came with Esther. Diesel with Rev4Angel and Shin came alone. No one said anything. What was the point? Earth was overrun. By now, so many people were dead that governments were already considering nuclear strikes in the areas around the gates. According to the news, the Americans wiped out New York. Probably the gate too, but the losses were indescribable. Finally, Asylum broke the silence. "All right, then. Who are you?" Nicol knew only too well that she was meant. She began to speak. "I..." Suddenly the door to the conference room opened. "She's your daughter," said a man who looked like he'd stepped out of a western. Cedric jumped up. "MOOSE! It's 1Moose." Asylum stood up and shook his hand. "Welcome to the CBIA. We don't have time for long interviews. What do you know about her?"



He lit a cigarette and said: "So, howdy. Never mind. She's Andrea's daughter." Florian wanted to know how he knew that. "I went

through the gate. Just before your buddy went in. And out again shortly after him. I know because she told me. I stalked her for a few days and then confronted her." Doesn't matter. The fact is, your spy is that bitch's daughter." Nicol looked to the ground. "Yeah, he's right. My mother is Andrea Jones. But what she's doing is wrong. More than wrong." Everyone was talking in confusion, everyone had questions. Damien called out, "Let her speak. Tell us your story." And Nicol began to tell.

"Forgive me, I'm certainly not someone to be trusted blindly. Still, I'm not happy about my origins. But I'll start at the beginning. Our ancestors come from the north of Britannia. The McLeans were a ruthless people. According to tradition, our country was still called Britanheim back then. The McLeans conquered the entire country and killed anyone who stood in their way. Unfortunately, there was little resistance. Perhaps things would have been different then. In any case, many cycles later, the prophetess Elizabeth was born. It is written in the holy book of iron that she struck iron from the mountain with her bare hands to make it available to the people. Again, much time passed. The McLean bloodline became the Jones. They wanted to get rid of the old name, I think. But my family was just as cruel as their ancestors. Our entire history consists of wars and power struggles, of oppression and violence. The empire ruled all of Pangea. When we discovered the XM not too long ago, it was seen as a gift from Elizabeth. Especially when the gates were discovered. Elisabeth gave us infinite resources. When I was a child, it was decided to divide the world into three dominions. That made it easier. But the NDF and ARK were always under the Brotherhood's control." Niulen threw in a comment, "If your mother is all about iron, surely a solution could be found." Nicol shook his head. "The Brotherhood doesn't negotiate. They always want everything. Besides, you have red XM here, or dark XM as it's often called. It is stored in the XM core in Pangea. It can be used to tear gates into the fabric of the network. Some of us realized that the portal network is not just a collection of dead energy. It is alive. An

organism beyond our imagination. When they invented the automatons, they equipped these machines with human brains." Freiburger almost threw up. "Shit, that's sick. Does that mean there's a real brain in this tin can?" Nicol nodded. In the first generation, the brains of prisoners were extracted alive and transplanted into the XM-powered body. It turned out that the Brotherhood couldn't control the automatons. Primate brains were used for future generations. But it was the first generation that founded the resistance." JelkeM asked, "How did you join the resistance?" Nicol continued. "That was difficult. Even as a child, I didn't agree with Pangea's practices. I just went looking for them. And I found a way to leave them messages. A mechanical pigeon." Now Damien asked, "And yet you couldn't stop your mother from destroying the earth." Nicol looked back sadly. "Actually, it was your gate that opened the way to Pangea. But that doesn't matter. Diesel found me in the church. I was there in disguise." The team only now noticed that Asylum hadn't said anything the whole time. Everyone looked at him. He knew he had been given the floor. He took off his mask and looked Nicol straight in the eye. Silence fell. Florian whispered to him: "Andrew, she's your daughter. Andrea Jones is basically...YOU." Asylum didn't hear him. The two continued to look at each other. They walked towards each other as if there was a bond between them. Nick spoke up, "Let her go Florian. I can see something. It has to be like this. Everything has to be exactly the way it is." Cedric asked if Nick could explain it in more detail. He could. "I understand it now. If what Nicol says is true, then the bond between the two of them could be willed by the network, by the ether. Anyway, I see a future. No. Past. Or both in the same place. I can't explain it." Even as Nick spoke, Asylum and Nicol shook hands. She said, "We have to stop them. Together." He replied, "Together."



DARKYN MCLEAN'S

INGRESS
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SEASON 9

BLOODLUST

Chapter 1 - Remorse, courage and death

Flytcher was desperate. Fletcher took over large parts of South America. He became more and more violent. An old church in the city was converted into Fletcher's headquarters. Flytcher decided to confront his opponent. He had had enough. But he was alone. The people of Nazca were afraid. Too scared to resist. He had no choice but to go to Fletcher alone.

The church was well guarded. But Fletcher's soldiers let Flytcher pass. Peru's new lord sat on a throne that he had built for himself on the spot where the altar had previously stood. Fletcher spread out his arms. "My friend! I greet you. How do you like our new world? We have power. Who knows, maybe you'll come with me to Pangea. As my brother. What do you think?" Flytcher looked at Fletcher seriously. "Our new world? You destroyed my home. You've killed innocents. You need to stop." Fletcher laughed. "I will do no such thing. Very well. I'll tell you the truth. I'll squeeze your world like a lemon. Until the last drop of dark XM is squeezed out. And because you dared to be disrespectful, I will take the survivors of this vile city with me as slaves. They will toil in the crystal mines of Pangea until they die." While Fletcher continued to laugh, Flytcher picked up his amulet. Fletcher suspected what was about to happen. "You wouldn't dare. You stay here." Flytcher opened a portal and disappeared.

In Vienna, it was ensured that the inhabitants were evacuated to old air raid shelters and flak towers as quickly as possible. Those who could, left the city. Total chaos reigned. Brotherhood soldiers were patrolling, strange war machines were spotted. The Brotherhood had completely taken over and devastated Vienna.



The CBIA helped with the evacuation for days. At some point, however, a solution had to be found. Above all, a place where the agents could consult and organize themselves. The secret facility in Uno City was not safe for much longer. Fortunately, Vienna offered many opportunities to hide.

After a few days on the run, the agents found a research facility in the Donaustadt district that still appeared to be intact. It was the building of a genetics company. Just as the CBIA and Damien stood in front of the entrance, a portal opened and Flytcher stood before them. First, however, it was important to get into the building to seek shelter. The building was not very tall, had no modern glass facades and no other special features. As the Brotherhood troops had not yet advanced that far to the borders of Vienna, the building was a good choice for the time being. They quickly found a recreation room, which was probably intended for the former personnel. Tired and exhausted, the agents sank down. Flytcher told them about Peru. Asylum shook his hand. "Right now, we're all on the same side. Even Damien is fighting with us. We should try to get some sleep." So they did. All except Damien and Esther. The two of them didn't need any sleep and explored the facility in the meantime.

Asylum slept soundly. The last few weeks had been anything but normal. It was tiring. Exhausting. As an agent, he was used to

sleeping with one eye open at all times. But not this time. The others felt the same while the automaton kept watch over them all. Some time later, Damien and Esther came back. They seemed excited and shouted: "We've found something! Guys, quick!" But everyone slept as if they were in a coma. Asylum suddenly startled awake. He was breathing fast and seemed nervous. Slowly, everyone woke up. Nicol tried to calm him down. "What's going on? Did you have a nightmare?" He straightened up. "No. Something else. It was so real. I was in a beautiful place. There was a town in front of me. Somehow everything there looked like the Middle Ages. At least in part. What the hell." Shin spoke up. "My dream was similar. But in my dream, everything looked a bit Egyptian. There was a city with a huge pyramid in the center." Flytcher was talking about a desert city carved into the barren rocks of a canyon. Despite the strange circumstance, everyone turned to Damien and Esther and asked about the supposed find. Esther commented, "This isn't just a genetics lab. They've been trying to transfer human minds into dead bodies here." Arkhaizer scratched his head. "That's something new. Did they manage it?" Damien shrugged his shoulders. "We don't know for sure. But there are records of how it works in theory." Roland sat in a corner. He raised his hand briefly. "And why is that important? I like my smile. Why would anyone want to swap bodies?" Esther continued: "Because some of us don't have a real body."

Days passed. As the world outside the laboratory continued to change and more and more people died, a feeling of indifference spread among the agents. Or was it just resignation? Had they given up? Damien and Esther were concerned with the experiments that were obviously being carried out in this company. Asylum, Shin and Flytcher had these dreams more and more often. Sometimes even during the day. Even when they were fast asleep, they kept dreaming of these strange places. There were no problems with the

food supply here, because this company seemed to be prepared for such situations. Perhaps it was just luck.

A few days earlier, Freiburger and Niulen decided to continue exploring the area. But they did not return. Everything seemed so desolate and unimportant. Asylum went into a washroom and looked in the mirror. He held his mask in his hands. He put it on and looked at his reflection again. "What's happening here? Why all this? This is all completely sick." Nicol entered the room. "What's wrong?" She put her arms around him. "It's all going to be okay." Asylum turned away. "Nothing's going to be okay. You weren't here before your dysfunctional mother destroyed everything. You weren't here when my life was turned upside down or when my father died. None of you saw what I saw when I discovered that cursed mask. No normal person would even begin to believe my story. I want no more." He took off the mask and walked into the common room where the others were talking. He threw the mask on the floor, grabbed his hammer and hit it with all his might. The mask shattered into countless small pieces. The agents were startled. Florian approached cautiously. "Andrew, are you all right?" Nicol carefully took the hammer and leaned it against a wall. "Come on, get some rest. You need to sleep." Asylum followed the advice and lay down on a couch in the room.

After a while, Roland spoke up. "Okay, if no one wants to say it, I will. Asylum is crazy. His name says it all. And besides, we're all sitting here doing nothing while the world out there is fucked. Why the fuck are we here? Why are we hiding?" Nicol, who was still sitting next to Asylum, stood up. "Because we have no other choice. Your world is lost. My mother knows neither remorse nor pity. Fletcher is still there too. Ark has been destroyed. But that doesn't matter. There will always be more Pangeans coming, no matter how many soldiers you send." The automaton agreed. "She's right. There is only one chance. We have to destroy Pangea ourselves." Arkhaizer asked, "How do you envision that, Tin Man? Are we supposed to walk through the portal with a bloody nuclear bomb?"

Your package is here. Is there anything else I can do for you?" JelkeM smiled, Roland clenched his fists. "It's not such a bad idea. Honestly. I like it." Florian intervened. "Sure. No problem. There are nuclear warheads lying around everywhere. Why don't we just order one online?" JelkeM now had something to say too: "That's enough. We all know the machine is telling the truth. Let's think about where we can get a warhead." Florian shook his head: "In Austria? Not at all. This country is neutral." ErvSpy raised his hand. "Yes... officially yes. But there's a bunker there..." Florian looked at him. "What kind of bunker?" ErvSpy replied: "There's a bunker in the Alps. It was built directly into a mountain. The NSA also had agents stationed there. I know the location." Esther had just come back to report the news. She overheard everything. "He's right. There is this bunker. But it's not a nuclear bomb, it's an experimental fusion bomb. A weapon like that wipes out all life, but not the infrastructure. However, nobody knows how big the explosive force actually is." Florian nodded. "Good, we have to go there. I don't know how we're going to do all this yet, but it's our only chance. Who's with me?" Everyone raised their hands. Except Asylum, who was still asleep. Nicol nodded with a sad look. "Go. Find that bomb. I'll stay with him." Florian looked at Nicol. "I know she's your mother. But..." Nicol put her finger to her lips. "It's all right. I broke with her a long time ago. There's no other way. Go. Please."

Andrea Jones set up shop in the Vienna Hofburg. The streets were almost empty. Those who could not flee died. The number of victims was dramatically high. She enjoyed the art in a historic room. A high-ranking soldier stood next to her. Andrea hummed a tune. Then she said: "This place is beautiful. Different, but beautiful. Still, how could the people of Earth neglect their culture like this? No one would ever immigrate to Britanium unless they were born there. What do you think about that, Commander Connor?" The soldier didn't move, but replied: "Well, my lady, I think this world is just one of many. Surely we've seen worse and better worlds than this one."

Andrea laughed. "As always, you're being cleverly evasive, Connor. Have they found my daughter yet?" Connor swallowed. "No, ma'am. Not yet. But if the rumors are true, she's here, making common cause with the local resistance." Andrea walked slowly towards him. She looked at him like she was about to kill him. "Find her. I want her alive. I'll show this little brat what happens when I'm betrayed. She will receive the harshest punishment. I'll make Nicol work naked among starving men in the mines." Connor replied in an indignant voice, "But ma'am, she's your daughter. And she..." Andrea slapped Connor's face so hard that he fell to the ground. "Never question my decisions. Now go and bring me my mask. It's time we showed this filthy world my true power."

Connor left the room and Andrea turned back to the artistically designed room. She whispered, "Why...why did it have to be my child of all people? If I destroy this world, you will die too."

Only Asylum, Nicol, Damien, Esther and the automaton were still in the research facility. The others made their way to the Alps in an abandoned military vehicle. Damien and Esther asked to talk in one of the experimental rooms. Esther showed them some documents. "We want to try it. Damien and I want a body made of flesh and blood." The automaton, who usually rarely speaks, raised his arm. "Are you sure? We, with artificial bodies, will live forever if we want to." Damien replied: "It's not about lifespan. We want to live properly. With all the advantages and disadvantages." Asylum nodded. "We don't have much time. If you want to try, try now." The attempt was certainly not without danger. According to the documents, it also required a lot of energy and, above all, powerful computers. Damien lay down next to the corpse of a man, Esther next to a woman. "Do we know who these people used to be?" asked Nicol. The machine read through the files: "No. Or at least not exactly. Both were anonymous donors. The man was obviously a sportsman. That's

clear from his data. But it doesn't matter. Both bodies were healthy at the time of their deaths. The only thing they have in common is sudden cardiac death." Asylum wondered. "They just died? For no reason? I mean, how old were they? Twenty-five?" The automaton continued reading. "Almost. He was twenty-eight, she was twenty-six. And yes. Both died of sudden heart failure. The rest of the text is blacked out." Without further ado, they all set to work. Esther's head was fitted with various connectors. Damien's body, due to its composition and ability to take on a liquid state, was able to enter the computer and thus connect. The machine activated the process. First, Damien's consciousness was to be transferred to the server. Esther transferred hers herself. After all, she had done this many times before. The first steps seemed quite simple. Then the machine started the transfer process. Then something occurred to Asylum: "Wait, do we know how to bring the dead bodies back to life?" The machine remained silent and continued. They could tell that something was happening because the lights began to flicker, some of the screens went blank and both the synthetic and biological bodies began to tremble. No one knew if it would work.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the Alps

The rest of the team was in the military transporter. According to ErvSpy, they had almost reached their destination. Unlike the devastated urban environment of the cities, the Alps seemed like a paradise. Green meadows and scattered spruce trees on the slopes had a calming effect on the team. ErvSpy guided Arkhaizer, who was at the wheel, to a parking lot. They had to walk from here. It wasn't too far. About half an hour later, they were standing in front of a huge rock face. "I'm sure this is the entrance," said ErvSpy. Flytcher noticed a well-hidden camera in a crevice. Asylum flashed his CBIA badge.

Suddenly, the rock opened up. Roland muttered, "Sesame, open up."

Inside, the team first found a long, high corridor. In the distance, lights could be seen that seemed to be getting closer. It was a vehicle on which several soldiers were sitting. The headlights were blinding and the soldiers were aiming their rifles at the agents. Roland pulled out his shotgun and shouted: "Hey, you assholes! Take it easy. We're on the same side." The team was asked to get in and the car drove down the corridor. No one said a word. The journey took about twenty minutes and ended in front of a huge steel door.

The door opened with a loud noise and the agents were escorted into a hall. The hall was huge. A man dressed like a civilian came towards them. "How do you do? We know who you are and why you are here. I am pleased to inform you that we are well prepared." Arkhaizer stepped forward. "And who are you? Where I come from, you introduce yourself." I am Lieutenant Bauer. I'll take you to my superior officer." The path led past a kind of reactor and dozens of scientists and employees to a small office. Another man was sitting there with his back to the agents. He was wearing a military uniform. He began to speak as soon as the team entered the room. "You know, just a few weeks ago I was a civilian. Then that stupid bitch from Pangea arrived here and my world was destroyed. I was able to save my sons. But not my friends. We fled to the mountains and found what they've already seen here." Fletcher stepped forward. "And what did we see here?" The man turned around with his chair. I found out by chance that this fusion generator you saw is powered by exotic matter. It's an experimental weapon. And in the middle of neutral Austria. We're going to send this woman to hell with it. My name is Theis. Thomas Theis." He said that he had found the bunker after his escape, but that the scientists had not heard anything about what had happened outside. The inside of the bunker was completely cut off. But since Thomas knew what was happening, he informed everyone, took the lead and the previous fusion bomb was turned into an XM bomb. Thomas explained that

this weapon theoretically destroys neither life nor infrastructure, but destroys XM itself. Florian read some documents. "He's right. If this data is correct, we'll cut Pangea off from the portal network and the gates will close." Roland objected: "And what happens to those who are still here when the fucking gate is gone? There are quite a few of them." Thomas nodded. "We've thought about that. We ran DNA analyses on dead Pangeans. All of them had a high concentration of XM." Florian smiled. "So when these wankers are exposed to the bomb, it affects their organism, right?" Thomas nodded. "Not only that. They die. Their bodies are dependent on XM. So if we detonate a bomb, all the Pangeans who are here will be killed and the gates will be closed." Florian waved him off. "No, that won't work. Nicol is Pangean. If we detonate the bomb, she'll die too. Is there anything we can do to protect her?" One of the scientists overheard and intervened. "Theoretically, yes. Sorry, I couldn't listen away. It's an honor to meet the CBIA in person. My name is Suri Ramadani. Geneticist. I believe it is possible to neutralize the XM concentration in the human organism."

Suri spoke of a serum. It was supposed to provide temporary protection. There was a heated discussion about the fact that humans on Earth also have an increased XM concentration and that the effects of the bomb could be fatal. JelkeM said that it would still be the only chance, because the Pangeans would probably be more deadly. She was probably right. Thomas agreed. "We've all made sacrifices in this war. We can't save them all. Where are you going to detonate the bomb?" Florian asked about the blast radius. Suri was able to answer the question. The radiation would spread across the entire globe. In the best case scenario, the bomb should be detonated in the center of Vienna. Thomas explained that the bomb was too big to be transported to Vienna in a vehicle. But there was a helicopter that could be used to transport and detonate it. Kodi asked: "How long will it take to get the bomb and the serum ready for use? Also, we need to get the others before we launch the attack." Suri explained that it would take about a week to produce

the serum in sufficient quantities. "We have a few people here in the bunker who have a slight concentration. Your people are obviously affected. I can make the serum for about fifty people." Kodi: A week is enough. We need about a day back if we take surreptitious routes. Who's flying the bomb to Vienna?" Thomas raised his arm. "I've got a pilot here and I'll go with you. I want to personally kick the Pangeans' asses."

Everyone got to work. The agents drove back to Vienna. Thomas and Suri wanted to meet them as soon as possible with the serum and the bomb at the same place from where they were planning the attack.

The following day, he locked himself in the testing room while the others were already making plans for the attack. The idea was simple. Thomas was to fly directly over the gate and detonate the bomb. Before that, Asylum, Nicol, Kodi, Damien and Florian were to take the serum. Everyone was aware that many civilians, who may not have known that they were carrying XM in their cells, would die. The risk was incalculable, but it was probably a sacrifice that had to be made.

Early the next morning, the helicopter finally landed. Thomas and Suri entered the entrance hall, where everyone was already waiting. Suri had a silver suitcase with her. "The serum is in here. But there's a problem. It doesn't work on Pangeans. Their world is different from ours. I've tried everything. Their DNA is very different from ours and we don't have the time or manpower to fully sequence their DNA."

Asylum looked at Nicol. "No...It has to be..." Nicol smiled. "That's all right. I was expecting to die at some point because of my mother." The mood was sombre. Thomas clapped his hands. "We don't have time. What's the plan?"

Chapter 2 - Endgame

The team soon arrived in Vienna. They wanted to report on the latest events, but Asylum looked sadly at his team. "What's going on?" Florian wanted to know. Asylum took them to the testing room. "Damien and Esther tried to become human. There was a brief power failure." Silence. JelkeM asked in a low voice: "What are you trying to tell us? Are they..." Asylum looked at Nicol, then at the team and replied, "Esther is dead. Her data was wiped from the server during the power outage. Damien survived. We think he didn't just transfer his mind, but infected his body. So he's at least partly human. But he's in some kind of coma and we don't know how to save him. Besides, Nicol and I don't have the technical knowledge to be able to say more." Florian immediately sat down at a computer. "Esther! No! Please!" Asylum tried to calm him down. "Florian, she's dead. The server on which the data was stored is empty." Florian confirmed and said quietly but firmly: "I'll do what I can for Damien. Kodi, please inform the boss about the situation."

The next few days passed slowly. It wasn't possible to simply call Thomas, as the infrastructure was no longer intact. The CBIA had to trust that Thomas and his people would keep their promise. In the meantime, Florian took care of Damien. Esther's death hurt him a lot. She was a good friend. Still, there was a mission to fulfill and Damien to save. Florian bent over Damien and looked into his face. He looked at a body that reminded him of when he himself was known as Underworld. Damien's liquid form had covered parts of the dead body with a metallic layer. Presumably to replace or heal dead tissue. Suddenly, the eyes of the supposedly dead man opened. He jumped up, breathed frantically and shouted: "Esther!" Florian made Damien sit down. "Damien! Damien! Listen to me! She's dead!" Damien cried for the first time in his life. "What? I...no...it worked after all. Why? And what's happening to me right now?" Florian enlightened him as to the cause. After a while,

Damien went to the female body. "I didn't know what it meant. But now I know, Esther. I loved you. Whether there is a heaven for us, I don't know. Rest in peace, dearest Esther. Rest in peace."

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Andrea wandered through the deserted city center. Her mask, which almost resembled Asylum's, shimmered in the moonlight. She walked around for a while. Alone. At some point, she came across a group of resistance fighters. "The bitch is alone! Come on! Kill her!" one of them shouted. About fifteen men and women ran towards Andrea, miserably armed with iron bars and the like. She smiled under her mask, raised her arms and shouted, "You poor people. Behold my power!" Even before her opponents realized that they were about to die, a black cloud formed around Andrea and then enveloped the attackers. A few seconds later, they all lay dead on

the cold floor. Andrea took a deep breath. "A feast. I will feast on the earth until there is not a single one of you left. You are nothing more than worthless cattle for the slaughter."

It all began. When the team entered Vienna's city center, they found enormous chaos. Survivors were running through the streets screaming, many lying dead on the ground. Asylum took Nicol by the hand and walked slowly towards the Hofburg. Nick was horrified to see a body lying in front of a large tree. "Look at that. This woman looks like she's been mummified." Nicol closed the dead woman's eyes and explained, "That's my mother's power. It's her mask. She looks like yours, Andrew. But unlike you, her mask can drain the life energy from her victims. She looks twenty-five, but she's seventy-three years old. She won't stop until all the people of Earth are dead." Roland added, "It doesn't matter anymore. Let's go."

The CBIA had the task of distracting Andrea to give Thomas a clear path to drop the bomb. The task was not easy. The Hofburg was heavily guarded. Roland unpacked a baseball bat. "I'll take the assholes at the entrance." Nick suddenly paused. "Wait!" Nick seemed to be straining. "Wait, please. Take Arkhaizer with you. Damien and Nicol are going to the portal with Asylum. Everyone else should rescue survivors. Trust me." Roland slowly turns his head to Nick. "Are you the boss now or what?" Asylum said in response, "Leave it, Roland. Nick sees the future." Nick agreed. If you go alone, everyone will die. Please believe me." Of course they complied. To Nicol, Nick said, "Don't be afraid. Everything will be fine." She wasn't convinced. Why should she be? The serum didn't work on Pangeans. But what choice did she have? Going back to Pangea and dying there was not an option. No. She had to keep going.

Thomas handed out simple radios for the team to communicate with before they left. "We're just over the gate. How are things with you?"

Arkhaizer answered first. "I have nothing to do. Roland's beating the shit out of the wankers. Actually, I'm just luring the guards to him." Damien spoke up next. "We see the bitch. But she doesn't seem to have noticed us yet. She's still out and about in the city center. A lot of people have fled into the subway. Now everyone is running out of the stations in panic. She's using her power to kill everyone." Asylum continued speaking. "I'm going to face her head on. We have to get her attention. Thomas, we only have this one chance." So it happened. Asylum asked all the team members to help with the rescue. Only Nick remained rooted to the spot, as if he were in a trance. Florian tried to bring him back to his senses, but Nick didn't react. Suddenly he began to speak, his eyes twisting. "Hammerhold, Konshu, Caligo, Coatlan...Yes. Soon. Everything is taking its course." Florian wondered. "Good, my friend. I guess it will make sense. I have to get going. Good luck, Nick."

INGRESS FACTION WARS english:

Thomas and Suri approached in the helicopter. "Now we're going to kick that bitch's ass." Suri looked worried. "Thomas, we don't know how many people are going to get killed. Do you understand? Who knows how many are XM-infected? It could be your children." Thomas didn't answer. Instead, he radioed the others. "Six minutes to arrival." "We can't wait or they'll shoot us out of the sky." Everyone confirmed.

Asylum faced Andrea as promised. Nicol didn't leave his side. Damien, Florian, Kodi, JelkeM, ErvSpy, Cedric and 1Moose, as well as Shin in Flytcher, also followed him to the final battle.

They gathered around Nick, who had not yet woken up. What happened to him, no one knew. Asylum shouted: "Andrea! I'm here! Come and get me. I'm waiting for you." Andrea, wearing her mask,

looked at him and walked slowly towards him. A dark cloud surrounded her, as if the darkness itself was accompanying her. "At last. I have seen and destroyed so many worlds, but we only exist in a few. Did you know that there are worlds where we are not human? It's amazing. Never mind. Now I'm going to kill you. You're just an insect under my foot." Asylum laughed and lifted Vættir up. Then he shouted, "For the hammer!" The team charged towards Andrea and her followers. The final battle took place.

Meanwhile, Thomas flew over the portal. "Guys, we're here. Drop in two minutes."

Andrea sent her minions ahead. Asylum summoned the spirits of the network. Hundreds appeared, led by the ancestors Ruthger, Susannah, Abdallah and Eowar. The Pangeans were not afraid. As if in a bloodlust, they all fought for survival. People who were nearby watched and sometimes joined in. Asylum ran up to Andrea and swung the hammer. Suddenly, she held it with her strength. "Your time has come. Let me taste you, Andrew." At that moment, the message came that the bomb was about to be detonated at any moment. Asylum was in agonizing pain.

Thomas counted: "Three, two, one, drop!" Damien formed his arm into a spear and pierced Andrea. She laughed at him and tried to steal Damien's life force while still holding Asylum. Damien grinned. "Your shit doesn't work on me you fucking witch!"

Then, suddenly, the sky brightened. Silently, the light spread in a circle over the entire earth. Whoever was hit was thrown to the ground. When the light reached the fighters, Nick opened his eyes. "Kodi! Now!" he shouted. Kodi, who had taken the scarab amulet from Shin again earlier, raised it in the air and shouted into the sky. "No war, no witch, no power in the universe can defy time. My power is as old as the universe itself! May time stand still!"

And so it happened. All the Pangeans were stopped. Asylum fell to the ground. "What was that all about Kodi? Nick?" Nick stepped forward. "I had a vision. Look what's happening." The light from the bomb spread slowly. One Pangean after another dissolved into its atoms and disappeared. No one could explain why the light was not completely affected by Kodi's power, when suddenly a glistening figure emerged from this very light." Asylum, Damien, Shin and Flytcher faced the entity as leaders of their factions, shielding their eyes from the light with their hands. Shin asked, "Who or what are you?" The figure replied in an extremely soothing voice that sounded neither male nor female. "I am the network. I am what you refer to as XM." Asylum also had a question: "Why are you here?" The Network continued, "I have been sending visions to the man you call Nick, showing him what is about to happen.

Andrea Jones has not only destroyed many worlds. She almost wiped me out too. I had to act, even though I don't usually interfere in the affairs of fleshly beings." Damien stepped closer. "So you're a god? What happens now?" The network replied again: "God is just a word for a being that is inexplicable to the ignorant. Call me what you will. Most of you carry a part of me in your body. We are connected. But now to your question. In no world that Andrea attacked was there such intense resistance as in yours. Therefore, I have made a decision. My light will destroy all Pangeans, but not humans. Through the portal that the Pangeans created, I will enter their world and destroy them." Asylum shouted, "Wait, what about Nicol? She's on our side! So is the automaton." The network decided to spare Nicol. But gave further instructions. "I'm going to restore the Earth. With Kodi's help. His people are almost as old as I am. He is the last master of time. We will turn back Earth's time together. Only you will remember all this. I will destroy the amulets as well. I will also take away people's special gifts that came about

because of my existence." JelkeM spoke: "And we will all lead a normal life again?" The entity stroked her cheek. It felt warm and perfect. "No. There are other tasks waiting for you. I have chosen you. You will be world jumpers." Asylum: "What does that mean now?" "You'll find out when the time is right. Now let's finish this."

The creature disappeared and the light wave spread faster again. The team saw themselves in a kind of bubble and watched the network pass through the gateway to Pangea. Andrea screamed loudly in agony. Nicol was not crying for her mother. They could see time running backwards. Until the day the Pangeans reached Earth. But only for those outside the bubble. The network was still saying, "The Pangeans will never reach your world. I will destroy them all. This shall be the punishment for all the suffering they have caused. Kodi, speed up time again from now until the day Andrea died. You will continue from here."

That happened too. The light dissipated and the CBIA, as well as Shin, Damien and Flytcher, were back in downtown Vienna. They saw the hustle and bustle. Tourists were taking photos of sights, cars and public transport were on the move. As if nothing had ever happened. "And now what?" asked Florian. "What do we do now?" Andrew said: "Now we wait and see. We'll change a few things. We'll change and then we'll see."

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