

10,000 DAWNS



The Finale.

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The 10,000 Dawns Universe is the creation of a group of talented creative individuals who have contributed ideas, art, and stories throughout the years. These individuals include: Josephine Smiley, Taylor Elliott, Jordan Stout, David Koon, James Wylder, Miguel Ramirez, Elizabeth Tock, Brandon Derk, Ellie Fairfield, Annie Zhu, EN Hempstead, Kegan Mixdorf, Meghin Shelton, Daniel Alejos, Patrick Russel Blaker, Colby McClung, Olivia Hinkel, Raen Ngu, Nozomi Neko, Chase Jones, Genevieve Clovis, Evan Forman, Rachel Johnson, and many more. The character of Graelyn Scythes is the creation of David Koon, the character of Alice MacLeod is the creation of Josephine Smiley.

We would like to thank every single reader and listener who has made 10,000 Dawns a part of their week, and their life. Its now our honor to share with you the final chapters of this adventure... But adventure itself will go on forever in your life.
-Love, the 10kd Crew

Index (No, not that Index)

2 – Credits/Index
3 – Chapter 26: The Council
12 – Chapter 27: A Miracle of Malice and Mercy
24 – Chapter 28: The Girl Who Missed the Ocean
32 – Epilogue

Interviews:

35 – James Wylder
40 – Alex Rose
42 – Rachel Johnson
43 – Jordan Stout
46 – Josephine Smiley
48 – Taylor Elliott

51 – Tribute to Annie Zhu
58 – Deleted Scene
60 – Essay: 10,000 Dawns: Using the Multiverse for Self-Discovery by Tyler Lipa
63 – Essay: Graelyn: The New Frontier
65 – An Artist's Journey
68 – Preview of 10,000 Dawns: Anthology

Chapter 26:

The Council

Image: You see Kinan Jans. She is sitting in a chair, looking at you. Directly at you. She offers you a cup of tea, but you're going to have to get it yourself. This is a book after all, she can't actually hand it to you through the pages. She tries though, if that counts for anything.

Kinan: I need to you witness this. Whatever happens from here on out, part of this is up to you.

Image: Kinan steeple her fingers, and closes her eyes, pressing the fingertips of her forefingers against her nose.

Kinan: Getting this into your hands, it hasn't been easy. But Inkspot has done a good job.

(Yes, I have.)

Kinan: Perhaps you feel I've tricked you. Kept some secrets from you. I have. But the future of the human race in 500 years depends on you reading this, right now. Because right now, we're just stories in another Universe. But when you read this, this will be a story in your Universe. It will be as real as the feeling you have that you want to eat toast in the morning. Or the memory of tea. Try thinking of tea. I'm offering you some, here. Have a cup. Imagine the taste. The sensation lingers in your mind and in your body. The tea is in you long after you drink it. It becomes real inside you. Inkspot and I have been watching you read this whole time, and thanks to you, this whole operation has been possible.

Image: Kinan presses a button on the desk, and a picture of you pops up on the wall, projected. You're looking great, by the way.

Kinan: You're a valuable member of this team. Dawn appreciates your help, so consider yourself an honorary member if you see this through... But now things get serious. What happens here in this chapter will have huge ramifications for humanity. I can't help Graelyn. Not directly anyways. But you can, and all you have to do is keep reading.

Image: Kinan lays her hands out on the desk, palms up.

(Good luck.)

As she watched her home bombed to the ground, Graelyn realized the gravity of her job. Part of her had assumed Kinan had been overstating the seriousness of her case, that maybe the warlord had just wanted a foothold in the Prime Reality. Part of her had assumed the Firmament had been exaggerating when they said that this reality had “fallen” in the future. She could now see, very clearly, that this was not the case. They had if anything, understated it. If she failed, changes would sweep across the history of 10,000 Earths, and they would all die, and the Council would win in thousands of defacto victories. They would sweep across everything, and it would be burned.

It is here, important to note scale. There is simply a point one reaches where numbers are meaningless when casually mentioned. You get above a certain point and it becomes “a lot’ and “even more than that”. The number of lives at stake was simply too large for Graelyn to understand fully, She could grasp its immensity, and she felt raging horror at it, but when she tried to think all she could think of was the individual lives she had met. Arch. Lizette. Alice. Manuel... She could go on and on. Her cat, Mister Sprinkles, came to mind to. She imagined him scratching at a locked cage, as the building he was in crumbled and burned. She wasn’t even sure if Arch, her Arch, her only person she could be sure to count on anymore, was going to live through this.

She was alone. Totally alone. And yet she felt watched by eternity.

She dropped to her knees, and slumped. She had no idea what to do. The orb was broken. Arch was dying. And she was just a teenage girl...

No.

She got up, and weakly looked around. She had to save Arch, and save the Universe. Her mind began to work. She had to do this. She had no choice. She inhaled, and exhaled, and began to conceive a plan.

Step 1.

She opened up a panel on Arch, and hooked her tablet up into it, pouring data on his health onto the screen. She moved to do the best battlefield dressings she could, and used a rock to bang shut a tube that was leaking vital fluid. She couldn’t do much, but she did what she could.

Step 2.

She had to fix the orb. No matter what, this had to be done. She reached inside it, and found the neural connectors, jamming them onto her temples.

“U-u-user rec-c-cognised.”

“Orb, what would be necessary for you to make another jump?” The orb sat for a moment, and she wondered if it had died.

“N-New Trime-Regulator needed.”

“I don’t know what that is!” The machine politely replied by jamming a full knowledge of a Trime-Regulator and how to install it into her head. Okay. To get one, she’d need to find a Council vessel. It shouldn’t be a hard part to find there. The orb stuck some more info in her head, and thinking quickly, she asked it to stick some languages in there to. Done.

Step 3

Disconnecting, Graelyn went over to Arch, and laid a reassuring hand on him, when she heard a noise, and stopped with her steps. Carefully, she made her way over to the edge of the hill, crawling through the scorched grass. Framed with the burned sky was a small group of people, dressed in ratty yet fairly new survival gear. They all had rifles. Someone was trying to restart another person's heart, but it was clearly a fruitless effort. The rest of the group looked exhausted, broken. Only one of them didn't slouch, their face covered by a wrapped cloth and goggles, their head by a helmet. An insignia on their

arm made it clear enough who it had to be. Graelyn's heart raced. There was some hope after all. If she was here, maybe they stood a chance.

"Alice!" Graelyn yelled to the woman with the patch of a songbird on her arm. The woman turned, as did the rest of the group, and Graelyn scampered down the hill. "Alice MacLeod! Thank god. I need your help." The group of people looked at each other, then halfheartedly raised their weapons at her. Graelyn skid to a halt, raising her hands towards the red burning sky. The woman with the songbird patch raised an arm to stall her troops, and unwrapped her face. It wasn't Alice. It was Alice's friend Yi, from her squad. She wasn't tall enough to be Alice, upon second glance, anyways.

"Alice is dead." Yi said. "She died in the second wave, when they leveled London. Not that I ever met her in person." Graelyn looked at her patch again.

"Why the songbird patch then?" Yi looked down at it.

"It's a symbol. A Nightingale. Someone has to lead the survivors. Alice died, someone had to take over. I'm the 4th one to bear the title." Graelyn nodded. Made sense. Still, she was starting to get nervous. No one had put their guns down. "As for you, you're dead to, Graelyn Scythes. The Council publicly executed you three hours ago." Everyone kept killing her, geez.

"So, I died like a hero..."

"Apparently not."

"Look, that's why I'm here. I'm not your Graelyn Scythes. I'm her, but I'm not her."

"That doesn't make any sense." Graelyn wanted to wipe her brow, but kept her hands in the air.

"The Council is from an alternate reality right? I am to. I'm here to try to stop them and save humanity."

"You're a little late." Yi replied, "You're looking at it." Graelyn peered around at the group. There couldn't be more than twenty of them.

"You can't be serious."

"I've never been more."

"Well neither have I. Look, I'm trying to go back in time. I can't stop the Council from Invading, but I can give humanity a heads up... A kick start. Change enough that they can't just walk over us, but not enough that history diverges too much and the Firmament steps in to fix it." She realized that might make no sense to them, but no one looked confused. She was after all, dropping a complicated political situation between multiple realities on their heads in a few sentences.

"How could you do that?" Yi asked.

"The same way I got here, I have this orb thing that travels through alternate realities, as well as through time. The Council built it. It was only meant to scout, not change history, in hindsight probably so the Firmament didn't stop them looking at stuff, which I am only just now realizing as I'm explaining that to you, sorry about the tangent, but if I can get it to someone who knows how to analyze it and take it apart they could take steps in secret to stop the Council. I even know who I'll use. But the orb is broken, it needs a part I can only get from the Council." Yi gestured to her troops to lower their weapons.

"Okay. So we get this part for you. You go back in time... Sorry this is hard to believe."

"I'm a seventeen year old version of what I'm assuming is a thirty something year old woman who you saw die. And I'm guessing she has a different hair color to."

"This is a longshot." Graelyn looked at the beleaguered people.

"Are you really all that's left of humanity?" Yi shrugged.

"There might be a few pockets who haven't surrendered yet. But we're definitely the largest."

"Then face the facts: you're going to die unless you help me." Yi paused, and thought it over. A bolt of

lightning flicked between a crystal moon and a strange bio-mechanical vessel.

“Anything has to be better than this. At least we’ll go down fighting. What’s your plan?”

Graelyn grimaced, “Well, you’re not going to like it.”

“Try me.”

“We’re not going to fight.”

* * * * *

The moon was having a fairly descent day. It looked like the war was basically over, the last resistance in Moscow had been destroyed, basically. As it floated above the ground, causing massive disturbances below, not that it cared, it picked up an emergency beacon. Scrambling into action, the moon scanned the ground for where it was coming from, and spotted an old Council Probe. It was very old. The kind they’d abandoned for being too hard to control. Going too far back in time could cause huge changes, and you might accidentally write yourself out of existence. The probes had been meant to simply gather data on a reality and then leave, but even that sometimes caused too much of a problem. What was it doing here? Still, the probe said it needed extraction. The moon was not one to argue.

* * * * *

“What exactly is she doing?” Yi asked Arch. The group had gathered around the orb, as Graelyn had hooked herself into it somehow. She wasn’t exactly sure what to make of the Cyborg, but now wasn’t exactly the time to ask questions.

“Making a call I presume.”

* * * * *

“What is your name?” The orb asked. *I’m a moon*, the moon replied. “No, your name before that.” The moon scrunched its forehead up. It had had a name, hadn’t it? *No*, its programming replied, *no you didn’t*. “Yes you did.” The orb said. “Pull the 4th cord from your head immediately for security reasons.” The orb was not one to argue.

No wait- its programming began. But it had already yanked. Suddenly, it remembered it had a name. *Awiti*. It had been a she, and she had lived in Nairobi. She’d had two brothers, who enjoyed designing clothes. They’d sewn her a brilliant suit for her first job interview together. They’d died hadn’t they? She felt the moon around her, she was it, and it was her and...

“...My name is Awiti.”

“I need you to listen very carefully. I need you to send down a Trime Regulator.” She had plenty of those. A stockpile in fact. She could do that. She was getting so confused.

“Its okay.” The voice said. “If you send that down, this will all be over.” That was good. She could get behind that. She had an orb drone pick up the part, and begin to float down to the ground. Somewhere in her head, alarms were going off.

You must recall that part, a different voice said.

“Do not rescind my order, Awiti.” The first voice said.

You are a Factory of Crystal, you do not have a name.

Yes, she thought back, *I do*, and she accelerated the drone towards the ground.

“Thank you.” Graelyn thought back, as the Council fleet aimed their guns at the moon, and it exploded into a shower of molten Crystal, its massive chunks hurtling towards the ground cataclysmically. Graelyn didn't disconnect as she heard Awiti scream through the mental link. As the link finally turned to silence she disconnected and watched the girl she'd just met burn. She had been so brave. Graelyn had never even seen her face. She'd died because she'd asked her to. She tried not to think about that.

* * * *

A single crystal ball lowered from the sky like a meteor, shining bright, and then halted a foot from the ground, hovering, humming. Graelyn ran to it, and with its touch it popped open revealing a complex chunk of machinery. Pulling it out, Graelyn ran to the orb and following the instructions in her head, installed it. The orb hummed to life, and without hesitating, Graelyn jammed the cords back onto her temples, and laid in a date, and a place. As the Council fleet shifted to move towards them, their guns angling, the orb lit up. The topsoil around them lifted up a few centimeters, and a white disk burst out of the orb. Yi looked a bit stunned. Graelyn smiled at Arch, who weakly gave a thumbs up.

“It worked!” Yi said.

“We have to get in the portal quick, they're going to bomb us.” Yi shook her head.

“We'll stay here. We've lost everything. Go change the past, give us a new future.” Graelyn looked Yi right in the eyes, and made a decision.

“Don't be an idiot. You won't do any good dying here. You want to save your future? Do it yourself. You fought the council firsthand. Teach them how they can do that in the past.” Yi's mouth opened, then closed. “If you die, you can't do anything. Now jump through the damn portal! And one of you grab Arch and move him to the orb, its not like I can carry him on my own.” Without another word, Yi gestured at her people, and they began to run through the portal. The Council's guns began to aim. Two quickly moved Arch next to the orb, and ran through. Yi herself followed, and then Graelyn angled the portal to surround herself, Arch, and the orb.

Who are you? A voice yelled into her mind.

“Well, its not like you'll remember.” Graelyn replied.

* * * *

Graelyn had assumed she could control the portal. She was wrong. She was falling through a winding green glow with the others, a giant gash in reality. With all her might she tried to direct where they were going, the Orb keeping them in a bubble of its own making, diving through the gap between Dawns. She could sense they were nearing the exit, and aimed them towards it. The Orb was trying to sustain the whole group of people she's chosen to save from the end of the world, and it suddenly struck her that while this had been very nice of her, it had in fact been a rather stupid movie. If she'd been thinking intellectually, disregarding emotion, she'd have left them behind. The Orb was repaired, but still damaged. She considered letting them go. They'd float off into the gap, and wither and vanish, or end up in random places in the history of the Prime Reality, or... She honestly didn't know. But she'd be dooming them.

She'd save herself though, certainly. Graelyn nearly gave the order, but then she remembered.

She was a hero. She'd died trying to save that reality. That was the real her.

She closed her eyes, and apologizing silently to Arch, told the Orb to focus on getting the survivors to

that reality safely. The Orb shot towards a chunk of time/space, and carved it open, sending the survivors through a portal safe and sound. The Orb headed towards the gash it had made, and Graelyn opened her eyes just in time to see the gash closing. She pushed the orb forward, gave it everything she had toward rocketing it forward, and the Orb began to slip through the hole, with Arch and Graelyn trailing behind it, holding on for dear life.

And then the gash closed. The tendrils attached to Graelyn's temples snapped off, and Arch barely got his hand out in time before it was crushed. They shot past it, and careened on.

* * * *

The ambassador to the Firmament squirmed in his seat like a child who'd been sent to the principal's office without knowing why. Gossen Suss had been to see the Arbiter of Alternity several times before, but every time had been a bit terrifying. The Arbiter was thousands of years old, and couldn't be bluffed. It had seen things he couldn't even comprehend. He felt a surge of relief that the Firmament treated itself like an interuniversal road crew, fixing potholes and making new paths, but not bothering to change the course of events like they were an interuniversal police force. The Council, the glorious empire he'd sworn himself to, was something they'd never truly considered rising up, even in their most pretentious might. Still, the Firmament was powerful, powerful enough they might have been able to wipe out the Council before they had become glory and might, but they were sticklers for rules. The Council was like a unifying story across cultures, the details might differ, but the core story remained, bending everything around itself. You couldn't escape the Council, he knew. They couldn't be defeated. Their story was eternal.

"Excuse me, the Arbiter of Alternity will see you now." A hooded Firmament said to him. Gossen wasn't sure if he liked them more or less with the hoods up. At least with the hoods up they were a known element, with them down who knows what they would look like that day. Gossen stood up quickly, and smoothing his hair down, stepped through the door into the Arbiter's office. The room was covered in small screen's, whose visual fidelity was beyond that of the human eye. It was like being surrounded in thousands of windows into different worlds, each one presenting an image from a different reality. The Arbiter stood in the center of the room, holding one of their weird books that seemed to be projecting holograms of different characters into the air as he skimmed it. Annoyingly, the Arbiter had chosen to take the form of Gossen Suss himself today. Gossen tried to not look as creeped out as he was.

"Ah," he heard his own voice begin, "Ambassador, welcome back. Would you like some tea?" Unsure if the tea was actually tea, or just something that was approximately tea he's have trouble keeping down as he drank it, Gossen refused politely. "Pity, its Earl Grey." A pillar rose from the floor with a pot and a set of cups, and the Arbiter poured itself one.

"I was hoping the tea would calm you down. After all, I'm here to issue you bad news. Worst of all, bad news you won't actually understand." Gossen hated when they talked down to him like this. Of course he'd understand. The Arbiter took another sip, and then set the cup down on the pillar. "Ambassador Suss, have you ever seen Star Trek?" Gossen wasn't ready for that. Was this news sci-fi related? He preferred to stay in reality, not far off fantasies. Gossen was grounded in common every day things like interuniversal travel, paperwork, and off the shelf replacement limbs that would grow to match your genetic code. He didn't deal in fantasies.

"I can't say I'm particularly familiar." He replied. The Arbiter looked disappointed.

"I'd hoped it would make a good analogy for this. See, in Star Trek, there is a group called the Federation. Like the Firmament they have a resolution to not interfere in conflicts with lesser cultures.

They break it all the time though, so it barely matters. Now, we at the Firmament are similar to the Federation in that we have firm rules about what we do, except we never break them. When we interfere, it is because we have a mandate to. I believe you have compared us privately to an interuniversal road crew before-- oh don't give me that look! Like your superiors don't read your mind all the time. Your thoughts aren't anything special." Another pillar rose off the floor, upon it was a page of parchment, upon which was scrawled glowing letters in the Firmament's characters. "Now, that being said, we have formalities we must follow, as odd as they may be. So it's my sad duty to inform you that the treaty between the Council and the Firmament has been declared null and void." The Arbiter raised a hand, and the glowing letters floated off the page, hovering a few inches above it, and then flew into the Arbiter's hand. Gossen's eyes went wide.

"Excuse me, but this is impossible!" The Arbiter looked smug, "The Council and the Firmament have never had a treaty!"

"Exactly." The Arbiter replied, "The treaty never occurred, therefore, we have to declare the treaty null and void. I'm afraid the negotiated freedom you had to travel between universes has been belied as well. You're no longer welcome in the Labyrinth, and our agents are going to attempt to take back the Factories of Crystal you took from us as well." Gossen's jaw dropped.

"This is outrageous! I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Yes, as I said, you wouldn't understand this. Your pathetic monkey brain is ridiculously underpowered, and while it's not my job to take sides in any conflict, I do have to say it's a relief to not have to follow the ridiculous things you managed to negotiate into that treaty when we were so briefly weak against you." Gossen furrowed his brow.

"Someone changed history!" The Arbiter smiled like a parent who finally heard a child say $1+1$ was 2 after four hours of hearing them say it was still 1.

"Good! You're catching on!" Gossen grew angry.

"That goes against your rules though, you're supposed to prevent anyone changing history."

"Sorry, your treaty said we were to stay out of your affairs, and we did. What happened in that timeline never did now, and we've scrubbed it from existence, barring a few survivors some Dawn Agents managed to move to the past. But we'll ignore them too, after all, they were moved while the treaty was in effect. Stopping them was your responsibility." Gossen was angry. This twerp with his own face was talking to him like he was some sort of petulant child! His face grew red.

"The Council will never stand for this. We will stop them, and then we will burn your final Firmament to dust, we will-" The Arbiter rolled Gossen's eyes.

"Oh shut up. Our rules say I had to inform you of this, we must be alone, and there must be a witness who is not me to our meeting who remembers it." Gossen raised an eyebrow.

"I've read your rules. A video doesn't count."

"Yes, but someone is witnessing this meeting."

"I don't understand." Gossen received the most pandering smile of all time. Just imagine the most smug, and yet utterly condescending face you can. Amp it up. No, more! Okay maybe that was too much... No more still, yes that one! That face. Gossen frowned.

"Of course you don't." The Arbiter looks at you, and smiles, "But I do thank you for stopping by. The Final Firmament is glad to be keeping your reality in order since the beginning of recorded history, which if I may note we invented. You're welcome. It's pretty clever how Kinan pulled this off, I have to admit, even if she is insufferable. But I doubt she explained it to you. Do you want to know what's been going on this whole time?"

"What are you going on about? Who are you talking to?" Gossen said.

“Shut it. There are infinite alternate realities, and we live in just 10,000 of them. Lots of things are possible you can't even imagine. Somewhere I'm sure, books are alive. Their letters can change history. The soul of the book spread through all of its copies throughout the world... Suppose you slipped a book like that into the world. Put it on the internet. Put it in print. Let its words get in peoples heads. That could change people. Give witnesses to events that might never be seen. Make them real when they were merely dreams before.”

“That's how every book works. People read them, and it changes them. That's nothing special.” Gossen said.

“Really? Well then, that's very interesting.” The Arbiter laughs, “But if there was a girl who gave away her cat, and ended up below the sea, and then in an alternate reality... Well, maybe you knowing that story could change something. But back to you Gossen, you have a lot of words in your head, and now that I've told them to you, and I have so many other witnesses, I don't really want you to keep them.” The Arbiter reached out his hand, and a slew of glowing letters poured out of Gossen's forehead, flying through the air into the Arbiter's hand. It closed its hand on the glowing characters, and Gossen blacked out.

Gossen Suss woke up on the bench outside of the Arbiter's office. Had he fallen asleep? He was supposed to meet with the Arbiter today. Checking his watch, he saw he'd missed the meeting time. Crap. Straightening up his robes, he knocked on the door, and a hooded Firmament cracked it open, and seeing his face, shooed him away. He gulped. He'd messed up big time. With the war against the Prime Universe not going as swiftly as they'd hoped, they needed any traction they could get. It was like they'd had a warning, not like that was possible. Defeated, Gossen shoved his hands in the pockets of his robe and walked away.

* * * *

She had barely gotten her helmet on. She'd closed her eyes, and held her breath. She was lost in nowhere, and there was no one. She had succeeded at everything, and she was dead. Graelyn opened her eyes in horror. She'd messed up. Around her, peaking through the green glow, she saw faces.

“No, you're the girl.” Lizette said.

“We saved her. You were right.” Manuel Said.

“You realize they'll kill you. You can't let this go forward.” Alice Said.

“Good luck.” Kinan said, “I'm counting on you.”

“If I'm going to be down here, I'll need a mechanic anyways. Just consider that your first observation as my mechanic.” Arch said.

“Meow.” The cat said.

She drifted down through them, and tried to think of what to do. She didn't know. She looked over to see Arch, and tried to get close to him. Whispers began to creep into the edges of her mind, and she tried to push them out.

“Are we going to die?” appeared on Arch's face, and Graelyn didn't answer. She focused. She needed to get out. She thought about herself. She was a hero. She really was. She knew this. There were rules to these things, laws. Things she could exploit. This wasn't just arbitrary, there was a way out. She remembered then that she'd had the answer all along, and she didn't realize it. She tried to swim

through the space to be by Arch, and he grabbed onto her. She reached into a pocket in her suit, and pulled out the cat pin. She couldn't let go of it if she wanted to live. The thing was an anachronism everywhere, passed around through time and space and different universes. It didn't make sense. And she'd cut a weak spot once before with it. It had to work. Carefully, she pulled the sharp point of the pin out, and slashed at the green. It was like she'd cut open a sandbag she was falling into-- the tear she'd made screamed open, shooting bits of reality out, and devouring them. She had no idea where they'd land, or if they'd survive at all. Arch, and herself dropped through the hole, and landed in a rolling sprawl on a finely polished oak floor.

Arch propped himself up, and Graelyn rose to her feet, aching. She'd done it. They weren't dead. Sure, she didn't know where she was but... She looked around the room. There was a sculpture of a fist, made of Jade, and a model of the pyramid at Nojpeten. There was a fountain in the floor, with a waterfall rolling down it. A bust of Richard Attenborough sat on a pedestal. Music wafted through the room, Mozart from the sounds of it.

And at the end of the room a woman rose from a mahogany desk wearing a blue skirt, a blue blazer with a pin on the lapel, a white blouse, a black tie, and red hair. She stared into Graelyn's eyes.

Or rather, Graelyn stared into Graelyn's eyes.

The real Graelyn.



Chapter 27: A Miracle of Malice and Mercy

“That's the real question isn't it? Trying to figure out what the question was. If you get it wrong, you're stuck with an answer to something you were never asked.” -Xavier Freeman

Graelyn stared at herself in awe. She was in her mid thirties, but you might mistake her for younger than it. She'd aged well, and possibly de-aged at some point. Her desk, and the whole office was littered with tinkering, experiments, and equipment, interspersed with carefully chosen pieces of art. The room was luxurious, yet practical. A quiet ticking sound from an old grandfather clock underlay the room, while the gentle sound of classical music flowed through the room.

“Mozart's 5th.” She said, finally recognizing the piece.

“My favorite piece.” She replied.

“Mine to.” The older Graelyn raised her eye brow.

“You have good taste.”

“You as well.” Arch looked between them. They'd seemed to forget his existence within the room.

“It is a bit rude to show up so unannounced.” She felt like apologizing to herself, but avoided that.

“One doesn't typically expect to meet yourself.” The other Graelyn smirked, and she felt a shiver down her spine. She walked around her desk towards her, and approached, her shoes clicking on the floor till they were facing each other. Every click lined up with the sound from the clock, and she couldn't tell if that had been intentional or not. Graelyn realized she had to look like a mess to her real self, she was still in her spacesuit, and had literally seen the end of the world, so she tried to make up for it with great posture, which her other self already had in scores.

“You know, since this mess with portals into alternate realities started, this is the first time I've ever dropped by for a visit with myself.” She reached out, and grabbed Graelyn's chin, turning her face from side to side, which was weird but she went along with it. “How old are you, sixteen?”

“Seventeen. Honestly I might be Eighteen, I've sort of lost track of time.”

“Close.” She let go. “And you bring such interesting company with you.” She looked at Arch and he raised a hand in greeting.

“Oh, this is my friend Archimedes.”

“Right. So why exactly are you here?” She looked into her eyes, and her younger self felt uncomfortable.

“Arch and I were trying to get to the past to change history so the Council wouldn't wipe out the Earth.”

“I see you succeeded.”

“Well, we got the intelligence there, just not ourselves... It was complicated.”

“Things always are.”

“I can't believe we're finally meeting. There's so much I want to know about you. Where my history diverged from yours, what you've created...” She started to reach out towards herself, but decided against it, curling her fingers back.

“And I'm as equally curious about you.”

Graelyn looked back at Arch, his skin flickered. “If we're going to chat, someone really needs to look after my friend. I don't want him dying while I'm having tea and crumpets.”

“Well, why don't I have a look at him.” She led herself over to Arch, and the red haired Graelyn knelt down next to him.

“This is one of Manuel Salazar's design's, correct?”

“Well, I'm more than just a design...” From behind herself Graelyn made a face, and he nodded. “Yes, technically.” pushing a wisp of her red hair out of her eyes, she began to look him over, and opened up

a panel on his chest.

“Salazar built him, but he's been a loyal companion. What do you need from your workshop to fix him I'll-” As she said that, the red haired Graelyn reached her hand out, and a box flew from the table into her hand. Adjusting her glasses, the younger one's jaw dropped. Red haired Graelyn pulled a tool from her box, and began to use it on a mechanical organ inside Arch, then reached in with her other hand and sent a slight shock of electricity into the organ. Like God had blown on it, it began to move and pump again.

“That's incredible. I heard people in the prime reality could master abilities from other realities, but I didn't really believe it. It just sounded so... Fantastic. Pseudo-scientific, even. Like you were wizards or Jedi knights or something.” Pulling another tool from her box, Red Graelyn continued her work.

“Well, what unique ability does your reality have?” She said placidly, as she telekenetically reopened the tube Graelyn had closed with a rock earlier, and then soldered it shut to the other half of the tube.

“We haven't been able to find one. There doesn't seem to be anything unique about where I'm from.”

Red Graelyn pursed her lips.

“Pity.” Arch made a noise as Red Graelyn finished another repair, and his skin grew brighter. “So did Manuel give you this unit for protection, or did you take it?”

“Er, neither, I found him by chance.”

“So Manuel never showed you his pet project while you were interning with him?”

“I, uh, never interned with him.” She patched one of Arch's organs, sealed it, and looked back at her.

“So there you go, our realities diverge there. Who did you intern with?”

“John Aril.” Red Graelyn gave Black Graelyn a look of disgust.

“Really? That idealistic buffoon.”

“He was right though, he actually did pull off his idealistic notions where I come from. Though, well, he couldn't have if I hadn't been working for him. I figured out the hole in his plans.” Red Graelyn seemed to warm for a moment.

“I'd expect nothing less. And I suppose that's how you got into an alternate reality, you made one of his experiments work.”

“Exactly. We've been popping around the 10,000 Dawns for awhile now, going from place to place, and we made a deal with some people to get us home if we helped do something to fight the Council. To make a very long story very short.” She looked at her own face, and tried to memorize every bit of it.

“When I learned there was a Prime Reality, I wanted to meet you right away.”

“Because you're based on me?”

“Well, to put it bluntly, yes. Wouldn't you be curious?”

“I'd want to be my own person.” She supposed she had a point. She ran a hand through her dirty hair and thought about that as Red Graelyn rose, summoning a cloth to her hands to clean them off. “Your friend will be fine.”

“Thank you.” Arch said, as she walked away from him. Black Graelyn gave him a smile, and then scampered after herself. Arch's body lit up, an exclamation mark on his face. She knew he thought something was off, but of course it was off! They had just dropped into her office without asking, from the future, as she'd said. She couldn't suppose time travel was a regular occurrence in her workspace. Black Graelyn looked at the tinkering: she could see a jar of nanobots forming different shapes, a patch that looked like the healing gel she'd gotten in Songbird's world... She had truly done amazing things here.

“This is fantastic.” She said, smiling up at herself. “Is this a gene modifier?”

“Improved vastly over the previous model. We've been able to use it to insert chains of DNA that

shouldn't fit in areas by using nanogens to recode other areas in order to fit the inserted code in more appropriately, with a very low rejection rate. Of course, I've had to delay perfecting it due to more pressing projects in the war against the Council. It works decently enough at the moment.”

“This is leaps and bounds over what I've seen....” She peered down at the other experiments.

“And what have you done?” She asked herself. She rose up, to meet her own gaze.

“Oh, well, my work has mostly been in inter-universal physics. I figured out how to make a semi-stabilized tear between two alternate realities, one that you could travel through. John Aril figured out how to make the tears, but not make them stable enough that you could slice through into another universe.” She nodded.

“Impressive.”

“Thank you, its nothing compared to... The sheer quantity of quality work you've done here. I daresay you might well put God to shame if you keep it up.”

“You haven't even seen the best of it.”

“You can help so many people with this...” A thought suddenly occurred to her. “Wait, I hate to ask, but Alice MacLeod hasn't tried to kill you in this reality yet has she?” Her counterpart raised an eyebrow again, and shook her head.

“I think she'd like to. It's not like she'd succeed.”

“Well, don't underestimate her. I saw her kick one of us out of a window with a rope around the neck in one reality... Which, well, I don't think she understood how fitting that was.”

“What do you mean 'how fitting that was?’” Black Graelyn tried not to look herself in the eyes.

“You know, what we did when we were young. Jumping out the window.”

“I never accidentally fell out a window.”

“It wasn't an accident. You remember, after Petyr died...” There was silence. Both Graelyn's shuffled their feet.

“You tried to kill yourself?”

“After he died, mom just... Fell apart. She changed a lot. Put pressure on the whole family. Started abusing us. I couldn't take it.” She looked back up at herself, expecting to see understanding, but instead saw a look of purest disgust. Black Graelyn felt like covering her face.

“You gave into weakness.”

“I know I did, but when I was falling, I realized I never wanted to fall again. I've been doing my best to stay away from people, keep to myself, so I'd never hurt them-”

“That's what you're worried about? Hurting people?” Her gaze was intensely analytical, like giving her motivations an MRI, yet intensely judgmental.

“Shouldn't it be? There's already enough cruelty in the world without me adding to it.” The look of disgust somehow managed to grow.

“Where is your ambition? Do you think the wonders in this room created themselves? You can't expect to achieve something while you're curled up in a ball.” Black Graelyn tensed, she felt the urge to run.

“I can't help people if I'm hurting them!”

“And do you really care about people?”

“Well of course I don't, people are cruel, selfish, petty, impractical, parasitic, and they only want what they can take from you!” She threw up her arms gesturing, and a metal mannequin in a glass box behind her mimicked her motions. “But I also know I didn't enjoy being treated like that. So I ran.”

“Because it was... Easy?” She crossed her arms.

“Well... Yes, honestly I suppose that was part of it. If I ran no one would hate me, cause no one could see me.”

“You think you're me?” Red Graelyn said, leaning in towards her, “You're nothing like me.” As if on cue, dozens of the objects she had on display in the room turned slightly. A dagger's edge faced her. What looked like the real mask of Agamemnon from Greece stared her down. A mechanical hand on a stand's fingers clenched.

“Of course I am! I'm you. Our lives diverged, but we're the same person deep down.” Red Graelyn examined her face. Black Graelyn could feel her breath against her face.

“What do you think matters in the world?” She tried to lean back.

“I'm sure you're looking for an answer so why don't you just say it.”

“Power.” With that word, she felt her elder dive into her own mind, and her brain swam. She could feel her own memories, like they were in her palm or brushing against her calf. She felt a cat's scratchy tongue on her hand, and a violent blow to her face. She felt her life, and felt a hand inside it twisting inside her braincells.

This Graelyn, she could go into people's minds.

The thought wasn't surprising, she'd after all dealt with Council technology that did exactly that, and the alien jellyfish that called itself part of “the Pantheon” that worked on the same principle. She'd seen Kinan put her own mind inside a T-Rex of all things. But those moments all seemed different than this. She had gotten the unconscious perception that the T-Rex and Kinan were both okay with their body sharing arrangement in some way. The Orb and the Pantheon had felt like they were simply sharing a user interface with her, it had felt normal and organic like learning sign language when you'd only ever spoken before: just a different form of communication between beings.

This was different. This felt invasive. There was no control on her end, like she was on marionette strings. It then occurred to her that that thought, was in fact, a bad one.

Yes, a bad thought. The hand in her brain pulled a string. She looked up at herself, clearly the better version of herself, and realized the truth:

She didn't deserve to live. This woman in front of her had accomplished so much, had accomplished everything. She had never given in, never faltered. This was her true self, and she was an embarrassment to it.

“I want you to get out of my sight.” Red Graelyn said, walking towards a window and unlatching it by hand. It swung in, wide and tall, leaving a windy hole in the side of the building.

“Of course, Miss Scythes.” She told herself, then corrected herself, “Director Scythes.”

“I worked for every scrap I have, and here you are, a parasitic weakling trying to coast on my back. Living in the dregs of my own memories. If your life is so defined by jumping out a window, then make it final. Jump. Do it for me. I'd like to see it.” She smiled at herself, at least she could make herself happy. That was, however, before Archimedes tried to stab Red Graelyn in the face. He was working enough that his gravity regulator's were functioning again it seemed, and his massive tank like body had barreled across the room like a gazelle in a silent film. A sword slid from his arm, and nearly touched Red Graelyn's face when she lightly gestured with her hand, and another arm blocked the blow. Arch and Graelyn looked at the second intruder to their conversation. He wore combat armor from head to toe that reminded Graelyn of Arch's carapace. It had taken on the exact image of the world around it, so that the figure looked nearly invisible. Revealed, the colors drained from its skin, and it was nearly Arch's color. Its armor looked like Arch's would if you advanced it a few decades in design. Its movements were perfect.

“You think I wasn't expecting that?” She sighed, and several more of the figures seemed to pop out of the walls, though it was clear they'd simply stopped remaining motionless and camouflaged.

“Johnathan, please take care of him.” Johnathan, whose armored arm was linked with Arch's sword,

stepped into action, and shoved Arch backwards. He staggered, and regained his footing, sliding the other sword out of his arm. “All of you, finish him.” She gestured carelessly, and looked back at Graelyn by the window. She seemed conflicted, even as she stood still, smiling all the while. “Well then, what are you waiting for? Jump. Its what you're good for.” Graeyn turned to the window, and walked to the edge. The breeze was chill but not cold, and felt good against her face. Her hand reached out and grabbed the edge of the window. This was a perfect place to jump.

Arch.

No one would miss her.

Lizette.

She'd be better off crumpled there on the pavement below, the pain would end, the memories.

Alice.

No one would ever hurt her again.

Kinan.

She could finally, finally, stop worrying.

...Me.

And I chose to be the kind of person who would never fall again.

She thought of the little girl she'd been, learning animal anatomy through dissection in the forest. So alone. That had been this Graelyn to. She thought of that night Ashlyn broke up with her, and the way her mother had slinked into her brain with her insidious words. She thought about her cat, how he'd always been there when she came home, brushing past her legs. She'd named him Mister Sprinkles. She'd held his fussy body to her breast and tried to get to sleep. She thought of her nights alone in project Atlantis. She thought of her nights alone all through her life: her friendships were so brief, so fleeting.

Such is life? Life is a miracle after all, but its one born of such malice. To have to live her life was unfair, to have to see it through till its end was cruel. She was a malignancy, a broken circuit in reality's operating system. She was poison. And she would be damned if she would grow old and ruin those who had loved her so needlessly with her mere existence.

It was finally okay. She'd given herself the okay, even. The ultimate sign of approval. The relief washed over her.

Never fall again.

She put a foot out past the edge of the window and felt her weight pull her forward. All she had to do was lean into it.

Never.

A thought occurred to her then, a simple thought, but one that she had never entertained seriously. It wasn't the kind of thought she'd expected to think, or that one would look back on and love or frame, or even lace in a fancy font in an image online, but it was her thought, and it was important.

It occurred to Graelyn at that moment, that perhaps she didn't need to be perfect. It occurred to her that maybe feeling like she wanted to die was okay, as long as she didn't actually do it. That wanting to achieve great ends and missing them didn't make her worthless, and that no one loving her but herself was enough reason to live as it was. That even if she couldn't love herself, her own breath in the chill air was enough reason to give herself the next one. That her need to be perfect, that her need to be in control, extended so far as to crush her own heart while she tried to walk to its beat.

She opened her eyes, and looked out at the city below her. She'd never seen it before, never been there before. She could see people below, going about their day to day lives. Streets were barricaded, and guns were on top of roofs, just like in Nojpeten, but the people there were still living, and still breathing, and if she fell the person it would impact the most was her. Because she wasn't alone. Like it or not, she had people now. She'd hid herself away, and yet for all that time thinking she didn't deserve company, it had come to her easily. She hated herself, and loved herself, and others did the same. She was just alive, breathing in the chilled air above the city, and her heart moving in and out with the steady tempo of adrenaline. As she exhaled, only then did she realize she had taken hold of the hand in her own head.

And I chose.

She stepped back from the window, and turned to face herself.

“No.” She said. A host turned to face her. Arch was trying to fight off a horde of armored men who looked eerily like him, and failing, but they all stopped to look at her. Red Graelyn squinted her eyes, and seemed to be focusing harder. She batted the hand in her own head away.

“I said, 'no,' or is your English that rusty?”

“Your mind must be much stronger than I-”

“Oh shut up.”

“As you, said: no.” She walked towards herself, their eyes locked.

“Let Arch go.”

“No.” Graelyn looked in her own eyes. Her own pupils locked with themselves, and Graelyn felt the hand reach into her mind once again. She thought of Lizette at the piano, and imagined her own hands guiding hers on the keys. She didn't bat the hand away this time. A quiver of a smile appeared on Red Graelyn's face, and she sprung on it. She pushed the hand back into the mind it came from, carried with it. Red Graelyn's eyes opened wide, as she seemed to realize what she'd done, and Graelyn grabbed her arm as she tried to gesture. As she did, they seemed to fall through the floor together.

They dove and spun in an inky green blackness, and Graelyn found her hand on Petyr's.

“They're gunna get you medicine Petyr, I promise.” He nodded weakly, and she clenched her hand around his. He was feeling colder, despite all the blankets. She got up, slipping her hand out of his as she crept to the door, and cracked it open. Her parents were meeting with the men in the nice suits with the jewelery.

“We know Centro has denied your request for medical funding, and you can't afford it on your own.” Said a man with a gold medallion around his neck. “But despite what you may have heard about our

organization, we're very family oriented. We want to help you, but we need something in return.”
“What exactly are we talking about here?” Her father asked. The man reached a mechanical hand into his jacket, and pulled out a tablet he handed to her parents. They scrolled through it together. A few minutes passed.

“We couldn't possibly do this.” Her mother said, her voice cracking. “We're godly people. We would never do something like this.”

“Lady,” the man began, “Centro has already abandoned you. Your kid is gonna die if he doesn't get treatment. All we're asking you to do is give us some information from your workplace. If you don't, someone else will. This is an opportunity you shouldn't pass up just cause you have some moral—”

“We have morals.” Her dad cut in, “We will keep praying for our son, and trust in God's providence.” The mechanical handed man scowled, “I'm your damn providence. This is the miracle you've been waiting for.”

“We won't do it, and that's final.” Her mother said. “This is wrong.” The man sighed, and rubbed his nose.

“If you change your mind before the 7th, the Index will gladly--”

“We won't.” Her father said. They showed themselves out.

A month later, she held Petyr's hand, trying to warm it up.

“Graeie, can you sing me a song?” He whispered, though maybe he was talking at full volume. She nodded, “What song Petyr? I'm right here.”

“One you really like.”

“Are you sure?” He nodded. His skin was so pale. She could see his cheekbones so clearly. She tried to think of a song, “Jackie loves her work, and her work is love, cause there is no other...” She began, his hand was feeling limper. He blinked.

“She said God has given me a job, Jackie loves her work, for there is no other...” He wasn't blinking.

“Petyr?” She said. He didn't respond. His eyes were still open.

“I don't want to hurt you... Just wanna... Have some fun...” She tried to keep singing, but tears started coming to her eyes. “Petyr, Petyr...” She shook him, but he didn't respond, just jiggled like a doll,

“Come on quit playing around... Petyr... MOM!” She screamed, and her parents ran into the room. They stormed into the room, and they all stood there silently. Graelyn had felt the tears coming, but they never finished. No one moved forward to touch the body.

“Did we pray hard enough?” Her mother asked. Graelyn looked up at them, and felt a cold rage. She knew, right then, that this had all been preventable. The coldness of the world had sank into her through Petyr's hand, and it wouldn't leave. There were those that used, and those that were used up, and they had chosen to let him die. Her mother met her eye, and in one life the coldness sank into both of them, and into the bones of their family, and in another they stared like a cliff and a glacier. Her mother made a choice, a subtle one, and started a slow descent, and in the other approached the body of her son finally, and dropped to her knees. In another life, she looked down at Graelyn, and giving into the darkest impulses to keep control of something in the shadow of her agony laid the first blow on Graelyn and yelled at her about why she hadn't called them in sooner, or prayed harder, and in another she crumpled over and wept, clenching her son's cold hand.

Two women named Graelyn emerged from that moment, inseparable, but forever apart.

There was a scream, and one Graelyn, a younger one with black hair felt her soul rise up through the floor into her own body, as her body rose up in the air and careened across the room, landing in a crumpled pile as she crashed into a pillar holding up a clockwork unicorn model.

“How dare you take me back there!” Red Graelyn screamed at her, and holding arm out, raised Graelyn into the air, suspended as if on wires. “You’re a monster, and I’m done playing with you.” She looked at Johnathan. “Stop messing around and kill him to.” Arch was trying to duck and weave a group that was faster than him, and his carapace was even more cracked than before. Graelyn looked down at herself from the air, and didn’t feel so small. She could see the agony in her own face, and the tear she felt inside her own soul bigger than any in the fabric of the universe, and she allowed herself to feel sorry for herself. She focused on that feeling, the pain she’d felt the long unending agony, and decided she couldn’t fix it.

“The past is over.” She muttered, and felt the grip tighten around her. She felt the grip, and felt how it tied to her. It was like there was a string between them, a connection, a window of failure in the laws of reality...

How am I aware of this?

She reached out to it, and could feel it like it was in her own hand... Like...

Her eyes went wide, and she grinned.

“Do you know who I am?” She gasped through the pressure on her chest. The other Graelyn raised an eyebrow. “I’m the one whose going to fall again.” She reached out, and felt the cord with her mind, and snapped it. Her other self’s eyes got just as wide as hers, as she fell to the ground. She got up, her eyes red with anger.

“You never had to deal with any of my pain, and you’re trying to kill me? Because you think I’m weak? What kind of a sicko am I in this reality?” She tried to reach into her mind and she slapped the hand away.

“What are you doing?” Red Graelyn yelled at her, and tried to throw a pillar at her, but she snapped the cord and it fell to the floor. She held a hand up, and tried to emulate Zeus himself by throwing lightning at her, but it fizzled in the air.

“I guess I know what my power is.” Graelyn said. “No wonder I didn’t notice it. I’m your opposite. I’m your off switch.” In a world where people only know how to turn a switch off, how could you know it was on?

“I’ve seen people who can turn off powers before, you can’t keep doing it like this.” Graelyn laughed at herself, and stopped a whole flurry of objects hurled her way. She could feel the cords between them, ties of reality, like an extra sense, and she knew Arch could feel them too if he learned how. Speaking of Arch, he found himself suddenly free of the soldiers as they were scrambling towards Graelyn.

“Kill her!” She heard herself say, and she felt them crawling up the walls of the room around her, along the ceiling around her, and on the ground next to her. Cords slid between each of them and the other Graelyn, and between themselves and their armor and the floor. She heard the music in the room, Mozart’s 5th, apparently on repeat, and reached her hands out, the universe’s own conductor, and ran her hands through the notes in the air, bundling the cords up, and in a moment of extreme apathy, looked herself in the eyes and whispered:

“Fall.”



And they did fall. A torrent of armored men collapsed to the ground, like butterflies falling from their perches in the cold. They rained down from the ceiling, slid off the walls or just collapsed on the floor. "Holy shit." Arch said. "How did you do that?" She smiled back at him.

"I just learned that-" She was cut off as she barreled towards herself, and put her hand around her neck. She tried to cut cords, but there were none to cut.

"Congratulations." She told herself, "You woke up to your potential. But you're still not-" Arch kicked her in the side, and she flew off of Graelyn to land a few meters away. He reached down, and helped her up. She stood, and they panted for a moment, then Arch collapsed. His carapace flickered, his breathing raspy.

"Are you alright?" She asked.

"Yeah, well, no, not at all." She stroked his faceplate, and looked over at Red Graelyn, who was dusting herself off and rising to her feet. She straightened her glasses.

"I underestimated you."

"We just want to go home."

"A pity." She walked over to her desk, and calmly picked up a glass of water from it. The soldiers in the room began to slowly rise themselves. She downed the glass of water without speaking, and set it down, wiping her mouth off. Graelyn looked over at the soldier she'd called Johnathan, and squeezing Arch's shoulder (though she wasn't actually sure he could feel it) slinked over to him. He tried to grab at her leg, but she dodged it.

"Curious, are we? You should have just tried to run."

"I need to know." She replied. They looked each other in the eyes.

"Then maybe there is something similar between us. Johnathan, go ahead and let her look." He grew still, and she reached forward and pulled off his mask. She knew that face. She'd seen it in the apartment of that other version of herself on Songbird's world. The one with the operating table. The one she had carved up in her own apartment as part of some project.

"Johnathan." She said.

"Oh, so you know Johnathan Carthage?" She shook her head.

"I didn't even know his last name till today."

"That isn't actually him, you know. She gestured to the room, and all the soldiers took their masks off in unison. They all had the same face. They stared silently and stoically. "I make them in Mexico City, I have a big plant there. Its my greatest achievement. With these soldiers as our vanguard we've been able to hold off the Council."

"Mexico city..." She thought of Alice, who'd seen something so horrible she couldn't speak of it there.

"Yes. Its a complex process, and it involves a lot of excess-

"Excess? Explain."

"Its fairly simple: not every person is able to attune to powers from other realities. Only some ever do. So we have to manufacture quite a lot of units to actually get the ones who can connect and attune to those powers. So we recycle the rest to reuse their biomatter."

"Recycle? Biomatter?" Graelyn yelled at herself, "This is a person!"

"Manuel Salazar knew better than to think a being you created is on the same level as you."

"Parents have a responsibility to their children."

"Parents can let their children die."

"I'm ashamed to share the same face as you."

"Likewise."

“I've seen us killed for doing this.”

“You won't see it here. Nightingale MacLeod is too weak to get the job done.”

“Nightingale? You mean Songbird.” She poured another glass of water, and shook her head.

“It's an alternate reality, catch up... This has gone on long enough. I have important business to attend to today, and you're becoming a bother. So how about you just leave?” Red Graelyn took another sip of water, and lazily gestured at the room. Black Graelyn watched as the damage in the room from the fight began to right itself, the objects flying back into place all over the room. Cracks seemed to close. The group of Johnathans faded into the walls.

“You... Can fix this all? Just like that?” She wanted to punish herself, throw this red haired Graelyn out a window, but realized very quickly she had managed the best possible result of a standstill.

“Yes. And if I'd taken you more seriously, you'd be dead. But you're not worth my time. Get out of my reality.” She didn't look back, just picked up a tablet on the table, and began to scroll through it, using her other hand to begin to piece a complicated device together in the air.

“You're wrong you know.” She didn't turn around. “Power isn't the most important thing.”

“What is it? Something sappy like friendship? Love?”

“Being able to accept your own flaws without falling prey to them. Goodbye, Graelyn.” She floated the thing she'd built into her hand.

“Goodbye.”

Graelyn weakly slipped an arm around Arch, and the two walked towards the exit of Graelyn's office, the doors opening before them. As they shut, a cord was sliced forever.



Chapter 28: The Girl That Missed The Ocean

She helped Arch make his way through the building, and out the front doors. Looking around, Graelyn still didn't know where they were at all.

“Do you recognize this place Arch?” He scanned the area.

“I think this is Indianapolis?”

“Indianapolis? Why would I want to be working in Indianapolis?”

“Your other self has clearly made some morally reprehensible and logically questionable choices, but from what's in my memory Indy seems like a pretty pleasant place...” Graelyn shifted her grip on Arch, and they made their way through the militarized city, making their way slowly to a train station.

“Where are we going?” Arch asked, as Graelyn gave the woman at the desk her Dawn payment card and shrugged in response, looking up at the list of destinations.

“...Annapolis.” She decided.

“Excuse me, but... Are you wearing a spacesuit?” The attendant asked. Graelyn slid the card further towards her.

The train ride was quiet. Few people rode there, and Arch watched Graelyn much of the time. He wasn't feeling great, naturally, but he got the sense she wasn't either. She stared out the window, the country side of North America flitting over her glasses in brief reflection. Her forehead touched the pane, her breath fogged the glass, making the glass warm itself to disperse the moisture.

“I filled out my internship application to Project Atlantis on a train, you know.” She said finally.

“Do you feel we're going full circle?” She shrugged.

The train got off at Annapolis, and Graelyn called an automated cab to drive them to the beach.

“There's still a beach here, so the world hasn't ended.” She nodded. “That's good, right?” She kept her forehead against the window, and didn't reply. The cab let them out at the beach, and Graelyn stepped out onto the sand, her space suit leaving moonman prints in it as she walked. Arch followed her for a moment, but let her finish walking by herself. She walked into the liminal tides, and sank down to her knees. She sank down, and looking out at the ocean, saw the immensity of it. This was the Atlantic, where she'd first gone down below and started this whole mess. There was the water, and she tried to become one with it as it rolled over her.

“I thought she'd be wonderful Arch.”

“I'm sorry.” Was all he could think to say, as the tears started rolling down her face.

“I thought I'd be this great hero, this amazing scientist... And I was a wonderful scientist, but... I was a monster? I was the sort of monster I'd always told myself I wouldn't be. That I had finally started to think I was wrong to think I could be. That was me in there. I treated you like Manuel treated you... Like a thing...”

“That wasn't you.” He tried to reassure her.

“But it was me! That was literally the real me.” The tide washed over her, and she began to weep. “I'd finally, finally thought I was someone worth while...”

“But you are someone worthwhile, you're not her. You share the same face, the same name, but you're not the same.”

“But we started the same, and I had it worse than her, easily worse. I could crash and turn into something even worse...”

“I don't think that's how that works.”

“And how is it fair that she gets everything I wanted while being so... Malicious? Her mother never hurt her. Her father didn't leave. And she turned out wrong?”

“Its not fair... But I don't think it was your pain that made you who you are, or her pleasure.”

"I'm destined to be her, whether I want to be or not." Arch heard a meow, and saw a large black cat sitting nearby on the beach watching. He ignored it and continued.

"No, you're not. You have the power to make different choices.

"My life is defined by cruelty."

"Your life is defined by more than that."

"Like what?" He thought for a moment.

"Mercy. You ran from people because you didn't want to hurt them. You've got a heart in there that you're following the rhythm of, even if how you conduct the score isn't always the best way, despite everything, despite you being a version of that woman, you're not."

"Than what's that make me? A miracle?"

"A miracle of malice and mercy." She saw the sun glint off the water, and closed her eyes.

"I don't want to be alone anymore Arch." She got up from the water, and looked him in the eye, "I want to join Dawn. I don't want to hide anymore. There are people like me who hurt people, groups like the Council who do it to... I want to be part of the fight against them. I want to stand for something." Arch walked toward her, and stood in the water with her.

"Then I'm with you."

"You don't have to join Dawn just because I'm going to, you have all sorts of other things to do."

He took her hand, "You think I don't have things to stand for? The man who made me built me to be a slave, and thought I was less than human. In our own reality, in our home, my people are still slaves there, and I need to free them. Dawn is the only group I know who can help me do that. And even if I didn't have that to fight for, you're my friend. You stood with me, you rescued me. You could have been selfish and let me die or abandoned me. But you didn't. We're in this together now." He placed his other hand around hers, her hand comforted by the cold carapace.

"We're joining Dawn."

"Well that's the kind of touching shit I like to hear." Backgammon Jenny said from next to the cat She got up, dusting the sand off her poodle skirt, and picked up the cat, who meowed as she did so, and placed him on her shoulder where he perched like a parrot.

"This is Salabaster. He's our cat."

Graelyn and Arch looked at each other, and then back at her.

"How long have you been here and how did you get here?"

"I live here? Remember? I remember someone pointedly told you that earlier. Its nice to see someone else from Dawn here. Kinan can't come, obviously. Not yet anyways. So its up to me to get you out of here."

"We need to make sure everyone we dropped in the past is okay." Jenny nodded.

"I've never actually time traveled. Within my own reality before."

"I think we can manage it now that Arch and I have done it..." Graelyn started trying to do some of the math in her head. "We'll need your help, but I think the three of us can pull it off."

"We're going to Spiral." Arch cut in, "I thought that was clear." Jenny smiled:

"Like I said, home."

"Wait," Graelyn said, "There is something I need from our reality..." Arch nodded, then clutched his side.

"I don't think you totally fixed me up." He said, his voice coarse.

"Ah." Graelyn said, "To the past it is then."



* * * *

Heirum J. Whitehead was not having the greatest day ever. His company had been shut down by Centro, and taken over, and now he was on Mars, technically still in charge of it, but also in exile. Mars was okay, but everyone was a repressed Communist, and he just wanted to run a ridiculously profitable tech company. He poured another glass of ginger ale, and tried to resist the urge to go get some brandy. It was a hard urge to resist. Taking a sip, he set the glass down, and stared into the stagnant liquid.

Then the liquid began to ripple. Raising an eyebrow, Heirum saw the ripples increase, and then in the center of his living room a large white swirling disk appeared.

Okay. That was new.

The next thing that happened was that a large number of things came through the disk.

-Seventeen people in what looked like ratty survival gear from a post apocalyptic world.

-A small crystal orb the size of a basketball.

-A larger orb made of metal and crystal.

He had barely had time to take in the reality of this occurrence, when a different disk appeared next to it, and from it popped out:

-A Cyborg.

-A teenage girl in a spacesuit.

-A woman in a poodle skirt and turtleneck with a katana.

Heirum stared, and then took another drink, before remembering it was just ginger ale and wouldn't actually do anything towards steadying his nerves.

"Okay." Heirum said. He wasn't sure what else to say at this point. The group of raggedy people scampered up, and raised up futuristic guns. Okay. The teenage girl ran over to the cyborg, and holding its hand, asked if it was okay. It nodded faintly.

"I hate to break up this touching moment." Heirum said, "But, uh, what the hell?"

"You're the Heirum J. Whitehead guy?" A Chinese woman asked.

"I am the only Heirum J. Whitehead guy!" He responded defensively. The teenage girl kissed the cyborg's forehead, and then got up and walked over to him.

"Hi, Heirum. I'm Graelyn. That's Yi." Yi waved, "That's Arch." Arch waved, clearly in pain. "And that's Backgammon Jenny, don't ask about the name."

"Hello to you. So, how terrified should I be right now? Scale of one to ten." Graelyn shrugged.

"Depends on what you mean. You have nothing to fear from us. But the future is pretty scary. That's why we're here."

Graelyn proceeded to tell Heirum a long story. It started in Atlantis, and ended in his living room on Mars, though it truly wasn't over yet. She told him about her friends, her enemies. She told him about Dawn, the Council, the Firmament. She told him about Alice's revolution, and she told him about Centro's future.

"And I know you'll help me, because you already have."

"That's awful presumptuous of you." She shrugged again.

"It's been a long couple of months." Graelyn ran her hand through her hair, as the group of survivors explored his living room, knocking a few lamps and knick knacks over.

"So what do you want me to do?"

"Change the future. Start figuring out how to fight the Council in secret." Heirum sipped his ginger ale, and rubbed his temples. "I know you will, because as I said, it's literally proven you have."

"You're asking a lot of a guy you just met."

"I have a tendency to do that." She replied. "But you won't be doing it alone. You'll have Yi's group to help you." Heirum rubbed his chin.

"I want a cool title if we do this." Graelyn rolled her eyes.

"Sure. Fine, whatever."

"Like the Heiropant!"

“Whatever floats your boat. As long as you do it. There are a whole ton of things that will be paradoxes if you don't agree to this anyways, so...”

“Oh I'm doing it. Being the person important enough to save humanity, that's right up my alley.” He downed the rest of the Ginger ale. “I'll gladly be important.” Graelyn narrowed her eyes. If he was really agreeing to this, then she'd done it. She expected Kinan to jump out of a closet and congratulate her, but no one jumped out. No one even celebrated.

“Then I guess we have an accord.” She looked out the window of his room. It was the first time she'd seen Mars, and she wished her first time seeing it was under less stressful circumstances. It was a rolling ochre plain, a storm rolling across it, a forest of pastel Russian Olive trees attempting to survive in the thin atmosphere in the distance. It was beautiful. She made a note to come back, and see it all without the shadows around her eyes.

“I need someone to fix Arch.” She said. Heirum nodded, and poured himself more ginger ale, then pulled out his phone and tapped something into it. In a few minutes some technicians and medics arrived, surprised to find a group of armed people in the room, and began attempting to fix Arch. Graelyn paced, and gritted her teeth as they worked, and let Yi and Heirum begin discussing their new future. Arch's eye grew brighter, and they slowly figured out where to attach an IV to give him more blood. They had some trouble with his systems, but he was clearly stabilized now. She stayed out of the medical tech's way: if she was them she'd be want to be left to do their job, only jumping in to give them a brief primer on what little she knew about his internal workings. When they were finished, she walked back over to him. They'd laboriously moved him out of the living room into something like a garage or a workshop. There was all sorts of stuff in here as she looked around, some prototype parts labeled “Judicator Mark 2”, the Orb which had also been carted in here, some jetpacks, a hovercraft... Arch was on a concrete slab. Whatever gravitational regulators he had so he didn't break chairs in his body clearly weren't working anymore, as there was a broken cot he'd clearly been placed on originally. Graelyn knelt down by his slab side.

“Hey.” She said simply. He reached out and touched her face.

“I'm still a bit awestruck you came back for me.” She shrugged.

“I'm just trying to be the kind of person I should be. Anyways, you'd have done it.” He laughed.

“Thanks for the faith in me. You did all the hard work this time.”

“Only because you saved me on Triton.” He made a “Psh” sound, and a dismissive hand gesture in response. “You're really the only person I can totally trust Arch. Aside from my cat, I guess. You have no idea what you jumping in front of the orb mean to me.”

“You sort of totally outdid my heroism, if you didn't notice.”

“Oh hush. We've come a really long way. And now we can go home.” Arch nodded.

“Though what on Earth do you need to go back there for?” Jenny and Salabaster opened the door as if on cue.

“Well,” Graelyn Said, “I do have other friends.”

* * * *

Doctor Hiriwa closed the hatch, and panted as she slid down against it. With all the ruptures throughout the base, she wasn't certain they'd be able to make it to the escape subs in time. Dan, Yossara, Layla, and Jerry along with much of the rest of the crew were busy panicking, while John Aril was quietly puffing on his ecig in the corner. Once again, she had to do the hard work.

"Can anyone see if the other halls are flooding?" She yelled, and Yossara and Jerry got to work checking.

"This one is!"

"So is this one."

"We're trapped down here." Aril said finally, and calmly. "The pressure outside those doors will kill any of us." Somehow, this stopped the panicking. The room became quiet as the grave they all knew they were in. That was, until, the white light appeared. Stepping out from a hole in the world, came the intern, Graelyn Scythes, along with the Cyborg she had found. Behind her were a woman in a long brown coat with an undercut, and another with a turleneck and poodle skirt.

"Graelyn?" Yossara asked.

"The intern?" Dan said.

"Huh." Aril added.

"Director Aril, I'd like to inform you that I'm resigning as your intern. Also, I'm here to rescue you."

"Well then, Miss Scythes." He said, rising to his feet. "I'd say that's a fair trade."

* * * *

Katelyn had been running the desk at the shelter for a few months now, but she had never seen anything like the colorful group of characters who arrived through her green-blue glass doors that day. There was a tall cyborg in a trench-coat, a weird girl dressed like the 50's on cyberpunk, a woman wearing a long brown coat with an undercut who never smiled, and, for some reason most notably, that girl who'd shown up a year ago to drop her cat off. She looked much older than a year older though. The girl came to the desk, and she set down a tablet.

"I'd like to adopt a cat. Specifically, Mister Sprinkles."

"The one you gave up for adoption."

"Yes."

"How do you know, like, that it hasn't been adopted?"

"He hasn't, has he?"

"Well no, but its awfully presumptuous of you-"

"Look I filled out all the paperwork..." Katelyn sighed and looked it over. It was all filled in correctly.

"Fine, follow me." The motley crew followed her into the back where there were rows of living spaces for different animals. She didn't need to be shown the number, she recognized her cat instantly.

"Mister Sprinkles!" She ran to the enclosure, and the cat came to the bars and gently nuzzled his face against her hand.

"I'm so sorry mister sprinkles. Can you forgive me? Yes you can!" She said in a weird sing songy voice.

"This is weird." Jenny said.

"Agreed." Kinan replied.

“Look, just let her be happy.” Arch whispered back. Katelyn unlocked the door, and Graelyn pulled the cat out it, holding him against her chest and feeling the gentle purr of him against her. She kissed him lightly on the head.

“Okay,” Graelyn said, “I’m ready to join your inter-universal paramilitary group now.”

“What?” Katelyn said.

“Glad to hear it. The hoodie suits you.” Kinan said, and opened up a swirling white portal, which the three of them stepped through, one by one. Katelyn stared as the swirling white portal collapsed into nothing. She couldn’t understand how what happened made any sense with physics, with reality, with logic, with the basic rules of the world, and then she looked down at the correctly filled out paperwork...

Well, at least the important things in life were being done correctly.

Epilogue:

Alice MacLeod looked at Officer Davis in utter confusion, “What do you mean I'm being released without charges? I beat up three police officers!” She shrugged.

“Its how the system works. Someone paid for your charges to be dropped, so you're free to go.” Alice's jaw dropped, and she almost wanted to punch the kindly officer just to see how far she could push whatever was going on, but decided against it. Fuming, she walked out of the jail, into the noonday sun. She was out just in time to get something other than jail food for lunch, at least. Walking down the sidewalk, she saw a woman on the sidewalk in front of her wearing a black converses, blue pencil skirt, a blue blazer, a white blouse, a black tie, sunglasses, and a hoodie with a weird sun/moon pattern on it on under the blazer, she was quietly scrolling through something on a tablet, so she paid her no mind till she spoke.

“Alice MacLeod?” Instinctively, she put her fists up, but saw the girl had to be only around 17 or 18. She lowered them slowly, and then saw a large cyborg in a trench coat and top hat coming from around the corner. She put her fists back up, and took a step back.

“Whoa there, calm down, don't be afraid, we're here to help!” The girl said cheerily. She lowered her hood, and took off her sunglasses so Alice could see her face.

“...Graelyn Scythes?”

“Sort of! And this is my friend Archimedes.”

“Hi. Good to meet you again, Alice.”

“What?”

“Don't mind that. We work with a group called Dawn, and we'd like to aid your revolution against Centro.” She raised an eyebrow.

“You're a teenage version of Graelyn Scythes. How is that even possible?” She smiled and shrugged.

“I get that a lot from you. But the main point is, we're here to help.”

“You want to help start an anarchist revolution?”

“They're anarchists here? Huh.” Arch mused. Graelyn made a face and shrugged again.

“So why should I trust you?”

“Because you'll have a long, bloody, brutal war ahead of you, and we can save a lot of lives. We're willing to back up our promises with actions.” Alice crossed her arms.

“Okay. So say I believe you. You just want to help us for nothing?”

“That's our job,” she said pointing at a pin on her lapel of a half sun/half moon symbol. “We help people like you rise up. Bring out the best in people.” She held out a hand to Alice, “We help people to never fall again.”



THE END

A note from the Author:

I never dreamed this story would find the readership it has, or bring out the love that's been felt towards its characters. I can't wait to bring the future of the 10,000 Dawns Universe to you soon with 10,000 Dawns Anthology, and let you see what other writers do in this wondrous playground we've set up.

Your support, your unending patience and tolerance for the sometimes awkward realities of trying to craft a story every week (I can't wait to have the time to go back and fix some typos...), and your passion has meant so much to me. I couldn't have asked for nicer readers. Well, I could have, but it would have been weird. You guys are the best.

Thank you. I hope you've enjoyed the ride, but the coaster is still going.

Love,

-James Wylder

Interviews:

We took the time to have some words with many of the personalities shaping 10kd in the present and the future! Learn about the creation of this story, and where we go from here....

James Wylder: Writer Interview by Alex Rose

James is the author of the serial “10,000 Dawns” story, as well as the Editor of the upcoming “10,000 Dawns Anthology”. He has also written several books including the Unofficial Doctor Who Poetry Book, “An Eloquence of Time and Space”.



What is or what has been your favorite part about writing 10kd?

This is a story I've wanted to write for years now, and so just making it exist, and letting these characters live on the page as I envisioned them is a more wonderful feeling than I can describe.

Out of every chapter you've ever written for 10kd, which has been your absolute favorite?

“Chapter 19: A Crystal Road” was a lot of fun to write, and went in some really surprising directions. Not to mention, the reaction from fans from it was awesome. Arch and Graelyn's confrontation, brewing throughout the whole story was one of the most brutal and heartbreaking scenes for me to write, because I hadn't originally intended for it happen. But while I was writing I realized it should happen, and needed to happen. It was what the characters would do, and so I let them do it. On a totally different end of the spectrum, the scene where the Crystal Moon plows through a wall in reality

ended up being a real fan favorite, and has to be up there in the most utterly bonkers things I've put into words, yet it works.

How exactly did you get the idea for writing the plot of 10kd? How did you come up with such a story?

10,000 Dawns has been a very long time coming, and answering where the story came from has more than one answer, and I can't say any particular version of the story is more correct than any other. So many things came together to make this story its hard to mesh them into one narrative, because the strands don't always knot together neatly.

The different strands come in the form of three RPG campaigns, a Doctor Who Poetry Book, an idea for a piece of fanfiction about fanfiction, some regular fanfiction from whole slew of different things, and like all things, my own life because I'm a terrible narcissist.

So where would I start? The story you'll hear the most is that 10,000 Dawns started with an RPG campaign of a dead RPG based on a dead card game. It was a weird start, and a memorable one, but its not the whole story. It was the start of it all though, and the friends who I played in that game with are some of the same people helping to build this world in prose now.

This specific story came about because my good friend Dave Koon created a character named Graelyn Scythes, and I was fascinated by her. She was actually a villain for heroes to thwart, but she was such a complex and well thought out villain I couldn't help trying to figure out why she thought what she thought at every turn. Later, I came up with the idea of Archimedes: a cyborg who is so much a cyborg, other people wonder how human he is. Graelyn was notable for being considered so cold or nasty that many people considered her nearly not human, while Arch looked robotic but his actions were so filled with heart and emotion he earned a lot of admiration. Juxtaposing these two characters leapt into my head, and the idea of taking both of them out of the kind of story they would live by themselves, and seeing how they would change each other's lives was just too good to pass up. I started developing the story, and even did a trial run of it in the short story in "An Eloquence of Time and Space" (which is still in continuity, mind you, so if you are desperate for more 10kd go pick it up!). I kept trying to convince myself I didn't desperately want to write this story, because it involved using so many characters my friends had made, and making alternate versions of those characters. Eventually though, I realized I needed to make this, and I wouldn't be satisfied till I did. I'm very glad I followed through on it.

What is the future for 10kd? Do you have any major plans for the story itself or the characters? Will there be a sequel?

Oh, the future is bright boys, girls, and people outside of the gender binary! 10,000 Dawns: Anthology is coming out this summer, which will delve into the stories and history of the world 10,000 Dawns is set in. There are all sorts of people, events, places, and groups that show up in 10,000 Dawns in fleeting

moments with huge histories behind them. You'll get to learn about the history of Centro Systems, of Mars, of all the different peoples of the rim, and most importantly of all how the 10,000 Dawns formed in the first place! You didn't think 10,000 Universes just linked up on their own did you? Its going to be a lot of fun, and I'm bringing in lots of other creative writers who are all adding their own flair to the affair. I cannot wait for you guys to see it.

Before that though, there are still a few bonus stories left featuring the adventures of Graelyn, Arch, and Dawn and company, including the three stories from the bonus story contest! So the adventures aren't over yet.

Later this year there is a novel set in the 10,000 Dawns Universe I wrote called "Death and Doubling Cubes" being released as well, which will feature Backgammon Jenny and Chess Mistress Hex, so look out for that!

Oh, and there is already a second Anthology in the works. Shhh! I didn't tell you!

As for a full on sequel to 10,000 Dawns... I'll get back to you! Annie and I have only just finished this one, and I think we'd both like to take a nap and finish the slew of other work we have before either of us even thinks about a sequel.

When you started writing 10kd did you ever think that you'd get so attached to the characters or the story itself?

The answer here might surprise you: no. I didn't. I went into this story with the full knowledge that

David Bowie has been one of your personal influences since you were young, did he in any way ever influence your writing?

Oh, did he ever. I listened to the Bowie albums "Hours", "Black Tie, White Noise", and "The Next Day Extra" over and over while writing 10,000 Dawns, and as you've read many of the songs seeped into the story itself. "God Bless the Girl" holds a special meaning to myself and Graelyn that cannot be separated from this story now.

But his music has been influencing me long before 10kd: while writing my first full length play "Cryptos", I listened to Bowie's "The Alabama Song EP" on repeat, with the rerecording he did of "Space Oddity" for it helping to shape the mood for the trek into the underworld in the play's second act. David Bowie is my favorite musical artist, and his notes have sunk into more of my writing than I can keep track of.

What are some struggles you've come across when writing 10,000 dawns?

The biggest struggle has been the time crunch of trying to get a chapter written, edited, formatted, proof read, and recorded as an audio podcast every single week. As many of you have noticed, the first thing that went out the window if there wasn't time each week was proofreading. I'm well aware the biggest complaint with the story is the number of typos there are, and I can't wait to have to chance to fix them finally when things finally calm down. I apologize that part of the story wasn't up to the quality it should have been. The weekly time schedule meant that I had to write, and had to post, and it was very unforgiving if I got sick (or if Annie got sick). We had to take two hiatuses in the end, just to keep things on track. That we completed this whole endeavor at all is a real triumph for me.

Chapter 22 really says a lot about Graelyn's childhood, and talks about how she had even tried to commit suicide. This really adds to Graelyn's character. In future chapters will we hear anymore about Graelyns past/childhood? Maybe more background about her parents?

Well, now that everyone has had the chance to read the end of the story I think its pretty clear the answer is a resounding "yes". Graelyn's childhood was difficult to write about, and I know it rings true for many readers... One thing about the 10kd fandom I've noticed is they're very private. I get more private messages and emails than I get comments, and that's okay. When I get a message asking a question about the text, or something as simple as "You know, Graelyn's mom is like my parent was." it reminds me how important creating fiction is, and what a duty I have as a writer to try to get this stuff right. I know 10kd isn't perfect, but I know its helped a few people, and I'm grateful it could.

As someone who has tried to commit suicide, who has friends who have tried, and friends who have succeeded... It was important for me to show Graelyn's suicide attempt, pull the cover off of it so to speak. I hope in reading Graelyn's story some people come away with what I've learned myself: life can be hell, but it can get better, and you have to be alive to see that better day. So hold in there. Dawn will rise, and the night will end.

10,000 Dawns is definitely not the only thing you've ever written, you've written multiple poetry books and plays, as well as released a short story book. What is your greatest accomplishment when it comes to your own writing?

I think the general consensus is that "An Eloquence of Time and Space" is my greatest achievement, and it definitely is in terms of popularity and sales. Its a really good book, and I'm very proud of it, however I think artistically the best thing I've written is my play "Paper Gods", which is a strange fever dream of theatre that deals with characters holding a revolution against the author of the play (me). Its printed in my book "Cascade" if anyone is curious to read it.

David Bowie has come up a few times throughout the story, the first noticeable time is when Graelyn had a dance off. Due to his passing, do you plan on putting any form of tribute in any of the upcoming chapters?

There was a tribute we already put out called “And a Star Spun Dark” that wasn't planned to be a tribute, it was actually a discarded bonus story for a canceled listening party for the release of “Blackstar” where the 10kd crew was going to post in-character as different people from 10kd as if they were listening to the album together. It would have been fun... But we didn't have time. I thought “I can just reuse the idea for his next album.” Surprise, in the worst way.

We will be having a full scale tribute though, in the form of a real bonus story with art by “Eloquence” artist Olivia Hinkel, so watch for that!

All of the characters that are in this story (10,000 Dawns) have depth and most, you can really connect to. What character are you most proud of?

I know its the answer you'd expect, but its true: Graelyn. She's a very complex, real, person who I feel like I managed to delve deeper into the psyche of than any character I've written before. I felt like writing her was a danger, because in all honesty she is such an easy person to hate. She does lots of selfish and petty things, but in the end she is trying desperately to be a good person, and I believe she is one. I wasn't sure readers would feel the same. That they did makes me very happy, because it means the readers of Graelyn's story have shown her the love and understanding that her family never did. I think she'd be happy about that.

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us!

No, thank you. I appreciate you taking the time to ask these questions. And thank you to the readers, you've really made this experience wonderful.

Alex Rose: Songwriter

Alex Rose is an Indianapolis based musician whose new song “Space Adventure” is 10,000 Dawns new Theme Song! You can hear a sample of the song in front of this week's podcast version of 10kd.



First off, could you introduce yourself for our readers?

Hi! I'm Alex Rose! I've been playing guitar for 8 years and music is my absolute passion! It's a major part of me and I'm so happy to be able to be involved in this great story! I'm an artist in many forms and I absolutely love creating things. I also love space!

The way you met the author of 10,000 Dawns was pretty interesting from what I hear?

Yea actually! We had met at PopCon in Indianapolis IN in June of 2015! Uh, but, how we became friends consisted of a major dance off between me (a cosplaying starlord) and him (a dancing Doctor!). And the friendship sparked from there!

Tell us about your song, “Space Adventure”, what inspired it? How did you go about writing it?

Space Adventure came to be when I was going through a rough time with friends and relationships. I was being thrown around emotionally, and the song is about me telling myself and others that I can do everything I set my mind to do and what they do doesn't hold me back It was me standing up for myself. It took a long time for me to actually come out and say what it was about, because I was afraid. But I'm so glad I did. And now it's a fan favorite

What themes do you think the song shares with 10kd?

Space man!!!!

I also feel like it has a strong connections with Graelyn! The song very much portrays a strong independent vibe which is everything I see Graelyn as. I feel like it really commits to the story and I'm so glad that it's the theme song!

What drew you into music?

My dad actually! He was a major influence. He taught me the basics of guitar.

What kind of music do you listen to when you're not writing it? Have a favorite song?

I listen to everything (but country) honestly! And my favorite song changes every week! But right now, it's I Want To Get Better by Bleachers

Like a lot of awesome artists, you do live shows! Where can people see you, and how do you feel about performing in front of people? Do you ever get nervous or are you always pumped?

I love doing live shows! Usually I play at different venues in Indianapolis, most notably being the Hoosier Dome on Prospect St! Sometimes I'm nervous, but most times I'm always pumped to perform! I absolutely love it!

What's the greatest moment you've ever had onstage?

Probably when I sang I Miss You by Blink 182 and people got on stage with me! There's a video of it on the Facebook page, and whenever I watch it I laugh!

What's the most embarrassing moment you've ever had onstage?

The time I forgot my own lyrics half way through a song and had to make it up as I went!!! 0.0

You have an upcoming album, correct? What's the album like overall?

I do! Overall the album is honestly about my life over the past few years. Some songs are really sad and about personal things or they're about happy stuff and moving on past the sad things, such as space adventure! Expect a good cry.

You're a reader of 10kd, as well as a songwriter. What's your favorite thing about the story?

I CANT chOOOSE

Do you have a favorite 10,000 Dawns character?

Graelyn!

What's it like having your song as the theme to a story like this?

It's so shocking honestly! I never thought my music would be taken so seriously!

We have to ask, did you and James Wylder ever consider recording a cover of something from Guardians of the Galaxy together? You don't have to answer but....

Hell yes!!!!

Where can our readers find more of your music?

Alexroseandthemagicalacoustic.bandcamp.com

Thank you so much for talking to us Alex, we wish you many more space adventures!

Rachel Johnson: Artist

Rachel is an artist who has drawn art for the 10,000 Dawns Artist Showcase, as well as for our bonus stories! It was a pleasure to speak with them.



First off, could you introduce yourself for our readers?

I'm Rachel. I'm currently a sophomore at the Minneapolis College of Art and design where I'm studying comic art! Drawing is one of my biggest passions.

You have an interesting relationship with 10,000 Dawns, in that you read it's first short story in "An Eloquence of Time and Space" and made the first fan art of it! Did you ever expect you'd be drawing more of it?

I can't say I was but I'm really glad I got the chance to!

What drew you to 10kd?

Obviously I'm going to be interested in anything a friend of mine is doing, but I also really love sci-fi so this is right up my alley.

Do you have a favorite character from 10kd?

Probably Graelyn. Or Mister Sprinkles.

What's your favorite work of art you've made for 10kd?

The big group picture I did of Songbird and her crew!

You've drawn more art for 10kd right now than any artist other than Annie Zhu, in some ways you've given your own feeling and aesthetic to Songbird's World, and the Bonus Stories. What was it like defining a look for so many characters?

It was pretty challenging trying to get everyone's looks to line up with their written descriptions, but it was also a lot of fun for me!

Can you tell us about your other art?

I also make short comics and also digital illustrations, mostly inspired by daily life and my interests.

What sort of things do you like to do in your free time? Any hobbies or interest?

I love to draw, obviously. I also enjoy reading. If I'm not doing either of those I'm probably watching superhero shows.

If you could have the chance to draw any character you haven't yet from the story, who would it be?

Kinan, probably!

Is there anything else you'd like to tell our readers? Thank you so much for chatting!

It's been so much fun being involved in this story and I hope you guys are enjoying it!

Jordan Stout: Writer

Jordan is a writer who has been a part of the development of 10,000 Dawns and will be featured in 10,000 Dawns: Anthology later this year! He's quite the character.



First off, could you introduce yourself for our readers?

Good day to you all. It is a pleasure to meet all the readers of 10,000 Dawns, I hope you are well, sassy, classy, and currently enjoying a good book of some kind. My name is Jordan Stout and I am proud to say that I am one of the writers for the 10kd universe. I've been with the 10kd project from the beginning, and I am honored to still be here helping readers make that special astonished face you all make when something too crazy to be possible happens on the page. Yes, you do totally make that face. Yes. Its kind of like the expression lemurs always have by default. Yes, like that, its my favorite, and I love you for it.

So you've been part of 10kd for a long time, how did you first get involved in this endeavor?

10kd for me started with a college friend desiring to embarrass me and my roommate with an obscure science fiction card game he had stolen from James' room that we had never played but he deceptively and wickedly already knew all the rules to. Naturally my roommate and I were disgraced forever and will never completely live down the shame, but there was something very thought-provoking about the cards themselves and the very lightly brushed on conceptual story behind them and it got us working out new and different ways to play the game, making a newer and deeper story, and then ultimately starting a full role-playing game and living out adventures in the world of our design every Saturday night, with the ever-creative James Wylder as game master. The adventures were rich and brilliant and often the sun would rise on a Sunday morning to us still laughing and shrugging off our exhaustion for another roll of the dice that would determine fates to altered the very alignments of planets and moons in our solar system. As much as it meant to us, originally it was almost a joke. There were only four of us at the start and it was almost embarrassing to tell others about this game we played that was loosely based off of a card game that no one in their right mind would have even heard of. We would get looks like we were all wasting our Saturday nights and there was no way to really explain. Stories, however, have a way of speaking for themselves. We gained two new people to make six just before I began a semester traveling abroad in Europe, and when I returned I was astonished to find more that thirty people sitting at the same little table the next Saturday night, all with characters woven into the intricate story that James had continued to weave. It only grew from there. The game evolved into an overwhelming topic of conversation, started holding its own reserved room at college events and conventions, taking form on social media, drawing the attention of other science-fiction writers, hosting its own website, inspiring

us to write short stories, and eventually became so big that rare was any hour of any day where a large group of people would not be sitting in the campus center discussing, bickering, building, or scheming some angle of the story arch and so there was never a time a person couldn't conveniently find someone to talk to about this story at our college. At that point it was clear that it had taken a life of its own, and after graduation it was keen to become the subject of literature.

What's it been like developing the 10kd universe together?

How do I love having my own characters represented in your work? Well, speaking on behalf of my character, Doitzel, he truly loves your work James, and is thrilled to see himself come to life under your pen, and, oh wait, he's demanded to speak for himself, he says "you haven't yet written about him at all yet," and "what's the matter," he seems rather angry. Oh, maybe he's crying. "Are you afraid of my magnetic personality? Think I will try to take over your story by force? I won't, scout's honor, I'm a changed man." I'm terribly sorry James, I'll have a chat with him. "Is it because I'm insane?" No, Doitzel, you need to stop this now. "I'm not you know, I have a letter from the state that says I've been pardoned." Yes, well done, Doitzel. "Not many people have those!" Doitzel, please calm down. Remember what happened the time when you shot the coffee machine. "I've always wanted to be in your stories, Jim, why don't you notice me? What do I have to do, take over a planet or something? I will if I have to." Doitzel, you need to stop threatening authors, this is becoming a bad habit. "Believe me, you'll want me in your story on your terms, don't let them be mine! Don't forget how many side characters were never fully developed because of me!" I'm sorry about that James, he's just cranky because of his tragic background. You know he can't be held accountable for his own words. He's harmless, really, you have nothing to worry about, and should keep up the good work we all love.

Now, you're a part of 10,000 Dawns: Anthology, which is set in the Prime Universe of 10,000 Dawns, featuring very different versions of some of these characters we've just met. Do you think readers will be surprised at what they'll see?

Naw, I think our readers are brave and ready to handle the surprises in store.

Can you tell us a little about what you're creating for 10kd: Anthology?

Most of my writing will be focusing on events on the Rim as well as one of my characters to grow out of the original role-playing game, Doitzel. It looks like I'm going to dive into the Rim in a few more questions here, and I dare not tell you what role Doitzel will play in the history of the known universe but suffice to say he is far from the conventional hero we've come to expect from our classic stories, but often, for better or worse, finds himself at the turning point of a story where in an ideal world the more conventional hero really ought to be. Audiences can be assured that he is not the kind of man who can do more than one pull-up, be counted on to always find the right solution over the most entertaining solution, and most certainly of all, learn anything meaningful about life or humanity over the course of a given story. I am delighted to see what you readers will think of my tales and characters and what you judge them to be for yourselves. Most frequently I feel natural writing a story out through thick layers of humor guided along by a brisk, confident pacing like the stride between two blind men who haven't realized the other is blind leading each other across a busy street. You can reasonably expect my stories to quickly rush up to the limit of where you will expect things to go and then take that one step over the edge, and I do hope you will enjoy every word, it's what I wrote them for.

What else do you do in your free time? Do you have any other hobbies or pursuits?

I rather like to keep my free time overbooked with as many things, equally ridiculous as my stories, as possible. I like long walks on the beach, traveling to any place less geographically level than central Indiana, which thankfully is almost everywhere, I play semi-professionally in the chamber folk band "Willoughby Sprig," I am told that my volunteer tours of the Indiana Central State mental hospital are very "...enlightening," I occasionally build my own home electronics out of unconventional things, and my dream is to one day photo-bomb the James Webb Space Telescope. I am truly blessed to have a cat that judges me abusively if I do not stop things I am working on and go to bed at a healthy hour.

You really helped shape the feel of the Rim in 10,000 Dawns, a place that our readers have yet to explore in depth! What sort of adventures can we expect to see out there? What drew you to it?

I have been, more or less, the creative designer of the Rim in the 10kd universe with the generous help of many other writers here like Andrew McLung, Taylor Elliott, Miguel Ramirez, and of course James Wylder. I took a rather passionate liking to working on the societies out there due to our need to write them as wild, frequently irrational, and possessing a far wider range of cultural differences than are found on Earth and Mars. With the story centered around a time when humanity looked to the stars, pushed boldly out to the edges of our solar system and then said "eh, that's good enough," the Rim becomes a place where people live ignored, desperate, short, but clever and exhilarating lives, mostly free from the powers of the planets, and organized into ever-warring gangs that might frequently be underestimated by the strong power of Earth. Readers can expect locations on the Rim to be strange and turbulent, and the characters from the Rim to hold dreams, specifically of the big and dangerous variety. Expect pirates with cybernetic bodies to be taking big risks for big payoffs. Expect crazed space-prospectors to ramble madly about pods of probably equally crazed space-whales they saw swimming past Neptune. Expect floating cities on the oceans beneath Europa's icy crust. Expect violently temperamental and shadowy gang bosses to be hatching layers of convoluted schemes against each other and the powerful governments of the inner planets. Expect remarkable space stations that could be possessed by ghosts. Expect scientists that my no means should have lived as long as they have to be messing with things that they really shouldn't be, and of course, expect our heroes to be right in the midst of it, holding their own.

If you could punch any 10kd character, who would it be and why?

I probably wouldn't punch any of them because its a universe where people are likely to punch back very hard.

Is there Anything else you'd like to say to our readers?

Many, many thanks to all you readers and supporters for the time and interest you give to this project. We couldn't do something like this without you, well, okay, actually we could but it would be pointless and dismal. I am trilled to be working on these new bits to come out and I hope you are all just as excited, and if not, then I hope the sheer strength of your obdurance is consolation enough for reading this entire article against your better judgement. Best wishes to you and happy reading.

Thank you so much for talking with us Jordan!

Josephine Smiley: Writer

Josephine is a writer who has been a part of the development of 10,000 Dawns and will be featured in 10,000 Dawns: Anthology later this year! She's was a real joy to talk with.



First off, could you introduce yourself for our readers?

Absolutely! I am Josephine Smiley, writer for 10kd, graduate student at the University of Missouri (Mizzou,) political and social justice activist, and all around geek. Actually, science fiction was my first love, so to speak: that love came in '93 in the form of Star Trek: the Next Generation, and it has been a wild and awesome ride from there.

So you've been part of 10kd for a long time, how did you first get involved in this endeavor?

When I was a student at Hanover College, a bunch of us were part of a Tabletop RPG Group of Total Geekery. I was one of those roleplay nerds who writes up detailed backstories for her characters. While I was doing that, more story ideas just came popping into my head, and I created Alice MacLeod, and then... well, you guys can see what happened.

What's it been like developing the 10kd universe together?

Amazing. I love being able to collectively create something as diverse and wonderful as 10kd, and everyone else on this team is the best. The fact that it's a team effort only makes it more diverse: other people have thought of ideas I never would have come up with, and everyone's ideas just give me more ideas for my own 10kd stories as far as places, people, and events that I can work in and develop a little more.

Some of your ideas (and characters) have made it into 10,000 Dawns: Serial, especially your character Alice MacLeod, what was it like seeing her come to life under a different writer?

The thing about Alice MacLeod is that she's supposed to be able to appeal to people from various different backgrounds. In the story, she leads a worldwide revolution, and in order to do that, you have to be someone that people can relate to at least a little bit. I relate to her a lot, and it has been a very interesting experience for me, watching how other people interpret her. I'm very eager to see how it plays out in the future as well. After all, Alice is for the people, I wouldn't want to keep her to myself.

Now, you're a part of 10,000 Dawns: Anthology, which is set in the Prime Universe of 10,000 Dawns, featuring very different versions of some of these characters we've just met. Do you think readers will be surprised at what they'll see?

Maybe. It's hard to tell, honestly. The Prime Universe is definitely different than the universe they've

seen in 10,000 Dawns: Serial, and several aspects of it will probably be surprising. Some characters have changed a little, and some have changed a lot. Whether or not their differences will be surprising to people, I'm not sure.

Can you tell us a little about what you're creating for 10kd: Anthology?

Absolutely! I have a series of short stories that I am working on currently, most of them about the relationship between Earth and Mars. I find that fascinating, so it features a lot in my work.

Are there any prominent themes in your own writing?

As Alice MacLeod would say: Viva la Revolution! My work definitely has a theme, and it's the same theme that dictates my life as an activist: it's all about universal struggle, uprising, and rebellion. I guess you could say it's an examination of what happens when human beings are pushed to their limit and survive.

What else do you do in your free time? Do you have any other hobbies or pursuits?

(What is free time? I do not know this term.) Okay, all joking aside, yes, I am active in several of my local social justice organizations which are constantly mobilizing, working toward a better future (if I may be so cliché about it.) That consumes most of my free time. I also run a blog, so there's that as well.

You're also writing a Novel set in the 10,000 Dawns Universe, correct? Without giving away too much, who and what are we going to see in it?

Well, I don't want to spoil my novel for everyone, but I can tell you that Alice MacLeod is in it, and it will explore a lot more of her personal story than the serial does. It also investigates the reality of Earth's mega-corporation, Centro Systems, and goes along with that theme I was talking about earlier.

The Alice MacLeod parts of 10,000 Dawns Serial had a lot to do with Revolution. Is this a theme that will continue with your own writing about Alice?

You better believe it.

If you could punch any 10kd character, who would it be and why?

Oh.... You know what, I don't know if I would. There are a lot of characters in the 10kd universe that I know I definitely wouldn't get along with in real life, I can tell you that much, but would I punch them? Probably not. I take my rage out in other ways.

Is there anything else you'd like to say to our readers?

You're important and you matter. I love you all. Keep being awesome!

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us Josephine!

Taylor Elliott: Writer

Taylor is a writer who has been a part of the development of 10,000 Dawns and will be featured in 10,000 Dawns: Anthology later this year! She's pretty darn interesting.



First off, could you introduce yourself for our readers?

Hi there! I'm Taylor, I write Ariadne Moore/Chess Mistress Hex. What's shakin', Internet?

So you've been part of 10kd for a long time, how did you first get involved in this endeavor?

Jim was running a tabletop RPG, the one the 10kd universe has spun off from, back at college, and most of our mutual friends were playing every Saturday night. I was asked if I'd be interested in playing and, while I was hesitant to devote every Saturday to a tabletop game, I agreed to come in as a one-shot villain — specifically one that had originally appeared briefly in a story Jordan had written for the universe. I went into the game with every intention of Hex dying, but not only did she survive, she managed to ROYALLY mess with the entire party during that

particular campaign. It was so fun that a few weeks later I came back, and the next thing I knew I was spending every Saturday night as Hex, who was masquerading as a crew member named Leesa Nickelback to mess with the other players and generally wreak total havoc.

What's it been like developing the 10kd universe together?

Super fun! This is a universe we've had our feet in for 4-5 years now. It became such a big part of our lives and has been a really strong bond for all of us. It's been so cool to take what was just a fun way for us to spend our Saturday nights together and see it grow into this big, new thing that other people can enjoy.

Some of your ideas (and characters) have made it into 10,000 Dawns: Serial, specially your character Chess Mistress Hex. Hhat was it like seeing them come to life under a different writer?

Really cool! It was fascinating to see how Jim understood Hex and the choices he made for her. Because she's such a complex and secretive character I was involved with the editing process for the scenes she's in, but Jim did such a great job with her that I really didn't need to do much. It was so cool to see someone else bring her to life!

Now, you're a part of 10,000 Dawns: Anthology, which is set in the Prime Universe of 10,000 Dawns, featuring very different versions of some of these characters we've just met. Do you think readers will be surprised at what they'll see?

Oh absolutely! I think they're going to be really floored by some of the differences and some of the adventures we have planned.

Can you tell us a little about what you're creating for 10kd: Anthology?

I am currently working on one project wherein we get to see a much younger Hex. I think it's going to be really interesting for everyone to see her before she became the Hex we all know her as, and I've been having a lot of fun exploring that chapter of her life. I'm also working on a joint project with Jordan involving Hex and his character. It's something we're both really excited about and I think the storyline is really going to shake up the universe!

Are there any prominent themes in your own writing?

I definitely play with some nontraditional character elements and questions of morality in my writing. I actually wrote my undergraduate thesis on antiheroes. I love writing characters who aren't all good, but aren't all bad either. I love making a reader really question whether a character is a protagonist or antagonist, and I think Hex is a really obvious example of this. While our lovely 10kd readers have good reason to believe Hex is a baddie, I don't think any of my fellow writers on this project would really classify her as a villain.

What else do you do in your free time? Do you have any other hobbies or pursuits?

I am an event planner by day, a nanny by night, and help run a small press publisher, PlotForge, by twilight and early morning. In my free time, I cook, read, write, croon at my cat, watch way too much Netflix, and plan fabulous international adventures. Last summer I spent two weeks in Japan where, among other things, I got to cuddle some owls and scared the pants off a guy I'm pretty sure was a member of the Yakuza.

Chess Mistress Hex (aka Ariadne Moore) is such an intriguing, and mysterious character. Will we get to learn more about her?

Absolutely! The readers are going to be seeing more of her in the future. I don't want to talk about her too much because I don't want to spoil anything, but I am really excited for everyone to get to know her better and understand who she is and what she does.

If you could write about any 10kd character you haven't yet, who would it be and why?

Chrometeeth. Hands down. Any character who rocks a cute sundress and can rip out a jugular with her modified teeth is a character I need to be better friends with.

You played a big role in developing the criminal group “The Index” for 10kd, as well as their home of New Alexandria. What draws you to them so much?

The old adage that knowledge is power is honestly the inspiration there. We’re not the first group of storytellers to hit on this — it’s what made Sherlock (and his enemies, Moriarty and Magnussen) so potent and intriguing. Anyone can be powerful in the sense of having a formidable weapon or military at their disposal. It’s an entirely different type of might and, in my opinion, much more frightening type of might to wield intelligence and secrets. The Index just takes this concept to an interstellar scale. Imagine the combined secrets of all of these groups carefully collected and stored away for a rainy day. And imagine, if you will, how the Index is securing all of that information. Makes you feel like you can’t trust anyone, huh?

As for New Alexandria... I mean, my inner history and literature nerds just LOVE the idea of paying homage to the lost library of Alexandria in this way. And how cool is that setting for something like the Index?! They built a massive compound on an ice moon! Just for fun! Could have built it anywhere but no, they took a look at Europa and said, “Yeah, that seems like a really hospitable spot for the compound we’re going to blackmail the entire system from.” It’s just makes me nerd out in a big way.

If you could punch any 10kd character, who would it be and why?

Manuel Salazar. Hard, in the face. My inner Hex is too strong for me to give any other answer.

Is there Anything else you'd like to say to our readers?

Basically just cue up “The Best is Yet to Come” by Frank Sinatra, because that’s what we have coming down the pipe for you guys. Get excited. I know I am.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us Taylor!

Thank you, Annie Zhu!

Contributing over 40 pieces of artwork to the 10,000 Dawns project, Annie Zhu has defined the look of a universe, and built an amazing foundation for other artists to build on. Her distinctive style has brought her lots of love from the Doctor Who community, and we thought it was time to show her some well-earned love for her art! So thank you, Annie Zhu. You made this whole thing possible. But don't take this nebulous paragraph's word for it, here's some love in quotes:

"Seeing someone else draw Hex for the first time was one of the coolest moments in my life. It was so incredible to watch these characters that I know and love come to life in such a beautiful way. Annie has made this universe real and tangible in a way only she could, and I don't know that any artist could have done the 10kd story justice the way she did. Annie: thank you, for all your hard work, and all the beauty you've shared with us." -Taylor Elliott

"Annie- I've been imagining 10kd in my head for a long time, but you made it come to life. Your art and all your hard work means that other people can also envision 10kd now, and that is something so awesome I'm not sure I can fully explain what it means. Thank you, you're an inspiration." -Josephine Smiley

"I wasn't sure what I imagined 10kd would look like while we were going through the creating phase; but Annie has captured it perfectly!" -Elizabeth Tock

"Every week, Annie provides readers with a visual portal into the 10,000 Dawns. Her art not only allows us to visualize a setting that is literally out of this world, but reveals a perfect glimpse into the action and emotions of every chapter." -Rebecca Jacob

"Annie, Rob and I just wanted you to know how much we love the art you've created for 10,000 Dawns. Your illustrations are so beautiful and your interpretation of the characters is as important as the words themselves. Thank you for being a part of our team and sharing your gift with our audience." -Martha and Rob Southgate

"Annie! I love your style - simple yet emotive. It takes a good eye and better hand to make successful images with limited lines and color palette. Well done in every way!" -Olivia Hinkel

"Annie, you simply captured the magic of Jim's work in the most beautiful way. 10kd wouldn't be what it is without you and I just want to tell you how much I appreciate your art. Thank you for being a part of it." -Brandon Derk

“Working with Annie made 10,000 Dawns into the story it was. I can't even count the times Annie drew something, and I had to go back and revise because her visual imagination was so strong she inspired me to do better. 10,000 Dawns has always been different in that the illustrations weren't a secondary thing, they were just as canon as the words on the page, and I couldn't have picked a better partner for this. I couldn't have made this story without Annie. Her commitment to creating and developing this world in her art made the world of 10,000 Dawns real in a way I never could have on my own. Every chapter of this story has her hand in it, every word has been helped by her spirit. I may be the writer, but she was the real artist.” -James Wylder

Annie Zhu tribute, continued.

What would 10kd have looked like without Annie Zhu's art? Lets find out!

Dear Jim,

In the full manner of our friendship, you have asked me to peruse your art for your upcoming tale, “10,000 Dawns.” Indeed, having been a part of this endeavor for some time, I was generally honored you asked me to look upon such works. In the full manner of confidence however, the news must be bestowed upon you that perhaps it would be finer and more prudent if you were to begin the search for an artist more skilled in the visual form, who is not capable of producing the visible horrors which have just assaulted my eyes. These abominations are unholy, and have terrified me worse than even that time I accidentally walked into the local chapter of the flat earther society and puppy kicking cabal while looking for a Dairy Queen.

Indeed, I am now hiding under my desk while writing this to you. Its dark in here, and perhaps that is for the best. Maybe seeing itself is overrated? There is a lot of dust under this desk, I really should clean more. At the very least, the papers ontop of the desk are now invisible to me. I am worried to leave. I have undertaken the task of calling in for pizza. Hopefully the delivery person survives the trip around my desk, and can give me what I desire: a delicious disk of bubbling cheese, tomato sauce, and baked dough with a 2-liter of carbonated beverage. I will be living down here till you come to remove the drawings off my desk. Please bring a blanket.

Your friend,
-Josephine Smiley

Dear Josephine,

Fine, I'll go get Annie Zhu to draw something sheesh.

Your friend,
-James Wylder

The following documents were retrieved from the top of Josephine's desk. The rest were burned by the pizza deliver person to prevent any one from having to look upon them.



Atlantis Base
"ITS underwater"™
Part of Andbis Corp
↑ part of Centro



* Not pictured:
a cat

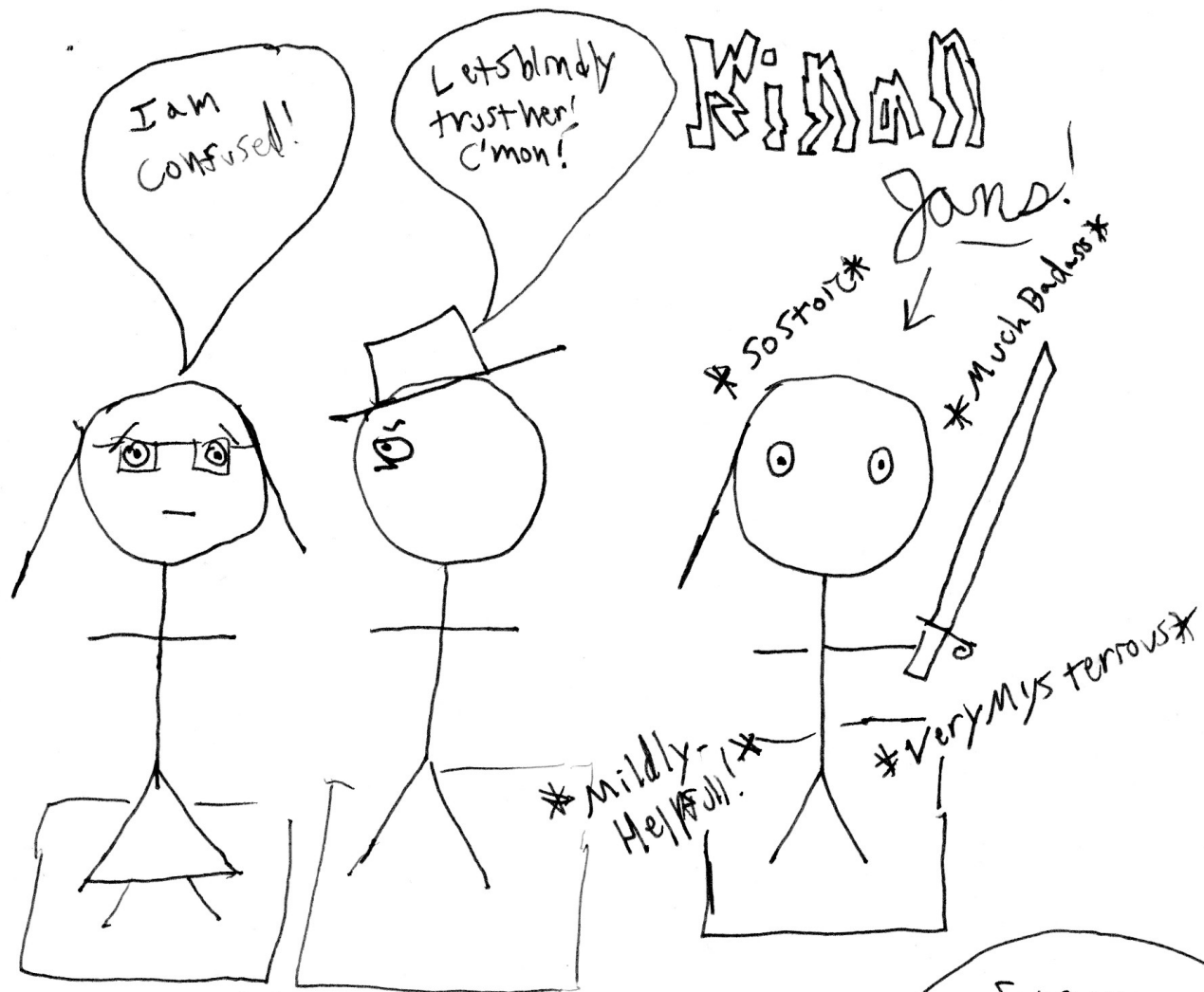
Chapter 1:

The cat who Missed Atlantis



Chapter 5:

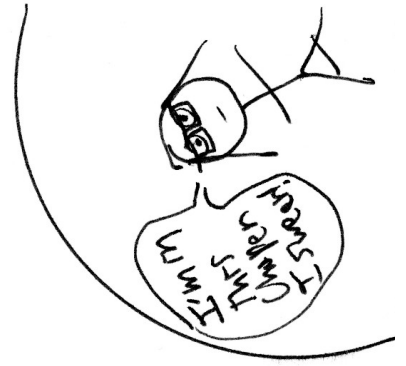
Alternities



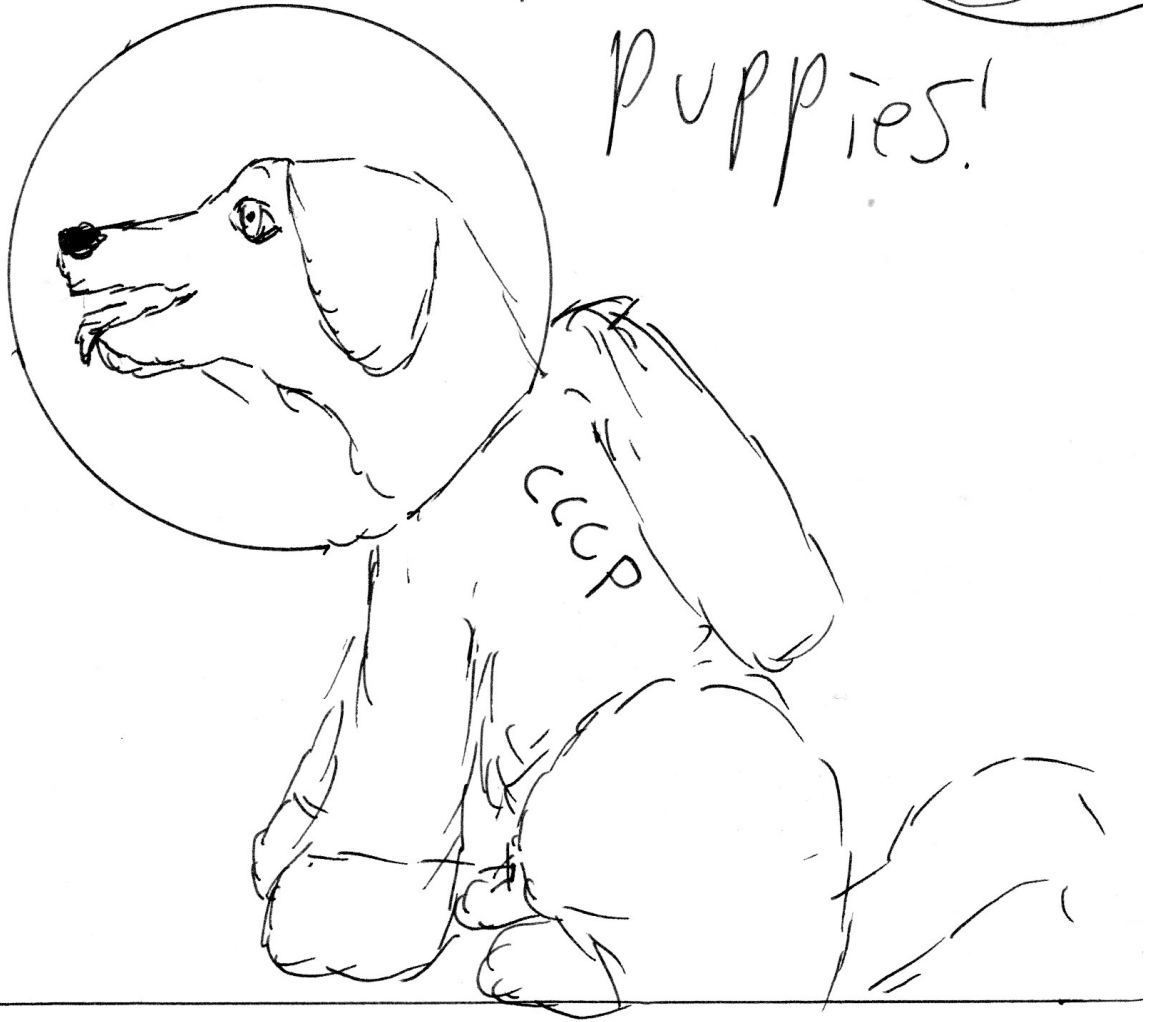
Chapter 16 :

The world was wider, the sky was Bolder

Communist
Space



puppies!



Chapter 21 :
The Burden of Solitude



Chapter 27:

A miracle of Malice & Mercy

Deleted Scene:

The Mexico City Tapes

Originally, during the trial of Graelyn Scythes, the prosecution was going to actually play the tape of what was going on at Mexico city. I decided to delete the scene: it was simply too early to reveal that to the reader, but I have preserved the contents of the tape itself for the curious.

A video began playing on the wall. It showed rows and rows of cloning cylinders, each with an identical man inside the cylinder. They bobbed in their amniotic fluid calmly. Then one dropped from the cylinder, out a hole in its bottom, and out of view.

"Where does that go?" A voice said from behind the camera. The voice is familiar. The Camera cuts. We pick up again in a new location, where the camera is moving through a door. One of the bodies drops from the ceiling, and falls onto a conveyer belt. The newly born man looks around, taking his new world in, and is then a crane leans down and circles around his head.

"What's it doing?"

"It's scanning him for something. Maybe checking a wireless connection? Ah, he has chips in his head. I think it is getting a full set of data out of him." The crane lifts up, and the conveyer belt begins moving him.

"Can we turn that off?"

"I don't know how, the thing is armored as hell, Trevon start trying to figure out how."

"Yessir." Graelyn recognized the voices. It was Songbird's team.

The conveyer took the man down the room as the team tried to catch up with him, cursing. He was elevated, and none of them could seem to climb the smooth sides to reach him. The conveyer belt then dropped the man into something like a huge fishbowl. He stood there, naked, still wet from birth, and confused. The crane moved over him, and began blinking."

"What's it doing?" The man suddenly began screaming. The bowl was filling with gas, gas that seemed to settle into the bottom of the tall bowl and not rise out of its brim.

"Break the bowl, get him out of there!" The soldiers fired on the bowl, but it didn't break. They pounded on it, but it didn't break. The man inside was clearly in horrible pain, but kept trying to leap for the brim of the bowl, as the crane above him kept blinking. He focused.

"He's trying to Clegg." Alice said, in horrified amazement. He didn't Clegg fast enough. He fell to the floor of the bowl, seizure, foam oozing out of his mouth. He stopped moving. Someone screamed.

"Oh God." Jack said.

"Shut this thing off Trevon."

"...Almost got it." He said sadly. It only then became clear that he was, in fact, still breathing, when body dropped through the floor. It turned off. Stepping forward, Jack looked down at the floor.

"Where did he go?"

"You know." Alice replied. He nodded. "Let's move."

The camera cuts.

We are standing in front of the door we saw Alice walkthrough before in Chapter 9. The one she threw up after coming back out of. She approaches the door. She puts her hand on the handle and grimaces.

"You're filming?"

"Yeah."

She opens the door, and steps through. The room is cavernous, and is clearly divided into two sections. One is filled with dead bodies. While the machines have been turned off, it is obvious what was happening, as the different stations are still filled with corpses in different poses. The people fell from the hole in the ceiling, and were picked up by a meat hook. The hook carried them through different stations where their different component parts were removed efficiently, one at a time. First the skin, then some muscles and fat, then organs, etc. Each station was frozen in a grotesque pantomime, midway through the procedure. Many of the corpses have bullet holes in their heads. They are not in the poses of people who were unconscious through the procedure. They look like they were screaming. Alice runs over to the man who fell through the ceiling, and helps him up. Chantelle found a blanket somewhere, and wraps him in it. He looks totally bewildered. "Get him somewhere safe. We're... Going to need a team upstairs to get the others when they are... Born." Alice stammers out.

"Yes ma'am." Chantelle replies.

Alice gestures for the camera to follow her. "When we came in here, it was silent, aside from the whirring of the machinery and the... The sounds of the... Of what they were doing. The victims were fully conscious. But...

They, they made no sound. Their uh, they, we checked a body and it wasn't born with vocal chords... So..." She looks down to the ground. "We turned the machines off. But many of them were...

Impossible to save. They were... Vacating too many vital fluids. So I made the call to put them out of their misery." She puts her hand over her mouth as she says that. Her eyes are welling with tears. She steadies herself.

"I'm sorry. We still have the other half of the room..." She gestures. There are what look like pens for holding cattle. Then there are dissection tables, littered with bodies in various states of experimentation. There are many machines next to the tables, but their purpose is unclear.

"We already removed all of the survivors to a safe location, but they were standing here when we arrived. Just... Waiting. Calmly. From reading the logs of the on duty scientists, it appears they were... Mass producing people in order to try to find the secret of what makes humans clegg. The ones who were strong enough to clegg hard enough to jump out of the fishbowl were then... Examined to try to find what made them special. Those who did not were taken apart for their parts to make more people to do this to. Taken apart, like cleaning a chicken." She turns to the camera. Her eyes are on fire.

"Graelyn Scythes ordered this. She directed this. She planned this. These weren't people to her they were... They were... Lab rats. She's a monster. She sees people as nothing more than a harvest to feed her goals. She is a blight on everything. A walking plague." She is more serious than you have ever seen someone.

"She deserves no mercy from us."

The video ends.

Essays:

10,000 Dawns:

Using the Multiverse for Literary Self-Discovery

by Tyler Lipa

Theoretically mankind is aware that a multiverse of possibility exist. Each decision that is made by us individually and by those around us creates an entirely new universe where any possible outcome could be selected. If you are reading this right now it is because the decisions that we made and were made for us has led us to this specific point in time. This is the world that has been created by James Wylder, the writer, and Annie Zhu, the illustrator, in the world of 10,000 Dawns. The main focus of this story is to illuminate what it means to transition from the person you were as a child to the adult version of yourself that must face the limitations of being human in a world that is constantly changing.

10,000 Dawns features the lives of seventeen year old Graelyn Scythes and cyborg Archimedes “Arch” von Ahnerabe as they stumble through the multiverses of their lives. Graelyn is a brilliant, mildly sociopathic, pansexual demiromantic, intern. Arch is a heavily armed, emotionally troubled, genderfluid cyborg. Through the help of Director John Aril of their universe they find themselves thrown into a time and a place where they exist, but in completely different fashions. Scythes and Arch must come to grips with who they are, and how they became this way in the first place.

Graelyn is a character who lives in the far future, but is representational of the modern world that the reader exists in. She is a perfect representation of the reader themselves. Graelyn wants to be different and thinks very highly of herself. For example, despite living in a future that offers a wide array of technological and surgical remedies for poor vision, she chooses to wear glasses. Graelyn thinks very highly of her biological self, and is representative of a “pure” human in a post-human environment. Her normality is what sets her apart from the world she exists in.

Arch is a character who is the exact opposite of Graelyn. Arch is an altered human being that was meant to transcend the trappings of normal humans such as Graelyn. He only has one eye, and his body is encased in armor plating. Arch also has complete control of the biochemical makeup of his body. Arch is the culmination of man and machine and is on one hand alien to the reader because of his modifications, but familiar in the fact that those who read science fiction are interested in attaining an ideal of human civilization.

Ideal is far from the reality that Graelyn and Arch exist in. The universe they inhabit is defined by corporate greed and cultural decline. The world governments have been replaced by a powerful corporate overlord known as Centro Systems. The only holdover from the present is the military. The time that Graelyn and Arch exist in is described as the end of a Golden Era. Humanity has once again

begun to rest on its laurels in regards to discovery and knowledge. This is reflective of the current frustration that is felt by many young people with the state of politics and the economy. Debt and a growing service industry are failing to add fulfillment to the lives of 20 and 30 year olds who are learning what it means to be an active part of the economy. Instead of finding a sense of importance there only seems to be low paying jobs and endless financial instability.

Pondering what life could have been if other decisions had been made haunts people who are leaving a time when they were filled with youthful potential, and now must face the realistic life decisions. This is where Wylder's concept of the multiverse is exactly what readers are searching for. This zeitgeist theory gives a hope that somewhere out there there is a version of us that has either made better decisions than us and are living a wonderful life, or there is a version of us living in much worse circumstances. Graelyn and Arch are able to see this first hand. Graelyn is able to meet a version of herself that is extremely successful, but is one of the most hated women in the world. Arch finds that he is only an idea in another world, and a simple interaction between his creator and a business woman decided his entire existence. This is just one of an infinite number of possible universes that exist.

Graelyn is a troubling character because of her long list of flaws that stem from her character's talents.. She is an amalgam of some of the worst character flaws of our time. She is burdened with the need to become an adult at a young age from an abusive mother which has imbued her with a false sense of maturity. Graelyn also has difficulty connecting with those around her, and in every universe that she visits she finds that even in the case of being an owl in one universe she is more interested in questioning others than thinking about herself. This lack of self awareness is excellent for her career growth, but makes it difficult to identify with her. She is always unique in every situation which can make her seem inhuman. Graelyn is crafted in the same mold as Ender in Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game. She is a very unique and intelligent character with a greater purpose than even she is aware of. Without her the future of mankind is uncertain, but it feels as if she is not part of the humanity that she hopes to save.

For example, when she meet an alien creature from the race know as the Pantheon she is able to deduce that the alien is communicating to her via mental electrical impulses. These aliens entrap humans and use them as slaves for a galactic empire. The alien comments that she is more astute than the average human which implies that she is in some way special or more advanced than the rest of humanity. This exceptionalism is a source of great contention for generations that have preceded the Millennial Generation. Characters like Graelyn as viewed from those outside of the target audience might be seen as pretentious and self absorbed rather than thoughtful and worldly. This does not mean that she is a poorly crafted character, but when viewed as a person that is not the reader she takes on a much different interpretation.

10,000 Dawns is a story of the world as it known today viewed through the lens of the far future. It captures the frustration and jadedness that can lead to apathy in the modern world. Graelyn and Arch are two characters who have an opportunity to see what is backstage to the world that they exist in. This view changes them and shows them that truth and meaning is dependent on the reality they inhabit. Unlike the readers who must find meaning from those around them Graelyn and Arch have the opportunity to discuss the darkest fears and uncertainties of being sentient with other versions of themselves. This concept of self discovery resonates strongly with the target audience because there are currently far less answers than questions. Despite the false confidence of youth there is a deep psychological need to find one's place in the world and to feel accepted. 10,000 Dawns evokes these strong emotions, and Wylder does an excellent job in drawing the reader down and building them back up to believe that they, like Graelyn and Arch, can find a reason to exist in their own respective words.

Revolution, corruption, hope, and fear. These are the key ingredients that make 10,000 Dawns such a compelling story. Wylder has created a world that can be inhabited by the emotions and desires of those who read it. All great stories have one thing in common. The reader must discover something that lay hidden deep inside themselves. 10,000 Dawns accomplishes this by creating a world that is just an intensification of the world as the Millennial Generation perceives it today. Wylder has created a challenge to look at our own reality and accept that we are part of it. This is accomplished through the use of a character who represents some of the worst aspects of the Millennial Generation. Instead of embracing these flaws the world that Wylder creates questions these character flaws and seeks to remedy them through hope and humility. Readers will find that they are looking at a reflection of themselves as they journey with Graelyn and Arch on this epic of self discovery.

Graelyn: The New Frontier

by Amanda Irwin

Let's start this essay with a statement, think about the female protagonist in science fiction literature. Think about it. Think about it seriously. What do you think about? Did you think about how few there are? What about female characters in general?

When I think about female characters in Sci-fi, I can't help but think about how few and far between they are or how limited they are in character complexity. What comes to mind is Leia Organa from Star Wars or all the women that James 'Jim' T Kirk has had relations with. For me, I often think about how women are not valued in the science fiction genre, if they're even there at all.

I was surprised to say the least when I started reading James Wyler's 10,000 Dawns that the protagonist was female. But not just female, like any protagonist, Graelyn Scythes is so much more complex and intriguing .

The first thing I noticed about Graelyn is that she is not sexualized. Graelyn is described as having black hair pulled into a ponytail and wearing black glasses. That's it. There is no mention of her body type, weight, or even skin color. It is all left up to the imagination of the reader and that on to itself is refreshing. Unlike Leia, Graelyn doesn't wear a metal bikini nor does Graelyn get involved in a cliché romance with the "bad boy" in the story. Do I sound pretentious and bitter? Probably. In the Star Wars films, Leia's most important quality, other than her metal bikini body, is her love story with Han Solo. What is Graelyn's most important quality in 10,000 Dawns? Her intelligence.

Although Graelyn is emotionally cut off and appears as though she doesn't care, she is, in fact, very human and cares for a few people. For example, she cares immensely for her cat, Mr. Sprinkles, and feels incredibly sad when she has to give him up in order to go to Atlantis. I wasn't crying when she gave up Mr. Sprinkles, not at all. But Graelyn doesn't just care for her cat but also for our favorite metal man, Arch. When she and Arch are thrown into a different universe and are attacked, Graelyn's fight or flight instincts kick in and she runs only to think of Arch right afterwards. Graelyn's thoughts keep wondering if Arch is okay and she hopes that he is alive.

Despite Graelyn's lack of emotion and logical almost robotic thinking it reveals that she has built a shell in order to stop feeling hurt by whatever has happened in her past. It's not just her past that she tries to hide but also her fears. Graelyn, like many people, fears failure and disappointment of not being able to leave a mark on history.

"I am very scared I will amount to nothing. I am already nine years old and I have not made any significant scientific breakthroughs. I can already tell I am a failure."

-10,000 Dawns, Chapter Nine

It's not just preventing herself from getting hurt and showing fear but Graelyn, also, doesn't want to be pushed around. Graelyn wants nothing more than to be respected and admired for her accomplishments and if she has to be cold towards others than so be it. This only adds to her humanity and her desire to not feel emotions.

It becomes very clear that Graelyn internally struggles between expressing her emotions and gaining respect. If she shows emotion, then she'll be seen as weak. But if she bottles up the emotions then she loses parts of her humanity. There is no win-win in this situation in Graelyn's mind and seems to be something that she battles with constantly. Does she express emotion and be perceived as weak, or does she lose her humanity in order to gain respect?

We all desire to be respected and admired for our accomplishments. Humans will almost do anything they to gain respect. Some kill others for it, some will only hurt others. Some will become cold towards others and see weakness as failure, much like Graelyn does. In a way, a desire to be respected is a common human quality

Graelyn is a complex character and I feel as though I've only scratched the surface of her character. She is very logical but hiding an emotional side, she tries to be aloof but still cares for others, and, the best part, she isn't sexualized in any way. The real question now is how can I get my Contemporary Gender Issues professor to start reading this story. Any thoughts?

An Artist's Journey:

A Visual History of Annie Zhu's 10,000 Dawns Art!

We thought we'd give you a glimpse behind the scenes into making the art of this grand adventure!

Exhibit 1: The First Sketch of Graelyn and Arch! Notice how its similar, but how Annie refined the details in her final versions. Many ideas changed during the early visuals of the characters and world.



Exhibit 2: Chapter 12: The Confrontation (Sketch to final version). Here you can see the basics of how a drawing went from Concept to completion. Note the addition of the swords in the final version!

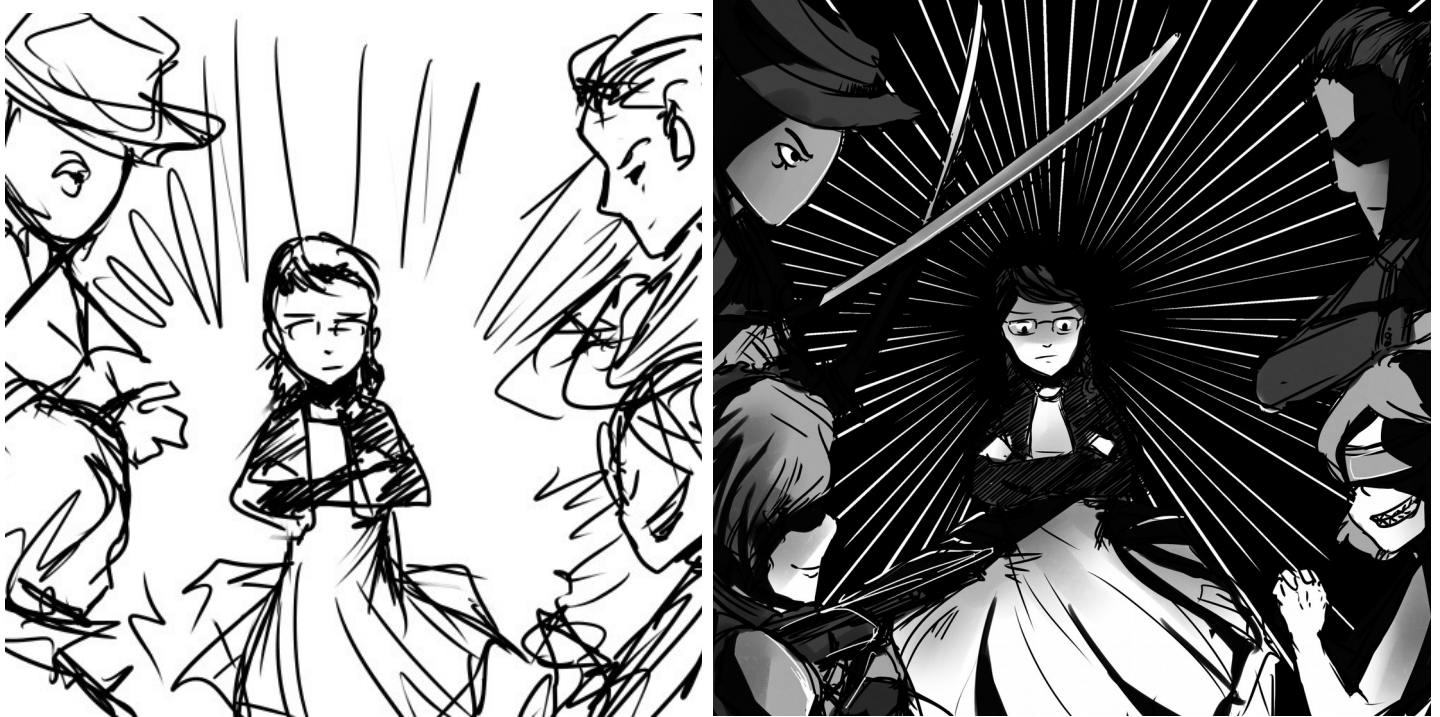


Exhibit 3: Chapter 16: The World Was Wider, the Sky Was Bolder (Sketch to Final Version). During development, the whole composition changed, with the final version suiting the chapter's tone better.

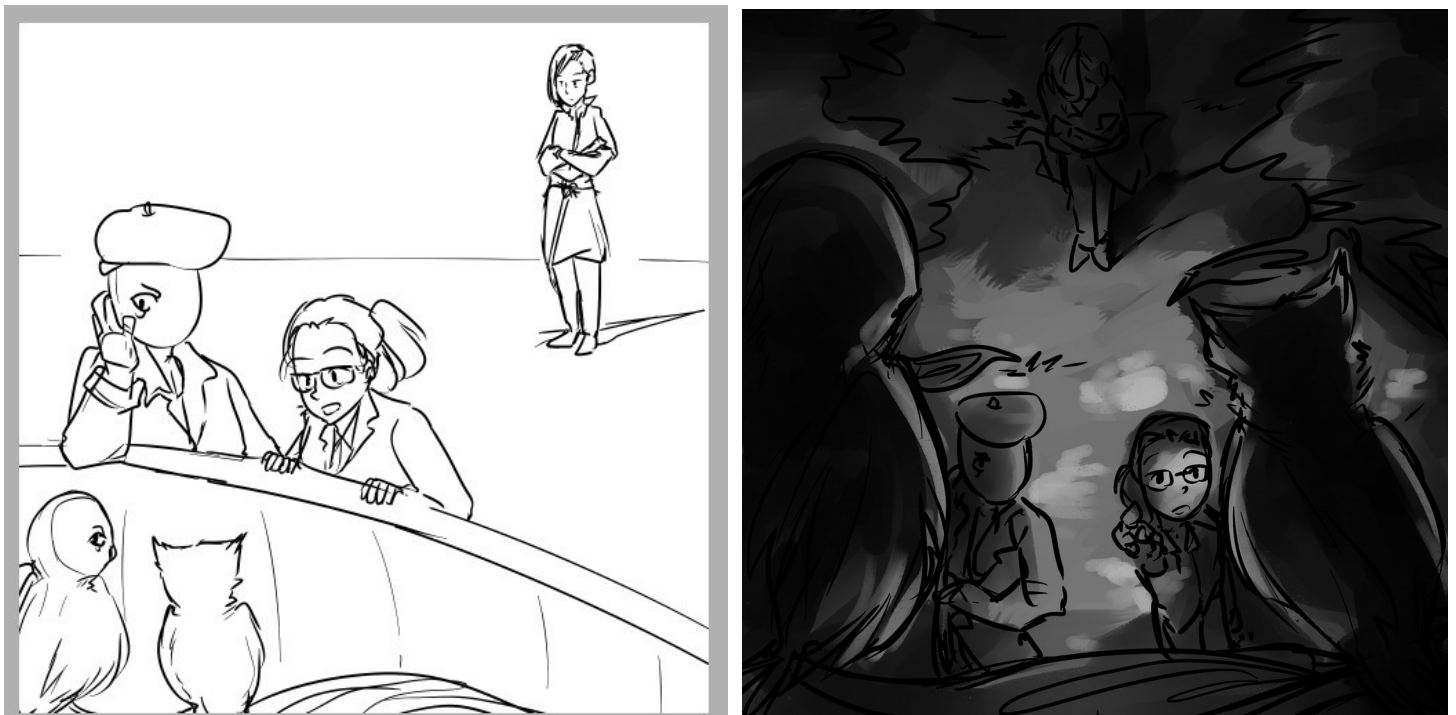
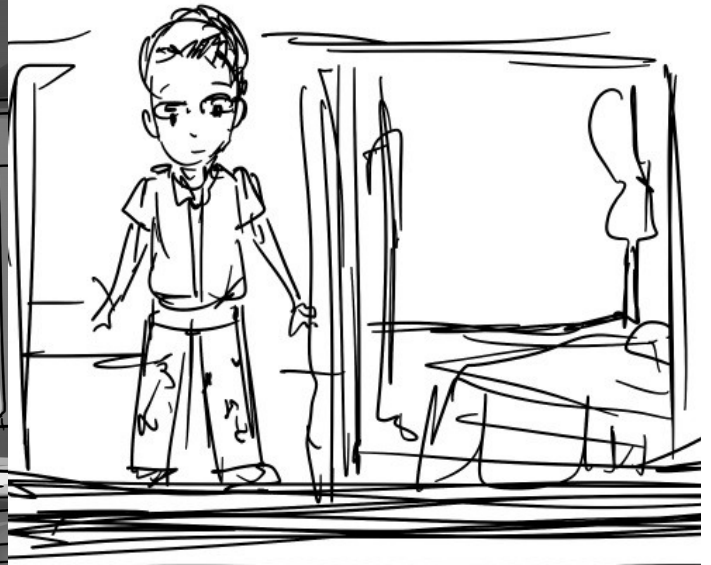


Exhibit 4: Chapter 22: The Pavements the Limit (Several drafts to final version). Chapter 22 proved to be the absolute hardest piece to nail down the art for. The dramatic and heartbreaking scene of Graelyn's suicide attempt went through several concepts and iterations to get it right. You can see several of the ideas Annie and Jim went through in trying to bring the scene to life correctly, until they settled on the final version that perfectly captured the moment.



10,000 DAWNS

◆ ANTHOLOGY ◆



A cause can bring people together...

Welcome to our Special preview of 10,000 Dawns: Anthology! This summer you'll be able to read exciting tales delving into the history of the 10,000 Dawns Universe. From the machinations of the Index on the rim, to the war between Centro Systems and Mars, you'll get to explore amazing new worlds, meet fantastic new characters, as well as learn more about old favorites.

This Excerpt comes from a story about two new characters named Zhang Han and Cornelia Carthage: two friends, one of whom believes in a cause worth going to war for... And is going to great lengths to prove it. We hope you enjoy the excerpt, and come back to check out the Anthology as it posts on jameswylder.com!

You'll get to read stories not just by James Wylder, but a slew of other talented writers like: Josephine Smiley, Taylor Elliott, Jordan Stout, Elizabeth Tock, Miguel Ramirez, Colby McClung, Evan Forman, Genevieve Clovis, Luther Siler, Briana Stanford, and more!

10,000 Dawns: Anthology. Coming this summer.

Story by James Wylder

Art of Zhang Han and Cornelia Carthage by Raen Ngu

Goodbye, Moon

Cornelia slapped the chemical pad on the edge of the door and ripped the back off. The hiss that followed and the bright yellow glow showed it had done its job. Now, Han thought, they just had to get off of this rock. The guards on the other side of the doors began to pound on them like somehow their fists could overcome a third of a meter of metal.

“Was this really your plan? If this was your plan—“

“This wasn’t my plan.” Cornelia replied. They both panted for a moment, then Cornelia turned and grinned. Her smile was infuriating but she couldn’t help but start to turn her own frown into something she wouldn’t let quite form a smile. “Mostly. But I can adapt to it. Ever flown a rocket?” Han shook her head.

“I’m a Marine, not a pilot.” Cornelia nodded and ran over to the control console. She looked it over, frowning.

“This is surprisingly complex for something whose sole job is to go ‘up’.”

“They call it rocket-science for a reason you know.”

“Yeah, and we stopped using these for a reason to.” Cornelia replied, thumbing a few switches, and pulling open a big panel to fiddle with the wires. The lights became brighter, and consoles lit up throughout the room. They might just get off Titania yet, even if it was on a missile. Cornelia brightened up.

“This orbital rocket is an old re-purposed passenger rocket, so it was built to carry people! I mean, its technically a bomb now, but it’ll do.”

“Cornelia, this rocket it meant to blow up a Centro battleship in orbit, not let us survive the trip...”

“It was meant to let people survive the trip a hundred and fifty years ago. Do you have a better plan?” Their banter was cut off by a crackling sound on the overhead speakers. It was a man’s voice.

“Your friend is right, you'll never survive lift off. We'll blow you up remotely.”

“I cut that system first.” Cornelia said, Han hadn't even noticed.

“Wise. We'll still shoot you down.”

“That's up for discussion.”

“You think you're worth talking to.”

“We are. Plural.” She replied.

“Of course. You and your little friend are guilty of crimes against our people now. You should feel honored I took the time to speak to you personally.” The man's voice replied.

“So, who do I have the honor of speaking to?” Han mouthed “honor” back at Cornelia while making finger quotes and doing a short mocking dance. Cornelia turned away and Han secretly hoped she was rolling her eyes. She was a bit disappointed to see Cornelia was just walking towards a voice panel on the wall.

“You have the prestige of speaking with Corinthian Candlelight, a First Holder of Titania.” Han tapped Cornelia on the shoulder and mouthed.

“Corinthian Candlelight? Seriously?”

“The names just keep getting worse and worse don't they?” She mouthed back. They really did. Meeting 'Alabaster Armoire' had been bad enough as it was.

“Hi Corinthian Candlelight, I'm Cornelia Carthage.”

There was a pause on the other side, probably someone was pulling up files.

“Never heard of you.”

“Well, data dumps take a while to arrive from Earth don't they?” The man on the other end grunted.

“You're certainly giving up a lot of information.”

“I have nothing to be afraid of from you.” She said plainly. Han scoffed. Cornelia made a face.

“You have a lot to be afraid of, Cornelia Carthage. The Vigilance of the Free Slavehold of Titania isn't for sale to anyone from Earth. You know nothing of what its like on the Rim. You sit in your alabaster cities, and you pretend that life here on the Rim can be governed by the principles you decided are moral. But morality is—“

“Isn't calling this place a “free slavehold” kind of... stupid? Like, I'm not a refined gentlemen, but isn't that not how words work?” Han interjected.

“You insolent snot—“

“Like do you point at trees and call them horses? Or point at yourself and call it ‘not a thumbsucker’?” Cornelia kept in a snicker.

“You Centro people are all the same. You grew up rich and fat on Earth.”

“—Actually I'm from Mars. Cornelia is from Earth. I'm Zhang Han, Martian asskicker. And yes, that's an official title.” The man grunted.

“Then you of all people should understand what we fought to build here. What we toiled to—“

“What others toiled to do for you.”

“Our hands guided theirs.”

“Your hands are too slippery with blood to guide anything.” There was a pause as long as 5 heart beats.

“You will regret this. Foreign spies aren't welcome on this moon, and your punishment will be severe. Maybe I'll cut out your tongues and make you my personal concubines.”

“Wow, you are an idiot.” Han said.

“Don’t expect the slaveholder to be particularly moral, Han.” Cornelia shrugged. “Anyways, we’re going to kill him, right?” Han looked at Cornelia. This whole stupid endeavor had been her ploy to this moment, this agonizing moment. She’d wanted her to see this place, this hellhole dressed up in posh dresses and frock coats. Their eyes met. Han’s teeth slid slowly onto the top of her lower lip.

She was done with the military.

She was quitting.

She was going to join her friends in the independent Mars student rallies.

Heck, she was going to be a student again.

She was going to ask out that cute girl from the Black Hole Lounge and...

“Yeah. We’re going to kill him.” Han said, and she knew Cornelia had been right. These people on Titania, hidden in darkness and surrounded by gilded lights were now in two groups: those who she would kill, and those who would be liberated. She’d seen hell out here during the Rim Gang Wars, trying to bring order in the name of Centro Systems... But Cornelia wasn’t just about order. She was about morality. Titania had been built on the backs of slaves, and it was a crime Han couldn’t turn her back on. She had to do this. The pointless war on the Rim had changed in her head, a switch had flipped, and there was no going back. Cornelia grinned.

“Bold words, but you aren’t getting off this moon alive.”

“Am I not?” Cornelia said, bemused. Han really hoped she actually had something up her sleeve.

“We’ll shoot your rocket down the minute it launches.”

“Will you?” Cornelia mused, and pulled a tablet out of her pocket, which was close enough to a sleeve in this case that Han was willing to let it count. The tablet lit up, showing a map of blips around the city.

“Because you gave me a full tour of your facilities, and its entirely possible I left things scattered around at the following co-ordinates. You might not want to touch them. They’re dirty bombs, they’d ruin all the careful terraforming you’ve been having your slaves do to this moon... But its your call, I wouldn’t want to decide for you.”

There was silence, and Han stared at Cornelia. This woman had thought this through so far ahead. Even when they were in a corner, she had a contingency. Any lingering doubt left her: she would gladly follow Cornelia into her war. Back into her nightmares.

“You wouldn’t dare.” The man said, his voice cracking.

“I always dare.” She replied. “Now choose.”



Sometimes, a cause tears us apart...

10,000 DAWNS

◆ ANTHOLOGY ◆

Coming Summer 2016