

*A mixed force is not preferable but a necessity, for the contingent of forces you face in battle will be clasped with varied shells in turn.*

*The No-Dragons—mistresses of the humors and masters of the flesh—have cultured beasts of impossible vitality, but even their mastery is not beyond rebuke. Other Guilds and Fallwalkers have their own Heavens—imbued with miracles of the absolute that can flay flesh, or deny bone its structure. Through these means come viruses of all varieties, some targeted, some not, all engineered to defile that which is organic.*

*Likewise, those of the alloy are not beyond reproach. I have seen more Omnitech creations crumble and die from their own madness than I can count. I have seen Voidtech wonders choke and wither away to nothingness within chasms of fracturing reality. Machines are of the pattern as well—there is a consistency to their builds, shapes, and designs. The energy that fuels them. The code and mem-data that guide them. Just as there are plagues of the flesh, so too are there sicknesses across virtuality, and all the rest of existence.*

*The instruments and arms we field must but of a sprawl. Thaumaturgy is the unwinding of reality's tapestry. A change in the pattern. A revision of what is.*

*Hold to a single line of faith, code, or concept, and be inevitably destroyed.*

*Should you spread yourself, however, stretch wide and embrace all there could be, then through symmetry you may yet prevail.*

*For that which bears tangible edge rings truest against a falling blade, and that which possesses the make of plagues reflected might very well achieve the same.*

—Osjon Thousand, *The Firmament and the Sky*, Chapter 5

18-6

### The Garden That Is Flesh

Avo felt the electricity surge through Subject One before any effects became obvious. The faint current it emitted was always there. As was the monochromatic field represented by the organic screen grown out from Elegant-Moon's skull. Each of the bioform's movements generated a faint "tug" to the senses as if a limb displacing water.

Watching the scene unfold via Draus' visual feed, slugs, explosives, and flechettes burst washed over the prototypical bioform, the initial barrage chipping through pieces of its exoskeleton, exposing the swirling masses of sporelings housed within.

Then, as if an aero accelerating hard through a curtain of falling rain, the field it emitted bulged at the front and the oncoming projectiles began tumbling off to the sides.

Gauss fire was more repelled than deflected while flung shrapnel jolted against the cloud of sporelings like daggers caught in a net. Matter made from patterns of complex alloys imbued with iron or steel tumbled from their path. Constructs that exceeded the realm of electromagnetism sailed unimpeded, only halting upon striking a hardened shroud.

*+It's holding against sustained fire reasonably,+* Jack said. *+But that's probably because Moonie here's keeping it juiced with her god-shit. +*

"How long can it sustain without her?" Avo asked.

As if to answer his question, Elegant-Moon released her Heaven. Immediately, the weight pressing against Avo's Domain of Biology vanished as a wall of missiles impacted Subject One's protective shroud. Kinetic force was parried for a brief moment as the sporelings swelled, but then the creature sounded a thrumming drone—the first sound Avo ever heard it make, and the currents pulsing through its body shorted out.

In an instant, the sporelings spilled out of the air as shot after shot buried themselves into the bioform's body. Its exterior carapace fractured, exposing tattered sheathes of breathing rubbery beneath. A slow-moving ooze flowed out from Subject One limbs were sheared from its body and its domed-shaped body rattled and cracked.

*+Ugh, about three seconds of functionality against a concentrated barrage of heavy kinetics,+* Jack said. *+Maybe we can improve efficiency by increasing its size and adding some hyper-catalytic nodes across its integumentary system?+*

Jane sighed. *+Such a thing would make it overheat in an instant. The only reason why it's not burning from the inside is because the Sang-harvested chrono-cyclical cells provided by Sister Ruveca for its electro-conductive membrane that we re-edited. We are functionally tricking reality into "misremembering" through the half-life we left on the organs. Nothing short of a Heaven could allow for it to output more power without complete and utter destabilization. +*

*+Loathe as I am to suggest this, but cybernetics can be considered,+* Ruveca added. *+A heat store or radiator of some kind. +*

*+We're going to have to redo the entire thing to integrate that,+* Jack mumbled. *+This thing is silicon-based. Most implants are made for carbon-life forms. Humans at that... At least it being silicon will keep the No-Dragons confused if they ever manage to take one intact. +*

"Do not presume such an advantage to endure, my friends," Elegant-Moon said, her smirk spreading wide. "What is law and theory to you is but a tale to us. The flesh is a story that we tell ourselves; a garden to be re-arranged. I bid you make certain of their ability to decay in an instant, for already my Heaven has mapped its make in nerve, tissue, bone, and sinew, and from the dreams of my Heaven will it be rebirthed with but the effort of a breath." But joy passed from her face like a season, and melancholy remained in its place. "But so little pleasure lives in

this. So much lost. So much life we could have cultured and intermingled with our own.” Her head tilted up at the porcelain white ceiling that was the Manta’s interior. In the backdrop of her awareness, Subject One was slowly coming undone before a tide of unceasing fire.

*{Pull it out?}* Draus asked as shots continued to spill in and out of her and Tavers.

*{No,}* Avo replied. *{Just a setback.}* Shifting his mind to be parallel with Elegant-Moon. *{Going to do some direct supervision.}*

*{Synced.}*

He mantled Elegant-Moon’s template upon his mind and deeper understanding followed in the span of a heartbeat.

Even whittled down to an effigy thriving on deeds of cruelty, a sense of artistry remained—fragments of her former self lodged within the ruined husk of her ego, unextracted. There was power in being able to twist and weave the very fabric of life to one’s whims. Power beyond science. Power to dominate laws. But also ignorance. Also deprivation.

What she felt primarily was *jealousy* toward grafters like Jack and Jane. Ones who have glimpsed the wondrous permutations of organic developments across biomes Elegant-Moon wasn’t able to fathom, dissecting bodies she would never get to know.

For the talk of a canon’s scope and scale, there was a deprivation of *depth* when one denied reality its rules. Mythology, after all, was born from the wanting minds of men, and what could such a thing be but shallow in the face of totality?

Avo conjoined his Conflagration with Elegant-Moon’s Metamind. As her ego vanished into his flames, he slotted her template back into her body and piloted her Heaven toward purpose. Little remained of Subject One now. Just scattered pieces surrounding an oozing smear of bioluminescence on the ground.

The smear was enough.

**Heaven: [Weaveress of Bodies Myriad] (Wounds/Skin/Sense/Architecture/Biology/Construction) - 9,783 THAUMS/c**

**Canon:**

**(Wounds)**

**->MY BODY THAT WAS, THAT WILL BE (III): Allows a user to grow replicas of a specific bioform or entity by treating wounds as seeding points. This canon can also be inflicted on all designated organic entities with active injuries for a certain distance (72 Kilometers). The physical characteristics (movement, sensory, regenerative, muscularity**

etc.) of the chosen organism will be multiplied with each replica grown at the cost of 2.2% REND per generation.

**Hubris: If the total mass of the total mass of the replicas generated exceeds the total mass of non-replica organisms, thaumic backlash will occur.**

The Dreamer of Bodies Myriad danced unseen within Avo's flesh—with the flesh of all beings for seventy-two kilometers. Much like with his Sanguinity, Elegant-Moon could have plucked the life from any single Syndicate thug with a thought. But her miracle flowed toward a single delta.

Subject One.

Only static currents traveled through the thick ooze that comprised the bioform's interior, yet from the mangled mess rose roots that spread into branches that became bones and burst into unfurling lattices. Threads of biomass were stitched back into shape by an invisible presence, felt more than seen.

Chambers was shuffling uncomfortably in his seat now, the weight of Elegant-Moon's Heaven grinding against his Lushburner. An adaption of such a canon might prove useful to him as well if he would grow wise enough to wield it properly.

A new Subject One regenerated from the corpse of the old in under a second. Bound to Elegant-Moon by cognition and the bioform thereafter via her Heaven, Avo discovered what it meant to become Subject One—to be a creature devoid of all senses but magnetoreception and tactile touch, to know pain as *colors* instead of sensation, to lack any true consciousness yet thrive off instinct alone.

Subject One was perfect isolation.

Subject One was thoughtless functionality.

Throughout it all, a wall of fire continued to pound against its carapace. From each bit of exoskeleton chipped free did new roots sprout, did new additions bubble into shape. Supported by canons from her Domain of Biology, the bioform was kept from death, each wound fading in the same moment as their infliction.

Jack sighed, watching as a single prototype expanded into two, then five, then nine. *+And that's just gross... I mean, it's bullshit. Cheating! Come on. Eons of technological development, countless biologists, cyberneticists, engineers, literal research minds, and nanite-supported cloning facilities, and here she is outdoing all of it without even a wave of her hand. Isn't this woo-woo stuff supposed to need some rituals? A song, maybe?+*

Kae frowned. "Thaumaturgy is not just waving one's hand and chanting random words. There is lore to be built. Years of study and death scaffolded to create each and every Heaven—a

consistent existential pattern behind all things worshipped. It is the single most potent thing a civilization can create. No ‘woo-woo.’”

*+Eh. I guess I can give you ‘potent.’ But honestly, it’s woo-woo, girl.+ Jack coughed. +I mean... look. Me and Jane managed to build Subject One with Sister Ruveca’s help. But honestly, we’re the only ones with the knowledge to understand what a silicon organism even is. You can’t create that because you live in a box. The last working box in existence, but still, you have no idea what you missed out on back when the galaxy was the galaxy and not this hellscape.+*

Jane sighed. *+Professionalism. Please.+*

*+But I’m not wrong,+ Jack said. +Listen. No offense. Your Heavens are tyrants. They rule. Literally. But you’ll always be making shallower art compared to ours because that’s what your canvas is: shallow. Something carved from cultural belief instead of the great magnificent car crash of all the fundamental laws, outcomes, choices, and lifetimes of that beautiful, lost machine we called a working universe.+*

Kae pouted and gave a light scoff. “My work is more than art. My work is existence reconfigured. You tell me of your glorious experiences. I’ll tell you that if I don’t learn to dismantle mythology, science, and anthropology at the same time, then millions of deaths will become billions when the next rupture widens.”

Expanding her Heaven to incorporate senses from all the bioforms she grew, Elegant-Moon bade her bioforms go forth, and as they moved, Avo realized more shots were slipping away from them, the magnetic field they projected stronger, the sporelings visible sparking in Draus’ feed.

*{Feelin’ a tug on my implants,}* Draus grunted.

*+So, next part,+ Jack said. +Scouting and offense.+*

*+Finally,+ Ruveca added, her excitement bleed over from Chambers.*

Directing the sporelings through the breach and into the elevator silo, the bioforms sensed the positions of every individual combatant in rapid order. It was the rigs of the enforcers that gave them away. That, and their implants. All things susceptible to magnetism shone in the pitch-black canvas of what made up the prototypes’ “minds.” The detailed contours of bodies followed after as a representation of the world manifested in edges and borders.

Never was there color or sound. Just shapes, movements, and electromagnetic kinesiology.

From nothingness, over five hundred bodies were isolated and identified. Guns and metal shone the brightness. That which couldn’t be pruned by magnetic means remained a faint gray.

"I see them," Avo breathed.

**[Do you now?] Elegant-Moon said from within. [I do not think so. Not really. We think. So we cannot see as the bioforms can. They do not think. They exist. They are. Unburdened. Wonderful beings. Wonderful.]**

+*Very good,*+ Jane said, somehow sounding pleased but not enthused. +*Now. Let us go over why the prototype is built as it is.*+ The flaring of fusion burners against the sporelings opened gulfs in the bioforms' unified vision. Connected to a single overmind, though, there was still little beyond Avo's ability to see. +*Test movement. And then finish with offensive capabilities.*+

Doing as requested, Avo sent his bioforms in and, even knowing their capabilities via Elegant-Moon, he still found himself surprised as they stopped crawling across the ground and *propelled* themselves through the air.

The first thing to note was how their segmented legs ejected their bottommost stacks, leaving metallic discs on the ground as a "*launch point.*" Pushing their field and sporelings into the discs at an angle, the bioforms shot through the breach as their iron-layered arms snapped out straight and wide, actively making minute adjustments to alter their trajectory. Enforcers cried out as the bioforms used them as launch points as well, though the force delivered was insufficient to topple them.

Gauss fire cut upward as the long spine of the elevator came into notice. A stream of fire splashed over one of the bioforms and it vanished from Avo's notice immediately.

Not even the Weaveress could restore a body that wasn't there anymore.

+*Ah,*+ Ruveca said, sounding more fascinated than disappointed. +*Heat was expected to be an issue.*+

+*Yep,*+ Jack said. +*Maybe if we can let them shed their waste heat slowly somehow...*+

Narrowing in on the enforcer that killed one of their number, the bioforms fired discs from their legs as crude railgun pellets. Shots struck but failed to penetrate, some skipping from the reinforced plating of the rigs, others bouncing off outright.

As the enforcer brought his arm up to trigger their fusion burner once more, Avo directed every single bioform to concentrate their fields around the man's arm and *twist*. Servos whined. Joints sparked. A body shuddered. An arm came free of its shoulder socket and began to spin.

+*Alright,*+ Jack muttered. +*Takes around eight of them working in tandem to overpower a single mook in a shitty rig. Yeah. No. Not acceptable. We need to give them more kick. Make them bigger. Much bigger. Boost their electromagnetism by a magnitude. Well, this is definitely going to require some cybernetics. Only practical solution. Looks like more research for all of us. And*

*also, we're gonna need you to grow a new module in that ship of yours, ghoulie. Put a cybernetics lab next to the Cloning Pools.+*

*+Undergo final test,+ Jane said. +Let's see how its voltaic vampirism performs.+*

Sporelings spread throughout the room as building currents of static tickled Avo's Domain of Lightning. As the bodies of the enforcers were bathed in the flea-sized organisms, bioforms tightened their grips around the nearest enforcers to them as they began to fall. Then, as the sporelings pressed deep against armor and flesh alike, the bioforms *drank*, siphoning bioelectricity from bodies and power grids for exo-rigs alike.

Armors locked up and froze. The bodies within them spasmed as currents were snatched from synapses. Channeling the excess output through their sporelings as well, other enforcers found themselves electrocuted by bolts leaping from each of their suits.

Thaums spilled over into Avo's Soul as casualties skyrocketed.

The amount of gauss fire was reduced in an instant as the bioforms suckled gun batteries dry.

*+And that's why we chose the Voltanids to serve as the bioform's base,+ Jack chuckled. +These little bastards are technovores! They'll make aeros and systems shit themselves. Hell, they'll probably short out a block if you put them in the right place. Drawing in too much at once will fry 'em from the sheer heat but if you manage a steady conductive flow...+ For every enforcer that went still, another burst into sparks and shivers. +Yeah. Short of someone designing specific countermeasures to bear, I think we'll make a menace out of these things yet.+*

"Artad forgive us," Essus moaned, looking away from the deaths displayed from Draus' feed. He swallowed sour spit, and Elegant-Moon wondered what it would be like to hatch a bird from the bulge of his Adam's Apple.

She was keeping all the males around her alive, anyway. Prevent her curse from unleashing its full weight. She deserved a rewards...

*+No,+ Avo said.*

The Sang's thoughts paused and shifted. **[Then perhaps something else. Something that will speak of my talents and appreciation. For allowing me to sample such an exquisite specimen....]**

And with their thoughts connected, Avo divined the gift she sought to grant and smiled. *+Yes.+*

**CANON:  
(BIOLOGY)**

**->FROM SEVERANCE COMES INHERITANCE: The user of this canon may interweave the biologies of two different organisms.**