

# Chapter One

The end has come. Will be coming. Came long ago. Who can tell? Perhaps I could have at one point. In the future. In this moment.

What does it matter anyway? Time is an arbitrary construct, one that we use to make sense of our lives... I think.

No, that seems wrong. What is 'time' again?

I try to warn my scion of the coming disaster, but they laugh it off. Can't they see...? Or has that happened yet?

No, no. They're telling me I was right and that they should have listened... They're looking at me with such pity in their eyes that it wounds me.

Don't they see? Or have they seen?

Why, why, why-?

*//4526.08.03-09:46 hour of the sun// Host, designation Serinius, has called on me again, and I have emerged.*

*A roomful of bereft ones—a class, I believe host calls it—is staring at them as they babble, speaking the flow of time aloud in an inappropriately disjointed manner. I do not understand why this group looks so confused. Surely some among them are strong enough to have pieced together the string of events that host is unwisely sharing.*

*...I should probably stop them.//*

Something calls to me in a voice I should recognize. Do I, though? It's as familiar as my own, or perhaps it's a stranger's.

That can't be right.

A wispy creature of light coils through the air around me, plopping to a seat in front of my face. It slowly wags its bushy tail with its triangular ears dropping from the tilt of its head. Its form inflates with that same voice screaming at me to *run!*

It calmly tells me to listen, practically seething with annoyance.

It seeps from the heart of me while I choke on a scream

DO NOT TAKE HER FROM ME! PLEASE!

//4526.08.03-09:56 hour of the sun// *I have tried to quiet host, but something has gone wrong. They are screaming at their class, long and loud, and I fear this might be another instance where they end up in recovery for a day*

*Watching them plaster themselves against the wall with its displayed mirage cutting through their body, I wince. AT LEAST one day.//*

Reality explodes, expanding from a single point too quickly, *too slowly*, for me to keep track of it.

Life, not yet sentient, crawls from the sea of its brethren.

Life, *heat*, dies as chaos takes its place on its throne.

All hail entropy! Long may it reign!

A primitive mammal learns how to fold reality, making our starfarers obsolete. The Leachers come, taking all of our energy with them, and look at what they leave in its place!

Two holes in the timeline. The twining of the *adraste* with our psyches. The destruction of our society. The premature death of our galaxy.

Why can't anyone else see it? The end is coming!

//4526.08.03-10:01 hour of the sun// *The door to host's left slaps open, letting several replete ones with my brethren trailing them spill inside. Host clicks their teeth together, setting into an attack form as they jerk toward the disturbance.*

*The replete ones are lucky. Host's unintentional call on me and my subsequent emergence have thoroughly distracted them, which gives their 'enemy' the chance to throw a handful of timelock grenades their way.*

*Such a short time spent outside with this summoning...*

*Oh, well. Time to integrate once more.//*

As I fall to my knees, several hundred versions of people in the peacekeeper uniform converge into only a few of them. What on-?

My classroom resolved into a clear picture with my students staring at me, and Aedeeka was floating in front of my face.

"Oh... *hell*," I said, even as I reached for my *adraste*.

Please, please, please say I could touch her again before...

Her wispy beat form funneled into a stream of white light that flowed toward the heart of me, and as she dissolved into my flesh, the sear of it knocked me sideways with drool leaking out of my mouth.

Thank fate for the peacekeepers. As they hurried forward with a sedative, I blessed them, even as I cursed them for needing their blasted drugs in the first place.

As my consciousness slipped toward black, I hurriedly catalogued everything I'd learned during this slip. There had been something important in it. What had it been?

Oh, yes. The end was coming.

A weak chuckle chased me into dreams. Of *course* it was.

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