

Why are there so few Gods of Time, you ask? Hm. A commonly asked question. What is the first thing you might do with time?

Many answers come with this question, but what unites them is change. People wish to change the nature of time. In relation to themselves. In relation to something else. What changes people desire to make informs us much about them.

A warrior might wish to move and strike first. To stop time so they can cut down all their enemies without difficulty. A farmer may wish to skip their crops across the cycle of withering and make every day a harvesting day. Merchants, perhaps, might want to shorten their travel time. And stuffy scholars like ourselves may wish to dull time's passage so we might spend more hours with our books.

But there is another thing that unites us.

Another thing that everyone—everyone has wished to do with time.

Go back.

There is always something that makes us want to go back. Perhaps it is a regret or old shame. Something that was left less than perfect. A wrong that no longer can be righted.

It is a desire so common that entire civilizations have been consumed by the attempt. Taken by the encroaching nothingness as they broke from reality's fixed track.

Even today, there are parts of the world that remain sealed. Bound behind locks both spatial and material to prevent anyone from passing into the temporal wounds.

And every now and again, we find artifacts. Instruments and ruins from places that no one remembers. That no one can recall anything about. But they are there. And they hold records of us, while we have retained nothing on them.

So. To answer your question, dear novitiate, the Gods of Time are not few in totality, but most never endured long enough to suffer the Godsfall.

-High Agnos Jakuta Ajayi

22-7

Matter of Time (II)

"Null?" Avo asked, unable to understand what that meant for his hubris.

"It means there's no cost," Kae said, her words flowing fast. "I think. Maybe. We will need to test this as soon as you resurrect. It—you are likely not inconsistent. Ontologically, I mean. That

should be the case, yes.”

“Don’t understand.”

The Agnos let out a note of frustration. *“Think of things this way: your ontological structure is likely now partially made from time. And I’m not speaking of your physical sheath but your true self. You are a self-moving mind more than anything else right now, if judged by functionality. There is no... no contradiction possible to the ways you can experience the passage of time. What might age or cause my body—or even your sheath to suffer anomalous harm—will functionally do nothing to you.”*

She paused.

“Perhaps we can make you partially manifest as a dragon metaphysically as well. Yes, that will be an avenue worth studying. But I will need time. More time.”

Avo grunted a light chuff. *“Might be something I can manufacture more of soon. Just like matter.”* He paused. *“Like... a matter. Made of time.”*

Kae barely reacted. *“You have been spending far too much time with Chambers.”*

That was possible. The man’s template was one Avo commonly interfaced with. *“He’s never far from my mind.”*

“Avo. Stop.”

This time he gave a hissing laugh.

“Let’s review all your options. Wait! Before that. There’s one thing I wish to see. Have the Frame estimate how much Essence this will cost to manifest. I have a feeling—”

WOUNDMOTHER

**(BLOOD/MATTER/FIRE/LIGHTNING/LUMINOSITY/PROTECTION/BIOLOGY) - 10,002
THAUM/c > 23,555 THAUM/c**

And the flechette to the gut finally struck. Avo’s attention zeroed in on the massive spike in thaums as displeasure filled his mind. *“Almost twenty-four thousand thaums needed.”*

“Hm,” Kae said, sounding unsurprised. *“Makes sense.”*

“That much of an increase is normal for Canons of Chronology?”

“For a miracle of enormous scope that affects all other aspects of reality deeply? Of course. Theoretically, you should have a horrifically vulnerable hubris as well, but once again, the rules

only seem to apply to other people.”

“What a shame.”

“You sound so sincere.” Kae sighed. “Frankly, I’m still trying to fully conceptualize this, but I expect these canons to be severely Rend-intensive as well.”

“Still not sure why this is more unnatural than turning blood into matter. Or matter into blood.”

“Because those Domains only affect specific catalysts and constructs in reality. If you rupture your Heaven of Blood, the affected Domains are relatively specific. Dangerous. Destructive. But specific. Your Heaven of Air comparatively, has a fixed area of effect. But you do not have a Heaven of Chronology, Avo. You have an ingrained Domain. With nothing bridging it. Not space. Not matter. Nothing. Instead, it is something you can apply and alter your existing Heavens. The implications are... ah. Let’s go over your other options before resurrection takes us. We can deliberate on theory back in reality with the others.”

“Don’t think they’ll understand it any more than I do right now,” Avo said. And then he paused. “But they could. We all could. You don’t need to be alone—”

“No!” Kae’s cry cut him off before he could work his rhetoric further. The Agnos’ Soul shivered and then tightened. He had the feeling she would be hugging herself for comfort if they were still of flesh-made.

RESURRECTION - 34%

A moment passed. She mastered herself. “Avo. You already have... you are capable of so much already. You have power beyond anything—you yourself are a miracle. Are comparable to a god. Can’t you see that? Don’t you feel that?”

“Yes. I—”

“No. No, you don’t know! No, you don’t understand. I know that—that your creators used you. Just treated you as waste and spent your lives. But you had not heights to fall from! I did! All my life I believed in a world that was fake! That didn’t care about me. My Guild gave me over to the Agnosi when I showed the potential, and then my fellow Agnosi—Voidwatch—everybody! Let my Guild cut me down because they got scared of what I was making.

“Come to find out then I was just part of someone else’s schemes. And they themselves were part of someone else’s plots. And further and further. My dreams meant nothing. My love and life meant nothing. My efforts toward the city meant nothing! All I have ever been was a tool! A thing to be traded and given and used and then discarded. A thing that had no chance of protecting herself, and no awareness—no way of even stopping the nightmare even if I knew.”

Her Soul crackled, but then simmered, rage succumbing to impotence. Emotions flowed weaker here. But her pain ran so deep that it scarred her ego.

The Agnos sighed. *"I cannot stop you from taking my mind. I cannot stop you from taking my ego. I cannot stop you from doing anything. Just like I could not stop Ori-Thaum. Or Zein. Or your father. I could not stop them. All I have left is my knowledge. That is the only thing that is true. That is all I am worth to the world. To reality. To myself. The chance I can still use that is all I have. If I lose that too then... Who am I? What am I worth?"*

"Revenge," Avo replied. *"Retribution. A life returned. Or a least a dream fulfilled. Advice to hear. Company to have. You're worth many things."*

"But those are just—just feelings. And you can change yours at any time."

"Not going to throw you away."

"I know!" A disbelieving laugh escaped her. *"I know. I know. The only person who still truly cares about me is a monster. A monster. A pervert. A girl who thinks herself a dog. And someone more weapon than woman. This. This is my home now. This."*

Avo grunted. *"We're not so bad."*

"...No. No, you are not. But I am scared. I am scared. I cannot decide anything. I am scared."

To that, even bereft the guiding advice of his templates, Avo knew exactly what to say. *"You are worth actualizing, Kae Kusanade. You are worth burning the Guilds. You are worth empowering. You are worth joy returned. You are worth faith restored. I won't take anything from you that you don't want me to. Can't. To turn back on this ideal will symbolize my fall back to mortality. Away from divinity. Trust in that. Trust in my self-interest. Trust in that I am vested in yours."*

RESURRECTION - 39%

Kae quivered again, but something in her seemed to shift. *"We are losing time. We—we should continue. Let's see them. The others. I want to see how sick I'm going to feel when we return."*

And so he did, turning from uncertainty back to delight as build after build assembled themselves before their eyes. Each passing design also saw Kae's misery overthrown by practiced passion.

Avo thought she did quite good for an Agnos that did not specialize in the study of time.

INFUSING CANONS - 1%... 25%... 100%

[WOUNDMOTHER]

(BLOOD/MATTER/FIRE/LIGHTNING/LUMINOSITY/PROTECTION/BIOLOGY)

->DOMAIN (BLOOD-CHRONOLOGY)

->CANON: BLOOD FROM TIME - THE USER CONVERTS THE PASSAGE OF TIME INTO BLOOD; EACH TON OF BLOOD CONVERTED ACCELERATES THEM [108 SECONDS] INTO THE FUTURE

->DOMAIN (BLOOD-BIOLOGY-CHRONOLOGY)

->CANON: PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE - THE USER CAN CREATE AND STORE ACTIONS, CONSTRUCTS, AND MIRACLES WITHIN STRUCTURES OF FUTURE-FLUNG BLOOD; THESE STRUCTURES MUST BE TRIGGERED IN THE FUTURE AND GENERATE TEN TIMES THE REND COMPARED TO PRESENT-BASED HAEMOKINETICS

HELL (FIFTH CIRCLE)--

ATTENTION: THE THAUMIC MASS OF THE [WOUNDMOTHER]'S HELL IS ALREADY AT BALANCE

FARDRIFTER (AIR/SHADOW/SPACE/LABYRINTH)

->DOMAIN (SPACE-CHRONOLOGY)

->CANON: NINE FUTURES FLOW - THE USER CAN DIVIDE THE PASSAGE OF TIME FOR [250 KILOMETERS] OF REALITY INTO NINE DIFFERENT STREAMS. EACH STREAM THAT MOVE SLOWER WILL NEED TO HAVE THE DIALATION OFFSET TO ANOTHER STREAM TO MAINTAIN TEMPORAL BALANCE; A PHYSICAL ENTITY OR OBJECT MUST BE PRESENT IN EACH OF THE NINE STREAMS

->DOMAIN (LABYRINTH-CHRONOLOGY)

->CANON: AUGURED ROADS - THE USER PLACES TEMPORAL PATHWAYS WITHIN THEIR STREAMS, CONNECTING TRAVELING OBJECTS OR ENTITIES TOWARD POSSIBLE LOCATION INSTEAD OF PHYSICAL ONES

TECHPLAGUER (SIGNALS-CHRONOLOGY)

->CANON: PRE-COLLECTOR - THE USER CAN INTERCEPT AND INTERACT WITH SIGNALS 5 SECONDS INTO THE FUTURE

INFUSING HEAVENS...

UPDATING CANONS

[WOUNDMOTHER] - 32,800 THAUM/c

[FARDRIFTER] - 18,355 THAUM/c

[TECHPLAGUER] - 5,770 THAUM/c

UPDATING LIMINAL FRAME (V)

THAUMIC OUTPUT: 56,925 THAUM/c

RESURRECTION - 98%

"I think that's good. For now." Kae shifted close to Avo's Soul as they both beheld his Heavens.

At a glance, their structures and expression remained unchanged, but from them trickled threads of gold, expressions of eldritch phenomena flowing eternally onward toward the future. More concerning were the draconic tendrils burrowing not only into each of his Heavens but also their corresponding Hells. The branching paths of the cyclers wove six ontologies into sets of three.

Never before had Avo felt his Heaven, Hell, and cycler so interconnected, just as never before was such a sight beheld by Kae.

"This... this defies theories. There... there should be a need to balance. The thaumic mass—"

"Feel the added mass in the cyclers themselves," Avo said, cutting her off. And he did. Faintly. Quietly. He could feel the self-devouring dragons slipping over into each Heaven's respective subreality.

"Are you sure?" Kae asked, almost breathless.

"There's nothing quite like it. I'll share the memories with you. After I get out."

"Yes. Yes! You must."

"Ah," Avo chuckled. *"Easy to accept knowledge. Hard to give, hm?"*

The frustrated noises she followed told her she was definitely pouting again. *"Avo!"*

"Fine."

RESURRECTION - 99%

Light began to build around his perception, his Soul peeling at his ego, drawing him back across the anchor, back through the hardened scar left by his death, back into the embrace of existence.

Before the end, he directed a few last words to his beleaguered friend. *"You should be proud. Stillborn was only possible because of you. I was only possible because of you. All this. Because you. More than Walton. More than Zein. More than anyone else. You weren't just a tool. You were the fulcrum."*

The Agnos shrugged. *"There could have been someone else."*

"There wasn't. Just you."

"I didn't even fully know what I was doing."

"Yet you succeeded in making a wonder." Avo sighed. "Take it from me. Ignorance is a friend. Take strength from what you have done. What you can yet do. There are still more wonders to build. Dreams to restore. A future to retake. Our deeds are not yet done. Not mine. Not yours."

Kae paused and bobbed. *"You know the others will be very, very annoyed about this."*

"Make it up to them. Still need to worry about Veylis. You all might operating more—"

RESURRECTION - 100%

And then there was no more time for words.

Time.

As Avo resurrected, time spilled up with him, strings of gold painting his path forward. Forward to life. Forward to existence.

The world splashed into shape around him, painting his awareness with vivid colors. The templates in his mind began screaming in unison, all awakening alongside him.

But not Calvino.

Despite everything, the EGI was gone. Still gone. Curious how they interfaced with the Nether. A place of awkward emptiness remained where the mind used to be.

Turning, he faced the rest of the cadre who were crowded around a twelve-meter-long strategic information center. Pulsing phantoms simulated the entire enclave approximately a thousand kilometers of the surrounding Sunderwilds from haemokinetic apparatus. Using their Metaminds, Draus' glass, and the phantasmally conductive nature of Avo's blood, they built themselves a new base of operations atop the blood-shaped tower.

Some things lost with the destruction of the George Washington were going to be hard to replace. But in time, all could be restored. The crew could be liberated. Equipment replaced.

Time.

Currents of gold contoured each of his comrades, all of them staring at him from their places around the grand table. He faced them, the unceasing light of the enclave washing in from the windows behind, and wasted no time with dialogue.

Casting out his splinters, he flicked the memories and experiences of his latest session with Kae over to everyone present just as the Agnos returned as well, stumbling to an unsteady rise beside him.

A myriad of reactions sang out at once.

Dice tilted her head, prompting the kitten on her shoulder to do the same.

Chambers cursed and directed Avo to look at a particular finger he had extended.

Tavers just shook her head, wanting nothing to do with thaumaturgy.

Denton's eyes narrowed while parts of Sunrise buzzed around her.

All their expressions were a delight to drink in.

Except for Draus. Who suddenly formed a large gun in her hand. A gun she promptly used. A gun that fired a two-stage rail-flung, high-explosive slug into Avo's sheath before he could materialize his Meldskin.

Avo jerked free of his body as a cloud of drifting smoke as he watched the upper half of his sheath burst apart into a splatter of gore. Some of his brain matter went into Kae's open mouth as she stood up, the Agnos gagging in disgust as Avo frowned.

He leveled his perception at Draus. The Regular just shrugged. *+Sorry. My index fingers get the twitches when I see somethin' that looks like a greedy nu-hog. Been that way since basic. Only thing I ever got PT'd for.+*

+Still have another 30 thousand thaums for the rest of you.+

+Nova. So. When the fuck's our special thought-formin' gonna happen? Before or after we get a piece of that expense-free Domain of Chronology you have.+

+When are you going to ambush the Hungers and swim in their blood.+

+Technically, I did with you, didn't I? "Thanks for showing me the colors" and that shit.+

The memory made Avo momentarily cringe, and so he dissolved the emotion. *+Will be culturing new cyclers. You want those, don't you? Remaining thaums can go to whatever you all want.+*

This time, Draus sneered. *+Reckon we can also consider some other things.+*

+Such as?+

+The people in the city. There's gotta be some half-strands left... right?+

Avo paused. Calvino would not like that. Calvino wasn't here. But he would not like that. More to the point, a good contingent of said "actively practicing half-strands" were slaughtered less than a day prior.

[Avo,] Abrel said, voice taut with annoyance, [you just finished getting your shit kicked in by Zein Thousandhand, and the very presence of the High Seraph sent you skittering across the Sunderwilds to avoid getting smashed. Despite your new canons—which are godsdamned bullshit, fuck you very much—things are bad. Very bad. You have no support. Your mind is gone. And Thousandhand could be singing all kinds of tunes to the Chief Paladin. You need everything you can get. And honestly? They're flats. They're flats who aren't going to make any difference otherwise. The Reg's right. I hate her, but she's right.]

[No.] A voice pierced through the din and clamor of Avo's mind. A voice long overwhelmed by chaos, drowned by horrific epiphanies and incomprehension. Now, however, the threat of his home being ravaged—of his people, his sword-bearer sharing his final fate gave them all the focus. Aladon, Pearlguard to a dead Fallwalker, guardian of a captured enclave spoke: **[No. Enough. You have taken enough. Please. You have taken enough.]**

The noise within Avo's mind quieted as he placed Instrument and Pearlguard beside each other. Then, before they could speak, a thought occurred to him. An urge.

A feeling.

A test.

An act inspired by Zein, that he now wished to try himself.

Invoking his Woundmother, he reached into his tower and with the caress of his will, animated blood. But more than mere matter shifted in the quick of the crimson. More than just light shone. Tendrils of blood coiled away, twisting into helixes of gold as Avo shifted the architecture of his mind between Aladon and Abrel.

For each, he made a body. For each, spoke as they would, giving them words, and actions. For each, he granted a gift of time; a miracle for all to behold, this act calling upon both his thaumaturgy and Necrotheurgy to manifest.

He wove into them miracle after miracle, and took a few moments longer to invest with them a spectrum of possible actions before casting his splinters into the blood, letting his subminds portray both Aladon and Abrel to play their arguments out ahead of time. Then, when he was done, he extracted his subminds and prepared to observe his experiment.

From blood rose Abrel, clad in a haemokinetic approximation of her combat skin, rising a half-meter taller than the shell-clad Aladon, wan of expression and unbalanced by his “return” to existence.

“Master’s light,” the Pearlguard whispered.

Abrel just sneered, her hawklike features and gleaming eyes casting scorn at everyone present—especially Draus. “Oh, good. You’re using your canons for a puppet show.”

Both stood apart from each other, faint strands of gold holding their shapes and guiding their actions.

->CANON: PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE - THE USER CAN CREATE AND STORE ACTIONS, CONSTRUCTS, AND MIRACLES WITHIN STRUCTURES OF FUTURE-FLUNG BLOOD; THESE STRUCTURES MUST BE TRIGGERED IN THE FUTURE AND GENERATE TEN TIMES THE REND COMPARED TO PRESENT-BASED HAEMOKINETICS

->Canon: My Blood The Harvester, My Flesh the Symphony (III) - Allows the user to grow, blend, or extract biological organisms and structures from their blood.

->Hubris: Another source of biomass must be present and in the area of influence or thaumic backlash will be inflicted. (6%)

REND CAPACITY [WOUNDMOTHER] - 9%

Chambers looked between the newly sculpted figures rising from the blood on the ground and frowned. “Uh, Avo. I know getting new canons is cool, but... what’s going on here? Are you about to have them debate for us or something? Or fight? Or... or... are they gonna.” He humped the air slightly.

Abrel closed her eyes. “I really wish you infused me with the act to cut that half-strand’s dick off.”

A moment’s confusion continued, but Denton, out of everyone present, was the first to understand. “Avo. Did you just... program two constructs with a set of possible actions and dynamic thoughts using blood, time, and your mind?”

“Prefer to thinking of it as cross-reality *pre-sequencing*.”