

# DYSTOPIAN AGE

## THE DARK COUNCIL OF THE HEX

*The Hex just wants to be left alone. Hunted across the galaxy, the Hex has come to Earth to find a new home for itself. It calls out to those similarly abused and victimised so that it might find companionship and learn from their culture and endeavours.*

*The Hex has no sense of right and wrong, it only knows survival and the loneliness that eons of persecution have brought about. On Earth it has made new allies and bonded with many who are similarly persecuted, but the Hex's gift of power is misused by humanity. Those who were the victim now have the strength to strike back at those who made them suffer. Led by a Dark Council the Hex manipulate and inveigle themselves in the great nations of the world, for only through control can they truly be safe.*

*From the pen of Doctor Burson Carpathian  
27<sup>th</sup> October 1871*

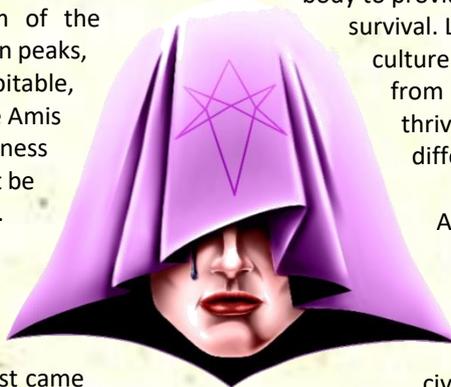
*My beloved Veronica.*

It is our anniversary once more and you are still not by my side. As I look back on the unfairness of our separation I cannot help but feel compelled to write this narrative in the hope that you might understand the nature of the faustian pact I have been forced to make. I hope that in reading it you will understand what it has cost me, and what it may yet cost me still.

It is said that life always finds a way to survive. Whether that is at the bottom of the oceans, upon the highest mountain peaks, or lost in the most inhospitable, scorching deserts. I remember the Amis speculating that even in the coldness of the aether, a flicker of life might be found. If they only knew the truth.

### DRIVE INCHOATE

The entity known as the Hex has existed for billions of years. Where it came from, or how it first came into being, none can say. Certainly, the Hex itself offers no explanation on the subject. It is a being devoid of the concept of history, it keeps no record and lacks all but the simplest memories of its own past. The Hex is the maxim of survival made manifest. It is barely aware and yet driven with a single-minded focus to survive at all costs. It is the quintessential fighter, an awareness of existence without an awareness of self, driven to continue to survive against all odds, no matter what opposition might rise up before it, no matter what the cost. Though that cost is great indeed.



### MIND WITHOUT THOUGHT

Beyond its unending drive to exist, the Hex lacks awareness as most sentients would understand such things. It is a disembodied force, a creature of energy that wants nothing more than to belong somewhere, to be a part of something and to survive. It is driven by instincts shared by every other organism in creation to do whatever it takes to continue its existence and to widen its understanding.

Lacking any true sentience of its own, the Hex is driven to bond with existing minds. In doing so, it is able to utilise those minds and the accompanying body to provide form, function and purpose to its survival. Lacking a history, higher calling, or a culture of its own, it assumes these things from its partnered organisms in order to thrive and perceive the universe through different eyes.

Although the Hex is unaware of its past on any practical level, the experiences that drive it exist somewhere in its being. It knows nothing of the Helmera, the first civilisation ever to host the Hex. It does not remember arriving on their planet of Kerin, or when it called out across that world to draw several sympathetically minded Helmera to it. There is no recollection of bonding with them for the first time. It cannot remember the flood of amazement and joy it felt upon first touching sentient minds, upon first looking at the universe with physical eyes.

But it does remember, on some primitive level at least, what happened next.



## THE BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

The Helmera were destroyed utterly. Targeted by some force from beyond Kerin, far outside the Hex's own experience, the entire civilisation was destroyed with a hatred it had never encountered before. First to die were those most closely related to the Hex. The entity had gifted vast stores of its own power to several of the Helmera, and these were the first to be destroyed. Then the Tenebrae Seed, the crystalline geode matrix through which the Hex interacted with the Helmera was destroyed. The energy force at the core of the being was diminished and damaged, driven back out into deep space.

The Hex does not remember the Helmera, but it does remember that it is hunted. The Hex does not remember the Cupash either, or the Sindar, or the Heelian nomads of the red planet. It has only the vaguest of recollections of the seventeen attempts it has made to find a refuge. The attempts to find a partner in the vastness of space only to be thwarted yet again by the hunters and forced to flee. Each time the Hex has been driven from its adoptive world by the hunters as they reduce to a charred husk the natives that had offered the Hex the one thing it craves: a home.

## THE SEEDS OF SURVIVAL

The hunters, known as the Order, are indefatigable. Driven by the need to survive against this ruthless threat, the Hex has developed all manner of defences. Upon arriving at a new planet, called there by some instinct it could never understand, it divides itself into six equal Tenebrae Seeds. Each Seed sinks through the crust of the planet, taking root far from prying eyes or population centres. In this way, it hides its power from those that might harm. At the site where each Seed sets hold, massive quantities of biological matter are converted into Hex Essence. This glowing, crimson ooze first forms a crystalline shell around the Tenebrae Seed, giving it physical form, and latterly creates a protective moat of viscous fluid hundreds of feet across. From this relative safety, each Seed calls out to sympathetic minds amongst the native population; the outcast, the pariahs, the castoffs of civilisation.

The Hex is a simple consciousness, yet eternal. It knows nothing of the temptations of mortal creatures, the lengths to which they might go to obtain power, and the depths to which they might sink to keep it. Once these kindred spirits link with

the Seed they can draw on a portion of its power and strength which allows them to build a network of further allies and support. This way those who are linked to each Seed develop the influence in the world necessary to protect themselves and the Hex as a whole. For physical succour, the Essence can be used to reshape biological matter so that the desires of a being's mind are made manifest in their flesh.

In exchange for this incredible power, each Seed shares its need for inclusion and understanding with those it brings into the fold, elevating them to positions of authority and, eventually, clandestine control over any other local factions. Through this eventual rise, the Hex consciousness develops, using each individual to multiply its own awareness, experiencing the physical realm through the culture and intellect of the host.

This process of influence and integration may take centuries if not millennia on a world to reach fruition. Once complete it is rare for the Hex to enjoy more than a few years of relative peace and security before the merciless Order return and wreak destruction on those carefully crafted societies, driving the Hex back out into the void once more.

Occasionally the Seed's call will go unanswered, its location is too remote for the natives to be aware or reach it. By dividing into six it ensures that even if one or two Seeds go unfound, enough of the other Seeds will make a connection to ensure its survival. The lost Seeds can then be rediscovered by agents of the Hex later in the process of connecting with the inhabitants. Each Seed is linked to the others and even if only one escapes the destruction of the world, the Hex will survive. On its long journey to a new home, the Hex will regenerate its missing substance until it is whole once again.

## THE DRIVE TO EARTH

The seventeenth attempt to create a home, on the planet Chy, was a true disaster. The emotional and spiritual connection between the Hex and the indigenous Chyne was particularly difficult. Perhaps due to their crystalline nature, true symbiosis with the Chyne remained elusive even up to the moment the dreaded Order arrived. This time, the Tenebrae Seeds had been unable to create a sufficiently influential group of followers, and those that had aided it were quickly discovered and destroyed. The Hex was driven out, vast portions of its Essence burned away as the planet was scoured in stellar flame.



The remaining awareness, insensate with agony and its usual unfocused, emotive existence, sought desperately for safety. Drifting near the solar system of the red planet it had once fled from aeons ago, for the first time the Hex found itself drawn back to a system it had visited before. Though the red planet had been lifeless for hundreds of millennia, its neighbour, a watery blue world was home to an emerging race of sentients known as humanity.

Not having recovered sufficiently, the Hex was only able to divide into four Seeds and fell to this new world in the hope that this might be its final home. The first landed in the northern hemisphere on an island known as known as Thera while the second landed near the frozen north of Europe. The third Seed fell far to the East in China, while the fourth landed far to the South in the steaming subtropical American swamplands that would in time become known as Florida.

Though some four thousand years before our present day, even then humanity was a diverse and complex a species as the Hex had ever encountered. While the first Seed found a solid foothold amongst the people of Thera, the second found none amongst the warring tribes of Northern Europe to link with. That second Seed instead watched and waited until the emergence of the Roman Empire before it felt the humans were advanced enough to begin to establish itself amongst the civilisation there.

The third Seed was supposedly found by monks of a particularly selfless and introverted nature known as the Tian Shang who took it back to their monastery in the mountains. I know not what happened to this Seed, for it is as lost to me as it is lost to the Hex. Perhaps the Celestians know more, but it plays no part in this narrative so let us give it no further thought.

The swamp-bound final Seed, so far away from the others, was left to its own devices. It waited, dormant and uncontacted for centuries beneath the Floridian swamps, the natives being warned away by their so-called Great Spirit that nothing good would come from contact. Unable to draw any of the local tribesmen into its sphere of influence, the Seed instead settled deeper into the wetlands. Its power leached through the murky water, drawing what sentience it could from the swamp dwellers and creatures of the dank, moss-shrouded wastes. Unbeknownst to the Seed, its seeping

power eventually reached a large, misshapen egg that had lain dormant, ossified for millions of years. The creature that had laid such an egg had passed from history so long ago there was no fossil remaining to tell of its existence. But nurtured with the crimson Essence of the Hex, the egg quickened, eventually hatching forth a creature who drew on the link with the Seed to develop a wicked intelligence and claim all of the surrounding bayous as her domain.

### **THE ALIEN WITHOUT**

After centuries on Thera, the first Seed developed its network among the sophisticated island culture. But then something extraordinary happened. Something that the Hex had not experienced on any of its previous host worlds. Its adoptive home was visited by aliens.

An alliance of different species, collectively known as Watchers, had arrived from off-planet. The Hex had never been present at a visit by extraterrestrials before. In all previous encounters with a new race of sentients, it had been the Hex who had been the alien presence arriving on their world. The Hex did not recognise any of the Watcher species and that was both a source of fascination as well as concern. As it would anywhere else, it immediately set about drawing several of these newcomers to itself, thinking to better understand their cultural ideologies if possible.

However, the Watchers had their own mandate on the Earth and having found agents of the Order already operating on the Earth they brought them to Thera, not understanding the consequences this would have for the Hex and its human allies. With no choices left to it, the Hex attacked, frantic to salvage what it could of the situation. The response from these Watchers was equally decisive and the island of Thera was engulfed in a fiery cataclysm, burying the Seed deep beneath countless tons of lava, stone, and seawater. Lost beneath the waves of what came to be called Mare Nostrum, the Seed was beyond the reach of the planet's inhabitants, no matter the power that might be offered.

### **A SLOW RESTORATION**

The other Tenebrae Seeds recoiled from the destruction of the Thera. Now the Hex was reduced to two active Seeds, and its situation proved desperate indeed for the merciless Order were doubtless still out there in the world.



It took more than a thousand years for the second Seed to work its council of allies into positions of influence and authority in the emerging European powers. Deep beneath the more obvious surface trappings of mortal power and prestige, these companions manipulated the rise of great empires that spread the influence of the Hex anew.

### **MY BURDEN**

On Earth, the humans who were drawn to the second Seed over time came to refer to themselves as the Dark Council. Each individual considered worthy enough to join with the Hex became a strong, driven leader despite their outcast status. The power gifted to them by the Hex made them formidable indeed. Linked as they were through the Seed, each member of the council was connected together on a fundamental, spiritual level. By entering a trance-like state the councillors could communicate with each other over vast distances and through this telepathy came to know the minds of the others. Over the centuries it became a tenet for the Dark Council (insofar as the Hex had the need for such rules), that none brought into its fold was capable of betraying its fellows. But the Hex had never encountered a mortal such as I, Burson Carpathian.

I had accomplished my scientific successes in virtual anonymity in Romania, sharing them with a small circle of friends and advisors through metered correspondence. All of my grand schemes were tossed to the wind when you, my beloved wife Veronica, fell ill with a wasting sickness so virulent that nothing I could do could halt its progress. It was at this lowest ebb, broken-hearted and despondent, that I inadvertently attracted the awareness of the Hex, an entity all too familiar with isolation and fear. Tasting my dreams, this kindred spirit reached out to touch my mind and introduce itself.

### **KINDRED**

As the alien sentience reached out and made itself known to me, it revealed its own desperate troubles and offered me a chance to bond with it. With a simplistic understanding of the physical universe, the Hex could not know how such an offer might be received by a man in my position. Nor could it know that in me it had met a being whose indomitable will and all-consuming passion would reshape the gift it offered into something that would change the world forever.

In desperation, and half thinking it was a delusion

of madness, I agreed and was drawn into the Dark Council of the Hex. I became immediately aware of other members in Europe, and elsewhere; the deeper and stronger pulses of energy and awareness flashing around the globe. I instinctively closed off his mind and fell to my knees, burdened with an intense, spiking pain which threatened to overwhelm me.

In that instant I not only gained the knowledge of all that had transpired for the Hex before this moment, but I discovered that not only was I blessed with a preeminent genius but that I am also blessed with a rare brain chemistry that enabled me to close off my mind to the others in the Dark Council. I would later learn that this was a talent never seen before in a human.

I had the ability to hear the thoughts of the others joined to the Hex Seed in Europe but could reveal nothing of my own mind to them, save that which I wished to. I was now part of a larger collective, something bigger than the man I had been and more far-reaching than even the Amis I corresponded with. I was part of the Dark Council of the Hex but on my own terms. A supremely advantageous situation, as I am sure you would agree, my dear.

### **THE ESSENCE**

I spent the next year learning all I could from the Hex and from the other members of the Dark Council. There was an easy familiarity among the Council due to the mental bonds that tied them together. I sensed very quickly that none of the others could isolate themselves from the gestalt in the way I had nor did they realise that I had done so. I parcelled out the occasional thought, the occasional scheme or secret so that they would believe the link to be truly two-way, but I determined to keep the knowledge of the true situation to myself.

I travelled all over Europe, maintaining and strengthening the protective web the Hex had spun around itself, gaining the full confidence of the other members. I discovered the nature of the Hex Seed and, most interestingly of all to me, that the base of this alien geode was a huge subterranean reservoir of a crimson fluid. The fluid was referred to as the 'Essence of the Hex', but other than helping fuel arcane powers or being ingested to cause physical mutation or transformation, the potential of the fluid was largely untapped. The viscous, crimson liquid was often provided to me in small doses as snuff and seemed to invigorate my



mind by its very presence. Tantalised by the properties of the Essence, I thought that it might hold the secret to returning you, my darling wife, to health. I spent my fiercely guarded free time studying the fluid, plumbing its mysteries and power, seeking to unlock the potential I saw in its vibrant ruby glow.

At the end of that first year, I felt the onset of crushing depression once again after coming to the conclusion that the Dark Council and their limited knowledge of the Essence could do nothing for you, my beloved Veronica. While the Dark Council continued to power play with the governments in Europe, I applied my scientific mind to the very nature of the Hex and its Essence. I quickly became convinced that the Hex itself did not comprehend the extent of its own power and how it truly interacted with the creatures of the Earth. The alien power was, in some ways, laughably naive to the darkness inherent in humanity and how that could spark human ingenuity. I came to see links and combinations between the powers of the Hex and my earlier experiments that hinted at far greater potential for this ruby Essence than even the Dark Council seemed to realise. The Hex could do nothing for you, but I was convinced there was something I could do to save you, given enough time. My goal was not a small one. Once I realised the full power of the Hex, I would settle for nothing short of mastery over death itself.

### **THE TAINTED AND THE HEX BEASTS**

I have observed that the Essence of the Hex can cause physical warping of creatures with prolonged exposure to it. In its captive state when used as RJ-1027 power cells (I will explain about these later, I promise), the Essence is relatively harmless, however, should it be ingested, injected or otherwise absorbed into the body the effect is quite different. The subject quickly exhibits the signs of Hex taint: their skin takes on an unhealthy pallor and their emotions are heightened to an intoxicating level. The eyes of a tainted individual may also occasionally display a crimson tint that flashes and fades under certain conditions. The experience is highly addictive, but is not a true connection with the Hex.

Should a tainted subject be mortally wounded there is a chance, particularly if their death is drawn out, that in their final desperate moments they will inadvertently make contact with the Hex. At the crossroads of death, the most likely response to a pitiful cry for mercy or salvation is the silence of the looming void. Rarely though, the taint within them

makes a true connection to the Hex and they are infused with new life and energy. This is a crucial moment, only those with the strongest minds and sense of self can hold the energies in check. Should an individual have the strength of character a bond with the Hex requires, they return to full health and live to fight again. Those found wanting cannot control the energies unleashed through their being and their flesh immediately begins to warp, their organs liquefying into volatile Hex Essence and, wailing pitifully, the cage of flesh stands again as a mindless Hex Beast. Mercifully such creatures do not live long. The Essence in their bodies catalyses quickly and within a few hours or days reaches a critical mass and they explode violently. There are tales of Hex Beasts that have retained a link to their former lives or have fallen under the influence of a powerful agent of the Hex and continue to function for months if not years after their transmutation. But such stories are rare and for most the path of a Hex Beast leads only to a volatile and violent death.

### **ENLIGHTENING OPPORTUNITY**

My peers in the scientific community of the Amis had begun to band together into a new organisation - the Covenant of the Enlightened. Ever the opportunist, I applied my genius to the aims of that new collective on the chance that they might further my goals. Gaining the trust and favour of various members of the Dark Council over a further two years, I was finally granted knowledge of the location of the European Hex Seed, buried deep beneath the small city of Innsbruck, Austria, high in the Alps. As a member of the Enlightened, I now had the resources to act.

I had been busy using my fierce intellect and will to obfuscate my intentions. Trusting your brother, Vlad, to help me bring together a loyal coterie of fellow countrymen, I used my contacts in the Covenant of the Enlightened like Herman Haupt and Gustav Eiffel to supply the machinery and expertise needed to make my plan a reality. My first act against the Hex was to break through the walls of the Schloss Ambras using Haupt's giant drilling machines and mechanical excavators. Once inside, your brother and his men ruthlessly dispatched the Hex-warped creatures guarding the site while I focussed on drilling down into the reservoir of Essence beneath the Schloss and the massive Hex Seed that lay at its centre.

The roughly cylindrical geode was over twenty feet long, thick as four men standing cheek to jowl, and warm to the touch. The enormous opal-like mineral



was placed into a stirginium-lined casket, before being loaded onto a purpose-built wagon. The moment the casket was sealed, the Dark Council realised something was terribly wrong. Although their gestalt ability to communicate as a collective remained, their arcane connection with the Hex itself had been severed. The servants of the Dark Council arrived to reinforce the site only to find my Enlightened and the Seed were already gone.

All this I did in secret, even from you, my beloved. You were so sick that I did not want to worry you with the risks I was willing to take. That journey as we absconded to the New World together was the beginning of my new nightmarish existence as no sooner did we arrive than you were taken from me. Though death claimed you for now, I swore then and there that I would dedicate all my genius to have you alive and at my side, no matter how long it took.

I placed the crystalline Seed at the centre of my burgeoning industrial empire spreading from a factory-fortress I built in the American Wild West. From this base, I was able to utilise the crimson Hex Essence to power a raft of new technologies. To hide its origins, I branded the power source RJ-1027 and claimed that I had invented it myself. On today of all days I hope you appreciate the meaning of those numbers, my love. Working from my stronghold, I spread this technology, and the Essence of the Hex, over the entire continent.

### **A NEW DARK COUNCIL**

Elsewhere in the New World, the final Seed had not been idle these past centuries. The nazombu witch Marie Laveau had claimed the artefact as her own power source to rule over the denizens of the bayous as their queen. This channelling of the Seed's energy was a beacon to those that had been touched by the Hex in the past.

Having been hidden amongst humanity for centuries, the enigmatic Shepherdess arrived at Laveau's court. With the ability to mimic the form of humanity, the Shepherdess claimed to have first bonded with the Hex on the long-forgotten island of Thera. Laveau sensed within the stranger something other-worldly yet also the touch of something familiar. While the Shepherdess was certainly not human, it was evident that she had been linked with the Hex and through that bond could share her ability to disguise her true form. With this gift, Laveau was able to move amongst humanity and spread her influence free of the revulsion that her true form evoked in mankind. In

the Shepherdess, Laveau realised that she had perhaps found a true ally.

The Shepherdess was not alone, however, for the beast-lord Carcosa Rex had answered the call of the Hex and presented himself and his people as another ally to the nazombu. Rex told the story of his people, that they were the true inheritors of the Earth, the first people created by the Great Spirit in ages past. But the Great Spirit was ashamed by the Carcosa's bestial nature and abandoned them in favour of creating humanity. Competing for resources in those early days, the human usurpers hunted the Carcosa almost to extinction. Now Rex and his kind numbered less than three dozen and had heard the call of the Hex. Perhaps, by joining with the others Rex could obtain the salvation for the Carcosa he so desperately sought and of course revenge on mankind.

In these three individuals, the Hex had found itself a new Dark Council.

### **CONTACT**

With the abduction and repurposing of their Tenebrae Seed, the Dark Council in Europe had instantly lost their connection to the Hex. They remained politically inveigled and hugely influential despite the physical loss of power but their ability to trust each other and influence the Crown, Commonwealth, Imperium and Alliance was beginning to fade. They had to track me down and reconnect with the Hex.

Eventually, the Europeans learned that Laveau, Rex and the Shepherdess had formed their own Dark Council, a unique alliance that excluded mankind. That could not be allowed to continue. The enigmatic Third Man was dispatched as an envoy from Europe to this new Dark Council. After a meaningful display of his power which resulted in the death of the Shepherdess, the Third Man was accepted by Rex and Laveau and together the three of them launched a clandestine war against my fellow members of the Covenant of the Enlightened in a bid to reach me and find the stolen Hex Seed.

This war did not come without terrible cost. Since the disaster at Thera, the Hex had avoided contact or conflict with the Order through maintaining a low profile, its supporters working from the shadows to establish and maintain the protection it needed. Now it is impossible for things to return to the way they were. With my distribution of RJ-1027 over an entire continent, and a growing conflict that might soon break out into the public consciousness,



the Hex's drive to survive means that even if I can be found and dealt with, the status quo can never return.

The hunters of the Order have emerged, and it is surely now only a matter of time before all-out war breaks out once more and this world, like the seventeen that went before it, may burn in starfire.

The Hex clings to hope. Hope to forestall the seemingly inevitable by seizing back from me the technologies and the power I stole. Hope that then the Hex might be able to burrow deeper into the societies of Earth. Hope that this time, unlike all those times before, the Order will not burn the Hex's adopted home to ash in an attempt to destroy it.

This is the price I am willing to pay, for what do I care of the world if you are not in it?

Yours forever,

*Burson*