

# DYSTOPIAN AGE

## THE WATCHERS HEGEMONY

*A pan-galactic group that consists of dozens of species all working together to a common cause, the Watchers have been observing humanity for thousands of years. Their standing order is not to involve themselves in the affairs of a sentient species until they reach a level of technological and cultural sophistication. Once this level is reached, the Watchers reveal themselves and the world is honoured by joining the Watcher Hegemony.*

*On Earth there is something wrong. Outside influences are interfering with humanity's development. Technologies are available that are decades, if not centuries, beyond their time. The Watchers came to the Earth to free humanity from the various unnatural influences that had taken hold, however recent events have caused their mission to change. One day the Watchers will be able to recontact their people and bring the full might of the Hegemony to this backwater ball of dirt. Until then, the Watchers rebuild their forces in secret, raiding settlements for raw materials and hunting down those who would threaten their own survival on this harsh and unforgiving alien world.*

*Diagnostic Event Recital  
Amber Alpha Jocasta*

For over six thousand years the Watchers have maintained peace in the galaxy. Led by the noble Guardians, the Hegemony of Watcher Clades have worked in unity to observe the myriad worlds for those that might bear sentient life. Where such worlds show promise, closer scrutiny is conducted. Self-awareness in life is both a blessing and a burden on all other sentients. Over the watchful millennia, should that new species evolve to a maturity that enhances the galaxy, they are welcomed into the Watchers and the species is re-engineered as a new Clade. Each Clade has a function in the Watchers, from the crystalline architects of the Indigo Clade to the personal protection services of the Vermillion Clade. However, should the emergent race prove to have no purpose save that of being selfish, warlike, aggressive or unreasoning then they are considered a threat to other sentients of the galaxy. In such circumstances, the Watchers act without compunction to eradicate the species and reset the primordial elements once more so that the world might give rise to a worthier race in the future.

### THE ARKVULTS

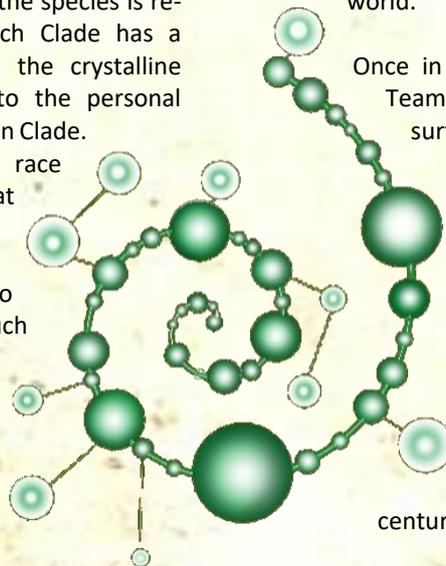
Travel between the stars is a lengthy and complex process. Early in their history, thanks to technology gleaned from the relics of a dead world, the Guardians developed and seeded large portal

gateways at key points across the galaxy traversing distances that would otherwise take centuries. Travelling from their idyllic Sphere-Worlds through this network of portals, the Watchers use large spacecraft known as Arkvauls to extend their vigil to the hundreds of thousands of planets that harbour sentient life. These city-sized starships contain all the resources needed to carry out the Watchers' mandate. Species from all the Clades are held in stasis in these immense craft for while the journey between portals is near instantaneous, the journey within the star system itself can take a week until the ship is in position above the target world.

Once in orbit, the Watchers' Observation Teams are able to make journeys to the surface in moments utilising shorter ranged portals. In this manner, the Watchers can conduct a thorough analysis of each of the worlds in their care. As an Arkvault is responsible for routinely checking on hundreds of worlds and so once the observation is complete, the team transmits their findings and the Arkvault departs for the next sentient world. The return of an Arkvault to a world within a century is seen only in cases of urgency.

### THE HUMAN CONUNDRUM

The emergent human race first drew the closer scrutiny of the Watchers around four thousand years ago. A team of Watchers (known as a myriad) from the Azure and Cerulean Clades discovered something surprising while making a routine





observation. Infiltrating the primitive society on the island of Thera, the Cerulean were impressed to find a cultured and innovative people. Reference was made to an even more advanced civilisation on a distant island in the Sea of Atlantis. The Azure Clade traversed the waters using their Etherwings, leaving the Cerulean to continue inveigling themselves into the higher echelons of Thera society.

Crossing the sea, the Azure Clade arrived on the island of Atlantea and found an unprecedented level of technological sophistication and organisation for a civilisation as primitive as the humans were believed to be. No species had made such a technological leap in isolation from the others of their kind. How could it be that the Atlanteans appeared to have mastered cold fusion while every other settlement on the planet was still struggling with glass making and erecting stone monoliths? Returning to their Cerulean allies, the Azure agreed to portal back to the orbiting Arkvult and inform the Hegemony of this unexpected development.

### **A SURPRISING WELCOME**

A larger team under the command of a Viridian Alpha arrived a few days later including myriad from the Grey, Azure, Icterine, Magenta and Viridian Clades. Charged with obtaining specimens of these advanced humans for further study, the Watchers emerged from the portal gateway on Thera to find the Cerulean waiting for them without the need of subterfuge. The natives seemed unconcerned by the arrival of the otherworldly visitors and the Cerulean quickly explained that the humans in Thera had discovered their mimicry not long after the Azure had left. Rather than being fearful, the Therans had welcomed them as brothers. The Viridian Alpha was suspicious of this ready acceptance. In her experience, such a fundamental shift in a culture's beliefs should not so easily be made. Focussing on the mission at hand Icterine Engineers and the Grey built a staging ground near the township of Akrotiri while a reconnaissance force of Azure and Magenta was despatched to Atlantea. Arriving in Atlantea the Magenta managed to abduct several of the humans before the armed militia, known as Spica, began to respond. Surprisingly disciplined and accurate, the rifles of the Spica cut down many of the Azure and Magenta before they could escape with their captives. Returning to Thera, the Atlantean prisoners were quickly transported back to the Arkvult while the Viridian Alpha had the Greys tend to the wounded as she prepared her

remaining forces for the next action decided upon by the Hegemony.

### **INTERFERENCE**

Aboard the Arkvult, the analysis of the humans was fascinating. Though they had potential to be a superb addition to the Watchers with their creativity and determination, it was clear that some external agency had influenced the humans of Atlantea. Though the humans themselves had been conditioned by some pseudo-religious doctrine it was clear that a greater intelligence was at work feeding them technological and cultural directives through their subconscious. Identified only as The Order, this previously unknown species appeared to be extra-galactic or possibly even extra-dimensional. Both of these concepts had hitherto only been theorised by the Hegemony.

Interviewing the captive Atlanteans, the Watchers deduced that they were proxies in some kind of war between the Order and another party known as the Hex. According to the Atlanteans, the Hex were a dark corruptive stain on humanity and their purpose was to cleanse that stain from the Earth. Regardless of how apparently well-intentioned the Order might be, the interference in the natural development of a sentient species could not be tolerated even if the Order were restricting their influence to the island of Atlantea. Furthermore, no sign of a corrupting dark empire could be identified on the planet. As the alien masters of the Order could not be communicated with, the Watchers had no alternative but to remove their agents from the Earth to prevent further interference.

### **BETRAYAL AT THERA**

While the Watchers aboard the Arkvult made plans to excise the island of Atlantea, the reconnaissance force at Thera was instructed to cease work on the observation post and withdraw all assets from the planet. The Viridian Alpha passed on this news to the Clades under her command and was surprised when the Cerulean petitioned to be allowed to remain, in direct contradiction of the directive given by the Hegemony. Surprise turned to alarm when, after denying this request, the Cerulean withdrew from the other Clades and entered a discussion with the Therans. The reaction was swift and unexpected as the Icterine and Viridian were attacked by murderous humans and monstrous creatures emerging from subterranean lairs. As the Cerulean psionically battered her to the ground and the blades of the humans pierced her chest the Viridian Alpha realised too late that she



had found the Hex.

### **JUDGEMENT OF THE WATCHERS**

Unaware of the slaughter of their kin at Akrotiri, the Arkvault in orbit targeted the island city of Atlantea with a simple sequence of commands. The starship's large portal generators instantly dematerialised a twenty-kilometre wide sphere of matter that included the island and the surrounding bedrock. After a split second, the waves rushed in to fill the void with a roar. As the sea settled there was no trace that the island had ever existed, save for the perfectly smooth kilometres wide gouge in the bedrock thousands of fathoms below the surface. As for Atlantea, rather than rematerializing in another location, the island remained as energy that was harmlessly vented into space. Atlantea and all its people were gone and with them the Order's connection to the Earth.

### **A DESPERATE ACT**

As the only survivors remaining from the surprise attack by the Hex, two wounded Grey managed to fall back to the geothermal generator that had been installed to power the partially constructed Watcher base. As the Hex beasts and hordes of grimly determined humans approached, the Grey realised that there would be no escape for them. Not willing to allow the human's betrayal to go unpunished, the Grey overloaded the geothermal reactor beginning a chain reaction through the crust and into the magma vent below. Joining hands in a last moment of comfort, the pair were annihilated as a detonation ripped through the island causing a volcanic eruption so massive that the Arkvault in orbit could observe its effect. Thera was obliterated as were the Hex corrupted humans and all trace of the Watchers on Earth. The distant lands of Egypt and China would record storms of ash and fire in the sky that year and whole communities were washed away by the tsunami caused by the vanishing of Atlantea and the annihilation of Thera.

### **RENEWED OBSERVANCE**

For several months the Watchers on the orbiting Arkvault scanned for any sign of the Order or the Hex. A heavily armed observation team consisting of myriad from the Viridian and Azure Clades made several inspections over the following weeks and even infiltrating myriad from the Cerulean and Magenta Clades could find no trace of the influence of either faction on the Earth. Satisfied, the Arkvault departed once more, with a follow-up mission scheduled for fifty years time. When that also found

no sign of continued interference the centuries passed and the observations became less frequent. Humanity continued to develop and it was hoped that after several more millennia the species might prove worthy of fulfilling their potential and take their place amongst the Watchers. Elsewhere in the galaxy, the Watchers searched for evidence of the Hex or Order on any other world of sentients but found none. Disturbingly, however, in the ruins of two dead worlds, fragments of technology were discovered. Though millennia old, the technology bore the hallmarks of those weapons used by the Spica of Atlantea and though there was no sign of life on either world perhaps there had been long ago.

### **RESURGENCE**

It had been almost over a century since the last observation when the Arkvault arrived in orbit. At first, all appeared as unremarkable as before, but a survey team from the Indigo Clade detected anomalous portal activity in South America. After a Magenta Beta and myriad were dispatched to the jungles to investigate it was found that an entire indigenous people had vanished. Suspecting the involvement of the Hex or the Order a reconnaissance force consisting of Cerulean, Azure, Icterine and Grey Clades was deployed to thoroughly chart every human population and identify any extra-planetary influence. Very quickly it became apparent that the dominant culture on the continent of Europe was being used by agents of the Order. It logically followed that the Hex would be present elsewhere on the globe.

According to the reckoning of the European humans, the year was 1518 and it was anticipated that before the next century was at an end, the Europeans would have spread to the lands they referred to as the New World. The Watchers concluded that this expansion would spread the agents of the Order and the Hex further across the planet and it might be impossible to remove them strategically. The Watchers were left with the unpleasant realisation that if they did not act soon they might need to exterminate a large proportion of humanity to prevent further corruption of their natural development. The Hegemony concluded that a decisive strike force must be deployed and remove the Hex and Order once and for all.

### **THE CLADES ASSEMBLE**

Operational command of the battlegroup was given to the Alphas of the Clades involved. Consisting primarily of myriad from the Viridian, Magenta,



Icterine, Indigo, Cerulean and Grey Clades, the battlegroup was charged principally with the salvation of humanity. Translocating from the orbiting Arkvault, the host of some two thousand Watchers arrived ready for deployment. The Grey aboard the Arkvault had identified a suitable landing point to construct a base of operations. The Grey, Icterine and Indigo translocated to the surface on the islands of Bimini. Mindful of the attack on their forces by the natives all those years ago, the islands were cleared of its indigenous population and the Watchers began to assemble an armoured beachhead from which the campaign could be conducted.

### **FOOTHOLD**

To ensure a ready supply of material and troops for the task at hand, a gateway was opened linking the base at Bimini with the orbiting Arkvault. Over the following months, the initial forces were expanded with the arrival of myriad from the Azure, Vermillion, Amber, Onyx, and Umber Clades. Their numbers now swelling to over four thousand the base was extended further below the surface. Geothermal generators and atomic batteries were installed to supply auxiliary power, though primary power was still supplied through the link with the orbiting Arkvault. Scouting myriad from the Magenta and Azure Clades were deployed to not only secure the surrounding territory but also search for traces of the Order or the Hex.

### **THE DELUSION OF MAN**

While the Watchers were busy preparing to strike down the Order in Europe, the human explorer Juan Ponce de Leon and his Conquistadores had arrived in the Bahamas looking for the fabled Fountain of Youth. The activity of the Watchers had convinced the natives that something supernatural was taking place and when rumours reached Ponce de Leon, he became convinced that the goal of his quest must lie there. Defeating an unsuspecting patrol of Grey, the Conquistadores managed to gain access to a service tunnel. Adventuring beneath the islands many of the Conquistadores were killed or lost in the labyrinthine network of corridors and vents. Fortune smiled on Ponce de Leon, as by chance he managed to avoid detection by the Watchers - until an encounter with a Magenta Lurker raised the alarm.

By this point the Conquistadores were deep in the alien complex and, though they viewed the place as an ancient temple of the gods, they understood enough of the architecture to know that the

chamber ahead of them was a place of great importance. In actuality, the humans had found the temporal relay substation that supported the uplink to the orbiting Arkvault. This apparatus was an essential part of the portal technology and compensated for the natural drift in space-time when using a portal over hundreds of kilometres. The temporal regulator array was aboard the Arkvault but as the portal was required to be open to the planet for a prolonged period, the Icterine had incorporated a relay substation planetside to support the efforts of the ship. While his men ambushed the demons they found deeper in the cave (actually Icterine and Grey working in the chamber), Ponce de Leon stood transfixed by the shimmering fountain of light at its centre. Light streamed from him as he crossed invisible protective shields and entered the hazardous heart of the chamber. He was bathed in temporal energy, feeling both rejuvenated and impossibly ancient at once.

As though on holy or sacred ground, Ponce De Leon took a golden goblet from his knapsack and placed it into the fountain as though it would be filled with life-giving waters. In a split second, his hand aged centuries and then was gone. The goblet fell from his grasp and tumbled into the volatile heart of the relay below. As he spun around, clutching the withered stump of his hand, the sound of klaxons wailed and the chamber shook. Monstrous Magenta scuttled across the ceiling and the entrance was barred by a myriad of Vermillion Sentinels. The Conquistadores numbered less than a dozen and each man knew that this must be their end. Then a pulse of white light filled the chamber and all was still.

### **THE LINK IS SEVERED**

The gold from the goblet caused a spectacular and unanticipated chain reaction to ripple through the apparatus. The shockwave pulsed back through the collapsing portal vaporising all the Watchers within half a kilometre of the portal gate on the surface. Within the relay chamber and the surrounding complex, the Watchers and Conquistadores were frozen in an instant of time, protected from the terrible firestorm that raged above them. The energy that pulsed through the portal exploded inside the orbiting Arkvault, causing crippling damage to the city-sized starship. With a flash that lit up the sky, the Arkvault broke open and its shattered hull plunged towards the planet. Even as its superstructure began to break apart as it slew through the atmosphere, the Watchers on the bridge of the Arkvault desperately tried to slow the



craft and ensure that the impact did not cause apocalyptic devastation to the planet. Using what remained of their dying strength, the Watchers ploughed the ship into the uninhabited frozen southernmost continent. The impact was felt in many parts of the southern hemisphere and caused tsunamis and firestorms that killed thousands, but the impact was not the planet killer it could have been and the shattered city-ship was buried under the frozen sprawl of Antarctica.

### **A NEW WORLD**

In the outpost chamber, after what seemed like mere seconds had passed, the light faded and the Watchers recovered their senses. The Conquistadores had vanished, presumably vaporised and the surviving Alphas quickly moved to assess their own situation. The lower levels of the facility were intact but everything from the first sub-level and higher was completely destroyed. As the Grey brought the geothermal generators online and the Icterine began to make sufficient repairs to power up the surviving systems, establishing contact with the Arkvault proved impossible. Once interference had been discounted a closer examination revealed that the starship was gone, presumably destroyed by the same cataclysm that had scourged the base. The Indigo managed to smash their way to the surface and a myriad of Azure were dispatched to reconnoitre the immediate area. What they found was at first confusing. The Humans from Europe had settled the areas previously uninhabited or inhabited by the indigenous peoples. Furthermore, their technology seemed significantly in advance of where it had been only hours earlier. Cerulean infiltrators contacted the nearby human colony in the guise of travelling natives and confirmed the terrible truth that more than three centuries had passed on the Earth while the Watchers were frozen. The year according to human reckoning was 1868.

### **AN UNCERTAIN PRESENT**

Looking to their strength, the Alphas could count on less than four hundred Watchers from the combined Clades. This was not only insufficient to carry out their primary mission but was also lacking the capability to immediately improve their current situation. The Watchers on Earth were left with a troubling matter, after three and a half centuries why had the Hegemony not sent another ship? Presumably, their own Arkvault had been destroyed but the lack of an update after a year or more would have been sufficient time for a

response. Yet nothing had arrived. Why?

Riven by uncertainty, the Clades fell into quarrelling and disharmony. The Amber Alpha acted quickly and decisively to give them purpose once more. For the present, they would have two key objectives with each Clade contributing to them as best they could. The first objective would be to construct a large portal here on the Earth to reconnect with the Sphere-Worlds. Though activating such a portal would cause devastation for hundreds of kilometres around, it would be a small price to pay to reconnect with their kin. Such a portal would require a significant quantity of materials, some of which would be difficult to source or replicate. The construction would likely take the best part of a decade to complete. In parallel to this first objective would be the second, to carry out the mission as given to them by the Hegemony. Seek out the Hex and Order influence on humanity and eradicate any trace of it. This eradication would include any allies of these forces as well as any trace of technology or other interference with the natural progression of humanity.

Already the Grey have begun construction of a new portal facility deep in Superstition Mountain in the Arizona Territory. Incubation chambers have been designed by the Grey Elite and Icterine that will enable a new generation of Grey to be cloned to reinforce the existing Clades. The Watchers are not sufficiently numerous to conduct a large-scale open conflict on the Earth and so, for now, must carry out their two-fold mission discretely lest their enemies move too quickly against them.