

# **Beneath the Shroud of Lunacy**

It is from within the confines of my cell that I write to you now; write to you not of my own volition, but after much force presented on the part of the warden. It is the belief of the professors here, within the asylum that is, that personal journals, such as this, act therapeutically to cleanse the minds of those cloistered within its dank bastille. Insofar as the doctors choose to believe, my ailment is not one that can be cured through any means, save those of a metaphysical nature of course: and so my curse will forever be to stare at the impenetrable darkness of mine own cell's walls, my mind unable to fathom the possibility of a discharge from this institution. Those memories gained from that summer morn shall forthright be present in my mind until the ever-constant spheres of heaven themselves cease to revolve, and perpetual day itself arrives, banishing the night, and with it, my nightmares, to a plane devoid of existence. Since first stepping foot upon this strange world many years ago, I knew that an arcane secret was being kept, and that one day, whatever the cost, I would crack the enigma that is life. I have cracked this ancient cipher, and the cost extracted was no less than my sanity.

My great discovery was made whilst transversing the desert on that fateful summer day, searching for none other than that which I soon found. I uncovered a mysterious crevice in the dunes, obviously much too large to have been created by human hands, and yet also far too refined to have existed as a result of the natural forces that drive this land. Intrigued, I entered to investigate. It wasn't long before I truly understood the scope of what I had found; the crevice appeared to be the entrance of a tunnel, and it was clear that the exit wasn't too far along. As I strode through the hallowed halls, sanctified by centuries of calm, I admired the odd etchings covering the walls. They seemed to depict a race, not too dissimilar from our own, and their conquests and tribulations over a lengthy period of time. At first I thought I had simply uncovered the adobe of an ancient line of people, however those thoughts were extinguished upon entering the next segment of the underground structure.

As I reached the end of the tunnel, my eyes having adjusted to the unimaginable darkness of its walls, I found myself blinded by the luminosity of the next room. Trembling in fear as an outline of what lay before me slowly crept into view, I found myself plagued by a chronic inability to turn back. The thought of facing that which filled the black orifice before me was unable to outweigh the intense curiosity I felt at that moment: and so I stepped forward into the primeval ruins which beckoned my arrival. Where at first I envisioned the tunnel being no more than a simple desert dwelling, I now realized that it was none other than the forgotten civilization of a race long gone. I began my descent down the precipitous stairs below, slowly making my way towards the largest of the skewed buildings which lay ahead. I seemed correct in my assumption that this locale's entrance was not constructed by human hands, for the architecture I now found myself examining was in no way fit for human use; the archways I walked beneath were almost cyclopean in nature, reminiscent of the tall walls of Tiryns or Argos I so often found myself called to examine. It would require a thousand human hands to lift a boulder the fraction of the size I saw within the fortifications around me. Again, the fear of the unknown returned, and I questioned whether all the knowledge in the world would be worth what I knew this fear was doing to me.

Eventually, returning to my senses, I stepped into the eldritch structure, finding myself within another hall, this one longer than the first. I continued along the linear path for quite a while, before realizing that these walls too were covered in strange engravings. Observing them as I continued through the halls, I began to notice a trend; just as before, these walls displayed victories and failures of some sort, however the inclination of the floor also seemed to reflect that which I saw before me: with triumphs came a rise in elevation, just as the opposite seemed true. For a moment, I found myself moving upwards steadily, rising towards the firmament, or so it seemed. With time however, humanity seemed to cease improving in the slightest, and the hall began to dip, slowly at first, towards the hell that lay below. Foreseeing what I knew would soon follow, I found myself sprinting along this path of

destruction, the prophecies on the walls shooting past in a blur of events come and gone. Then, in my flurry of psychosis, I reached the end of the path and was forced to stop. Looking up at what lay ahead, I saw a single wall blocking my path; and what lay on this wall is the image that will haunt me long past my death. It was not the etching itself that that drove me to the mental state I find myself in today, but instead what was meant by the simple image shown within the stone carving. I saw, in the background of the image, the very hall I had just run through; and upon the final canvas within the hall, an unfinished etching, with its artist working his hand upon its contours. As I moved my eyes upwards towards his face, I found myself panicking as I imagined what I would find. The legs, the torso, and the arms all looked familiar, and my fear only grew with each passing second. With one final, reluctant glance upwards, I saw that which I knew I would find the whole time, a face bearing features similar to mine own, no- a face that was my own. The etchings I passed had shown every event that had made humans become what they were today, and the one that lay before me, showed that which would undo who we were: I had seen myself painting the destruction of my species, and I realized that soon enough, I would fulfill this prophecy, just as all others were fulfilled before it.

It is from within the confines of my cell that I write to you now; and it is from within the confines of my cell that my spark will soon go out. I have seen what I will do- what I must do, and yet I cannot let it come to pass. I've heard tales of great heroes sacrificing themselves for the people they love, and I now understand the meaning of this sacrifice. Before the night is through, I must end the life of one, in order to save the lives of many, lest my greatest fears may come to pass, and I'll have worse than death to answer for.