



# Prologue

**D**awn comes, as it always does. The sighted often fail to appreciate that the rising of the sun is an experience to be felt rather than simply observed. Its radiance stimulates your dark skin in ways your unseeing eyes have never known.

This may be the last time you feel it.

You were born for one purpose: survive, ageless and vigilant, in the forbidding and uncanny realm of the Elder Things, and close the portal should it ever open again. It has been almost one year since you failed in that purpose - one year since Cthulhu escaped to Earth and began to feed on the collective psyche of its inhabitants.

Within a month, hospitals and mental care facilities were overflowing across the world. Billions of people live in terror of the mind-rending visions haunting their sleep - images of impossible shapes and a dead city, and the whisper of sanity's edge.

“Death?”

You knew the woman was standing in your room's doorway before she opened her mouth. “Shannon. Are you ready?”

A genuine pause, followed by equally genuine determination. “Yes. I have to be.”

“Then let's go.” You stand up from the wooden chair and slip past her. The smells of your custom-designed room, of old wood and older stone, are replaced by those of the sterile metal and processed air of the Devil's Triangle facility, deep beneath the ocean.

You hear Shannon's footsteps alongside yours. Her breathing is deep and controlled - just like you'd been teaching her. Deep breathing means a deep sleep. “Everyone's ready,” she says quietly.

You smile knowingly. “You're allowed to be nervous. I'm sure Harrison's worse than you.” She stifles a laugh.

The hallway leads to a single door, with a single dead-end room behind it. The word ‘ONEIRONAUTICS’ is written above the entrance - or so you're told. A sufficiently confusing word for what you and your team have been doing here for the last nine months.



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You and Shannon step through, and lock the door behind you. As always, you can tell the large, dark room is empty except for an arrangement of five bed-like slabs around a cylindrical device in the space's centre.

Three of the beds are already occupied, and you don't need your eyesight to recognise the presence of the only friends you have in this world. One of the occupants is a tall, gangly man muttering to himself - Harrison McCloud, a long-time engineer with Devil's Triangle and designer of the strange cylindrical Somnus machine sitting just behind his head. Not the best dreamer, but without him, you would never have been able to bestow your unique abilities upon anyone.

Beside him lies Penny Earhart - small, blonde, confident, and the strongest person you've met in your brief time back on the planet. Her self-discipline makes her an incredibly lucid dreaming partner to have. "You're finally here!" she breathes. "Please, remind Harry we can all hear him."

"Lamar finds it comforting," says the man on the third occupied bed in his usual third-person manner. Lamar Benson had become such an avid and adept oneiro-naut in the last year that he had given up flying and apparently 'really let himself go', a phrase evidently only meaningful to the sighted.

Shannon takes her place on the bed next to Harrison, her partner, and whispers something to him. His response - "I'm fine, I'm fine!" - was somewhat more audible. You take the opportunity to slowly raise one hand up to your face, feeling the featureless wooden mask you find there. Gently, you remove it and place it on the floor at your feet, before sliding gracefully onto the final bed.

"You know why we're here, and what we're doing," you say. "We're going to dream, just like we've practiced. But we're going to keep dreaming, and keep going deeper, until we get to -"

"Please don't say it," whispers Harrison. "I hate that word. Use that other word instead."

You smile. "OK. We're going to get to... Limbo. We're going to find Cthulhu, and drive it out of collective minds and back into oblivion."

"Starting the machine," says Harrison, more firmly. "Good night, everyone."

Silence fills the room, punctuated only by the sound of liquid chambers filling in the Somnus. As consciousness fades out, you murmur one last thing.

"Remember... close your eyes."