



A post-apocalyptic future where Plato's "Republic" becomes terrifying reality.

REPUBLIC LOST

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REPUBLIC LOST

A Novel by J. Paul Rinnan

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ISBN 978-1-61434-273-1

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Cover art by Todd Engle

Map art by S.C. Watson Illustration (www.oreganoproductions.com)

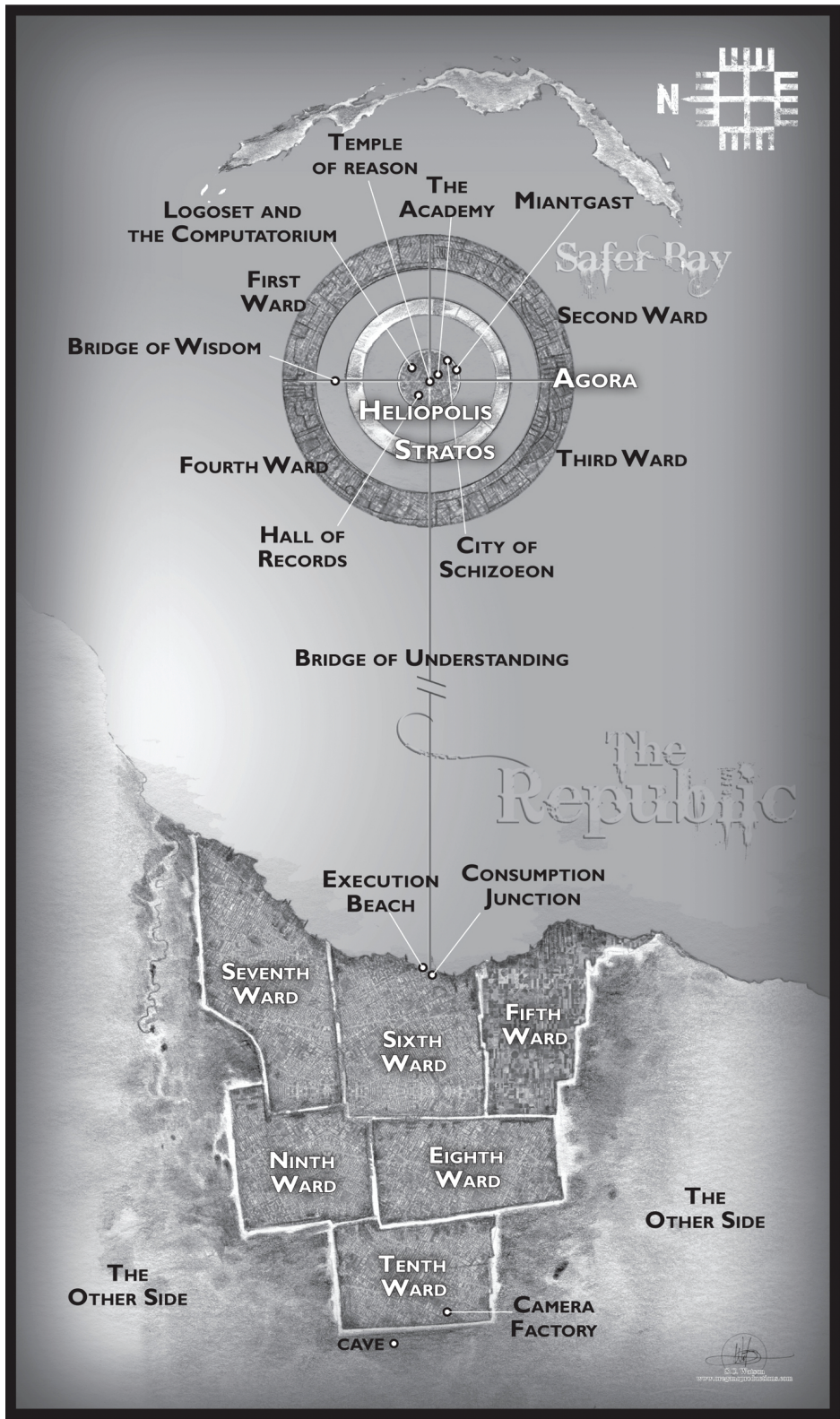
Printed in the United States of America.

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2011

First Edition





We are compelled by the truth to say that no city, constitution, or individual man will ever become perfect until some chance event compels those few philosophers who are not vicious to take charge of a city, whether they want to or not, and compels the city to obey them, or until a god inspires the present rulers and kings or their offspring with a true erotic love for true philosophy.

Plato, *Republic*, 499b

Every trace of anarchy should be utterly eradicated from all the life of men.

Plato, *Laws*, 942d

Give me the high eye
To see like Kabiri,
Fly up the dream heights
Kissing eternal light.
Come show me Fate's Form
Daughters of the storm,
Break all psychosis
Blocking henosis.

Initiation Mantra of the Kabiri Mysteries

BOOK I

THE CALL OF KABIRI

I § 1 THE CAVE

Beneath the rocky earth outside the Republic, beside a shimmering river, the helot boy Glaucou played within a world of shadows. His cave was his own, and he explored the dripping darkness. Every morning he searched the cavern's passages as if they were his own body. He woke up early to find his way back into Gaia's womb. Lighting a cylindrical levilamp and grabbing paper and ink beside the nightstand, Glaucou slipped through a small hole in the city walls, made his way through the forest. Adders and brown spiders crawled up dark trees as he ran past, deer ceased their drinking. Glaucou paid no attention; his home beneath the earth wasn't far away. Some days, when it was boiling hot, Glaucou dived into the river to swim and felt the water rush past his face. On others he'd ignore the stream's friction and sit by a sandy bank, watching fish and tadpoles swimming.

Melete Oxenbridge, Glaucou's mother, was tall and virtuous. She smiled with joy at such wanderings, for she was the one who first showed him the way. The city was no place for her son's free spirited dreams. She knew that. In the cave he had rights. How she loved her son's inquisitive mind in the morning, his thirst for knowledge and thoughtful expressions as he went along. She marveled at his soft footsteps, pattering on the carpet at the chime of the morning temple bells. When he passed through her metal entryway, she hugged him tight. Glaucou was young, but he wore his body as a grown man. His blonde hair curled from sleep, and his sharp grey eyes peered up full of questions.

Mother and son lived together alone in the Tenth Ward. Melete's bondhusband died three years before from plague, the sixth such epidemic since the origin of the Republic under Guardian-King Hythloday. Only the boy was left her now, a fragment of love, a memory she treasured as herself. Each morning she called Glaucou home the world brightened.

Melete frequently went to look for Glaucou in the cave. She'd sneak outside the city gates and find him scribbling poems on the dirt. Levilamp fluttering nearby, Glaucou stared at where earth met edges of rock and water, foot tapping softly.

Glaucou was always thinking but never on any one thing. Melete could see the world flooding through her child's mind like wind that tosses lovers. He paced about, hand level to his forehead, kicking up dust in exasperation. With broken sticks and clay scattered about in various shapes, the architect

formed little buildings. Glaucon kicked them in a rage, sat down again, returned to his troubled drawings.

Glaucon felt happy and loved during adolescence. Though Melete was sometimes strict, she always helped him study, reading to him from old books she kept hidden in the cave. When Glaucon fell asleep, she caressed his warm hair and wondered at creation, talking to her sleeping baby. They warmed one another from night's loneliness. Glaucon would wake and snuggle closer to her feminine flesh, and smell her long brown hair with the scent of lilies. The cruelty of the world could be escaped deep within the chasms of his mother. Like the cave she shielded him from the strain of losing his father.

Then, one summer day, Glaucon never saw his mother again.

Melete never observed three hooded men descend from the hill near her home. She only heard a knock at the door. They entered dressed in plain woolen robes. Their shadows filled the room blocking out the sun. Only the sound of broken leaves and twigs still hanging to their sandals could be heard.

Glaucon's mother quickly fell prostrate to the ground, trembling in fear. She could only see their sandals now, but she knew who they were. *Why did they leave their golden city?* she shuddered. (They hardly ever left their golden city.) *Only something ruinous could've brought them to my home.*

These men were guardians of the Republic, masters of the Celestial Forms.

Amidst dust quietly settling on the floor, their leader spoke: "We are told that a young boy by the name of Glaucon lives here."

The man's hood covered his face like a powerful god.

Glaucon's mother anxiously muttered, "You're right to believe so, my grace. He's my only child. I pray he's not dishonored the Republic."

"No, not yet, my dear, not yet. But with time the dragon from the egg hatches, and all is left in ruins. Your son carries the blood of Apollo, and gold is in his veins."

"*Gold*, my lord?" The word filled Melete with dread.

"Yes, he is intellectually gifted. If left alone, he could become extraordinarily dangerous to the Republic."

Glaucon's mother gulped slowly. *How could Glaucon be a threat?* she thought.

The cloaked guardian motioned for one of the others to pull out a large sheet of paper.

On it was a rough sketch: a small boy beside a tombstone in a walled garden. He was alone and sitting upon a large rock, staring at the ground.

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Trees hung over the boy like arches, faces visible in the leaves, twisted by painful loss.

The guardian explained, “Your son’s teacher found this on the floor of his classroom and brought it to our attention. Reflects the Beautiful, doesn’t it? You can almost feel the tragic laceration, the tormenting distress and tender acceptance of the boy sitting on the stone. It cuts through my emotions, confusing me and exposing my desires—sets my soul afire! One of my associates reviewed it and claims he was deeply moved. In this respect your son has become a dangerous threat: He has the power to undermine reason with a stroke of his brush. He is a conjurer of shadows, and shadows of shadows, and could lead people away from the Form of Truth. Does your son know the laws against painting?”

“No, I don’t believe so,” Glaucon’s mother said sobbing. She struggled to control herself. “He enjoys drawing, and I’ve always humored him. I’m surely mistaken. I recognize I’m nothing more than bronze, but I felt it was healthy for the boy to express his emotions. His father died when he was very young—”

“His father?”

The guardians stifled a low laugh.

“—and he struggles with guilt and sadness constantly. Please don’t be angry with him. If anyone must be punished, it’s me for allowing it.”

“No,” said the guardian, “the fault lies with us. One cannot blame the race commanded by desire. It’s your nature to allow such things. Only we are capable of controlling your son and putting an end to these impassioned arts he cultivates. Where is the boy? We’ll speak with him directly.”

“He runs off alone,” Melete answered. “I know not where he is.”

Bending over, the guardian whispered in Melete’s ear: “Liar; the Kabiri Circle knows all your dirty secrets. Every one. Your foolish night husband betrayed me.”

Glaucon’s mother pushed lower to the ground with a frightened look. So they knew everything, then. This was the Kabiri she’d been warned about—the Engineer, Oracle of Machines.

The guardian put a hand on Melete’s shoulder and wiped away a tear gathering on her cheek. “Tears are a fool’s errand in this life, fallen whore, when one contemplates the intelligible realm. The place we take the child will be responsive to his needs and ours. He doesn’t belong here in the darkness with you and the other helots. Your lust for desire would turn him into a cruel, contemptible sphinx. A god like him would become a slanderer if he worked with his hands.”

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The hooded man rose, adjusted his robes. He slid out of the room and gently closed the door. He followed the other guardians through the hole in the city walls to the forest.

Melete was still lying on the floor lifeless when her door opened again. She could hear other families being dragged from their homes, screaming. It was all her fault. *What will happen to my Glaucon?* she choked. She wished she could warn her son to flee, but it was too late. Too late.

The windows shattered. Auxiliaries came in through the door like a malignant wind.

I § 2 INTENTIONAL TRAUMA

Glaucon played in the whispering cavern. Like any other day, he invented a game. This time he tossed pillars of sand in the air, pretending to conjure smoke with black magic. Friendly stalactites watched, called his name, but they suddenly pulled back.

Pounding metallic footsteps echoed in the chamber, loud as the Calydonian Boar. Glaucon feverishly looked for a place to hide, but he was trapped against the walls. Four machines scurried under hydraulic spider legs over the ceiling of the cave. They abruptly flooded the cavern with hollow light. Their heads were shaped like crescent moons and grinned menacingly. The Greek word ALETHEIA glowed above their single eyecameras, a manufactured blue.

Three men trailed the machines like hooded ghosts.

“Come with us, Mr. Oxenbridge,” one of the bearded ones commanded. “Do not mind the golems. They’re only my midwives sent to give you second birth.”

Glaucon timidly rose to his feet. He followed the men out, without thinking, back into the foreign light of day, back into the forest, out the door in the earth. He watched his cave fade away and wondered if he’d ever see it again.

The boy kept pace for what seemed like hours. He heard the golems’ soulless scampering behind and worried he’d be scolded for leaving the city walls. His mother had warned him, sternly, to hide if ever discovered. To leave the Republic was forbidden. And the books—the books!—were especially dangerous.

Away the procession walked from Glaucon’s mother’s house, away from his flowing river. The group walked out of the forest onto a meadow, to a

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large fig tree, and sat down. One of the hooded men pulled out a few loaves of bread and passed them around. He made certain not to break them to stave off bad luck.

Cool wind rustled the grass. Glaucon was offered a drink of apple cider but refused. His mouth tasted dry, and he could barely speak; golems' tails mesmerized when whipping the air like scorpions.

He was still getting accustomed to the light.

The largest guardian pulled down his hood, revealing a middle-aged man with a bearded face. The beard pointed sharply, like a Spanish conquistador. He had white bushy eyebrows and pale skin. Silver hair, parted to the side, covered his left ear. He was lion-like and stared intently. The others, obviously younger, removed their hoods as well. Each was bald with a ring of hair, looked like monks.

"Do you know who we are?" the guardian asked curiously.

Glaucon shook his head and stared submissively at the ground. He hadn't been confronted by such determined male figures since his father. They etched their will upon him, forced him to shudder. Of course he'd seen guardians before; many acted as priests for temple rites. Many times at school Glaucon walked by statues of the last ten guardian-kings. Their gold arms, reaching for the sun, filled all with deep reverence and fear. To young boys they were divinity. Daily history lessons about the metals amplified this awe. As his teacher explained, "The Earth, under command by the Form of the Good, birthed humanity with certain metals in their souls: bronze, silver, and gold. Those with gold were best suited to rule the Republic while those with bronze should obey and produce." The golden guardians were always to be respected.

Glaucon shivered. He noticed the golems' heads twitching back and forth like hungry birds ready for a feast.

The guardian tried putting the boy at ease: "My name's Prodicus, Glaucon. Don't be frightened. What a pleasure finally meeting you. How I wish you could see your face. You look astonished; you really do—as if you've seen a phantom. I assure you, we mean no harm. We only want your help remedying a potential danger. Pay no heed to the golems around us. They do as they're told. Their scorpion tails have no sting as long as I'm here."

"How do you know?" Glaucon asked.

"Because I built them to obey." Prodicus pulled out a small controller and spun a knob. Both E's on the ALETHEIA disappeared and the golems clunked lifeless on the ground. "There. The golems are resting and won't

bother us. We can get down to business. Stand firm and be truthful: We received word from school you've picked up painting. Is that true?"

"Yes," Glaucon nodded ashamed.

His answer made the guardians behind Prodicus shake their heads. Prodicus had expected the response, though, and asked, "When you sit in your cave what do you draw? Do you etch things that are animated and colored and meaningful? What drives you to do these things?"

Glaucon swallowed hard before answering. He knew before he started painting and writing that such things were forbidden. Such images were shadows. Teachers said so in school. The material world was a false illusion in which opposites tumbled about in confusion. Nothing was as it seemed, and all was chaos and flux, on the furthest end of falsehood. Beautiful things, like a sunset or a tadpole, only partook in the immutable Form of Beauty; they were not Beauty itself. To draw pictures of these beautiful things was to copy copies, not to come closer to understanding the universal.

Glaucon sighed. He never understood the ban on painting (or the Forms, for that matter). The Forms were a mystery, as difficult to understand as Bellerophon's journey to the circles of heaven on the winged horse Pegasus. Glaucon remarked exasperated, "I'm sorry, but I don't know why I draw them. Images spring up in me like breathing air and linger. I must express their melody. Just the other day, I saw an old man lying by the roadside. He was tapping his cane and a small dog was near him. I saw him staring at me, forcefully. He looked away. I couldn't sleep that evening because of the man, had to etch his features onto something. Haggard cheeks, forehead covered with coarse and straggling hair, eyes black as coal, yet there was something serene and stubborn about him. An official ordered him to take a special pill, but he refused. He was dying and wanted to die. Refused to eat. Then soldiers beat the man and took him away."

The three guardians looked at one another as Glaucon finished speaking. Calm descended over the group sitting in the grass. A large eagle circled overhead. Prodicus lifted his steely eyes, thinking for a moment, listening at the sky. The roar of spiritcarriers and zizthopters could be heard whirling in the distance. The aircraft flew like the eagle did, with feathered wings, and fired Deathstalker missiles into the city, chasing down the petrified faces of his enemies.

Pacification of the Tenth Ward commenced like the fury of a thousand fires, coughing up smoke and dust and concrete mixed with rending cries.

The concussive blasts fell softly on Prodicus' eardrums, and he thought approvingly: *Soon the Katharoi rebels will be dead and temperance will*

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return. The hunger strikes and rioting will end and the Republic will be at peace. If only I could find the children Xenon stole away. No matter. The Fates said they'll return, in time. He turned back to Glaucon: “The things you speak, boy, I’ve felt intimately. When I was your age—younger even—I too had become lost in a sweltering sea of voices. I found myself chased by wild images not my own. Unhealthy books, creative passions and rebels, ideas made civil war in my yet untrained mind. You know, I wasn’t born far from your street in the Tenth Ward. As a young man, I also fell into some trouble with the authorities when they discovered several of my sketches, or rather should I say, ‘imitations.’ If I recall, one was a picture of a vivid phoenix bathed in fire. It was the creature I longed to be. Can you believe I dreamed of flying like that eagle above us?” Prodicus laughed merrily.

The two guardians behind, though, fidgeted uncomfortably. They had clearly never heard this admission before and were astonished. The shorter one plucked a blade of grass from the earth and broke it into six pieces, contemplating Plato’s number, trying to ease his mind.

Prodicus went on, “When my imitations were discovered, guardians came to see me, too. I thought they were daimons at first and tried to run away. However, the ‘pure ones’ found me, as they always do. They educated me of the historic animosity between poetry and philosophy. The best means to achieve truth was through reason, logic, and argument—not metaphor and the brush! I didn’t believe them at the time, but I’ve come to do so. Do you know why?”

Glaucon shook his head at the philosopher.

“Only through reason do we discover the divine. Reason helps see past the distinctions and opposites to comprehend the universal *in itself*, in its androgynous reality. Let me explain,” Prodicus said patiently. “See this stick next to me by my robe? We took it from your cave as we left. I hope you don’t mind. It seems to be wet and rotting.”

“That’s how I grab them from the tree,” Glaucon interrupted. “Almost impossible to grab dry branches. I was using it to draw patterns on the floor.”

“All the easier for me,” Prodicus said slyly as he briskly grabbed the stick. He broke the gnarled branch with sudden force and Glaucon watched amazed. Prodicus lay the broken branches on the floor. “Now listen carefully, boy,” he said. “Would you say the two sticks are equal in length or unequal?”

Glaucon carefully examined the two sticks on the ground. He picked them up to measure their length against one another. “I suppose they’re equal,” he answered.

“You suppose so or you know so?” Prodicus quipped.

“I know they’re equal.”

“Are you sure?”

“Could be no other way.”

“Very good, Glaucon, that’s how one should state their opinion. You should always clearly and precisely state what you mean. Your belief seems true in this case, but how did you know they were equal in length?”

“How did I know?” Glaucon stammered. “That is a strange question to ask. They’re just equal. I measured one against the other.”

Glaucon looked exasperated and perplexed.

Prodicus laughed, “You’ll find knowledge of truth impossible without charting the path you took to comprehension. You fell right into my trap, little one. Look at his pink face, gentlemen. He looks as if I cast a sorcerer’s spell on him. You know, Glaucon, they used to call Socrates a torpedo fish. Do you know why? His questioning could draw listeners to tears and make their minds and tongues go numb. Have I done the same to you?—I hope so. You’ll soon find that many people make speeches but few understand what they’re saying. The untimely word is characteristic of an evil mind—remember that. Now, we need something more, a system of knowledge to explain how you are able to distinguish the Equal from the Unequal. Tell me, did you learn about the Equal in school?”

“No.”

“No? By Hera, how wild and curious is your power. So you never took a class on the Equal, never read a book on it or sang patriotic songs about the Equal. Yet so skillfully, here you are applying the concept like a seasoned scholar. How is this power possible?”

Glaucon tried to think of an answer. Prodicus was right. He’d never been told about the Form of the Equal, yet every day he used the concept skillfully, as if he’d always known. “I don’t know how I differentiate between equal and unequal things,” he said. “I walk over to my little stream, and I see two stones—a red and a white one of similar size—and I say, ‘They are equal.’ So too with the trees in my forest. I walk under their green canopy and look at their trunks and say, ‘These trees are of equal size.’ I’ve spun around my whole life applying this term, and never has anyone told me how to do it. Perhaps Mother showed me?”

Prodicus was dubious. “Ah, but then where did she learn it?” He knew already the debate was won. Glaucon’s confusion was considerable. “You said you always knew when two things were equal. Would you say your understanding of the Equal is stirred up like a recollection, then? You recall how to use the idea of the Equal?”

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“Yes, I would say it’s very much like that.”

“Very good; now how do we regularly remember things? We either see the object directly or else we see something which reminds us of the object. Now, have we ever seen the Form of the Equal directly?”

“No, and if I did I should surely tell people about it.”

“Very well, but you admit to seeing other objects which remind you of the Equal?”

“I do.”

“Would you say these objects that help you recall the Equal are related or unrelated to the Equal?”

“I don’t understand.”

“For example, I might see a lyre and then remember the boy to which it belongs. I recollect a second thing from the first, but they are unrelated. I hope you would agree knowing a boy is different from knowing a lyre.”

The guardians behind Prodicus snickered.

Glaucon did not understand the joke. He said, “Oh yes, of course. Whenever I return home and sink into our jelly-couch in the living room, I can smell my mother’s perfume. It smells like lilies in the summer, and I immediately recall her face.”

“Exactly right,” Prodicus praised him. “You are recalling through association what was forgotten. Just like you smell your mother’s lily perfume and recall her face, you must also see similar looking sticks and recall the unrelated universal idea of the Equal. How wonderful! You must’ve always known about the Equal, yes?”

“That must certainly be true,” Glaucon shouted, “otherwise how could I have originally talked about equal things.”

“Indeed Glaucon, what a lofty and beautiful thing you’ve done to glimpse the hidden manifold causing our reality. Through my coaching your reason awakened and discovered what it knew all along—your mind possesses innate knowledge about the Form of the Equal, and all the Forms for that matter: the Forms of perfect chairs, horses, trees, and cities, mathematical truths and geometry. Draw a right triangle and you can derive an army of truths from the exercise. You can derive them independently of sensory experience. *A priori* knowledge, mathematics, the Equal are proof of the divine.”

Glaucon breathed every word with his teacher.

Prodicus continued looking possessed: “Imagine if our souls could detach from our bodies and the confusion of our senses, what we could come to know. We would finally view reality purely in itself. We could see the Form

of Beauty and taste the Form of Love without needing to go through material objects as the intermediary. Why, it would be like diving into a fresh spring and shedding clothes weighing us down. Glaucon, what if I said you first learned of the Forms before being embodied in your mother?”

“I should say that is a strange belief.”

“No,” Prodicus scolded. “Don’t look so confused. Don’t turn back on your learning like an insolent puppy. Even as babies we’re ensnared by the senses. It seems self-evident—a principle of reason—that prior to becoming incarnate in your current body, your eternal soul had access to the Forms in the Pure Land. You swam through the Forms of the Good and the Beautiful like a clown fish through coral reefs. It was there you communed with the Form of the Equal and carried it out with you into this material world. You just forgot the Forms when you swam through the River of Forgetfulness! But you can recall them now, can’t you? Because of the preexistence, you’re able to apply universals like Beauty, Truth, and Justice to beautiful things and just societies. Tell me, have you ever noticed imperfection in our world?”

“Sometimes,” Glaucon sighed. “Nothing under the sun ever seems constant. My father was alive, then dead. There are deserts and swamps, fallout and flies, pain and death like the old man I drew. I can never write or draw anything in just the right way. My perceptions are flawed. A teacher told us in class that a gorilla is beautiful to other gorillas but ugly to humans. I found this lesson strange. As you were saying, the Beautiful should always remain beautiful. If beauty can change to ugliness in a gorilla, it must be there imperfectly.”

Prodicus stared intently at the agitated child, chewing on his thoughts. The golems continued to lie lifeless on the ground.

Faint pounding drums followed Aegis tanks into the Tenth Ward. The field’s elevation was too low to see the battle, but Prodicus imagined the lobster tanks slowly gravitating behind the blindfolded rebels like pillars of judgment. The buildings were collapsing, washing all around his new subjects. Prodicus was saddened by such barbarity. *But, alas*, he consoled himself, *our Republic is not a suicide pact. Delivering a pregnancy requires much patience, and if the child will not live we must cut it off. Better that some should die than suffer total catastrophe.*

Prodicus said turning from his thoughts, “Your words strike me as wise, Glaucon, almost too wise for your age. But *imperfections* in the world have a purpose.”

“They do?”

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“Yes. Each broken vessel we see is a signpost to a more virgin reality—to God, the Form of the Good. The cries of our souls bind us with it, like the Good binds all the other Forms to its will. We reappear every lifetime until one day—if we fulfill our given role in the Republic—we return to the Eternal. Unjustified violence, earthquakes that kill everyone in temple, our need for tanks, all stimulate man from his indifference, make him confront the Cosmic Soul. Remember: To sense imperfection is at the same time to recall perfection. Opposites beget opposites; the Form of the Good causes us to feel alien in order to help us remember the home we lost. And one day we shall be restored.”

Prodicus remembered the lost souls slain earlier before coming to the Tenth Ward: his sister, Potone; her meddlesome night husband, Lycaon; Ekklesia the Blind. All Katharoi heretics. All schemers. Most likely, they’d end up as rabbits or fish upon rebirth, but perhaps, if they bore their role joyfully, they might return to the Republic. No one was beyond redemption.

“Restore us from what, Master?” Glaucon asked.

“Why, from dualities, the grip of nature, endless rebirth!” Prodicus shouted. He felt like the boy was reading his thoughts. “Gods, Glaucon, I can hardly believe I’m telling you this already? Even our twelfth grade neophytes at the Academy don’t have the privilege of hearing such wonderful things. I told you he was a special boy, Zeno.” Prodicus gaped back at the portly guardian.

Zeno’s cheeks were cracked and his face was piggish. He was not necessarily ugly, Glaucon decided, merely pestering. Glaucon looked back at his teacher, amazed. *How on earth did we get from talking about equal sticks to a discussion on the preexistence of the soul?* he wondered. Logic somehow slipped along the way. Nevertheless, Glaucon felt a startling ownership of the argument which made the words spoken exceedingly persuasive. Walls of disbelief breached, a force like lightning engulfed him.

“The Fates hide nothing from us,” Zeno said stoically.

Prodicus was less convinced. “The Fates are blind. Computers only deal in probabilities. They have their purpose, but only I can find the Vessels. You may commence the evaluation, Zeno. But I know the truth. We’ve found the Second Vessel.”

“Yes, my grace.” Zeno walked over to Glaucon and pulled out a small cylindrical box with an electrical wire shaped like a tuning fork. “We call this an I.T. magnetometer,” he explained. “It’s a sensitive device connected to Kabiri-35’s—the Fates’—mainframe. Measures your body’s electromagnetic

wave structure for neural and cardiac resonances. This may feel cold and intrusive. Don't be alarmed."

Zeno turned on a metal switch at the bottom of the cylinder. The machine burped, started to crackle with radiation. A flat red light spread from the metal hose like a controlled tornado. Cold ice tickled Glaucon's skin as Zeno measured him up and down. Nails scraped his brain and cracked it open.

Zeno looked up astonished. "This can't be right. His I.T. dialogue matrix is at a pitch of nearly four hundred and eighty waves per second. There must be an error with the instruments."

"No error," Prodicus said. "Measure me now."

Zeno turned around and aimed the machine at the philosopher. He pulled Prodicus aside and whispered in his ear, "You are nearly just as high, Prodicus. If I hadn't come, I wouldn't believe such levels exist. Your face is almost glowing."

"Zeno, what color is his waveform?"

"The wave glows indigo, Sire. Like yours. Like Kleomedes and Sophia."

"Holy stars," Prodicus gasped, "the Fates have led us to him. Just as their programming spit out on that tape: 'A narrow path from the tree of souls, three indigo Vessels will appear: one earth, one soul, one crown; living animals—stillborn—to repair. Gather them like the fruits of harvest. Mix with Kabiri together in the sky. Putrification prime renews virgin reason, the spirit of Good; forms the Golden King.' We've found the Second Vessel, I know it."

Zeno said, "For someone so skeptical of the Fates' judgment, much faith you place in their prophecies."

"A man who builds something recognizes its limitations. I only realize *some* probabilities come true. I act according to the values at stake."

Glaucon could barely hear what was being said. The I.T. magnetometer left a sensation of being locked in a bubble and falling down a deep well. Then holes were in the bubble, deflating. He struggled to breathe.

Prodicus walked back to Glaucon gleaming. "This is your first time for such an intensive I.T. reading, isn't it? Don't worry, it's just separation poisoning. It'll subside in a moment. Photographing your I.T. waveform can be unbearable without protection—they don't say 'Intentional Trauma' for nothing. But it's necessary for the Fates to do their work."

"I.T. waves? I think I'm going to throw up," Glaucon stuttered.

"*Electromagnetism.*" Prodicus tasted the word and let it roll from his tongue. "An unsatisfying term. The energy is electrical and magnetic, yes, but so much more. It covers everything from power waves that propel atomic and

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molecular motion, to gamma rays, x-rays, and visible light. Each of our living cells radiates a spectrum of energy. With each heartbeat, your body emits two and a half watts of energy—enough to power a levilamp. Did you know, we can read your I.T. energy arc emanating almost ten meters away? The waves spread and return to their source, contact others, resonate, like our souls and the Form of the Good. The Fates taught us many things about the human body.”

Glaucon’s stomach started to settle, but black smoke pouring from the Republic’s walls upset him again. *What is happening to my home?* he wondered at the ash filling the sky. *Is Mother safe?*

Prodicus noticed the boy losing interest in their dialogue. He drew his attention away, commanding, “Don’t look at the burning land. The people there are dead.”

They walked through a row of twisting oak trees. Zeno and the other guardian followed, their faces turned away from the city.

“As I said earlier,” Prodicus continued, “I was like you as a child. When guardians came to my home, they gifted me with the Argument of the Equal. They then offered me a choice. The guardians said if I’d been a little older, my artwork would make me guilty of a capital crime. I would be sentenced to death in the Bull—”

“To death?” Glaucon asked alarmed.

“Yes, Glaucon, art is a very serious thing and keeps the mind from recognizing the Forms. Oh, I was so much like you as a boy. I did not understand the danger of my actions or the nature of my crimes. When the guardians offered to mitigate my sentence to travel with them to Heliopolis, I thought them fools. When I went with them, though, I soon learned the error of my ways. You are fortunate. Like me, your age and innocence saved you.”

Glaucon slumped to the ground and averted his eyes from the philosopher, suddenly ashamed. The guardian raised Glaucon’s head with his finger and stared directly at him, like he had his mother.

“Curious,” Prodicus said wrinkling his beard, “I don’t know why the schools kept your presence secret from us. Your potential should’ve been discovered years ago.”

Zeno grumbled loudly, “Xenon is to blame. He was led astray by sympathy for that girl, his profane desires. You shouldn’t have let him join the Kabiri Circle.”

“No matter,” Prodicus said. “All in the past. Xenon shall have his reckoning soon enough. Now, Glaucon, we must see to your future education. The most noble occupation open to any member of our society is that of the

guardian estate, for it is the duty of our office to maintain security and harmony among the world of men. We are ancient relics from a past fraught with war and blood. Do you know the story of the Age of Aporia?"

"I've heard some things in school. Long ago, man was almost destroyed because he let desire rule. Those with bronze in their souls ran society into the ground."

"Yes, Glaucon. Each person sought their own freedom without searching for the hidden Form of Freedom. Their 'freedom' was that of the libertine: to wander blindly through the dark graveyards of frivolity, sex, and circuses. The appetitive part of their soul splintered their compass. They had no captains familiar with a map of the stars to direct them to their destination. Accordingly, they sailed lost in a million different delights. Because they spent their time staring only at the garment of Justice, they were unable to see the hidden Form of Justice. Only we guardians can see the Forms, not they. Our Republic is the most perfect in history, the only city left. It mirrors our soul with appetitive, spirited, and reasonable parts. But now reason whips the appetites to obey."

Glaucon was silent. He smelled burning wood.

Prodicus looked at the boy with sadness. "Glaucon, forty-five years ago I chose to leave my family. We told your mother we think you gifted. Yet, at this moment, your future is very much in question. I must sadly leave the same choice left to me as a child: You may choose to come with us to the Academy, to learn how to commune with the Forms, become intellectually free to pursue your mind's greatest ambitions, or you may go to juvenile detention for re-education in order to be readmitted to the helot class. What will you do, my son?"

"I want to go back to Mother," Glaucon asserted passionately.

Prodicus turned to the others and laughed heartily. "Do you see how he breaks my constraints?" he asked. "What a rascal! What good will re-education do him?"

Zeno said, "As if you would let another Vessel escape your grasp, Oracle."

With lament, Prodicus placed hands on his shoulders. "No, my son, I'm sorry to say you'll never see your mother again. It's not your fault. She's been neglectful in her duties to you and almost sired a dragon among us. Art! Lies! Katharoi teachings! Although not unexpected given her breed and vulgar occupation, she is unfit for motherhood, especially for someone like you. You'd best forget her. She can only confuse you. Our earthly mothers possess

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ten thousand times less reality than the Form of Mother. Our mothers are only trivial reflections in the dark. Insignificant!”

Glaucon did not agree. He wanted to sit with his mother again, to feel her warm hand stroke his head in the evenings and whisper forbidden stories. He wanted to hear her voice by the fireplace and hold her brown hair watching the digitele. His lip quivered, eyes watering. He felt disoriented again.

The guardian’s heart went out to the boy. “It will be difficult for you at first, like it was for me. But I promise all will be well. If you only knew the world of light to come, you’d rejoice. You will soon learn ‘every animal is driven to pasture with a blow.’ ”

Prodicus turned to the other guardians. “Zeno, this boy is blessed, and he will triumph over ignorance. By consorting with the Forms he will become divine.”

The other guardians stood up and brushed grass from their robes. Zeno stuffed the magnetometer back into his bag. “And you, Great Oracle of the Kabiri, will be divine as well,” he said, slapping his chest with a fist.

ALETHEIA returned over the golems’ eyes, and they scurried toward Glaucon like ravenous wolves, chirping.

Zeno grabbed Glaucon gruffly by the collar. “You will come with me now,” he ordered. Prodicus’ serene face disappeared as Zeno pulled him across the field—half walking, half dragging—through the dirt to an awaiting rusty red hovertruck. Glaucon hadn’t even noticed it. Solar panels formed the roof, and a door in the back opened. A black cross with five fingers on each end was painted on the door. Glaucon remembered his teacher calling them the “*Hands-of-God*”—sacred symbol of the Republic.

Two auxiliaries in scarves and army fatigues, holding shining Neokalashnikovs, stepped down from the truck and grabbed the boy from Zeno. Glaucon could barely muster a thought of protest and was thrown into the truck bed to the sound of locking doors. Golems, fidgeting behind the soldiers, were the last thing he saw.

“You are to take him to Heliopolis immediately,” Glaucon heard Zeno say through the muffled wall of steel. “Tell Yannis he is to tend to the boy personally under direct orders from his holiness, Prodicus, High Philosopher-King, newly crowned Vicar of Reason. We’ll return tomorrow after attending to the Katharoi traitors here.”

Another door slammed and the truck lurched forward. Glaucon peered into the truck bed tomb. The darkness did not feel the same as his cave. An

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hour later, gunshots and screaming. He did not know where he was going, and unfriendly shadows taunted.

He fell asleep thinking of his mother.

RESTORATION AB AETERNO: Rebuilding the World

The following chronicle, written by Simmias during his nineteenth year at the Academy, was created from a compilation of reports, classified documents, memorandum, personal journal entries, shadowspare recordings, and his own fanciful imagination. It attempts to chart the history of our Republic from the Age of Aporia to the death of the first philosopher-king, Abaris Hythloday. (Top Secret/Publication Prohibited.)

There is a legend we tell children in our Republic: In the beginning mankind lived in unity with the earth. There was only happiness and delight. Then a desire to multiply overcame him. A pride to transcend the world severed his connection with Mother Earth. This severance broke the crust and caused a *fire consuming fire* to flood the world with light. So much heat billowed forth that all metals melted and drifted apart. The *Demiurge* found the liquid minerals drifting lost in the Gulf of Mexico. Cooling the stray minerals back to ingots with the sea, he fashioned three new races, bronze, silver, and gold, and placed them on the sacred island of Heliopolis. He foretold another *fire consuming fire* if the race of bronze or silver should ever attempt to rule the gold.

Although certainly a fantastic story, such legends carry a nugget of truth. The Age of Aporia preceding Heliopolis did indeed die in *fire consuming fire*. The dangers of the twenty-fifth century looked nothing in comparison to the dangers of the twenty-sixth. At the exact time wise rulers were needed to tend the world, none found their way to the halls of power. Instead, businessmen with appetitive desires governed. The Forms of Truth and Justice they shunned like maggots in meat.

Using money to buy votes, businessmen elected princes, potentates, warriors, and tyrants, too. Disobedient to themselves and their desires, they built sluggish governments which could not help but veer off course. In essence they lived as if in sleep, when the reasonable part of the soul slumbers. They cultivated the worst beasts biting at their veins. They loved money for the sake of money, and so they printed as much as they liked, succubi satisfying their every need for food, drink, and sex. When this too left them unsatisfied, they conjured additional wants to wet their addictions. The more they consumed the more they desired, and the more they desired the more they consumed, onward and onward, into a spiraling frenzy through the teeth of Charybdis.

Intense economic competition between the industrializing and industrialized capitalist states caused an epidemic of overproduction. From 2407 M.G.P. (Meta-Genissi Plato) to the 2435 Recession, over one hundred crises rocked the financial markets. This, however, was nothing but a prelude to greater market instability. As overproduction filled the world with trash and economic misery, the environment collapsed. Glaciers melted, continents flooded, Category 6 hurricanes raged. Droughts charred the ground seeding famine and war. The profit-lovers did nothing but fight over the scraps of their planet. India and China continued to exhaust the Earth in ways the twenty-fifth century never fathomed. Meanwhile, the United States of America attempted to salvage its dying empire by engaging in misadventures around the world, borrowing heavily from China and Russia to support its wars.

The United States was the first to fall. The horrors of Black Tuesday, 2356 M.G.P., could not compare to the cauldron of evils which befell them on Black Thursday, December 4, 2514 M.G.P. All economies of the world were tied together like a living tapestry; all fell together, too. China called for its money, and the United States refused to pay. The Great Sino-American War lasted less than a day.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization launched their missiles. The Russo-Beijing League launched theirs. The missiles flew like fiery red horses slaying peace. As late figs drop from a fig tree, the Russian land of ice and the ascending Dragon Throne fell. Every sovereign fell. Thunders boomed and stars hop-scotched across the globe. Souls gave way their resistance and burned in the *fire consuming fire*. Mankind fell like a broken vessel.

This event has been labeled by philosopher historians as the *Day of Hylopleonexia*, the day matter overreached.

Man took refuge from the flames as he always does—by hiding. Those that saw the coming missiles retreated to their fallout shelters like buried arks. One soul to survive at NORAD's underground shelter in Colorado was General Abaris Hythloday. Some sources say he went mad under the earth; others say he became a sage. Sitting alone for months in the dark, a single beautiful white book maintained his sanity. It was a book by Plato called *Republic*, loaded with ancient philosophical knowledge and blueprints for the perfect society.

General Hythloday grew obsessed with the work. It haunted his nights like a poltergeist. Plato, we are told by some accounts, frequented his dreams and made him scribble hundreds of copies, all to be given to the soldiers under his command.

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One day, according to another witness, General Hythloday even gave one to his younger brother, the grey-eyed Sextus, but he refused to read the work. Although Hythloday warned his brother of the warheads to save his life, “the loaf musician” remained insubordinate. The two brothers drifted apart underground. Silently, each wanted to kill the other.

General Hythloday commanded his brother to obey: “You will read this book and understand what kind of government awaits us when we return to the world of the sun. We shall build it, and man will be perfected. I swear to God he will. As above, so below, humanity shall mirror the harmony of the Pure Land and finally be happy.”

Sextus laughed garishly, as though he wished to rip his brother’s soul to pieces. Then—and this is difficult to write—he did the unthinkable, and tossed his copy of the *Republic* into a trash can. “Plato was a crank as all philosophers are cranks,” he heretically jabbed. “Plato never wanted you to take him seriously. The Republic is a phantom as fantastic as his Forms. Creating his vision is more impossible than democracy and would be twice as oppressive. I’d rather kill Socrates again then live in *that* place.”

For weeks the brothers remained silent, refusing to relent, refusing to forgive. But as the shelter was so enclosed, they couldn’t separate. General Hythloday passed Sextus sometimes, shaking in uncontrollable fury as he rested near a naked woman. “What am I going to do with you?” he would say. “Do you think you can just sit here staring at the wall? We have planning, much planning ahead of us. Just look at your sorry state—chasing women and drinking what’s left of our wine. You’re incorrigible, a glutton, and a cheat! Oh, how will you ever mop up your sins and ignorance? If I could only show you the advantage in shunning this life, to give up impurity for virtue, I might kiss you here.”

Sextus shrugged and returned to his woman. “It’s late, Brother, leave me be. Go preach to others who enjoy slavery. I will always remain here, avoiding your little white book.” He kissed his woman in rebuke.

General Hythloday departed irate, raging through the corridors. He went to a nearby room filled with refugees. They were all molemen, sitting there under the fluorescent lights: chewing spit, dreaming dreams of past unfulfilling lives without a thought for the future. “I forsake thee! I forsake thee! Always will I forsake thee,” he called turning to the frightened dreamers. “I forsake it all—this reality, this world, this people. Look, I shall wipe it all away with a sponge and paint a new Shangri-La, a city more valuable than El Dorado. Its gemstone shall be reason’s light, her leader reason’s medicine-man. Philosopher-kings will rule! All will be happy.”

Such teachings kindled hope in the darkness, and many were filled with aspiration. “The Form of the Good shall be our compass,” Hythloday pointed to the *Republic*, “and the Form of Justice our shield. All parts of the soul will fulfill their roles. *Not self-rule, but rule by reason and the reasonable.*”

He read his little white book aloud on a locker box. Disciples carried his work into the deepest chambers of the fallout shelter. They taught Saint Plato at Sunday school and church, replacing the absent Yahweh who failed them in the war.

Hythloday raced around the shelter talking of the great chain of being, angelology, on the need to reform and repent, to prepare for the coming of the Republic. Curious listeners transformed like werewolves to men and knelt before him. He placed his hand upon their heads, blessed them, held baptisms of water. “Greater than the Form of Beauty, the Form of Love, or the Form of Courage, is the Form of the Good, binding all together.”

Back they cheered, “A benediction on the human race and our journey to mingle with the Forms!”

Hythloday promised, “We’ll all be perfect if we unite in harmony, if we follow this book and make Justice our lighthouse. Look and see, we’ll examine what appetites each person possesses to avoid the rocks of instability. If a man is filled with desire or has an aptitude for engineering or farming or crafting or shipping, we shall make him a helot—a producer of goods. Yes, and what a wonderful role that will be, to fuel our Republic with the goods for its survival. We should make the helots produce, not only enough for themselves, but also enough for the auxiliaries and guardians. We’ll gather those in tune with the emotional part of their souls and make them soldiers. They shall defend the helots. The reasonable ones—those with a ‘good memory, quick wits, smartness, youthful passion, high-mindedness’, a devotion to the Form of Truth over money—we will make our honored guardians, and they’ll direct the auxiliaries how best to protect our city. ‘And the State will erect monuments to commemorate them. And sacrifices will be offered to them as demigods.’ Does this seem fitting?”

All listeners agreed.

“I should like to be a herbologist,” shouted one. “Perhaps we can build special domed greenhouses to fight the fallout.”

“That sounds most fitting,” said General Hythloday.

“And I should like to start a nanofactory for research again,” shouted another named Dr. Zosimos Ozbolt. “I was best in my class at the University of Chicago. I could build all kinds of important technology for our Republic. We could begin from scratch and use solar energy to power a clean

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environment. I could reconstruct molecules and make buildings withstand a hurricane.”

“You shall have all that and more. But we should allow the guardians to carefully monitor any activities that reconstruct reality. That’s only fitting.”

“Yes, only fitting,” Dr. Ozbolt agreed.

An older man named Professor Dodsun stood up with bleached white hair. “I have a Doctorate in Political Science and spent some time in the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. I taught Plato at the University of Denver for a time. I could be helpful as a guardian . . . in the bureaucracy, at least.”

“Splendid, Dodsun, splendid. However, we should have you tested first. Guardians must painstakingly prove their intellectual metal to rule. And right away, no guardian will own any paper money or property. We’ll not have kings in our Republic, but philosopher-kings.”

General Hythloday beamed with satisfaction, but his brother sat in the corner with a smirk. “You have something to say, Brother?” he asked.

“You’re delusional if you think this is going to work,” Sextus scoffed, black hair shimmering under the lights. “Without money, what incentive will the guardians have to work? They’ll be like simple thieves, stealing from the helots to feed themselves.”

“Not so,” Hythloday shouted frustrated. “Their incentive rises above earthly desire. Their incentive is truth for the sake of truth and governing an effective state. I can see already you’ll be a helot. A guardian would never ask what incentive he had to work.”

Sextus snorted unfazed. “And who will guard the guardians?” he asked. “They will have absolute power in your city, no one will check them. We came from a state of practical checks and balances, yet you discard them for dictators.”

Hythloday laughed. “A guard for the guardian ruled by reason is absurd. Checks and balances were not the problem in the Eagle Republic. The appetitive people were, and now over ten billion are dead. We’ll not make the same mistake again. No, one job, one function.”

Sextus threw up his hands and uncorked a wine bottle. “I drink to you, Brother, you and your cursed city. Here, let me consecrate the ground on this holy day. To you, who will finally bring harmony to the world.”

General Hythloday ignored him and continued to amass followers. “It’s a principle of reason that our soldiers should continuously listen to music and sing patriotic songs. This is because it suits their emotional character and will light their souls for battle. Rhythm and song permeate the soul better than any

other medium, provides a small glimpse of the Forms through the tune's harmony. Music sheds the ego. Of course, we'll do everything to erase the auxiliaries' individualities and make them completely subservient to the guardians. A soldier should be like a hammer wielded by a higher, more reasonable mind."

"What truth," said the awestruck crowd, "and never have we heard anything more godlike."

Their cheering woke Sextus and drove him to mutiny. "I'll have no more of you, Brother, or this madness about mindless soldiers. What do you think destroyed us before?" he shouted racing up the ladder to the surface.

General Hythloday screamed to stop, shouted, pleaded, hated Sextus for trying to flee.

The door opened and everyone gasped. Sunlight slew the darkness and fresh air flooded penitent lungs. The world bloomed green and beautiful. Fallen buildings littered the landscape. The brothers embraced. Why had they fought? They were outside again. Outside! The shelters were over. The darkness was over. The brothers bounded like yearling gazelles in summer, apologized, squinted upwards.

"Now we can set to our work," General Hythloday rejoiced, hugging him.

Sextus relented when he saw his brother's happiness. Even if he left, as he promised, where could he really go? The world was empty, and he didn't want to be alone. Further, he held many doubts his brother would succeed. Perhaps Sextus stayed to see him fail.

General Hythloday jumped onto a nearby rock to address the crowd: "See, a brave new world is upon us, a better lot than Huxley's vision, too. The lathe of Saint Plato is hot with yearning and sets ours tasks for labor. Let us carve the earth to be fit for the Good."

Except for Sextus, all fists punched the sky. The community made a pilgrimage south, walking down Highway 287, avoiding the radioactive rain in the Fallout Corridor. They marched from the mountains to the boggy swamps of the Gulf Coast, to Houston's port, now a heap of ruins. There they scavenged parts and excavated the sea. Hythloday said, "What a fitting test we have before us: Only swamp and sea, yet watch how we'll cause a firmament to rise from the deep. We speak the same language and share the same values. With a little ingenuity nothing will be impossible for us."

Hythloday held hands over the water. "We command the Republic to rise."

The survivors set to work. They built a factory camp in the ruined outskirts of Houston. Most of the city had been obliterated by nukes, but

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scavengable machines still lay here and there to put to use. Yellow bulldozers, rotary cranes, pile drivers, joro-drills, and front loaders awakened like sleeping giants. Reclamation scrapers, hydraulic claws, rippers, and sand hoses tore apart the coastline as a quarry to build the promised Republic.

Like Atlas waving his arms and standing in the sea, the Republic slowly congealed. It rose as a spiraling skeleton, slowly collecting rock and glass skin. One of the largest construction projects ever undertaken, it couldn't help but draw other survivors of the war to participate.

The Republic was not one island but three. In the center was a perfectly circular island—Heliopolis—surrounded by two concentric island rings—Stratos and Agora. As one moved to the innermost sanctuary, each island ascended higher than the last.

Heliopolis was the most convincing city on a hill (if there ever was one). The central island rose from the sea like a volcanic mountain, with pine, oak, cypress, maple and other trees and ferns planted above its skyscrapers like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Two large bridges in the shape of a cross intersected on a North-South and East-West axis and were called the Bridge of Wisdom and the Bridge of Understanding. The Bridge of Understanding connected Heliopolis to the coast and the factory camp which, by now, worked as a thriving settlement. Architects rationally planned streets on a grid system. Measures were also taken to fight the hurricanes. Before the invention of the aquamolpis, which controlled the weather, a thin harbor on the east side of Heliopolis acted as a shield against storms. The harbor—Safer Bay—rippled from Heliopolis as if hit by a rock.

The second island ring was a sloping plain and home to the auxiliaries. It lay largely free of buildings, so that the soldiers of the Republic might perform their drills unmolested by luxury. The defenders of the city lived in tents and stiff wooden barracks, suffering the elements and hardening their silver bodies for the good of the Republic. Speakers were placed around Stratos to serenade the soldiers with music and develop their souls. It would be a hard life, but one best suited for their emotional, spirited natures.

The third ring and the coast became the home of the helots to produce wine, clothes, and shoes; to knead bread and build furniture; to farm wheat and corn and barley; to cobble and weld and craft the delicacies of any proud civilization. Housing and apartments were mass produced for each helot family according to their needs. Behind each home sat a communal garden for socializing. Giant stone aqueducts carried water from the coast to Heliopolis, and auxiliaries ensured Heliopolis never thirsted.

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One day, many months later, while Heliopolis was still being built, General Hythloday and his brother Sextus sat barefoot on the beach at sunset.

“Look how beautiful Heliopolis is even in twilight, Brother,” Hythloday said. “See how there is nothing beyond our reach. Guardians guard, auxiliaries defend the walls, helots are happy producing. What a wonderful thing we’ve done tending our garden. How pleasing and good.”

“I see a city like other cities,” Sextus frowned. “Nothing lasts forever, and I suspect the Republic will be the same. You and Dr. Ozbolt can rearrange atoms all you want. You can build an elevator to the moon with your new nano-metals or construct airships and supercomputers to perfect our knowledge, but you will never change what man is. Perfection is not enough for us. It is not that man is ignorant of what’s best for him. It’s that he sometimes yearns for his own suffering, his own miserable existence, not your perfect walls. His passion to build a city is just as great as his passion to destroy it. That is why we’ll never succeed. I wake up today and admire what we’ve done. But tomorrow, I should like to smash our Heliopolis to smithereens.”

General Hythloday looked at his brother in disbelief. He stood up and walked away along the beach. Staring back several times, he kicked the dirt in frustration. Seagulls circled the city like a summer gale, just as he imagined. Nevertheless, as Heliopolis shrank in the darkness like a dying flame, his anger for his brother burned hotter.



A post-apocalyptic future where Plato's "Republic" becomes terrifying reality.

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