

Time of Gods

Written by Andy Emmerson

“Damn Hippies!” Came the thunderous voice breaking the silence inside the office. Its source, the NuHelix CEO, sat hunched in his chair, hands clenched and eyes bulging. Anger boiled over and spewed out of him.

“These little radicals are ruining everything...” Despite the volume being lowered, his words still held their burn, the last ounce of his self-control melting away. Did it matter? No one was in the building this late, save for a few janitors. They would keep quiet. They knew not to speak of what went on behind the closed doors of Orlandia’s biggest corporation.

The report that sparked his anger still sat right in front of Mr. Metz. His eyes hadn’t moved though his body shook furiously.

Despite the company’s best attempts, it seemed as though that once again the radicals that lived out in the Wylde of Orlandia had stopped his plans. This had been going on for too long. There was a short time where it looked like they had finally let up, but it seemed, almost out of nowhere, the radicals had found a source of gems. They financed a large scale protest at one of the larger sites and completely chased off the workers.

Now it was all going downhill. The plans, the company, Orlandia. Mr. Metz was growing both weary and desperate. “I’m sick of this!” He yelled, slamming both fists onto the table. “Sick of these little... cretins.” Couldn’t they see that the world needed to advance? Saving the Wylde would only stop progress and surely leave many without jobs, homes and food. All for the sake of the damn animals.

It wasn’t as though he’d allow the entirety of every forest die off. He’d save some pieces, some animals, create a place for it all and put it in the new city that they desperately needed. Which would be paid for by the gems and jewels found in the ground beneath all of the untouched land. It would be perfect if it hadn’t been for the Wylde Preservation Society.

Mr. Metz let out an exasperated sigh and looked up from the desk. The sound had started minutes before, but he had ignored it originally. He believed it to be some noise down the hall or in another room. Now it was much too loud to ignore. It was... pulsing. As if a heart were slowly coming to life in his office. His eyes narrowed, looking closer at what should have been open space.

Right above the carpet, the air warped unnaturally. Mr. Metz stood up slowly, unblinking eyes wide with shock. His anger was forgotten. Now all that was left was a combination of curiosity, fear, and confusion. “What in the name in Orlandia...?” He whispered, pulling himself up fully from his chair.

Somehow, in some way, the warped air was making the pulsing noise.

Mr. Metz stood behind his desk, gazing forward. He wouldn’t approach. Not until he could find out exactly what this thing was. But how would he do that? He was no scientist; he was a business man.

Slowly, his hand reached into his pocket, aiming for his cell phone. Maybe he could reach someone to come quickly and identify this thing. When his hand wrapped around the piece of metal, the warped air

let out a loud thump and then a noise like it was breathing in. Mr. Metz froze. Had movement made it... come to life. Did it know what he was trying to do?

It breathed again and then made the same pulsing noise as before, this time much louder. And then it fractured.

From inside of the tear was flashing lights of various colors, rainbows of hues that started up and ended quicker than Mr. Metz could keep track of.

An air effect similar to that of a vacuum began to pull at the CEO. His papers flew off his desk, soon after followed by his various heavier objects like his stapler and small filing cabinet. He could feel his own body begin to be tugged forward. Mr. Metz's hands quickly gripped the table in front of him, using all of his strength to hold onto the wood furniture.

It took only a few more seconds of the vacuum's pull before the desk too was lifted off the ground and pulled towards the fracture. His feet left the ground, along with his chair, another side desk and everything else in his immediate sight.

It took no time for Mr. Metz to fly into the colors, to feel the strange warmth that came from being inside.

And then the pain ignited.

His mouth struggled to open. His eyes could only see the rainbows of colors and his hand lost grip on the desk a second later. It was as if his whole body was on fire; the comfortable warmth gone and replaced with the pain of an inferno.

As quickly as it came, it left and the colors vanished, leaving him partially blind. There was air. He could open his mouth. A wiggle of his fingers and toes allowed him to know that he was indeed alive and nothing seemed to be broken or injured. Both hands jumped to his eyes and rubbed them raw to draw away the stars left over in his vision.

When he finally managed to open his eyes, all he could see was an eerie blue light stretched across what he assumed to be the ceiling. As he came to realize this, his ears adjusted and he could hear faint beeps and shifts in the background, as if they were many rooms away. Or maybe the warp just damaged his hearing immensely.

Slowly Mr. Metz sat up. As his vision cleared, he saw that the room was empty save for one large, complex looking machine and a single man standing in front of it. A mask covered the man's face and his arms were crossed over his chest.

"Glad for you to join me, Mr. Metz."

"Who... Who are you? Where am I?! What was that?!" He let out, his voice hoarse. Rage began to build up again, this time at the mysterious man. "Do you know who I am?!"

"...Obviously I do. I just said your name," The masked man replied with an edge to his voice. The answer made the CEO blink with a vacant look in his eyes. "Although you weren't my first choice, I am limited on my control." The last part of the man's words was even sharper than the first, making it clear that he had his own frustrations.

“Well...where the hell am I then?” Mr. Metz fired back.

“Orlandia, Mr. Metz. But...a slightly different version of it.”

“What are you on about? Let me back to my office right - “Mr. Metz’s words were cut from his tongue as the man launched forward and gripped his throat tightly with a clawed hand.

“Listen here you foul mouthed little slug. This is not your party anymore; it’s mine. You do what I say. You do that and I can promise you that we will get you a way around those pesky little activists in your part of the woods.”

Mr. Metz stared forward into the mask, slowly controlling his breathing. He reached up, nails digging into the stranger’s wrist. He growled and ripped the hand away from his throat. Eyes narrowed and through gritted teeth he replied, “I’m listening....”

Time of Skies

Written by Dimitri Kopansky

Typically, air raids had a death count in single digits. If too many die, the cargo crashes to the ground, far below, and is destroyed. It’s just bad business. Yet, in the first violent moments of the attack, three enemy ships were sent plummeting.

“Focus all fire away from the Cruiser!” The Captain of the North Star stood tall at the helm, her voice booming above the gunfire. The spindly man to her left moved to echo her command, but turned back, his brow furrowed.

“M’sorry, which one, Cap’n?”

Rousseau sighed, her eyes closed. “The big one, Mr. Dodge. The big, slow one.”

Her first mate nodded, and set off to holler out at the crew. Captain Rousseau maneuvered the ship through the skies above Orlandia with precision and skill only a handful of others could match. What gave that precision its razor’s edge, however, was the pirate’s secret to ruling the skies. The North Star boasted six Khazradanium compression engines, forsaking cargo space for the added mobility. This made the vessel infamously difficult to hit, and left her enemies dead in the air, respectively. A fact Rousseau used to deadly effect. Within short order, the small fleet guarding the merchant vessel was left at two ships.

“Just a few o’ the vultures left, Ladies!”

The Captain’s hard stare locked onto the Skimmer off the port side. Wood groaned as the North Star’s engines fired against their momentum. The ship’s stern lined up with the center of the Skimmer, speed building. Desperate pleas and cries rolled out from the skimmer as the crew members leapt overboard with makeshift Kite sails and parachutes.

The North Star was too close. What crew remained on the skimmer could do nothing but wait, and Brace for Impact.

The iron tipped stern of Captain Rousseau's ship was now just a few feet from the Skimmer's hull, when the airship dropped, like a lead weight. The North Star hit nothing. Rousseau stood at the helm, stunned and as confused as her crew, before bringing the airship around.

"Grab the wheel, Miss Colfer," she said.

A broad shouldered, dark skinned woman rushed up from the main deck. Without waiting, Rousseau turned to the edge of the ship and looked over. Her eyes narrowed, darting about. The Skimmer wasn't dropping to Earth at terminal velocity. It wasn't even gliding at a slow pace. The airship simply wasn't there.

The Captain leaned further, craning her neck to get a look further under them. Then the stern of the ship yanked down and toward where the Skimmer should have been, and Captain Charlotte Rousseau was knocked from her ship, into the open air.

She tumbled, end over end, faster and faster, the wind past her head growing louder and louder. Rousseau fought against the pull of gravity to stabilize herself, and slowly flattened out. Yet the roar of the rushing wind didn't stop growing in strength. When she realized this, she also discovered that she wasn't free falling. She was being pulled, faster, toward where the Skimmer should have been. And as she approached, she could finally see what looked like a wide, jagged split in the air, where all the light was being pulled toward. Just as she reached the rift, she felt two large, rough hands clamp down around her ankle. Then she and the hands fell through the rift. Every color she had ever seen exploded about her, accompanied by a sudden rush of warmth. As sudden as the warmth came, it was replaced by a searing pain tearing at her skin, pulling her limbs in different directions. Rousseau could feel the hands around her ankles squeeze tighter, nails digging into skin.

Then they were yanked to a stop, suspended in the air. Rousseau looked back at her foot and saw Mr. Dodge half way through the sky.

"I gotcha, Cap'n!"

Captain Rousseau exhaled with relief. "This, Mr. Dodge. This is why I hired you. Now if you'd please-."

The Captain was cut off as the sound of air blowing passed them suddenly ceased, and Mr. Dodge's face screwed up in pain and confusion. Rousseau didn't realize she was falling once again until she bounced off the main sail of the Skimmer, now wrecked, and crashed in a heap on the ground.

She slowly rose into a seated position and looked around her. Towering dark spires were off in the distance, and the sky was covered in dark clouds. Where the skies she had spent her life sailing through tasted fresh and crisp, this place tasted of copper.

And still grimacing, his hands still clamped around her ankle, was the top half of Mr. Dodge.

Time of Storms

Written by Andy Emmerson

An explosion swept across the desert with incredible speed. Thankfully, the cave that Zenner sat in was positioned away from the oncoming shock wave. All she heard was the detonation, the rush of air, and

the aftermath flew past her. Sand ripped past the entrance of the cave and off into the Badlands outside Orlandia.

“Looks like BK did it,” Zenner spoke and turned back. There was only one other person inside the cave with her- her trainee Flynn. The broad shouldered boy sat with his back pressed against the cave wall. He seemed unfazed by the sounds coming from outside. That was good. Zenner didn’t need some weak willed partner. Orlandia was gone. The desert was everyone’s home now.

Zenner walked over to Flynn, the echo of her boots overpowered by the roar outside, as it slowly died out. Zenner wondered who was left. Many of Jester faction had pushed into the city with the Bandit King. They knew they had high chances of dying.

Die with a man’s head beneath your boot, don’t live under someone else’s. That was the creed of the Jesters.

The plan had been to surge the city; to take back the land and return it to how it was before. Return it to the sand.

The Polaris and Orlandia’s military had tried to stop them every step of the way. The Polaris believed in justice. Like the world worked that way. It was eat or be eaten. At least the military understood power. But they too had wanted something concrete; a so-called utopia of order and prosperity through strict unity.

Unity. What a load.

You had to take what you believed was yours. Giving jobs and homes was just enabling the weak. And the only forms of payment were blood and sweat. No tears. Jesters don’t cry.

Zenner doubted any of them did as they walked towards the almost-sure death. It had been pretty much every one of their numbers. Zenner and Flynn alone were to await The Bandit King to return and go from there. A small part of Zenner did hope for some of the others to return, though. It wasn’t much of a faction without more people.

As she pondered, the sounds outside all but died down. The Big Bitchin’ Bomb had gone off. Now it was done. Only the normal noises of the desert were left. Soft winds over rolling dunes.

“Finally done, huh?” Flynn asked, breaking Zenner from her thoughts.

“You’re a genius, aren’t you?” Zenner replied, raising a single brow at her trainee. He merely shrugged and looked back outside. Toughening trainees was fun, but only in the beginning when they couldn’t take the insults.

Flynn stood up and dusted himself off. “How long do you think it’ll take before BK gets back?”

“Probably a few hours. Can’t imagine he’d be able to just stroll out after that explosion.”

“Right,” Flynn nodded and turned towards the back of the cave. “We could go exploring.”

“In a cave, that we know is only about twenty feet long and leads to just more cave? Are you always this dumb?”

“I like to think I’m pretty consistent in my stupidity, yes.”

Zenner sighed and waved him off to do as he pleased. As long as he didn’t somehow destroy the cave they took shelter in, she couldn’t care less what he did with his time.

As Flynn walked off, Zenner wondered once again about their fate. What would become of the few Bandits left? Would they ride off into the desert to find more towns like Orlandia? Or did they stay and thrive amongst the ashes of the decimated city? Surely others would survive and they could join their ranks. And if they didn’t want to, they’d be made to. Or they would die. Zenner felt her lips split into a smirk. It would be nice to have some fresh blood for her to break in and teach the true ways of life.

“Hey! Uh...Zenner! You might want to come check this out!”

“Flynn. I’ve seen a rock before.” Once again Flynn had pulled Zenner from her own head and this time she felt much more annoyed by it.

“Not a rock. Definitely not a rock. Unless they make vacuum rocks!”

“What are you on about...?” Zenner muttered more to herself and then turned to walk back into the darkness of the cave. Her feet carried her roughly ten feet before she bumped into Flynn, who stood in the dead center of the cave. “What’s the deal with-!”

“Shh...-Listen.”

“Did you just “Shh” me?”

“It happens. Listen.” The dark figure of Flynn didn’t move, but somehow a little more of his form was growing into focus. At first, Zenner chalked it up to her eyes adjusting. However, there was clearly light growing in a space a few feet from the ground and the noise that Flynn had jokingly called “vacuum rocks” was becoming apparent to Zenner.

“What in the name of Khazradan?” Zenner whispered as the light and the suction grew rapidly. For a second, the two stood watching without any movement.

Then the light grew and the suction force pulled with power a hundred fold.

Rocks and dirt flew up and around the two of them. Zenner covered her face with her arms as she felt her whole body being pulled forward. Amongst the rush of vacuum, she could hear grunts and groans from Flynn, but they were masked by the storm inside the cave.

Zenner fought the wind’s grip, but the pull grew too much too quickly and she felt herself lift off the ground and forward.

The pulling winds of the strange vacuum were replaced with a near silence. Zenner’s eyes remained shut, but behind them she could see an array of colors and hues. Her body was twisting and was screaming in pain, but she gritted her teeth and withstood it.

She was flying. And then she was on the cold hard ground. Dirt. Air. Okay, so she had been... swallowed and spit back out? There’s still the soft sound of the vacuum nearby and then the grunting thud of

another body. Its voice was familiar and immediately Zenner realized that Flynn must have had the same thing happen to him.

The Jester quickly stood up on both feet woozily. Her hands jumped to her eyes and rubbed them.

As they adjusted, Zenner's eyes found the landscape so unfamiliar, she had a small notion that she must have passed out and this was a dream. She definitely wasn't in the cave anymore. There was no cave. She had been brought to an open plain. Purple sand and dirt crunched under her boot and the warm desert air had been replaced with cool, almost electric winds blowing past. This wasn't the desert she knew. This wasn't Orlandia. Where was she?

"Is this some sort of joke?"

Time of Swords

Written by Dimitri Kopansky

Hard leather heels dug into the horse's flank, spurring it past an already break-neck speed. A tree branch scratched across her neck. Beads of blood dripped down Farah's throat. She flinched, looking back for the red glow of their pursuer's hateful glare. He was gaining ground.

"Kayden! Thorne is closing!" Farah clung tighter to Kayden's waist.

The knight growled in frustration, and yanked the reins to the right, nearly sending their squire tumbling off the horse. The evasive maneuver did little to break Thorne's progress. Kayden's eyes darted back and forth, hunting for a route that would lead to an escape, or at least give them a stronger place to stand and fight.

"Duck!"

Kayden felt Farah's hand yank down on their shoulder, dragging their head down by the horse's neck. The motion caused the knight's arm to pull at the reins, turning the horse's head at the same moment a javelin flew by. The horse let out a loud neigh as the missile cut a gash in its side. It was all Kayden could do to keep the two of them from being tossed off as their steed darted back and forth. As the horse was brought under control, they broke the tree line. Fifty yards away was the edge of a cliff. Being thrown may have been the better option.

"Cursed be that fool in kings' clothes. And cursed be his lap dogs and wolves," Kayden said. They pulled the horse up just shy of the edge, and turned about.

"Orders? Ideas?" Farah asked. Her hand went to the short sword at her hip.

"We do what all knights are called to. We fight the unjust."

Kayden dismounted and went for the shield strapped to their horse's flank. Thorne walked his Nightmare forward as Kayden and Farah stepped about, weapons barred. The king's guard, in his dark armor, drew forth his sharp edged mace. A deep throated, mirthless laugh echoed from him.

"You stand as if to die with some shred of honor left. But there will be no songs or stories told of your slaughter." Thorne brandished his mace and charged.

Shield out, Kayden rushed in, meeting the ghastly creature and the Nightmare he rode. The black hooves connected with their shield. Kayden rolled and thrust upward at Thorne's off side. Steel met with steel. But before Thorne could counter, Farah's own blade dove in, digging into the Nightmare's belly. The beast reared in agony. It threw its rider to the dirt. The beast dissipated into black mist and flew towards Thorne's belt. As it did, he stood.

Kayden shifted to stand between their squire and the king's guard. The two anointed knights held each other's stare for a long moment. A howling wind picked up. Leaves and dust and debris whipped past unmoving legs. As the tree line bent in- limbs craning for a better look at the coming bloodshed- Thorne rushed forward. Kayden planted their shield firmly in the dirt, unwilling to yield any further ground. Black edged steel swung in. But at the last moment, Thorne's mace diverted, clipping the corner of Kayden's shield harmlessly.

The two fighters paused, confused. Thorne no longer looked at his prey, but past them. Kayden knew they would have no better opportunity, and swung with all their might. The space between them felt like water, slowing the strike. And then a pull. Kayden felt not only their sword arm yanked back, but their entire body sucked back by an unrelenting gust.

The ground rushed away from Kayden. Howling wind filled their ears, then nothing. Color exploded all around, brighter and more intense than anything Kayden had ever seen. But they couldn't take notice, as their skin erupted in searing pain, the pressure of a mountain threatening to crush them from all sides.

Then cold air, and the sound of their bodies thumping into a wooden hull.

Kayden could see nothing but the blinding colors for a long while, and fumbled at their knees, searching for anything familiar.

"Here, let me help you, my lo- I mean liege" Farah stammered, lifting Kayden from under their arm. They could breathe easy, knowing their companion was there.

Kayden started to offer their thanks when a door banged open behind them.

"Khazradan be damned, who's out here banging on my ship in the middle of the night?" Charlotte Rousseau strode out, gun raised and hand at her cutlass. "If you're with that blathering scientist and his followers, I've warned you once I'll-" the captain halted abruptly, seeing the clear confusion on the pair's face as they looked about.

"...I'm sorry," said Kayden, standing taller. Their eyesight was slowly returning. "I'm... not sure where we are, and I can't quite see, yet."

"Aye, you will. Come inside," Captain Rousseau slid her gun back in her belt and motioned to Farah to help her companion in. "What's left of my ship is the closest thing this place has to neutral port. And hospital. And bar."

"Is that sanitary?" Farah asked, helping Kayden inside the hull of what seemed to be a wrecked ship.

"Honestly girl, are ye?" Charlotte fired back.

A light smirk worked its way onto Kayden's lips. Their eyes had adjusted and they could see the pirate with whom Farah and them had been conversing, "I like her."

Time of Shadows

Written by Andy Emmerson

When the brutal, burning stopped and Ross was thrown to the ground, he entertained the thought that he might have actually died. Being sucked into a black hole wasn't exactly something people usually lived through.

For a few seconds, he surveyed his body — he wiggled toes and fingers, and then onto moving full limbs just to make sure all worked. He was good. Even the pain that had plagued him when he had been sucked in was slowly dying out.

Now, if only his vision could come back.

His eyes opened up as soon as he hit the dirt and all he could see was the swirling colors from the vortex. Was this what being blind was actually like? No one ever talked about the colors before.

Soon enough though, as the pain subsided, his vision returned. The darkness of space was gone. At first, he thought his eyes hadn't really healed yet, but were putting an odd spin and blur to the planet he had been on before. In front of him sat a grouping of large rocks. Beyond it was something he had never seen before. This... purple landscape with towering spires and electrical storms was nothing like the lush beauty of red and yellow from the planet Ross had visited to find his sister.

Sister...

Riley!

Ross shook his head to focus. Whatever had happened to him he'd have to think and wonder on later. The important thing was finding Riley.

He stood up slowly, rolled his shoulders, and twisted his neck to work out any leftover kinks. He looked over his shoulder at the split in the air a few yards away. It was still pulsing, pulling and pushing. Had Riley come through one of these as well? Would it be dangerous to invest —

"It seems to be just behind this group of rocks, sir. Would you like the other Porphyron to check it out first?" A voice pulled Ross from his thoughts immediately and yanked his focus back in front of him. They were close by. What did he do? Was this planet friendly or had he happened into dangerous territory? It'd be better to hide for now. He had nothing to protect himself — his gun didn't make it through the vortex.

"The Porphyron are as good as naught, but guards and cannon fodder. I will be fine, Armaros."

Ross stumbled forward and pushed himself between two of the rocks, letting out a groan of pain as the rock cut across his back. He quickly sucked in his breath to stop the sound. After managing himself into a little nook where he wasn't being stuck by a rock, he waited and watched, eyes trained forward.

Ross didn't have to wait long. Two men appeared into his line of vision a few seconds after he hid himself. Unfortunately for Ross, he couldn't hear much at all beyond the rocks. They stopped any words making it back to the Rocket Ranger. They didn't, however, stop him from being able to watch the pair.

The two men walked around the perimeter of the split in the air that Ross had come through. The smaller of the pair gestured to it quite a bit, shaking his head almost as much. The bigger of the two just nodded now and again, walking much slower than his smaller counterpart. Eventually the two stopped, Shoulder to Shoulder, and appeared to continue to talk. The smaller gestured one more time in a grand sweeping gesture then walked away.

A second later, Ross watched four more people walk to the portal, each holding a large gun in their hand. Those silhouettes were easy enough to recognize.

The five seemed to speak for a while — Ross assumed from what he saw. The left as a group, walking away from the portal. Ross waited and watched. He didn't know who they were or what they wanted, but he was not going to risk anything until he found out more about where he was and if Riley was still here as well. Those were the only things that mattered.

The Rocket Ranger pulled himself out of the rocks, gritting his teeth as the rock sliced at his back again. This time would surely draw blood. After he freed himself, he took a look around. No one else seemed to present. Neither of those voices or those other armed shadows. The... Porphyron? What an odd name. The Porphyron. Armaros. And then the one only known as "sir" so far.

Ross eyed the vortex for a few seconds before he finally looked past it. Long away in the distance, he could see light. It was small, but it was a better sign than he had seen so far for actual civilization. It was also in the opposite direction from which the suspicious group came. That was enough for him.

He took off in that direction, every now and again checking over his shoulder for any sign of the Porphyron, Armaros, or "sir." But no one else was out in the desolate landscape. There were a few sporadic Lightning Strikes nearby, but Ross didn't pay much attention to them. Eventually he kept his eyes forward on the light source and, hopefully, something that would lead him to Riley.

Unbeknownst to Ross or any other souls, something else did eventually come through the rift. It was a mass of black, shapeless limbs branching off from a smoky body that never quite solidified. It rose up when it appeared and then disappeared into the rocks that Ross had hidden in as well, quickly disappearing into the darkness.

Crossroads at the Fork of Time

Written by Andy Emmerson

The fifth time being exploded back into a wall was the final straw for Patroclus. And possibly for his back. Which ached increasingly as he pulled himself back up, fixing his askew glasses and dusting off his lab coat. A sigh left his lips and both hands went to his head. He stared forward at the machine that had caused all of the explosions.

It was his life's work — a machine that could use pure Khazradanium to open portals to anywhere. A powerful means of transportation without any waiting. Just in one side and out the other. The mere idea had made his name synonymous with “mud” in recent years, but he knew he was getting closer. Khazradanium would prove to be the source he needed.

Patroclus walked forward and stopped in front of the 6-foot-tall machine. Its body was once sleeker, with silver and steel completely clean. Now it was dented from Patroclus' work, the shine gone and its cleanliness had waned from Patroclus' dirty hands and the passage of time.

Time.

How much time had he spent on this? It was his life's work, so the quickest answer was that: his entire life. But this version of the machine — the closest yet. It had been five years. Five years of Patroclus' life had been spent working and tinkering with this very machine. The Thetis.

“This... I can feel it. I can feel everything come together,” He whispered to himself quickly. He said it every time. Words of encouragement because he knew eventually he'd be right. And Orlandia would never be the same.

Patroclus moved his glasses from his eyes and rubbed them, then refocused. He had been awake for fifteen hours. He rarely slept when an idea came to him and this one had been, in his mind. his best in some time.

Khazradanium was the power source, but what if it was also the point of reference? For years, Patroclus had fought and struggled to find a way to connect his place to another. There had to be a fixed point. An energy source to draw on. Of course there were landmarks, but buildings didn't emit an energy that Khazradanium can sense. However, more Khazradanium did! And that was the solution. Use his Khazradanium to find more on the other side of the world. Or another country over. Whichever.

It had taken a lot of tinkering, but Patroclus had done it. The last explosion had been from his machine attempting to adjust to its new settings. It was an explosion and it hurt, but it was much less this time and he knew he was just a few steps away.

There was no light peeking through the windows — night had fallen hours ago. So in the dim laboratory, Patroclus once again started up the Thetis and moved to its location settings. “Okay, more concentrated this time. It can't focus on too much. I wish I had that problem...” He laughed to himself. “Wait, no I don't. I wouldn't be me. Or like me. Unless... — Nah, unlikely. Unlikely like me. I like me. I want to stay liking me...” He switched its settings for all of his Khazradanium to focus on one. One strong field of it emitting from the first result. Not multiple pieces. Not anywhere in particular. Just grab and go. “Just grab and go,” He said to himself and flipped the switch.

For a few seconds, there was nothing. Okay, no exploding was good.

And then, there was the sound of a vacuum.

Patroclus stood in the dim light, his eyes squinting through his glasses and towards the machine. That sound was new. But he needed to remain still and watch and listen. If a problem happened, he needed to be able to identify it.

The sound grew louder. And louder.

The space next to the Thetis, between it and his work desk, seemed to... pulse. He took a step closer in its direction. His boot touched the concrete under him carefully. Had he...?

The air became visible. It warped and shook and spilled inward in almost an instant. Patroclus sucked in his breath and prepared for whatever was to come.

What came was the very space ripping in half. There. Right there in front of him, space split open and in front of him was almost like... a rainbow. Colors swirling in front of him in various hues and shades. Amongst the colors were... images. They went by so quickly that he was unsure what he was really looking at.

He smiled. Wide. His mouth opened up in jubilation and Patroclus let out a loud whoop of happiness. Then another. Soon he was dancing around, arms moving, legs doing the same. He had done it! He had opened up a rift! The very fabric of space had been undone and now he could see to a place unknown, surely some ways away. Even if it was two blocks away from him, Patroclus wouldn't care. He had done it!

For a few minutes, the scientist danced around, wearing himself out. Oh, he'd needed to do so since he'd hardly be able to sleep tonight. There was so much excitement rushing through him.

As he calmed himself down, he looked into the portal's colors once more. It was beautiful in there. Vibrant in every color possible.

"I wonder where it goes..." Patroclus said to himself and took a few steps closer. It seemed safe. Nothing was being sucked into the rift or pushed out. As he got closer, he slowly picked up the sounds of... metal. Metal on metal. And there were... yells? Of joy and anger and sorrow and pain. Then gunshots.

Was it a... battle?

Where did this portal open up to?

For a few seconds, he sat and listened, trying to decipher the noise. It was as if each sound was coming through a tunnel. It was hollow and distant. But amongst the various weapons and screaming, one voice eventually was able to be heard over all others: "I have seen realities burn and worlds decimated. And I am on the very cusp of my victory! Get out of my way, or I will tear you apart as I have time!"

What anger. What ferocity. Patroclus stood still as the sounds of battle once again picked up. Suddenly the exhausted scientist felt fear. Where had this rift opened up to? A place of war and, it seemed, mad men. Realities burn. Worlds decimated. Victory. Tearing apart time.

In a moment, he flew across the floor to the other side of the Thetis and shut the power off. It got louder, it's Khazradanium power source growing in its glowing purple and slowly the rift disappeared from out of the corner of Patroclus' eye.

When it was gone, he stood for a few minutes breathing heavily. Only silence met with the sounds of his labored breaths. And then slowly he stepped away from the Thetis. "I have some things to work on clearly..." He said to himself and walked towards the door, suddenly more ready for bed than he had in some time.