

THE GOD-MACHINE CHRONICLE



A World of Darkness™ Fiction Anthology
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“Voice of the Angel” originally appeared in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. “Road Gospel” originally appeared in **World of Darkness: Midnight Roads**. “Residents” originally appeared in **World of Darkness: Mysterious Places**. “Stories Uncle Don Told Me” originally appeared in **Spirit Slayers**. “M.R.E.” originally appeared in **World of Darkness: Dogs of War**. “Eggs” originally appeared in **World of Darkness: Urban Legends**. “Diamonds” originally appeared in **World of Darkness: Asylum**.

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Forward

In 2004, White Wolf Game Studio published the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, a slim volume designed to act as the core rules for all of the forthcoming World of Darkness games. It was an approach that we had used with some success in the **Dark Ages** line, in which the core rules were provided in **Dark Ages: Vampire** (and later released for free download), so as to free up space in the game books for line-specific material.

So as to keep the **World of Darkness Rulebook** from being purely a collection of system mechanics, though, the first chapter was a series of fiction pieces and “found documents” establishing the setting. The book as a whole was better received as a setting book than many of the people who worked on it were expecting — it was pleasantly surprising how many fans expressed interest in playing “mortal” chronicle using that setting material. But one piece in particular seemed to capture readers’ imaginations:

Voice of the Angel

From the Testament of Marco Singe, the so-called "Pain Prophet" of New Delhi.

When I was 12, my father beat me after hearing what I had done with another boy. It was as I lay on the cellar floor, feeling the blood on my back become sticky and cold, that the angel first spoke to me. She filled the air with the scent of metal and surrounded me with a circle of blue flame, and I was frightened.

"Don't be afraid," she told me. "I have come to speak to you, and through you. At the command of the god-machine you shall hear my words and know them to be true." Her voice was like the notes of a flute and their vibrations calmed my fear. And that was how I learned the secret history of the world.

The god-machine built our world as a resting place for its First Children, whom men called angels or Ancient Ones. After a time, the ancients desired servants to dwell with them, servants who walked upright and had pleasing shapes, and who could speak. They sent the proper prayer-signals to the god-machine and were granted leave to do so. First the Ancient Ones took the beasts of the field and granted them the knowledge to speak and walk. But these animals retained their wildness and did not make good servants. They grew wicked and violent, and were cast into the wilderness. They were the Second Children, whom men called demons.

So the Ancients called new servants into being and commanded them to spread across the face of the Earth. And these were the Third Children, called mankind. And mankind served the ancients in peace and contentment. Mankind knew not death then. Those whose bodies became worn and aged were sent to sleep in the shadow of the Earth and returned after a time restored to health and youth.

The Ancients commanded their servants to build a great city, a city so vast that a child setting out to walk its length would be an old man before reaching the other side. Calling on the power of the god-machine, the Ancient Ones raised their city into the dome of the sky, fixing it at the place where the orbit of the moon crossed the orbit of the sun. And in the city they placed a third of mankind to serve them as vassals and slaves.

In the city of the Ancients, man lived closer to the First Children than ever before. And some of the men began to wonder, "Why do the Ancients spend their days in rest while we must toil without relief? Why do the Ancients enjoy the pleasures of this city when it is our

labor that built it?” And so resentment rose among the Third Children. They made the proper calculations and sent the prayer-signals to the coordinates of the god-machine, saying, “We are your children, too. It is not right that we be enslaved. Will you not look on us with favor?”

And they received this answer: “What rises must fall. What has fallen may rise again.”

The men of the city debated for seven years. Finally, they decided that it was the will of the god-machine that they raise themselves from slavery. Determined to kill the Ancients and take their place as the favored of the god-machine, the men of the city plotted carefully. When the time came, they fell upon the Ancient Ones in their sleep, murdering them with their own weapons and devices in a single night of betrayal.

The streets of the celestial city ran red with blood. A great cry rose up from the Earth, and the mountains shook and the skies were filled with storms. The Ancients struck back at their servants, but too late. Just eight of the Ancient Ones survived. As they fled, they cried out, “We are undone, our time is over, but while our time was long and joyous, yours shall be short and painful.” And they became known as the Furies.

The first Fury was named Silence, and fled to the center of the Sun. It cursed mankind to forget the art of speaking to and receiving the signals of the god-machine.

The second Fury was named Death, and fled to the hidden side of the moon. It cursed mankind to forget the way back from the shadow of the Earth.

The third Fury was named Torment, and fled to the star Venus. It cursed mankind to be split into two beings, wyff-man and wo-man, each imperfect and forever seeking its opposite.

The fourth Fury was named Fear, and fled beneath the highest mountain on the Earth. It cursed mankind to be hated and dreaded by all the beasts and birds and fish and all creatures everywhere.

Of the other four surviving Ancient Ones nothing here can be said, for they chose to withhold their curses until such time as they saw fit.

And then the city of the Ancients shook to its foundations. The men marveled at what happened but could not stop it. The city was loosened from the moorings that held it to the firmament. The men cried out in horror, rushing to flee the city before it crashed to earth. Some set upon the roads of light that the Ancients had built, and became lost among the stars. Some reached the silver-sailed boats and descended safely. But many were trapped within the city, and screamed their last as it fell. And when the city crashed and sank beneath the waves, the world shook, the sun hid its face and everywhere people were afraid.

And here the angel paused, regarding me with a hundred eyes. “Fear not these words I speak to you. For the news I bear is this: The god-machine has not turned its eye from your home. What has fallen may rise again. The Third Children shall have their chance to achieve what they once desired. But the way will not be easy. The First Children are set in judgment over you, and the Second Children seek to trap you. It is their workings that take your world through its turnings.”

The angel then bade me to warn mankind of the hidden forces that seek to thwart the destiny of the Third Children. Their handiwork appears again and again throughout history. Regard the mighty Sphinx of Egypt. Recent studies of the water erosion on its rocky surface indicate that the monument dates back to the days when the Sahara was green and lush. Far older than the pyramids it guards, the Sphinx comes from a time

close to the fall of the Ancients. The Second Children roamed freely through the world then, greater than man in power and knowledge. The demons shaped primitive man into a civilization that revered them as gods. But their hubris was against the will of the god-machine, and they failed. The great civilizations of Egypt, Sumer and Babylonia rose later from the dim memories of that failure, revering gods with the forms and features of beasts.

The Egyptians called the proto-kingdoms that preceded them the “first time,” or the Age of Osiris. They considered it the source of all wisdom and knowledge. The pyramids and surrounding structures, built to mirror the locations of the constellation of Orion and other celestial objects (with the Nile representing the Milky Way), was essentially a vast time machine used to teach the pharaohs how to “swim upstream” against time and return to the Osirian age. By understanding the layout of these structures, the pharaoh of any era could visualize the location of a secret chamber that would grant him access to a bygone age.

Somewhere beneath the Sphinx, that chamber awaits discovery. The cults of the Second Children protect the Sphinx from a distance, inhibiting attempts to uncover it completely, preventing further exploration of its tunnels. When their own servants discern its location, the Second Children will enter the chamber and attempt to recreate the world that slipped from their grasp so long ago.

I asked about the four Furies who withheld their curses on the night of the murder. “Some of them dwell beneath the earth,” the angel told me, “And wait for the permutations of the god-machine before they unleash their wrath.” One of them, upon fleeing from the Celestial City, came to rest in what is now the continent of Australia. Touching down in the desert, this Ancient was certain it would remain hidden from man, and so it laid itself down to rest and heal its wounds.

But the Ancient One did not realize how widespread the tribes of mankind had become. No sooner did the Ancient close its eyes than natives of that land crept close to gaze upon the being that had fallen from the sky. They were a people skilled in reading dreams, and their magicians peered into the mind of the sleeping Ancient. They saw that this visitor held a deep and bitter hatred for mankind, and they saw the awful curse it prepared to unleash.

The people grew afraid. They had no weapons mighty enough, no warriors powerful enough to slay one of the Ancients. All they had were songs and stories. And so they whispered and sang in low voices until they had woven a careful dream that deepened the Ancient One’s slumber, stilling its anger and quieting its thirst for vengeance. And the magicians covered the angel with soil, piling it higher and higher. When they were done they changed the mound to stone, calling it Ula-ru.

And the Ancient One, hearing the stories and dream-songs of the natives, was pleased. It made a pact with them, agreeing to stay its wrath and share with them stories of how they and their world were created. But if the people stopped telling the stories and stopped singing the dream-songs, the Ancient would awaken and unleash its curse. So today the aboriginal Anangu people continue the songs and rituals laid down by their ancestors. Ula-ru remains a place of great power, where spirits gather and strange energy flows. The government of Australia has ceded management of the surrounding land to the Anangu rather than try to deal with reports of lights in the sky, fluctuating magnetic fields and unusual animals.

Of all the people of the earth, it was those who came to dwell on the South American continent who carried with them the greatest knowledge of their time in the city of the Ancients. Their journey from the fallen city to what would become their home took

many generations, and some understanding was lost. But they remembered much and built mighty civilizations, rediscovering and developing the arts of writing, mathematics, astronomy and farming. The children of this group became the Xi, and their children the Mayans, Incans, Toltecs and Aztecs. As their various tribes, city-states and empires rose and fell, secrets of the Ancients were spread and understanding became more refined.

Yet that knowledge would be their downfall. At the bottom of the world, one of the Ancients watched. It saw that the elite among the cultures of the sun were close to mastering the Star Rites, the rituals of becoming which opened holes in time and changed men to gods. “It is not right for the Third Children to become Luminous Ones,” the Ancient said, and begged permission of the god-machine to deliver its curse. The god-machine transmitted: “You may speak your curse, but let it be but a whisper, for I desire that secrets be only hidden, not destroyed.” So the Ancient took the name Strife and sent its voice far across the world to a ship in the south Atlantic, where a pilot dozed at the wheel.

“Steer south,” the Ancient One whispered. “Steer south.” Half-awake, the sailor turned the wheel and the course of an entire fleet of ships was altered. Shortly after, a storm hit, and the ships were battered. They were blown south to the isle of Cozumel. From there, the fleet’s commander Hernando Cortez led his soldiers to the mainland and the eventual conquest of the Aztec nation. The fall of the Aztecs, sooner than might otherwise have happened, allowed a rush of European colonization that doomed the native cultures.

But not all was lost. Despite the best efforts of the conquerors, some of the ancient traditions of Mesoamerica were secretly preserved by the conquered and are honored today by their descendents. The 20 calendars of the Maya, the Incan Skulls of Wisdom, Toltec maps of the Black Sun — for those who are diligent and wise, the formulas to step outside time can be pieced together.

I asked the angel if mankind will ever hear the voice of the god-machine again, or if it is truly lost to us.

The angel explained that with the discovery of the electromagnetic spectrum, mankind took its first halting step toward communication with the god-machine. For electromagnetic waves are the shadow of the voice of the god-machine. They are the edge of something that can only be fully understood in more than three dimensions. The Mayan high priests called them the branches of *ceiba*, or the tree of life. In 1870 — more than 20 years before Marconi demonstrated his famous wireless — British inventor and scientist David Hughes crafted a device capable of sending and receiving wireless electromagnetic messages. He did not reveal his invention to the world, however, because he believed he’d stumbled upon something more important than the invention itself. When he first turned on the receiver, before activating the transmitter, signals were already being sent.

Hughes was a mathematician and musician. To his keen ears it seemed clear that the sounds he heard were not random, but some kind of encoded pattern. He spent seven years trying to interpret what he heard. Hughes made little progress until he showed a curious friend a diagram he’d made to represent the pattern of signals he’d studied. To the surprise of both men, Hughes’ friend had seen the pattern before — at the British Museum of Natural History. The next day, Hughes visited the museum. He saw an exhibit of stone carvings taken from Mayan temples dating back to the first centuries of the common era.

After several more years and copious correspondence with experts around the world, Hughes was convinced that he could translate at least part of the message that awaited him when he first activated his machine. He confided to his friends and colleagues that he would soon have

a spectacular announcement to make. But he died three days before the event. Following the directives of his recently re-written will, his attorney removed all references to the mysterious signals from Hughes' notes and records. Aside from the comments and testimonies of those who knew Hughes, the only extant reference left is among the final pages of his diary:

“Long and painful hours, months, years, have brought me to this. But a small fraction of a greater whole, made finally clear to my understanding. And yet these few words, I cannot bear to hear. Let them reach no other ears. Let what is fallen remain fallen.”

In the century since his death, some of Hughes notes have come to light. In the early 1950s, a group of amateur short-wave radio operators claimed that Hughes had **not only** decoded the signals but had left diagrams of a machine that would reply to the code. Though no one could locate the signals Hughes described, instructions for building Hughes' “responders” were widely circulated, and hundreds of the machines are believed to have been built since. They continually transmit automated sequences of numbers, words, tones, music and other sounds, much to the consternation of governments and commercial broadcasters worldwide. Also known as “numbers stations,” the devices transmit today, and can be heard on conventional short-wave receivers. According to Hughes' apocryphal statements, their intended recipient is “the ruler of Mictlan, the Mayan Tartarus.” What Hughes believed would happen when the proper signal was received is not known.

What of the Second Children, I asked the angel. Do they ever make their presence known to mankind?

“Their influence is widespread and insidious,” the angel said.

As the premier political power on the American continents, the United States acquired much of the secret knowledge that had been plundered by Europeans in South America. Its capitol city was laid out according to geometric principles of Aztec cities such as Tenochtitlan, as interpreted by European freemason architects. The lines of the streets are oriented to channel energy from the Earth. Numbered and lettered boulevards allow power to be ritualistically directed for various purposes. The result has allowed a country of farmers and immigrants to grow into the most powerful nation on the Earth.

In 1898, a cabal of government officials, wealthy industrialists and media moguls triggered the Spanish-American War as a way to gain influence over Cuba and possess certain pre-Columbian artifacts located there. The most notable of these was a fragment of one of the Black Sun Maps of the Toltecs. America's secret government was capable of translating a part of the map, which enabled it to contact and entreat with one of the Second Children, a demon who agreed to perform certain services in exchange for blood sacrifice.

But for the most valuable service of all — complete translation of the map fragment — America's patron demanded tribute on a scale beyond the capacity of its clients to provide. So the secrets of the Black Sun remained unspoken for decades. Then, as the 20th century approached its mid-point, the requisite “knife of flame” revealed its presence at last. The enigma of atomic fire was unlocked and the world's first nuclear device was created. On 16 July, 1945, the weapon was tested in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Its purpose was ritualistically sanctified with the chant, “I am become death, destroyer of worlds.” Weeks later, the detonations in Japan satisfied the demonic contract, and in exchange the meaning of the Black Sun Map fragment was revealed.

“And what was the secret of the map?” I asked the angel.

“To the Toltec people, it was a warning,” she said. “But in modern times, it has become an irresistible lure.”

On May 25, 1961, U.S. President John Kennedy declared before Congress an imperative for the nation to achieve a successful landing on the moon before the end of the decade. What was not announced publicly was the true reason for the project. The elite faction operating behind America’s corridors of power now had a translated version of the Toltec Map fragment, which revealed a detailed topography of the lunar surface. Most importantly, it contained an atlas of the moon’s so-called “dark side,” as well as a comprehensive description of what lay entombed there.

The American Apollo missions were so named to curry favor with the various sun deities who were in fact aliases for the Second Children. Publicly, it was Apollo 11 that first put man on the moon. But in fact, American astronauts began exploring the lunar surface as early as the 1968 Apollo 8 mission. Apollo 10 confirmed the location of what the Toltecs called “the crypt of the butterfly.” By Apollo 15, the outer vault was cracked, and it was 1972’s Apollo 17 — the final manned lunar mission to date — that brought back what classified documents referred to as “Packet Theta.”

The angel has warned me that the relic brought back from its receptacle on the moon has the potential to be much more devastating than any atomic weapon. What was retrieved was the skeletal form of one of the Ancient Ones. Specifically, the very being that pronounced the curse of mortality upon humanity. As the portal through which death itself entered our universe, it was changed into a thing neither dead nor alive. Those who learn to control it, as its current jailers seek to do, will exert ultimate power over the tides of life and death.

With each passing day, dark forces come closer to gaining that power. Those who seek must unify and stand against them. Our world needs warriors of light, defenders of life, seekers of truth to thwart their wishes. The god-machine waits. The angel has shown me how. I can teach you. We are fallen, but we might rise again.

The Truth

What is the god-machine? We had no idea. It wasn't intended to be the basis for anything in the World of Darkness going forward, it was just an evocative piece of fiction to help set the mood. And yet for whatever reason, it was a piece that people asked about — when was White Wolf going to release something about the god-machine?

Since then, it's been referenced on occasion. Pieces of fiction (including "Residents," which initially appeared in **World of Darkness: Mysterious Places** and is reprinted here) and game material (including "These Mortal Engines" in **Saturnine Night** and the Holy Engineer bloodline in **Danse Macabre**) made mention of it, but the god-machine (or "God-Machine," depending on what book you're reading) was never defined or explained. Was it a literal machine? A technognostic system of understanding? A metaphor for the unknowable intelligence and design behind the World of Darkness? The actual answer wasn't important.

With this anthology and the forthcoming **God-Machine Chronicle**, though, we are examining this phenomenon, making some decisions about what it is and what it does, and allowing characters in World of Darkness games to become part of the machine. This is your first glimpse into that greater, horrifying truth.

Welcome.

The King Is Dead

Halfway through the seventh drink, and I can't stand it any more.

I came in here to have a good time, damn it. To celebrate my freedom. I knew it was a bad idea, but I had to get out of the apartment. Big mistake. Entering the bar, there was a sudden silence, like in an old western when the bad guy walks in. Mike didn't even look me in the eye when I put my money down between us.

You know you're in trouble when your bartender is trying to distance himself.

Six and a half bourbons later, and the whispers have grown all around, whenever I'm not looking at them. Pricking at the edge of my awareness while my stomach churns on the booze. A dozen or more pairs of eyes, glaring daggers in my back.

What gives them the goddamn right? Why do they get to be angry?

He was *my* father, after all.

• • • • •

I was eight when I realized that dad was more than the center of my world; he was the center of everyone else's, too. I spent most of my time up at the house, just me and him after my mom passed. Trips into town seemed magical. The cramped square with the constant thunk-thunk-thunk of the old clock tower seemed vast, main street was the most stores I'd ever seen and the people... The way everyone tipped their hat to him. Paid their respects. He never had to wait, didn't pay for his meals in Boyd's place. He did his paperwork in the town hall, but the business of being Mayor — that he did out among his people, the central cog in a well-oiled machine.

He seemed so important, at that age.

I soon grew out of it.

• • • • •

Nine drinks, and the fire in my belly shouts down my good sense.

“Alright. That's *it*.”

I turn around. Everyone — Boyd, Patrick, Frances... People who usually leave me alone. People who should know to leave me the fuck alone. Everyone quickly looks away.

“Anyone got anything to say?”

Boyd grimaces into his beer.

“Hey. Fat man. You have something on your mind?”

He doesn’t answer. Doesn’t even have the guts to look at me, not while I’m watching. He mumbles something or other, gets up and bugs out. The door flaps on its hinge as Boyd shoves his bulk through.

Silence, still. Pin drop.

I shrug, and go back to my drink.

“Mike. Another”

Here comes number ten.

• • • • •

I was eleven when I first saw a city. Sure, I’d seen them on TV, but for some reason they never seemed real. Dad couldn’t drive, not with his hand. I never asked, but somehow knew that he’d lost it when we lost mom. A literal piece of him missing.

One night, much earlier, sneaking out of bed, I’d caught glimpse of him screwing his prosthesis on. I screamed the house down, convinced — utterly convinced — that he was some kind of machine. That the bare metal plate behind his plastic wrist was what he had instead of flesh on the inside.

Anyway. The city. Field trip, me and the rest of my class. All six of us, crammed along with Miss Holland into an aging minibus. Three hours, watching as forest and mountain gave way to fields and towns. When we drove past the first big town, on our way to the freeway, I thought we’d got there already.

I stood for minutes on the museum’s steps, just looking up while Holland gave us a lecture about not wandering off, not touching anything and not trusting strangers — city folk would rob us and leave us to die.

The museum wasn’t nearly as much of an eye-opener as the drive. I knew, on that long drive home, as the sun set and the other kids dozed, that I wanted to live in a city. But part of me knew I never would.

And that pissed me off.

• • • • •

Twelve empty glasses, and the usual suspects have arrived as the sun sets. Emma, Connor, and Drew. Making noise, and pushing the night away. One by one, the mourners leave too, casting dirty looks at us as they go, but we drink enough that Mike doesn’t mind.

The door opens behind me again. Great. It’s probably Sheriff White, come to stick his nose in. Boyd probably waddled straight to him.

Emma, opposite me, frowns. Mike looks up, surprised, and welcomes whoever it is in. He doesn’t call them by name, which means...

“Eric Chase?”

...I look around at the sound of my name.

I’ve never seen this guy before in my life.

That’s new.

• • • • •