

Episode 10: The Great Orchid War (Part 2)

(vb) Well hello FRIENDS! (a) I mean ummm PROFESSIONAL (right professional):

Hi friends. After several focus groups worth of artificial intelligence data and future speculation on behalf of Mojave Logistics, the makers of Wireland Ranch have determined that the preferred narration going forward should be the voice of our archaeologist. It is quote “super sexy and creamy like butter,” and “flows like a water spigot of cynical political philosophy and language.” And who am I to argue with the data?

And even though the cat’s out of the bag, the beans are spilt, and the game has been given away we can still move forward with a sense of calm and understanding. [background: “language is cool!] You know who I am now and I will *always* know who you are. Never forget (lol.) So friends, where were we?

I believe last we left off I was tied to a tree in this raggedy ass human body that I probably should’ve taken care of before it died cuz this motherfucker is beat up for real for real, and you had just met our lovely Leah and witnessed her encounter with the entity known as Godwynn. Now a sickening mass of compulsive cellular production and necrosis, consistently shifting, a creature of tragic ambition and greed that once sought profit and now seeks all, but before, in your time, he was nothing more than a man who’d failed forward into a massive fortune. A fortune which afforded him things you could never imagine, including but not limited to, the secrets of Gods long dead and forgotten to history. Lost to the ceaseless forward march of time. For time is the nemesis of all life. Even for the Methuselah tree.

I see the villagers in the distance, at the base of this great white mountain and, friends, they only approach for two reasons: to reapply the milk and honey, or to end my punishment, and when your crime is heresy, the end of punishment means only one thing, and that thing ain’t no good. Luckily for me though, death is a mere passing phase and can be quite a thrill if done correctly. But seeing as how I have a mission in this body, as this person, as this Archaeologist, then I suppose that means, I need a plan. The chances are slim and the physical restraints are tight but I have survived worse on this fucked up little plane you all seem to thrive in so I guess, let’s fucking ride.

But first I suppose we all need to understand what this is about so let’s head back to the bunker that once served as my home, and do a little eavesdropping on the past. Because the past is unfortunately where the answers are always found.

LEAH: (stuttering and scared) I really just want to leave. I don’t think I am meant to be here. I want to go back to my home. I miss my (confused) famil... my my family– my home.

GODWYNN: Do you even remember this *family.* If you thought about things more carefully I think you’d realize you, in fact, do not.

LEAH: My mother, my... my brother? I had a brother? His name was... ummm, his name was (continues muttering.) Goddamnit his name was—

GODWYNN: You see down here, dear Leah, everything is a construct of thought and crossed wires. Neurons lacking synapses. And one thing you will come to realize is constructs are never real Leah, family, love, money, fucking all of it, nothing more than a series of thoughts and associations and you will find from this point forward, those associations to be quite different than they were before you arrived.

And Leah suddenly realized she did not remember her family at all, what they look like, how they smell, the curvature of their smiles flickering in the community fire at night during times of congregation.

GODWYNN: That is something you will forget as well, yr little town with those big dreams on everyone's lips. The unity, the community, the peace. Peace does not breed progress. Your home is not reality. For reality, my lovely lovely Leah, reality is cold, reality is dark, reality is blanketed in misery for all except those who bend it to their will. Those like me. (angrier by the word) And somehow this world has gone *WAY* off course. And your home, LEAH! Your home is a slap in the face to the titans upon whose shoulders you stand. Your home is a joke. (calming down) But fret not, you and I, we will repair that... together.

Meanwhile out in the world beyond the bunker and the rotten bones of Wireland Ranch, Leah's family searched desperately for her. They had seen the box unfolded, approached it despite their fear, and anyone who came too close to it, would become sick, nearly withering away over the course of the days that followed, unable to eat, unable to sleep, until their last breath was expelled in violent fits, stomach acid, and blood dripping from slack mouths. They would spread this sickness among themselves. Before they realized they had to separate the ill from those who had yet to come into contact, as quarantine was absolutely a foreign concept to those people who had lived bright, yet challenging lives and knew not sickness or depression. The first cracks of a waning unity reared its ugly head. Paranoia began seeping into brains and distrust grew with each subsequent death. And Leah's family? Well friends, they left before the sickness started but carried it with them into the unforgiving badlands and the last of them is crawling through the dust on the desert floor as Leah realizes she has all but forgotten them, their skin cracking in the sun, praying no predators are lurking nearby looking to make them a different kind of prey.

But not to worry friends, by the time night falls outside the bunker, Leah will have forgotten most everything she ever knew. Her home included, and she will begin her new life as queen of a coming age, an age not unlike the one you find yourself in now. An age, I think we can all agree, which needed to stay in the past. But one thing we all know, friends, corruption comes for everything.

Leah stood straight despite her fear, straight and defiant but as she stood there that defiance melted away along with her memories of any existence she may have had before this moment. Her childhood diminished within her mind, all the years she spent staring at the Damascus Steel

box, while her community bustled around her. All the times her parents called her home and she pretended not to listen to watch the sun go down by the lake, transfixed by seeking answers to questions her mind could not begin to formulate. And the more she thought about this the more her fear subsided. And those memories, all that space in her head, her life, her love, her once promising existence took on a new sort of promise. A promise meant to restore things back to where they were before, back to the mess the lot of you helped to create and participated with for your whole lives when all you ever had to do was fucking stop. And after a few moments, the hard drive had been cleaned and a new operating system uploaded to the wet processor at the center of her soft machine.

GODWYNN: Now, my dear, what is your name?

LEAH: (almost robotic) You have yet to give me a name.

GODWYNN: I liked Leah, it suits you. Let's stick with that. Now what is your name?

LEAH: My name is Leah.

GODWYNN: And what is your purpose Leah?

LEAH: I do not know.

The tablet in Leah's hand began buzzing incessantly, the screen flashed a symbol of a black form, a single eye in the center of its head, multiple limbs extending from both the sides and bottom of the creature, curled and attached to the outer rim of a circle, each limb wrapped into an invisible web past that perimeter, a web reaching into the lives of everyone and everything within its orbit. Or at least it did in its time. Yes, friends, in its time, in your time, Mojave Logistics was as close to a true cosmic entity as a physical thing can be, it swirled itself into the fabric of society, its trucks stopped traffic everywhere you went, its online presence swallowed every minor consumer establishment that had the gall to become noticeable, for a decent chunk of your existence Amazon— fuck, there I go again, I mean, Mojave Logistics was the end all be all of what was, at the time, considered American Success. There were others for sure, but they had the good sense to own everything and just not tell you they owned everything. In this way, Blackrock comes to mind. But Blackrock is its own special case and I am sure at some point we will discuss that nightmare as well.

The symbol faded from the screen and in its place the words "Mojave Logistics Heritage Initiative," strobed in and out for a few seconds before the screen again went dark.

GODWYNN: (gentle) Leah, I want you to stare into the screen and listen very closely to me. This will be an intense experience but, afterwards, you and I will be as one. A little less you and a little more me of course but that is the way nature intended, so...

Leah had little choice but to obey because Leah wasn't really there any longer, friends. The thing that stood in that room, surrounded by a series of symbols moving so fast along the metal walls they bled into one another, shoulders still squared and defiant, was no longer Leah, no longer the beautiful and inquisitive woman that slid down the hole no more than an hour prior. There are many phrases for what she is now, friends, but the one serving to be the most apt, is vacuous shell.

Leah's head fell forward, stiff and focused on the screen, moving robotically as if controlled by hidden strings and when you consider the fact that every move you have ever made was determined by your brain seconds before you made them, that doesn't seem very far fetched after all, now does it?

The screen before her was solid black aside from a tiny white dot in the center, which then expanded slightly and began swirling around the screen slow and deliberate, not a swirl as in hypnosis, more a swirl of purposeful gestures, as though writing out an incantation but to a more trained eye, when observed by a Mojave technologist perhaps, [the word Code might apply. (improvise/rewrite)]

GODWYNN: Goodbye Leah.

LEAH: Goodbye (final halfhearted cry)

GODWYNN: Now relax... there is nothing left for you here, dear. I will take it all from you, hold it close, and use it to right the wrongs initiated by my brethren and you my lovely, lovely girl... You are the perfect vessel to direct change in an imperfect world.

The swirling intensified as Godwynn spoke, the lines becoming harsh and sharply angled, symbols and runes similar to those we have seen before, friends, in the ever shifting sigils in the halls of Wireland Ranch.

GODWYNN: Used to be, everyone knew their place. And do you know how they knew their place? They had a tool of measure. This measure dictated far more than station though, dear Leah, this measure dictated everything. Where you lived, what you ate, Who you were able to talk to, whether you went to jail or paid to be free, if you drove a car or rode a bus or lived in places where even a bus was a luxury. This measure dictated who you were going to become before you were even born. And there are very few exceptions to that rule. But most importantly, once you had acquired vast sums of this entirely unfounded yard stick and I must stress, this was not a natural invention, but was rather conjured from whole cloth by men who could formulate a precise vision of the future within their minds. Men who could see the signs and symbols all around them and translate them into action, thus furthering the importance of the measure and the weight it carried within people's lives.

The rune and symbol swirl began to repeat a deliberate string of symbols so quickly that the naked eye could not discern one from another, each piling upon the other with such quickness

that we can make out each of them simultaneously. A phrase dire in its purpose and ruinous in its intent, melting away the old neural pathways in Leah's brain while writing new ones concurrently. Pathways that would give Godwynn a firm hold over Leah's body for as long as he may need it, even after that body dies, because, friends, we all know that is where this is headed, maybe not soon and unfortunately for everyone outside that bunker, definitely not soon enough. Inside Leah's head the phrase written in that waning tongue drills hard and drills deep, illegible to any person that has been alive at any point in the last 10,000 years, but friends, I know what it says, and deep down, so do you.

[GODWYNN's voice begins beating into Leah's brain, quietly at first, advancing quickly toward a cacophony of "LET ME IN!"]

GODWYNN: (info for ML: give me a bunch of "let me in's" here, just as many different ones as you can and while you are doing it think of how you would sound like a malevolent external voice trying to make way for a new home.) LET ME IN!

GODWYNN: Yes, dear Leah, let me in. That is your purpose, has been since the day you were born. Did you ever question why the Seed called to you? Why you felt, from the first time you saw the light from that metal gleam into your eye, as though you had no choice but to study and ponder and dream of what it might be, as though you had no choice but to break the seal and unleash a new way upon this world you and your flock seem to love so dearly. Because you do not understand, this world, this pile of dust and rock and fossils, is a tool, it is meant to be pillaged and plundered to move your species forward, meant to be the launch point to the universe beyond. Just as a great man once said, meant to be nothing more than our blue origin.

(the "let me ins" rise to a crescendo)

GODWYNN: But fret not dear girl. I came to return the measure. To install the balance. And together, you and I, will set things the way they are supposed to be. And this time, there are no petty gods to block our path.

From the far section of the room, the creature, which had been cloaked to this point in the dark where the metal gleam showed no light, hid there for more than a couple millenia, waiting for this moment, waiting for anyone to show up and set him free, began to slink from the stygian veil and what we see friends, is a nightmare. A slinking pillar of black flesh, bent and broken, moving forward as though it has been centuries since it tried and for all intents and purposes, that is true. The majority of its body is covered in a nebulous cloak, numbers and figures gleaming as though they are stars written in tongues long dead representing lives long gone. For in his time, life was numbers and rarely anything more.

This shifting and swaying form moved towards Leah, cracking, crumbling, and rebuilding with each inch forward. And as the creature stepped into the light we see the black flesh is wet and necrotic, millions of parasites crawling in and out of fractured scars and fissures and crevices, a faint pale pink light shown from inside, from the core of that creature, and unlike the petty gods you know and love, petty gods such as I, there is no natural formation here, no excess of

energies. This is a creature artificially thrust into forever, snuck under the radar of nature, a being of technological, and therefore artificial, immortality. And, friends, does it show.

Just a lil VOIDBRO side note here: though my siblings are mostly dead, I mean they'll likely pop up sometime in the future but for now, they are dead and I ummmm... well I miss them and the fact that this MOTHERFUCKER figured any of this out and that this MOTHERFUCKER can only exist as long as they do not, really just gets under my fucking skin. It is a testament to why you fucking assholes cannot be given power. Cuz this is what you do! You fucking just like break the fabric of everything cuz yr so goddamn scared of dying and and I get it bro, dying sucks, especially cuz there's fucking nothing else I get it it sucks. But like... forever belongs to us, it is ours, stay the fuck out of eternity cuz it's too fucking much for yr brains to handle. Deal with yr limited capacity and shut the fuck up and sit the fuck down somewhere. We got the god shit is what I am saying and this MOTHERFUCKING ASSHOLE here exemplifies that fully and completely. Y'all have dark hearts and nightmare minds. And it's okay bro, just like know yr station and fuck off. I mean is that too much to ask?

(laughing still then serious) Now, friends, I just had to get that off of my chest because this has caused the natural and ever evolving state of the world to go stagnant. Cycles are necessary to the sustainability of reality and whether you like it or not, my brethren and I are the cogs hidden behind that clock face, ceaselessly ticking along so that you can have a fucking life at all. Yr welcome.

This vile broken creature slinked slow and deliberate to where Leah stood, sidling alongside her and for the first time in thousands of years, attempting to stand straight behind her, its frame reaching nearly to the ceiling. The cloak swaying over Leah's body, obscuring her partially, her eyes still locked onto the screen, the swirling dot forming a hundred forgotten runes simultaneously. And if we could see her eyes, friends, we would see that dot bleaching her iris and pupil, erasing them entirely and leaving only sclerae behind, and this will be the only physical difference between the Leah we know now and the Leah we will know after that moment passed.

Godwynn slings the cloak away, digits glistening like stars fade into nebula dust and the cloak goes black as void, floating above this terrible thing and reaching downward to separate Leah's skull from her jaw with utter ease, as though pulled apart at a seam. There was no blood, no gore aside from slender tendrils of flesh reaching out toward where it was, attempting to seek out attachment points to return to the way it was supposed to be. First the seeming cloth of the cloak pierces the top of Leah's brain, sliding between the exposed sulci of her brain changing the shade of her gyri from dull and washed out faded pink and gray to sable black, spreading throughout like ink seeping into a blank page.

The last of Godwynn's form slid down through Leah's brain and into her body, settled into her central nervous system and assumed total control. As the last of this horrible being, this amalgamation of malevolence and concentrated corporate greed, this sty on the eye of everything, faded into her, the tablet fell to the ground, its white dot swirl gone in a quiet flicker, leaving behind a blinking, final "let me in," before the progress bar began to fill in slowly and the

system is wiped and reloaded. The next time this bunker is found, who knows how far into the future, the tablet will still be there, a white screen saying hello in several different languages, looking for a new host to guide along a different path. But that, friends, is me before me, wink wink, nudge nudge, but that is a story for the future.

The line of people below trudge higher up the mountain, weaving on the path between one ancient tree after another, and there appears to be more than usual this time, which does not bode well for this dumb fucking body I find myself in. Usually when they come, it is two children, both carrying a different earthenware jar, one for the milk and one for the honey. It's a game to them. They climb up this mountain and reapply their ointments in equal measure and then they sit next to me, backs leaning against the dark maroon bark, each taking sips from the milk jar and small fingerfuls of honey. The smell doesn't seem to bother them, which is wild cuz the smell bothers me. Rotting flesh, rancid honey, and soured milk isn't exactly a best seller at Bath & Body works— and that, friends, is a very specific joke for a very specific set of people— But they'd sit there and watch the sun go down with me and I think I might always be grateful for that.

And after the sun went down and they collected their jars to walk back down to the village, the two, obviously hailed from the sect of the Golden Arches, they'd look at me solemnly, their eyes cast downward, place their hands over their hearts, simultaneously whisper "I'm lovin' it" and head back down the mountain.

Down in the bunker, all those years ago, Godwynn found he was finally free after a few thousand years, and it was time to circle back to his action plan. You see friends, long ago, right around a few years before you are hearing this Godwynn realized things were on the way down. He saw all the signs in the world: the crushing inequality, the rise of left wing movements, and the inevitable rerouting to fascism in order to quell those movements worldwide, the ever creeping feeling that things were on the cusp of change, the kinda change that destroys companies and pauses all progress until the dust settles. He could see that even if Capitalism came out on top it would be stilted and stagnant, the people wouldn't stomach these things for much longer so in order to maintain the current rates of profit the world had seen up to that point would require far more investment in police, military, and other types of surveillance and security. Investment to the point of loss and what was the fucking point in that. No he could see things for what they were and more importantly, what they were becoming.

So after several focus groups, research, and brainstorming with various boards both corporate and governmental, he knew what needed to be done. A complete reset. Wipe the whole fucking thing off the map and restart from nothing. And that story is on its way, friends, that story puts a tidy little bow on everything up until now and will be forthcoming. If this were a show, you might call that story the finale.

So in the bunker, Godwynn became accustomed to his new body, far more... aesthetically pleasing than he might have imagined, cuz even tho he's an absolute fucking monster, he still had a little bit of his humanity left, and that human part of his brain, well... lets just say he might've had to offer Leah a pony after a massage gone wrong in a past life.

And I was not there, friends, I was out roaming the empty planes, bored af, when all this was occurring and I had I known, I could've prevented it from happening because the world Godwynn wanted, was a world not even the worst of my brethren could abide. As a matter of fact, thinking back, I felt a wave of change sweep over the world when he settled into that body but at the time I knew not what it was. Things felt colder and an atmosphere of sheer darkness settled over everything.

I had not become aware of these machinations until the first battle of the Great Orchid War began. And I say battle but what it really was, is more aptly described, as a massacre in Thillia, well after the sudden sickness had begun to burn out. After the Seed had been activated and Leah had left her home, after the townsfolk quarantined their sick and dying, and got a hold of this illness and buried their dead, the Mecca of the cult of the Angel Orchid, a sanctuary of unity and understanding and a foundation for the kind of world most people would dream of living in, was attacked by well outfitted soldiers on behalf of the Mojave Logistics Heritage Initiative.

You see friends, after Godwynn's very strange distraction and latent sexual attraction to the body he found himself in, he got to work. The bunker had not only been his home, but housed everything a newly minted warlord might need. Weaponry, technology for rebuilding, and a map to a vast network of preserved icons from the world you find yourself in now. All he needed was people and time. Though the Cult of the Flower had claimed and unified most of humanity by this point, there were still pockets of nomads, warring tribes, and desperate cannibals looking for something more. Leah and Godwynn offered them safety and organization, a rekindling of agriculture and seeds to sow crops. And friends, we all know, the only thing people ever really need, is a reason.

So Godwynn roamed and searched and collected these people and built a home for everyone on the long forgotten corpse of Wireland Ranch. And after a couple of years, and more than a couple of missteps, Godwynn had what he needed, Godwynn had an army. An army that was controlled via a brand new religion. A religion Godwynn, in the form of Leah, could espouse as the true way, and not only that, but this new religion had ubiquity on its side. Godwynn began sending out teams of surveyors and laborers to dig up sites, standard city blocks and parts of towns you walk through everyday, things you see that mean nothing to you: KFCs, Walmarts and Wendy's. Places you don't even think about anymore but to a person who has never seen your world, would be established institutions of great importance, some might even say, if they didn't know any better, that is, great religious importance. Why would there be so many of these things built, why would every square inch of the world have the same six or seven brand establishments built on every fucking corner of every fucking street in every fucking town if it did not mean something more, if it did not mean the old ones, the wise ones, had it all figured out?

And thus, the foundation was set, for the beginning of the Great Orchid War.

The sun, pallid and distant, spread a muted light across Thillia. The morning seemed to pause, holding its breath, suspended in a silence deeper than that of any desert dawn. The ubiquitous angel orchids, revered sentinels of the Cult, bowed their heads as if mourning the day that was about to unfold.

Thillia, an oasis of faith in an otherwise barren expanse, had long been untouched by the violence of the world outside. Its inhabitants, the devoted followers of the Orchid, lived in a rhythm set by prayer, congregation, and the gentle touch of the desert breeze.

Yet, as dawn broke, an impending doom approached from the horizon. The Mojave Logistics Heritage Initiative, their motives cloaked in darkness, advanced like a storm cloud. Men and machine, devoid of empathy, ready to snuff out a way of life.

The unsuspecting townsfolk were deep in their morning rituals when the first sounds of engines echoed across the land. Before anyone could fully grasp the situation, the town was enveloped in chaos. There was no battle cry, no declaration, just the cold, methodical extermination by the MLHI.

Houses were set ablaze, the flames consuming both wood and flesh indiscriminately. The streets ran with blood, and the air was filled with the cries of the innocent. Those who tried to flee were gunned down, their hopes extinguished before a new dream for the world could unfold.

In the heart of Thillia, by the shrine of the angel orchids, or what you and I know as the bookshelf that once stood inside the walls of Reynold's Curiosities, an elderly priestess held an orchid aloft, her voice trembling but determined as she sang a soft lament. A requiem for her people, her town, her faith. But her song was cut short, silenced by the cold hand of a Mojave Logistics executioner.

By the time the sun reached its zenith, Thillia was transformed. From a town of faith and community, it became a testament to man's capacity for cruelty. The massacre left no survivors, but the memory of that day, and the spirit of the Angel Orchid Cult, would linger long after, a ghostly whisper on the desert winds.

And this would kick off a war that would change the destiny of our world once again, only this time, unless I have anything to say about it, this change is irreversible.

At the bottom of the path leading to the Methuselah tree, the villagers stop. A man wearing a ten gallon hat gestures for the others to stay behind. They have no jars with them so that likely means we are in a worse case scenario situation. And unfortunately for these people, I cannot let that happen. Too many things left to be fixed. I have too many brothers and too many sisters that have yet to be reborn, yet to reshine their hideous lights again, on to your world.

The man approaches slowly, a knife in his belt, solemn intention in his eyes. He comes to a stop before me, the people behind casting their eyes away, because they know what comes next and deep down, they don't want to see it. I see the boys who would trudge up the mountain with their earthenware jars, only to sit with me and take in the sunset. One tries to run towards the man and I, but he is held back, and his eyes are shielded by what must be one of his parents.

The man pulls the knife from his belt loop, places a hand on my shoulder, meant as consolation, I am sure. He raises the knife to my throat, says, "we have the meats," in a shaky guilt riddled voice, and touches the blade to my flesh.

(VOIDBRO LAUGHING) I know this isn't yr fault bro and I am so sorry but uhhhh, I can't let this happen. So let's make this easier, close yr eyes for a second.

NARRATION VOICE: See you again, down here 'round the bend, very soon friends.

LAUGHING CONTINUES. A LARGE THUNDEROUS SOUND.

LAUGHS FADE AWAY.

ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER PLAYS.

END.

