

The Ministry of Thought

By Jaden Cohen

A raindrop flew through the cloudless sky.

It struck the ground with a soft plop, seeping into the soil.

Then it was flying once more, sailing through the azure heavens.

And it struck the ground once more.

And again it streaked through the endless blue.

And became nourishment to the loam.

Time and space bent and twisted, a single raindrop falling again and again.

Until all existence was naught but a single drop of rain.

There was something in the wind, something new. It buffeted at the raindrop, stripping it one layer at a time. It tried to resist, but the force was inexorable, and with every cycle it lost a bit more of itself.

Then it was gone.

The man resurfaced with a gasp, a headache striking him as he opened his eyes. He was in a plain white room, a familiar one, though the blinding light made it hard to tell.

What was going on?

Where was his raindrop?

He looked down at himself. He was wearing a white suit, covering everything except his hands and face. His skin was pale, but he lacked a way to look at his face. He wondered what he looked like. He wondered where he was.

The Ministry. The Origin. The Revival. The Last Outpost.

He clutched his head as another massive headache struck, and with an effort he managed to turn his mind from the flood of names filling it, turning it to the room's other occupant.

She was short, barely over five feet tall, with pitch-black skin and white freckles, like stars in the night. Straight silver hair framed high cheekbones and slightly slanted eyes. She was clothed in a gray and blue space suit, sleek and smooth.

In her outstretched hand was a picture of a young boy strikingly similar to her, and her black lips were moving.

Something danced at the edges of his awareness, a faint unease that grew and grew until it slipped from his lips.

“You should not be here.”

She stopped, surprise flashing over her face, quickly replaced by indignation. This time when she spoke, he listened. “Have you not listened to a single thing I said?”

“No.” His voice was growing stronger.

She groaned and thrust the drawing in his face. “Do you, or do you not recognize this child?” He observed it for a second, reflecting on the fact he couldn't remember *anybody*.

“No.” he hesitated. “Who is it?”

A frustrated sigh escaped her lips. “It's my brother. He vanished here a few years ago.”

“Oh.”

He knew he should leave it at that. His instincts were screaming at him to leave it at that. That she should not be here. But his curiosity got the better of him.

If a simple raindrop could contain so much, how much could she?

So against his better judgment, he found himself opening his mouth once more.

“I may know where we can find someone who can help.”

The halls were the same blank white as his room, somehow well-lit despite the lack of any light source. The lack of shadows it produced made it almost impossible to tell what was space and what was wall. They curved and veered and twisted, sometimes in ways that seemed to break the very laws of space.

They do break the laws of space, the man realized, another bit of knowledge he knew not the origin of. *And the laws of time*.

The girl was silent as they walked, seeming to struggle with something.

Finally, she spoke. "Who are you? What should I call you?"

Words tickled the back of his mind, but as he reached for them he found naught but mist. But he still needed a name, so he made one up.

"I am one who watches. You may call me Watcher."

"Watcher?"

"Yes"

"Watcher," she muttered under her breath. She shrugged. "Sure. I'm Pandora."

And so the long march resumed.

Watcher did not know how long they walked, if time even mattered, but eventually, they arrived at a vast white wall. It stretched for as far as the eye could see, seamlessly blending into the rest of the halls.

He extended a hand to the wall, not entirely knowing why. It was warm and smooth to the touch, and he brushed his fingers along the surface, feeling a pang of melancholy. Words sprang to mind unbidden, spoken in a language long dead.

Spoken by a man whose ideas had defined eons.

Esse est percipi.

To be is to be perceived.

The sense of unease redoubled.

Watcher hesitated, knowing the way through the wall, but the words stirred something within him.

He remembered terror, darkness, pain. A sense of impending doom, so close it was palpable. Words spoken through the dark. Grudges thrown aside.

He remembered hope.

And then nothing more.

“Watcher?” Pandora’s voice was soft, as if sensing his inner turmoil. “What's wrong?”

He swallowed. “We should not be here. Nobody should be here. It's too risky.”

“What are we risking?”

“I don’t know.”

She was silent for a moment. “We’ll be careful. I promise. We’ll be careful.”

“Pandora...”

“Watcher, please. I need my brother.”

He began to back away from her.

“Watcher! Please! He’s all I have left!” her voice cracked, but she soldiered on, softer this time. “Please, Watcher, Please.”

Tears began to fall from her eyes. Angry tears. Hopeless tears. Lost tears. Her legs failed her and she dropped to the ground, a sobbing mess. Regret rose in him like a tidal wave, striking hidden chords within him.

He remembered those tears.

After all, he had once cried them.

He watched her cry, silver teardrops streaking across her face like shooting stars, like a certain drop of rain, watched her like he had once watched the rain.

And he saw.

He saw a scared girl, struggling to overcome the loss of her family. He saw her life stretched out before him like a line, from the moment of her conception to the distant future, a path still waiting to be walked.

It was glorious, and it was terrible.

Far greater than the raindrop he had contemplated all his life, he found tears streaming down his face at its beauty, striking chords long forgotten within him, tears of pain, wrought from trying to understand something so grand he was nothing before it.

He found himself clinging to her, weeping tears of agony and awe alike, rejoicing in her existence, and grieving at her pain.

Pandora didn't respond, and together, they wept.

When they finally calmed down, Watcher had reached a decision.

His instincts were screaming at him not to open the door, screaming at him that *everything* was a risk. But Pandora had woken up something within him.

He remembered faces now, although he still lacked context. He remembered love. He remembered losing it. So once more, against his better judgment, he found himself stepping forward, reaching out to touch the wall.

Pandora watched with quiet hope.

Watcher's fingers danced over the wall finding no gaps, no openings.

It didn't matter.

Esse est percipi.

To be is to be perceived.

With a mental wrenching, Watcher *changed* his perspective, imagining he could look through the wall. For an instant, there was a silent tension in the air, before the wall yielded to the new perception, its very *being* shifting to match how it was perceived.

The wall melted away like mist on a summer day.

Beyond it was a grassy slope, a cliff overlooking a raging sea. The sky was azure, not a cloud in sight to obscure the bright sun. Strangely enough, at the line where grass gave way to empty space, there stood a desk. It was deep mahogany, plain but well-made.

And on it was a quill and inkwell, holding down a single sheet of parchment.

Watcher stepped forward in shock, ignoring Pandora's sniffing gratitude.

He knew this place.

He looked around frantically, eyes instinctively focusing on where his raindrop would inevitably fall.

He didn't find it.

Pandora wandered past him, eyes wide, and without quite knowing why he found himself stumbling alongside her, heart pounding.

They arrived at the desk at the same time, both stopping to look at the parchment. It was blank.

"What is it?" Pandora asked.

"A way to contact the others. To awaken them when it's time."

“Time for what?”

Watcher didn't hear her, still reeling over the implications of the words he had just spoken. Others? There were others? Where?

“Watcher, time for what?”

“When... when it's safe. When the Ministry is no longer needed.”

“Safe from what?”

“I... I don't know.”

A splitting headache struck him. There was too much streaking through his head.

“Watcher, what does the ministry do?”

He groaned, clutching his head and falling to his knees. “Too much. Too much.”

“Watcher!”

He was in a place far away, watching as the last of white dwarfs slowly reached its end. Watching the inevitable march of entropy claim the last of the universe's light.

And yet here he was.

What had happened?

His thoughts returned to the raindrop that wasn't there, and a thought struck him. Had he merely observed his raindrop? Or had his observation been a part of it?

Pandora was yelling something, but he was too far gone to hear.

All went black.

Kairos was tired, so very tired. They all were. The universe was dying, its last stars gone.

He flipped on the hologram, going back to the emperor's announcement. It flickered into being, showing the emperor in robes of purple and gold. He looked tired with white hair and a

visible slouch, nothing like the imposing man he had once been. But his voice was strong, filled with hope.

“My people, we will live yet another day. Entropy may have us in its clutches, but this is not the end.”

He paused, letting that sink in.

“Trillions of years ago, when humanity was still in infancy, there was a man. His name is lost to time, but his words are not.” He panned his gaze across the camera, seeming to meet the eye of every watching individual. “Esse est percipi. To be is to be perceived.”

“Over the eons, we have achieved all there is to achieve in this universe. We have conquered the stars. Tamed the black holes. Sped past light itself. We are far beyond bending to the whims of nature. This shall not be our end.”

The hologram flickered, replacing the emperor with a massive cube of the purest white.

“This is the Ministry of Thought. We will reside in it, and we will learn how to watch. How to truly see something, essence and all. And our perception, our will, will manifest a new universe for us. One created by us, and maintained by us. So long as we watch, what we watch shall be.”

The camera switched back to the emperor, and he drew himself up, seeming for a second the man he had once been.

“This is not the end. Come next eon and all those that follow it, and we shall be *gods!*”

The hologram flickered off.

Kairos sighed. He didn't care about godhood.

He just wanted to live.

Kairos, once known as Watcher, woke with a start, terror surging through him.

He knew why his raindrop no longer existed.

And if Pandora woke the other Watchers, more than a mere raindrop would cease to be.

Everything would.

He scrambled to his feet, yelling. "Pandora! Get away from the parchment!"

She yelped and jumped away from the desk, the quill in her hand sending a droplet of ink flying in a sick mockery of his raindrop.

And on the parchment, there were words.

Please, help me find my brother.

Accompanied by a loving sketch of a young boy that could be her twin.

Kairos' heart sank, and with a sad sigh, he walked past the desk, and took a seat at the edge of the cliff, overlooking the sea. He patted the spot beside him. "Pandora, sit with me."

She sat. "Watcher, what's wrong?"

"My name is Kairos. And there isn't much time."

"Till what?"

"The end."

"Wh-"

"No more questions. Watch."

Deep within the Ministry of Thought, more and more were woken by a strange drawing appearing before them, their trances dissipating and the objects of their attention vanishing.

Pandora's brother clutched the message in his fist. "Sis..." he whispered, tears filling his eyes. "What have you done?"

But still, he smiled.

Kairos wondered what it would be like in the outside world, watching object after object vanish. Watching person after person slowly sink into black from whence all things came.

In the end, existence would end with a whimper.

The ministry would be the last to disappear, having been made to endure the pressure of non-existence, at least for a little while.

He heard Pandora suck in a breath as part of the sea in front of them vanished, and patches of blue sky gave way to empty black.

“What's happening?”

Kairos put a comforting arm around her shoulders, drawing her close. He was so very tired. “Shhh. It's ok. It's ok. Just watch. This is a sight that can only be seen once.”

She began to shake, perhaps coming to realize the magnitude of what was happening, but Kairos had no more time to comfort her. Deep below, the Great Watchers began to wake, and with their wakening, space and time began to unravel, continuity becoming nothing more than a long-forgotten dream.

Pandora began to change, turning into a small child, then a baby, then an old woman with silver hair. She smiled weakly.

Then she was gone.

Kairos sighed, pushing down the pain. He was well acquainted with loss.

Time and space began to converge, coming to a single point of *everything*.

Kairos looked deep into its depth. Once he had dreamed of a raindrop. Now, he looked at everything that was, had been, and would be. He saw his wife, countless years dead. His

children, dancing under the bright sun. He saw Earth, the planet humanity had once originated on. He saw a man, in a black robe, writing words in a book.

Esse est percipi.

The plant's fiery end appeared, in one of countless wars he saw. The construction of the ministry flashed by, and he was in a new age. Life flourished under its watchful eye, growing to encompass the universe. It was similar to how the previous age had played out, and he saw greed, love, hate, life, and death.

And he saw its end, families crying out as their children went to non-existence, only to follow.

He knew not how long he looked into everything, for time had already died.

But, regardless it was gone, and he was alone in the black, the only being in existence.

Then he realized he didn't exist either.

And he was no more.
