

**Jet Stroud** knelt in the shadows.

He steadied his breathing and waited, trying to quiet the voices inside his head.

A rat scampered by his foot, oblivious to him with his cloak drawn. He was nearly invisible, thanks to its ability to bend light around him. It was quiet down in the belly of the first belt, only the occasional sound of dripping water could be heard. The steel corridors smelled of dust mixed with an acrid scent. If it had a color, he imagined it would be a dull gray.

He waited for a long second and searched the area with his mind, lengthening out to feel for other nearby Heliographi. But he could only sense traces of ghostly voices, ethereal screams from other dimensions so common to this particular area. Somewhere behind him, cloaked and hidden, were DiJinn and Cord. But their thoughts were hidden from him. Any other Heliographi sneaking around down in Lyrinthum, a vast maze of tunnels deep below Skylight University, would be undetectable too. Whether it was Lucem or Atrum, he would sense no signs of either down here.

He continued, winding his way deeper into the bowels of Lyrinthum, darting between shadows. He had memorized most of the underground tunnel system now, after spending nearly four years wandering them since his days as a student. Still, he had to stop occasionally to regain his bearings.

He was approaching the rendezvous point, which was inside the Lyrinthum Particle Accelerator, at least what was left of it. The defunct atom smasher had been a real wonder, Cord had told him. During the early days of the university, planners used the interior of the belt for the accelerator's loop. Here, university scientists could smash particles together at the speed of light and gain knowledge about the origin of the universe. It seemed the walls still held a supernatural current, which provided cover and allowed Jet to meet here secretly without being surveyed by others. There was still enough juice left in the old equipment to create interference from other tracking devices. It was a perfect place to meet, considering the nature of his current business.

In years past, the old particle accelerator had been home to millions of experiments and trillions of atoms smashing into each other. The left over residue seemed to be transcribed onto the walls. He could almost see the remnants of those violent collisions with his eyes, the walls seemed to glow in his vision. These halls felt haunted by the random voices he heard in his mind, whispering from the shadows. Solan had once mentioned the voices were haunted ghost particles—a gateway to other dimensions sought so desperately by scientist. *If they knew what*

*inhabited those dimensions, they might not be so anxious to uncover it, she had told him. The human mind is not equipped to conceive what lies beyond our known dimensions.*

He had only discovered this area of Lyrinthum, thanks to DiJinn. Apparently, she used this place for *sensitive* discussions from time to time. Jet was learning who the rulebreakers were in the Lucem. DiJinn, and Cord, seemed to be the two he could trust with this type of matter. Of course, Solan was trustworthy, as were all the other Lucem. But only DiJinn and Cord were crazy enough to help him with what he was about to do. They were the rebels and DiJinn was always up for a bit of rule breaking. He had grown fond of her over the last several years and knew he could share certain things with her, just like with Cord. *Bending the rules a bit never hurt anyone*, Cord had said, and Jet couldn't agree more.