

**The Starspun Seeker**  
*A Tale of Universal Proportions*

## Prologue

"I can write death across the stars. I can cast chaos through the universe. I can sling rage, pain, and hate for gigaparsecs. This has been my occupation for centuries. And you come to me, you insignificant, puny *thing*, daring to ask me for a boon. *You ask me* for a *kindness*? And for what? The notion of *love*? Love, that most fleeting and insipid of disgusting human traits. It defies definition, it rejects explanation...and yet, such courage. So very much courage it gives you. Astounding."

"But will you?"

The creature looked down into his eyes; almost with what the man could almost imagine was compassion.

"No."

"And why not? Surely you must have a reason." The despair in the man's voice was practically tangible, here in this world beyond worlds, this outpouring of the void, where mere thought gave things shape.

"Because you have nothing to give which I could desire," it said. "You are without import for my universe. Your very existence has no meaning for me, and your deeds, however great they may seem to be, are beneath my notice. Without your audacity, I could have eliminated your entire planet with no more thought than you may have given to brushing dust off of your clothing."

The sound of the human's heart breaking echoed across the nothingness like a gunshot. Tears began to pour down his face. He attempted to form words, to argue or rant or cajole or even perhaps attempt to bully, but the realization that his quest was utterly hopeless crushed all the air from his chest. It weighed down upon him like a thousand worlds here in this place where ideas had form but matter itself was meaningless. He looked up at the creature in front of him again in time to see it shift toward him.

The creature did not stoop; nothing so formless could be said to truly have position at all. But if you had asked him, the man would have said it stooped down to his level. It spoke again, slowly. "But it is also because, dear little small thing, you insect among giants, you speck of stardust among the universe – with courage like that you can accomplish anything you need to do, with or without my help."

So many roads had led him here. So much trial and tribulation. He had felt sure that as he had trekked, as he had endured, as he had pressed on, he was earning the right to his boon. "You earned a boon," came a voice from behind him, light and airy, trilling its words as if every sound was a new beginning, as if no syllable that passed had ever been heard before. The man spun, looking for its source.

"Your boon was to speak, not to have all your wishes granted," the voice continued. "To speak your piece, to receive an answer, to go your way in peace." The voice twisted and wound its way around him, passing overhead and behind and in front, but no matter where he turned he could not see its source. "Personally," it continued, "I think that it was rather benevolent. I have seen those who earned the right to speak capriciously destroyed when they thought about speaking."

Pausing, the human looked directly at where he had last heard the voice. "Why, then, was I spared?"

The source of the voice looked at him. He could feel it, though he could not say how, as it gave him a long, studious look. Then, from near his ear, it spoke again, quietly, yet close enough to make him jump. "I have seen your kind before," it said, trilling softly. "You are human, from Terra, which some call Dashtal, and others call Elsemer. Your kind is arrogant enough to call it Earth."

The man nodded. "Some of your kind have met me before," it tilted at him. He felt as if he was being prompted with clues to a puzzle, though he could not identify the framework, let alone solve the matter. He could swear he heard it sigh. "I am Harpahtanskatilloris," it said, with an air of finality. The man shrugged, helplessly.

There was a long silence. "You haven't heard of me," said the voice. This time, he saw...something, from the corner of his eye, a twirling web of light, or a fountain, perhaps – but when he turned, it no longer graced his vision. "No," he said, attempting to decipher the riddle of the voice.

"Those who met me first," it sang, a note of pride in its delightfully small but grand voice, "declared that they would never let my memory die, and so they made an instrument to imitate my voice. But when they tried to name it after me, only the first syllable stuck."

"You're – a harp?" The man was awestruck. Such a small thing, to have made such an impact. He began to set one foot before another, walking back toward his reality.

"*The Harp*," Harpahtanskatilloris corrected him, firmly. "All others are copies."

The man said nothing. His wonder at the situation was fading into a mixture of skepticism and heartbreak. He plodded forward further, and with each step he became more solid, the world around him taking more shape as

he drove himself toward the gateway.

“I am coming with you,” came the voice again. The man looked back, on reflex, though again, he saw nothing. He couldn't help the question. “Why?” There was a long pause.

“To help you,” it sang out. “To find your wife.”

## Chapter One.

### The Wellspring in the Dark

Lightning cracked ominously above the sky. Most people would have said that it was in the sky, but Julian Benedict knew better. This particular flash was somehow *beyond*, somehow past what should have been. He sprinted inside the house, calling for his instruments. He was halfway into the lab before he remembered that he had, in a fit of solitude, ordered every member of his staff to holiday, sending them to their various cottages and homes, rather than keeping them puttering about his old estate. It was not as if Wellspring Manor had much need of them in these later days, at any rate, he thought to himself, as he pulled the chains for the laboratory's lights. The old bulbs flickered on, gradually, revealing scientific instruments of all sorts. Rapidly, he pulled a few from tables and shelves.

The Manor had been handed down to him by a wealthy uncle, who, upon passing, left all of his belongings to his nephew. Julian did not have much use for the place – he kept a flat in London, where he worked as a consulting analyst for a major marketing firm – but in his uncle's last testament, there was an odd request that Julian not neglect the pursuit of science he had embraced as a youth.

In keeping with his uncle's wishes, therefore, Julian devoted one weekend every month to the old Manor, using it as a laboratory, observatory, and many other -ory words that he adored. He had trained most of the household staff, whom he kept on as Wellspring employees, in the uses of various minor scientific instruments, such as microscopes and telescopes, Bunsen burners and the proper way to fill a beaker. They had become nearly invaluable to him, but sometimes, like this weekend, he simply wanted to be as alone as possible.

Julian managed to carry his instruments through the house and outside again, managing somehow to lollop across the lawn without losing his grip on any of the equipment. Quickly working to set up a few of his more esoteric devices, such as his electromagnetic field detector, a gravimeter, and his ever-trusty Geiger counter, he then swept open his long coat, and looking for all the world as if he were an ancient ship's captain, pulled out a spyglass and a mariner's astrolabe. He stalked around his typical observation area, pausing every few steps to measure with his astrolabe and scribble notes down in his steno pad.

These flashes of light had been happening for some time, but it did not seem to follow the normal laws of physics. For example, Julian knew that light traveled faster than sound, and yet he almost always seemed to hear the crashing thunder of these events before the light illuminated the sky. Checking the results of his readings, he then scanned the sky with his spyglass, counting down slowly. His calculations proved to be incorrect when he arrived at zero and there was no sign of another event. He sighed. As he collapsed the glass, however, there was a sudden rumble. Reflexively, Julian whipped his spyglass out again, snapping it up to his eye.

A curse dropped from his lips in awe and surprise as he saw the light – like lightning, it was bright enough to illuminate the whole of the sky for only a moment, but unlike lightning, it was slow to fade. In the afterglow Julian saw a vision of a different world – the skyline of a golden city, framed against a glowing orange sunset, seen through what appeared to be a great jagged tear in the starry black of his own sky. His consternation grew, when, as he watched through the spyglass, he saw a human shape fall through the hole, speeding toward the nearby forest.

Dropping the majority of his tools, the young amateur scientist took off at a run, making his way over the meadow and into the underbrush of the forest. After stumbling his way in the right direction for a few minutes, he began to mentally berate himself for his lack of preparation in forgetting a light, which then turned into internal cursing at his own absent-mindedness as he remembered that he was, at least, carrying a lighter in his pocket. Pulling out the small implement, he clicked it on, then gasped at what he saw in the faint light. In the earth before him was a long, deep furrow, such as might be caused by falling wreckage or a meteor.

In the dirt lining the deep scar in the earth were golden-colored flecks, reflecting the illumination of Julian's lighter. While rather sparse near where he stood, they began to appear in more density further down the furrow. Julian's mind was cataloging every detail of what he saw, but he moved quickly, following the plowed earthen groove. It gradually widened, but as it did so, the flecks of gold-colored material became more numerous, until there was almost a full covering over the dirt of the irregular trench, like a light dusting of metallic snow.