

Introduction

My name is Clarissa Dyle. It's not my real name but it the name I am known by on hundreds of worlds and world fragments. Across these worlds, the name Clarissa Dyle conjures up the image of a rich and powerful lady. A lady of great beauty they say. A lady who walks with grace and ease among the rich and powerful. A lady of charity whose works have saved tens of thousands of lives and bettered the lives of many, many more.

But that is just the surface that I project. There is much more to me.

In order to begin understanding the real me, one has to start with the nature of reality. First, one should be aware that this little compendium of stories is being sent to any number of places. Some near and some very far. I have no way of knowing which of these places you the reader might be from so I will quickly cover the basic facts so that everyone can begin from the same base of understanding.

At the beginning of time, the Creator built the Well of Time. The One then set in motion events that would lead to the making of Terra, the prime world within the Well. Terra is the name of both a central planet and the entirety of the first and largest reality. Now before Terra was populated, the Creator and the angels tested a wide variety of life to determine what should and should not be introduced to this new world. This testing was not done on the same level of reality but in a nearby place the angels called Novhortus. In the common tongue it is known as the Early Eden. While this place was connected to the Well of Time, it was not actually located within it.

Slowly, the seeds of those plants and animals were cultivated into Terra as the Creator decided what would and would not function properly for the Grand Design. As intended, the creatures and plants changed and slowly began to show the promise that Novhortus had displayed. As they approached what the Creator wished, the One began giving the various creatures souls. Some had large souls and some small. Weak and strong and all manner in between. When these lives came to an end, the creator needed a place for them to go as their journey was now beginning in earnest. The Spirit World was created to accommodate the early-stage needs of these souls.

With the list of what animals and plants that were to be planted on Terra now complete, Novhortus was closed. However, among those early creations had been a variety of peoples. Before the doors of Novhortus were secured for the last time, these peoples were allowed to pick and choose which plants and animals they liked and to travel to another realm of existence, a group of worlds that came to be known as the Magic Lands.

During these years, the servants of the Creator argued among themselves. Eventually, one set of them turned against the Creator and the servants fought a terrible war among themselves which raged across the worlds. The Heavens had become divided and eventually Hell was spawned from the place the rebels angels were cast down into. But the fallen were not finished. They changed their tactics and began subverting those souls they could. The Creator noticed and the Seven Great Seals were placed to protect the world and universe that was Terra.

From the Spirit World some souls found their way into another realm, Purgatory. This was a place where the souls discovered the light and the darkness that lay within them. And there they decided which aspect they would nurture. Angels and demons walked those streets amongst them and tried to sway the souls therein to their way of thinking.

For many long years this was the nature of things.

Then something wonderful happened. A soul decided to follow in the footsteps of the Creator. Slowly at first, this being began learning all that could be understood. Eventually, this soul began working with the very building blocks of reality. And the first apprentice to the Creator thus came into being.

But not the last.

Out between worlds where there was nothing, this first apprentice created the Dimensional Confluences. These were primal realms where the Apprentice could study the interactions between the basic materials from which everything is made: nothingness, matter, energy, and life.

As the centuries passed, others joined the First Apprentice. Banding together, they worked to create their own worlds. Their first attempt was a monumental failure which resulted in the Possibility Vortex. An ever changing funnel of worlds where the rules of reality mashed together and pulled apart into a most chaotic and unseemly mix. Towards the 'top' of the funnel are the Unlikely Lands. Strange places that are the closest to stable one sees in the Vortex. The farther down the Vortex one goes, the stranger everything gets until you finally reach the bottom of the Vortex. There you find the Unraveling. The place where nothingness, matter, energy, and life are all returned to component parts. Legend has it there is a direct connection between the Unraveling and the Spirit World.

So, the apprentices to the Creator wandered around and studied the Vortex for a while. Eventually, they figured out what went wrong. And they once more took up world building. This time they got it right and the result was the Probability Maze. A loose collection of worlds and world fragments where a variety of conditions apply. In some places magics work. Someplaces only particular magics function. In others, they do not work at all. The same with technology. Many places have subtle changes in the laws of physics that keep things interesting. And those changes have even more interesting effects on magic and technology. The Probability Maze was an incredible success. So much so, that they offered to share it with their Master.

Pleased, the Creator populated the Probability Maze with peoples he'd stashed away from Novhortus who never went to the Magic Lands. And no few people from the Magic Lands went to the Maze looking for a new life.

Linking the worlds and partial worlds of the Maze were a series of pathways. These interworld corridors led from one world to the next. Sometimes there were many such doorways and paths. Sometimes only one. Some few have even been closed. The nature of each of these paths is usually different and synchronized to the worlds it connects to. Most often, like places lead to like. Very seldom might you find a pathway that leads from... say a desert into an ocean. Or from a hilltop into outer space. Those pathways made by the Apprentices were typically made for ease of use and with an eye towards harmony with the worlds they connect.

Upon the world of Regillus grows a great city which shares the name. This is where you will find the interworld headquarters for the Dyle Alchemical company. The company from which I took the last name by which I am so well known. Of course, this is also one of those places where I am more commonly known as Duchess Clarissa of the House Diamond. My father, Andus, is a prince of the realm and my grandfather, Lawrence, king.

The House of Diamond is a powerful house built upon powerful magics. My great grandfather, Titus Diamond, built a singular machine from the most powerful of magics. This machine marks each of the family who visit it with special abilities. Some of those abilities are standardized. Such as the ability to sense the trails between worlds, sensitivity to magic, great natural longevity (sadly, we can indeed still be killed), and more than human physical and mental attributes.

It can also convey other powers but those seem more random. At least until one masters the magics that surge and flow within the machine. Until then, those effects vary widely from physical abilities to magical abilities and talents... and beyond. For instance, some time ago I gained the ability to transform myself into a wolf.

Regillus is an interesting mixture of light technology and heavy magic. Great Grandfather Titus told his children that the architecture was initially modeled after Roman architecture on Terra. Just how he knew anything about Terran architecture remains a mystery. They say that our whole society was modeled after the land of Rome. Everything from our early clothing to our military to our very language. As we began traveling through the worldpaths to other places, some of this changed and some did not.

Clothing styles have changed the most. No one wears togas any more except during certain ceremonies, re-enactments, and plays. Style and practicality combined to do away with the toga long, long ago. I can't honestly say I'm the least bit sorry about that either.

Our legions still patrol the worldpaths and the many roads we have built to trade with our neighbors. Our navies sail the seas even farther out. Within a dozen worlds in any given direction, Regillus is the single greatest power for law, trade, and peace. This was originally achieved by conquering, marriages, and negotiation. One of the reasons those gains have been maintained and why we remain so powerful is the Regillus Trade Consortium. The Consortium, or RTC as it's popularly known as, regulates trade along the roads and pathways that immediately lead into Regillus. Because of the Consortium, we are the richest by far of worlds at this end of the Probability Maze and those beneath us do quite well in their own right. It is no accident that my cousin, Vance, heads the RTC. Vance is the third son to Crown Prince Marcus and is the most naturally inclined merchant I have ever met. Due to my work with Dyle Alchemical, Vance and I meet often and get along pretty well. We'd probably get along even better if he'd quit trying to bed me.

Regillus City was originally built on the shores of the Sinu Caligini, the great bay looking out into the sea we called the Mer Demens. Slowly at first, then with great speed, the city grew up the shore and into the foothills of Olympi Mons. The city now covers half the mountain. Two hundred years ago the city's outwards expansion was halted by order of the King. However, it did not stop growing. As outward growth was prohibited, the city instead began slowly growing down into the mountain. Probably half the inside of the mountain has since been transformed into a wondrous warren of streets and buildings. The neighboring mountain has only a very few buildings upon it due to the fact it is held sacred.

Mulvius Mons is the mountain where Great Grandfather Titus found himself a nice, deep cave and built his famous machine. Upon the entrance to that cave, he built the Castellum Regillia. The castellum is a huge fortress protected by two legions of elite guards and by powerful magics. As it is also the home to most of my family, it would be a very dangerous place indeed to try and invade. When Uncle Marcus was young, someone actually succeeded in getting to the walls of the castellum. Evidently, it had been part of a trap and thus the only army to ever make it to the walls was killed to the last man.

People tend to remember that sort of thing.

Lower on the slopes of Mulvius Mons are the great temples to the Creator, the Sacred Angels, and the Creator's Apprentices. These huge campuses receive a great deal of traffic from the city as well as pilgrims from far beyond. From the sea, the Castle is protected by a huge, sheer cliff. If you were to walk to the southern end of the Great Rose Garden, you would find yourself abruptly looking very, very far down to the bay below. On the east side of the mountain, one would find a

small but inhospitable jungle. There are powerful wards bordering the jungle to keep what's in the jungle there. At least from the Regillus side. Within the jungle is a interworld pathway that leads to a place filled with a variety of terribly unpleasant creatures. They tend to wander through into the jungle quite often. Between those creatures and the wards, we see no traffic from that area. The north side and a good deal of the west side of the mountain are covered by the beginning of the Great Silvani Woods. My Uncle Lloyd and his people see to it that only friends and allies make it through that massive forest that literally crosses many worlds. To the west-southwest is the road up the mountain to the castellum. There are a number of bridges along the way that can be conveniently lowered or raised should the situation arise. Just another precaution for a family that sometimes borders on being paranoid.

Olympi Mons, on the other hand, has a much more simple defense: a massive magic and artillery battery located in Castellus Insuperabilis which protects it. Located above the lesser, grey cliffs, the fort has a clear shot at any approaching ships as well as the primary trade routes out of the city. As my Aunt Flosia once said, 'Once a Diamond holds something, they tend to hold it forever.' Of course she had been talking about her art collection at the time but the same rule tends to apply with any Diamond and with any possession... be it a world or a painting.

And there you have it. The bare bones of my worlds and the very uppermost tip of the iceberg that is my life. Below that tip you will find much, much more... if you dare.