## NUMENÉRA DISCOVER YOUR DESTINY

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**Discover Your Destiny** 

Eric made it all the way to Michi's doorstep before he started to panic.

"Wait, Jesse," he said. "What if I get everyone killed?" He had a pan of still-warm brownies in one hand and a bag full of brand-new dice in the other. He and Jesse had picked them out together at the game store just a few days ago. Holding them in his hand for the first time had given Eric a sense of excitement he hadn't felt in a long time. Now that excitement had turned almost completely to panic. "Or drop my dice? Or drop my dice AND get everyone killed?"

Jesse had stopped on the stoop, his hand, lifted to knock, went back down to his side. "How many more worries do you have in there?" he asked, teasing.

How many? So many. What if I do something stupid? What if I say the wrong thing? What if I make a stupid voice and they all laugh at me?

"A lot," Eric said finally.

Jesse nodded, taking the brownies from him. "I know," he said. He probably did. He knew Eric better than



anybody. "But it's going to be great. *You're* going to be great. Ready?"

Eric nodded, and felt his stomach turn over as Jesse lifted his hand again to knock on Michi's door.

They'd been here before, a bunch of times. It wasn't going to Michi's house that made Eric so nervous, nor hanging out with people who were mostly—originally, at least—Jesse's friends. It was the idea that the others played roleplaying games almost every week and he never had. Not once. Not even in high school. He knew how much they all loved it—it was a topic of conversation every time they get together, the stories of their exploits making Eric itch to join. But the fact that they all loved it so much also made him nervous. He didn't want to be the bad apple that caused the fun to go away and made the group stop playing. Or, almost as bad, screw everything up so that they never invited him back. That would be awful.

Don't think about it. Don't think about it.

Thankfully, Michi answering the door and embracing both of them in a hug, following by, "Oh, damn. You brought brownies!" made the worry recede enough so that Eric could step inside and act mostly normal. At least for now.

Ashley was already at the dining room table, her dark red hair pulled into a ponytail, books and character sheets spread out around her. "Hey, guys!" she said, waving a pencil. "I'm making a Glaive!" She must have seen Eric's look of confusion because she added, "I'm gonna swing a giant sword and bop things on the head."

Michi took the brownies from Jesse, and waved them to the table. "Go ahead and make your characters. I'm going to grab us all drinks. And totally not sneak a taste of these brownies."

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"You probably shouldn't anyway," Jesse said. "They have nuts in them." They didn't. Eric had made them and everyone knew that nuts were the worst thing you could do to chocolate.

"Nice try," Michi said, laughing. "I know Eric would never do such a thing to me. Also, didn't anyone ever tell you it's not wise to taunt your GM?"

"Oh, great," Ashley said. "That's going to come back to haunt us." She scanned the book at her elbow, then made another note on her character sheet. "Okay, I think I'm done. Please allow me to introduce you to Liora, bad-ass laak fighter and contemptuous snubber of priorworld everything."

"Oh, she sounds fun," Jesse said. She did, even if Eric only knew half of those words. "I'm thinking about playing a Jack this time," Jesse added, as he picked up one of the books and grabbed a character sheet. "Something different."

"You always play a Jack," Ashley scoffed.

"Not *always*," Jesse said. "Just mostly. Eric, what are you going to play?"

Eric stared at the table. Everything looked so cool, but he had no idea how to start.

"Eric, want me to help you make your character, since I'm done?" Ashley asked.

"Yes, please," he said. "I have no idea what I'm doing."

"What kind of character do you want to play?" she asked as she pushed an open book toward him. Before he could even answer, she continued. "We started playing Numenera four or five years ago. It has three character types. There's a Glaive, who's like a warrior. There's the Nano, who uses the technology of the prior worlds to do kind of wizard-like things. And then there's Jacks, who are jacks of all trades. A little bit good at everything.



"I'm going to hit things with my Glaive and Jess is going to play a Jack, right, Jess?"

"Yeah, who Masters Weaponry, with my awesome bow." Jesse made the gesture of pulling an arrow out of a pack on his back and notching it into a bow.

"But today we're going to try a new campaign. There's a new set of rules, with two books: *Discovery* and *Destiny*. Numenera's always been about discovery—going into ruins from the past and finding amazing technology. So *Discovery* still has those same three types."

"But there's lot of cool new abilities now," Jesse interjected.

Ashley nodded. "*Destiny* is about taking the stuff we find and doing things with it. Building a new future. Making the world a better place."

Eric liked the sound of that.

Jesse interjected again. "So *Destiny* has three new character types that kind of focus on that theme. We've never tried them yet. You should totally choose one of them, Eric."

Eric nodded. This was a lot to take in at once, but he sort of liked the idea of playing a character type they hadn't used before. Maybe it was an opportunity to kind of make it his own.

"So, you could lead us, with an Arkus..." Ashley said. That sounded terrifying to Eric, and he quickly shook his head. "And there's Wrights, who make stuff, but I don't know if that's the best choice if you're just starting out."

Ashley opened the book to a picture of a cool-looking character leading the group into what looked like an ancient structure. "Or maybe a ... Oh, I bet you'd love being a Delve. You can explore places, and get in there and break stuff."



He liked that. If his job was to actually break stuff, then he couldn't screw that up too badly, could he?

"How does that fit into the 'building a better world' idea, though?" Eric asked, trying to understand what he'd be agreeing to.

"Well," Jesse answered. "the Ninth World's a really dangerous place. People need protection. They need help. But there's all this stuff from the prior worlds that we could use to help them. It's called the numenera. Delves are knowledgeable about the best way to salvage numenera safely and bring it back."

"Okay, I'll give that a try."

By the time Michi came back with drinks and a bowl full of chips, they'd finished their characters, and Ashley and Jess had walked him through the basics. Once he made the basic choices, Eric was a little surprised at how quickly it all went.

Michi sat at the end of the table, and folded her hands together. "Okay..." she said. "So the three of you are friends, and you live in a little town in the Steadfast. A knowledgeable woman named Brenadil has asked you to do something for her..."

Dellas was still worried about that strange mist blanketing the valley floor.

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"What do think it is?" he asked.

Liora took a few steps closer to the edge of the precipice overlooking the valley. Steep walls of rock rose up on either side of the green vale, but here and there the rock showed unexpected regularity, like strange, inhuman faces peeking out of the stone. The mist glistened in the late morning sunlight with a violet hue.

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"I don't know," she replied, "but it doesn't seem to be hurting anything down there. The trees and plants are fine."

"Yes, but," Wren whispered, "where are all the animals? I don't see any living creatures down there. The only birds I hear are up here." He adjusted his large backpack and quiver nervously.

Dellas examined the tree-filled valley with one more sweep. "Wait, I see something." He pointed. It was some mammalian beast slumped in the tall grass of a clearing. The purple mist swathed it. It wasn't breathing.

"Well, I'm convinced." He shook his head curtly. "We stay out of the mist."

"But we have to get down there," Liora said. She gestured toward the rust-colored edifice in the middle of the valley. It was vaguely pyramid-shaped, but with numerous pocks and holes, not created through time but ancient design.

Dellas looked to the colossal faces in the valley's walls and wondered if those were the people who built the structure. Something about them suggested an even greater age than the pyramid building. Like comparing a huge, ancient tree to the very mountain that it grew upon. He was reminded of his grandfather's words growing up. *There were eight worlds before ours*. Dellas wondered if the beings that built the structure looked upon the faces with the same wonder as he did.

"Maybe if we wait a while, the wind will disperse that fog," Wren said.

"We can't wait that long," Liora said. "We've got to get what we came for and get back to Brenadil. We already waited for you to hunt those casets this morning."

"You're going to appreciate these tasty birds at dinnertime tonight."

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Dellas could imagine Brenadil working feverishly on the machine that would keep their little town safe. She had actually dreamed up a device that would drive away the abhumans that had been stepping up their raids of late. But he realized she probably wasn't doing that at all, because she couldn't finish the device without the materials she'd sent them to retrieve.

Liora pointed at another outcropping of rock that hung over the valley like the one they were perched upon. The precipice that she indicated, however, was considerably closer to the structure. "There," she said. "We go there." She wore a jack of mail over her torso, mostly hidden by a loose tabard of white and blue.

Wren shook his head. "That's closer, but it's not nearly close enough. Even if we climbed down there, there's a hundred paces or more through the mist to the edge of the structure."

Liora smiled. "We climb down there. We cross there." She pulled a length of thin metallic cable from her pack. "I told you this would come in handy."

Dellas saw what she was intending. "Crail," he cursed. "I don't know."

But before he knew it, the three of them stood upon the second precipice. The structure was close, but still dangerously far away. Liora was affixing the end of her cable to one of Wren's arrows. "This will work," she said for the second or third time to no one in particular.

From here, the pocks and holes in the structure appeared to be open valves of some kind. There were closed valves as well. Pipes of different sizes ran along the outer surface. Brenadil had sketched a picture of what they were looking for. Mimetic gel, she'd called it.



Colorless goop in a silvery canister. Older delves had retrieved some from this ruin long ago, she said.

But no one had ever said anything about a violet mist. A very likely deadly violet mist.

"My arrow'll never penetrate the metal of the structure," Wren said.

"It won't have to." Liora's mouth was tight when she spoke. She probably thought that made her appear more confident. "We just need it to get hooked amid the pipes."

"Okay," Wren said, not hiding his lack of confidence at all. "I'll give it a try."

"You can do it," she said.

Wren pulled back a slender arm and loosed the arrow. It hit the side of the structure, bounced off the metal, and fell to the ground. Liora, holding the cable, reeled it back up to them.

Wren grimaced at the arrow's blunted tip.

"Well, the tip's not important for this," Liora said, patting him on the shoulder. "That was just practice." Her mouth was still pursed tightly.

On the fourth try, Wren did managed to get the arrow wedged between two close, parallel pipes. Liora pulled the cable taught and then pulled harder still to test it. It held.

Dellas sighed, synched the strap of his bag, and clasped a buckle, attaching it directly to his dark leather jacket. "I should go first."

No one objected. Liora wound and then tied the other end of her cable to a large tree. The line descended from their precipice to the central part of the structure. Grabbing hold of the cable and pulling himself up so his legs wrapped around it, Dellas was glad his thick leather gloves would protect his hands because his descent was more slide than climb.



When he reached the midpoint, the cable was bucking under his weight and he could sense rather than see the arrow bending. If it snapped, he would drop to the valley floor where, if the fall didn't kill him, the mist probably would. He gave up climbing entirely, loosed his legs and just let his weight pull him down the cable's length as fast as he could. The metal cut through his gloves and scraped his hands. His grip was sure, however, and just a few seconds later his feet found purchase upon a pipe on the structure's side.

He breathed out his relief and, when he could, called out to his friends. "Untie the cable so I can have some slack. I'm going to secure it better on this end. Getting into places like this was his job, but so was protecting those with him.

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"Well? What do you think so far?" It was Liora, no Ashley—for a moment, he'd gotten so used to thinking of her as her character that he forgot her real name—who asked. He sensed Michi was listening to his answer, too, even as she was pulling fresh drinks out of the fridge and handing them to Jesse.

What did he think? He could still feel the way the dice felt in his hands before he rolled. Like a moment of potential and power, all wrapped into a single gesture. With a huge helping of fate, or luck, or probability tied in. And that moment when he crawled across the pipe, making it possible for everyone else to follow? That was pretty awesome.

He said as much.

"Yeah," Ashley said. "I'd give anything to go back to my first time again."

Michi shot her a glance, brow raised.

"You know what I mean."

"I do," Michi said. Still talking, she handed everyone plates and gestured to the spread—brownies, chips, two different dips, even the spicy candy that Liora loved and no one else would touch. "Everyone dig in. The first time I rolled a twenty was... well, I was going to say better than sex, but I hadn't had sex at that point yet, so...yes, definitely better than sex at that point."

"Still true," Liora said. She and Michi clinked glasses. "Still true."

Jesse shot Eric a quick look, and Eric just shook his head, laughing, and reached for a handful of chips.

"Is this really different from the way you guys used to play, before these new books?" Eric asked.

Jesse shook his head. "No, this is absolutely still Numenera. It's just that there's even more things to do."

"Right," Ashley said. "So, the woman who sent us to the pyramid, she's building a thing to help the town. So she's probably a Wright. Do I have that right, Mich?"

Michi nodded sagely.

"And now there's rules for how to do all of that. Maybe next time, I'll play a Wright and actually be the one making the devices. I'd be able to make cyphers for us and everything."

"Oh! You totally should have been a Wright," Jesse said, finishing a brownie.

"One campaign at a time."

"Okay," Michi said. "You ready to get back to it? I've got some good stuff coming up."

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As Eric sat down at the table and picked up his d20, he thought again about how good it felt in his hand. How right it felt to sit here with his friends laughing around him. Yeah, he could get really used to this. All that stress and worry, and for what? He was having a great time, and he hadn't gotten anyone killed yet. Not even close.

Water that smelled more like bile dripped from grey pipes that ran across the ceiling. Dellas tried to avoid it at first, but eventually resigned himself to be wet with the foul stuff. It made the floor and walls slick, so they moved slowly. Tiny, pale creatures with glistening shells clung to the pipes and the walls but seemed unconcerned about the three of them as they moved deeper into the structure.

Wren carried a glowglobe for light. Its glow accentuated his narrow face and long nose. Liora clutched her drawn sword in both hands. Dellas was in the lead, hands free.

As they crept, it seemed more and more to Dellas that they didn't walk down a corridor in a building so much as they made their way through the inside of a massive machine. Or the innards of some gigantic metal beast. The "passageway" felt more like an esophagus—a tube not meant for walking but for moving some substance from one place to another. But he had no idea what that substance would be.

The three barely spoke. Occasionally, the place itself would break the silence with a groan or hiss, lending even more to the sensation that it was alive.

"Do we even know where to start looking?" Wren asked quietly.

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"Deep inside," Liora replied.

"Wait!" Dellas heard, and then saw the signs of danger. Ahead, one of the pipes on the wall, near the ceiling, rattled as it spurted more of the awful liquid than the others. He thought it would burst. On instinct, he pulled off his leather jacket and wrapped it tightly around the junction that shuddered and whined the most.

"Go!"

Wren and Liora rushed forward past him, but he followed right behind. He urged them to keep forward, despite the fact that rushing down the slick accessway in the unknown presented its own dangers. However, moments later, they heard a powerful metal crack behind them and the clash of metal bits striking the walls. Then a rush of splashing liquid, although that quickly abated.

"Good work," Liora said. Wren nodded.

Dellas' eyes gave a quick smile. "This place is old." His grandfather would have laughed at the understatement. "I think it's falling apart." He indicated a burst pipe on the ceiling above them that dripped a little. "Whatever it is in these pipes, there must be some kind of automatic shutoff after they fail. But that probably just puts more pressure on the other pipes. So over time, the problem's just going to escalate."

Liora shrugged. "Whatever. Let's just get what we need and get out so we don't have see that happen first hand." Her contempt for those who tried to understand the prior worlds frequently made itself evident. Dellas didn't understand it a tenth as well as Brenadil, but still it fascinated him. Plus, he had to understand a little of it to do his job.

The better part of an hour passed before they exited the conduit in which they walked through a hatch that

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had clearly been pried open. "The people who were here before—they came this way," Wren whispered. "That's a good sign."

Liora nodded. "They brought back some of that gel that we're looking for now, so that's good."

The irregular chamber that they found themselves in held a tangle of tubes, some silver and others transparent. Somewhere, a light other than the one that they brought with them flashed blue.

Before Dellas could even react, Wren's glowglobe dropped to the floor and his bow was in his hands. He followed the other man's gaze and saw one of the creatures with the colorful shell but it was far larger than those they'd seen before. Twice the size of his head, crab-like legs jutted from beneath the shell and tendrils writhed around what might be a mouth. It scuttled across the wet floor toward them. But Wren's arrow pierced the shell and the creature collapsed backward with a clatter.

"Another!" Liora lunged at a second creature, this one half again as large as the first. The thing's shell turned away her blade and it grasped at her leg with its tendrils. One tendril pulled across the fabric of her pantleg and drew blood.

Liora hissed a curse but did not back away. Tiny barbs covered the tendrils that whipped around her too fast to track. Wren loosed an arrow, but it couldn't pierce the shell.

Dellas had a large knife in a sheath but he doubted he could accomplish anything with it that Liora couldn't with her sword. Particularly with the welts on his hands from sliding down the cable. So instead, he pulled his shoulder bag off and stepped forward. The things tendrils lashed at Liora, tearing at her flesh. He dropped the bag over the

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center of their mass. The barbs hooked into the leather and quickly tangled.

"That won't hold long," he said.

Liora didn't need long. Stabbing rather than slicing, she thrust her blade under the shell and drove it into the creature. It fell over backward, exposing more of its underbelly, and another quick slash ended it.

Dellas' bag was shredded. "Thanks for the assist," Liora said as he tried to pull it free from the barbs and then gave up.

Wren used his nimble fingers to pry out most of Dellas' gear from the torn pack without cutting himself on the tendrils that wrapped around it. "If you keep taking things off and throwing them at threats, next you'll have to use your pants," he said with a wry smile.

Dellas shrugged. "I just use what I have at hand."

Then Wren added, "I can carry some of this stuff for you in my backpack."

Something caught Dellas' eye farther into the chamber. "Hey, look."

He stepped cautiously forward, eyes seeking the slightest sign of more of the creatures, but focused on the set of matched tubes coming into a junction. Once he reached it, he studied it for a moment and said, "I'm going to open this up. I think we might find the iotum we're looking for in here." He looked at Wren. "But I'll need my toolkit."

Wren already had the kit, recovered from the ruined bag, in his hand.

"I'll keep a watch." Liora cleaned the creature's muck from her blade with a rag from her own pack.

It took time to pry the casing away from the junction and get into the device's inner workings, but it paid off.



Small canisters of mimetic gel sat ensconced amid a woven mass of tubes and conduits. "Ha!" Dellas couldn't contain his triumph.

"Hey I hear something," Wren said.

"Sounds like more skittering feet," Liora added.

"More this time," Wren added.

Dellas used pliers to pry away a flexible tube from one of the canisters. "I need just a second or two."

"Hurry," Liora hissed. They could all hear more of the creatures coming from even deeper in the structure.

"They must feed off the stuff this place produces," Wren said.

Liora looked around, clearly unsure where they might be coming from. "But they seem to want some meat to supplement their diet."

"Or they're just defending their territory."

"Whatever. Are we ready?"

Dellas pulled a canister free. The thick gel looked a little like mucus inside it.

"Great!" Wren said. "Let's go!"

"No," Dellas said. "I'm going to get more." He was certain more than ever that this place was breaking down. Maybe that was why there was mist outside when there wasn't before. The machine was venting something as it failed. He doubted they'd ever make it back in here safely to get this stuff again.

"No," Liora shouted now with a hoarse voice. "We have to go now!"

"Come on, Dellas," Wren knocked an arrow.

"Just one second."

Liora picked up the canister he'd already scavenged. "We got it, we can go."

Dellas wiped his eyes. "I can get more. Brenadil will..."



The mass of crustacean-like creatures seethed into the room from all angles. The machine was riddled with valves and conduits for them to crawl through. Dellas looked up. There must be at least a dozen of them.

Wren's eyes flashed in the flickering blue light. "We're dead."

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"And at that harrowing moment, we'll take a quick break," Michi said.

Oh no. Eric felt sick to his stomach. He wanted to blame it on too many chips, but it was a hundred percent the fact that his friends were about to die and it was all his fault.

"I'm so, so sorry," he said. "I didn't mean for that to... I thought I was doing the right thing... I..." He'd never be invited back to play. Of that, he was sure.

From across the table, Jess took his hand. "Breathe," he said. "It's great! Almost dying is really the only reason we play this game."

At a sound of discontent from Michi, Jess grinned. "Well, not the *only* reason. But it's definitely one of the reasons."

"It's true," Ashley said. "The boringest game is the one where no one almost dies."

"Oh, but you're not safe yet," Michi said, her tone ominous. "Don't be getting cocky with that *almost* dead stuff."

"Bring it, Miss GM," Jess said. "We got this. Our Delve's got us. Give us your worse. We can handle it. Right, team?"

Ashley pantomimed a swinging sword, growling as she did so. Then she lifted a fist to bump it against Eric's arm. "We got this," she said. "You got this."





Eric gave a small nod. He felt a tiny bit better. "Sure," he said. "We got this." His voice sounded almost as uncertain as he felt. That was okay. He was going to do his best, and whatever happened, his friends would still be here, helping him out.

"We got this," he said again, louder, and this time he thought they just might.

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"I'm sorry!"

Liora slashed her sword back and forth to ward three of the creatures away. Tendril-mouths hissed.

"Out the way we came!" Wren loosed arrows as fast as he could at the oncoming threats. Dellas had never heard Wren shout before.

Dellas, no second canister in hand, ran to where Wren had dropped the glowglobe earlier and scooped it up. He knew there was no light between where they were and the outside. His hunting knife was in his other hand.

A bloody Liora pushed past him into the accessway. He held the light high for her. "It's clear," she said.

Wren had felled two of the creatures with arrows, but as he retreated, a fist-sized thing clung to his knee with tendrils and segmented legs. Dellas slashed at it with his knife, and the force of his blow knocked it free, but it took a bloody chunk of Wren's leg with it. He cried out and fell toward Dellas, who held him up.

"Go," Dellas said. "I'll hold them off for a second." It was guilt talking, not bravery. This was all his fault. If they'd just left after he pulled the first canister free, they'd already be well on their way out.



"We're a team," Wren said, and let another arrow fly into the oncoming swarm.

Liora waved them on with the hand still clutching the iotum canister. "Right, we all go. But we go now!"

They ran, but Dellas could see Wren falling behind. His leg could barely hold his weight. He dropped the knife and hooked his arm under the other man's shoulders. Glowglobe high, he half-carried his friend forward. Clattering steps were still loud behind them.

They made it about halfway to the entrance before the globe flickered out.

"Crail!"

Dellas reached into Wren's backpack. "I had a glowglobe, Wren. Did you pack it when you took my things?"

He could hear Wren breathing hard. "I don't think so." "Liora."

"Working on it," she said. He could hear her fumbling in her own pack even as he could hear the creature getting very close.

"Did you mean what you said about them wanting something to supplement their diet?"

"I guess?"

Dellas hadn't felt a glowglobe in Wren's pack, but he had felt something else. The two birds, wrapped in synth fabric. He pulled them free and tossed them in the direction of the oncoming skittering.

When Liora got her globe lit, they could see that most of the creatures were already upon the dead birds, tearing at feathers and flesh with their tendrils.

"Go!"

They reached the valve where they'd entered. Daylight welcomed them, but there were still creatures in pursuit.



"You first," Dellas told Wren. The smaller man swiped at the nearest creature with his bow and slid it out the opening and down into the valley floor below. The effort made the bow snap in half and he tossed it aside as he grabbed up toward the cable. He pulled himself up and hooked his good leg around it for support and began a slow ascent.

"I was hoping these things would be unwilling to enter the daylight," Liora said, tossing the glowglobe away and drawing her sword again.

Tendrils slashed across Dellas' leg. At least three of the largest of the remaining beasts were determined to get them. Liora crashed her weapon against the nearest shell. "You're next. I've got your back."

Dellas reached the cable. He had no idea if it would support all three of them at once, but there wasn't time to think about that. Wren clearly moved as quickly as he could, but it wasn't very fast. Dellas winced in pain to be gripping the cable again. He thought of home with comfortable beds and healing salves. But he'd only get there if he climbed this cable. And Liora couldn't get on it until his own ascent was well underway.

"Crail!" he spat as he began his climb.

Liora took one more vicious wound from a creature before there was room for her to grab the cable herself. It bowed and whined with the weight of the three of them at once. He could hear Wren whispering prayers to various gods. Probably every god he could think of.

Deadly violet mist swirled below them like a hungry beast of an entirely different sort. Ancient faces peered out of the rock with impassive stares.

The creatures couldn't follow them on the cable, though, so once they were all out of reach, he stopped to



let Wren make it all the way to the other end. He wanted to keep the least pressure on the cable's midpoint. Liora saw what he was doing and told him it was smart through teeth clenched in pain. They both had to just hang there for what seemed like hours while Wren reached the other side. It was probably no more than a minute or two, Dellas told himself, but each moment was agony. When Wren was safe, he made his own pain-wracked climb.

Wren helped him to the outcropping of rock when he reached it, and they both helped Liora. All three of them lay upon the bare rock in the sun like basking lizards, panting with exhaustion.

Liora remained on her back as she reached into her pack and pulled out the canister of mimetic gel. She held it aloft like a trophy.

"I'm sorry," Dellas said again.

"Hey, we wouldn't have got it at all if it wasn't for you," Liora replied.

"We're glad you're with us," Wren said with a quiet smile.

Dellas smiled as well.







