

The Legend of Kopesh-Ra

A story in 21 musical chapters
by drummls

Musical accompaniment to this story
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Chapter 1: Cutoff

The traffic is dismal in Dome City. The aircars hover, waiting for the robots to finish their work removing a broken-down vehicle from the airplane before it resumes and takes Samuel back to the little box he calls home. "At least," Samuel thought to himself, "at least I'm not exposed to the air outside or stuck living in The Dregs." The Dregs was the ghetto section of Dome City, spread out over kilos upon kilos of land below the planetary surface, housing people who were only just able to get by – no jobs, no prospects, no force squads, no light from the day star, Nova, and no hope. It is a daily struggle for the residents who live there, the brutal side of the sacred human ecology of competitive evolution taken up by the leaders of Dome City. "At least I have an aircar," Samuel muttered to himself.

The aircar hummed a self-satisfied musing, and lifted itself and Samuel up into the airplane preparing to gauge its surroundings and resume the journey back to *Wonderland*, Samuel's gateway community, floating above the tenements of The Dregs. With a start, the car accelerated into the stream of other aircars, all taking their occupants to another section of Dome City, like vesicles being delivered by intracellular messengers to the proper receptor organs within the organism of society. Dome City, as everyone knew, was the last to survive the Omega Incident. Outside of the boundaries of the city was only drought and devastation. Those who lived in Dome City knew that they at least could live, whatever their standing. "What exactly happened to the other cities?" thought Samuel. "Did they –"

In an instant, Samuel found himself flying through the aircar, his body smashing against the opposite door, wrenching his neck to the side and contorting his frame unnaturally. His restraint lay broken on the adjacent seat. Looking out the back windscreen of the aircar, Samuel saw a relic, an antique from an older age, a museum piece naught to be seen in the airplanes. It was an aircycle, one of the first models to emerge after antigravity was invented, and highly illegal in the airplanes, as it did not have a robotic pilot as do all modern aircars. The cycle must have cut off Samuel's aircar, a feat unheard of on modern skyways, and sent him reeling into a building. "What the hell is that doing here?" mused Samuel. Aircycles were rare and aircar mishaps of this kind were almost nonexistent. Samuel felt lucky to have survived, particularly



since his restraint failed, another unlikely coincidence. Ensuring he was only bruised, a robomedic summoned another aircar to transport Samuel home.

The traffic intensified as Samuel got closer to *Wonderland*. Friends and neighbors congregated in their isolation, doing the cellular work necessary to keep the organism alive. He tried to suppress the forbidden thought that there was something terribly mysterious and terribly wrong with the world as it was. Where was freedom? There must be a Solution.

Chapter 2: Champagne Collapse

The physical trauma of the accident left large black and blue marks on Samuel's back and neck. The analgesic cream provided by the robomedic did not do much to soothe the pain, but Samuel knew what would: real alcohol. But since alcohol was prohibited in the Great Cleansing, soothing his woes was going to be a difficult prospect. One sure bet that one could find it, however, would be to host a Gathering of Friends. It being the festive season, Samuel had no trouble filling his guest list with likely prospects.

The one alcoholic beverage allowed during the annual cycle of Renewal was champagne, so that was to be the beverage of the evening. Toasting his good fortune to be alive with his friends, Samuel began to feel the effects of the alcohol working at his body and his mind. Though black and blue, his body felt relieved from the real alcohol numbing his pain, but his mind felt heavier, still wondering about the incredible coincidence of "The Cutoff" (as the comm controls were now referring to the incident with the aircycle). How could such a thing have come to pass in a world as orderly as his? Were the people living in The Dregs slowly rising up to express their... their... what is the word? Their *will*? The champagne flowing, these questions continued to disturb his reverie at a subliminal level. Unfamiliar with the intoxicating effects of real alcohol, Samuel collapses on his bed to sleep uneasily.

Chapter 3: Uneasy Dream

Rolling restlessly in bed, Samuel dreams of the accident again and again, mulling it over in his half-sleep until he wakes floating above a colorless and empty cityscape sitting on a hill. It is his City, but not, as if the slate had been wiped clean, waiting for a new regime to overcome the emptiness. Slowly, a red-colored orb descends from the heavens, passing through the top of the immense Dome that covers the city, reflecting its light over it, and then onto the mountains and canyons of buildings that span the city. The Red-Light Orb emits an energy that is regenerative, emanating across the cityscape and changing the colorless landscape to a spectral rainbow of shining, glittering growth. The gray turns to green as plant life and then animal life overcome the desolation, growing quickly to overtake the hyperplastic structures that once dominated Dome City.

From Samuel's vantage point, the entire City is overcome by the vegetation and becomes a Jungle, alive with billions of organisms cooperating to create a paradise, a fantasy realm of plenty and joy. But lurking in the distance, Samuel senses a dark presence, as if just over the horizon of his paradise Jungle, a threatening presence was waiting, biding its time for the right moment to return.

Chapter 4: $\pi\beta$

Samuel's mind cannot turn from the previous night's dream. Yet, another more tangible distraction is about to take place. While in Occupational and Civic Reinvestment Training, Samuel meets someone named Avogadro claiming to be a member of a secret guild that believes that the history and ideology of Dome City is a front put on by a conspiracy of government, media and economic institutions. Avogadro pulls his sleeve back to reveal a forbidden skin marking resembling a combination of letters from an ancient script. He learns of a backdoor out of the facility from his mysterious co-worker, who invites Samuel to test his conspiracy tale by taking that way home. Samuel debates with himself deeply during his Reinvestment Training and is conflicted. What he knows to be true does not coincide with the accusations of Avogadro, a stranger, truly, who has nonetheless piqued a not-wholly-unfamiliar sense in him: curiosity.

Going through the backdoor, Samuel happens upon a kind of control room. Avogadro said that a Secret Number is being broadcast through the various media streams that cycle constantly to the population of the city via the standard cranial data ports. This number, known only as $\Pi\beta$, is a way that the leaders of Dome City maintain social control.

Samuel realizes then that he is looking at that very number on a large display screen at the front of the control room. He makes a quick exit so as not to be detected.

Chapter 5: Harmonic Convergence

Escaping the Occupational and Civic Reinvestment Training Facility through the backdoor, and learning of $\pi\beta$, Samuel is confused. He misses the regular aircar line that takes him back to *Wonderland*, and ends up taking an aircar deep into The Dregs. There he sees how the other half lives. Deep poverty, drudgery, and hard labor define life there, punctuated by a malevolent odor and darkness unfamiliar to the residents above. Dark, hooded faces turn his way as his unscathed aircar passes by. He sees the symbol of the resistance group, the same that Avogadro had recently shown him marked in his skin, etched on the steel archways that support the infrastructure upon which his world floats, bearing down like the planet upon Atlas.

A convergence of comprehension regarding how Dome City operates and what may lie beyond begins to dawn on Samuel. He starts to believe there is a Solution to the problems of his

failing world. Thinking deeply as his aircar emerges from the darkness below to slowly make its way back to *Wonderland*, Samuel wonders at the new way he is seeing his home. Dropping him off at his apartment building, *La Nouvelle Marne la Vallee*, Samuel is greeted by the familiar reflection of his apartment door in a pool of condensation formed at the base of a maintenance hatch; but as Samuel walks past the image, it becomes distorted, indiscernible.

Chapter 6: The Church

After another restless night, Samuel is exhausted. It is clear to him that the mental tension coming with the comprehension of the Secret Number $\Pi\beta$ is stressing his mind and body. Sapped of energy and unable to contemplate anything else, Samuel meditates on a solution to the problem of the $\Pi\beta$ Conspiracy. "Should I go on believing in the way of life that is normal, or should I use my recent experience as a more pure guide? What if the Truth is not what the Educomm Ministry espouses? Is there something beyond Dome City? Am I to expose others to the Truth of the $\Pi\beta$ Conspiracy?"

With further contemplation, Samuel sees that if he is to lead others to the Truth that has been revealed to him, the solution is to alter the $\Pi\beta$ signal. But he knows this to be impossible: the control systems that broadcast $\Pi\beta$ throughout Dome City must be hidden and impervious to tampering.

Seeking understanding and sympathy for this new conceptual problem, Samuel goes to the nearest Shaman of *Wonderland*, at The Church of the Beloved Humanist. The Church, a leftover from the previous era in which humans believed in a mystical and unseen interloper in human affairs, is the primary center of Dome City for introspection and self-understanding within the context of what was left of humanity after the Fall. Lighted at the entrance to The Church is a large symbol of a human male with curly hair, arms outstretched and legs spread, framed by geometric shapes. He has the conspicuous name Vitruvian. As is their way, a Shaman comes out to greet Samuel before he can enter the temple itself. The Shaman are volunteers who help citizens along their life journeys. For his counseling session, Samuel is led to a Shaman named 'eplk, a large, androgynous person who listens intently and engages Samuel in a line of questioning and philosophical debate about his problem. "You seem to think you know a lot about how Dome City actually works," says 'eplk, after hearing Samuel's account of his encounter with the Secret Number $\Pi\beta$, "but truly, you know nothing – yet. Seek with me and find." Not willing to submit his disciplined and reasoned mind to conspiracy theories, Samuel refuses to return to The Church for weeks. But a chance encounter with Avogadro leads him back to The Church later that year.

Chapter 7: 'epIk

After several trips to The Church of the Beloved Humanist, Samuel gets to know 'epIk better and realizes that 'epIk is not a normal Shaman. 'epIk's appearance, though entirely human, does not give the impression that he is from Dome City, which is, of course, impossible. After hearing further of Samuel's dilemma regarding his knowledge of Πβ (the Secret Number), 'epIk reveals his own knowledge of a beautiful, domed *Dream City* and the *Dream Master*. Instantly, Samuel recognizes these as places existing only in the fairy tales that children and fools believe in. The *Dream City* is thought to be a fantastical construction used to teach the young that citizens must always continue the very necessary task of consciously and conspicuously separating the real (what is) from the ideal (what can never be). Yet 'epIk seems to convincingly speak of the *Dream City* as more than a metaphor. 'epIk suggests that Samuel knows, and has always known, this truth. The *Dream Master* is the one who holds and protects the *Dream City* from The Beast.

All of this is too much for Samuel, and he gets up and turns around to leave. Before him, though he did not recognize it when he entered the Contemplation Chamber, stand two doors. Samuel looks at 'epIk for guidance. "The Leftmost Door will lead to the real world from which you came to me. The Rightmost Door leads to the ideal world of the *Dream City*. Knowing what you know and being told what you have been told, which will you choose, Samuel? If you choose the Leftmost Door, I will no longer be able to guide you. If you choose the Rightmost Door, I will guide you to the *Dream City*, where the Solution is decreed and utopia reigns. You must also know that you will come face to face with the *Dream Master* and The Beast – if you make this choice from your heart and not your head." Samuel still does not believe the *Dream City* actually exists, but is curious where 'epIk will take him, so he agrees to take the journey, and they both pass through the Rightmost Door.

Chapter 8: Behind the Wall

Samuel and 'epIk pass through the Rightmost Door and enter a long tunnel lined with tapestries and electric lights. The tapestries depict scenes of human decadence: people eating together (long since banned by the fathers of Dome City), people engaging in intercourse and birthing (not necessary or desirable since the Parthenogenesis Project). If the City Elders were aware of these artifacts, thought Samuel, the Temple would be destroyed within minutes, and a new one would take its place within hours. The tunnel exits into an unimproved region at the edge of *Wonderland*, near the edge of Dome City where travel is forbidden by all but the most senior Dome maintenance staff. 'epIk leads Samuel to a juncture in the Dome Wall named "Station 42" where, inexplicably, they slip behind the wall and into the desolation of the Barrens beyond, a drought-blasted zone of radiation, toxic wastes and chemical contamination. 'epIk explains to Samuel that this is a secret exit unknown even to the Shamanic Order, and that they both have now passed too far to easily return to Dome City. Confused at his whereabouts,

Samuel seems to be swallowed quickly by a dense fog as he steps further into the Barrens, eventually losing sight of 'epIk and unable even to see his own feet. He begins to hear sounds in the distance, strange sounds that he has never before heard, a kind of music, but one wholly unfamiliar to the music of Dome City. Drawn on by the sound of the strange music, Samuel moves instinctually toward the *Dream City*. The density of the fog slightly diminishes and Samuel can see he is on a dirt path, surrounded by vegetation, so thick as he has never before imagined. Out of the jungle stumbles 'epIk, two strange fresh fruit in his hand. "Ha ha, here is what will bring you fully into this world!" He hands one of the fruit to Samuel. In taking a bite out of it, Samuel sees that his hand – no – his whole arm, and looking down, the rest of his body, is covered in a kind of bio-memetic sheath, an armor that is part-biotic, part-technological.

"Look at yourself!" says 'epIk, smiling broadly. "You are no longer Samuel. Here you are *Kopesh-Ra!*"

Chapter 9: Visible Ghost

Travelling further along the jungle path, 'epIk and Samuel, now *Kopesh-Ra*, enter a clearing in the vegetation. From here they can see that they are on a hilltop, overlooking a long valley that lay between two colorful mountain ranges. At the far end of the valley, a City glowing golden and green can be glimpsed standing on a tall hill. Samuel – *Kopesh-Ra* – is awed with wonder and joy, breathing deeply and expanding his chest tightly into his new skin. He cannot believe such a world could exist, and has been kept from him his whole life, except in the form of fairy tales. 'epIk advises that the valley is where they need to go if they are to further their knowledge of the Secret Number with which they can be prepared to face The Beast.

Heading back into the jungle they descend toward the valley. In the distance, smoke rises from a small village. They hear numerous sounds of life calling, howling, tweeting, screeching in the jungle around them. *Kopesh-Ra* is stunned at the seeming volume of the life around him; never has he seen such natural vibrance. He breathes in the air as if it was his first breath of life. But when he exhales he notices that all has gone quiet. 'epIk stops in front of him and waits.

Suddenly, a ghastly and impermanent white figure appears out of thin air before them on the trail and quickly approaches. The ghost, visible and material at will, stretches its hands out and passes each hand through 'epIk and *Kopesh-Ra*. A cold sensation passes through them both and they feel numbed from the inside out, as if their spines had been severed, yet they were intact. Falling to the ground, the ghost hovers above them menacingly. But *Kopesh-Ra* feels quickly regenerated by the bio-memetic suit and rises to his feet. The ghost, now like a naked pale human male, steps back, astonished, and kneels before *Kopesh-Ra*. In a halting, wispy whisper, the visible ghost says, "None other has felt my grip and risen, but you, you are the One, the *Ra*. I grant you my servitude and my power."

Kopesh-Ra glances beside him and sees 'epIk lying there, as if in a coma. "Resurrect my friend from this ill fate." The visible ghost casts a long glance at 'epIk and slowly, he too rises from the jungle path. He starts at the sight of the ghost, but Kopesh-Ra reassures him that they have a new ally, loyal to the end. 'epIk looks down the path and says, "That way, through the Valley of the Strange Birds, will lead us to the *Dream City*." As the three figures advance down the path, the visible ghost whispers, "Yes, but do not forget that there is a toll to be paid for any who approaches. The Beast awaits."

Chapter 10: Filters On Your Eyes

The jungle path flattens as the three weary travelers enter the Valley of the Strange Birds. Kopesh-Ra understands why the valley is named so, as they spot, fleetingly at first, but then more clearly, an assortment of flying objects with the most bizarre forms. They are alive and are winged, but their geometry seems wrong, as if space had been turned on its head – not only unsuitable for flight, but arguing vigorously against the very nature of form and matter itself. Not immaterial, but unbelievable. Yet there they were, in ever more numbers, now clearly aware of the presence of the travelers and alerting other "strange birds" to this fact. The birds seem more curious about the travelers, in fact, than the traveler about the birds. Their numbers increasing, and their inquisitive calls growing in volume, the travelers forge on. "I've never seen such behavior from these creatures," whispers the ghost. 'epIk agrees, whispering back, "Yes, they usually keep to themselves."

As they make their way through the jungle valley, Kopesh-Ra begins to think about their progress. Rekindling his memory of the electric tunnel, the wall, the fog... where was he? Was his name once...Samuel?

Glancing up, Kopesh-Ra realizes that the fog has returned around them and discovers that he is once again alone. Calling for 'epIk and the ghost, he hears no answer in return. Moving forward on the path, thinking that he has been left behind, he encounters a river blocking the way. The path continues on the other side, but the water is moving quickly and is of uncertain depth. Turning around, Kopesh-Ra hastily retreats, only to find minutes later that the path he came from has also been mysteriously blocked by a river. The fog, at least, seems to be less thick, but as he turns around he sees a heart-stopping sight – two piercing red eyes looking at him from within the jungle. The eyes are clearly in front of him, yet somehow Kopesh-Ra suspects they are the manifestation of something deeper, not of this world, and this impression is deepened when he hears a deep, threatening groan, ominous, the breath of Death. Then something astonishing happens – Kopesh-Ra hears a voice in his head, as if being spoken to telepathically, a kind of talking to oneself, yet the words are controlled from another source. The voice says "I am the avatar of Lo-Sàfah, *Demon of the Dream City*." This was clearly The Beast that the ghost warned us of, thought Kopesh-Ra. "I am The Beast," he thought, unwillingly. The invasion into Kopesh-Ra's mind is unwelcome and foreboding. Listening to it, he

seems to lose his own will to move on toward the *Dream City*. He is drawn to the eyes in the jungle. Kopesh-Ra moves off the path and into the jungle, toward the malevolent spirit of The Beast.

Chapter 11: The Beast

Lo-Sàfah draws Kopesh-Ra closer to satisfy his curiosity about this strange new entity that has entered his world, a will that seems at once weak, yet indomitable. Advancing further into the jungle drawn on by the red eyes, The Beast and Kopesh-Ra enter a clearing. Here, Kopesh-Ra sees The Beast in his full eminence. Emitting an aura of stench and contamination, The Beast looks gaunt yet muscular, lean yet fat, tall yet repugnantly short, a handsome man or an old witch. It is an ever-changing avatar of something yet unseen that distinguishes The Beast, Kopesh-Ra realizes.

Facing each other at either end of the clearing, Lo-Sàfah begins to advance, it's aura emanating ever closer to Kopesh-Ra. They engage in what seems to him a dance, slowly turning and twisting, gaining more proximity, then circling and moving apart. The dance gains in intensity, the two gravities setting up a feedback loop that increases the amplitude.

Just as The Beast is about to make impossible Kopesh-Ra's escape from the black hole of its will, showing up at the edge of the clearing appear 'epk and the ghost. Seeing Kopesh-Ra engaged in the vicious battle, they rush toward him and get swallowed up in the gravity well of The Beast. Disrupting the orbits of Lo-Sàfah and Kopesh-Ra, the ghost is the first to be swallowed into the grotesque spinning form of The Beast. His wispy form dissipates quickly as the clearing becomes a dark vortex of color and energy. Spinning wildly, 'epk yells as he too gets caught up in the center of Lo- Sàfah, who releases its grasp from Kopesh-Ra. As Kopesh-Ra goes spinning off into the jungle, 'epk yells, "Keep with your mission! Go to the *Dream City*! *Only YOU are Kopesh-Raaaaaaaaahhhh!*"

Chapter 12: Six Secrets

The sun beats down in a way that the artificial lights of Dome City never did. Kopesh-Ra awakens with a strange bird pecking at his bio-memetic suit, which easily absorbed the shock of being thrown off into the jungle after his dance with The Beast. But it was more than a dance. Being so close to Lo- Sàfah in the encircling attachment allowed Kopesh-Ra to gain special insight into the secrets of the *Dream City*. The secret Kopesh-Ra learned in the City that led him to this strange new world is as nothing to the Six Secrets revealed through his close encounter with The Beast. His mind turns toward each secret revealed in the choreography of the dance, each exponentially advancing his solution to the Πβ conspiracy. He begins to understand that

this is the elixir he has been looking for, the reason for his journey. But in order to grasp the true meaning of the Six Secrets, he must visit the *Dream Master* in the *Dream City*.

Now fully mentally attuned, he gets up and finds some fruit to revive his body. Kopesh-Ra faces the sun, allowing its full light to envelop him. The daylight here is so strong, it is as if the sun channels the energy directly into his soul and he feels enlightened from the inside. Reflecting upon his journey so far, Kopesh-Ra begins to come to terms with the dichotomy of his life in Dome City with his life as Kopesh-Ra. The way to the *Dream City* is obvious and, like a blossom, the path opens and he sees his goal clearly in the distance, a great pair of shining gates marking the entrance to his destination. Kopesh-Ra sets off at a sprint.

Armed with the Six Secrets and racing now toward the *Dream City*, the Great Gates loom before him. Suddenly, something unseen rushes from the side of the path and checks Kopesh-Ra; his body is immobilized by the invisible, yet familiar presence which cuts him off and he falls to the side, hits his head against a rock and falls into a deep sleep.

Chapter 13: Loincraft

In the Valley of the Strange Birds, Kopesh hammers away at his iron. The pounding of hot metal, the rhythm of the swing and hit, the smell of the fire all calm him in a way that allows for him to go on. In some ways, not remembering was better than knowing the truth of what happened before he was discovered. Kopesh knows this at the most fundamental level.

It was the strange birds that led the wanderer from the village off the path and into the jungle where he lay. Having been taken to the healing temple after his discovery, the people of the Valley tended to Kopesh. He was stripped naked, with only a sheet to cover him, lying on a thick bed of large, green jungle leaves. When he finally awoke, Kopesh recalled his story.

He was heading for his obstacle, his goal, the *Dream City*, but he was blocked by a malevolent, invisible force. Each time he tried the repugnant force would reject him, wherever he stepped. For each step a laid toward the *Dream City*, he was knocked back twice as far, only to return to try again. Minutes turned to hours, hours turned to days, until, well off the path, he was led struggling to survive from the Jungle by the strange birds, not cognizant of where he was, willing to give up.

Taken in for rehabilitation by a farmer of the Valley, Kopesh quickly convalesced. Obtaining employment as a smithy's apprentice, he showed skill with a hammer and a willingness to work hard. Moving into a cottage of his own in the Valley, he quickly became familiar with the people, and particularly the women, of the Valley.

Perhaps because of his apathetic condition, or perhaps in spite of it, Kopesh became familiar with many of the women of the Valley. Discovering a new occupation with his new personality – "loincraft" they call it – he becomes the Casanova of the Valley, wooing women of

low and high places, of all ages, from country and city. Surrounded by his new ladies court, he forgets entirely why he came to the Valley and loses himself in his new role. Kopesh slides into a daily life of sloth, lust, and gluttony.

Chapter 14: Dirty Laundry

Months after his discovery, Kopesh is sitting by the stream with a charming and handsome woman of *Dream City*, discussing the qualities of the Valley life and contrasting them with the perfection of the *Dream City*. Walking to a nearby river, glittering gold as it flows through banks of fleecy lavender, he stares down into the golden water and sees a pattern of stones. He instantly recognizes the pattern as a visual representation of Πβ. He is physically knocked backward by the force of the realization, as an entire lifetime of memories floods back into his consciousness. Dome City. The Dregs. The Cutoff. The Occupational and Civic Reinvestment Facility. The Church. The Dome Wall. The Jungle. The *Dream-City*. The Beast, Lo-Sàfah. With the last memory, Kopesh realizes who he is: not Kopesh, but *Kopesh-RA!*

Feeling embarrassed for the ignorance imposed upon him by his self-imposed exile, Kopesh-Ra surveys the damage. Months of time past. No matter. His material artifacts – the bio-memetic skin suit, his walking stick– lost. No matter. Time and artifact can be replaced, rearranged to aid a further will: to reach the *Dream City*. That is what is important. That is the task that lay before him. But he fears the obstacle as well. The Beast waits in the darkness at the side of the path, ever lurking, ever waiting.

Kopesh-Ra reveals his secret to the ladies of his court and requests their help. The ladies, with charm and gold, procure for Kopesh-Ra the finest of replacements for his lost artifacts. His new bio-memetic suit is custom made by the finest tailors of the Valley, fitting tight and able to channel his energy with much greater force. It feels to Kopesh-Ra as if some strange form of magic emanates from the suit. And, to add to his travelling accoutrement, his ladies provide him with a shield, but no ordinary shield: it is a Shield of the *Dream Master*, a mental shield allowing for one to become impervious to the disastrous lines of thought through which dreams often lead. After all, unlike Kopesh-Ra, the ladies are aware that lucid dreaming is a condition one must attain in order to enter the *Dream City*.

Bidding farewell to his sweet ladies and travelling into the jungle, it begins raining. The river flows to his left as Kopesh-Ra follows the path, occasionally encountering a strange bird still attracted to him, only to wave it away, intent on his journey and watchful at the sides of the path. At the juncture in the path where, many months ago, he undertook his Sisyphean task, he again begins to sense a malevolent, invisible presence. This time, however, when the presence approaches to collide with him, Kopesh-Ra raises the Shield of the *Dream Master*. Colliding with it, the invisible Beast at once becomes visible, its full horror exposed immediately to Kopesh-Ra. The unexpected collision of these powerful elements creates a warp in space and time, with

each of them being dragged into a Void, a black gate into the unknown that seems to open in the ground. Dragged down into the oblivion, Kopesh-Ra and The Beast enter the Void.

Chapter 15: Ordeal

Emerging from darkness, Kopesh-Ra's senses open into a vast and unknown place at the edge of the Universe. He floats, spinning slowly and observes. In front of him is a starry mass, galaxies upon galaxies unfolding into the vastness of the Universe. Behind him there is only Void, an emptiness so great and so terrible it is difficult to even look into its eyes.

And there, at the edge of the Universe with him is Lo-Sàfah. Waiting and watching, the Beast seems to have grown larger, although Kopesh-Ra wonders how he can know this, given that there is absolutely no point of reference at the edge of the Universe.

"Dance," the Beast commands.

And they begin the awkward dance again. But at this instance, it seems less awkward, less confined to failure, less dangerous. Kopesh-Ra, equipped with his bio-memetic space suit, and having in his possession the Shield of the *Dream Master*, feels drained of fear as the dance begins to speed, confidence brimming in his chest as he matches the Beast step for step.

But just as Kopesh-Ra contemplates stepping up the beat himself, he realizes that his exuberance and overconfidence was taken advantage of by Lo-Sàfah. Slowly, the Beast had been manipulating the dance away from the edge of the Universe and into the Void. Kopesh-Ra struggles to get free of the dance, but is enmeshed as one with the Beast. The subterfuge of Lo-Sàfah eliminated his own chance to control the dance. Slowly, now, the Beast begins to move away from Kopesh-Ra, leaving him alone in the Void.

Chapter 16: Venus Transit

A shining bio-memetic suit floats limply in the middle of nothingness.

Kopesh-Ra fades.

Without hope of return to enter the *Dream City*, Samuel lets go of his loose attachment to life. But just as he lets go, as he allows his hope to fade and gives in to the abandonment of the Universe, a great event occurs.

Behind him, as if from nowhere, a tremendous light appears. As Kopesh-Ra lifts his head, he can see his own silhouette embracing the darkness, as if a blackness deeper than the Void imprints itself on the edges of that dark place. A bright dot at the center of the shadow begins to grow larger. The Universe is returning to Kopesh-Ra, the galaxies accelerating toward

him, beautiful masses of light and life, wonderful agglomerations of matter and consciousness, passing by him, through him.

He slows as he approaches a spiral galaxy, at the edge of the rim whereupon a smallish, blue-green planet greets his presence. He realizes this is his home, and the light behind him is his Star. Just as he is about to return home; however, a malevolent presence returns to the cosmos and once again blocks his way. The Beast, now immense and bloated, larger than the planets around him, resumes the dance, tossing Kopesh-Ra about like a rag doll. But his biomimetic suit and the Shield protect him, and with great concentration, Kopesh-Ra increases his mass to match the size of his opponent.

The Beast grabs the Moon with his immense hands, hauling it over his head, and heaves it at Kopesh-Ra, who leaps to avoid the massive object. But Ra's grasp of the manipulation of space and time is untrained, and he vaults well over Lo-Sàfah, spinning past a smallish red planet and crashing into a bed of asteroids. Grabbing the two moons of the red planet in his hands, he throws them at the Beast, who easily moves aside, coming then into reach of a giant gaseous orb. Disappearing almost completely into the outer gas cloud, the Beast releases the gas giant, which hurtles at unimaginable speeds toward Kopesh-Ra. But at the last moment, he turns and grabs a ringed planet, using it to deflect the striped, stormy orange giant, shattering both and scattering a dozen moons, large and small, across the solar system, like a cosmic game of planetary billiards.

Feeling the weight of the last collision, Kopesh-Ra feels fatigued, even with his biomimetic suit and the Shield sent from the *Dream Master* to protect him. He knows that he cannot continue to battle the Beast endlessly. He looks at the Day Star, Nova. As if in mourning for the loss of her planets, the Star dims and the light by which the galactic brawl is seen diminishes. Kopesh-Ra understands that he needs to make a final, ultimate effort to defeat Lo-Sàfah, and he heads for the Star. The Beast follows, hot in pursuit. He reaches for Kopesh-Ra as they pass his home world, being torn apart by massive gravitational forces unleashed from the battle. In a final burst of energy, he leaps upon Kopesh-Ra, tearing at his enormous being. But Kopesh-Ra has reached his destination: the Evening Star, Venus, the complement to the Day Star, Nova. In harnessing these two energies, he will unleash Balance, his only ally in the ultimate battle.

Resisting the urge to succumb to the teeth and claws of the Beast, Kopesh-Ra pushes Venus forward toward Nova. The Star gets hotter and he raises the Shield, exposing himself further to Lo-Sàfah's sharp spurs, which crawls inside of him. The depth of the intrusion keeps Kopesh-Ra from moving further, preventing him from unleashing Balance. But then he remembers the Six Secrets. Repeating them out loud he succeeds in disentangling himself from the Beast and pushes Venus with enough force to send it crashing into Nova. As the two masses encounter one another there is a momentary, eternal, silence. Lo-Sàfah recognizes the nothingness. He falls toward the emptiness and as he reaches the center, the brilliant finale of the collision of masses explodes around him, engulfing him and leaving no doubt about the fate

of the Beast. Kopesh-Ra is blasted back by the explosion, only his Shield protecting him from the detonation, moving at accelerating speeds out of the solar system, away from the spiral galaxy and back to the edge of the Universe, to descend into the gate from whence he came.

Balance defeats Chaos, Beauty trumps Darkness, the planets reform and realign, and The Universe returns to normal.

Chapter 17: Strange Birds

Kopesh-Ra has defeated the Beast, but he bleeds. He awakens on the floor of the jungle of the Valley of the Strange Birds. From the precipice upon which he lay, he can see in the distance the Gates of the *Dream City*. This is his last memory before he again falls unconscious.

His bent and broken body, still wrapped in shreds of the biomimetic suit, lay still on the precipice. The odd and clever nonsensical flying forms they call the strange birds are flitting about the jungle in great numbers. A strange bird approaches the ragged body of Kopesh-Ra and lands on his chest. And then another. And another, until his body is covered with them. Over several hours the odd, non-Euclidean geometries of the strange birds, in linking together, form a bizarre cocoon which covers Kopesh-Ra. A green fluid seeps from the sporadic spaces at the edges the cocoon, a healing salve that slowly restores Kopesh-Ra's wounds and revives his collapsed essence. The strange birds do their healing work through the day and into the night, mending bone, soothing mind, and returning Kopesh-Ra to life.

As the dawn approaches, the strange birds recognize that Kopesh-Ra is awakening from his convalescence. He stretches his arms above his head, breaking through the wall of the strange cocoon, and the green fluid has become a powder that quickly dries and falls off of him. Amassing into an amorphous, yet somehow contingent shape, the strange birds flock over Kopesh-Ra and lift him, prone, into the air. Flipping him over so that he can see the full view of his journey, they fly faster through the Valley, following the Path that Kopesh-Ra walked earlier. They fly on, past the point where Kopesh-Ra was sucked into the Void, and yet further beyond, up to the Great Gates of the *Dream City* itself. The *Dream City* looms before him as the strange birds set him down feet first before the Gates. Kopesh-Ra walks past the Great Gates and under the Dome, into the light of the *Dream City*.

Chapter 18: The Legend of Kopesh-Ra

Word travels quickly through the *Dream City* about the victory over Lo- Sàfah. Kopesh-Ra's name becomes synonymous with hero. The malevolent force that has kept the denizens of the *Dream City* from altering their course and looking outside has been vanquished. Kopesh-Ra is treated to the greatest of pleasures. The *Dream City* is at his disposal. Parties from dusk to dawn keep him telling and retelling the story of his encounters with Lo-Sàfah, the very

personification of evil for their society. Although unbelievable, Kopesh-Ra inspires great hope and confidence in many of the people of the *Dream City*.

Inside the *Dream City*, the Solution is apparent; there is no sense of desolation or despair. There are few, if any, real problems. There is peace, justice, equality, and freedom. And most of all, there is not a constant ring in his mind of the $\Pi\beta$ signal. It is a place for which Kopesh-Ra has yearned during his prior life as Samuel. Samuel... the word now rings strange and hollow to Kopesh-Ra.

As the legend of Kopesh-Ra circulates through the private parties and the public meeting places of *Dream City*, the people start to speculate about the outside world. It is soon theorized that Kopesh-Ra's coming means the end of their utopian *Dream City*. Without Lo-Sàfah there is no meaning for the Gates, no reason to avoid the Path. The Balance has been upset. The Day Star is fading.

Kopesh-Ra is now hero and anti-hero for having released the *Dream City* from its natural bounds, unleashing an unknown variable into the equation for which the Solution has been so precisely calculated. The future is no longer calculable. Anything can happen in a world without boundaries.

To discuss their situation and Kopesh-Ra's place within it, the *Dream Master* summons him to the Palace at the summit of The Spire in the center of the *Dream City*. The Spire nearly touches the zenith of the great Dome that covers the *Dream City*. At the peak of the spire is a glowing red light, symbolizing the unity and peacefulness of its people.

Chapter 19: Rapidfire Waltz Ministry

The *Dream Master* speaks:

"Kopesh-Ra, you have vanquished the Beast."

"Yes," responds Kopesh-Ra.

"You have used my shield well," says the *Dream Master* in a kind, slow voice.

Kopesh-Ra supplicates, "Thank you for coming to my aid."

"Is the *Dream City* all you expected?" asks the *Dream Master*.

"Yes; it is the perfect outcome of The Solution."

"This is how we designed it. But now the Gates are opened permanently and my purpose here is resolved," said the *Dream Master*, seeming both regretful and sincerely thankful.

"The Balance can be restored," answered Kopesh-Ra.

“Yes,” says the *Dream Master*. “Yes it can. But not by me.” At this, the *Dream Master* comes nearer to Kopesh-Ra and, nearly touching him, whispers something into his ear.

The whispering stops and Kopesh-Ra steps back, stands still and looks into the eyes of the *Dream Master*. “I need to return now.”

“You will be shown the way back, hero of *Dream City*, villain of *Dream City*, savior and destroyer of *Dream City*. Remember, Samuel. Anything can happen.”

At this, the *Dream Master* fades from Kopesh-Ra’s vision, to be replaced by a hooded figure who escorts him into another area of the Spire, the ballrooms of the Rapidfire Waltz Ministry, a transport facility that uses the power of dance to aid travel between worlds. Samuel hears the music in the time of three and rapidly picks up on the correct step sequence. Quickly, he sees the room fading from view, a thick fog filling the Spire and sending him into an anesthetic state.

Chapter 20: Avogadro’s Number ($\Pi\beta$ reprise)

Samuel awakes to find himself behind the wall of *Wonderland*, where he started his journey so long ago. No longer encased in the protective biomimetic suit, he is dressed only in rags of stained clothing. Nearby, Samuel sees Station 42 and the long tunnel lined with tapestries and electric lights through which he travelled – months ago? Years ago? Samuel was unsure. He enters the tunnel. The decadent figures on the tapestries seem less shocking to him now, not so much a reminder of a banished past, but of a life more recently lived.

As he walks back into Dome City, he tries to recover his memories of his time outside, his mind is fogged with the reconstruction of thoughts that could not have been, that conflict with the fog that endlessly interrupts and occupies his mind. He tries to shove the memories back, keep them at bay, but they resurface, vague figures great and small, strange geometries, peeking out of the fog and then returning. Upon getting back to his apartment, *La Nouvelle Marne* (a strange sight after such a long time), Samuel is again greeted by the reflection in a pool of condensation formed at the base of a maintenance hatch; unlike the past, however, as Samuel walks past the puddle he clearly sees an image in the still water. It is himself. But in the image, he seems to be wearing a shining suit of some kind. He realizes then what the communication is that is blocking his mind: the $\Pi\beta$ signal.

The realization is trigger enough to allow the Six Secrets to slip through the cracks in the signal and into his conscious mind. This disables the $\Pi\beta$ signal for Samuel, allowing him to finally see the world with clear eyes, a critical mind, and in full color. From the sheer enormity of the contemplation, he collapses on the floor of his apartment and all of the memories of his journey come flooding back into his mind.

Eventually, Samuel returns to the reality he once knew, but he retains the secret knowledge given to him by the *Dream Master*. He sets off to the Church of the Beloved Humanist to find 'eplk, only to discover that there was no such Shaman. He goes back to the Occupational and Civic Reinvestment Training Facility hoping to find a like-minded individual in Avogadro, the fellow traveler with whom he might relate his story, but discovers that Avogadro was removed from the facility after tampering with equipment in restricted areas. Moved to fill the void, Samuel becomes a Storyteller, going by the strange name *Kopesh-Ra*, and shares his memories as serials over the AirNet, furtively broadcasting the Six Secrets of the Solution with the knowledge that he is birthing the foundation of his own *Dream City*, the utopia that he can still visit in his memory and his stories.

Chapter 21: Tearing

Through months of Samuel's storytelling, the Solution is secretly revealed to the population of Dome City. Many people individually are moved to prepare themselves for the transition in a manner that is hidden from the institutions and authority structures of Dome City. Unnoticed by most, the industrial wheels begin to turn in a different direction. There is a tension sensed in the city amongst all of its residents, like the buildup of energy just before an explosion rips apart what is closest, the holding of a collective breath. Each citizen, from the towers of *Wonderland* to the depths of The Dregs, senses that they have a duty to transform their world, to challenge the rigid ways and summon life from the dispirited souls of a city full of individuals driven mad by $\Pi\beta$, turned into cheerful zombies, feasting on the media flesh of a dead civilization. All sense that it is time to challenge the powers that be.

One day, Samuel feels compelled to go to the room in the Occupational and Civic Reinvestment Training Facility where he first discovered the $\Pi\beta$ signal. There he finds again the control room with the enormous screen that is displaying the $\Pi\beta$ signal. He walks over to the console below the screen and, armed with the Six Secrets revealed to him in his encounter with The Beast, enters the code that transforms the $\Pi\beta$ signal into a revelatory release entering the cranial data ports of all citizens simultaneously. The ensuing explosion of realization creates a buzz of activity as each citizen activates the plans that they have subconsciously been working toward for months as a result of Samuel's AirNet stories. Each citizen begins to turn on the machinery they have been transforming these past few months, inspired by Samuel's stories.

Then there is a momentary quiet as all movement comes to a halt. The city stops, as if time is suspended, a united consciousness utterly focused on a common end. Suddenly, the Dome City shakes violently, as if the very ground beneath them trembles at the might of an entire population woken from a terrifying, brilliant dream, ready to rise up and overcome. Samuel runs out the back door exit of the control room to go outside near the edge of the Dome and see what is happening. The quake continues, yet buildings stand firm as the landscape outside of the Dome appears to slowly sink around them. A great cloud of dust and smoke rises

from the area surrounding the Dome, which continues to fall below the Dome City. But then Samuel realizes that the ground isn't falling out from around them – rather, the entire Dome City is rising, rocketing up and off of the face of the planet! As the Dome City rises further, Samuel believes he can see green jungle below past the desolation of the Barrens that once surrounded the now airborne Dome City. A red beacon shines from the top of the Dome, guiding their way into the heavens. Transcending the gravity that once held them firm to the ground and climbing into outer space, Samuel notices out of the corner of his eye a glint of Novalight shining off of a twin Dome that remains in the jungle valley far below.

Go to drummis.bandcamp.com for the musical accompaniment to this story.