

We don't know who built it.

We don't really even know why.

Some say it's a trial, a test. Some believe it's a zoo. Some, a game. The sorcerer proposes the notion of an alternate dimension, the soldier thinks it a battlefield, the scientist, an echo chamber of quantum vibrations.

They might all be correct.

Where I come from, there was a place affectionately called - at one point in its history - the "Great Melting Pot." The First Sphere at the top of the Cascade is a wild example of that, no doubt. If you survive the shock of that place but don't wish to assimilate, there is only the descent for you. In that, we are connected, you and I.

How did it come to this? Seekers seeking the same legend, fighting to be the first to find a thing that may not even exist. Followers of the same faith, maybe, yet, at odds with each other over something that could save us all. Competition driven by the Transmigration Gate intervals, I s'pose.

I wish you the best of luck in your odyssey. I'm just about bled out, vision getting all swimmy - s'pose I'll know in a few heartbeats if dying is the only escape from this place.

I truly do hope it ain't the *only* one. Keep descending, find the Final Sphere. Make the myth true.

— Anonymous

There is a trap at the center of our universe, at the singularity.

Whoever built the Cascade seems to have had a single goal in mind: halting any traversal of spacetime that makes use of warpage. Folding. Slipping. Gravity wells, wormholes, inter-dimensional portals — all attempts to fold spacetime evidently sends travelers through the singularity, and when they arrive, the Cascade collects them. Bends them off their straight path into the funnel, like a black hole inside of a black hole. I can't even speak to the math of that.

The Athenaeum in the First Sphere has a Library, a growing archive of anecdotal evidence pointing to the nature of this place. Beings from across the breadth of the universe have been collecting here for aeons. (Of course, when we math out that every moment exists at the same time, measurements of time passage present as the holographic approximations that they are.)

— Laboratory Cardinal Scheff

I've made a life here in Tertia, the first city of the First Sphere. My wife and I are happy in the Hall of Scribes. She excels in her post as a transcription archivist and I find great peace in my work as a census recorder. One might think the mission a boring life but it is much the contrary. I find the personal histories of each new arrival fascinating! And working with Boulagroniz, my social stenographer, to profile the personalities of those who transmigrate to the Second Sphere and below on that strange quest for the mythic Final Gate, those Phyles of adventurers descending lower and lower, that is doubly as fascinating! It would be disingenuous to suggest that most of us do not hope, in some small back corner of our curious minds, for some message, some word, no matter how small, that might bubble back up through the Cascade heralding evidence of possible escape. So many have descended into oblivion, I would call them countless but I know that is not true. I am one of those who keeps count, who keeps the records as true as possible.

— Tulmai the Scribe

I run trade up and down the Cascade, been oscillating for two decades — you know we had to make our own calendar down here, same with the mead — I ain't had no hand in it, mind, smart folks back I don't know when set up them Chronomactica Conventicles — that ain't nothin' but a mouthful, eh — I just woulda put in more holidays, you know. Ain't nothin' like a day off with a dance and a cager from Third Sphere. What's that? Oh. Well, I almost made it eighteen Spheres down, back when my knees ain't had to had these wraps on 'em, but you know, Seventeen is worse than any story you ever heard of it. Kajak's Phyle, them crazy caravan bastards, they hit Thirty Two ... oh, ways back. Most of 'em made it all the way back to Top Sphere, but ... you know ... they all come back ... glowing, right? Half the crew gone but the rest of 'em with them shining eyes ... they talk up bucketfuls of crazy, boy. And we already in the Cascade! So, you know, ain't like "weird's" on a premium or nothin'.

— Kleath Vorscallia, Oscillator

I don't know who "they" is, I don't know if it's a buncha BS or not, all I know are these two things: one, there's a lotta fools gone down the Cascade and ain't hardly none come back. Normally, you tell me a buncha fools up and disappeared, I ain't about to go where they went, feel me? But this here ain't that case, now is it? Not when the whole point is to go down and down and hopefully *not* come back. Maybe they ain't come back 'cause they escaped, right? Which is, in fact, the whole damn point, right?

And two, I ain't staying here under somebody else's control and just living like there ain't nothing different, not if there's a chance I can get back to my time and my family. Feel me? Now get that gun out my face.

— Mashburn, Symphyletai

Order and security is established and maintained for a reason. And this is why Tertia is known as the First City of the First Sphere. You may visit the ruins of the previous two attempts at metropolitan society. You'll see why their names have been [redacted] from the records. You have the freedom to excel, failure brings its own risks. As long as you keep the peace, you shall be afforded citizenship. Our sister city, New Seer in Second Sphere, has an open gate policy for citizens, some prefer that terrain, but no modern streets rival Tertia's.

If you want to join an expedition Phyle, visit the Expedition Corridor, see what the Cascade has to offer, and do your part in securing and bolstering Tertia's Elementium reserves so we can

maintain the trade routes upon which civilized society is predicated. If war is in your blood, I suggest you see the Sergeant Herald in the Arms Ward and enlist as a privateer — hunt those Phyle's fool enough to go seeking myths and legends while squandering resources and pirating information and harboring fugitives and cutthroats and rogues and zealots. Or join the ranks of the Tertian rangers scouring the Spheres for resources and intelligence. If you manipulate the Psychic Fields or practice Sorcery, you'd best align yourself with the Mysterium and Athenaeum, society does not tolerate unlicensed or wild magic.

— Lady Nuerellia, Tertian
Marchioness

Everyone says the Final Sphere Gate is legend. Myth. On the world I'm from, people thought the oceans fell off a cliff into a dragon's mouth - until someone went to actually check. That's when they figured out the planet was round. No one here knows the Cascade is infinite for a fact. The lowest Sphere breeched so far, at least the one with the strongest level of documentation, is number 64. That Phyle found the opposing Gate to 65 but wasn't able to transmigrate for some fairly horrific reasons - look it up.

What bugs my logic centers is that every Sphere, aside from First Sphere (well, depending on how you look at it, I guess), has two opposing Gates. Gates that were *built*. So sure, who built these things, why'd they build 'em? But most important to me is: where do they lead?

— Corwyn Steadfast, Phyle
Leader

How many children have been born in The Cascade, you ask? That is an interesting query. Some would say none, and some would say many. Both could be correct, but are almost certainly not, either.

Is a child simply a collapse of a wave function? Does the sorcerer manipulate quantum data with her thoughts? That is a direct question, non-rhetorical. Magic was not a verifiable phenomena on my world, but I think now that it may have always been, we just never oriented our measurement devices - or queries - in the correct direction to supersede materialism, an error I now see clearly.

— Byrak Sachim, Metadata Priest

I am happy to guide you, I am a construct of House Gaussian and that is my purpose. You stand currently on the Upper Boulevard, the southern ecliptic of House Gaussian's manor, a raised road that terminates two hundred and thirty seven meters northwest at the phaeton terminal. You may descend to avenue level at any of the various pedestrian bridges along the ecliptic.

To the north lies the Tertian Council District, which houses municipal facilities, offices and most governmental halls. Accessible to the east are the Ports of Entry and the Arrival Halls, to the west, the Martial Halls and Temples and the Industrial Corridor. And here in the south lay the Housing Districts.

We do not have compasses in the Cascade as magnetic navigation does not function properly. Use the horizon and the Scintillating Tower to orient yourself.

— Z, House Gaussian, Baron's Suite