

Edge of Elders



MITCHELL R COTA

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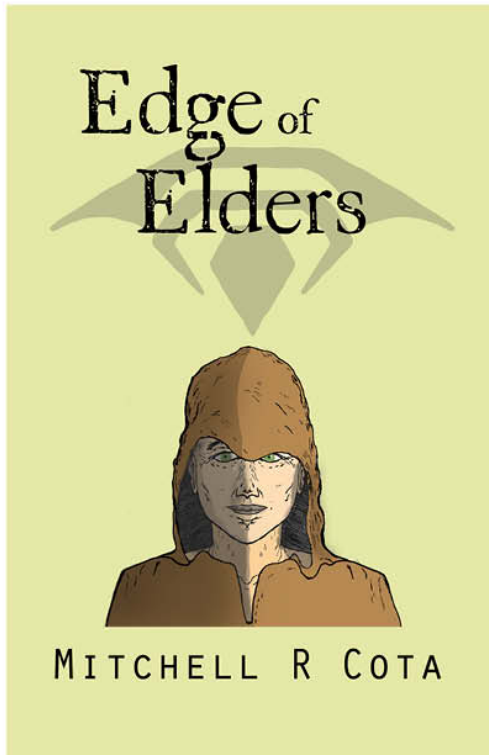
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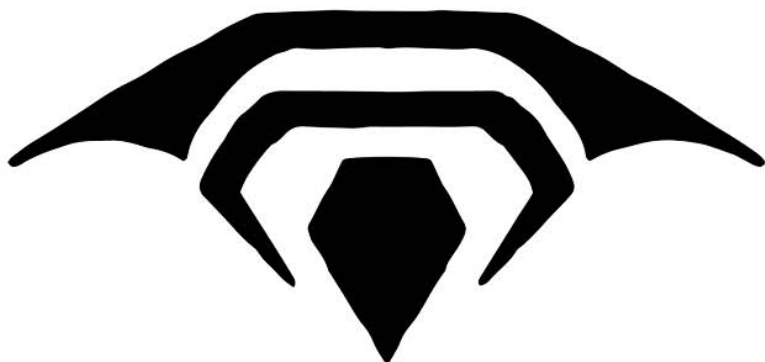
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First and foremost, I wish to dedicate this, and every piece of work I create in the future to Grace R. Cota, my mother for believing in me and my siblings that we can do anything we set our minds to.

Also, to my wife Desiree and my Sister-In-Law Linda, for being my biggest supporters hounding me to complete a story or their series.

Finally, my Daughter Jessica who said she would not read any until it was completed, now she has no choice, I fulfilled all their request.



It seemed so long ago he looked through younger eyes, watching as children played along the hillside that overlooked Eminence Temple. “They play the same games, so active and carefree, don’t they? Do you not agree,” he paused for effect, knowing how it would be received, “Tefius?” the Elder’s statement preceding the Premier Preceptor as he entered the room. He continued watching the children through the window, never looking towards the Preceptor as he approached.

“Excuse me, Regent,” Tefius answered surprised yet knowing the question would be asked as it always was, “you know it unsettles me, knowing who enters without so much as a glance over your shoulder,” sighing as he walked to the Elder. “Regent, I asked you to stay in bed, your weakened condition is get....”

The Preceptor’s words were cut short as the Elder held up his hand, “My weakened

state will only worsen as the days go by. Allow me to see the world around me and enjoy the days I have,” saying with a glint of anger along with a healthy portion of defiance, ”and I also asked you not to call me Regent.”

“Yes Tyaisis,” he tilted and bowed his head slightly in obedience watching the Elder as they both gazed out the window. Sounds of children could be heard in the distance, making their words clear enough to give meaning to their actions.

Clamoring young boys scuffling and running through the field overlooking the hill alongside their village, in protection of the Temple. They were yelling, “Stop them, stop them all, before they get to the village!” Their play sometimes searched the hills for mystical beasts or monstrous creatures of all types, always fending them off, but today the battle was with different enemies attacking the sanctuary housing their most precious treasure, the Elder. Today their forces were locked in mortal combat with an overwhelming enemy force in defense of the citadel.

Tyaisis glanced at the Preceptor, “If I remember, you gained a pupil playing these games some years ago?”

“Yes, Tyaisis,” as they watched the children’s adventure playing out. “Why do you ask?”

“Oh no reason, just curious, watching the children reminded me of that day, what was it, 15, 16; no it was 15 years now, when the boy fell out, was it not?”

“Yes, the Eminence order gained the stricken boy as a new novitiate,” Tefius said as he placed his hand on the Elder’s shoulder, “I am imploring you to return to bed, your fever has worsened.”

“Is he still stricken,” Tyaisis asked taking his eyes off the children and facing Tefius, ignoring his request.

“He is, though I am not sure of how often he has episodes. I would have to ask the brother he’s assigned to for an answer, would you like me to inquire?”

“No, no, just buying time away from the bed...,” his words dropped as he answered, and color started draining from his face.

“Tyaisis, I must insist you return to bed,” he watched as the Elder lost strength moment by moment, “Please Tyaisis.”

“I know Tefius, my time is near, I just wanted,” his words became softer and spread as his voice weakened and his legs became unsteady, he turned from the window, “I, just... just wanted to view the blue sky and life around me once again.”

The two slowly crossed the room, Tefius helping the Elder back to bed as his worries grew stronger of the Elder’s condition deteriorated. After the Elder settled Tefius

walked back to the window where the Elder stood a short time before, as memories flooded his mind about the incident, an incident he'd attempted to place far in the recesses of his mind. It was a memory of a dark chapter, a noticeably but short disturbing chapter the community and the boy would come to live with. Its memory still disturbed him. He turned his head without taking his eyes off the children playing.

"Pia," Tefius called for the young girl standing at the door leading into the Elder's room, "Ask Hyridicus to assemble what he feels is necessary," he hesitated, "Tell them to hurry, time is nearing!"

"Yes, Preceptor," she acknowledged with a courteous bow then left the room, as quickly as she disappeared into the hallway, another young attendant replaced her where she was posted.

Tefius, turned his attention back to the children playing, it was if he were reliving that day. They played the same game as those from so many years ago, as he remembered he and the Elder witnessed as the boy was stricken. At the time, the whole community worried and were frightened thinking the boy had been possessed by a demon. It was determined that he was afflicted with Miqtu, an illness not known to the community in living memory.

Following the boy's illness; he checked the scrolls, but no mention could be found, this puzzled him. He contacted other communities' Preceptors, and all had reported their villages had had many cases of the illness with every generation as far as they could remember.

He still found it odd, the memories brought back bewildered feelings having one case in their village. "One case," he muttered, "why only one case?"

Pia ran down the steps of the temple's tower and headed across the circle to the Brothers' monastery. She reached the heavy wooden doors and frantically began knocking.

The massive door creaked under its own weight as Tyro Nynell slowly pushed it open. "Yes Pia, what is the urgency?"

"Nynell, I have a message from Preceptor that Hyridicus is needed for the Elder and to assemble what is required," wheezing her words out, still panting from running.

Knowing the importance of the directive, he called into the great hall, disregarding the code of quiescence's, "Brother Hyridicus, Preceptor requests you and your needed essentials in the tower at once," he repeated his words two or three times now echoing down the corridors of the great hall and leading to the individual rooms. The monastery was a place for reflection, so

silence was observed within the walls.

In his chamber, Hyridicus was reading scrolls, when he heard Nynell's cry out into the monastery. Knowing for a Tyro on duty to cry out for all to hear, the importance of information was profound. For him to inform every Brother, Tyro, and Page was alarming, for the news so grave, to be broadcasted so intensely could only mean one thing. "The Elder," he said worriedly.

"PAGE," yelling as he grabbed his satchels of medical remedies, "PAGE," Hyridicus shouted again, scrambling to his feet trying to grab all his things at once.

Densen had jumped to his feet and was entering Hyridicus's room, when the second cry for him was shouted, he answered nervously "Coming Brother, coming," stumbling into the center of the room. He watched the Brother fumbling with all manners of things hurriedly stuffing them into his satchels, "Yes, Brother?" he replied unsure of what would be asked of him. He could guess what was needed but he always wanted to hear it from Hyridicus to be sure.

"Densen, get Atticus and three other Pages and accompany them to meet me in the Elder's chamber," Hyridicus's voice crackled as he spoke and pointed in the direction of the others, "Hurry, boy, hurry!"

He ran out towards Atticus's room and collided into another Page on his way out

and momentarily lost his balance in the corridor leading to the atrium. Rounding the corner of the opened room Densen could see all the Brothers with their Tyros assembling in the center. His fellow pages were also entering and filling the ranks encompassing them.

He watched Hyridicus as he exited the great hall towards the tower when his eyes focused on Atticus, who was waiting on the outer edge of brothers, they had formed a circle in the center of the hall. "Tyro Atticus, Hyridicus wants me to accompany you and three other pages," he said somewhat reluctantly, Densen was not told to choose the others, and lacked courage to take on that responsibility. "Tyro, he never instructed the names of the other pages," saying timidly.

Atticus looked at Densen knowing how desperately he desired to become Tyro himself and eventually rise to Brother of the Order, still, he lacked the confidence within himself. The two were similar in age but Densen's life was marred by illness and misfortune.

"Densen, you choose," Atticus said pointing at the gathering of Pages. "Just ensure they are as hard working, know what will be expected of them, and have a same sense of devotion you have shown to our order," he said as a small grin appeared

knowing the importance he placed upon him would both excite and worry him at the same time. Densen wanted to be a Page that was noticed, but his disability made him reluctant about his own abilities. "You will do fine," Atticus whispered to him, patting him on the shoulder as he walked slowly to the door. "Go ahead and choose the three Pages and gather the supplies you know we need. Meet us in the Elder's chamber's, I will inform Brother Hyridicus you are on your way," he said glancing over his shoulder as he exited the hall.

Atticus cleared the Monastery's entrance as another Page came bolting from the tower. He continued to the tower but wondered what happened in such a short span for Roai's frantic state. The Page was overweight and prone to nose bleeds when physically taxed. Running and the excitement he felt was sure to bring on an episode.

As Roai passed Atticus noticed his face was pale with two crimson streams beginning to run down dripping on the front of his robes. The cascades became thicker the closer he approached the monastery. Time did not allow for the customary observances of a bow for rank, his full stride had slowed with each passing yard. Reaching the doorway of the Monastery Roai called, "All Brothers and Tyros to the Tower, all

Brothers...,” he collapsed in Nynell’s arms as he passed through the doors. He looked into Nynell’s eyes and weakly exhaling, “hasten, Brothers.” He could no longer speak; weakened, breathing heavily and his face completely void of color from his exhaustion.

Atticus continued his way to the tower knowing that Roai would be in good hands in the monastery. As he cleared the landing Tefius and Hyridicus were hovering over the Elder’s face trying to understand the foreign words Tyaisis was mumbling, “Artroos istic, Artroos istic.”

The two looked baffled never having heard the words before from the Elder.

“The Elder’s mind,” Hyridicus said turning to look at Tefius, “it grows mad with fever, Preceptor,”

“I’m not sure my old Tyro,” Tefius stated, “There are many things still unknown about the Elder, he had once confided to me he knows many languages and had seen many lands although he never described or shared any. I, to this day, do not know his age or where he is from!”

“He is not from here?” Hyridicus asked in disbelief. He like everyone in the village had always thought the Elder was one of them, a native of their settlement.

Tefius never answered as the Order rushed into the chamber behind Atticus. The Order

consisted of the Preceptor, seven Brothers, seven Tyros, and a host of Pages. Only a few Pages were summoned to the chamber. The Order was formed thousands of years ago and entrusted as healers, religious clerics, and teachers of the knowledge passed on by the Elder. But in this village, they had an additional duty that was far greater than the other Orders. Their main task was caring for the Elder's every need and to one day assist in his ascension and aid the Anointed One.

As the Brothers and Tyros gathered around Tefius, he began, "The hour is at hand for our Order. The Elder has started his ascension, but a successor has not been named."

"What becomes of the Order, if the Elder does not name a successor," Hyridicus worriedly asked as he scanned the group all of whom wanted and desperately needed to know.

"Our Order will survive, Elder Tyaisis will choose someone," Tefius said with confidence in his voice, reassuring the Order but he buried his true feelings deep within himself about his uncertainty. "We must break his fever. Ideas?" he asked never wasting a teachable moment.

Most said bleeding him would release the illness. A couple just shook their heads in acknowledgement not really having their own idea.

"Make a broth with angelica root and

honey,” Murríc suggested, ending the others’ discussion momentarily. He was the last of the Brothers in the Order and always tried new remedies.

“What did you say,” Hyridicus asked in a scorning tone of the novice, “Have you used such concoctions before?”

“Yes Brother,” he said confidently. “I have used it on a few, and all their fevers were broken in a half a day or sooner.”

Tefius raised his hand, interrupting the discussion before it could go further, “Brother Murríc, make your broth.”

Murríc and his Tyro left the chamber to retrieve items and supplies they needed for the brew.

“We will try Murríc’s remedy, when it is ready.” Tefius said to the others. “A second and third method will also be needed in the event this does not work, as our young Brother has proclaimed.” He always liked to have more than one way to combat an illness, but he was not entirely sure this was a common affliction this time that could be cured by bleeding, herbs, or brews as he glanced over to the Elder’s weak state.

Densen and the other Pages entered the chamber with the standard complement of supplies Hyridicus demanded at his disposal. Six satchels in all, two filled with tonics and herbs, one with surgical tools, and three with more scrolls. He walked to Atticus to let

him know they had arrived.

Atticus was listening intently to all suggestions being given and weighed each of them on their merits. He also disagreed with bleeding, in every instant in its use he witnessed a patient's illness worsen or they would expire. Although he had used different herbs for many illnesses, he had never heard of Murric's remedy and was eager to see its results. Noticing Densen walking up, he raised his hand for him to stop, then nodded in acknowledgement.

Densen halted his advance and nodded obediently, then returned where the other Pages were waiting.

As the discussion continued, Atticus could hear the Elder's words, "Arctoose estic, Arctoose estic," very softly at first but still slightly over the Brothers and Tyros statements who were standing closer. He found the words haunting as the Elder laid on the distant side of the room. "Arctoose estic, Arctoose estic," he heard the words over again and again.

"Atticus, your thoughts," Hyridicus asked as the discussion endured with the group.

Atticus's eyes were transfixed on the Elder as he muttered across the room having never heard the question Hyridicus had asked, fully focused on the Elder's strange words.

"ATTICUS," Hyridicus's voice raised turning to look at his Tyro.

“Yes, Brother,” Atticus blurted out jolting his head towards Hyridicus’s voice.

“What are your thoughts,” Hyridicus asked again then continued, “do you have any recommendations?”

“I, I, would like to check, check the scrolls, if I may before I recommend,” Atticus warily answered, turning his eyes towards the Elder and still hearing his voice, “Arctoose estic, Arctoose estic”.

“You may,” Hyridicus said, concerned, “Atticus your thoughts, hold them together, and keep your mind on the matter,” he motioned him off to conduct his research.

Atticus turned away from the group and walked towards Densen where he was waiting with their Pages as the Elder’s words still echoed in his mind.

Tefius stood diligently by the Elder’s side. “Tyaisis my old friend,” he whispered, finishing his thoughts to himself, “once again you are right about your words, but how will a successor be chosen?” He glimpsed at the Order, wondering, worrying, and uncertain of their future. This band of young and old brothers have gone through many trials and had always triumphed, but this is the first time their fate was in question. “What will we do Tyaisis, I cannot choose” he thought.

Densen met Atticus halfway across the room and walked with him back to the Pages

and satchels, "Tyro, I came as fast as my legs would carry me, what more is needed?" he asked.

"We need to search the scrolls for treatments to aid Tyaisis," the Pages looked at Atticus in shock for using his name. "Forgive me, the Elder," he said. It was out of place for a Tyro to refer to the Elder in this manner. Not even the Brother would act so familiar as to call him by name. Only the Preceptor had such an honor. The five of them began combing through the parchments.

Densen finally broke the silence, "What are these words, Arctoose estic, and their meaning, Atticus?" he questioned his Tyro.

"I am unfamiliar with these words, this evening is the first I have heard them," he told Densen. "We must focus on our task, I am sure when the Elder is better, he will let us know or he may decide to keep their meaning a secret until it is time to be known," Atticus voiced it without knowing if what he spoke was true.

He and the Pages continued searching the scrolls when Murrlic and his Tyro reentered the chamber.

Murrlic brought the hot mixture to Tefius for his approval. He studied and smelled it, then motioned to Murrlic to administer it to the Elder.

Murrlic and his Tyro approached the Elder

who was still uttering the bizarre language, “Arctoose estic,” the only phrase for the first several hours until Murric placed the spoon on his lips.

“Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic, Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic,” the Elder’s tone was starting to grow both in volume and intensity. The muscles tightened throughout his body every time the spoon was put to his lips and he kept repeating the same unusual phrase. The mixture ran down the Elder’s cheek and neck with sparse amounts making it into his mouth. The brew very well may have worked if they could have only dispensed enough, and the whole Order were forced onto the next option.

Yet again some in the Order suggested bleeding and for others, various tonics, and herbs. The debate devolved into near arguing, out of frustration with the different treatments, but mostly for fear of not finding a cure for their Elder.

Atticus was still searching the scrolls with the Pages as the Order erupted on the other side of the room, even through intense monologues he could still hear the foreign language coming from the Elder. The words were luring his attention away from the parchments as his fascination grew with every repetition. Was it their bizarre sounds? The fact that no one in the Order understood their meaning. Or how he heard them over

everything else, although faint but still audible to him.

He rose without warning and walked to the group closely followed by Densen. Densen was unsure why they were heading across the room, but he followed in case he was needed. The two of them heard debates on what should be done next. Passing them, and stopping alongside Tefius and Hyridicus, he announced softly, "Preceptor, pouring cool water from the stream should help lower his fever." Densen looked surprised at his Tyro after walking with him and Attius suggesting a remedy they had not seen as a treatment using cool water in among the parchments, he stood slightly behind as Atticus spoke.

Tefius and Hyridicus looked at Atticus in puzzlement as the words were being chanted around them, "We must bleed him, Preceptor, we must bleed him," coming from Brothers and Tyros alike.

Tefius studied this young Tyro and had seen a new sense of confidence in his eyes he had never noticed before. He also heard an unusual calmness in his voice but was unable to respond to him before Hyridicus had interrupted.

"We must bleed him Preceptor, to relieve his fever," Hyridicus blurted out in desperation for the Elder's life, also to upstage his Tyro suggestion.

“No,” Tefius stated raising his hand up to silence the group and lifted the tone in his voice, “There will be no bleeding today, no bleeding of the Elder at all. I, too, have heard bloodletting has worsened a patient’s illness and has even contributed to their deaths that some of the younger Brothers and Tyros have acknowledged. We will go with Tyro Atticus’s method for the Elder’s therapy.

“But Preceptor, my Tyro’s method is untried,” Hyridicus softly protested as the group of Brothers and Tyro stepped in closer to hear.

“My stubborn Tyro, most treatments are untested before they are tried or shown to be effective,” Tefius stated “Sometimes it’s the simplest ways that work best; we will go with Tyro Atticus’s procedure.”

“Yes Preceptor,” Hyridicus nodded as the rest of the Order bowed their heads in silence following his lead.

“Atticus, choose your Pages to assist in drawing water from the stream,” Tefius’s instruction was clear, direct, and just loud enough for all to hear.

“Yes Preceptor,” Atticus said nodding and turned to leave the room, motioning to Densen to accompany him as one of the Pages.

“Tyro Atticus,” Hyridicus commanded, “Choose another Page.”

Atticus and Densen stopped as the other three Pages waited across the room. "May I ask why Brother Hyridicus?"

"You may not," he uttered harshly as frustrations grew mostly because the Preceptor dismissed his suggestions twice for bleeding the Elder.

"I was given instructions," his comment was cut short.

"I said choose another Page, Densen's leg is lame, and it will slow you down," he barked at the young Tyro.

Atticus paused for a moment to choose his words carefully before speaking. Tefius watched the encounter to see what this young Tyro's next step would be. He had to let this play out and knew that most would have chosen another Page as he was instructed, not wanting to cause friction within the Order. But this was different; it was not defiance nor stubbornness; he was simply following protocol.

He slightly bowed to his brother before speaking. "Brother Hyridicus, I was given instructions," he said again firmly but respectfully.

"I am amending them, choose another," he nearly shouted it to his Tyro as the entire Order had remained silent and were engaged with the two's altercation.

Atticus turned slightly to face the Preceptor then bowed and asked, "Preceptor

Tefius have my instructions changed?" He watched Hyridicus use this same tactic with the Brothers in the Order and knew he was within his rights. Hyridicus did not give the instructions and it was not within his power to change them.

A crimson cast fell over Hyridicus's face as his anger grew realizing that the young Tyro had turned his own tactic against him. He could only stand there waiting for the answer from the Preceptor.

Tefius looked upon his senior Brother knowing Atticus was within his rights to choose the Pages he wanted by his original decree. Going along with Hyridicus, his old Tyro would place him in a position, jeopardizing centuries of order in their sanctuary. This is a position the Eminence Temple and the Order could not readily afford today, as the outcome of the Elder's health and the stability of the Order were uncertain. He looked at the young Tyro and stated, "Atticus, your instructions are unchanged; you may choose the Pages you need!"

"Thank you, Preceptor," Atticus said, then turning to Hyridicus and continuing, "Thank you, Brother for your concern, I choose Densen as one of my Pages," looking over at Densen and saying, "take the other Pages collect four amphorae to the stream and I will meet you shortly." He nodded at

Hyridicus in respect turned and nodded again at the Preceptor before following the Pages out of the room.

Tefius looked over to Hyridicus and said, “Your Tyro Atticus has learned much from you, both what you wanted him to know and that which you did not, would you not agree my Old Tyro?”

Hyridicus’s face was still red from the exchange and turning towards the Preceptor he narrowed his gaze, slightly tilting his head and nodding with an uncomfortable display of acknowledgement. Tefius knew he would get over his embarrassment in time, it was the Elder’s welfare that concerned the Order at this moment. He directed those who remained to continue a search for a remedy and attend to Tyaisis until Atticus’s return.

Arriving at the stream’s closest bank, four of the five young men started retrieving water and filling their vessels.

As the Page filled his amphorae, he and Atticus discussed how things in the Monastery would be after Elder Tyaisis regained his health. The topic was more of the treatment Atticus would be receiving from Hyridicus in the coming weeks or months. The Senior Brother was not known for his charity much less for having a forgiving nature and most other Tyros and Pages steered clear of him on the best

of days. After today no one knew what to expect. Unfortunately, it was not the case with these two, they were assigned to him and often jokingly said it felt as if they were imprisoned by him. For what crimes they had committed in their lives neither of them knew and would often laugh about it over a cup of ale at days end.

Atticus felt even as he talked with Densen it was as if he could still hear the Elder's words, "Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic," he whispered just loud enough for Densen to hear.

"Those words are besieging, Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic, I wonder what they mean," he said looking up at Atticus as he poured another pail into the vessel. "Is it directions for building a new tool; no, maybe it is a new way of farming crops, or maybe long-lost words to a forgotten song; no, no, it could be, no Atticus it could be anything; the possibilities just endless," he said smiling, leaning over to fill his pail once again. He always sensed he could be himself around Atticus and using levity he felt he would never be judged or pressured by him to be something he was not. Others often shunned him for his stiff leg, they thought it slowed him down, and hampered his ability to complete a job. But this was never the case with Atticus. He always treated him normally, giving him the same tasks as other Pages, where other Tyros would not.

The five had completed the task and were heading back to the temple, when Atticus's body stiffened dropping him to the ground.

Densen was walking beside Atticus carrying an amphora when the Tyro dropped and was unable to break his fall. He set his vessel down against a wall. Not thinking, he had ordered the other three Pages to the tower with their water. "Tell Brother Hyridicus, that Tyro Atticus has had an episode and I will remain here until it is over. If we are not back shortly after you get there one of you return for my water for the Elder," saying confidently to the other Pages. He began checking his Tyro to ensure he had not injured himself in the fall.

The other Pages just stood in the road not knowing if they should listen to him. After all, to them he was just a Page as they were, he had no higher rank than they themselves had. They continued waiting, "Atticus told me to choose you, therefore it is as if the Tyro himself is directing you," he said rising to his feet as anger rose within his voice. "If the water is not delivered to the Elder, his fever will continue to rise. Seeing as your legs work better than mine you can get there quicker, now, go." As the Pages left with their loads of water, Densen turned his attention back to his Tyro and friend, his body remained stiff as he lay motionless. He could not remember a time his body ever become

so stiff before.

Densen rose, "Give Hyridicus my message," he yelled to them as they headed to the tower.

Conversations that had just filled The Elder's room moments ago had fallen silent as three Pages entered, noticeably missing a Page and the Tyro.

"Miqtu, you could not have chosen a more inopportune time to afflict Atticus," Hyridicus said watching as the Pages brought in the water. He remained cross with his Tyro, but not enough to wish him harm and always hated when he was overwhelmed with an attack. The last Page to enter the room approached him with a customary greeting then relayed the message as Densen had instructed. "Thank you for seeing the task through under these conditions," He praised the young Page for taking charge as he bowed and started to walk away.

The Page stopped, "It was not me, Brother, I would be lost without guidance. I am in my first month," the young man said.

"Then, which one of those took the lead," Hyridicus asked pointing to the other two that entered with him.

"Neither, Brother," he answered, "It was Densen, Sir."

"Densen, you say," he surprisingly stated. Hyridicus was impressed that the Page

remaining with Atticus had taken the initiative when needed. "Return and retrieve Densen's amphorae, be quick about it." He felt he poorly judged the Page over the past years, but the boy had never shown any wits about him.

"Yes Brother," the Page answered, nodded, and turned and walked off.

Tefius had already directed both Brothers and Tyros to sponge Tyaisis down with the cool water. Each time the cold liquid hit his skin his peculiar words became louder and the steady glow from a tattoo on his forehead brighten then returned to its natural glimmer. Over the years he had noticed it lost some of its vividness.

"Ezz Tai, Ezz Tai," The Elder mumbled as muscles tighten throughout his body.

Tefius had watched helplessly as Tyaisis' body constricted since the beginning of his ascension. He wondered if Tyaisis had ordained another in his absence. There were comings and goings throughout each day, he could have called upon anyone he met. If no one were anointed, how could the Order survive, what would become of the world if the wealth of knowledge were lost.

"Ezz Tai Arctoos...", Tyaisis' words abruptly ceased as unconsciousness consumed him. His body went rigid for the last time and beads of sweat trickled from his pores onto the bedding. Tefius

thoughts were broken as the Elder's body became placid, as waters on a windless lake, and he knew that his mind was retreating into oblivion. Breathing had slowed to near nonexistence and it was just a matter of time before the end of the Elder's life and possibly that of the Order.

Tefius noticed the once radiant tattoo that prominently gleamed but now faded with every moment as his mind slipped into darkness. He observed the dimming of the Elder's Mark on Tyaisis' forehead as did everyone else. The deafening silence drained the sounds and their hopes out of the chamber as they looked upon one another for answers. But he knew none would come and the thought of not having an Elder was inconceivable and fatal to their Order.

Tyaisis laid motionless on his bed, his body clinching to each precious moment of life as death grew closer. The image of his chamber, a room he called home for many centuries slowly faded away into the many alcoves of his mind, his old body that served him so well was ending but he was headed for something new. He watched as the wall slowly morphed into the brightest of white lights. He knew from the past the old but familiar sights and surroundings would soon transform themselves from the nothingness.

He reached out his mind searching for

another presence near him. His weakened body ravaged with fever and frail with age made it difficult to concentrate to connect with. Nonetheless, he knew they were close, and that distance was irrelevant in one's own mind.

He watched as images of long-lost but recognizable structures, surfaces, and faces from the past slowly materialized before him. As he inhabited his new reality of translucent relics from ages long ago, a new form was taking shape before him, although a brilliant silhouette it was not yet time for the two to meet and would have to do for now.

An intimate world created from his memories coming into focus foot by foot at first then yard by yard. The captivating illusions in slow motion, the colors, shapes, and movement, only sped up with the passage of time. The closer he came to his death, the quicker images changed. Beautiful wooden walls with ornate carvings in the citadel slipped away, replaced with partitions of carbon fibers painted smoothly with bright colors and discernable writings of all manner that lit brightly on shimmering glass. Friends from today and yesterday morphing into his absent but familiar colleagues and his companion from a time long ago.

Contours of the brilliant figure were

becoming more defined as edges and shadows portrayed more of his details. Their time for meeting was near, but time was still needed for him to become accustomed to this new reality.

The brightness gave way to beautiful interiors lined with hallways and people moving up and down their avenues. They lead off in various direction to other corridors or into cubicles. He walked among and sometimes through these phantasms with each having a Descent Symbol upon their foreheads. Glancing at each as he passed them, he remembered each of their names. He also remembered where this memory was leading them, he heard the eerie words of his native tongue; "Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic."

Atticus's consciousness seemed to fall through time and space encountering the brightness of his mind. It was a brilliantly blinding and painful light that made gathering his thoughts laborious. To shield his eyes, he tried placing his hand between his eyes and the light, he even turned away from its source, but nothing he did helped. The intense light was devouring everything around him.

In the distance he could hear the haunting words, "Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic," sounding so far but so close at the same time as if hunted by them.

"It is hard to see," his thoughts turned into words, but he could not feel his jaw moving, "I must be in some sort of outlandish dream." Shadowy images as apparitions slowly appeared before him. Things he had never seen before, as if looking through crystalline colored objects, having no words to describe what they were. "Where, am I?" he asked as more bizarre surfaces and unfamiliar shapes appeared before him.

"Your mind," came from a disembodied voice, he heard the words in his mind as if he were saying them himself. But those words had never entered his thoughts.

Again, he asked the question, "Where am I," searching his surrounding this time to see the source of the answer.

A brilliant presence moved toward him stating, "In your mind, Atticus."

As forms and colors appeared and disappeared before him it had become hard to discern reality from a dream. "Am I dead?" he uneasily questioned.

The luminous entity continued its approach answering, "No, no, you are not dead; merely immobilized for the emergence."

"Emergence? I do not understand," Atticus replied as he found himself unknowingly walking alongside the entity. It was slowly shaping itself to look like ghostly figures all about them in this new world.

This world with unfamiliar walls unfolding before his mind's eye of color was too unreal to describe. He noticed the people were similarly marked on their heads but unlike the Elder's. They were all dissimilar to any persons he had ever gazed upon with small, framed bodies, void of hair, and milky thin skin. On each forehead a regalia gleamed but none he looked upon were the same as the other. Each one unique and different as the individual it adorned. Atticus noticed as they traveled through the structure and peering out a window only a starry night's sky was all he could see. The people were moving around engaged in all manner of activities. Some appeared to be working, others were eating together, a few seemed to be locked in conversation. Although he could not understand the foreign language, he heard them and felt at ease in their company.

The entity stopped and looked at him, stating, "This was our last moment together," as the Elder's mark started appearing.

"What do you mean," Atticus asked as he noticed the same mark on a man across the room from where the entity stood. It was him but from a different time long ago.

The entity stood silent as a thunderous explosion sounded and shook the structure sending everyone flying across the room

except for Atticus and the entity. He noticed flames and debris soaring outside the window. Sounds from the injured entity's moaning with pain and frantic cries for help as some tried getting back to their feet. They watched them being tossed about by an unseen violent force; no sooner would someone get upright than they were pitched in another direction, throwing them back to the floor or against the walls.

He followed the entity as he turned and exited the room, as the same words that had been plaguing him throughout the night were heard again, "Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic, Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic,"

Looking at him and instinctively asked, "Elder, what do the words mean?" He did not know why he called him Elder other than the fact he bore the Elder's mark.

"My name is Tya," he said in a calming voice, "The words will soon be made clear to you Atticus!" they came to rest at a junction at the end of a corridor.

They watched as people scurried about while being slung in all directions. He felt helpless and unable to assist the injured as he was trained. The two of them observed as air just moments ago, calm, and peaceful suddenly whiffed down the hallways carrying lifeless bodies and other foreign matter into the direction they entered from.

"My people were on a long voyage when

something went terribly wrong. To this day I do not know what caused it," Tya sadly said looking at his past self-hanging from a protrusion on the wall. A large panel flew past, barely missing him, and lodged itself in the doorway. It blocked most of the air that was escaping. He saw himself working his way back to his quarters, but the emergency hatch sealed off that corridor. Peering through a small window on the hatch empty space now filled where the ship's missing parts once stood. "Ryar, my beloved," Tya whispered reliving the moment, "my wife, she was in our quarters with our child Dnan, they were gone!" He could see fragments of the vessel small and large, escaping gas littered with all manner of the ship's contents, and fellow voyagers floating off into the endless voids of darkness.

Atticus stood in wonderous silence looking at a world he could not understand nor interpret the magnitude of its violence. He glanced at Tya as he described the scene unraveling before them and became dismayed, seeing the torture and sorrow engulfed on his face.

Survivors grabbed at Tya's arms and shoulders in passing trying to get him to run. Some also stopped to peer through the window momentarily, but his mind stayed fixated on the destruction beyond the hatch. Someone finally captured his attention by

shaking his shoulders and pointing in the direction he needed to go.

He turned looking at them as blood trickled from his head, and unable to hear what was being said due to the explosion still ringing in his ears. He was lead and strapped into an escape pod looking through dazed eyes up at his savior. "Ezz Tai Arctoose Estic," the words resonated from his head rest.

The two watched in silence, Tya visibly shaken having to relive the traumatic event once again, and Atticus living the chilling experience for the first time through the Elder's eyes.

"Ezz Tai Abandon Ship," the meaning of some words was becoming known to Atticus as the craft Tya occupied exited through a tube of the great vessel as it spun out of control.

"No," Tya cried out grabbing at the ship as he shot away from it. "No, Ryar, Dnan, No o o," coming out of his narcosis as reality set in.

"All Hands Abandon Ship," the captain's voice still commanding survivors aboard. As it rotated, her name came into view, "Taylaeva," Tya gasped, "I almost forgot, Taylaeva." The ship continued to spin out of control as eight pods raced towards a small blue planet.

"Atticus, our journey is at an end, our

emergence is at hand” Tya said, unsure of his fate. “You have a choice: deciding whether or not to accept what you have just witnessed as yours and along with all the knowledge I have to give you.”

Atticus watched as the pods streaked across the planet’s equator impacting on several landmasses. He observed as centuries passed, gazing as great monoliths and pyramids were erected along those sites.

“My people helped create great civilizations in your past and I am unsure of what became of those who landed. We lost contact with one another many centuries ago. I am the last, I think.” Tya explained, “we were travelers from another world and destined elsewhere but forced upon your world. I was a builder in my world before I fell among you.”

Tya turned looking at Atticus, “Your Miqtu, brought upon by my mind reaching out to yours, preparing you for this day. On my world it is known as epilepsy; the symptoms are the same as on yours. My abilities prevented anyone within your village from being afflicted, only you. Only your mind and mine were compatible after so many centuries, yours and yours alone had the ability to receive this knowledge.”

“I have to choose,” Atticus asked glancing at Tya.

“Yes, a choice. As I said the choice is yours

to make,” Tya said, turning to look back towards the planet.

“And if I refuse?” Atticus asked, also looking back at the spinning blue sphere.

“My journey and story will end here tonight,” he said with despair in his voice, “as I said this is your choice, it cannot be forced upon you. You have to be willing, willing to carry my story to my people when they come, and willing to be the last.”

Densen noticed Atticus’s body as it relaxed, and his eyes fluttered then opened beneath the cowl. “Tyro, you were out an unusually long time,” he stated getting ready to help Atticus to his feet.

“Taylaeva,” Atticus mumbled as he began to get his wits about him.

“What, Tyro?” Densen asked, never having heard the word.

“Nothing, Densen, give me a hand up,” he said raising his arm so Densen could pull him up and they headed back to the tower.

Tefius and the others were standing around the Elder’s bed when the two entered the chamber.

Hyridicus met them halfway across the room telling them, “Our Order has lost the Elder,” as many of the Brothers and Tyros were preparing his body for his final journey. “No one has been anointed.”

Tefius had retired back to the window where he and Tyaisis spent many days looking

and talking. He stood with his arms folded behind him staring at the stars.

Ignoring Hyridicus the tyro walked up as Tefius was in deep thought, "It is a beautiful night, is it not," He asked.

Tefius turned and looked at the Tyro. "Shouldn't you be helping with the Elder's body, Tyro?" he asked dismissively turning back to the window.

"No, Tefius, my place is here by my window and you by my side, as it has always been" he said with a slight grin on his face.

Tefius turned as the Tyro pulled the cowl off his head and revealed the Elder's Mark, "Forgive me, Regent," he stated nodding in respect. Those of the Order not rendering care to the Elder's old body noticed what was transpiring at the window turned and bowed to the new Elder.

"Preceptor ensure that Regent Pisis' body is properly cared for," the Elder said as he looked at his old friend.

"Yes, Tyaisis," Tefius bowed and nodded.

"That was my former name; with the emergence with Pisis, I became Tyaisis! Now, I am Tyatticus," he said, motioning for Densen to approach. "Tefius, I believe the Order is in need of a new Tyro."

"It is, Tyatticus," answering as he bowed.

Densen was accompanied by Hyridicus neither knowing the reason why the Page had been summoned.

As the two joined them by the window, “Densen, I have recommended you as our next Tyro,” he said glancing at the Brother, “Hyridicus, you are in need of a Tyro, are you willing to train him?”

“Yes, Regent,” he said as he bowed then continued, “It has come to my attention, in the past I have been too harsh in my treatment of this Page, I beg for your forgiveness,” holding his bow until answered.

“Brother, it is not my forgiveness you need, your actions did not harm me, it is Densen that was the victim of your distrust,” he stated looking at the new Tyro.

“Yes, Regent,” he answered begrudgingly but could be heard across the room no matter how softly he tried to speak. The thought of apologizing to a Tyro annoyed Hyridicus but he complied. Turning to look at his Tyro, “Tyro Densen, forgive my past treatment of you,” he said and waited for a reply.

Densen had never been in this position before and was unsure of what his response was supposed to be. He said, clearing his throat, “Yes, Brother,” returning his bow.

“Preceptor could you and Brother Hyridicus give me a moment with Densen,” he asked, the two bowed and walked where the old Elder’s body was being tended to. “Densen, I am afraid our evening ales will

cease now that you are Tyro,”

“Yes, Elder, I imagine so, with you being the Elder and all and well, with me being a Tyro now, we may not have time for our evening ale,” said with the saddest of smiles. “I peeked under your cowl, by accident of course, there was a glow, and well, you know my curiosity, I just had to look,” he had dropped his eyes out of respect by the time he completed his statement.

“It is okay, I am glad it was you tonight with me,” he said reflecting on their friendship, “You always made me smile with your antics, and I am afraid we will have to travel different paths for a while. But I will be watching you, Tyro Densen.”

“Before I leave, Elder, may I ask the meaning of Taylaeva,” not knowing if the question was pushing the boundary of their friendship too far.

“I am not sure, there are still many things I will have to unlock and discover in these new memories, hopefully one day I will have an answer for you,” he said knowing it would be decades before they spoke of it again. And Densen would probably not even remember the question. “Remember, I will be watching you, my friend.”

Densen smiled, nodded, and then walked to Hyridicus to start his training.

Eight years would pass before Tefius felt he were too old to continue serving as Preceptor

anymore and Brother Murríc would be chosen to replace him.

Brother Hyridicus left the Order shortly after the new Preceptor was chosen, living just outside the Monastery raising figs, grapes, and making their wine and ale. Brothers and Tyros heard his grumblings and mumbles at anyone passing him tending to crop's and brewing his spirits. He supplied his goods to the Monastery and the village. Living many years before the sands of time ran out for him. Some said the bitterness he felt towards the Order finally killed him, others who understood him knew that missing the Order was the true cause.

Preceptor Murríc died peacefully in his sleep one night of unknown causes almost twenty-eight years to the day of the Elder Tyatticus Ascension.

Today the Elder is to choose a new Preceptor as the seven Brothers and seven Tyros wait patiently for the announcement in the courtyard.

The Regents scribe walked out on the balcony and cried out for all to hear, "Be it known from this day forth Brother Densen is hereby granted the title as the 214th Preceptor of the Order for the Eminence Temple, long may his guidance endure." All the brothers and tyros congratulated Densen as their new Preceptor.

He changed into his new burgundy robes affixed with golden trim that signaled his new status, then headed over for his first meeting with the Elder. He entered the Elder's Chambers bowed and slightly nodded as he reached him. "Regent, I am honored you have chosen me as your Preceptor," he said and waited for the Elder's response.

"Thank you, Densen. How have you been, my old friend?" Tyatticus asked as if it were yesterday when the two had last spoken alone.

"I have been fine, Regent," Densen replied slowly, not knowing how the relationship between the Preceptor and Elder were supposed to be. Past Preceptors never discussed such matters with the Brothers of the Order. This left a puzzling feeling in his mind and he did not want to insult the Elder treating him as a Tyro.

"Please call me Tyatticus," he asked Densen walking over to a table in the far corner of the room then sat.

"Yes, Tyatticus," Densen answered and followed him to the table but did not take a seat.

Tyatticus motioned for him to sit, "Please, join me," he asked as he gestured for a Page to bring over a prepared bottle, "I bet you have questions?"

Densen studied his Tyro turned Elder; in his world he was made to conform

hiding his true self until he was alone. The attending Page poured two cups of ale and a smile grew on his face.

“Go ahead ask me,” Tyatticus sat back and took a sip from his cup.

Densen thought for a moment before asking, “Its meaning, Taylaeva, what is it?”

Tyatticus nearly spit his ale out not expecting he would have remembered after so many years, and answered, “Atlantis, it means Atlantis, a civilization of people destroyed by their world exploding. Taylaeva means Atlantis,” he smiled and raised his cup.

Afterword

The idea for Edge of Elders came from watching different television shows on The History, Discovery, and other similar channels ranging in topics from ancient myths from Greece, Ancient Aliens, and lost civilizations that disappeared across the world without a trace or with very little to go on. I jotted down about 1000 words somewhere around 2017 and set it aside hoping to one day finish it. In November of 2020, I revisited it and gave myself a self-imposed deadline to fully develop the idea into a short story by the end of that year. And I did! I completed it on December 10, 2020, four days before my birthday. I hired a local editor, discussed the revisions, and published the story you just read.

I hope you enjoyed this story and will consider following me at mrcota.com for updates on upcoming writing projects.

About the Author

Mitchell R. Cota

Hello, I am a retired USAF Master Sergeant having served my country for almost 30 years. Retirement has afforded me the chance to pursue a hobby I picked up while serving, "writing." Using my GI Bill, after retiring, I earned two Associates Degrees – The first in Television Production the Spring of 2018 and the second in Visual Communications the Fall of 2018, to make me a better storyteller. Both areas of study helped better my insight for developing the worlds I am write about and placement of character within those scenes.



