

## Epilogue

“So how did you escape from the flame?” the Dean of Applicants asked. “You were underneath a burning building, after all.” Eldritch nodded. They sat by a sunlit fountain. The spashing water was joined by the song of birds. Aromatic late-season flowers bloomed nearby in the well-manicured grounds of the University with No Name. The gentle garden seemed a world away from the dark, noisome inferno of Vogel’s manor.

“The other tunnel was a dead end,” Eldritch said. “But enough air flowed through to act as a chimney, so most of the manor burned. What remained collapsed into the cellar. I merely went to the far end of the tunnel to wait until the remains cooled, and allowed me to dig my way out.”

“And what of your companions? Did any else survive?”

“None,” Eldritch said. His eyes watching the flickers of sunlight on the water in the fountain.

“I am sorry,” the Dean said.

“Thank you, Sir,” Eldritch said, and turned his gaze back to the older man. “They were there of their own free will, but I have seen too many people... too many *friends* die.”

“Do you think you can change that here at the University?” the Dean asked.

“That is my hope.”

“I cannot promise that,” the older man said. “What you find here may not be what you hope it to be, but it may be exactly what you need.” Eldritch thought about that for a minute, and nodded.

“May I ask a question? Sir?”

“Of course.”

“When will I know if I am accepted?” Eldritch asked. “I haven’t much money, and no real place to stay. If I’m not ... Let’s just say I will need to find my way quickly, if I am not here.”

“I see,” the Dean said, his brow creasing slightly. “Do you think that should matter in our evaluation of you?”

“Oh, no,” Eldritch said. “I would not seek anyone’s pity. It is not the first time I have had a lack of funds. I merely wish to know when the committee may decide my application.”

“Very well,” the Dean said. “I believe the committee has made his decision. I speak for the University in saying that your application has been considered, and you are accepted as a student here, with all rights and privileges, something, proud tradition, something, and so on. I never cared for that pompous ritual. Do you mind if we skip the speech, and merely let me welcome you?” He thrust out his hand, and Eldritch shook it gratefully.

“Thank you, Sir!” he beamed. “I will do my best to keep things interesting.”

“I suspect that will not be a problem.”