

## The Call From Beyond

**Synopsis:** Three tales evolve across different epochs where three explorers attempt to find a mystical city they've only ever encountered in their dreams.

### Characters:

- Edward Cunningham
- Amelia Cunningham
- Charles Dawson
- Alexander von Meyer
- Don Pedro de Leon
- Chief Manduana
- Sheikh Abdullah Hashir
- Amir al-Hajj
- The Captain
- The Explorer

### Plot:

#### Prologue

One morning in an isolated house in the countryside, 8 year old Edward Cunningham asks her mother, Amelia, if she again dreamt of the **dream city**. Amelia warns her son to never travel there, whatever happens to her. She is about to go on a journey to find the city and feels immensely guilty for abandoning her son. But she strongly believes her dreams are a **call** towards that city and she has to answer it. Edward then sees a **tall peculiar figure** observing them from a distance and an ominous **shadow** beside it. Their sight considerably scares him.

#### Main plot

**1926:** In the Norwegian Sea, Edward, now in his 30s, is traveling alongside The Captain to a specific set of coordinates indicated on a map. The coordinates were written by Amelia who mysteriously disappeared during her quest. Back then, Edward was still a child and his mother's sudden disappearance left an **emotional scar** which he carried into adulthood. Upon also recently experiencing these recurring dreams of the city, Edward chose to ignore her warnings and embark on a journey to uncover the mystery behind her disappearance.

The Captain is skeptical about Edward's endeavor, finding the concept of trying to locate a city within one's dreams absurd. Of course, he accepted the job for the money. As the weather worsens, The Captain becomes increasingly irritated and questions Edward about what he hopes to find in the dream city besides his mother, provided it truly exists. He begins to question Edward's sanity, comparing him to an obsessive man detached from reality. Finally, to prove he is not insane, Edward takes out a diary of Charles Dawson who, in 1820, embarked on a similar quest in the Mesopotamian desert.

**1820:** Charles Dawson is a linguist, writer and avid traveler who journeys alone in the Mesopotamian desert to find the mystical city which plagues his dreams. He received its location through his dreams, supposedly found near a tall mountain range along the border separating southern Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula. He is well aware of the Sumerian and Babylonian civilizations that once, thousands of years ago, occupied this region and wonders if the dream city is related to them.

Charles is a devoted Catholic and sees his journey as a religious endeavor. He believes he was chosen to venture to the city, interpreting the dreams as a call from the divine. He feels a great sense of **pride and importance** for having been chosen and strongly believes he will find **enlightenment** once he reaches his destination. Whilst riding a camel in the scorching heat, Charles comes across a Hajj caravan and decides to join them for resupply. The pilgrims showcase their hospitality by providing him with water, food, and offering that he spends the night with them. He strikes up a conversation with the Amir al-Hajj wherein he finds the pilgrimage journey similar to his quest towards the dream city although he hides it from the Amir, fearing he will be ridiculed.

Later during the night, Charles begins to read an old German notebook of Alexander von Meyer who, in 1750, also went on a similar expedition in the Amazonian rainforest. Being multilingual, Charles decides to recount the story of Alexander in his diary.

**1750:** In the Amazonian rainforest, German explorer and scientist Alexander von Meyer and his diseased native guide reach, by canoe, a tribe led by Chief Manduana. The natives are initially hostile but Manduana accepts to accommodate Alexander for the night while the guide, suffering from smallpox, is taken care of. Alexander is forced to participate in tribal rituals for his own “purification”. The **agnostic** Alexander doesn’t believe in such things and during a conversation with Chief Manduana, he talks about his quest.

He has little faith in his endeavor but chooses to pursue it nevertheless in hopes of obtaining the knowledge borne within the city. Manduana’s beliefs stand in striking contrast with Alexander’s penchant for rationality. He warns him that those dreams could be the reflections of evil spirits that inhabit the jungle, such as the shape-shifting **Chullachaki** who exploits the greed and fears of men. Alexander mostly turns a deaf ear to his warnings. Later during the night, the guide dies from smallpox and the natives blame Alexander for it. They say the disease was brought by the foreigners and the guide is just another victim of **colonialism**. Manduana is forced to exile Alexander. He spends the night elsewhere in the forest, alone. Weird sounds are heard and a tall mysterious figure is seen amidst the jungle. Alexander ignores these phenomena but barely manages to find any sleep.

The next morning, the tribe has moved and while Alexander wanders alone in the jungle, he stumbles on a group of Spanish conquistadors and indigenous slaves led by Don Pedro de Leon. Alexander begs Pedro to let him join the group considering he is out of provisions. Pedro, a narcissistic and uncompassionate individual, refuses but when Alexander explains his mission, Pedro becomes very interested in him. He believes the city in Alexander’s dream is in fact **El Dorado**. The Spanish have long abandoned the search for El Dorado but Pedro becomes hopeful that if the city exists, it could bring him unimaginable **wealth** and **power**.

**1926:** The weather worsens and the boat suffers severe damages which frustrates The Captain. He goes to Edward to discuss the possibility of turning back but Edward, obsessed by the dream city, adamantly refuses. The Captain believes his obsessive personality makes him a **Jonah**, a sailor who brings bad luck.

The Captain then recounts the story of a writer who traveled into the ocean for inspiration after feeling a sense of purposelessness. Overwhelmed by curiosity and the simultaneous **fear and obsession for the unknown**, the writer uncovered some **forbidden truths**; unspeakable horrors which can induce insanity. It is unknown what became of the writer but The Captain warns Edward that they wouldn't want to discover such things if ever they do find the dream city, acknowledging it could bear terrifying secrets. Edward ignores his ramblings, blinded by his determination. The Captain knows Edward just wants to fill the void within him resulting from the glaring lack of maternal love. He believes this void is the root of Edward's cold personality.

When Edward asks how he knows so much about him, the two are interrupted by a nearby lighthouse from an island. The coordinates on the map point to this region implying they have at last reached their destination. After a docking attempt which nearly capsizes the vessel, the two leave into the harsh snowy weather to look for any signs of civilization. At first glance, the island seems deserted but then they stumble on the isolated ruins of a church. Inside, they are horrified by the sight of the decomposed remains of dozens of individuals (including children) hanging from the ceiling and ancient Celtic pagan symbols written on the walls. The Captain begs to leave but Edward catches sight of a coastal village and decides to go there. Looking back into the church on his way out, he briefly sees the **tall figure** which he first saw when he was 8.

The village turns out to be mostly occupied by fishermen with strangely more men than women. Edward and The Captain are lodged in a dirty old hotel where the hotel clerk demands that they stay inside during the night. After the sun sets, The Captain asks Edward if he is married. Edward reveals his life is devoid of any human connections and The Captain jokes it could be because he is not human. Drunk and agitated, he asks where the dream city is since if the coordinates are right, it must have been on the island. Edward suggests that the dream city's existence might be metaphysical and beyond our current plane of reality. The Captain dismisses the idea as nonsense but both are too exhausted to argue. Edward gets back to reading Charles' diary.

**1820:** In the desert, Charles wakes up in the middle of the night and sees a tall mysterious figure levitating above the pilgrims. They wake up and each utters a deafening distorted scream. Charles wakes up in a cold sweat and realizes it was just a dream but reality is much more horrifying: a Bedouin tribe slaughters the pilgrims and decapitates the Amir al-Hajj. Charles is captured and taken to the leader of the tribe, Sheikh Abdullah Hashir. Charles scorns the Sheikh for brutally murdering the pilgrims but the Sheikh reveals that the caravan has failed to deliver a *sarr* payment to ensure safe passage of the Hajj caravan.

Charles questions Abdullah's faith by asking how he is able to commit such atrocities whilst believing in God's existence. He replies the act itself is merely a retaliation to being wronged and hence won't be seen as immoral by God. The Sheikh explains how his faith has never been stronger, having been tested many times in the past. He recounts the story of his brother's possession by a Jinn. Shortly after a successful exorcism, the Sheikh found his sister being devoured by a ghoul as if saving one sibling's life came at the cost of another. This traumatic event

made him question the reasoning of God and his obscure goals. The event made one of his brothers insane whilst another lost faith. Abdullah however believes faith cannot and should not be affected by such events since it's up to the individual to shape his own beliefs and not external influences, like the demon and its likes. The Sheikh discusses the **importance of faith** and religion for **morality, purpose** and **goodwill**.

Charles finds it hard to trust Abdullah's words considering he just ordered the massacre of the pilgrims but relates immensely to his struggles with faith. Amidst his story; he is inspired by the perseverance of his spirit in face of what he experienced and his success in overcoming **uncertainty**. Charles mentions that he is on a religious journey believing he received a call from God to which the Sheikh warns him of the demons that inhabit the dunes and the ancient cities, for they can be manipulative and dangerous. As dawn nears, Charles continues his diary while reading the accounts of Alexander.

**1750:** Alexander explains that in his dreams, the dream city is located beyond a dormant volcano and the journey will get rougher from here on. Later, he is shocked to find a conquistador murdering a native slave for failing to read the Bible. Don Pedro defends the conquistador's actions saying that if the natives fail to convert to Christianity, they will remain 'savages'. Alexander highly opposes **proselytism**, finding the concept contradictory to **free will**. He also laments on how the natives are brutalized and mistreated by the Spanish. As he describes his agnostic views, Don Pedro disparages him for going on this 'mystical' quest in the first place, saying Alexander believes in nothing and refuses to acknowledge it.

The German expresses his concerns that he is being treated like a slave, merely serving as guide to Pedro. The Don reveals that he and Alexander are similar. Pedro desires power through wealth and Alexander through knowledge. Through power, Alexander hopes to have a sense of **control** by unraveling the unknown, feeling that all his life he always felt like a pawn to circumstances. He talks about his childhood traumas whereby his father physically abused him and killed his mother. As a child, he viewed his father as a **Faustian figure** who made a pact with the Devil in favor of wealth but at the expense of his humanity. He powerlessly watched him murder his mother and was too scared to denounce him. During the same time period, mysterious disappearances of women plagued his childhood town. Furthermore, he encountered a **shadow** at the murder scene which horrified him. The incomprehensible nature of his father's crime left him perplexed and his powerlessness worsened his anguish. As an adult, he now thinks he imagined the whole Faustian storyline to deal with the puzzling nature of his father's psyche.

Alexander explains that ultimate knowledge and power can only be achieved by a **super human**; the last step of human evolution which is a goal each human, consciously or unconsciously, sets itself. The Don agrees with him and believes religion is merely a tool for **control**. His beliefs in Christianity are solely based on the promise of power; which he admits serves as his driving force. He also provides more insight into his **misanthropic** views on mankind, calling humans inherently flawed, despicable and unworthy of love. Alexander wonders if ever mankind's **hubris** and **vanity** will one day subside to which Pedro replies humanity has always been defined by them. At night, Alexander continues his diary before seeing the tall figure again. He follows it to a nearby river where the figure dissolves into the water. When he looks into the river, his own reflection emerges from the

water. As he gazes at the scene in sheer terror, the reflection morphs into a deformed apparition of his father causing Alexander to scream before waking up from this nightmare.

**1926:** The recurrence of the tall figure's apparitions in the narratives of Charles and Alexander terrifies Edward. As he looks outside on the rocky coast, he finds a naked siren who looks exactly like Amelia. The siren falls back into the sea and Edward, realizing he must surely be dreaming, tries to break out of the dream but fails.

Edwards realizes his journey was a mistake and goes to The Captain to tell him they should return. But The Captain has disappeared and as Edward frantically looks for him in the hotel, he hears a woman's screams from one room. He looks through the keyhole and finds a pregnant woman agonizingly giving birth to a grotesque creature. The woman dies during childbirth and Edward sees, to his horror, that the woman is Amelia. He runs out of the hotel into the night, refusing to believe that the woman was his mother. The storm intensifies and he hears chants from a group of people near a cliff. There, he finds himself witnessing a satanic ritual. The Captain has been brutally murdered and his corpse is displayed as a blood eagle. The leader of the fishermen cult reveals they have opted to serve their 'newfound gods', apparent descendents from the Older Celtic gods, after the Christian settlers tried to destroy their ancient pagan religion.

The rituals include a dozen naked women smeared in The Captain's blood. A dozen tall hooded figures approach the women. They open up their stomach with their bare hands and as their intestines and organs fall off their body, tentacles emerge from the gaping wound and enwrap the women. Edward, unable to bear the horror of the scene, runs away. He dashes to the boat and escapes from the island as deafening screams are heard. The island disappears into the fog and Edward finds himself alone in the middle of the ocean. He frantically opens Charles' diary, looking for anything that could explain what just happened.

**1820:** Charles prepares to leave but is called by the Sheikh for a final conversation. The latter wonders if pursuing the journey is the wisest option considering what lies ahead may worsen Charles' spirits. Charles finally admits he has struggled with faith since he was a child. During his childhood in a secluded and archaic town, he witnessed his devoted Catholic mother being burned alive at the stakes after being accused of witchcraft and procreating with a demon. She had given birth to a deformed infant who was also immediately destroyed. The image of a dark ominous shadow at the scene of her death is ingrained in his memory. The whole ordeal made him question his faith in Christianity specifically God's silence and indifference to such atrocities.

Although the experience traumatized him, he preserved his beliefs and remained convinced that one day his devotion is going to pay off. The Sheikh warns him again against the malevolent spirits of the desert before wishing him farewell. Having been provided with a new camel and provisions, Charles sets out into the desert. At night, he fails to find any sleep and thus continues his diary whilst reading Alexander's journey.

**1750:** A scouting party informs Don Pedro that a native tribe's village lies ahead. Don Pedro grows excited and prepares the conquistadors for an attack believing the villagers can replace their diseased and deceased slaves. He forces Alexander to take part in the attack to demonstrate his loyalty to him. The conquistadors end up decimating most of the villagers whilst some are captured. Alexander is traumatized by the fact that he

participated in the attack, having also killed some natives. Pedro wanders through the village and finds the remains of other conquistadors; brutally maimed and dismembered in what seems to be a kitchen. He also finds fattened Spanish prisoners and realizes to his horror he just attacked a cannibal tribe. Overwhelmed with disgust and anger, he orders the execution of the captured villagers including the women and children.

As they burn the village, Alexander tells Pedro that the tribe resorted to cannibalism due to the Spanish pillaging their village and exhausting their crops and livestock plunging the tribe into a famine. He tries to rationalize the tribe's barbarity by explaining how by destroying the natives' culture, the Spanish took away their humanity as well. Don Pedro grows furious and nearly kills Alexander for his remarks but restrains himself since he needs him for the journey. Later during the day, a traumatized Alexander notes his experience in the diary.

**1926:** Alone in the ocean, Edward again encounters the naked siren on a rock. Lightning flashes and the siren slowly morphs to the tall figure inhabiting his dreams. On closer look, the figure has dark grayish skin, wears a large black cloak and has an elongated hairless head which barely looks human. The figure summons a giant octopus which destroys the boat. In the cold water, Edward swims to the shore and hides in a nearby cave where he keeps reading Charles' diary, firmly believing he'll find the answers he so desperately needs.

**1820:** After days alone in the desert, Charles reaches the mountain range. Exhausted, Charles finally catches sight of an ancient Sumerian city. The ruins are in pitiful conditions but not necessarily as a result of weathering. It is as if the city came under attack, from an external force or from something within its own walls. The central ziggurat catches his attention. Inside it, he is mesmerized by the mural drawings clearly showcasing that the ziggurat was a shrine aimed at linking heaven and earth. As he follows the corridors whilst analyzing the murals, he finds staircases leading to an underground complex beneath.

The ceiling and murals still bear some revealing drawings and it is with horror that Charles realizes the drawings are telling a story and a terrifying one: The inhabitants of the city confronted some demonic entities whose shape remains indescribable and the Sumerians never dared depict them in their drawings. The entities came from somewhere under the city and they tried to convert the Sumerians into a new form of intelligence which the Sumerians described as demonic although further details remain vague. The murals warn any travelers that what lies at the end of the corridor annihilated the faith of many because they uncovered some horrifying truths which would have been best left buried. The mural drawings seem to become more **primitive** down the corridor indicating a **degradation** of the civilization as a result of their encounter with the demons. Charles is shaken by this but his **curiosity** and **obsession** keep him going.

At one instant, Charles comes across a pack of grotesque Arabian wolves that have no fur and are eyeless. They've lived in those corridors for generations and have been accustomed to the darkness. Since they are blind, Charles tries to escape in silence but his scent gives away his presence. A chase ensues, Charles climbs up a staircase near the end of the corridor and comes out in a large and dark dome-shaped building. The wolves strangely refuse to follow him. Exhausted, Charles sits down and reads Alexander's diary.

**1750:** Back in the Amazon, Don Pedro's obsession for El Dorado grows dangerous as he abandons the diseased and injured travelers to die while he pursues his journey. Realizing he is merely a powerless pawn in this adventure, Alexander regrets ever encountering Pedro, feeling he'd have a better chance to find the dream city without him. When the group of conquistadors reaches the foot of the dormant volcano, they're angered to find no signs of El Dorado. Don Pedro becomes frustrated and blames Alexander for misleading them. The group is then attacked by a tribe of natives who are, this time, heavily armed and prepared.

A brutal fight ensues and since many of the conquistadors have died due to fatigue and diseases, the group is at a much lesser manpower. During the battle, Alexander seizes the opportunity to escape but he is chased by an injured Don Pedro. Alexander disparages Pedro for being a sadistic and immoral leader whose sole obsession is power. Pedro screams that Alexander is no different and that Alexander, who doesn't believe in anything, has long lost his morality although he fails to acknowledge it. He references how Alexander heartlessly killed the natives during the village attack. Don Pedro forced him to take part in it merely to test his hypothesis; that Alexander is just as inhuman as him. In a fit of rage, Alexander takes a large stone and crushes Don Pedro's head.

The natives approach and Alexander dashes away. Just as he begins to succumb to the despair of failing his quest, he sees a reflection of the dream city in the river. Alexander, desperate and with nothing left to lose, jumps and swims towards the reflection but encounters an abyss. He swims into the abyss while painfully holding his breath and emerges on the other side where he sees sunlight. He leaves the water after nearly drowning and what he sees is beyond fulfilling: at last, **he has reached the dream city.**

**1820:** Charles is ecstatic that Alexander managed to find the city, giving him hope that he's close too, but Alexander's diary comes to an abrupt end. He leaves the dome-shaped building and as it turns out, **he has reached the dream city too** with the dome-shaped structure forming part of the city's vast network of buildings. He writes his recent experiences which in Charles' case also turns out to be the final words of his diary.

**1926:** Edward is confused; how come both Charles' and Alexander's stories end the moment they reach the dream city? So far, the narratives of these two adventurers served as a guide as well as emotional support for Edward, a proof he is not crazy. With that gone, Edward has to pursue his adventure alone. The cave turns out to not be a naturally-occurring one when he finds mural paintings and structures very reminiscent of the city he's been looking for. He leaves the cave, climbs a mound and gazes in bewilderment at the sight of the beautiful dream city. The fog which once shrouded the region has gone as if **he is now in another world.**

**Dream city:** Edwards walks into the city and gazes at the monumental buildings whose architecture looks simultaneously futuristic, exotic but also somehow reminiscent of ancient structures found in Babylonian and Sumerian cities. At first glance, the city seems deserted but somehow the buildings are very well entertained. Edward is disappointed since he hoped to find some closure about what happened to his mother. However a truly cathartic moment arises when he meets Charles and Alexander who have also been wandering the city. Their encounter confounds the three men for they each belong in different centuries but Edward theorizes the dream city is simply found in a reality where time is non-existent or behaves in different ways. The encounter is filled with amazement when Edward tells them how their three journeys are interconnected but quickly follows

with a sense of despondency for Charles and Alexander who are wondering why their diary came at a halt, implying something must have happened to them.

Alexander talks about the purpose of his journey which is his desire for knowledge to achieve the **power** necessary to overcome the **uncertainty** and **uncontrollability** plaguing his life. Charles explains his struggles with **faith** and seeing the city as a **divine call** for **enlightenment**. Edward talks about how he wants to uncover what happened to her mother and regain his fading **humanity** through her. The three, initially disappointed for not finding what they had hoped for, choose to embark on a mission together to uncover the secrets hiding within the city and ultimately find something which would not make their journey fruitless.

Charles awakens in a forest neighboring what seems to be an archaic town. Whilst wandering inside the town in a disoriented state, he quickly realizes it is that of his childhood. On finding his home, he enters his mother's room where she is sleeping peacefully in her bed soaked with blood, having just birthed Charles' brother. As a child back then, Charles only heard rumors of the deformity suffered by the infant. Seemingly invisible to the midwives and doulas in the room, Charles approaches the cradle and what he sees inside defies his very sanity.

The cradle is lit on fire by Church officials and from the shadows, the tall figure of his dreams emerges and presents himself, in a distorted voice, as **The Explorer**. The mother is taken away by the officials. Charles tries to intervene but The Explorer mentions how they are merely shadows out of time. The inevitability of this event cannot be changed by external temporal influences since all this is merely a memory originating from Charles' **compartmentalization** of his struggles with faith. The Explorer and Charles wander in a nearby field and Charles is suffering from extreme spiritual and emotional dread. At this point, The Explorer reveals that Charles' brother is not a product of the Devil but another form of man, an evolved form of intelligence devoid of the constraints of humankind, which is the concept of humanity itself. The Church's rejection of the newborn stems from the simple-mindedness of their beliefs, their myopic and extremist views and their inherent paranoia that such a being would shake the fabric that constitutes their faith.

Eventually recognizing The Explorer as a higher being, he breaks down after realizing what such revelations imply. Charles asks if anything his faith is based on is real; if the truths he believed in is indeed the truth or merely human fabrications. The Explorer says that since objective truths vary from religion to religion, it simply doesn't exist. Anything Charles believes about God, Christianity and the very existence of the divine are all but a lie. Humanity birthed by haphazard biological outcomes and whilst higher beings do exist, they have little to no interest in mankind for we are **insignificant on the cosmic scale**. However, The Explorer reassures him that this fact does not necessarily mean that humanity cannot transcend its limitations. Charles' torment is further amplified when the two reach, in the middle of the forest, the burning down of Charles' mother who is being accused of witchcraft, procreating with the devil, and giving birth to the antichrist. At that instant, Charles' dread reaches its apex as the crowd cheers at the burning of his mother. Also present is Charles' younger self who sees the older Charles as the ominous shadow that scared him.

Meanwhile, Alexander awakens in his father's mansion. The fear of seeing his father haunts him while the thought of seeing his mother gives him hope. On hearing screams from the basement, Alexander goes in but the



sheer terror of what he finds sends him screaming out of the basement and running to an exit. However the mansion seems like an endless labyrinth. The Explorer materializes into the house and tells Alexander that Alexander always knew his father was connected to the mysterious disappearances which plagued his hometown.

He explains that his father made a pact with the higher entities in exchange of knowledge. When asked what constitutes the pact, The Explorer reveals that mankind as it is needs to be transformed to a new state of being to serve the cosmic purpose of much higher entities which The Explorer and his species also serve, hence continuing a cycle of eternal **servitude**. To do so, women have to copulate with some entities to give birth to a new intelligence and Alexander's father helped facilitate the process. All those revelations turn out to be the forbidden knowledge his father sought and only one of the many cosmic knowledge hidden in the dream city.

All of this contradicts Alexander's desire for free will and his fight against the fatalistic nature of existence. There is no power, only the terrifying revelations of what the future of humanity holds. But he still fails to comprehend why his father killed his mother. The Explorer takes him to the crime scene where the father is standing in obscurity whilst gazing blankly at his wife's corpse lying in a pool of blood. A younger Alexander arrives and sees his older self as the shadow which haunted his childhood. His father's obsession disturbs Alexander since he fears succumbing to the same loss of humanity.

The Explorer elaborates that the evolved humans will be devoid of humanity and hence of emotions. The lack of envy, dread, pain and emotional sufferings is a compelling attribute of this new form of intelligence but its condemnation to serve in some obscure cosmic purpose for far superior divinities remain the biggest detriment. Paralleling proselytism, the forceful conversion of humans to this form, often referred to as demonic throughout history, contradicts any concepts of freedom. The Explorer tries to rationalize the aim of the higher deities by saying they believe conversion is inherently good (**master morality**) since it is an advancement towards something greater and that humans (**slave morality**) tries to justify their primitiveness and fear of the unknown by labeling the advances as evil/demonic because, they, on their own, couldn't advance and are slowly adopting a passive and aimless approach to evolution (**Nietzsche's last man**), something which disgusts The Explorer. While this is in accordance with Alexander's beliefs of a super human and serves as an answer to his agnosticism, it goes against free will, a far more important value to him. Moreover, the sight of his dead mother deeply disturbs Alexander. Despondent and unable to accept these revelations, he perceives all this as a dreadful nightmare and begs to wake up although this ironically leads him to faint.

Charles and The Explorer walk in the quiet night like ghosts from another time. The Explorer posits that the relationship between humanity and higher beings has always been complicated and the creation of religious institutions is a mechanism of rationalizing what can't be understood as well as to establish social order. The Explorer asks Charles to join his cause of converting humans, stating that his beliefs and religion are sure to exist and what Charles has witnessed so far are the ultimate proof. In spite of all this, Charles' faith in Christianity still remains and he argues that a lot of The Explorer's claims still haven't been proven. Impressed by his unshakable dedication, The Explorer gives Charles a last challenge that will conclude his journey.

He points to a pathway in the forest and at the end of it; Charles will be back to the dream city and from there, back to reality. The goal is to take the route alone and on reaching its end, not only will he be free but his mother will be resurrected from the dead under the sole condition that his faith shall remain unblemished. Charles readily accepts and embarks on the last part of his journey. Based on his recent experiences, he expected the walk in the forest to be filled with dreadful happenings. He has so far interpreted his experience in the town of his childhood as God's challenge or a visit in purgatory to test his faith. But as he continues his journey, the dead silence of the night and its unexpected calmness have a considerable impact on him. The silence reminds him of God's silence and his utter indifference to the horrors of the world. His childhood experiences amounted to nothing but pain and despair. Whilst Charles kept thinking there was an end, a point to all this dread, he came to the realization there was none. God has no purpose because God doesn't exist. His struggles with faith stemmed from childhood but only now do they seem justified and even validated. As he nears the end of the pathway, the traumatized and dejected Charles commits **apostasy**.

He looks back and much to his horror, his mother stands there **alive** and with a horrified look on her face. Suddenly, her body catches fire and turns into ashes. Screaming in horror at what he perceives as a consequence of his rejection of faith, Charles suffers a brutal mental breakdown which projects him into insanity, his psyche having been permanently marred by his journey. He wakes up back in the dream city which slowly fades away and Charles finds himself in the underground of the ziggurat of the Sumerian city. He leaves and makes his way back to the desert in a catatonic state. At each instant, he hopes the heat and dehydration will kill and free him from his pain. However, he is seen by a British cavalry who saves him and discovers his unfinished diary. Charles, having succumbed to madness, won't ever say a word from now on and his silence equated that of God's.

Alexander wakes up in a cold sweat and is horrified to find his father next to his bed. He orders him to accompany him to the murder scene. There, it turns out his mother is still breathing and Alexander is given a flintlock pistol and ordered to put an end to her misery. He suffers an emotional breakdown and desperately seeks out the answer as to why his father killed her, unable to understand his motivations. The father simply repeats his order. Powerless to his authority, Alexander pulls the trigger. Unbeknownst to him, it turns out his father was in fact The Explorer in disguise as shown by a mirror reflection and all this was the result of his manipulations, an act to force Alexander to join his cause by showcasing free will is nonexistent. By cutting his ties to what is left of his humanity, Alexander will have no choice but to join The Explorer.

However this is not what happens. The experience annihilates Alexander's psyche. Human sanity has always been frail by nature and Alexander has far exceeded the limits of what he can endure. After seeing his aspirations, hopes and beliefs all destroyed the moment he pulled the trigger, there is no going back. His surroundings fade away and Alexander finds himself in the dream city anew, staring blankly at its horizon. The dream city fades away and Alexander is back to the river in the Amazonian forest. At dusk, Alexander is found by the same native tribe led by Chief Manduana.

Manduana believes Alexander's soul is corrupted by the Chullachaki. In an attempt to salvage what is left of it, the tribe performs a ritual of purification but it's too late. Also present is a Dutch cartographer who stopped by

for resupply. He recovers Alexander's diary which will be transmitted to Charles over the next century. Both Charles Dawson's and Alexander von Meyer's journeys end in tragedy for both were unable to bear the weight of the revelations hidden within the dream city. What is left of their spiritual and psychological well-being was doomed the instant they entered the city, a place where their most repressed wishes, memories and traumas were carefully hidden and materialized to them in most dreadful ways.

We pick up the scene of the **prologue**. After seeing the ominous shadow, a young Edward rushes back inside the house and finds his mother packing up for her quest to the dream city. She promises that whatever she finds there and whatever happens, she will be back for him. As young Edward watches Amelia leave, the older Edward along with The Explorer observe the scene at the precise location where young Edward saw the shadow. Edward mentions how he never understood why a mother would abandon her child and explains how her absence terribly affected his upbringing resulting in his cold and anti-social persona.

He hoped reuniting with her in the dream city would rekindle his dying humanity by giving him the love and affection missing from his youth. This is what fueled his obsession for the dream city. At this point, The Explorer has already told him about the human conversion ploy, the higher deities and their implications but Edward is still confused by the meaning and point of HIS personal journey. He asks The Explorer about the primary purpose of the dream city. The Explorer finally reveals that the dream city is in fact a metaphysical world where the dreams, memories, thoughts and even consciousnesses of its visitors are stored. This also makes it a haven of all the accumulated knowledge of all the beings (cosmic or human) who visited the city. Who built it? No one really knows since the city is believed to be as old as the universe itself. The Explorer sent out a call to specific individuals, a call which lured the receivers to the dream city (whose entrances were placed at strategic points in the physical world) through the exploitation of their most repressed wishes (the search for god, the desire for power and the need for humanity).

Though not human, The Explorer is a fully conscious entity and as any consciousness, he is curious. The Explorer used the dream city to explore what the impact of the revelations of mankind's true destiny would have on the human psyche. He wanted to see what it would take for mankind to join and accept the conversion to a higher intelligence as his species once did, centuries ago. The Explorer, often seen as a demon, travels from world to world to serve the higher deities in their goal. He exploits the insecurities, repressed wishes and desires of his victims to lure them into the illusionary dream city. His aim is to explore the fragility of the human spirit, faith and sanity. He represents the Devil's attempt to make sense of what forms the basis of humanity.

Edward, disgusted by his revelations, finds solace in the fact that his love for Amelia is the ultimate proof that his humanity is still present. However The Explorer reveals that it is this humanity, the concepts of morality and human emotions which restrict humans from advancing to this new intelligence, wherein humanity is nonexistent but intelligence and mental capabilities are much higher. Much to his bafflement, The Explorer reveals it is not too late for Edward to change as **Edward is in fact, and has always been, one of these new entities (the evolved form of humans)**. This revelation bewilders Edward; he is not human after all, making all his attempts at humanity futile. Edward refuses to even remotely believe him but The Explorer further reveals

that the life he has experienced so far was in fact a dream existence fabricated from the memories of his mother. The memory of the countryside house is not his but that of Amelia's childhood intertwined with his fantasies on what life there could have been with her. The fragmented and blurred nature of his memories is further proof that these memories are indeed not his.

The Explorer affirms that the whole quest to the dream city, Edward's experience on the island, and everything so far was his mind's attempt (with the combination of Amelia's memories) to make sense of this new state of being. The journey to the dream city was secretly a journey to abandon his human side by coming to the conclusion that rekindling his dying humanity (his repressed wish) is futile and to hence accept his true self. The Explorer acted as a guide and a catalyst to make sure this happens. Edward is a superior entity, much like The Explorer, and he too is doomed to spread the cause of converting humans thus joining the endless cycle of servitude for the higher beings, their supposed 'Gods'.

Edward can't tell if his feelings are real or merely those of Amelia's. Her consciousness is probably still stored in the dream city. When asked what happened to his mother, The Explorer claims Amelia was told about everything when she arrived at the city and she readily submitted to the cause. Unfortunately she passed away during childbirth although her consciousness still resides in the dream city, where death is meaningless. As for Edward, he never even left the dream city. He exists there and although his mind created a whole human life in Britain, his true self has always been within the walls of the dream city. This ironically makes his whole life a dream and his existence in the dream city the ultimate reality and it is only now that he is waking up.

When asked if Alexander and Charles joined the cause, The Explorer reveals that their human spirit couldn't bear the weight of the truth. He explains how he found out about the importance of motherhood on the individual and by tapping into that, he could make use of it. At this point, Edward questions whether Amelia really did accept the cause but suddenly, Edward's childhood house catches fire. Interpreting its destruction as the degradation of his human self, Edward tries everything to quench the fire but the blaze is too strong. When The Explorer approaches him, Edward has a sudden moment of epiphany. He says that although he never personally knew his mother, he can now feel her consciousness permeating through the dream city and he can hence have an insight into her true thoughts. Amelia never accepted the cause, she rebuffed it and unlike Charles and Alexander, she preserved her sanity in the face of her discoveries.

The two are then back to the dream city where Edward walks in determination and perseverance, trying to find his mother. Edward realizes Amelia was raped and impregnated by the demonic creatures and he is the result of this. While currently in his human form, Edward disparages his and The Explorer's true material form, which is too horrifying to showcase. He now knows The Explorer tried to exploit Amelia's desire to find purpose and meaning in her life. Charles and Alexander were possibly also manipulated by false correlations between the atrocities of their pasts and The Explorer's cause. The Explorer's beliefs seem to be the objective truths for him, an undeniable fact which he pursues. But all this knowledge resides in a city which forms part of dreams, based on the characters' perspectives. This brings out a paradox wherein dreams are illusionary by nature and hence from Edward's perspective, they cannot and should not be taken as reality.

Edward lambasts The Explorer saying that the latter is very well aware of this. The Explorer wanted to lure individuals and see how they react to his truths not to satisfy his own curiosity but to see how they justify his cause because as it turns out, even The Explorer is in search of an enlightenment. In this case, the justification of why he does what he does, aka helping the higher beings in perpetuating their quasi-proselytism. Edward rebuffs The Explorer by invoking the subjectivity of his truths and its uncertainty. Finally, Edward comes face to face with his mother. They tearfully reunite as The Explorer gazes at them in anger. This meant defeat. A group of city dwellers, possibly other consciousnesses inhabiting the dream city, led by Amelia attack The Explorer and forcefully take him to the shore at a stake. The Explorer's powers are useless in the dream city and he is lit on fire whilst the crowd, Edward and Amelia gaze delightedly as the fire consumes The Explorer.

The flames represent the **perseverance of the human spirit**, the rejection of forced **doctrines**, of **slavery**, of **false truths** and the embracement of **freedom**. This is a massive human victory: it meant faith can still exist in face of these contradictions for one's beliefs depend entirely on the individual and how they live by them, something Charles and Alexander failed to understand. As for Amelia and Edward, this is the enlightenment and purpose they sought in the dream city and at last, they have found what they came looking for.

## Epilogue

In the countryside house, now surprisingly intact, Edward and Amelia sit down to discuss what's next. Considering Edward's apparent life in the real world was all an illusion, he will have to accept the city as his reality. Amelia recounts her past life as a writer. Whilst suffering from a writer's block, she was induced with a feeling of **purposelessness** and **meaninglessness**. Her infertility made her inner struggles worse in a society where **conception** is regarded as one of women's main roles.

It was around that time that she began dreaming of the city. There, she had hoped that documenting something otherworldly would restore her sense of purpose. Although her beliefs on the importance of humanity and her pre-conceived notion of the meaning of life were shattered, she persevered in the face of adversity both psychologically and spiritually. Having read Charles' diary during her journey, Edward read his and Alexander's stories through her memories. While she was cured from her infertility in the city, birthing Edward ultimately resulted in her death though her consciousness survived within the city. Amelia doesn't regret having Edward by her side now even though he isn't human. Although the evolved "humans" were supposed to be devoid of humanity, Edward is proof that this need not be the case.

She promises to be his mother in this newfound life and offers to give him all the love he never had the chance to experience. She asks if he wants to go for a walk in the fields outside the house. Delighted, Edward takes her hand and they leave whilst the dream city stands peacefully in the background.

## The End