

7.16 Rularuu the Ravager

7.16.1 Background: On Cosmology

Before one can understand the threat that Rularuu the Ravager poses to all existence, one must first understand a bit about cosmology. As the Rikti Invasion so dramatically showed us, ours is not the only dimension out there. In fact, it is just one of many untold millions of such places. Each of these dimensions is like a reflection cast off from the original universe – a sort of Platonic Ideal where all existence began billions of years ago when time began. Ever since that time, the Origin Point has been casting reflections, each of which have in turn been casting their own reflections, until there is a seemingly infinite supply of dimensions.

But in truth, the dimensions only seem infinite. In fact, many of the reflections have such slight differences from one another that they collapse in upon each other and rejoin, or just fade away. While every moment births or destroys a new dimension, most of existence never notices these subtle shifts. What defines a dimension, and allows it to maintain its own stability in the multi-verse, is its uniqueness. The more radically the universe differs from the Origin Point and from the other universes around it, the more permanency it achieves. While there are potentially an infinite number of such places, in fact only a few million such places are known to exist. While this is still a staggering number of universes when you consider that each one is as seemingly limitless as our own, it is not in fact an infinite number.

This multitude of dimensions are all connected to one another through a plane of non-being called the Aether. One way to picture the geography of the multi-verse is to imagine a lake with thousands of tiny islands in it. Each island is in turn vibrating just enough to send out a constant flow of ripples from its shores. The islands are of course the various permanent dimensions, while the ripples are their reflections

– existing for a short while before collapsing back into the Aether or merging with some other reality. In the common parlance of inter-dimensional cosmologists, these are called Shards. By traveling underneath

the surface of the lake, one can reach any island without having to pass through any other dimensions. The same is true with inter-dimensional travel – a quick jaunt through the Aether brings you to some other reality.

Earth is relatively new to inter-dimensional travel, and so is just learning the lay of the land. The Portal Corp has mapped close to a hundred other dimensions, only about a quarter of which are Permanent Dimensions, while the others are mostly Shards. Travelers from other realities have been searching the multi-verse for much longer, and amongst them one dimension has become particularly legendary – the Origin Point. This is the world that started it all – the universe which has cast all of the other reflections in existence. No one knows exactly where it is (or even if it really still exists), but many have hunted for it. The theory goes that events that transpire at the Origin Point have consequences that ripple through the entire multi-verse. If one were to seize control of the Origin Point, one could theoretically hold all of existence hostage to his or her whims.

7.16.2 Birth of The Ravager

Ultimately, it was this legend – that whoever controlled the Origin could dominate all the realities – that inspired Rularuu to begin his campaign of terror and reality destruction, but that is a development that came later in his mortal life. Before he earned his title Ravager, Rularuu was just another priest in a temple to The God of Gateways. He came from an alternate reality very different from our own Earth. On his world, religion and magic had been systematized and spread to all humans very early in the history of civilization (as opposed to on our world, where the secrets of magic were jealously guarded by a few priests and sages). The whole world practiced magic in some small way or another.

It is not surprising then that the people of Rularuu's world had discovered the existence of alternate realities and had been opening up passages to them for centuries before he was born. With the help of their gods, they had managed to explore and even colonize several dozen other Earths. Some they conquered, others they peacefully assimilated into their own inter-dimensional community. The key to this expansion was the God of Gateways, a deity who held sway over all manner of magical portals. It was he who allowed Rularuu's people to use inter-dimensional travel as a means to actually teleport around on their own world as well as traveling to other realities.

Intra-dimensional teleportation is simple in theory, but very hard to master in practice. Instead of using the Aether to travel to another dimension, you use it to skitter around the exterior of your own and then come back in at a different point. Because travel through the Aether is nearly instantaneous, it's very easy

to miss your mark and end up reappearing in space or on another planet rather than somewhere else convenient on the surface of your own world. On Rularuu's world, only the God of Gateways had the computational power and inclination in his divine being to make the appropriate calculations. Thus he was a very powerful and important deity, especially once teleportation became the main method of travel between places and dimensions.

As one of the god's priests, Rularuu acted as a combination gatekeeper and travel agent. Using the appropriate prayers and incantations, he would arrange for supplicants (i.e. customers) to reach their final destinations. Although this duty required significant training and expertise, it was far from the exciting life that Rularuu wanted for himself. He wanted to explore the multi-verse and unlock its secrets. But exploring new realities was a dangerous and honorable duty, reserved for only the most experienced and proven of the God of Gateways' priests.

On his thirtieth birthday, Rularuu came to the realization that he still had another fifteen years of service as a "travel agent" to do before he would even get a chance to join the exploration cadre within the church – and even then his admittance into their elite ranks was by no means assured. The thought of waiting that

long was simply beyond toleration for the ambitious young man. And so he did the unthinkable – he began to search for a way to travel to new dimensions on his own without the god's help. He transferred from his home universe to a frontier church on one of the colony worlds where his experiments would attract less attention. There he began to develop a series of mystical rituals that would hopefully allow him complete freedom to travel as he pleased across the multi-verse.

It took close to a decade, but Rularuu finally made the breakthrough he'd been striving so hard for, although it wasn't exactly what he had expected. Normally, when a gateway between two realities comes into being, it connects the origin universe to a similar, or linked, point in the other universe. For example, traveling to another Earth much like our own, you would arrive in a very similar location on that other world. Arriving somewhere else requires the kind of calculations only a god or super computer are capable of (which is what the Portal Corp and Rikti do). Rularuu didn't have that kind of power at his disposal. But he found another shortcut – he could link himself to himself – or at least to the soul in another dimension who most closely approximated his own being. He could then use that link to transfer himself into another universe, appearing at the exact location of his other "self."

The only down side to this was if you happened to be on the other end of Rularuu's linkage, you got destroyed in the process. In short, to travel to another dimension, Rularuu had to destroy one of his other selves. He had no idea that this is what would happen when he first tried the spell, but once he did, he never looked back. In the process of destroying his first alternate self he actually consumed the other being, and in the process took in all of his knowledge, memories, and life force. He'd never felt better in his entire life – plus he instantly had all the knowledge he needed to survive in the strange new dimension he'd teleported himself in to.

Of course, the big problem was, Rularuu had no way of returning to his home dimension. In fact, he had very little control over where he was going on any given linkage. Unlike the God of Gateways or Portal Corp, Rularuu had no sensors or divine insight that would allow him to ascertain his destination before he traveled there. Thus it was impossible for him to effectively direct his travels. And even if he could find his home dimension, he couldn't go there because there was not "him" there to link with – he was traveling the multi-verse. Ultimately though, the inability to return home didn't bother Rularuu very much. He'd spent his whole life trying to escape from home, and now he had the freedom he'd so fervently hoped and worked for.

Rularuu tore across the multi-verse for several centuries. He found that each self that he consumed revived him – in effect giving him eternal youth as long as he still had worlds to visit. Most of his other selves were very much like him – incredibly intelligent, curious about how the universe worked, and ambitious. Thus Rularuu managed to absorb the combined knowledge of hundreds of geniuses, scientists,

wizards, writers, artists, and politicians in his travels. With their accumulated knowledge, combined with the data he acquired during his own explorations of the realities he visited, Rularuu came to have a fuller understanding of the multi-verse and its underlying principals than anyone else in all of existence – including beings like the God of Gateways in his home dimension.

Eventually Rularuu's ever expanding knowledge base overcame those original deficiencies in his mode of travel. His multi-faceted mind became capable of the awareness and computational power necessary to

discern pathways through the Aether to specific dimensions. Likewise, he mastered the magic forces necessary to directly open a link to other realities, obviating the need for him to link with other selves and destroy them in order to travel. He could now slip from one reality to another with ease. But of course, that didn't stop him from continuing to fold his other selves into the greater-than-human beings known as Rularuu. He'd become addicted to the power, the knowledge, and of course the fountain of youth aspect. He kept right on devouring his reflections, becoming more powerful with each new acquisition.

And then, after close to five hundred years of such traveling, Rularuu decided to return to his home dimension for a little visit. His own Earth had not changed very much during his absence. The empire had expanded to include a few more dimensions, and the trade federation now spanned close to a hundred realities. In all his travels, this was one of the few multi-dimensional political entities that Rularuu had ever seen, so he decided to sit and wait a while. Rather than taking the time to learn all the ins and outs of

this society, he chose to visit a few of the member dimensions and find his selves there. Their knowledge and life force would see him through for quite a while.

But Rularuu found something unexpected. He had become quite an anomaly in the multi-verse. He was a being composed of many parts, all joined into one cross-dimensional entity. Such a thing was, if not unique, then extremely rare. As a result, Rularuu himself had begun to cast reflections through the reality web. His alternate selves were becoming more powerful and more like him. Some had even discovered his secret and were busy devouring other selves on their own. Thus, when Rularuu sought out to link with one of his counterpoints to begin the devouring process, he found that his other self had set up magical wards that blocked the linkage (which Rularuu immediately recognized since he himself had such wards protecting him). Finding a self with such power made Rularuu all the hungrier to devour him.

Using less invasive means of interdimensional travel, Rularuu shifted to the other's world, and confronted the mage. The fight lasted but a few seconds, since for all his power, the other self was no match for Rularuu. What took longer was figuring out a way to consume the other's soul and memories without using a dimension spanning link. Rularuu held the self imprisoned for several years while he worked on a solution to the puzzle, and eventually he devised a magic ritual that should have accomplished the same result. It worked, but it worked far, far better than Rularuu had originally planned. He had spent a lot of time formulating the scope of the spell in an effort to ensure that he would get everything from his prisoner that he would have gotten if he'd devoured him through his normal process. His ritual defined one of the parameters as "the full contents of his life and experience." When he cast the spell, Rularuu consumed not only the other self, but everything and everyone that the other self had ever come into contact with. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, children, animals, and even buildings and streets and forests were torn from reality and condensed down into some form of pure energy and knowledge that Rularuu could absorb.

This cataclysmic event was disastrous to the reality that he'd torn asunder. The planet began to tear itself apart now that tremendous sections of it had just vanished. Dazed by the sudden influx of extraordinary power and new sensations, Rularuu only just had the wherewithal to shift realities before the disintegrating world caught him up in its death throes. Safely ensconced in a remote location in his home universe, Rularuu spent some time just absorbing all the new knowledge. He had never really dreamed that he could actually consume a world, or even just a piece of one. The experience was the most intoxicating thing he'd ever felt. He knew that his days of taking in just one person at a time were now behind him. Whole realities would be his fodder.

But his other self had also given him an idea, once his memories had been integrated into Rularuu's own. The other had learned what Rularuu had been doing and thus protected himself. But the other knew that he

would never be able to match Rularuu's power unless he found some new way to augment his own. That was when he conceived of his own brilliant plan. He would find the semi-mythical Origin Point – the reality from which all other universes were first reflected. If he could find and control that realm, he would have the power to influence the entire multi-verse and could, in effect, edit Rularuu out of it. Of course finding a single needle in an infinite haystack was a tall order, but the other saw it as his only hope. Now the idea belonged to Rularuu and he had a new twist to add to the plan. Sure controlling the Origin Point would give one tremendous power. But what if one consumed the Origin? Rularuu planned to do just that – find the Origin reality and devour it. Then he would embody the Origin and would thus every reality in existence would become a reflection of him.

7.16.3 The Ravager Comes

Rularuu perfected his ritual, expanding its scope to include an entire world, and then an entire reality. Once he completed it, he felt the perfect place to test his new scheme was on his own home world. As he expected, the gods and priests divined his intent and sallied forth to try and halt their reality's destruction. Their combined power should have proven more than sufficient, but Rularuu was prepared for them. He distracted the divine army with a host of false reflection – each made from a tiny fraction of his own being. In effect, he was spinning off pieces of himself that he had devoured over the past five centuries. As these lesser reflections delayed the gods (each was still a powerful magician in its own right), Rularuu completed his ritual and consumed the entire reality in one fell swoop.

The infinite meal that a universe makes left Rularuu in a kind of intoxicated daze as he struggled to absorb the knowledge, experience, and power of an entire reality. As it turned out, a lot of knowledge got lost in the translation – individual thoughts and memories from the untold trillions he'd slain all got lost in the shuffle, and distinct personalities merged into aggregate wholes. Nevertheless, the amount of data and power was staggering. Short of God himself, Rularuu had become the most powerful being ever to exist. And he was just getting started.

Even with all that knowledge and power, Rularuu still could not pinpoint the Origin Point. However, he did have the ability to distinguish lesser realities from greater, more permanent ones. The varied dimensions of the multi-verse shown like stars in the sky – and he chose to start devouring the brightest ones first. Rularuu had truly come into the title Ravager as he cut a swath of destruction through the Aether. And then, one day in 1968, our reality, and our world, caught his attention.

Earth's dimension shone particularly bright in the multi-verse at that time. 1968 was a year that saw sweeping change and discord across the globe. A new breed of hero was developing, society was falling down and rebuilding itself every month, and the times, they were a changing. Normally even such sweeping events on a single planet in a whole universe would not have attracted much attention, but there

were two factors in play. One, Rularuu had come to believe that the Origin Point was indeed on a planet that was analogous to Earth in the multi-verse. Two, Rularuu's other self on Earth was heavily involved in the events taking place there.

Here, the other Rularuu was more popularly known as Gerard McNaughton, AKA Gerard the Green, famous comedian and stage magician by day, crime-fighting sorcerer by night. Gerard was also secretly a member of the Midnight Squad, a group of mystic minded heroes in Paragon City who fought to keep the world safe from supernatural threats. Gerard the Green had been using his notoriety and public fan base to

help promote some of the more controversial causes of the day, including protests against the Vietnam War and fighting for African-American Civil Rights. He used his nature-based magical powers to great effect in some of the best known pranks and protests of the era and was even featured on the cover of Time magazine on one occasion.

For all his affable personality and pointed political humor, Gerard was actually a very powerful magician. He had become aware of what Rularuu was doing by using his own existential link to the Ravager to secretly monitor his crimes. Unfortunately, as Rularuu searched the Aether for bright worlds that might be the Origin Point, he espied the trans-dimensional tether and followed it back to Earth. Thinking it as likely a place as any for the Origin Point, he decided to devour it and his other self.

Gerard the Green immediately saw what was happening and prepared the Midnight Squad for the Ravager's arrival. Although he knew what Rularuu was capable of, he still felt that there must be some way to stop him before he destroyed the Earth. Rularuu arrived in Paragon City in the form of a hurricane force storm that covered the entire Eastern seaboard, driving people away from the coasts and into shelters or their homes. He then materialized a physical avatar and proceeded to begin the three-day ritual

of consumption from the top of a tower located precisely at the storm's eye. The Midnight Squad and the city's other heroes threw everything they had at Rularuu, but he either swatted them aside like flies or shut them out with impenetrable force fields.

After two days of futile fighting, the Midnight Squad met to discuss one final plan. Gerard the Green had developed a strategy, all be it a very dangerous one. He suggested using the power locked within an ancient artifact known as the Dagger of Jocas to trick Rularuu into consuming the wrong world. The

dagger had the ability to actually sever reality, and the Midnight Squad kept it locked in an extradimensional vault for safe keeping. None of the members felt comfortable using the artifact, but they realized that they had no choice. With the dagger's power and their own magic, they would simultaneously cut away a tiny sliver from the reality of every person, animal, and thing in Paragon City and then use their magic to weave them together into a shadow version of the great metropolis. If they did this at the exact moment of Rularuu's ritual, they could trick him into consuming the shadow shard instead of the real thing. They theorized that this would cause the ritual to actually backfire, forcing Rularuu to consume himself instead of Earth's reality and hopefully destroying him forever.

The Midnight Squad made its preparations while Rularuu finished the last stages of his ritual. All across the city residents felt a simultaneous tingling in the back of their necks as the Dagger of Jocas cut away a part of their existence. The shadow city came together just as Rularuu's incantations ceased and then – POOF! – it was over. The storm immediately cleared up and Rularuu was gone from his tower. It wasn't quite what the Midnight Squad had expected, but they were definitely pleased with the results. Only Gerard The Green had any reservations. He still had his connection to Rularuu and he knew that somewhere, out there, the Ravager still existed.

7.16.4 The Shadow Shard

Gerard was right of course. Rularuu did live on, although he was none too happy about his current situation. The nanosecond before his ritual fired off he realized what the Midnight Squad had done. He sensed that the shadow Paragon City had been substituted for the real universe, but it was too late to stop the ritual. Yet if the ritual went off as planned, he would devour nothingness and, as predicted, destroy himself. In the short sliver of time, the several universes that comprised Rularuu's mind made a quick calculation and acted. Rularuu sacrificed a great portion of his own power to immediately infuse the illusory city with true energy and form. Where the Midnight Squad had originally anticipated that the false reality would exist for only a moment, Rularuu's infusion gave the new universe true form. It swirled up out of the Aether and formed a pocket universe, known as a shard, that was an exact replica of the Paragon City that Gerald and company had copied using the Dagger of Jocas.

Rularuu realized almost immediately that he was trapped – and the fact that it had taken him more than just a moment to fully comprehend his situation worried him more than anything. At his full power, such realizations should have come instantaneously. He had truly become but a shadow of his former self. He looked around this false city and found it full of very real people, including copies of the very Midnight Squad that had tricked him. He unleashed his full fury on the assembled – and startled – heroes. They fought back as best they could, but even in his weakened state Rularuu had more than enough power to tear them each limb from limb, along with most of the other copied heroes in the false city.

Not satisfied with slaying just the shadows of those who had defeated him, Rularuu's madness drove him even further. He had brought his hurricane with him into the Shadow Shard and now he increased its intensity to the point where it actually started to tear the reality of the place apart. Huge chunks of the city went flying off into space or shattered into millions of pieces. Hundreds of thousands of shadow people died – although to call them shadow people is to unfairly diminish them. Rularuu had given them all full life – they had all the feelings, memories, and emotions of the originals from which the Midnight Squad had copied them.

Rularuu's rage lasted for almost a year as he systematically searched every atom of the Shadow Shard in his quest to find a way out. But he was literally trapped within himself. He'd given up so much power to give the realm permanency that he no longer even had the ability to peer out into the Aether or into other realms. He couldn't even use his most basic ritual and link with another one of his selves (something he dearly wanted to do to Gerald the Green). Finally, he resolved himself to his fate, or at least to the fact that he was going to have to find a long term solution to his problem.

As the Ravager, Rularuu had not spent a whole lot of time building anything. He hadn't even really had a home or base of operations for centuries. Although he had the knowledge of several dozen universes stored away in his brain, the Shadow Shard's creation had scattered and jumbled his thoughts. It took him a while to start to piece together a plan for how he would shape his own little personal kingdom. He made an early, vain attempt to simply rebuild the city as it once was, but soon grew bored with the results. He let his imagination run wild a little bit, and constructed his new home to more closely suit his own special needs.

While Rularuu retains just a small fraction of his former power, by Earth standards he's still amazingly powerful. His preferred modes of transportation are flight and teleportation (his feet haven't touched the ground in years), so he saw no reason to retain the basically two-dimensional arrangement that had once governed the city's design. He also found that he could easily bend and reshape such basic elements as the laws of physics. Thus he could create low or high gravity areas to suit his needs, pipes and rivers that flowed up instead of down, and his own multi-hued, ever shifting sky in place of a sun and stars (which didn't exist in the Shadow Shard as real celestial bodies anyway).

Of course this radical new construction left the hundreds of thousands of surviving humans in a state of shock and confusion – but nothing worse than what they'd already experienced when Rularuu fist tore the shard apart. Ninety percent of Paragon City's shadow residents had died during that time, and many of those who did survive only did so because they either had super powers or were rescued by someone who

did. All the major heroes had died fighting Rularuu in those first few hours, but hundreds of lesser powers had survived. They were smart enough to know that they couldn't do anything against Rularuu's god-like puissance and so had hidden themselves from his wrath as best they could.

Rularuu had paid little attention to the survivors. He simply didn't care what happened to them. Having devoured whole realities, the fate of a few shadow humans who wouldn't even exist were it not for his sacrifice of power didn't even register on his radar screen. But soon Rularuu began to experience two emotions he had not felt for quite some time – loneliness and boredom. He'd had no need for companionship or entertainment when he was busy sucking in other people's knowledge and experience. But now he needed some sort of distraction, some kind of companionship. Furthermore, he could use any help he could get when it came to finding a way to escape his current predicament.

And so Rularuu sought out the survivors and brought them all together in a great, many-tiered public plaza that he'd constructed out of different pieces of roadway and parking lots. Although he has keen, supernatural senses and some clairvoyance, Rularuu is not omniscient within the shadow shard. A few hundred managed to stay hidden away, but the vast majority – about a hundred thousand – gathered together out of fear or curiosity to see what Rularuu had to say. The Ravager appeared before the assembled masses as a hundred foot tall floating figure in purple and yellow robes. His head had long ago

left any pretensions to being human and instead appeared utterly demonic. His hands burned with green fire and he stood atop a column of smoke and multi-hued lightning.

Rularuu spoke for many, many hours. Once he started talking it was like he couldn't stop or, at the very least, he didn't want to stop. He quite frankly and openly told them about his past and how he came to be a ravager of realities. Naturally he left out the embarrassing bits and focused on his great accomplishments, his limitless knowledge, and his world shattering power. He didn't mention how he'd gotten himself into his current situation at all, but rather implied that he'd chosen to create the Shadow Shard for his own mysterious purposes. Then he gave them all a choice – serve him or be broken down into their constituent atoms and rebuilt into something useful. Everyone assembled agreed to do as he commanded, although really, what else could they say? Of course, in their hearts, most of them pledged allegiance out of fear, not devotion, and secretly hoped to one day find away back to their home (since of course, none of them realized that they were copies of the originals and therefore already were home).

7.16.5 Reign of Rularuu

Rularuu the Ravager became Lord Rularuu in 1970. He set up his little kingdom with several important goals in mind, some short term, and one long term. The overriding goal remained finding a way out of this prison. He now knew for certain that he couldn't do that on his own, so he had decided to try and find some other way. He'd consumed realities where science had created portals for passing through from one

reality to another and he retained a basic knowledge of how such things functioned. He hoped to harness the creative and intellectual abilities of his new subjects to the task of helping him rediscover the entire technology – or a magical equivalent – to break through the dimension barrier.

In the meantime, the society as a whole needed to be organized and the use of resources tightly controlled. Rularuu retained tremendous mystic power. He could transform matter at the atomic level with a fair amount of effort or simply reshape and reform basic materials with ease. His control over things like gravity and even time and space within his dimension gave him great flexibility in defining

reality. But one thing Rularuu could not escape was the fact that there was a very finite amount of matter and energy within the Shadow Shard. With no access to even a sun for light and energy for plants to photosynthesize, the realm's resources needed to be very carefully conserved. Just making sure there's enough food and power for everyone (including his own needs) takes up much of his time. For more information on the food chain in the Shadow Shard, see that document.

Rularuu has tinkered with nearly everything in the Shadow Shard to one degree or another, including the denizens. He has tweaked the way their brains work, expanding their minds and mental capacity to help him focus on finding a way out of this prison he accidentally created for himself. The vast majority of the denizens were, for the past thirty years or so, entirely engaged in scientific or magical research of one sort

or another. Those who weren't were busy working to support those who were. This vast commitment to research is quite an accomplishment given that none of the individuals involved had any training in the appropriate fields. Everything they've learned they either got from Rularuu's own fragmentary memories or from their own discoveries. It has been a slow going process and, even given the access to mutable laws of physics and whatever equipment they need, not much progress has been made. Up until recently, they'd managed only to create a device capable of sending out a signal into other, nearby dimensions and

scanning them for basic facts. This turned out to be an achievement whose consequences they couldn't have foreseen.

Of course not everyone went along with Rularuu's game plan. Those initial few hundred survivors who had hidden themselves from the Ravager remained hidden as best they could. They had the sympathetic help of many of those who had pledged allegiance to the lord of the Shadow Shard. Many of the realm's remaining super powered beings were among the hidden, and they became the nucleus of a resistance group. But their form of resistance was very passive. They feared any attempt to directly – or even indirectly confront Rularuu. Instead they focused on stealing away resources from him and working on their own efforts to escape the Shadow Shard and return home. Occasionally Rularuu would find one or more of them and then his anger was terrible to behold. He'd publicly execute the rebels and lash out against any loyalists who happened to be nearby. Resisting Rularuu proved a deadly vocation, but those who did so felt they had no choice.

7.16.6 The First Rikti Invasion

The first Rikti to invade Paragon City came not to Earth, but to the Shadow Shard, albeit, they came in much smaller numbers. While preparing for their invasion, the Rikti spent a great deal of time surveying our own dimension. During this time, they picked up the scanning signal sent out from the Shadow Shard. Without that signal, the Rikti would never have noticed the tiny pocket universe since it was so small that it was lost in the noise and chaos of the Aether. The Rikti's own, much more advanced scans determined that this shadow shard seemed to be attached to and created from the very dimension they planned to invade.

Imagining that perhaps this was some kind of secret military installation or other target of military interest, the Rikti sent several drones and scouting teams into Rularuu's realm to ascertain if the place was a threat. They quickly determined that, yes indeed, it could be a threat since the ruler possessed godlike

power levels. However, they also determined that the realm had no contact whatsoever with Earth.

They decided to withdraw from the realm without engaging the residents in battle and to keep a watchful eye on it. If Rularuu's realm became involved in the war at any stage then the Rikti would act against it, but until then, they decided to leave it be.

Rularuu and his subjects lived through the Rikti War without ever realizing it was going on just nextdoor. Indeed, it might have been centuries before the original Earth and the Shadow Shard came into contact were it not for a captured Rikti database. During and after the war, any data recovered from the Rikti about inter-dimensional travel immediately got transferred to the Portal Corp for analysis. The analysts had tons of data to sift through after the war, and it was only recently that they finally decoded and evaluated some information about the Rikti's scouting of the Shadow Shard. All the Portal Corp analysts could determine was that the Rikti had visited the realm shortly before the war and that it seemed

to be connected directly to Paragon City in some way. Obviously, this bore some investigation.

Unlike the Rikti, who were experts at covertly scouting other dimensions, the Portal Corp team that first went through the barrier into the Shadow Shard did not take enough pains to secure their secrecy. They had opened a portal into an area of the realm that still looked somewhat like the original Paragon City that they had expected from a dimension so closely situated to our own. It didn't take Rularuu long to discover them, and when he did, he sprang into action. He immediately seized all but two of the ten-person exploration team. Those last two had been left behind to guard the portal location where a group of resistance fighters found and captured them. Thus, almost simultaneously, Rularuu and the resistance both learned about the existence of Portal Corp, our world, and a possible means to escape.

Fortunately for Earth, the Portal Corp techs back home automatically shut down the portal when they didn't hear back from the exploration team. But something strange had happened. While the portal was closed, the connection between the two realities was not entirely severed. Because the Shadow Shard was,

in reality, a part of our own dimension rather than a unique plane unto itself, it yearned to be reconnected with its "parent." The Portal Corp could thus not fully close the path between the two worlds. Not only would it now be much easier for people to travel to and from the Portal Corp facility to the Shadow Shard, but the possibility of random portals opening up between the two dimensions became very real. Back in the Shadow Shard, Rularuu easily picked apart his captives through a combination of torture and mental powers. Within a day he knew a great deal about the true Earth, the Rikti invasion, and Portal Corp. He had of course immediately investigated the site where the explorers entered the Shadow Shard and found traces of the connection to Earth. He immediately set his scientists to investigating the area with all the equipment they had available. Meanwhile, the resistance fighters were also learning from their "captives." They told the explorers everything they knew about Rularuu and described what had happened to them. The Portal Corp explorers agreed to help them escape back to Earth if they could get back to the portal location and open a doorway home.

The two Earthlings and a group of about forty resistance fighters mounted a lightning raid against Rularuu's scientists. Rularuu had never had much need for soldiers, guards, or police of any kind. His own power had always been more than sufficient to ensure law and order. The attackers quickly overwhelmed the scientists guarding the location and the explorers sent their emergency retrieval signal. Rularuu rushed to the scene in time to see several dozen of his subjects rushing through an interdimensional

gateway. He of course followed them. But Portal Corp was ready to repel any such unwanted guests. Applying a combination of force fields and energy weapons, they quickly drove Rularuu back through the portal before he even realized what was happening. Even so, his own defenses managed to kill fifteen people in the Portal Corp facility and cause substantial damage. But the portal was closed once again, and Rularuu was trapped. Not only was he trapped, he was injured – something that hadn't happened to him since he was human.

Rularuu was actually a little bit frightened. He could taste his victory, but he could also taste his death. On the other side of the barrier he had been much, much weaker than he expected. So much of his power

was wrapped up in creating and maintaining the Shadow Shard reality, that Rularuu at home and Rularuu anywhere else were two vastly different beings. As long as the Portal Corp continued to effectively guard their portal facility, he didn't think he could get back through there without an army. Which obviously meant it was time to start building just that.

Portal Corp was all for just sealing off the Shadow Shard and never looking back, but unfortunately they couldn't do that. After extensive debriefings with the explorers and the new refugees, they began to get some idea of what the Shadow Shard really was. Although none of the Midnight Squad who'd fought Rularuu was still alive, they were able to go through the hero group's archives and pull out some salient details about Rularuu. They surmised what had happened, and eventually came to the conclusion that the realm could not be ignored. At the urging of the refugee resistance fighters they also had to admit that they owed it to Rularuu's subjects to try and rescue them from his tyrannical reign. After all, they were actually citizens of Paragon City too, in a weird way.

And so the battle lines were drawn and the time for a war between the Shadow Shard and Earth had come.

Rularuu was intent on fighting his way through the portal (which his scientists would soon figure out how to open) and the Portal Corp and its allies needed to overthrow Rularuu and rescue the Shadow Shard's

human population from slavery. A month after their first incursion into the Shadow Shard, The Portal Corp started sending in strike teams to secure a foothold in the realm. What they found surprised them tremendously – Rularuu's newly minted army had taken the field. The resulting battle was tremendously bloody and costly, but the humans eventually prevailed. They left the portal permanently open and used as a conduit to place a force field around the beachhead. Thus far, Rularuu has been unable to break through, although his power grows daily.

The Portal Corp knows that humanity is on a ticking clock. They must defeat Rularuu before he finds his own way out of the Shadow Shard. Otherwise he will be free to once again start devouring whole realities, and there's little question as to where he will start first. And the next time, it probably won't be so easy to trick him.

7.16.7 The Army of Rularuu

Rularuu had never made an army before. Indeed, he'd scarcely ever made anything at all in his long existence. He'd been so busy destroying things, he'd never had the time or inclination to build anything. His thirty-five years in Shadow Shard have taught him a lot about creation and modification. He's fashioned a funhouse reality from his own imagination and altered his human subjects to make them into better scientists. When it came time to quickly create an army to fight for the portal, he first turned to the humans once again. But he also drew upon the fragmented but still extensive database of knowledge in his head about the scores of universes and billions of inhabited worlds that he'd devoured in his time. He culled through these memories for the deadliest warriors he could recall and used them as models for his new soldiers. The result is a mixed bag of styles and influences from across time and space, but which together have formed a decidedly dangerous and effective fighting force.

Rularuu wants to keep as many humans as possible still working at trying to make their own portals. Since the battle with Earth began, Rularuu has been using captive soldiers and heroes as raw materials for his army-building program in addition to his own subjects. Still conscious of the finite resources available to him in the Shadow Shard, he uses everything at his disposal, from dead enemy soldiers to spent shell casings and discarded cigarette butts. Any bit of matter or energy that the Earthlings bring into the Shadow Shard is more fodder for his mills. Even the energy put out by the Portal Corp force fields has proven a valuable new resource.

7.16.7.1 Field Marshals

The only soldiers not created from humans or spare bits of matter and energy are the few dozen generals who oversee Rularuu's growing army – the Field Marshals. Rularuu doesn't really trust any of his subjects. He's smart enough to know that they'd all run given half a chance. Even though he heavily indoctrinates his soldiers with mind control and memory wiping magic, he still won't risk putting command in one of their hands. Therefore, he had no choice but to lead the armies himself. Of course, he

can't be everywhere at once, but part of him can. The Field Marshals are just that – parts of Rularuu himself that he has broken off from his core being and given lives of their own. Each of them is a fully formed personality from one of the many selves that Rularuu has devoured over the ages. These personae are all still loyal to the greater Rularuu whole. They've been around long enough to come to appreciate and enjoy the power that being Rularuu gives. Thus they're totally loyal to the Ravager. They do not, however, continue to share thoughts or memories. Each Field Marshal is a complete individual once again, with a small (but significant) fraction of Rularuu's power. Under other circumstances the Ravager would never have made such a sacrifice, but in this instance he felt that he had no choice. Each Field Marshal resembles Rularuu himself, although their looks vary slightly, as they're all individuals and tend to choose colors and accoutrements that best suit their personalities. However, the overall look is consistent, since it serves as their badge of office and authority. Dressed in deep purple robes, the Field Marshal stands twelve feet in height. There are no feet visible since, like the Ravager himself they travel by floating, flying, or teleportation. The robes have intricate designs and patterns in colors that vary depending on the Marshal's tastes. Their hands are more claw like than human and are constantly surrounded by a halo of blue or green flames. Their heads are demonic, almost dragon like snouts with different arrangements of horns and spikes depending on the individual Field Marshal's tastes.

Field Marshals are powerful foes in their own right, but their true terror comes from their ability to lead Rularuu's armies. They each have several thousand soldiers assigned to them, which they can instantly

teleport to their side in times of need (effectively summoning more minions). They can also reshape energy and matter like their master, allowing them to heal themselves and their soldiers during the course of battle.