

The Discovery of god
by R. Patrick McLaughlin*

I should begin by introducing myself to you. My name is R. Patrick McLaughlin, and I am the author of this story. I feel it is necessary to establish my identity due to the nature of the narrative I hope to share. Everything considered, I recognize that this is an odd introduction, but in order for you to fully appreciate the world I have created (yes, I realize I am using past tense even though from your point of view I have not yet created this world), I believe it is necessary.

In this story you will recognize my words, which are the source of my creative power in my world, in three forms. The first is in this plain format lacking quotation marks. This is my narration of occurring events and also my commentary. The second form will be italicized, also lacking quotation marks. This will be my dialogue with characters in the story. The third form does not need to be explained, as I am sure that you will recognize it when it happens. Now... let there be creation.

It was quiet, a stilled silence, and dark. How can I describe what it looked like? It was the absence of anything. I will call it "nothing." That is how things were. But I replaced the nothing. At first there was only white, like a blank canvas. That is where you joined me. And now, with your permission, we will take a journey together, a journey that will begin and end with the discovery of god.

His name will be Dorim. That is what I will call him. What will he be like? I hope he will appreciate all that I have done for him, and all that I will do for him. I hope he becomes everything I want him to become. I hope he turns out the way I want. But how could he not? I love him dearly. Before creating him I already know that I will do anything for him.

Dorim, Dorim, wake up.

Dorim lay sleeping on the floor of the earth, amidst the leaves and stones. Turning slightly, he seems to be aware that I am calling him. Still, he does not answer.

Dorim, it is time to wake up.

"Who is calling me?" he asks as he slowly sits up.

It is a shame really, because I enjoy watching him sleep. He is so innocent.

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“Who is calling me?” he asks again. I should respond.

It is I.

“Who are you?” he asks.

I am the author.

“The author?”

I appreciate his curiosity. I hope he never loses it or misuses its potential.

Yes, the author. Everything you see, feel, and experience is the result of what I write. Another way to think of me is the creator, if that helps.

Dorim stands up and looks around. There are trees randomly scattered on rolling hills where long blades of grass get caught in the high wind. Cascading like waves in the ocean, they peacefully sway as far as he can see. The sky is bright blue. White clouds dance across it, occasionally breaking the warm sunlight.

Animals, both large and small, run together through the fields. In the air, birds swoop and glide with all the grace of my imagination. The waters thrive with seemingly infinite forms of life, all of them as splendid as the deepest colors of my dreams.

On the horizon a vast chain of mountains stretches across the long plains. The taller ones are capped with pure white snow. At their base rests a thick forest with a great variety of plant life. Trees of different seed grow as they climb the mountains toward the shorter peaks. Flowers of every color spill out of the forest onto the open fields where streams make their way to endless oceans.

Dorim stands in awe. The beauty of my world brings a beaming glow to his face. It is a world in which vast diversity swirls together like melodies intertwining into perfect harmony. Everywhere he looks, there is peace. Everywhere he looks, there is abundant life.

Turning around, he sees a great tree in the distance. Towering high above the other trees, it stands as a testament to my greatness. Its leaves dance in the soft breezes, casting elusive shadows all about the earth. The greens and yellows twirl in front of its thick branches. Like an intricate tapestry these branches weave together forming a perfect sphere high above the ascending trunk of the tree. It is truly a work of art.

He does not know this at the moment, but I have created this tree retrospectively. He really cannot know, but I am attempting to make a point to him, though I know he will not understand it. I have entered into the past to create this tree. That is how things are as the author. Being outside of the story, I have access to every point of time simultaneously. I can see the beginning and

the end even now. As a reader, you will understand this better within the next 1,312 words you read.

“It’s all so beautiful,” he says to me as he stares in wonderment. “I have never seen anything like this before.”

I am glad you like it.

“I love it.”

It is all yours.

“Mine?” he asks.

You may wonder, as I have just created Dorim, how he understands what I am saying. Somehow, he does. I made him that way, so it is no surprise to me. I say it is no surprise to me, but of course as the author I cannot really be surprised. I always know what will happen next. Surely I cannot write anything without knowing what I am writing.

“Are you still there?” he asks me.

When I am not speaking to him it is only natural for him to wonder if I am still here. He cannot see me. How could he? He is a character in a story I am creating, and I am the author outside of the story. We are in two very different categories, Dorim and I. Even though I have an image in my mind that is similar to myself as I write about him, we are utterly different from one another. Thus, I could not write about our interaction any other way. The best I could do is to describe myself to him in his terms, but he would not fully understand. As a character in the story he could never comprehend what it is like to be outside the story. So I only speak to him in metaphors describing myself, and not me as I truly am; that is, as I am outside the story.

“Are you still there?” he asks again.

Yes, I am here.

“What did you mean when you said this is all mine?”

It is yours to take care of.

Dorim stands and looks out across the land. “What is this place called?”

What would you like to call it?

“Lyria,” he says.

Then ‘Lyria’ it is.

Dorim looks in the distance, and there is smoke rising. It was only a matter of time until his attention was drawn to it. A lengthy wall extends far across the borders of Lyria. Behind it are strange rock formations, much less natural than the mountains previously mentioned. They are symmetrical towers, like high-standing skyscrapers in an unforgiving city.

He looks bewildered. “What is that?” he asks.

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And so it begins. My breath is already stolen from me.

That is Andra, the land of a vast city.

“Andra?” he asks. “Can I go there?”

Absolutely not, Dorim. Andra is a place far from Lyria. It is a single massive city of jagged rocks and buildings. They are entangled together like a dissonant chord, forming a hopeless snare. As the city is so far away from all of my trees, it is infectious, polluted by a combination of its self-productivity and its disposition. If you live there, you will surely become ill and die.

“Why not put your trees there as well then?”

I cannot live in Andra, and my trees cannot live without me. Andra is polluted because I am not there. That is its disposition.

Dorim turns to me in confusion. “Why aren’t you there?”

I do not answer immediately. It is not the right moment. Sensing my reluctance, Dorim moves quickly to another question.

“Did you create that place?” he asks. “You did say you are the creator, right?”

This is a strange sensation. He is questioning me. In his heart, I know his true thought is, ‘Why did you create a place that could kill me?’ I shall answer his hidden question.

I had to create it.

“Why?” he asks. “You said those who live there will die.”

But that is only because those who are with me will live. Understand, without me life will end. But I want you to live by your own choice. Without Andra, there would only be Lyria. If that were the case, how could you choose to live in Lyria?

“I am not sure I understand,” he says.

I know, Dorim. In time, the answers will come. Until then, you must trust me.

Dorim smiles as he turns warmly back to the beautiful sights of Lyria. “I do trust you,” he says. “This place is perfect, and I have no need to leave. I will stay with you, here in Lyria.”

For the longest time, Dorim and I talk about a great many things. He does amazingly well at his task of taking care of everything I have made. The world beckons at his call in full submission and he in turn governs in love.

In the morning, when the dew is still fresh, he walks through the fields stirring the animals to life. During the day he travels all throughout Lyria, from the high mountains to the low valleys. Everywhere he goes, he tends to the life of Lyria. Whether tree or flower, mammal or reptile, bird or fish, he gives the greatest care to ensure their comfort.

As the sun slowly falls behind the horizon, he often stands on the cliffs in the east and spreads his arms as the swift breezes blow in from the sea. Closing his eyes, he imagines he is a bird taking flight over the forests. At night, he lies down in the fields and stares into the sky, watching the lights dance as he drifts into peaceful slumber.

However, over time he seems to grow overly inquisitive. Even with a world as grand as my deepest imagination, he stands at the border and looks onward. Part of him is not satisfied. Part of him feels alone. Worst of all, I find him looking at Andra with silent curiosity. In his head, he hears a foreign voice calling out to him. It is the voice of doubt. It is his own voice, but he does not recognize it.

One day, I notice he is walking through the woods carrying a strange rock. It is a rock from the base of the outer wall at Andra.

Dorim, what is that you are carrying?

His face turns pale with a sensation that is new to him. It is fear. "Nothing," he says through a quivering voice, "just this rock."

Where did you get it?

Looking long at the rock, Dorim takes a deep and long breath. "Why won't you let me explore Andra?" he asks me.

I told you Dorim, you will die if you go there. Andra is where I am not.

"How can you not be there?" he continues. "You made it. You must have been there when you made it."

It does not work that way. I am everywhere, but not the way you understand it.

"Then explain it to me."

You will not understand.

"Am I not intelligent enough?"

It has nothing to do with that. Your existence is simply not analogous to mine. You cannot understand what my existence is like.

"Why did you make me that way? Why not make me able to understand?"

It simply is not possible.

"Why not?" he asks, quite irritated.

I can try to show you, but it will not make sense from your perspective.

"Please," he says, "just try."

Very well. Turn around.

Dorim turns around and sees a massive tree stretching up into the beautiful sky.

"What?" he asks me.

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What about that tree?

“It is a great tree,” he says. “You can see it from almost anywhere in Lyria.”

At this point, as I mentioned before, 1,249 words earlier to be exact, I am returning to an earlier section of the story to write this tree into existence.

I just created it.

“Nonsense,” he says, “this tree has been here as long as I can remember.”

Yes I know, but that is only because I just went back in the story to create it.

“Went back?”

Into the past.

“No,” he says in disbelief. “That’s not possible. That tree has always been there. I remember it.”

I am sure that is how it seems. I want you to trust me, Dorim, even though you cannot understand.

“Are you keeping something from me?”

Dorim, you know that I would do anything for you. Have I ever given you reason to doubt that?

“Take me the Andra then. Prove what you say is true.”

You still do not understand. I cannot take you to Andra, because if I were in Andra it would no longer be Andra; it would be Lyria.

“That doesn’t make any sense!” His voice is escalating.

Look at the tree again.

Dorim, though goaded, turns again to look at the great tree.

What do you want to see?

“What do you mean?”

What do you want to see happen to that tree?

“Anything?”

Anything.

Dorim shakes his head trying to make sense of our conversation. I can tell he feels frustrated, as if I am giving him riddles rather than explaining myself plainly to him. Finally, he decides to comply with my request. “Make it glow,” he commands.

The tree begins to glow vibrantly, as if reflecting the brightest light from the sun. Dorim shields his eyes.

“Make it stop!” he cries.

Immediately the tree ceases to glow. Dorim slowly removes his hands from his eyes.

“How do you do it?”

I told you, Dorim, I am the author. I am the creator of everything you experience. The world will bend to my words.

Dorim turns sharply. “And what about me?”

This is an interesting question.

What would you like to say?

“You can make me say something?”

Yes.

Dorim looks into the sky with disgust. “You can’t make me say anything.”

Andra would be evil.

“You want me to say that?”

Yes.

“I won’t say it,” he cried out, “because I don’t know it aside from you telling me that.”

You said you trusted me, Dorim. You need to trust me.

“I want to trust you. But how can I really trust you if I don’t understand you?”

I make myself known to you. I have told you nothing false. Please trust me, Andra would be evil.

“Then you created evil,” he accuses.

No. Andra only has the power that you give it. If you do not live there, it is good. As soon as you leave Lyria, Andra becomes evil.

“I don’t understand.”

To be in Lyria is to be with me. I needed to create a place other than Lyria. If I did not, then you would be forced to live in Lyria. I have told you this before. I have set before you two places, one is with me, and the other is apart from me. Choose to be with me.

“And it would be evil for me to be apart from you?”

Yes.

“And the main difference between Andra and Lyria is your presence?”

Yes.

“So without Andra, I would not be able to choose to be with you.”

Yes. Because I have done this, you can choose where to live. You can choose to remain with me in Lyria.

“Then as long as I choose to stay in Lyria, Andra just means that I am free to leave.”

Yes.

“So, Andra is only a threat if I enter it.”

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And if you did enter it?

“Then Andra would be evil.”

But Dorim pauses after he says this. He looks down. He remembers that this is exactly what I wanted him to say.

“If I stay here,” he whispers desperately, “I will always say what you want me to say.”

I remain silent. I know that if he does what I want him to do, it is for his own good.

“What kind of freedom is this?” he asks as he laughs to himself, almost defiantly.

What?

“What kind of freedom is this?” he shouts at the top of his lungs.

I have made you free, Dorim.

“Do you control me like you control the great tree? At the whim of your wit do I act?”

No, you are different.

“How?”

Because you only act as you want to act. You only act in line with your character, with your nature.

“But you gave me that character! You gave me that nature, didn’t you?” Dorim stands in a rage. “This is no kind of freedom!”

Turning from me, he walks away. He is leaving me. Before I made him I decided I would do anything for him, and I know this will cost me everything.

Dorim...

He pauses. Fiercely, he turns to me. “I know why you don’t want to me to go to Andra. It’s because in Andra you won’t have control over me anymore. I will have control over myself! I won’t need you there, because I will become what you are!”

With this he turns again and continues walking.

Dorim, come back.

This time he does not respond. He does not even hesitate.

Dorim!

As he walks, he knows that I am with him, and will be as long as he is in Lyria. He begins to run now, as if fearing either his conscience or my voice will dissuade his pursuit. Suddenly, he stops and turns around. For the entire reach of his sight, he sees only peace, swaying grass and beautiful trees against a backdrop of majestic mountains. Everything he knows is there in Lyria.

Looking again in front of him, he sees a great stone wall. It is Andra. His feet are flush with a large wooden door. I call to him, but he does not want to hear me. He places his hand on the cold rock and walks along the wall with a distorted smile on his face. For the first time, he feels truly free. Like silence before a storm is his feeling of freedom before an intense slavery. After walking for a while, he stops. Again, he stands before a large wooden door. In fact, it looks exactly the same as the last door.

“That’s odd,” he says as he rubs his eyes.

He looks in both directions down the wall and sees no other door. Quickly he moves farther along the wall about ten paces and then looks back. There is no door there, but in front of him stands the same wooden door. It is following him. Andra desires to have him. Taking a deep breath, he pushes on it.

As the door opens, he sees it: tall grey towers on frost-covered bedrock. There are endless streets and walls spilling forth in every direction. Everything is faded and cold. Overhead a dull sky moves aimlessly along the horizon. The calloused bricks loom over Dorim everywhere he turns. There is no life on the floor or walls. The green plants and vibrant flowers of Lyria are nowhere to be found. All is lifeless, colorless, distant and unfeeling. I call to him again, but he does not hear me. Instead, he walks deep into Andra.

The city is a maze, its walls forming entangled corridors that lock their prey inside them. With the passing of hours, the harsh corners of the buildings shift to new positions, making the already impossible stone labyrinth a perpetually changing secret. It is an unsolvable puzzle from the inside. And that is where Dorim stands, lost inside this curse. I call to him again.

Dorim, please come back.

There is a pale look in his eyes. For a moment, his heart warms. Part of him wants to return, but it cannot convince his more determined side. He feels conflicted. Deep inside, he hears a muffled and distorted voice calling as if from a distant dungeon. It proclaims my words, but only in vain. The greater part of his resolve fights against me. In frustration, he strikes his head against a rock to stop the voice he hears. Everything goes black. He falls asleep.

Time and time again this occurs. I can see that he does not respond to my voice, at least not from this great void that separates us. No matter how many times I try to call him, he does not listen. He is becoming consumed by himself. I am not with him, not as I desire to be. He is alone, and he has left me alone as well. At this rate, he will die soon. For now, if I cannot bring him out of Andra, I will have to protect him while he lives there. As much as I want him to return, I will have to give him instruction on how to survive in Andra. But no

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amount of instruction can sustain him indefinitely while he is away from me. The air is poisonous. Without the trees of Lyria, without my presence, he will not survive long.

I want him to return. In his absence, the world has grown wild. Throughout Lyria the peace that once reigned under Dorim's stewardship has been replaced with chaos. All is spinning in disarray and confusion. The animals have turned on one another without Dorim governing them. The plants have grown untamed and competitive. I remember how they lived together in harmony, but now all life has turned to one desire: self-preservation. Only the fittest survive while the weak are left to the whims of the powerful. Dorim's relationship to the rest of my creation was an integral part to the world's design. Without him, all has fallen into ruin. While he stays in Andra, the entire world rejects his authority. The stones dance about him, mocking his reign. They pay no heed to his welfare. The world mourns and taunts its once powerful servant.

I know the conflict inside of him will not easily be solved, but still I call to him from the distance. Dorim was right: there is part of me that is in Andra. Somehow, even though he is there, I am near him. It is the words I write. I cannot be far removed, because through my words I am as near to him as ever. With every letter I write, I am somehow beside him, in his presence. But I feel so far away, like an outcast from my own creation. He is much like the world: he both mourns and taunts his once powerful servant.

As he wanders aimlessly through the endless halls of stone, I speak to him about how to live in Andra. I tell him the rules that he must follow for his survival. But he will never be able to follow them; he lacks the strength while he is away from me. These laws may help him stay alive, but he will never be free to breathe like he breathed in Lyria. Nor will these instructions I give him stir his memories of better times in Lyria. As long as he is so far from me, he will never remember what true freedom is, what true life is. Still, it is better that he survive by these laws, albeit only survival for a short period of time, than not to survive at all.

He hears me less and less as the future turns swiftly into the past. He has forgotten the beautiful colors of Lyria. He is parched for water. As he breathes, clouds of dust swarm into the air, only to re-enter his lungs with his next inhaling. His eyes are darkened and glazed. For as long as he has lived there, he has never seen the brightness of the sun. He knows only grey. He feels only cold and damp. Though once enjoying the plethora of life in Lyria, he now smells only the lifelessness of rocks and his own stench that stalks him like a shadow. He has lost himself. Whereas at one time he knew who he was by knowing who I am, now he has nothing by which to define his existence. He

speaks only to himself, conjuring specters that do not actually exist. Walking without purpose, he stumbles over his own feet. With only himself as a measure, he has lost all identity.

With every passing moment, Dorim becomes more ill, wasting away like a rock under constant, dripping water. I know what must be done. Someone must go into Andra to save him. It is the only way. But whom do I send? As the author, I could create another character to send, but after entering Andra, he or she would no longer hear me either. Surely that character would die alongside of Dorim. Not only that, but I know that Dorim would not listen to a stranger. He needs to hear my voice, but my voice cannot effectively reach him. I must find a way to get my voice into Andra through a person who will not lose touch with me while there.

There is only one way this is possible. I will write myself, R. Patrick McLaughlin, as a character in this story. It is the only way I will be assured Dorim will hear me and the character will not lose sight of me. How could I lose sight of myself? In this way, I can enter into the story to save Dorim while simultaneously remaining outside of it to guide myself. As a character of the story, I must be careful to remain fully obedient to myself as the author; for, I might find myself attracted to the deceptive freedom of Andra as well. It is a risk I must take. Before making Dorim, I agreed I would do anything for him, and this must be done or he will die. I always knew it would come to this. As I mentioned before, there are no surprises.

Ryan, wake up. It is time.

Ryan turns and looks around. How strange it is to be part of this story! The feeling is unlike anything I have known before.

Walking to the walls of Andra, Ryan stands at a wooden door.

Wait. Before you enter, swallow this.

A small glass sphere of pure water descends from the sky. Ryan swallows it just as I requested.

This is my voice. I put it in you so that when the time comes, it will be released from you. You are my very own, like a son created from my essence, but you have been as long as I have been, because we are one and the same, though different. I am well pleased with you. You must not fail.

Ryan takes a deep breath and opens the door to Andra. As he enters, he notices that the air is thick like a blistering, humid day. Immediately he feels the pain of separation. I feel it, too. We feel it together, the same, yet differently.

Andra is a horrid maze. You are trapped inside of it. In order to find and save Dorim, you will have to do exactly as I say.

“I will not waver,” Ryan says to me.

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With great precision, I direct him through the sharp turns. But there is a problem. Andra recognizes something is stirring. As far as truth can be told, the author is not in Andra, because Ryan is a character in the story. How clever this is! But Andra senses something is amiss. It will not give up its prize without a fight. Falling from the towers, large stones surround Ryan. Andra is trying to trap him.

“What should I do?” Ryan asks me.

You are as the author. You can speak the words. Speak as I have spoken.

“Andra turns peaceful, and the rocks move to the side,” he says.

All the towers cease to crumble, and everything becomes peaceful. The rocks that blocked his path move away and the streets are clear before him.

You must hurry, Ryan. Dorim needs you.

As determined as ever, Ryan runs through the maze. I direct his every step with my words. Finally, he turns a corner and sees a man lying helplessly on the ground. It is Dorim. His skin is pale and his eyes blank like those of one long dead, but he is still breathing.

I have sent you at the right time. Wake him.

“Dorim, wake up!” Ryan shouts as he shakes Dorim.

As his eyes slowly open, a dry coating crumbles away.

“Who are you?” Dorim whispers desperately.

“Do you not recognize me?” Ryan responds.

“Your voice,” he says, “I know your voice.”

He is still delusional, driven nearly mad by the poisonous air and the lack of water and food. But even now, as I am so near to him, he knows his master’s voice.

“Dorim you must get out of here. You are going to die.”

“You have the voice of the author,” Dorim says in a hoarse tone. “How is that possible?”

Ryan looks down at the earth, and then to the grey sky. He sighs. “I am as the author,” he says to Dorim.

“Impossible,” he slurs. “If you’re the author, then who is writing the story?”

“I know it does not make sense, but you must believe me. You cannot accept that I am the author and that the author remains outside of this tale, but it is true. It does not make sense from your perspective, or from mine, but you must believe me! Dorim, I need you to trust me.”

When Ryan says this, Dorim stands and looks into his eyes. For a brief moment, he remembers what it is to be human, to be alive. For a brief moment,

he feels a sensation of peace and clarity. Somehow, he sees me in Ryan. But this is short-lived. He has come face to face with truth, and his heart cannot bear it. He sees himself as he should be, and it breaks him.

Dorim's head begins to shake. He convulses out of control.

"Get away from me!" he shouts.

He pushes Ryan down and begins to stagger away. But he stops before long. Turning slowly, his eyes roll to the back of his head.

"You're not the author," he cries wildly. "You can't be! You are a slave of Andra sent to deceive me."

"He has lost his mind," Ryan shouts to me. "He is going to kill me."

This is the only way.

A tear falls down Ryan's trembling face. His body shakes, brimming with fear. "So be it," he whispers softly.

Dorim bends to pick up a shard of rock broken off from the towers and walks slowly towards Ryan.

Tell him how to get out.

"Dorim, do you remember all the rules you follow to survive here?"

There is no response.

"Dorim, listen to me! Those rules cannot save you. If you stay here you will die! I have come to save you. I am as the author, Dorim! You must leave here."

Tell him how.

Dorim holds up the rock and moves more quickly towards Ryan, who looks at the dense maze.

"The walls move, creating a straight path to the edge of Andra. There a door waits leading to Lyria."

A loud rumbling noise erupts from Andra as the walls violently shift. Momentarily, Dorim stops to take note of the changing world. In the distance a wooden door appears at the end of a long path. What once was a maze is now a hallway to Lyria.

Dorim screams fiercely and charges at Ryan.

Ryan cries out to me, "He will not hear me when I am dead!"

My voice is in you. When you die it will be released, and he must drink the water.

"I see," Ryan says, still trembling. "The water is your voice from Lyria. If he drinks it, he will hear you."

Dorim swings mightily at Ryan's head, knocking him to the ground.

"Dorim," Ryan groans as he staggers at the deafening blow, "drink the water inside of me. You need the water."

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Again, Dorim strikes Ryan. He pauses, watching Ryan try to lift himself up. He is on his hands and knees, crawling, screaming, dying. He is the creator of all things. He is my very self. I cannot bear to watch. As he bleeds, everything inside of me breaks. Dorim swings again. Ryan calls out in anguish. Andra has tasted his blood and calls for more of it. I cannot bear to know it. I cannot bear to write it...

On the ground, my dead body lies broken like a piece of glass on jagged rocks. Dorim drops his makeshift weapon, now covered with blood. The walls of Andra howl as the wind whips through them. The unforgiving city has won. Closing in around Ryan and Dorim, the walls leave the two of them in utter darkness. But it is not the end. From Ryan's tattered body, a small pearl-shaped object emerges. It is my voice, and it erupts like thunder.

The walls shatter in every direction. Dorim shakes with fear. When he comes to his senses, he notices Ryan is no longer with him. All that is left is the small pearl-shaped object. Suddenly, water springs forth out of it. It is the water of Lyria. Dorim's thirst is great. He falls to his knees and drinks the water. The dust in his mouth washes away in a great flood. The pasty film that covered his withered throat disappears. The water rushes through every inch of his body and becomes like fire in his veins. For the first time in as long as he can remember, Dorim knows what it is to feel alive. Andra still shrieks while the stones rumble loudly as they move about. Dorim covers his ears. The sound is nearly unbearable. Suddenly, like the eye of a great storm, everything falls still for one brief moment and all that remains is a tranquil whisper.

Dorim, run to the door.

Dorim looks at the sky in disbelief. He can hear my voice. I am inside of him. "How is this possible?"

Run, Dorim!

The rocks that once blocked Ryan's path now move in Dorim's way as the cries of Andra resound more deafening than ever. Dorim runs madly for the door. Andra cannot stand his leaving.

"What do I do?" he asks me in panic.

Remember Dorim, Andra would be evil.

"What?"

You must say what I want you to say. Say the rocks move!

"The rocks move!" Dorim shouts without hesitation.

Like leaves caught in a hurricane the rocks burst into the sky. As soon as the path clears, Dorim continues running. The remaining walls close in quickly. As he runs, his arm gets caught in one of their crevices, and his hand grips the rocks. All at once the towers completely collapse around him. He

could command them away, but part of him still wants to remain in Andra. Pulling on his arm, his body begins to tear apart. He is simultaneously holding on and pulling away. The rocks cut him viciously as they tumble to his side.

Dorim, you must leave it behind!

With all of his might, Dorim pulls. His arm is left hanging on the wall as he sprints to the door and opens it. As he slams the door shut, Andra becomes completely silent.

Falling flat on his face, Dorim weeps bitterly.

Do not weep, Dorim. Why are you sad?

Dorim stands with his back to Andra. "Is Ryan still in there? How...?"

"No Dorim, I am here."

Looking up, Dorim sees Ryan standing in the open fields of Lyria. Suddenly, he disappears out of the story.

I will always be a character with you now, Dorim. I know what it is to be like you.

Dorim looks down at his torn body and knows that words cannot describe how penitent he feels for his actions against me. "Part of me is still in there," he says morosely.

You will never go back, Dorim. You know that, right?

"I will never want to," he replies. "There is no longer a need for Andra. I freely choose to stay with you forever."

Turning towards Andra, Dorim sees the city lying in ruins. It destroyed itself while trying to keep Dorim inside of it, and to some extent, it succeeded in both aims.

What do you want to see?

"What do I want to see?" he asked, slightly mystified.

What do you want to see happen to Andra?

"Anything?"

Anything.

"When I entered Andra," he says as he turns away from the remains of the city, "it turned against me and against you. It wanted me to die, and you to be left alone. Part of me turned against you in going there, and again in wanting to stay there. Justice must be done, and only you can do it."

Then I will do what must be done.

Dorim turns again to Andra. From the sky a strange sound begins to drone. A purple wind with floating lights cascades upon the city. Instantly it is consumed. The land that was once Andra is left as only a desolate field.

"Why not just destroy that land?" Dorim asks.

The Discovery of god

The goal is not destruction, but redemption. Whatever seeks to be redeemed will be redeemed. The rest has been destroyed, and there is bitter joy in it. Now everything will be one.

The sky above begins to clear, and the sun bursts forth on the once-forsaken land. From the barren dirt, one small green leaf appears. Soon, another joins it. Like a crescendo in a symphony more and more life appears. Color floods the land, consuming the shades of grey. As all manner of flowers and trees emerge, the whole world becomes Lyria. The animals cry out in joy at the sight as all the world sits in still peace and harmony.

“So,” Dorim says, “after all of this time, am I now back at the beginning? Have I finally returned to Lyria?”

At the beginning? Not at all, Dorim. Andra is destroyed. As you said yourself, you no longer need Andra in order to freely choose Lyria. Because you have experienced Andra, and I have saved you from it, you know what Lyria truly is. No Dorim, you are so far from the beginning.

Dorim smiles. “How can I ever thank you?” he asks.

This is the point for which I have been waiting from the beginning: the turning point. Dorim now knows that I love him and that I have given everything for him. Now, I will hear what I have longed to hear from the very beginning. After his long journey, I will hear him say, on his own accord, that he loves me.

You can thank me by answering a question. Do you love me, Dorim?

I want so badly for him to say it, but he does not.

Dorim, do you love me?

Again, there is silence. He will not say it. I could write that he says it, but I want him to say it on his own.

Please Dorim, tell me that you love me.

He does not say anything. Instead, he stands there lifeless. I know that he will not say it, not unless I write it. But I do not write it, and he never says it. Now I understand... now I realize.

I look around me only to see an empty room and empty pages filled with my thoughts. I am alone. This is no victorious story; it is a whim of my imagination. There is no Dorim; he is only the shadow of Ryan Patrick McLaughlin.

When I take a step back and consider all I have created in this world, I must admit it is not good. For, I now realize that ultimately I only had the power to control it. I never had the power to set any of it genuinely free. I lacked the ability to allow Dorim to do what he wanted, independent of my omnipotence. He could never have chosen to love me, because I could never

have granted him the gift of choice. I was the only free agent in this story. Ultimately, I was the only character.

The truth is clear: I had no power at all. While I had the power to create a world and manipulate its every move, I could not create a world that moved without my perennial manipulation. It would have been such a beautiful story... if only I were more powerful. What a great power would be needed to compose a world without the creator writing its every word! One would need the power to sacrifice exhaustive control.

But I have no such power as to limit myself in these ways. Now I know the miserable reality I have created, if I can call it reality at all. Dorim, along with the rest of this world, will die with my ceasing to imagine them. This has truly been the discovery of god. Dorim discovered that I am god, and I discovered that I am not.