



# **Tunerville**

## **The Realm**

A. ELIZABETH WEST

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## Author's Note

The following material was originally Chapter 12 of the novel *Tunerville*. One of my editors recommended removing it to tighten the book's point of view.

After much soul-searching, I had to admit she was right. I enjoyed imagining the Realm and I found the Directorate dialogue amusing to construct. I think it made the book stronger to take it out—not only did the edit give the first appearance of the Realm more power when we see it through Chris's eyes, but it also made Callahan and the Directorate a bit more mysterious. Who were the Directorate? What say did they have over happenings on Earth? How closely did they work with the Amaranthine?

The skating rink was something from a dream I had—oddly, before I ever learned to skate. I'm convinced it's real. In fact, the Realm as depicted here and in the novel is pretty much how I imagine it will be when I arrive.

I gave a copy of *Tunerville* and its sequel, *Confluence*, to my father for his eighty-fifth birthday (November 25, 2021). He enjoyed reading it but had only just started on the second book when he passed unexpectedly in March 2022. I found it on his “currently reading” shelf with a bookmark in it after his memorial service. I'm quite sure he's having a blast in the Realm, and since all the books ever written or that will be written are in the Library, he's probably finished it along with the last book in the trilogy (which I'm currently writing as of this publication) and the chapter you're looking at right now.

I hope you enjoy it too.

Callahan made his way slowly across a bridge of greyish stone. He barely noticed the merry tinkle of water below, or the pirate ship floating on the bright blue ocean that stretched beyond the structure. He passed several spirits leaning against the parapet. The new ones wore expressions varying from astonishment to fear. He did not speak to them; Welcomers had already approached them or were on the way.

Once over the bridge, he continued on a white pebble path. His slipper-clad feet made small crunching noises. Birdsong twittered at the edge of his hearing. Its sharp, high notes punctuated the soothing susurrations of the sea.

The path widened and became a cobbled road, each stone perfectly aligned with the next. A piece of parchment would not slip between them. The clatter of horse's hooves grew, and he stepped aside without looking to allow a coach-and-four to pass. The occupants waved cheerily, but he ignored them. They drove on, not offended. The horses clopped past him and receded.

He passed several classical-styled buildings a newcomer might take for museums, which shone white in the warm, diffuse light. Trees dotted the street, their leaves green and lush. Sometimes fruit appeared, more for appearance and scent than any gastronomic purpose, although they were quite tasty when sampled. Other times, the leaves turned and fell just as if it were autumn here. There was no sun, nor any weather, unless a spirit desired it in the area of its dwelling. In this part of the Realm, known as the Center of All, the light never faded. No weather requests would alter it.

He could have teleported instantly, of course, but the walk was a pretty one.

The Library, its sprawling steps littered with readers who preferred the outdoors to its magnificent interior, loomed on his left. A circular structure stood on the right, rosy columns warmly beckoning. Inside, he

knew, a large, oval sheet of grey iridescent ice tempted those who had skated in life or wished to now. With no earthly restrictions, skaters easily achieved endless jump rotations and could spin for hours in every imaginable position.

Ahead lay a massive white oblong building, its roof adorned with huge arched shells in layered scallops. The Great Hall resembled a large gull, feathers ruffled, crouched in the middle of a sea of green, a terraced path dotted with verdant flowering plants leading to it.

He trudged toward it. The Directorate meetings weighed on him lately. He disliked the formality, the pomp. He would much rather be in the Gardens tending the lilies and wildflowers that were his favorites or in the Library reading Poe, perhaps conversing with him.

News of the tuner had reached the Realm, naturally. No one but the Directorate seemed the slightest bit concerned. The readers read, artists painted, fishers fished, writers wrote, children played, and on the vast azure surface of the Realm's ocean, sailboats drifted serenely.

Heavy gilded doors opened of their own volition as he approached them. Cool white marble heavily veined with gold and black surrounded him. Too soon, he arrived at the large meeting room in the middle of the building.

Assembled under an oval skylight at a large white table of the same shape were the full complement of Directorate members, some greatly accomplished in life and spiritually matured since their deaths. Nearly everyone in the Realm resembled Earth age late twenties or early thirties, except those who chose their childhood forms. The Directorate presented as in the later stages of their incarnations and wore the same clothing. It was a mark of their rank that they cared not for appearance's sake. Callahan himself chose to stay at forty, the mortal age when he felt he had looked his best.

Directorate members could rotate in or out as they pleased, but the number stayed constant at twenty. Interspersed between the likes of Beethoven, Nikolai Tesla, Emile Zola, and Jane Addams were unrecognizable souls, brought into the Directorate for balance and their purity of heart.

Callahan much preferred the company of these. Indeed, he had been tapped as one himself. If his heart could ever be considered pure. He had

instead chosen the task of Explorer, which required regular observations and reports from all over the world.

“Ah, our esteemed colleague.” Directorate Leader Frederick Douglass greeted him. “Have you a report for us from Dimension One?”

“Yes, Leader. I have observed Christopher Leon Taylor, the young inventor. His creation functions as we thought. What is more, he has no idea how he accomplished it. Nor do any of the men of science who have tested the device.

“No one has ever interacted with Dimension Two in such a way before. It is unprecedented. Right now the tuner, as they call it, exists mostly in the region known as the United States, but interest in it has spread around the globe. Of course, some cultures both within the country and outside have denounced the device, so as not to corrupt their citizenry with supernatural congress.”

“What is happening spiritually within the dimension?” Douglass asked.

“I have seen a great many unhappy spirits attempt to resume their former lives or finish matters left undone. Murder victims, jilted lovers, suicides who could not pay their debts and chose death instead. They congregate near the tuner openings on Two. None has approached the Threshold, which is unfortunate. Currently, the living still cannot access it and those who are here cannot travel between worlds. So we are safe for the moment.”

“Could this device open it?” Tesla asked. “Would not someone scientifically minded find a way?”

“No one would leave this place when they have everything they wish,” Beethoven said with a touch of scorn. Although he spoke his native language, everyone understood perfectly. “If the ones on Two only knew what they were missing!”

The others laughed quietly. Callahan did not.

“Perhaps, Maestro,” he said gravely. “The concern is not that spirits here will leave, but that the living will find a way to cross. Their presence on this dimension would cause a catastrophe.”

“They would be instantly disembodied,” Tesla mused. “It would kill them.”

“You are correct. Imagine tens of thousands of suddenly displaced beings wandering lost and confused round the Gardens.” He paused and let them picture it.

“Do you really believe they would storm the Portal?” Elizabeth I, a formidable woman with fiery, white-streaked hair, asked.

“I do. They could not resist the temptation to see their loved ones again.”

“Humans,” she said, and snorted. “It’s hard to believe we were ever such troublemakers.” She elbowed Beethoven. He leaned his head toward hers, and they shared a conspiratorial chuckle.

“Chaos!” Zola declared in French. “Absolute anarchy!”

“The families left behind,” Jane Addams said sadly. “Can you imagine their grief?”

“Disorganization on an unprecedented scale,” Douglass agreed. “Many Welcomers would have to be recruited and trained. Cleanup could take millennia.”

“Exactly,” Callahan said.

“We must prevent a breach. It is imperative.”

The Directorate sat pensive, ruminating. Then a small man at the end of the assembly cleared his throat. As one, they turned to him. They saw a short, balding figure with thick glasses, dwarfed by the massive table.

“My name is Eddie Pulaski,” he said in a heavy Brooklyn accent. “I’ve only been here for a coupla cycles, so you won’t want to listen to anything I got to say.”

“Please, sir, speak. You are a member of this panel and have the right,” Douglass urged him.

“Oh, thanks. I mean, thanks, Leader. Uh, yeah.” His face flushed. Callahan quashed a sudden urge to smile at the man’s ingenuousness. “Um hrrm! I think we should close it.”

“Close it?”

“Yeah. No one in or out, until the situation is under control.” As he spoke, the mousy little man seemed to expand. “See, in my earthly life I was a sewage technician. When we had a leak, the only thing to do was shut everything down until we could fix it. If we didn’t, it made a big stinkin’ mess. If ya close it, you won’t have to worry about a buncha people leaking in where they don’t belong. They’ll either stay on Two or go back to their bodies, if they can.”

Silence. Pulaski shrank in his chair. “If you think it would work, that is.”

“Mr. Pulaski, that is sound reasoning,” said Douglass. “I call a vote. All in favor of Mr. Pulaski’s recommendation that we close the Threshold until the matter of the tuner is resolved, please indicate. Opposed, the same.”

The Directorate did not make a show of hands but their votes were recorded. “The measure passes. As of this moment, the way is barred until this matter is resolved. All recent arrivals must wait in the Vestibule.”

He turned to Jane Addams. “Madam, will you please gather the Caretakers and make certain the souls are properly attended to while they wait? They will need comfort.” She nodded and vanished. “Callahan, you must speak with young Christopher.”

“Leader, perhaps his Guides should undertake that task,” Callahan said, startled. “I am an Explorer and earthly contact is forbidden.” Douglass shook his head.

“Precisely why you should. You carry more authority and are sanctioned to speak for the Realm under subsection 15,736 of the Earth-Realm Relations Covenant.”

“Someone must recruit the young man to aid us,” Zola said. “It is his mistake we are dealing with here.”

“Monsieur Zola is correct. I will confer with the Amaranthine at once. Please proceed to your observation point and await further instruction,” Douglass said.

“Yes, Leader.” Callahan bowed. He teleported to the Threshold, where specially appointed guards held it against intruders. They reluctantly allowed him through. He sighed deeply and took the long way to the surface, through the solar system.