

# The Hands of Lungbarrow!

By James Wylder



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In a shady room reserved just for this purpose, four figures sat around a round table. Two of them were dressed in robes, one of them was wearing a blue hoodie, her chin length black hair poking up from the collar, and one was blond in a comfortable and equally blue shirt, his eyes scanning the others carefully. “Your move,” Chris Cwej said. “Show me what you got.”

Filla'novon'avarna'us set her hand of cards down, and Sang Mi pushed them back and up into her fingers. “No Filla—no you don’t show them to everyone that’s not how you play.”

Filla’s eyes lit up. “Oh, they’re secrets! What fun.”

Sang Mi sighed and looked over at Chris.

“Don’t look at me, you’re the one who invited her,” he said.

He had a point. “Well, I wanted to play the Star Wars CCG, so nobody gets to complain.” She flicked through her hand and mumbled; “Pity they never made a follow up game with an original setting.”

Cwej got very quiet and found his hand of cards suddenly and incredibly fascinating. After a moment, he threw his hand down and stood up. “I’m... going to get something to drink.”

“Don’t do that blue stuff again, you started telling me weird stuff about cannibal bears.”

Chris winced, and gave her a thumbs up as he slid out the door.

Laying a single card down, the Intercessor tried to move back to playing the game. “The Engineer of spirals.”

Sang Mi shuffled through her hand. “Er... Urizen of... no. Oh!” She placed a card down. It showed a large whitewood house with vines stretched across the exterior and deep into the doors and windows. Even on the cardstock, it seemed like it was breathing. “Chapterhouse of oroboruses.”

The Intercessor sighed. “They had to illustrate it with Lungbarrow, didn’t they?”

Sang Mi frowned, looking down at the card again. “Chris mentioned that before. Lungbarrow. That’s one of those living Houses, right?”

Filla waved her hands to dispel the notion, once again revealing all of her cards. “No, well, yes, but they’re much more than that! It’s just a

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reductive way of thinking about them. Especially Lungbarrow, considering everything that went down with it before.”

Sang Mi looked between the two Superiors. “Okay. What happened?”

Filla shook her head. “It’s not a story Cwej would tell you. It all started when he started having a bunch of strange dreams.”

The Intercessor tilted her head. “I think it started earlier than that. And how do you know that anyway?”

Pouting, Filla set her cards down. “I do read, you know.”

“Yes, but what did you read that—”

“Anyway! What happened next?” Sang Mi said loudly.

“Sorry,” the two women said in unison.

Filla continued. “Basically, Chris travelling with the Great Defector—”

“Don’t call him great,” the Intercessor cut in.

“The normal not adjective-y Defector. They returned here, to the Base of Operations, our glorious and shining home, and went to the Defector’s home of Lungbarrow, where he had been Loomed all that time ago.”

Sang Mi nodded. “Chris told me about the Looms—you guys all got cursed by the Pythia and couldn’t have kids so you made people instead. I saw one of them!”

“Indeed, when you saved my daughter, but that’s a different story,” the Intercessor added. “Unfortunately, Quences had been murdered. He was an important person in Lungbarrow, and they had to investigate the murder.”

“But! It turned out that there had been a secret third founder of our homeworld. Not Urizen or the Engineer, but another one. A sort of... other. They called him: the other,” Filla said dramatically. “And it turned out the Defector was a sort of... Loomed reincarnation of the other, and had known this all along and had all of the other’s memories—”

The Intercessor interceded. “No, no that’s not right at all. He only had flashes of the other’s memories and this was all a revelation to him!”

Filla frowned. “That’s not how I remember it.”

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Throwing her hands up, the Intercessor said some colorful curse words that didn't seem to translate well. "How do you remember any of this?"

"Ladies, please," Sang Mi said, after checking the top three cards of the deck and rearranging them. "So how did that all play out?"

Filla spoke louder than she needed to, a bit annoyed at the Intercessor correcting her on things. "Well, they solved the murder. And then the first baby was born on the Base in millenia, and the House of Lungbarrow slid down the mountain." Filla mimed this with her hand, and full sound effects from her mouth. "And when the baby was born, the Pythia's Curse was broken!"

"Okay, but who was the murderer? Who had the baby? What did the other have to do with it?"

Filla thought for a moment, then shrugged. "Oh, I don't remember that."

Sang Mi groaned.

The Intercessor shook her head in heavy exasperation. "The Ordinal-General was killed by Cousin Glospin, I believe. And as for the other, well... I think that just happened parallel to—NO WAIT, it was Otherstide! That's right. So that must have had something to do with it. I wasn't there though." She took a breath composing herself. "Then your friend Chris was given an offer by an old High President to work for us, joining the glorious work of the Superiors in righting and stabilizing the universe."

Over the last few months, Sang Mi had learned almost too much about what that had cost him. She looked askance. And then as if on cue, the door to the room opened, and Chris Cwej himself entered, holding a tray of drinks."

"I got something for everyone! Did I miss anything?"

"Oh you know, just girl talk about Looms," the Intercessor said.

Chris nodded, clearly pretending he understood what that meant. "Well, I'm just glad we're all here together." He smiled at all three of them. "It's hard enough to know what's real on days like this, so it's good to have people I can trust."

Sang Mi smiled. "Right back at you."

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He held her gaze, smiling back. “You stacked the deck while I was gone, didn’t you?”

She very quickly reached over to shuffle the deck.

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