

The Name of the Binding

ICFP Programming Contest 2025

A F T E R W O R D

Adso reflects on his ordeal with William at the monastery of St. Kleene.

OUR visit to the monastery of St. Kleene has concluded, but I find myself uncertain whether I was truly awake through those days, or whether it all had been one long, half-remembered fantasy. Each time we entered the labyrinth, it seemed reborn: familiar, yet reshaped, as if the stones delighted in rearranging themselves whenever we approached the Ædificium. Maps I had hurriedly scrawled during our initial explorations seemed useless mere hours later. My memory became a labyrinth of labyrinths, a thousand overlapping shadows of the same place, none enduring.

Perhaps it was by the hallucination of a mind poorly rested, or perhaps it was by some curse (though William would have been swift to call it illusion) of the library itself, but I beheld, in the flickering lantern-light, one hundred and forty-two reflections of our party moving through the corridors. I stood apart, a witness to our own wanderings—or to the wanderings of my brethren, these ciphers of my own being. Which of these Adsos was truly I, and which only a phantom of stone and candlelight, remained hidden in the folds of the labyrinth; and in this uncertainty, my heart faltered, my reason trembled, and I felt myself unmoored. Each shadow folded back upon the labyrinth, and the labyrinth folded back upon me, until I scarcely knew where my own steps had fallen, nor whether any were mine at all.

My unknown brethren bore instruments of cunning. In some reality, William guides me with cold engines of logic, weighing every possibility with relentless order. In another, we tend fires of annealing, tempering our guesses

like metal in a forge. Still elsewhere, we cast random walks as auguries, listening for echoes in the dark, telling one chamber from another. The librarian Alonzo watches ever vigilantly, yet we slip our marks upon the walls, and by morning they are gone; the ageless Ædificium swallowing our striving in immutable silence.

The Ædificium itself seems eternal, a monument of stone and shadow, risen from the will of a vanished hand. Long ago, an Architect must have set its bounds, now lost to memory. Perhaps he imagined that some pilgrim would employ the subtle arts of Automata-learning, yet if so, I — or, I should say, my mirrored brethren — have confounded his expectations. In every reality, we defy that unyielding will, moving with fewer steps than even he might have imagined, guided by invisible grace.



Now, in the silence, I wonder whether I ever left the scriptorium at all. The corridors blur together in memory; the libraries overlap like dream upon dream. Perhaps it matters nothing whether we walked or dreamed, whether we succeeded or failed. I shall never know which Adso I am, or which William walks beside me. But I know I have witnessed ingenuity, persistence, and the strange joy of exploration, however fleeting, however futile.

It is cold in the scriptorium, my thumb aches. I leave this manuscript, I do not know for whom; I no longer know what it is about; *Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina vineta tenemus.*