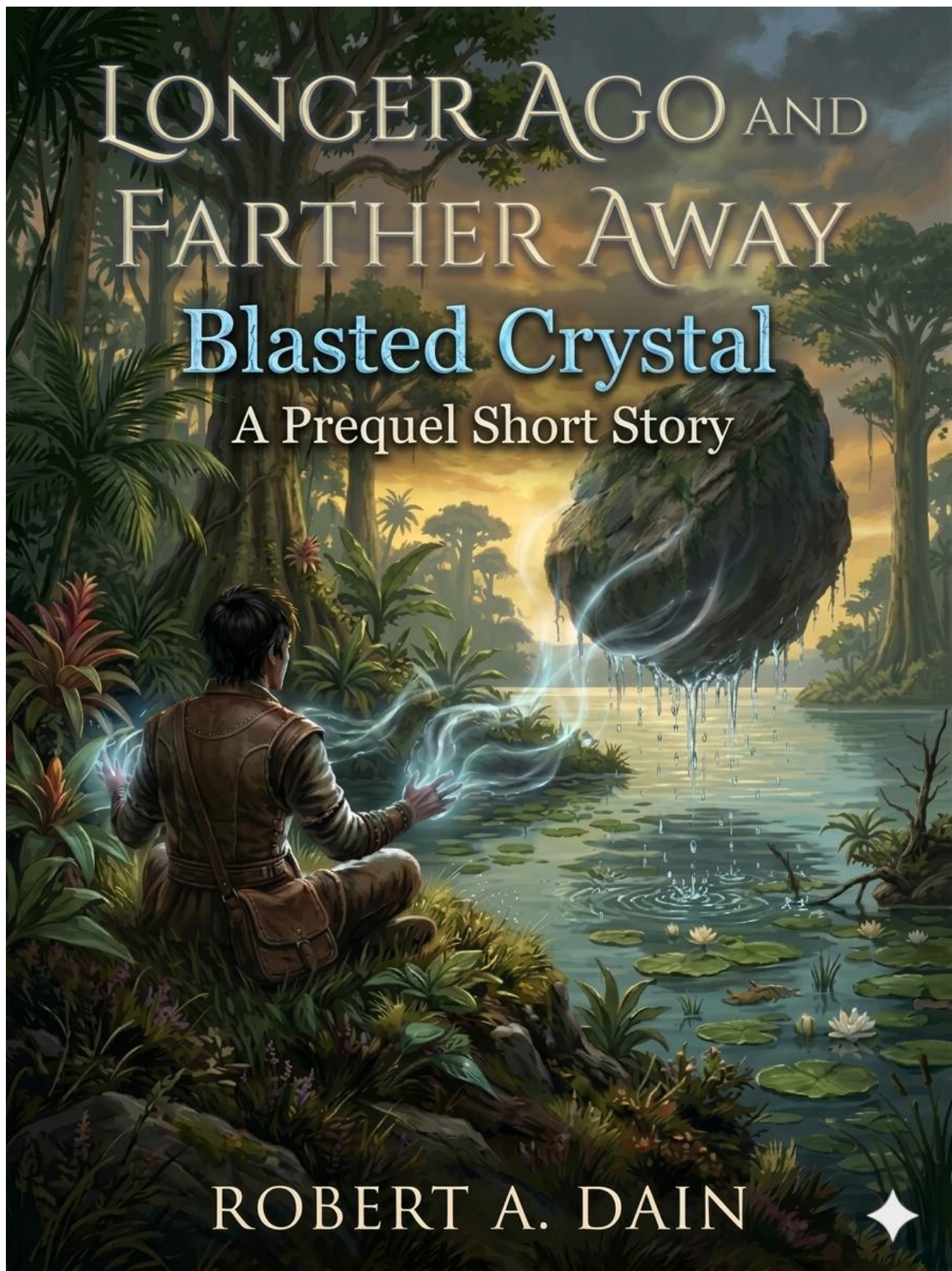




Cover art generated by Nano Banana 2.

## Longer Ago and Farther Away – Coming July 2027

Janid Braxen has unique abilities of telekinesis and extrasensory perception that he has kept hidden his entire life. He is learning to control them, but there is still so much he does not understand. When a mysterious crystal enters his life, his secret is exposed and an enemy he didn't even know he had is coming for him. As if that weren't enough, an ancient Void lies buried beneath his world—patient, merciless, and finally ready to wake. To survive, Janid must master his powers. And fast!

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Please enjoy this prequel sneak peek into the crystal's chaotic journey as it makes its way to Janid's homeworld.

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## Blasted Crystal

"What in the Seven Broken Pillars of Tulsar's Throne are you doing up there, you blasted robot!"

Brek Greel was not having a good day.

The intercom gave Perry's voice a tinny quality as he spoke from the cockpit. "I can tell from here that you've spiked your vitals again. I suggest you take a sedative and remain quiet until you calm down. The operative word being *quiet*."

"Blazing pits, he'll be the death of me," Brek muttered, ramming a new cartridge of splatter rounds into the receiver of his projectile weapon. It settled with a satisfying click. Splatter rounds would do plenty of damage to his adversary, but were guaranteed not to pierce the outer hull and send them all out into the vacuum of space. Brek tried to avoid that when possible.

His adversary, however, was under no such constraint. It let loose another burst of solid projectiles. They passed harmlessly over Brek's head, but ripped straight through the inner shield wall, tore through the thick layers of faux-grav insulation, and pierced the outer shell of the ship's hull, venting atmosphere into the void.

Brek didn't have to look to know any of this. He felt a brief shimmy as the grav balancers compensated for the damage, and heard the distinct whistle of several new hull breaches big enough to poke a finger through.

Keying the intercom again, he snapped, "Blast it, Dee, where's that repair droid?"

Perry, whose official designation was Perdix-D, detested being called "Dee." In protest, he decided to ignore Brek entirely. Given the circumstances, however, total silence seemed rude. That's not to say his attitude algorithms weren't running in high gear.

His voice crackled over the intercom once more. "Oh, you mean the repair droid that was damaged by the loader when we brought that security bot on board, and then you refused to allow time to repair it? That repair droid?"

"Tesser's Gate, Dee, just tell me where it is."

"It is currently en route to your position, but it is moving slower than normal due to the damage it sustained. There is a fifty-two-point-nine percent chance the entire bulkhead of bay three will give way before it arrives. You really should do something about that security bot."

"Space it, Dee," Brek hissed. He lowered his voice because he was peeking around a cargo pallet that was pulling double duty as cover from a rampaging security bot. Across the bay, the secbot was targeting a merchandise-laden upper shelf with a propelled concussion projectile.

"Oh no you don't, you miscreant slag heap," Brek growled. Stepping into the open, he unleashed a burst of well-aimed splatter rounds at the errant droid.

The security bot swiveled its heavy weapon toward Brek, but a line of splatter rounds stitched across its primary body segment. While they failed to penetrate the thick armor, they successfully spoiled its aim. The kinetic force also seemed to cause its weapon to malfunction. The droid paused, studying, adjusting, and then simply shaking the weapon.

Brek took the opportunity to scramble to a new position. He fired off another burst, scoring hits from a fresh angle. Once again, the rounds had minimal effect, merely knocking the droid momentarily off balance.

"His armor's too tough for this weapon, Dee. I need you down here!"

"I'll be right there," Perry replied.

And he was, too—medibots could move incredibly fast when they wanted to. Brek felt more than heard Perry drop from the bridge access ladder. The secbot barely managed to switch weapons before Perry was sliding into cover at Brek's side.

"I reengaged the nav system," Perry said. "There are no other asteroids in the vicinity."

"Blasted asteroids," Brek grumbled. A freak asteroid strike had sheared the security bot loose from its storage mountings, sending it crashing from an upper rack. Somehow, the impact had triggered its activation sequence, and it woke up in full assault mode.

"I brought you this," Perry said, handing Brek a short-barreled, large-caliber weapon.

Brek squinted at it. "Splatter rounds?"

"Of course. They won't penetrate its armor, but the heavier mass should keep it off balance. Try to draw its fire. I have an idea."

Brek scoffed. "How about *you* draw its fire and *I'll* have an idea." But Perry was already moving. "Blasted robot," Brek muttered under his breath.

The roar of the new weapon set Brek's ears ringing as he sprang from cover, pumped a heavy round into the bot, and dashed toward the bay two bulkhead. The security bot was thrown off balance, but recovered quickly. Heavy slugs whipped past as Brek dove behind an open door that led to the next bay.

Sparks suddenly erupted from the far wall and a flickering plasma arc strobed. The repair droid had finally arrived and was beginning to repair their leaking hull.

"About blasted time," Brek whispered. He leaned out from behind the bulkhead door and fired two quick shots.

As he expected, the secbot had been turning to target the slow-moving repair droid, but it spun quickly to target Brek instead. Paint fragments sprayed into the air around him as slugs pelted the opposite side of the door. He had ducked behind it just in time.

Tensing for another salvo, Brek paused when a loud, high-pitched buzz rang through the cargo bay, followed by the heavy, echoing crash of collapsing machinery.

Peeking out from cover, Brek saw Perry standing over the inert form of the secbot, looking quite pleased with himself.

Brek approached, noticing thin streamers of acrid smoke rising from the natural gaps in the secbot's armored joints. It looked as though it had burned up from the inside out.

"Black nebulas, what did you do to it?"

"I administered a charge from my cardio resonator. The security bot's outer armor is conductive, so the result was a localized electromagnetic pulse. I was only eighty-seven-point-four percent certain that it would work, but it seems to have been quite effective."

Brek chuckled. "Nicely done, Dee. Yes indeed."

They both fell quiet, surveying the wreckage. It was bad, but Brek had seen worse. It was a shame about the security bot, though. He'd essentially gotten it for free back on Revero Seven, trading a few leftover bits of junk that would have otherwise ended up in a smelter.

He chuckled at the memory of that haggle, then looked back down at the still-smoldering chassis on the deck. "Blast," he muttered.

"We've lost approximately eighteen percent of your merchandise," Perry reported, still scanning the smoking ruins of bay three.

Brek blew out a slow breath, then shrugged his shoulders and sighed. "We'll be fine. We've still got plenty of inventory. I've been to Corvarus Two before. It'll be a gold mine for us, you'll see."

Then, growing serious, he gave Perry a meaningful look. "And we'll be rid of that crystal once and for all. By the Seven Pillars, Dee, I swear we will. The crystal, and all of its blasted bad luck."

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Follow Brek and Perry in [Longer Ago and Farther Away](#) as they transport the mysterious crystal on the final leg of its epic voyage. Travel with Janid as he fights to unravel the crystal's hidden power. Will its secrets be enough?

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