

# Dominion of Eden

## THE WAY TO DAWN

*CHARLES LEE*

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*THE WAY TO DAWN*

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## Prologue

Ever since I was a little girl, I have always wondered, why does mankind make trouble where there is none? There are even those in the realm of light who can't be satisfied with the natural peace we already have.

I know. Such mature thinking for a little girl, right? Well, when you're raised by the four wisest men in existence, you mature quickly.

My teachings began with my elder guardian, Carnavess. He taught me more than anyone about human nature. A painted canvas of dark urges and immoral crimes is what plagues man. Wholesome actions masked by self gratifying functions.

During my teachings, I learned the history of the realms. Before their ruling, all realms were in chaos. But this madness ceased once the four elders showered everyone and everything with their wisdom.

Carnavess was like a stepfather to me. My biological parents were murdered shortly after I was born. He wasn't soft and loving, but he supported me whenever I wanted to give up. When we were together, he was either teaching me the way of the sword, building my psychological abilities, or pawning me off to the palace staff.

Many people would think training and learning for over eighty-eight percent of your life is an unfit existence for a child, but for me it was the same as riding a bike... Fun... and intoxicating.

When it came to learning spells, I was trained by Xenler, the elder of ‘Supreme Magic’. His classes were rough and exhausting. Worst of all, he would become very condescending if you were unable to learn a spell in the first few attempts.

By the time I turned fifteen, Helios, the elder of ‘Superior Intellect’, would occasionally come by and join me and guardian Carnavess for my combat training. It was always a blast when he came by. Because those were the times—I was really—pushed to my limits:

“Bring it ooon!” I screamed.

I don’t know why, but for some reason... I was so hungry to face him. Not like there’s anything different about that, but Helios just brings the best out of me. Depending how you see it.

Helios chuckled. “Carnavess, this kid’s fun,” he said, breathing heavily.

“Didn’t I tell you she’s a beast?” Carnavess replied, breathing just as heavy.

The three of us stood in a wide open space filled with endless white. I wore my usual training set. A plain white jumper and matching sneakers. Carnavess and Helios wore their white and gold elder robes, each brandishing their own distinctive swords. Carnavess, holding his black and green sword with black cracked bones and green lava layering over the base. Helios, holding his broad blade with the internal flames running wild within his sword.

I sinisterly grinned. “If you fear the beast, then fight on your knees.”

“Ha!” Helios belted. “She has not only adopted your grin, Carnavess, but she’s leached off your early day arrogance. Why would I bow down to you if you can’t even scratch me?” he said to me.

Carnavess stood up straight. “Alright, Helios. Fight the beast while I watch you prove her to be lower than you.”

“You are only saying that because she’s a reflection of your work. That child will not harm me.”

He lightly smirked. “Hmph. No rules besides killing, right?”

“Agreed.”

“Fine,” I replied halfheartedly.

It’s not like I really wanted to kill him. At least not in the way most would think. I can’t explain it. And I’m not going to try harder than this. You need the heart of a warrior to understand.

Carnavess grinned and walked far from us. I raised my slender red blade overhead and charged in.

Helios gave me an indirect stare. “Still favoring Demonweaver I see.”

While running forward, I leaped off the ground, appearing to be soaring. It was then I prepared to summon my next sword. I raised my arm and folded it inward, moments before the transparent green aura came from the sides of my forearm. Chunks of rock formed from the sides, slamming together and layering over one another three times as a rising grip sprouted from the top.

The rocks immediately turned into shiny metal of blue and gold. This sword looks more like a shield with the edge properties of a sword. Its heart-like shape gives it a short gold point at

the end. Most of the blade is blue with gold plated lines running down the blade. The grip extends six inches from the top, to the opposite end while being tightly welded into the blade.

I gripped onto the small horizontal handle that extends several inches from the upper backside of the blade. Sliding in close, I crouched as his sword came down, raising the massive blade over my head to defend. As soon as his attack was blocked with my recently summoned sword, Helios's face became confused. "Bastion!? When did you—!?"

"No time!" I shouted before pushing his sword upward.

With my crimson blade, I quickly attempted to slash him across his chest. Helios jumped back before I could connect. Helios ran backward while creating a large orange energy sphere at the middle of his sword. A trick I've seen enough times when he's taking you lightly.

He released the sphere, moments before I slammed Bastion into the ground and crouched behind it for protection. Elder Carnavess smirked and raised an eyebrow before hopping much further from the battle.

Upon impact, an explosion of light went off. A blue transparent shield appeared to cover the excess energy that tried to go around Bastion. As the energy almost faded, Helios came from above, descending from the sky with his blade pointed down.

I grinned. Helios's tricks were laughable. "I don't even have to look." Water began to form around my feet as green, blue, and clear bubbles rapidly appear around my hand. The water carried me across the floor before lifting me into the air. I looked back as I rode the funnel of water and raised a slender blue blade to my mouth. "A typical counterattack. Right, Nebulous?"

With the wave of Helios's sword, he generated a powerful heated air that evaporated the long water funnel I was on. I jumped higher up into the air before the water vanished and hurled Nebulous near him. It pierced the ground and glows with violent tides of water pouring out the hilt to create a massive flood.

Helios stepped back and jumped up toward me. He slammed his blade into mines, quickly pressuring me to yield. He maintained his form till I wrapped my legs around his waist. He swung wide as I squeezed him tight. I leaned far back. Far enough that I was making a full arched lean to aim my blade into his thigh. Helios quickly flash-warped out of my lock and waited below as I quickly fell toward him.

I pointed my palm at him and pulled it back with a clenched fist. A rush of water beneath his feet caused an undertow effect on Helios. He loses balance and fell on his back as he's carried toward a forming ice spire. He takes his sword and slashed the ground, heating the water around him to create instant evaporation. I landed on the ground, hands first, magically creating uplifting ground that raced toward Helios in a narrow path. Upon standing, he's lifted while nearly losing his balance.

Helios escaped doing an arched backflip over the shaky ground. As he passed over, a bed of ice spires awaited him. He stabbed his sword into the ice and balances over it before pushing himself off the hilt and over the ice. He landed a few feet from his sword and was quickly surprised from behind by me in midswing.

Helios turned and ducked under my blade before doing an under-handed gut punch. I painfully grunted from the impact, moments before I'm sent several feet into the air from an unseen force. Helios flash-warped near the bed of ice to pull his sword out. Once I hit the

ground, he gripped his sword as water rushed past his feet from my body. In that instant, the ice spires extend up higher and tore up his arm with a multitude of grazed wounds.

“Grrr!” Helios groaned with his arm being immobilized.

I stood up and smiled at him. “You were saying?”

He smiled back with a less joyful expression. I waved my hand to dismiss all my swords. The ice quickly melted to the ground, revealing his tattered robe and bloody arm. Helios soon dismissed his blade in a quick erupting pillar of flame and turns his back to me before walking away. Elder Carnavess stood near me and grinned at elder Helios’s defeat.

Helios waved the back of his hand at us. “Congratulations. You’ve created a monster.”

At that moment, my smile died and I became mildly offended. “Helios, you didn’t have to call me a monster.”

“Indeed I did. Take it as a compliment. A testament of what you are. Carnavess, Grayson will be in shortly to see the monster. Excuse me, I mean the beast. Or is that offensive as well?”

Carnavess slaps me hard on the back. “She can take it! Right, Afearia?”

I turned away from them and started walking. “Yeah... Right.”

I never liked being called that... even though it’s true.

My right eye was acting up that day too, because of his statement. Anytime I felt like crying or did cry, my eye would burn mercilessly. Even if they were tears of joy, it would still burn. Ever been near raw onions? But despite his rare crude remarks, Helios was a joy to be around.



When learning the history of the realms and the beings that inhabited them, elder Grayson was who I studied under. I was taught how to read and write by the age of three. But my curiosity and thirst for knowledge excelled at the age of eight. At that time, for reasons I didn't understand, I found myself fascinated by the dark beings known as *Demis*.

Their behaviors and their means to survive were savage to me. And yet, I still found it all remarkably interesting. Almost relatable without reason. It was as if I was drawn to learn more about beast. It was irresistible. Even though I was raised in the light, something in me always called to the dark.

I once found a book that had a brief topic on advanced Demis. These types were able to talk and harness massive amounts of dark energy. I continued to search other books about these creatures. But my thirst left me even more eager. I discovered there were even greater dark beings that surpassed advanced ones called Demi Anthropoids. It was said that they were to be the highest level of Demi evolution. But very few of their kind existed in the worlds. There were no images of what those beings looked like in the library.

And for good reason.

When I decided to ask elder Grayson what they looked like, he pointed at me with quite a serious face and said, 'Like you.' I wasn't sure if he was acting like my other guardians, or if he really meant they looked like me. But the idea of such powerful beings walking right under our noses can make anyone feel uneasy.

When I turned twenty-one, the elders sat me down and enlightened me on why I spent my life training and being educated. Before then, they would never tell me anything, no matter how much I asked. Not even what happened to my parents. All they would say is that they were

murdered, but refusing to go into details on how or who. But that day when they sat me down, there wasn't a single detail they left out.

Twenty-five years ago, two heroes... A hero from the mortal realm failed to stop a group of rogue Demis. In those twenty-five years, that group amassed more power and reigned unopposed.

Back then, they were lead by a cold, ruthless fiend named Derexen who tried to take over Elysium. Fortunately, his plan failed as he and his team was forced to withdraw.

Today, he reigns as king over Terra and Armagevion.

My mission as the new bringer of light is to dethrone Derexen and destroy its faction. As an acting soldier of peace and justice, I will—return world order.

# Departure

## Chapter One

The luminesce sun glazes over the city of Elysium, blessing it with all its beauty. The citizens are cheerful, but quiet. But there's reason for the low whispered talking. Several weeks ago, the elders held a citywide speech for the arrival of 'balance'.

The residents of Elysium talked amongst themselves and continue looking over to the palace, wondering what was to come.

At the holy palace, Afearia lies in her puffy white queen bed with full cotton padded quilts on top of her. She tosses and turns under the covers a few times before a palace maid comes in the room and nudges her to wake. "Lady Afearia? My lady, it's time to rise and shine."

Afearia grumbles. "I'm sleeping in today."

"But, my lady, today's the day."

"I said I'm sleeping in."

"But the elders—"

Afearia swiftly lowers the covers to the bridge of her nose and glares at the woman with her right eye. The red of her iris strikes fear in its gaze.

The maid becomes a bit panicked and steps back. "I'm sorry," she quickly says.

Afearia sits up and rubs her eyes. "No, I'm sorry." She sighs, staring at her quilt. "Tell them I'll be in shortly."

“The elders said they will meet you at the gates. Lord Xenler will remain in the palace to lower the barrier. When you are ready, please see lord Xenler in the control room.”

“Yeah-yeah,” she carelessly replies.

The maid walks out and closes the door gently behind her. Afearia throws the covers off her and slowly pulls her legs to dangle off the edge of the bed. Her short royal blue satin nightgown is raised half past her thigh with her partly balled bed robe with colorful flower patterns. She sighs and shakes her head. “I guess it was only a matter of time.”

Afearia’s spacious room has a color scheme of blue, white, and green. The three windows that look out into the city are all to the right of her bed. Her floor is of black marble with messy white patterns in it.

The royal canopy bed Afearia was sleeping in has an 18<sup>th</sup> century decor. It’s a wooden bed with a white cover from the top of the canopy that opens on all sides. It’s parted open like curtains with little gold ties at each bedpost. Across the room from the foot of her bed is her dark brown wardrobe with a bathroom to the left.

She gets up and walks over to her wardrobe and pulls out several garments. She lays it over her arm and enters the bathroom for a shower. As soon as she’s cleaned up, Afearia comes out wearing loose-fitting white cotton pants with gold stitching lining the waist. On her feet are white high-cut jika-tabis with a zipper on the sides.

Her shirt’s a white loose-fit, hanging on her right shoulder while sporting an off-the-shoulder look on the left. Her top is a bit past her waist and the right sleeve is halfway to her wrist. The exposed areas of her chest reveal neatly wrapped gauze around her upper torso.

Afearia's shirt has a mesmerizing gold and light violet pattern on it. The gold looks like classic drawings of dotted wind spirals. The violet complimented by being near the edges of the top, layered with the gold pattern as long stripes of silk.

Afearia wears a sash with the same pattern as her shirt. It's tied from across her hip, to the middle of her thigh. On her neck is a wide black choker with a similar band on her left wrist. She flips her long red hair back and grabs two black hair ties from the drawer of her wardrobe. She slides apart two wooden boards in the wardrobe and reveals a large mirror. Staring in the mirror, Afearia checks the corners of her eyes. She leans close, thoroughly checking her red and blue irises.

She opens a small drawer that holds a silk scarf with the gold pattern of dotted spirals. Afearia folds the scarf several times before tying it over her right eye and blinks at the mirror before closing the drawer.

Afearia pulls open another drawer from underneath, taking out two small white gold hoop earrings and puts them in her bottom left earlobe. She grabs two silver ball studs and puts them at the top left corner of her helix. Afearia pulls her hair back into a ponytail and uses the first tie at the back of her head in a bow. She then ties the second one three fourths toward the end of her hair.

With her ponytail tied tight, her rich hair dangles past her tailbone. Afearia parts her bangs from her eyes before tilting her head and doing a nod of joyless satisfaction.

She closes her wardrobe and walks to the door. When she opens it, Afearia slowly looks around her room one last time before sadly shutting it.

Proceeding down the hall and up several flights of stairs, Afearia passes warm, welcoming guards as she opens the door to the control room. Xenler, who is typing commands into a large computer, briefly turns his head toward her before continuing. "Afternoon, Afearia."

"Good afternoon, elder Xenler. My maid said you wanted to see me."

He turns to her and approaches the small table in the middle of the room. "The day has finally arrived. You should be excited to fulfill your duties."

"I don't think excited is the word," she says while approaching the table. "More like anxious."

"Do you fear what awaits you?"

"I know what's there, so why should I be afraid?"

"Just because you got the knowledge, doesn't mean you are prepared."

"I'm ready, Xenler."

"You better be. Have you gathered all the things you will need?"

"Yes."

"And your little diary?"

Afearia looks away from him. "Don't call it little," she mutters.

"That still offends you after all these years? Nonetheless, where is it?"

"I won't need it for this adventure."

“Afearia, you are about to enter a world that has been plunged into hell. You will need some way to express your feelings. You are not the most stable thing that’s been under our care. I rather you have something so you don’t cost us everything we’ve put into you.”

“Whatever, I’ll go get it,” bitterly walking away from him.

Xenler throws something at her back. She turns around and finds her diary at her feet. “Time and time again, I’ve told you not to say ‘whatever’ to me. Maybe on Terra you’ll learn some manners.”

“How did you get your hands on this?” she flusters while picking it up. “I didn’t tell you where I had it as of lately.”

“You’re welcome, Afearia. Now put your childhood memories somewhere safe.”

She gives him an annoyed look before waving her hands in alignment of the notebook. The black metal cover glows a gray aura before vanishing.

“And you sent it where?” he asks.

“With the spell I used, I can now call it to me whenever I want. It doesn’t have to be on me twenty-four seven.”

“As if I was actually interested in such low arts. Be on your way, Afearia. Your elders are waiting.” She walks to the door and steps into the hall. “Afearia?” She looks back. “Don’t return until you’ve finished what we have started for you.”

She shuts the door and walks down the hall to the flight of stairs. Instead of heading down to the ground floor, she proceeds up further. Afearia slowly makes her way down a wide

and lengthy hallway with white armored palace guards at the end. Even from the distance, she can see the giant ivory doors with embedded gems in the frame. She reaches the bolted doors and is stopped by two of the four guards.

“Halt!” the two guards to the left demand.

Afearia makes a face as if the guards are mistaken. “Do you know who you’re talking too?”

“Sorry, lady Afearia, but this is protocol,” one of the guards to the right says.

“Now you four listen to me. I am moments from embarking on a very long quest for the sake of all realms and their inhabitants. So I highly recommend you open this door or you know how I will handle it.”

The guards stand firm for a moment. “Open the doors,” says the commanding guard to the front left wearing silver plated armor.

The other three guards begin to pull the large metal bolts from across the doors. In pairs of two, the guards grab the large gold handles and pull the doors open. A bright light begins to spill out from within. Afearia calmly turns her back to the pouring shine. As the light fades, she turns around and walks through the light with her head down. “Thank you,” she says.

“Five minutes, my lady.”

“I’ll leave when I’m ready,” she says upon entering the chamber.

When the doors shut, the light balances out, allowing her to lift her head. Inside the chamber is an open space of white with no bottom or ceiling. A flat, broad rug of red and yellow



stretches ahead on the invisible floor. Lining the edges of the rug on both sides of Afearia are stone altars with Emyrean blades going as far as the eye can see.

Beneath and above her are other floors with no stairs, just more swords floating above their altars. She starts to walk up the path while looking into most of the invisible cases. While walking, Afearia runs her finger on one of the cases, making the barrier visible in a fading rainbow streak. Suddenly, one of the blades glow and start wildly bouncing around inside.

She smiles and walks up to it. “Adamantre, you still trying to break free? I admit that I wish you guys didn’t have to be cooped up in here, but it’s for the best.” It stops bouncing around and leans against the barrier as she puts her hand on it. “You behave yourself while I’m away, you hear?”

She takes her hand off and walks further up the path. Once her rainbow print begins to fade, Adamantre leans back off the barrier and hits it twice toward her direction before ceasing.

At the end of the path, she climbs up invisible stairs being hugged by the chamber’s rug. At the top of the stairs is a large open space shaped into a semicircle. The rug connects up across the open space to fit the area’s shape. Along the half circle are more swords with bigger altars and fairly visible barriers. There’s an active fountain in the middle with plant life growing around some of the Emyrean blades. Afearia smiles as she steadily looks around the area. I’m going to miss my times on Kings Road, she thinks.

She looks toward her right and walks before an empty altar. She kneels down in front of it and gently brushes her hand over the faded name at the base. “Hey, it’s me again. Today’s the big day. I’m a little nervous. I shouldn’t be, but I am. I don’t know how long I’m going to be gone. I hope the years I’ve spent talking to you like this was as meaningful to you as it was to

me.” She looks up and sighs with a dropped head. “Well, I better get going. If possible—please watch over me...”

Afearia deeply mutters a name before standing and walking back to the ivory doors. When she reaches the entrance, she shouts, “Open this door!” The doors unbolt before parting open.

Afearia walks out the light and stands before them with her back to the door. They close the doors and lock up, but she still stood there. Without giving the guards eye contact, she turns to them and briefly bows.

The guards get on one knee and bow more obediently. “Take care, my lady, and be safe,” the commanding guard says.

She walks up to him and puts her head on his. “Thank you, commander Darien.” She walks off as the guards stand up to watch her go with mournful expressions.

Afearia descends down the stairs to the ground floor, quickly being addressed by a hasty butler. “Lady Afearia!” he blurts. “The elders have been waiting for a very long time! You must hurry!”

“Don’t rush me!” Afearia’s shout startles the maids and butlers in the area. She calms down and sighs. “Sorry.” As she passes the man, she puts her hand on his shoulder. “Take care of yourself, Reggie,” she whispers while walking by him. He turns to her as she heads out the front doors. “At least while I’m gone, you won’t have to take the blame for a troublemaker, right?” she says jokingly.

He kneels down and takes a bow. “It was always an honor, my lady. Please be safe.”

Armored guards pull open the front doors to the palace and let her through. She nods at them and proceeds down the hill to the city below.

Once she reaches the city, the citizens watch her walk through the hill gates with amazement as they whisper to one another. Most questions about where she came from and who she is.

A young boy strays from his mother and runs up to Afearia. “Hey, hey,” pulling her pants leg. “Why do you cover half your face?”

The mother runs over and grabs her son. “Tony! I am so sorry.”

Afearia smiles and waves her hand. “That’s quite alright. He was just curious.”

Afearia proceeds to the inner city gates as the hyper little boy continues yelling. “Hey, hey! You didn’t tell me! Hey, hey! Pretty lady, wait!” He keeps yelling as his mother tries to calm him down. Afearia giggles to herself and keeps moving.

Once she reaches the golden gates, the guards open the way to her. Waiting beyond the gates are elder Carnavess, elder Helios, and elder Grayson.

“Afearia, you look great,” Helios says while approaching her. “What’s wrong? I expected you to be jumping for joy now that you have free walking range.”

“My duties come first,” Afearia says firmly. “There’s no room for petty things.”

“A well said answer from an educated warrior. What took you so long?”

“Last minute preparations.”

“Yes, this is a task that shouldn’t be embarked upon half prepared.” Helios puts his arm around her while stroking his black goatee. “But you’ve never been one to slack. Doesn’t the endless conflict below get you fired up?” he whispers. Afearia says nothing, not even expressing slight response to his words. “Hmph,” he smiles. “Alright, come along. We’ve been standing here waiting to see you off,” he says while walking her toward the other elders. “Gentlemen, a few parting words before we ship her?”

Carnavess, standing in front of her, leers down at Afearia. Afearia’s five eight height makes his six foot posture look quite threatening. “I expect success from you,” he says. “I’ve been the key to your existence from the moment you were born. As my reflection, I expect you to be flawless.”

“Understood, father Carnavess,” she says. He steps behind her and stands next to Helios.

Grayson smiles before Afearia walks toward him. “My child, you look uneasy,” he says.

“I’m fine.”

He puts his hands on her shoulders. “I can see the worry in your eyes. You know I can read you better than anyone else. Are you concerned that you may lose control?” She makes a slight frown and looks to her right. “Just remember what we taught you. Control those things and you should be fine.”

“I just don’t understand why he would do this to me. He has no remorse... I hate him.”

“Yes, he is a troubled individual with no care on who falls prey to his actions. But to him, he must have thought it would be the best method to destroy Elysium by having *it* roam free. A

plan to destroy us from the inside.” He lifts her chin. “That is why we chose you. Not just because we felt sorry for you, but because we knew you were the best candidate for the job.”

Afearia lets her eye slant back toward the right and then back at Grayson. “I want to help save this beautiful world. I want to protect it from all forms of tyranny.”

“Then you are ready, my child. That solid resolve will keep you going. Hold on to your beliefs and nothing will stand in your way.”

“Thank you, father Grayson. I won’t let you down.”

Grayson smiles at her once more before looking toward the palace. *Xenler*, he says telepathically. *Open a pathway to Terra.*

A white light glides over the city like a slow moving sunrise. Suddenly, an oval shaped doorway of white light opens before them. Afearia walks toward it and looks back at the palace she has spent her whole life in. The citizens watch silently while the elders stand calmly. First time I’ve heard the city so quiet, she thinks. Grayson nods with his welcoming smile while Carnavess turns his back to her and begins walking toward the palace. Afearia turns to the portal and enters the light, disappearing with the portal soon after passing through.

“You think she’ll make it back?” Helios asks.

“I would be surprised if she did,” Grayson replies. “But let us hope she performs even half as well as we intended. If so, all else shall fall into place.”

*Diary Entry #6173*

*“Sometimes the unyielding are just fighting to stay alive. No one wants to find out that their life was a lie. And when you change someone’s mind, you are only rebirthing them into your reality.*

*You destroyed one truth just to replace it with your own. And now you’ve just played God, without declaring yourself as God.”*

*This is what one fiend told me. Even though I know he’s wrong, his words echo in my head like bells.*

*I hate him.*

# The World Without Light

## Chapter Two

In the lands of Terra, the skies are dark, the air is heavy, and the surrounding areas have poor vegetation. The roads are deserted with little signs of life. Not even the sounds of bugs or birds give indication of their presence.

Without warning, a bright ball of light shoots down from the sky with a fiery streak behind it. The sphere of light crashes into an open grass field. The ground shakes with the formation of a large crater that expands far enough to tilt over the only tree in the field. As the smoke clears with parts of the field on fire, Afearia begins to emerge from the hole. She walks out with not even a speck of dirt on her.

Afearia momentarily loses balance. “Geez, my head’s spinning from that landing.” She slowly observers her surroundings with a stern look on her face. “I wonder which way it is to the nearest town.” She fully climbs out and walks through the field toward a two-way dirt path. A man suddenly comes walking from the west side of the path. Afearia notices him and approaches. “Excuse me, sir? Where are you coming from?”

“Armport,” he says calmly. “Just came from visiting family.”

“How far is that from here?”

“Not too far. Should be at most, two miles down the west road.” The man oddly looks her over. “What’s a young lady like yourself doing out here alone? Don’t you know it gets dangerous around here?”

“Then why are you out here?”

“Because I’m a strong man. I can look after myself.”

“Then I suppose I should be careful.”

“I can take you there if you like.”

“That’s alright. Your kind of help is the last thing I need.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?”

She swiftly swings her arm across his body without touching him. Within that moment, the wind shifts toward the man’s right before subsiding. His chest suddenly slides diagonally from his stomach before hitting the ground. The rest of his body hits the ground as she steps around him.

She walks down the path smirking. “Heh... Shapeshifters.” His body flakes into a gray ash being lifted by the winds.

The closer she moves toward the town, the more she becomes aware of the land’s condition. The field’s grass is in patchy green or completely voided of plant life. A number of uprooted trees by the dozen lay about. She shakes her head and presses onward.

In little time, Afearia reaches the town of Armport. She stands at the entrance, observing the empty population from the streets. As Afearia enters the dark lit town, she notices the many twist and turns by the buildings overlapping one another’s path of crooked walkways.

No one’s on the streets, she thinks. Maybe I should try to gather information from a tavern or something. She finds the local tavern a few blocks from the entrance, but when Afearia



opens the flimsy door, she it's unattended. Not even a thieving customer inside. She backs out and keeps walking. What is going on here? Where are the townspeople?

After searching around, she begins to hear low voices in the distance. She turns a few corners to follow the gradually rising voices. The once hard to hear words of men and women becomes loud enough for her to make out.

“Now's our chance to stand up and fight!” a man shouts with the sound of cheers. “If one of their elites shows up, we will prove to the king once and for all that we won't be bullied any longer!”

Afearia reaches the area where all the shouting's coming from. She remains in the shadows of the alley to see a man dressed in green and white fatigues. He's in his mid-thirties with facial hair that's mildly thick, and black hair on his head that's neatly combed back. Along the sides of his head is gray hair in streaks of white.

He continues speaking, standing on top of a wooden crate while a large mass of people carrying firearms listen to him.

“We will not let him continue toying with our livelihood!” he shouts while gripping his rifle. The crowd roars briefly. “Once his elite sees us take the town back, he will be forced to accept that he does not control us! We are a free people who will make him step down from his throne!” The crowd cheers to his words.

As the cheers wane, Afearia slips in a comment. “And if he doesn't?”

Everyone quickly turns toward the back alley where Afearia stands in the open with one hand on her hip. “Who are you!?” shouts the man leading the rally.

“What do you people think you will gain by throwing your lives away? How will you reason with a fiend as if he were a man?” The crowd begins to speak amongst themselves with fearful tones.

To the left of the rally leader is a man roughly the same age with a black goatee patch and a brown gunless holster strapped to the waist of his blue fatigues. Briefly staring at Afearia, he whispers in the rally man’s ear. “Is she the elite? She’s here too soon.”

The rally leader watches the crowd’s moral beginning to dissolve. “Silence!” They all do as they’re told and quickly face him. He points his rifle at Afearia. “You’re the elite from the king’s government, aren’t you? Put your hands where I can see them.”

“I will do no such thing,” Afearia says. “I am not the elite you’re waiting for.”

“You think I’m going to believe you!? I have never seen you in this town before, and your clothing is not of material in this area. You aren’t fooling anyone. Now put your hands up!”

“They dress in white?” Afearia asks, not remotely shaken by the man’s threats.

“Put your hands up! I won’t say it again!”

“I see you don’t know a helping hand when you’re in the direct presence of it.”

The man’s finger tightens on the trigger. Before he can pull it, chains come from underneath him and snatch the rifle away while crumbling the wooden crates him and his men are standing on.

The crowd parts as the chains retract into Afearia’s sleeve. She catches the rifle and begins wagging her finger, shaking her head, and sucking her teeth. She tosses it to the side as

the men who fell stand up. The rally leader pulls out a large hunting knife that shocks the crowd but didn't intimidate Afearia in the slightest.

The man slowly approaches her. "Don't look down on us, demon!"

"Do you even know how to use that thing?" she says, mocking him. "You're holding that knife with poor form. I'm no expert, but I do know they are not held like that."

"A weapon is a weapon. Anyone can use it!"

"But if it's used improperly, its effectiveness diminishes. You could very well hurt yourself."

He runs at her. "Not if I hurt you first!"

Afearia shakes her head. He sounds like a child, she thinks. When he forcefully tries to stab her, she gently pushes his hand down toward the ground. He stumbles forward and turns back to her. She doesn't even turn around to face him.

His frustration grows before he tries to stab her in the back. Afearia steps to the side and bends her arm outward. His arm goes between hers as she wraps her arm around his and leans back. With him kneeling, Afearia uses her other hand to apply pressure to his wrist, disarming the man.

"Is this your strategy to bring down an opponent?" Afearia asks.

He struggles. "No, this is!" He tries to spin around her and nearly tears his muscles. He briefly screams out in pain.

“You are very inexperienced,” she says low enough for him to hear. “Save face and accept my help.” He grunts a bit before ending his resistance. She lets him go to retrieve his knife. “What’s your name?”

“Duncan,” he says while dusting himself off.

“I can safely assume you are the leader of this rebellion?”

“Are you going to make an example of me? I ask of you, don’t involve the others.”

“Duncan, you are not listening to me? I have no ties to the king. I am here to help. I have been sent here from a higher plan to save the people of Terra.”

“Like an angel?” says a woman in the crowd.

Afearia turns to the woman. “I wouldn’t get that righteous, but the similarities are there. I advise you disband this group,” looking to Duncan. “Tell them to return to their usual routine while I handle it from here. There is no reason for all of you to throw your lives away against something you can’t beat.”

Duncan puts his knife away and sighs. “Alright everyone,” he says while walking to the front of the crowd. “Get back to work. No need to panic. I’ll come up with something else that has a safer outcome.”

“But the elite is coming tonight,” says a man from the crowd. “We have no time.”

“We can’t put our trust in some stranger,” says another man.

“We were all strangers once,” Duncan says. “And now we have grown to trust one another. We have even banded together to find a solution to our oppression. Even if she may be a spy, I promise I will keep the casualties to a minimum.”

“Of course you can say that when it probably won’t be you on the line, Duncan,” says the man who was on the crates with him. He steps forward from the mob. “You and I both know we can’t afford to randomly trust someone not of this town.”

“You’re right,” Duncan says. “But whether we trust her or go with our original plan, lives may be lost. I actually believe less lives will be lost if I let a spy walk through here than us doing an all out attack.” The crowd begins to look more satisfied with his decision.

“Everyone, return to your homes!” Duncan says to the crowd. “I will deal with this woman’s arrival. We’ve made it this far, right!? What’s another night?” The crowd nods and talks amongst themselves. “Please act casual. Tonight is still the night. Alrog will be forced out of here one way or another.” The townspeople begin to leave in different directions. “Oh, and be on the lookout for Demis!” He turns to Afearia. “I assume you would like to know what’s going on here. It’s best we move this to the tavern.”

The two of them turn down the alley with the other man following them. She stops and looks at him. “You know him, right?” she asks Duncan.

Duncan smirks. “Yeah. No need to walk behind us, Ben.”

“I’m keeping the rearview in sight,” Ben says. As soon as Afearia takes another step, she suddenly stops and looks back at the area they just came from. “Is something wrong?”

She smiles and walks behind them. “I think I should watch the rear. I’ll leave the front to you guys.” Ben shrugs and walks up front with Duncan. She looks back once more with a peculiar expression.

The three of them reach the fairly mellow tavern and grab seats at the bar. Duncan and Ben begin drinking while Afearia downs her third shot. She finishes and exhales refreshingly. “Hey! Another shot of gin, please!”

“Who do you think is going to pay for these?” Duncan asks while looking at her empty shot glasses.

“You! Now finish telling me about this Alrog fellow.”

“It’s as you saw. Tonight is the night we try and assassinate Alrog before his elite arrives.”

She finishes another shot and waves the barkeeper for more. “How do you know if this ‘elite’ will actually arrive?”

“One of my men overheard him talking about this over the phone at his house.”

“A spy operation by non-soldiers with no casualties? Not bad.”

Ben pushes his drink to the barkeep to take. “Who said no one died. There are times our men don’t return. The dangers of walking into a lion’s den don’t change because you live around the lion’s home.”

Duncan sips his drink and nods in agreement. “It’s unfortunate, but without those brave souls, we wouldn’t have even made it this far. But this cycle of death ends at his doorstep.”

“I understand,” Afearia says. “But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Tell me who Alrog is exactly?”

“Word has it that he’s one of the king’s many top men ordered to watch over this place.”

“By any chance, is he in the Righteous Kiras?”

“The what?”

“The Righteous Kiras, Duncan,” Ben says. “It was the name of the rogue group the king controlled before seizing power. It was a small group of super monsters with no obvious aim beyond destruction. But it turned out to be a global aim for control. You should brush up on the government’s history, Duncan.”

“How do you know about it?”

“I was looking for clues to bring them down a while back. Now they’re just recognized as government elites or pillars. But to answer your question,” he says to Afearia. “We don’t know if he’s an elite or not. No one from this town has ever seen the whole group.”

“That’s unfortunate,” she says. “When should this elite be arriving?”

“He said sometime tomorrow night.”

“Then I’ll have to see this Alrog tonight. Take me to his location.”

“You said we would be throwing our lives away if we face him, right? Why would it be any different because you’re doing it?”

“Because I have something you people don’t. Now take me to Alrog.” She downs her last drink and flips the shot glass upside down before leaving. The two men get up and put money on the bar before walking out.

When the two men step outside, they see Afearia sitting on a barrel, gazing up at the stars with a wondrous look in her eye. She turns her head toward them. “You Terraians really do have a marvelous view of the sky.”

“You act like you’ve never seen stars before,” Duncan says.

She hops off the barrel and brushes the bangs from her face. “I’ve read about them. I have even seen images of them on paper. I couldn’t understand what was so great about them. Burning balls of gas that humans wished upon. It sounded idiotic.” She looks up at the sky again. “But it’s a different—yet irrational feel when you gaze upon it for the first time.”

“That’s a shame. The darkness in the area you live must be very strong to block out stars.”

“It’s actually quite the opposite. But enough small talk. I have business to take care of. Where’s his location?”

“It’s right by the entrance. To be honest, I’m surprised he didn’t see you arrive. He never misses people coming or going.”

“Or he saw me but didn’t bother to stop me. That’s troubling.” Afearia suddenly starts darting her eyes around while backing up a bit. “Duncan, how often do Demis roam around here?”

“Every night. Now that I think about it, I’m surprised we haven’t seen any.”



Ben looks over at Duncan. “And you just found that strange?” he says.

Suddenly, four men from the rally come from four different directions with smiles and light laughter. “Gillen, Mike, what are you guys doing here?”

Afearia pushes Duncan back a little while giving a very serious expression to the four men. “Stand back. I don’t think your friends take kindly to intruders.” Suddenly, the men’s eyes begin to sink in as their bodies start to deform.

“What’s happening to them!?”

“Get back, Duncan!” Ben shouts as he pulls him back.

“Listen, your friends are no more,” Afearia bluntly says. “I thought I smelled something, but I wasn’t sure. This whole time you thought you were spying on Alrog, but truth be told,” she walks toward the deforming men. “He was spying on you.”

The muscles of the four men become veiny and large. Their faces turn demonic as their hair falls out along with their ears. Their teeth become sharp as their skin turns black like leather. Their eyes become completely white with their bodies stretching to eight feet tall. The four Demis look like giant men in tight leather suits covering their whole bodies.

“More shapeshifters,” Afearia says while eyeing her opponents. “This town must be crawling with them.”

Immediately, the first one darts at her like an Olympic track runner. It throws a punch and Afearia jumps over it before landing on its shoulders. She quickly brings her feet together and does a leaping spin that takes its head clean off. She lands elegantly behind it before the Demi topples over.

As she rises up, the other three look at one another and then back at her with their muscular brows expressing anger. Two of them look at each other before charging in together. Within a single step, Afearia waves her hands around in a circle motion. The two slow down and move right past her before coming to a complete stop. Their bodies burst with gash wounds as they collapse to the ground.

The last Demi has a shocked expression. Afearia raises a curious eyebrow to it, sending fear through the Demi. The shapeshifter turns away and sprints deeper into town. "I wonder where it's going," Afearia smirks, walking after it.

"Wait!" Duncan shouts.

"Don't follow me. This is where things fall into my expertise." The two men watch her go off into town on her own.

The shapeshifter runs recklessly toward the town square while Afearia walks in its direction with a calm look. When she reaches the square, she slowly looks around for the runaway Demi. The black-skinned creature pokes its head from a ground floor window. Afearia tilts her head and smiles. "There you are. You were smart to call for help."

Suddenly, over a dozen eyes are filling up the windows of the three story house. The top window shatters with the release of flying-type Demis. The flying creatures look similar to the shapeshifter, except they have no legs. These Demis have pointy ears and damp, decaying skin of multiple shades of brown.

The center windows break open when eight-legged Demis with human torsos jump through. Their torsos are pulled back so their heads are upside down and low to the ground.

These three foot tall Demis have hooves for feet and hairy legs. They drool an acidic liquid that only sizzles once dripped off their foreheads. Their eyes are milky and twice the size of a normal person, completely void of irises or pupils.

Several more shapeshifters of lesser height and brown skin emerge from the lowest windows. Afearia puts her hand on her hip and begins to point, counting each individual Demi. “Let’s see. Four flying-type, eight ground-spiders, and three shapeshifters. A total of fifteen opponents. Tsk, still not enough.”

The eight-legged creatures begin to move toward her at a moderate speed with closed mouths. She runs her hand up her right arm as glittering green seals appear where her hand glides over. The crescent-streaked-through seals fade as Afearia slams her hand on the ground to make two walls of solidified soil rise up and collide together, killing off half the ground-spiders. The remaining ones split off into two groups before jumping up and vomiting their acidic drool.

She puts her index and middle fingers together and places them on her mouth. Afearia quickly slides them off her lips, making a brief kiss noise that ignites a large flame. She moves her head from left to right, setting the streams of acid on fire. The flames travel into the mouths of each spider, causing them to explode. Afearia smirks and waves over the remaining Demis.

One of the shapeshifters extends their arm to try and grab her. Afearia jumps up to nearly get hit by two arms from the other shapeshifters before leaning back and grabbing one of the arms to swing herself higher.

Suddenly, one of the flying Demis grabs her by the arms while soaring into the sky. The other three flyers swoop in to slash her apart with their claw-like hands. Afearia keeps smiling as

she begins to swing her body back and forth, gaining enough momentum to wrap her legs around her carrier's neck.

Squeezing her legs together, Afearia pulls down just before her first attacker can cut through her. The initial slash cripples the wing of the Demi holding her, causing them to fall. She grabs hold of the creature and forces it down head first. Afearia hurls it to the ground like she's playing leapfrog. Shortly after the falling Demi hits the ground, dying on impact, air pressure builds in Afearia's palms and breaks her fall by using the wind to flip herself upright.

Soon after landing, she does a backflip to avoid the extending arms coming her way from the other shapeshifters. Before completing the flip, she releases four chains that punch clean through the skulls of the brown-skinned shapeshifters and the hearts of the flying Demis. The black-skinned Demi from the tavern fearfully watches as all the others fall to the ground.

Afearia lands, retracting her chains and looking up at the shifter. "You do realize I left you alive on purpose, right?" The Demi begins to quiver before running off again. She fires another chain from her sleeve and wraps it around its neck. "Whoa, down boy!" slamming it to the ground, leaving a bloody scar on its forehead as she slowly retracts it toward her. "Let's talk."

With great reaction speed, Afearia releases the chain and jumps to the far left before being smashed by a massive war hammer. Dust flies up into the air from the impact. The shapeshifter stands up and wastes no time to retreat from the area.

The dust quickly settles and positioned behind her is a mammoth sized fat man standing over fourteen feet tall. His nose has hairs coming from all angles and a scar down his left eye. His arms are heavily sculpted, but his belly is huge and undefined. The man has little hair on his

head, but a hairy shirtless torso with tight brown leather pants. His reddish oiled skin has nasty warts poking from his folds.

Afearia turns around while retracting her chain. “You must be the elite, Alrog.”

“Something like that!” he bellows. “What the hell are you doing in my town, little girl!?”

“By the holy order of the higher counsel, I have come here as the representative to liberate the mortal realm from Derexen. And it begins with this town.”

Alrog laughs with enough force to lightly rumble the ground. “I don’t think so! Keep up the act and you’ll end up like the last world guardian that was stationed here!”

“What did happen to the last guardian?”

He lifts his massive hammer and kisses the end with dried blood. “He met a fortunate end to my trusty hammer!” He looks Afearia up and down and grins. “Then again, you look too tasty to smash! Maybe I can train that body for—!”

“I’ll cut your throat you fat pig,” she warns.

“Very threatening! But you can’t defeat the mighty Alrog! I’ve been watching you and I see you’ve yet to use the trademarked Empyrean blade! Either you can’t wield it for long, or you can’t wield it at all! I’ve met both types!”

“Neither assumption’s correct. I chose to come unarmed because of a promise I made with myself.” Twelve glowing red rings appear on her arm. “That was not to slay anything with my swords till I met someone from Derexen’s group. Looks like I can turn it up a bit.” Suddenly, a black samurai hilt begins to emerge from her palm. A red blade with a matching glow slowly

pokes out as the hilt rises. “On behalf of all the guardians you have killed,” she unsheathes the blade from her palm and raises it below her eyes. “I’ll make sure your death is a beautiful one.”

Alrog becomes angry and slams his hammer from over his head. Afearia jumps to the side and leaps onto the handle of his weapon, rushing up toward him with cold-cut eyes. She tilts her sword to the right before jumping up and severing the muscles in his arm.

Afearia leans her body back and prepares to take his head. Alrog screams out and takes a wild swing at her. She puts her hand up while using her other hand to make a transparent yellow seal with a curve and three markings. “Gale Current!”

When his palm neared, it struggles to break through the wind pressure. Alrog’s hand is deflected before Afearia lands behind him. With little pause, she turns around to do a dashing slash attack. “Nooo!” Alrog screams as he grips his hammer and swings it across the ground. Afearia grunts and jumps over it in the opposite direction, leaving her body horizontally in midair.

Suddenly, she vanishes, almost like a shimmer as Alrog continues to thrash about with wild speed, tearing up the ground around him. “Once I gather your remains,” he screams. “I’ll wear you as my hat! Ugghhh!” His eyes widen with shock.

Afearia stands behind him with her sword halfway through his back, grinning devilishly. “Not before I wear you as a coat.” She jumps up, splitting his back open while making sure to land far from the shower of blood. She turns her head to his corpse and sucks her teeth. “Is this really the best an elite can do? I could have sworn they were stronger than this.”

“We are,” says an unfamiliar voice.

She turns around and sees a man walking out from behind the dead giant. He has wavy light blue hair sticking outside the hood of his white robe. Edging his robe is an intricate series of diamond shaped patterns. Although she can't see his whole face, his most distinctive feature is his constant smile.

“Who are you?” Afearia roughly asks.

“It's funny how meeting strangers only leads to a series of questions. Trust no one, I always hear. And this is the trustless world at its best.” He glances at the corpse. “It's been a while since I've seen one of these guys killed. To think, I only came here to check the status of Armport. A standard routine that happens to end with the exciting twist of meeting a red-haired heroine.” He lightly chuckles. “And where do you reign from, young warrior?”

“Elysium.”

“Oh? Those youngsters sure did take their time to do anything down here again, huh?”

“You talk too much. Tell me who you are.”

“Demanding, but as a talker, I must play into my curiosities before actually introducing myself.”

“Then I'll just have to shut you up.”

“You can't, I'm innocent!” he panics. Afearia's confused by his reaction. He lightly laughs before turning around and analyzing the area. “So the elders have decided to send their royal guard to attack the problems here. I guess they've had enough?”

“Yes. The era of darkness is at an end. I, as the seventy-second light bringer, shall restore balance.”

“And how will you do that?”

She smirks. “Well, I’m not off to a bad start. That’s one down and nine to go.”

“Nooooo,” he says playfully. “That’s none down and ten to go. I assume you’re speaking about the government pillars.”

“What are you talking about? There’s a slain elite lying at your feet.”

“Says who?”

“He did.”

“He’s just an apprentice. In other words, a person who has tried out to be a top government official and failed. All you killed was a minor pawn. Hmph, maybe less than that.”

Afearia kicks up dirt. “Crap, I broke my promise on that fat pig!”

“It was silly to begin with. It’s those who are overly proud of their abilities that tend to make the most blunders.”

“You talk too much,” she says with a threatening glare.

“Why are the young ones always so eager to fight? When does that attitude—?” Without warning, Afearia dashes through him with a clean cut into his body. His arms are stretched out before him as he stands motionless. He suddenly becomes transparent and drops into a puddle of water.



Afearia looks back. “Water!?” she says with an appalled tone.

The man appears in the building with broken windows. “Wow,” he nonchalantly says to get her attention. You are a fast one,” leaning on the broken window frame. He puts his elbow up on the window to prop his head. “You know, your kill now and ask questions later, methods are very familiar to me. What’s your name again?”

“I never gave it.”

“I want a name to the face. I have a feeling we will be seeing you quite often. I need something to report to the king since I have no interest in fighting you back for this land.”

“Afearia.”

For a brief moment, his smile drops as his mouth slightly opens while leaning off his hand. “Afearia...” He smirks. “Are you alone?”

“Do you see anyone else of my caliber around?”

“I would have expected the grand elders to have sent their trump card with a stronger blade. Demonweaver isn’t going to cut it. Heh, it couldn’t even cut me.”

“And who are you to question my chosen companions?”

“Companions? Hmph, now that’s rich. But trust me. I know more about what awaits you than your precious elders.”

“What awaits me is victory. And this fragile kingdom will be crumbling at my feet once I get through.”

“Then I assume you are going to persist and fight against everything he stands for?”

“Till the last breath in me is spent.”

He stares into her eye for some time before leaning off the window. “That’s not just words coming from you. You’re serious. I can feel your resolve from here. Just remember, words hold less power than one’s actions in the end. Enjoy the lack of difficulty while you can. Because the hardships of extraordinary proportions are what will shape and challenge all that you once knew.”

“Don’t kid yourself. You clowns will never cause my frame of mind to waver.”

“Strong willed. Arrogant. And helplessly naïve. They’ve raised one hell of a girl. Till next time, Afearia. I earnestly look forward to it.” Water swirls around the man’s feet as it encases him in an ice prism. The icy diamond shatters, leaving nothing but fast evaporating ice shards.

Afearia looks around for anymore enemies before taking a few steps and suddenly pausing in thought. Wait a minute! That man said Demonweaver. But I never said the name of my blade. How did he already know my sword’s name? Is Derexen’s info that in-depth? She looks back at the window. Perhaps they also had time to invade the chamber as well...? But even that’s an unlikely answer. Afearia looks from the corner of her eye toward the alley she once came. “I thought I told you to stay at the tavern.”

Duncan and Ben step out into the square. “Now I see why you said you were the only one capable,” Duncan says. “Looks like you really aren’t a spy.”

Afearia’s sword is sheathed through her palm. “So you were still suspicious of me.”

“Not anymore. This is great news. To know someone as powerful as you is on our side. Terra could use a true warrior again. Won’t you stay for awhile? There are things I would like to discuss with you.”

“I can’t. I must restore this world as soon as possible. I must move on.”

“I understand. Then be careful passing the checkpoint beyond this town.”

“Checkpoint?”

“Yeah. After passing a certain point in this area, you will find Demis of greater variety in the wild.”

“Then how has this town been getting any food? Sounds too dangerous for humans to tread past their homes.”

“Before we decided to actually take back control of our town, we used to receive aid from bottom ranked government officials. They arrived with goods if we signed government trade agreements. But we stopped. Since then, we’ve been doing illegal trades with foreign partners. It’s been hard, but—” Afearia begins walking away. “You’re still going?”

“Your town should be fine without me. And even if not, I did what I could. I have to resume my original assignment. Good luck.” She walks down a different alleyway, leaving the two men disappointed by her distant attitude.

# New World Order

## Chapter Three

Far from Armport lies a large town surrounded by dark clouds and black sky. But this town has an abnormal environment. Above this town is a separate blue sky with sunlight only shining down in its vicinity. The darkness is formed in an irregular shape around the town with dark clouds passing through to become white clouds.

At the very end of this town is a floating gray castle with red banners and flags displayed throughout. Underneath the castle is floating rocks with broken ground and strange dark energy rings spewing out every so often. No buildings are in the surrounding area, just street lanes and stone paving.

Inside the dark castle, a very important meeting is about to take place at the center floor. In the meeting room is a mahogany table with a red tablecloth stretched across it. Around the table are ten black chairs with ten different roman numerals carved in red on the head of each chair. Smooth pillars are lined close to the walls on the left and right sides of the room.

At the head of the table is the first roman numeral, carved in a black marble throne with steps leading down to the table. Behind the throne chair is a large wall with a red flag's outer edges in black draped across it. Like the other banners and flags around the castle, the design has spread black wings with a man's hand reaching up holding the world. The left wing has the word *Government* in red castellar font and the right wing reads *Law* in the same font. From its position, whoever sits on the throne appear to have wings.

Eight robed people sit at the table waiting for someone. Several of them are sorting through papers in their folders when suddenly, a cloud of darkness and a shot of light transpires at the head chair. When the light fades, a man dressed in all black appears before the chair holding a black leather coat over his shoulder.

The man wears a black long-sleeve dress shirt with thin vertical gray stripes on the front, and loose-fitting black leather pants with a silver chain hanging through the belt loops. His long shaft black boots have belts and buckles for sturdy fastening. The man's strong jaw line has light facial hair and messy styled mid-length black hair. His bangs hang above his cyan eyes in rows of three.

As he scans the room, his face seems pessimistic, as if nothing in this world can surprise him. "All rise." The group does as they were told. A blonde woman sitting to his left comes up to him and takes his coat. He spreads his arms as she puts it on him. Once he sits down, the rest of them do the same. "Today is Terra's monthly maintenance check," he says to the table while upturning his collar. "I expect promising reports," folding his hands. He looks around the table once again. "Looks like someone's late."

"As always," says a woman to his right with the number six over her chair. She leans forward with her elbows on the table and smiles.

The woman's robe is dark purple with golden stitching lining the edges. Her hood's fairly large in comparison to the other members. On the back of her robe is a stitched design of large black demon wings. Her fair skin is a soft whitish-yellow and her hair is a silky royal blue in a loose high-rise bump ponytail. This style gives her hair the appearance of body while complimenting the thick, heavy bangs dangling over her forehead and ears.

“Then I shall begin without him,” the man at the head chair says. “Going counterclockwise, verbalize your location’s status.”

To his left is another woman with blonde mid-length hair neatly combed and rounded down the sides of her face, reaching the end of her neck. Covering the top left side of her face is a series of curved bangs that lightly dangle before her left eye. The top right area of the woman’s head is where the hair parts to create her alluring style. Her irises are silver with the flattering accessory of a diamond stud in her left ala nasi. She has smooth, buttermilk skin and a lean body to accentuate her youthful appearance.

The woman wears a black robe with thick red stitching crossing through one another along the edges. On the back is a star with five-points colored half red where two ram heads meet up top. Carved on the head of her chair is the number ten.

“My city in the southwest is doing better than expected,” the blonde woman says. “Despite the damages from the Demi invasion, the citizens are recovering.”

To the left of her is an empty chair with the number three above it. Next to that chair is a man with crystal blue eyes and whitish-silver hair of near shoulder length. His hair is full of body and has a silky, wavy shine, giving the near appearance of wavy curls. His mature facial features, clean shaven jaw, and his innocent expression, give his masculinity a more sympathetic persona. Even his fresh-cut apple skin bolsters his handsome facial symmetry.

His black robe has a stitched design of smoky gray smog at the wrist, completing at the bend of his elbow. The same design is also at the base of his robe, connecting from the bottom front and completing in the back like a giant hill. Above his chair is the number eleven.

“My-my-my a-area is at p-peak growth,” he says with nervous stutters. He shakily raises his left hand and puts on a black mask with a large white swirl in the middle. The right side of the mask has a white tear design. The mask’s right half expression is of angry joy while the left half is sorrowful. “However, it seems the Demis are starting to get rambunctious,” he says in a confident, rough, threatening tone. “Because of this, the general public is acting out in a rebellious manner.”

“Rebellious?” the blue-haired woman replies.

The man lifts his mask and sighs. “Yes. It-it appears that the-they are trying to-to form some kind of ta-task force against the government.”

“This problem should be addressed as soon as possible.”

The man in the head chair raises his hand to calm her. “Bonnie, don’t prioritize until you hear all the situations.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Is there anything else, Kyoto?”

“That is all for-for now, sir.”

Next to Kyoto is a skinny man with his legs crossed. He has no facial hair and a thin framed muscle build. In his right earlobe is a small gold hoop earring. His prominent lengthy eyelashes and light hazel irises give the man a feminine appearance. The man’s lengthy blond hair is cleanly done over to the right with the black sides and back of his head shaven low.

His dark brown robe with wide lines crossing through one another is tighter than the other members. Carved into his chair is the number thirteen. “As usual, my area is blind to their desires,” he says. “They don’t even know there have been murders as of late. Or they don’t care.”

“What murders?” the man in the head chair asks.

He femininely flicks his hair back as it falls over his eyebrow. “Don’t know. Looks like the works of a human. But I haven’t figured it out yet.”

“After this, you will be gathering your sector’s forensics team.”

“Alright, I’ll get on that,” sounding almost like he won’t. “As for the Demis, there was a brief flux of them in my areas, but they soon went elsewhere. I guess they saw something better,” he says, licking his lips to reveal two centered barbell piercings.

“Like?” the blonde woman asks.

“I don’t know. Once my sector’s clear of troubles, your guess becomes as good as mine.”

She bobs her head and looks away in annoyance. “Because it’s no longer your problem.”

He smiles. “Oh Valerie, you always know what to say.”

At the end of the table is a young girl with straight long black and silver hair. She has bright powder blue irises and light white skin with a beautiful complexion. Her dark blue robe has black rings going around her ribcage in rows of three. The same pattern appears on her hood and at the bottom of her robe. The number above her chair is fourteen.



“The town of Alexander remains unchanged, empty, and lifeless,” the young girl says.  
“Unwelcomed Demis do not come to my area, even when I’m away.”

To her left is a man with an average build and a scar going down his nose. The scar begins between his eyebrows and ends at his right nostril. His skin complexion is dark brown, finely complimented by his light green irises. He has a blond goatee shaped into a square with a soul patch, and a wavy dark ceasar with temple fades.

His dark red robe has a stitched design of a white skull impaled with multiple black rods. Above his chair is the number fifteen. “The ones in my sector are calm, respectful people. There appears to be no sign of rebellious desire. Even the Demis know better than to do anything illegal.”

“It’s probably because of your murderous tactics,” Bonnie says joyfully.

“Murderous is a bit much, don’t you think? I prefer to call it—strict persuasion,” he says with a strange smile.

“Awe, I wanted you to say something witty, Agonda.” He chuckles to her comment before the man in the head chair gestures for the reports to continue.

Above the chair next to Agonda is the number twelve. In that seat is a well aged man nearing his late thirties wearing a dark gray robe with a repeating light gray wrinkle pattern going through it. He has mid-length sun-kissed hair with streaks of gray and light brown irises. At the nape of his neck, his hair extends further down to the top of his shoulders.

Though he has a fine white, tan complexion, his face has noticeable age lines, majority of which being covered by his five o’clock shadow. Neatly groomed are distinct sideburns curved

and pointed away from his ears. His physical build is slim and nicely bulked with muscle, noticeable through the opening of his robe.

The man next to Agonda scratches his broad nose. “My areas are clean this month. But the citizens are angry. There seems to be a lot of people going up in arms in my city. Screams of repression and cries for freedom. Protests and marches spreading everywhere. They’ve become a very lively group.”

“Then why haven’t you done anything to calm them?” Bonnie asks.

“Who says I haven’t tried?”

“Because you tend to make light of things like this.”

“Only when I think they raise good points.”

“Then what’s your judgment this time, Glenn?”

“This political bunch has valid and irrational points that I feel would best be answered by the king.” He leans forward and addresses the man in the head chair. “If you have time, I would like you to confront them so they can better grasp what they’re so angry about. A king is nothing if he is not for the people. Am I right, Derexen?”

Derexen stares at him for a moment before shutting his eyes. “Indeed. I’ll be sure to speak with your region this month.”

Glenn sits back. “Then I’ll spread the word this week on your possible arrival.”

To his left is a woman with a slim build. Her raven hair is short and cut unevenly. Her skin is a beautiful blend of peach-white, smeared with black eye shadow and eyeliner that

accentuates her bright blue irises. She has a slender face that expresses zero emotion as she sits idly at the table. To match her black leather gloves, the woman's robe has a gray medium-sized skull design with a crack going through it on the right side of her chest. The robe's silver double zipper connects from the collarbone to the bottom of the robe.

Bonnie glances at the woman and shrugs carelessly. "I guess I'm next since Minerva doesn't really watch sectors like we do," she says crudely. Minerva remains gazing at the table with no reaction to her colleague's comment. "Fortlindo is doing much better in terms of Demi control and societal order. The Demis in the rest of the region are still a bit wild, but I should have them tamed by the end of this month."

Derexen nods a few times while looking down at the table. "I see. From my left," Looking toward Valerie. "Open up current issues in your departments."

"Global affairs are remaining frustrated by their new position in the world," Valerie says while reaching for a black folder on the table.

"Hmph, still?"

"People don't like stepping down from power against their will," flipping through files. "The old regimes will hold this grudge for as long as they live."

"Let them grumble."

"But, sir—"

"What else can you inform me about?"

"I'll touch the other topics as we move around the table." Valerie looks to Kyoto.

Kyoto lowers his mask. “The unknown influenza outbreak has been put to a halt in the west. But we have a much scarier problem. Recently, people have been becoming ill from something that is corroding their DNA.” Derexen looks remotely curious to his statement. “We are not sure what it is yet, and we haven’t been able to find live victims infected with it. We’re always one step behind.”

“Are there symptoms?” Derexen asks.

“Yes. The symptoms are almost the same each time we receive the reports of what happens before their deathly illness. Mimicking a fever and developing painful sores is the beginning.”

“Contagious?”

“Not that we know of. It could be nothing, but I want to isolate this or find the cause at least.”

“We should put out a news broadcast about the symptoms and have people with the following signs go to the hospital,” Valerie suggests.

“Until we know more, that will be our best course,” Derexen says. “Have that arranged, Valerie.” Valerie pulls a pen from the folder’s sleeve and makes a note. “Anything else, Kyoto?”

“No, sir.” Derexen looks toward the feminine man near Kyoto.

“Well, like others have mentioned, the main violence issues we are dealing with is amongst the rebellious ones. Fortunately, they’re having troubling getting their hands on guns, thanks to the firearm regulations created a few years back.”

“Ooo,” Glenn says with his hand to his head. “That rebellion was nasty.”

“All we need to do is calm the masses.”

“That can be addressed in the next world speech the king has scheduled,” Valerie says, looking through a note-filled calendar.

“Agreed,” Derexen says. “Next.”

The young girl puts on small glasses while reading off a document. “It’s basically the same issues as before. The arts are slipping with the lack of funding. The south public school districts are doing better, but overcrowding is becoming borderline law breaking. The northern and eastern schools continue performing at the top across the country.” She lowers the sheet and looks to Derexen. “My biggest concern is the arts and the overcrowding. I’ve stressed to you before that art is vital to expand a child’s mind.”

“I know.”

“And crowded classrooms make it hard to focus and receive special attention from the teachers when you’re having trouble.”

“Agreed.”

“When will you do something about this? I feel the education department gets steamrolled more often than it should.”

“That’s because there are other matters of greater issue,” Valerie replies.

“So you’re basically saying the education of Terra’s children is meaningless to you?”

“Don’t put words in my mouth, Yadeira.”

“I’m saying the truth. Just because no one’s life is in immediate danger, education seems to get the least attention.” She looks to Derexen. “My lord, please. The children need education if you want this world to function properly. Even ignorance can kill. Remember the national concern two months ago about the death of that thirteen year old boy? He struggled with reading according to teachers and failed to read a medicine label that any fifth grader could read. He mixed pills with his new medication and slipped into a coma, shortly before passing away.”

“And what the hell does that have to do with the arts?” the thirteenth member asks.

“Nothing. That was me stressing the issue of kids failing in academics because of overcrowding. The schools that have the highest scores are the schools with the least kids. And if you want me to explain the importance of the arts, it’s like I said during our last gathering. It’s sometimes the one thing that gives these kids reason to not throw their lives away or to stay out of trouble from gang violence.”

“Blah, blah, blah. All I’m hearing is a bunch of weak-minded kids succumbing to temptation.”

“Don’t be rude! That’s the problem. No one’s taking these things seriously! Ignore the small problems and this will come back to you. Like little holes in a dam, there will be a flood.”

“Agreed,” Derexen says, getting her attention. “I shouldn’t continue pushing it to the side. Tomorrow’s problems should be addressed today. Hold fundraisers around the country and I’ll see what I can give the education department. I should have an estimate by this week. As for

the overcrowding, I'll have more schools built in the southern region within the next few years. We'll begin the projects as soon as possible."

"Thank you so much. You won't regret this down the line."

"No promises, Yadeira. We've only recently avoided a near recession. Fortunately, we were able to curve it before it was made public. I have to use the government funding as wisely as possible."

"I understand."

Agonda readjusts how he's sitting. "Now that the smaller stuff is out of the way." Yadeira looks to him with annoyed disbelief. "National security's in the green. But I tend to be getting conflicting reports from my staff."

"How conflicting?" Derexen asks.

"Enough to say we could be in the orange if these possible threats are real."

"What have you been told?"

"Mainly assassination attempts on your life and ours," he says nonchalantly.

"Please—don't sound alarmed or anything," Glenn says sarcastically.

"These threats are just words in the wind. Nothing to worry about."

"Rumors or not, there is always a source," Derexen says. "And all potential threats must be investigated. Look into this immediately."

"Yes, lord Derexen."

Glenn leans forward. "I would like to bring to your attention this country's two highest crimes. Hate and theft. The prosecution for these crimes needs to be reevaluated."

"Meaning?" Derexen says.

"I'll start with theft. It's starting to spike with stolen goods, tech, and identity. In this day and age, these things may require heavier crackdowns."

"What is it you suggest?"

"Extend the time a criminal has to spend behind bars for things of this nature. Goods are important and more necessary now with an overpopulated world of seven billion people. To take away someone's identity has always been a problem, but it's becoming a natural thing."

"Identity theft has already been raised for being punishable to twenty years. Depending on the degree of abuse to another person's identity, could be life."

"The life sentence is up for debate," Valerie adds. "If you want to help push that forward, compile more documented proof that this is necessary for your cause."

"Alright," Glenn says. "That won't be a problem. Now recently, there's been an increase in attempted and successful technology theft. Items that are illegal for public ownership is no small matter."

"What tech has been taken?"

"Classified Orcein lab equipment. Demis were certainly involved."

"Don't be cryptic," Bonnie says. "My department is liable in this situation."



“Don’t worry, Bonnie,” Derexen says. “I’m very interested in hearing how you let equipment be taken from a high security building and not know about it.” Bonnie nervously swallows spit.

“In-side-job,” sings the man sitting across from Agonda.

“Shut up, Jodi!” Bonnie snaps. “And why isn’t Valerie to blame too? She’s part of that department. The head to be accurate.”

“Always quick to point, aren’t you Bonnie?” Valerie says. “Should I address this, sir?” looking to Derexen.

“Not for a second time,” he replies. “Bonnie’s the one who’s over a week behind mentioning this.”

“Actually, Bonnie may be partly clear,” Glenn says. “See, whoever did this knew the shipping schedules and knew which building had the lowest security. That’s when they lifted a box of warp devices. The building they took it from is not a building Bonnie’s stationed in. So the fault mostly falls on the chief in building three.”

“That doesn’t change why she manages a whole building where not one of her staff members reported this to her, but Valerie happens to get wind of it through others.”

“Like I said, partly clear.” Looks to Bonnie. “Tough break, Bonnie.”

“Stolen technology violations are already set to thirty-five years to life.”

“I would like to make it forty-five years to life since this can be a possible terrorist attack the defense department may have to consider. Could be linked to a government attack on home

soil too. Things like private technology being stolen by the public is not something we should allow with a light sentence. This is why I want to push the justice department's sentence time on these criminals before it becomes a national threat."

"Why not add a death sentence if they plead guilty for wanting to use it as a terrorist plot or a device for civil assault?" Valerie suggests.

"Isn't that extreme?" Glenn says with some distress on his face.

"It's a suggestion. All I'm saying is if these people don't come out reformed, the only thing you would've accomplished is increasing their hate for the regime and giving them enough ample time to plan and scheme the second time around."

"She has a point," Agonda adds. "Being that I'm staffed in the defense department, I rather do all we can to prevent such attacks on our government."

"Agreed," Derexen says. "Glenn, this is something you need to think about. Till then, I'll give you time and we'll revisit this topic at a later date."

"Hmm. You've given me a lot to think about," Glenn says with a pondering expression. "I'll have a concise response by next week."

"Good."

"And the hate crimes?" Valerie asks, flipping through files and making notes.

"Another nasty problem," Glenn says. "When we started the, temporary species merger," he air quotes. "There was a huge issue making the Demis respectively repress their baser instincts when around humans. Killing to kill. Killing what's human. And just looking for

something to eat. It was a problem that took years to fix up. Not perfectly, but better. But the problem that still remains is the rogue Demis killing humans because they're human. Today, we have humans killing Demis because they're Demis. It's creating a hate cycle."

"Nothing new," Kyoto says. "Humans have hated Demis long before the government was fully established. Now they're just taking hateful action about it."

"Why bring this up now?" Valerie says. "Lord Derexen has already set up the best control methods possible. Demis who are less than intelligent, and appear to be nothing but beast, don't go to trial and are killed on sight. As for the ones that do, they are either banished from the mortal realm, or sentence to death by government regulations."

"But the humans get a slap on the wrist," Glenn says.

"By being put under the same government regulations? Are you suggesting your department be allowed to kill humans on sight?"

"I would never. But more often than not, the humans are only jailed for a few decades, verses the Demis who are often killed, than banished back to the dark realm through revoked citizenship."

"Most cases are valid for death," Derexen says.

"Not always. And I think a lot of that has to do with the judges all being Demi hating humans with legal power to shut their lights."

"If you feel this is so, have your staff review Demi related cases, while sitting in on some of the judgments being issued across Terra. Compile what you can and we'll see where to go from there."

“When should I deliver my first report?”

“Two months from now.”

“Good. Let’s hope I’m wrong.” Glenn looks to Minerva. She remains gazing endlessly at the table. “Ahem, lifeless one, you’re up.”

Valerie tilts her head. Maybe she’s tired, she thinks. We all did just come from field work. “Minerva?” Minerva looks her way. “Is there anything I have to tell the king that you haven’t already told me about the labor and defense departments?”

Minerva looks toward Derexen who’s leaning on one arm with his hand covering part of his mouth and jaw. He stares back at her with no care to her dazed reactions. She looks toward Valerie. “The south’s job market is dipping again,” she says in a low monotone. “With our current funding, I can’t bring enough jobs to them.”

Derexen stares at Valerie. Valerie has a double take with the king before addressing Minerva. “What would you like the lord to do about that? He’s already funded your department for the next few months. And—”

“The problem isn’t money, Minerva,” Derexen says. “The south lacks, in most cases, the right skills for the jobs that are already available. Until that’s filled with competent workers, I won’t increase your funding. I suggest you direct your staff to hold classes to teach them the proper skills needed to obtain work. Fill the vacant spots and I’ll bring more jobs to the region.”

“If I may add,” Valerie says. “If you charge them for the classes, you can bankroll that for the department as well. This is a way to help fund for more jobs yourself. We even have

some upcoming projects that will require a large number of workers. It happens to be in the south. I'll put together the articles you need so you know what to teach."

"Understood," Minerva says.

Agonda turns his head in annoyance. And she's the head of the defense department, he thinks. Ridiculous.

"Is that all?" Derexen asks.

"Yes," Minerva replies.

"Bonnie?" Derexen says sternly before she looks toward him. "Before you begin, explain to me about your poor staff unable to detect theft."

"I apologize for my staff," Bonnie says. "I've found the ones who should have detected this crime and had them fired. Their files are on record and I'll submit them to you right away. Their judgment will be in your hands."

"Do you suspect they or anyone else is involved in this incident?"

"Yes, I do. If Glenn is willing, I would like him to interrogate building three"

"Nice cover up," Yadeira says.

"Excuse me?" she says in disgust.

"My lord, if I may speak?" Derexen nods in allowance. "Although you are not stationed at building three, isn't it your responsibility to look over all the tech buildings every week? And yet you're over a week behind in reporting this? How can that be?"

Everyone looks to Bonnie. “Stop,” she says with suppressed annoyance. “I don’t like how you’re trying to accuse me of neglecting my duties.”

“Then explain,” Glenn says.

“I... I didn’t fully go through all the buildings during my last visit. I’m sorry.” She looks to the king. “I really am, lord Derexen. I was cutting corners to make up for lost time with other things I needed to handle in the science department and the tech buildings in Orcelin.”

“So because of your recklessness, you caused private technology to be lifted from us and decided to remain quiet about it?” Derexen says with a near threatening tone. “Moreover, your poor judgment by not informing me left a cold trail. A cold trail that miraculously, Valerie managed to trace and alert Agonda and Minerva on her possible leads. We now have them under our eyes.”

Bonnie looks confused. “If things worked out, then why—”

Derexen stomps his foot, creating a thud that startles everyone. “Fool,” he nearly bellows. “Just because we may have found our culprits, doesn’t mean all is fine. The mistakes of a Pillar hold more consequences than any other position in the government. I won’t tolerate your inability to be a functioning body in my kingdom.”

“I’m sorry,” she sadly says. “It was one time. I didn’t foresee this happening.”

“Common sense, Bonnie. Get some.” Jodi turns his head and lightly whistles to Bonnie’s tongue lashing. “We are a tolerated and hated organization. Of course individuals want to see us fall. Make another blunder of this size and you will not only be removed from the fold—you’ll be crushed to dust.”

“It-it won’t happen again, my lord.”

“Proceed with your department’s issues.”

“The science and technology departments are nearing a breakthrough with Winull. And the underground costal barriers to halt tsunamis on prone shores should be fully operational in the next four years.”

“The Winull?” Valerie says. “That’s the project to deploy small devices that neutralize a windstorm’s power, right? That’s part of the Bionull projects.”

Bonnie glances at her with near annoyance before looking back to Derexen. “Funding for the Winull is running thin. I figured after the storm that destroyed several major town’s earlier this year, I saw best to speed the project along.”

“How close is it to completion?”

“Over ninety-two percent.”

Derexen thinks for a moment. “Submit to me an estimate.”

“No need to wait, my lord,” sounding slightly excited.

Bonnie pulls a document from her manila envelope. As she stands to hand it to Derexen, Valerie puts her hand out. “Give it.”

Barely able to hide her conniption, Bonnie lightly smiles at her. “Of course.” She hands over the document and sits back down.

Valerie looks it over for a moment. “Your department really bleeds us dry.” She glances at Bonnie. “You’ll get half of this.”

“You can’t decide that.”

“I’m not. I’m telling you, you’re asking for too much. I know what’s in the treasury, and I know how much the departments are spending. Until things are in order,” she tosses the paper envelope back to Bonnie. “You’re getting half.”

Bonnie stares at her with irritation. “Fine, then I won’t finish.”

“You will finish,” Derexen says. “I want completion by the second week of the following month.” Bonnie makes a low throat grunt.

“And don’t skimp on the design aspects because you didn’t get what you want,” Valerie adds. “Make sure all that money goes to the Winull.”

“Always in my affairs,” Bonnie gripes.

Valerie leans forward while folding her hands under her chin. “As overseer of all departments, it’s my job. And unlike you—I don’t cut corners.”

“How dare—!?”

“Enough,” Derexen demands. Bonnie relaxes herself with low mumbles. “Will that be all from you?”

“Yes, my lord.”



Derexen crosses his arms and leans back. “This concludes the maintenance checks. Several areas will need patrolling while others need more direct support from us. I want to hear where all of your departments stand the next time we meet.”

“That’s the king for ya’,” says an echoing voice coming from down the hall. “Always doing just enough.” The group all look toward the open double doors. A man soon turns into the room wearing a white robe, removing his hood. He flicks his finger at the possessed black suit of armor guarding the entrance with its spear. The armor turns to him as he walks further in. “So lively. But enough is no longer going to *be* enough.”

“Aquarius, so nice of you to join us,” Bonnie says sarcastically.

“What was that statement you mentioned a moment ago?” Valerie asks.

“Change is upon us. And it comes bearing gifts,” he says with a childlike smile.

“Stop playing around and tell us what you know,” Agonda demands.

He smiles on as he looks toward Derexen. “Looks like Elysium has dispatched their trump card.”

“Trump card?” Yadeira says. “What do you mean?”

Aquarius walks toward the table. “This is over your head, bijou,” he says while mussing her hair. She loudly grunts and swipes at his hand after he raises it off her while proceeding further up the table. “But yes. The brass men of the light realm have sent a red-haired heroine to destroy us all. How amusing, no?”

Kyoto raises his mask. “Is-is-is-is she strong?” he stutters.

“I would think so. But she hasn’t done anything for me to consider her a major threat.”

“She became a threat the minute she decided to stand against us!” Yadeira shouts.

Aquarius turns to her and puts his finger to his lips. “Shh, you’re ruining it,” he says playfully.

“Ruining what?” genuinely confused.

He chuckles. “If you can’t see it, then leave it be.”

“Ignore him, kid,” Jodi says, filing his nails. “He never makes sense.”

“Hold on, Jodi,” Glenn says. “All matters should be addressed and stamped for the king’s approval,” he jokes. “Senseless or not.”

“Coming from you, that’s funny.”

“Would you guys stop messing around!?” Yadeira shouts. “This isn’t funny.”

“Calm down, Yadeira,” Glenn says lightly. “I know. But it has been a while since anyone of that class stood firmly against us. I wonder if she can actually do any damage at all. I sincerely doubt it. And truly hope she can’t.”

Derexen looks to his left and slightly slants his eyes. “Did you get her name?”

Aquarius nods with a smile. “Afearia. A special name for sure.”

“What should we do about this?” Glenn asks.

Kyoto lowers his mask. “Should we crush her right away?”

Bonnie leans on the table. "I'm not even sure she's worth our time. Aquarius said she's not a threat."

"But she is from Elysium," Valerie says. "Surely they wouldn't send a weak soldier to battle for them."

"You give them too much credit," says Jodi. "Whatever they have planned probably won't be too much of an issue. Just let one of the apprentices handle it. She'll be dead in a week."

Aquarius's smile grows. "One has already tried. And failed miserably."

"What?"

"Worth our time now, Bonnie?" Yadeira says bluntly.

Bonnie grits her teeth and shouts down the table. "A dead apprentice is no reason for us to get all riled up!"

"Then calm down," Valerie says. Bonnie grits and grunts before sitting back.

Agonda makes a pondering face with his hand to his chin. "Still. I can't recall the last time when one of our underlings died on the job."

"Perhaps we should send out an analysis team to determine what we are dealing with," Kyoto suggests.

Derexen slowly leans forward. "I agree. Bonnie, gather information on this girl using your networking force. I want everyone to speak with Aquarius about her previous location and anything else in between. This meeting is adjourned."

*Diary Entry #4894*

*It is exhausting to be at the peak of perfection. I am forced to train six days a week, and the one day I should have off tends to be filled with some alternate form of training. What a pain... But I guess it's my fault after what happened awhile back. It has been three weeks since I lost control. That feeling that swells up inside of me can't be described. After all the anger and pain subsides, I quickly become sleepy as the frightening rush of cold takes my body. It's as if ice is being poured directly into my veins.*

*Heh, I guess I can describe it a little. Though the sensations of it changes depending on my current state, the end results remain beyond disastrous... I shouldn't waste time thinking about this. My break is almost over and I don't need to be lectured again. I should get back to training.*

*"Father" Carnavess is waiting.*

# Cause & Effect

## Chapter Four

“Afearia, wait!” Duncan shouts. Afearia looks back and continues to walk. “Afearia!” He catches up to her, slightly out of breath.

“Our business is done, Duncan,” Afearia says. “Go home.”

“I know, but me and Ben thought we could lead you to the next town as an apology for accusing you for being a spy.”

She looks back and sees Ben walking slowly behind them. “No thank you, Duncan. I can just follow the scent that has the highest Demi activity.”

“This is why I wanted to help. Wait, scent?”

“Never mind. What are you getting at?” she asks impatiently.

“Oh, well the areas with the most activity are not your problem. It’s the areas with the least you should be worried about.

She gives him an odd look. “Is that right?”

“Think about it. Demis are known to be migratory creatures that have no bounds once given free range. So why are some areas of Terra heavy in Demi population, while others aren’t?”

Afearia briefly ponders. “You have a good point. The lowest activity seems to be in multiple directions. I’ll start by heading further west.”

“Great, we’ll take you there.”

“I said no. I am not to involve myself with mortals from this plain. You’ll just get in my way,” she bluntly says.

Duncan stops and looks a bit insulted. “Just like Derexen. You look down on us too.”

Rage immediately takes Afearia as she fires a chain that wraps around Duncan’s neck. “Duncan!” Ben shouts as he runs over to him. She quickly realizes what she’s about to do and releases him. Duncan coughs a few times while she stares at him with irritation.

Afearia turns away. “Let me tell you humans something. You are not fighters. You don’t have what it takes to actually change your current living situations. You can’t even organize a decent group to combat oppression. How can beings of such low stature hope to do anything? You are not heroes. Stop pretending you are helping by playing commando and get out of the way of someone who can.” She leers at them. “And you wonder why Derexen won’t take you seriously. Go home. Do what normal men of your level do. Live.”

She proceeds from the alley, leaving the men to watch her go with frustration in their eyes. “Such arrogance!” Duncan says. “She made me feel so…”

“Small,” Ben reluctantly says. Duncan looks at his face and notices that even his stoic partner was shaken from her words. He balls his fist in the dirt and lowers his head.

Afearia, far from Armport and on the roads toward the west, she walks the dry grounds that have been traveled on many times before her. After a while, she decides to stop and walk off road to gather sticks and branches.

In her arm is enough wood to make a campfire. She kneels down and finds a patchless area to place it. Once built, Afearia swabs her lips to puff a light flare to light the wood. She lies flat on her back and watches the night stars. Her stern face melts into a state of tranquility under the sky. For the few minutes she lied there, she didn't think about a thing.

Her peaceful look fades with a less calm expression. Afearia raises her hand to the sky and chains begin to slowly move around her arm, twisting up to form a broadsword. Once the chains retract, she holds a sword with a black and white layered blade with chains wrapped around it.

Afearia tosses the sword from its bronze hilt and red crossed grip. It pierces the ground and lightly leans over. She sits up and stares at the blade. "You don't want to talk?" A white sparkling energy floats out the sword and shapes into a transparent man.

He has short, dirty blond hair and brown irises. The man's shoulders are broad and strong like his solid physique. His skin is a light tan complexion, wearing a navy blue short-sleeve shirt that's covered by a puffy black vest. His pants are loose-fit blue jeans with a white leather belt. The belt buckle has silver pirate sabers crossing through each other with a silver square holding the design in place.

"What's the matter?" he asks, putting his hands in his vest pockets.

"I think I overreacted with one of the mortals," she says regretfully.

"What happened? You know I can't hear or see anything unless I'm summoned."

"The foolish man compared me to Derexen and I almost choked him to death."

“You’re not supposed to harm humans, no matter the situation. You know better than that, Afearia.”

“But he compared me to Derexen.”

“You have to control your emotions better. No need for me to stress why.”

“I know, but he deserved it. His comparison is the meanest thing he could ever say to me.”

“What did you do to make him say that?”

“Nothing. He just claimed I was looking down on him and his species.”

The man smirks. “Sounds about right.”

“Excuse me!?”

“You have a very presumptuous presence. And you tend to fail at concealing how you feel superior to others. A very human trait.”

“And now you compare me to the Terraians. You are all being very insulting.”

“Why do you enjoy excluding yourself from them so much?”

“I don’t. It’s just true. I wasn’t born here and my people are the next level of human existence.”

“How exactly? Because you have access to things people on Terra don’t? I know we’ve had this conversation before.”

“And it ends the same...”



“Your people are—”

“I know.”

“And so are you.”

“I can’t be. I look it, but no human has to deal with *that* kind of issue from within.”

“No one from your realm has to either. Don’t discount yourself over something like that.”

“Fine, but the point is humans are foolish.”

“You know I was once human.”

“But you’re different.”

“I am no better, nor lesser than the people you will meet on this journey. Which is why you need to choose your words carefully when talking. Terraians can be very sensitive, even though we are aware you mean well.”

“I suppose that should be something I can relate to.”

The man looks up at the sky and notices the reddish moon. With saddened brows, he sighs. “So this is Terra now, huh? All because of my inability to stay alive. I wonder how much more has changed in these last twenty-five years. A world where the sun won’t shine and the dark won’t hide. It’s depressing.”

“Don’t beat on yourself like that again. You said you wouldn’t do that once we got here.”

“I know... but I feel like a failure when I think back on what I did wrong and how I should have gone about it.”

“Demeseus! You are depressing me now! I bet you died in a way that was completely unavoidable.” He says nothing as he continues to stargaze. She frowns a bit after looking at his face. “Why won’t you tell how you died? I’ve asked you like a hundred times when I was a child and you’ve never told me.”

“It...isn’t something I’d like to speak about.”

“But we...” He looks over at her wondering what she was going to say. “When you are ready, I promise not to judge you, and to be more respectful than you’ve ever known me to be.” He lightly nods to her respectful words. “I think I’m gonna take a short nap. I still haven’t fully woken up after the undesired dream interruption.”

“A dream? Was it anything special?”

She smiles at him. “It was to me. One of my best dreams yet. Kicks the crap out of all my nightmares,” she says while doing a kicking motion. “You mind staying here till I fully lose consciousness?” she humbly asks.

“Yeah, no problem.” She begins to lie down. “Hey, did you encounter any interesting individuals?”

“No. Was I supposed to? The things on Terra won’t interest me the way you may be trying to state.”

He lightly chuckles. “Alright, Afearia.”

“Good afternoon, Demeseus.”

“You know, you can call me Eternity if you want.”

“Good afternoon, Demeseus,” she repeats louder.

He laughs. “You are cranky today. Geez. Good afternoon, Afearia.” Soon after curling up by the fire, she falls asleep. The sword begins to glow white as he becomes fainter. Demeseus looks down at Afearia before looking back up at the moon. He puts his hand to his chest and makes a face of mild distress. Memories..., he says to himself, moments before fading away.