

Demon Sage

By: Daniel "Pendragon"

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***Warning:** this story contains scenes of violence and mild sexuality.*

***Rated:** R*

Note from the Author: *Ladies and gentlemen, readers of the Mystic League Universe that "DocWolph" has created and that I contribute to, I wish to present a warning before you begin to read the pair of stories contained within this two book compilation.*

The passages below are meant to inspire much emotion beginning with the bad, bringing it to the worst – a "darkest Hour" as it were – and then slowly healing back to good and light. This story is meant to be a fundamental change for many lives in the shard multiverse that DocWolph and I share, and the fundamental catalyst of all those changes is in effect engendered by my character Lord Sage.

My warning to you is that the first half of this story, everything contained in Book One, will make you feel negatively inside, but I promise you all that I make up for all of that in the second book, which immediately follows. The purpose of this pair of stories is to set into motion several very large changes, many of which all came to be with one, single act of madness.

In as such... this pair of stories will prepare you all for the following stories which will be upcoming as soon as they are completed, and will mark the end of the first chronicle and the beginning of the second; the first ending on the tenth year following the story "The Fate's Duel."

Remember as you read these proceedings, however, that it is darkest just before dawn...

- Daniel "Pendragon"

Book One: The Fall

Chapter One: Deception

Lord Sage Preypacer is an alien to the Great Wide Universe.

Because of the level of exploration across this universe, the term "Alien" in the case of the GWU can only be termed to extra-dimensional beings like Sage. Else wise all species are familiar with each other, are friendly, and are apart of one multi-racial community or government or other organization.

Sage had caused ripples in this universe with his influence from day one, many of which have been deemed disruptive... but as of late, as he is settling down, trying to learn the ways of this universe, fitting in with his new happy demeanor and kindness, he has nonetheless proven himself to be amongst the top five of the most powerful individuals known in the universe; and constantly jockeys for the number one position with Rae Iksaki, a position that more often than not, she holds.

But also... quite often... he has made himself a target due to his actions. And in this case... there were individuals who were targeting him again... but not to enact revenge or punishment on him for something that he's done... but rather to ultimately use, abuse, and then dispose of him for their own selfish desires...

Sage had just recovered from the most serious beating of his life. He had... garnered a deep affection for mother Sanari, especially how she nursed him back to health after nearly being killed again for the second time in a single month by the enigmatic Minotaur.

There were parts of him that still ached from the dual experiences, one from nearly being fried to death, the other having been wadded up into a ball and discarded and left for dead.

Both times... Mother Sanari had been there to watch over him, to help nurse him back to health. It was a truly, deeply moving experience to wake up in her silk sheets, your head cradled by her slender arms and bosom while you looked at her shapely bust through the opened folds of her robes.

Sage thought he was falling in love.

Thoughts of her engendered themselves within his mind almost constantly now. He felt himself gravitating to her during meetings to stand by her, felt his thoughts move to her amidst pauses in teaching or while he walked... and he drew comfort in the scent of her, being held in her gaze, being in her presence. She made him feel happy, excited and nervous all at the same time. It was truly, truly wonderful.

He couldn't remember the last time he felt like this...

After his recovery, Sage had taken to working in the hospital. It was usually low grade things such as sprained muscles and bones and torn ligaments, but the hospital was also the depository for a multitude of projects that all needed to be done right away. Just for something to do, he did half a dozen major projects himself and had their reports on Hyurri Namah's desk the following morning.

She was most pleased and asked him to do more. By the end of the following week he'd completed half of the projects that her hospital had in their backlog to complete but had no time to do.

It allowed Sage something to get his mind off nearly dying again. As he worked, however, he began to feel... hollow inside, and inexplicably he found his vision blurring for no reason when he felt this hollow feeling, and lifting a finger to his eyes, found that there were tears there. He didn't know why he was crying even.

Asking for a check up, the doctor who examined him found nothing terribly wrong with him.

Sage continued to work nonetheless, and had all projects for the hospital completed by the end of next week, and for something for him to do, Namah placed him in charge of the hospital's many projects, which likewise made him in control of projects.

His students were beginning to see less and less of him, to the point where Mayia finally came to see him, to see if he was all right. Sage professed that he was, and was happy in his surrogate daughter's presence, but as soon as she left, he felt the hollowness inside him return.

So when, one day, Sage received an email from a party on a planet called Qeen, he found new purpose and excitement upon reading the text.

Dear Mister Preypacer,

It has come to the attention of our organization that you have remarkable skill and knowledge in things biological, and have thereby earned yourself many awards and rewards for your knowledge and skill.

We've been following your medical career, and would like to offer you with an opportunity to study a biological artifact we discovered on one of our archeological digs. We have already sent you a prominent amount of credits to intrigue you, and to help pay for your transport should you feel interested. Else wise, keep our gift, and we shall look elsewhere.

Sincerely

*D'Bra Saiyadeena
CMO, Dekan foundation*

"Dallas..." Sage said into his desktop communicator in which Daedalus, his lair computer entity, was directly attached to.

"I already anticipated your concerns, master. There is a sum of one point two million credits now flush in your personal account at the Universal Observatory's financial servers.

"Regarding the Dekan foundation... they are a predominantly a Caldynnii organization searching for expansion worlds for their government. Immediately... they appear to be a legit organization. Are you considering their offer master?"

Sage sat back and smiled. It felt... like a good thing to do. He loved tinkering, loved to work with new things no one has seen before and the honor of being able to lay hands on a biological artifact of unknown use and origin sounded like it would be a wonderful thing to do. It would take his mind off things, and he was due for a vacation...

Fifty years past due.

"Dallas... I think I'll take this project... at least temporarily to look at it. I believe Mayia and the other top students can handle the Shadow League in my absence... and though Namah will be a little miffed about the missed revenue... Perhaps... just perhaps I can find something to occupy my time and be useful again..."

Lord Sage was glad to be taking a vacation... He didn't want to bother his servants in something like this, and so booked a commercial space liner. At first look, one would mistake him for a debonair, exotic looking white tiger Casid... a bit small for a Casid male, but nonetheless quite handsome.

The planet Queen was a sprawling metropolis that covered most of the planet's surface, with the remainder of the planet reserved for farming and recreation.

Gathering his carry-on and riding the shuttle to the planet's surface, he was greeted by a tall and muscular Aphkei wolfess in a trim and snug uniform that accented the fact that she was a she, making ample display of the thick pad of feminine muscle between her broad hips and burgeoning thighs, and likewise amplified the presence of her bosom.

"Mister Preypacer?" she greeted.

"I'm he." Sage stated, standing a full head taller than this wolfess.

"I have a transport for you sir... we've been awaiting your arrival."

"Thank you."

Sage followed her, dressed as a subtle businessman carrying a suitcase; the style was reminiscent of fashion from Earth, so it allowed him to stick out in a crowd just by the style of his clothing. She led him out of the spaceport to one of the places where the various types of vehicles were kept. She opened the rear hatch and held it for him as he entered and sat back in a plush, white leather seat surrounded by a wet bar, a holo phone in the middle of the cabin, the phone linked to computer access... all the amenities.

This was a limo ride...

Sage felt a little uncomfortable being received like this, and something, way in the back of his head was tickling him for his attention. He ignored it for the time being and sat down, placing his suitcase beside him.

"Are you comfortable, mister Preypacer?" the pilot who came to fetch him asked.

"Very much... thank you." Sage replied, crossing one leg across the other and sitting back.

"Just sit back sir... we will be getting you to your Absolute destination... soon enough."

She closed the door, and several heavy duty locks slid shut into the doors. An automatic safety measure Sage assumed as he rested backward in the seats.

A few moments later, the cockpit door opened and the pilot slid into her place.

"Allow me to adjust the air conditioning for you sir." She said, and Sage felt a cool hissing about his ankles.

He sat back and rested, feeling the hissing lessen the air temperature to a cool air. Unlike most people, Sage loved the cold. It felt better than warm breezes to him. He sat back, relaxing, closing his eyes, growing more relaxed. Something began to tickle his nostrils, and his brows beetled before he rubbed a finger beneath his nose. The tickling sensation slid down his nasal passages into his throat, and he cleared his throat to get rid of it. But the tickling grew more intense and he coughed, and opening his eyes drew in a breath of shock, but that intensified the burning as he gasped in a deep heavy fog that was forming in the cabin.

He heard heavy locks rolling into place that surrounded the whole cab, and armored plates slammed shut over the windows and between the cockpit and the cabin. He choked for air as all the oxygen in the cabin and his lungs was suddenly removed from some chemical reaction and holding his breath he rammed an elbow against the hull, creating a deep impression in the hull. He was growing dizzy, and struck the same spot, before several panels opened up and shot at him. Pronged metal darts lanced into his flesh, carrying with them powerful electrical charges that forced him to spasm and release his stored breath, gasping in more of the chemical. The chemical likewise electrified as it gushed into the cabin now, and Sage shook and spasmed from the charge in the air.

There was only so much that a mind could take... even Sage's, which was accustomed to pain and suffering. The lack of air, the stabbing sensation in both his lungs, and his body riddled with wounds, he finally collapsed and blacked out.

Daedalus gave off a brief spasm as he lost contact with his master's homing beacon. Immediately he began to reassert contact, and then attempted to contact his master but to no avail. He immediately began to redirect processing power to his communications arrays in an attempt to find his father and master.

An hour later... he was attempting to gain access to the satellite array around Queen through proper channels.

Sage awoke hours later, naked, and stretched firmly between four heavy duty arm and leg braces. He was very dizzy, and had been drooling, and awaking, he strained against his restraints, finding that they were holding fast, and were likewise thoroughly reinforced by ceramic bands holding him to a super-composite steel frame that, despite his normal strength level, he couldn't even bend.

"Do not bother, Lord Sage... we have been thoroughly studying you for a long, long time. You are sufficiently under our control... more proof that no matter how powerful the male... females are still stronger."

Sage forced himself to focus. He was wearing a face mask that was restricting his ability to breathe, and was likewise feeding him a constant stream of something that was making him weak.

He saw a tall Aphkei female with a musculature like an Olympic body builder, and breasts that undulated unbound against her chest. She was every bit as tall as he was, her clothes were tight, and like the driver who'd come to pick him up her clothing was made to enhance her femininity. Tight pants with bell cuffs drew tight about her sex and between the cheeks of her rear, and likewise left the sides of her hips naked and bare. Her white silk blouse and opened black silk vest displayed a grand feminine expanse; the vest purposefully covered either of her monstrous breasts and made them separate, while at the same time displaying two more sets of naked nipples down her

muscular abdomen.

Her hair was elaborate, and she idly held the collar of a male who was dressed only in a leather Speedo like thing, and wore a leather harness and a leather studded collar with a ring leading to the golden leash. He walked on his toes and knuckles close beside her as she stepped up to him, and when she stopped, he began to grind her calf with his bulbous groin, kiss her thigh and fondling her swollen labia with one hand.

"I need to remind myself to never trust a Caldynnii again." Sage said quietly, remembering what members of this faction had done to Luna and Fatima a few years ago. "Who are you?" He continued; surprised at how gravely his own voice sounded.

"Why, I'm your hostess... D'bra Saiyadeena." She curtsied, and her pet took the chance to rise up to her, fondling her breasts and sucking from her tit. She smiled down at him and pet his head and back.

"Why... am I here?" Sage asked, trying to focus on her.

"We've just collected some alien technology, Lord Sage... just now... with your arrival." Sage stared at her, knowing that she meant him. "You are quite unable to get away, Lord Sage... so you may as well make yourself comfortable. The things that we will do to you, just because we feel like it, will make you want to die and rot in hell to escape them."

"Been there, done that." Sage responded. "What part do I play in your mad schemes woman?"

"The Caldynnii are geneticists, Mister Preypacer. I know you are in a drug induced stupor but one would think that even you would consider that. But you are after all only male. You're only purpose is for breeding..."

"We're going to extract your DNA, Mister Preypacer, and then our foundation will all grow large and powerful, and The Caldynnii government will have to take us back, just so that we can share these secrets with them."

Sage chuckled. "Kicked out of people who are considered refugees? That must've been some proper crime you've done D'bra."

She flexed an arm, and took pleasure of her blouse sleeve shredding about her massive arm.

"I used... questionable processes to enhance our base strength level. But you have powers known as Supernatural which can enhance our strength even more! We will break you, Sage, we'll break you, take all your genetic knowledge and dump you like waste."

"Why are you telling me all this?" Sage rumbled.

"Because you can't do anything about it..." she laughed, and stepped away, her pet mate falling from her tit to walk hurriedly along with her.

And right away, Sage saw female technicians, all of them muscle bound and powerful with great breasts approaching him with sharp implements that were to saw, poke and prod. He exhaled, and knew that he was going to be in for some pain.

Sage hung as a bloody pulp in his restraints, with slashes and gashes all over his body from head to toe. A droplet of blood fell from his body to the ground, and instantly turned to ash. This was, in effect, the problem.

"Forgive me, my mistress... but we are facing something we've never seen before. His tissues cannot exist outside his body for longer than a few seconds. Within moments of removal from his body, his genetic fluids and tissues exhibit a morpheic ability to them, and try to move in his direction. After a few moments, the tissues just... die. They disintegrate in seconds, too fast for us to even create a testing sample let alone move it to analyze his genetic

code."

D'bra was sitting in her large chair even as her pet mate was untying the strings to her black silk pants, pulling them off her legs before he knelt between her thighs and began sucking from her sex.

"I do not want to hear this, Sitsuke. I want results!"

"Again... forgive me... but... he is proving most difficult."

D'bra pouted, resting her chin on one hand while she ran her hand affectionately through the mane of her pet, even as he stripped sexily from his trousers, unsheathing a remarkably powerful penis that rapidly erected, and straddling her hips, he pushed his erect phallus in between her labia, coaxing a minute orgasm from her as he likewise stripped her chest open to reveal her massively engorged tits; his hands immediately going to grope them.

"Hmm..." she murred, and then looked down to where her pet was pleasuring her crotch, and wiping some of the mixed fluids leaking from her and tasting it, she paused as she licked her fingers and looked at Sitsuke. "Hmm... lucky Sage." She murred as her pet began to suck from her tit and become more energetic by pounding her sex. "If all his fluids and tissues die, then one would assume that his species at least have reproductive capabilities. Collect his seed, Sitsuke... piece together his DNA make up from that."

"How would we extract it?" Sitsuke asked.

D'bra rolled her eyes. "Be creative, Sitsuke. You're all women. Prove yourselves worthy of the name. Extract and compile... keep me informed on the progress."

"Yes milady." She curtsied.

"Now leave us." She said, and began stripping herself of her blouse. "My pet can be quite powerful when he is in the throws of a rut like he is. I will not have you craving him while he gives me new daughters."

"Yes milady." Sitsuke said, curtsying again as she exited promptly. As soon as the doors closed, D'bra leaned forward and placed her pet on his back, stripping herself of her blouse and vest, and began to pleasure him in return.

He was her pride and joy... and he never acted out of place. She showed him her pleasure in this every chance she got.

Her pet was still humping away at her cunt when Sitsuke returned to her in her chambers, D'bra and her pet covered in furs as he pounded her vaginal mound now, D'bra's thighs covered with his highly mobile seed.

"Success already?" D'bra murred, and fondled her pet as he orgasmed again.

"No ma'am."

"WHAT?!" she hollered and rose, her pet continually humping her.

"He... we cannot extract from him." She said. "He is very strong willed and somehow is ignoring our attempts to withdraw a sample of his genetic package."

D'bra kissed the forehead of her pet and pulled him out of her, only for him to erupt several jets of his seed all over her navel and thighs. D'bra bent over him and sucked out all his extra spooage as he continued to ejaculate, before she promptly wiped her navel off and dressed. Her pet pulled on his shorts and attached his leash, handing it to her as he followed in step directly beside her.

"Sitsuke... you are incompetent!" she growled at her, very upset that she didn't get the fullness of her sexing with

her pet.

D'bra paced all the way down the stairs to where Sage still hung. Immediately, she became incensed again at the sight of a strapping male, and her pet pawed at her crotch again as he hung from her opened vest and blouse.

His eyes were closed, and he was purely relaxed.

"He has unsheathed, mistress... but that is all that we've managed to do." There was a fem sexing him now, but he remained flaccid as she sucked on his tip. "We're pumping him full of chemicals that should be acting as an aphrodisiac. The reactions are there, the hormones are present... but he is somehow ignoring the bodily desire to become erect.

"Away with you." D'bra said and the fem sexing Sage scampered away.

D'bra then immediately took hold of Sage's phallus and began to caress and cajole his groin expertly.

Her pet whimpered, and she smiled at him hugging him to her breast and then began giving Sage a hand job, and frustrated dropped the mass of male flesh.

"Are you impotent?"

"No." Sage said, opening his eyes to look directly at her. "My will is stronger than my body. I'm afraid that you will have no success with this body. May as well just have your way with it and dispose of me."

"Your will? Mister Preypacer," She grinned and growled, pushing herself forward, palming the head of her pet to her chest. "You'll soon not have any..."

Chessa was slender, athletically slender, with a soft hourglass belly and narrow biceps, with a rounded body as she entered the lab. Despite that she was physically smaller than the other fems here, she held a power that they all respected and feared:

Her mind.

Fitted with cybernetics made to amplify her brain waves, and tighten its waves into better focus, she was more than a master psionics at the moment. The only reason why she had not overrun the entire foundation was because she was also genetically altered and brainwashed to be fatalistic to her mistress...

She palmed the transparent plassteel composite barrier that surrounded Sage, licking her lips as she stood wearing only an overly large shawl and a tong panty. She gasped at Sage's prostate form, her labia swelling, her clit erecting, and palming one of her breasts, she probed him.

Sage jerked as he lay there with his face mask on still, still nude.

And then Chessa dug into his mind. His defenses fell to her assailments easily, the ramparts nothing to her attacks, the walls falling till she delved straight into the center of his mind, finding the controls to the whole of his being.

There she found what she was looking for, and murring, she touched it off with her mind, and activated Sage's sexual centers.

He fought her, and she smiled.

The plan was to activate his sexuality, get him into a torrential rut that would splatter his seed all over his prison. Then all they needed to do was scoop up the goop, and reassemble his complete genetic formula, and break it all down to the last DNA sequencing. After that... they could incorporate his natural powers and abilities, his healing

factor, supernatural strength, psychic powers, magical connectivity and more. Chessa murred at the thought of having a body like her mistress...

"That's it." She said and Sage spoke her words unconsciously as she said them. "Right there."

Still he fought her... misdirections, dead ends, false starts and endings. She dug deeper, past the Absolute defenses, and triggered more of his sexuality but found... something strange.

"Ah... a schizophrenic you are, Mister Sage." She and he said simultaneously. And you don't even know about it... how droll."

She looked at the alternate personality, feeling that it had its own completely different set of powers and abilities, and there were only a few certain traits that kept the two in harmony.

Guilt. Self-Restraint. Decency.

His will was between the two halves... and she had to separate them in order to access and destroy that. Then he would be a willing thrall, and would do whatever they wanted him to do. She laughed... thinking to have him as her lover now as she reached out and tore apart his Guilt.

Sage's green eyes opened as he gasped, and he acted of his own accord now.

"No! Stop!!" he cried, tears rising up in his eyes.

She reached out and pulled away Decency.

"N-no!" his voice became more rasping as he immediately unsheathed his phallus and it began to thicken. "You don't know what you are doing!!"

She removed Self-Restraint.

Sage spasmed and Chessa saw his will, swirling there... just before it dissipated like a fart in the wind, slipping through her fingers beyond her control. She gasped in misunderstanding, just before she saw an orb that was at the center of everything...

She'd never seen such a thing, and lifting a hand, she reached out to touch it, but then the orb turned slowly, till the black half with a white dot faced her. And then the white dot turned black, and the white half shattered to the ground behind her. She heard Sage screaming inside here, and the myriad of synapses began to change all about her, darkness... utter darkness flooding in from all sides, and she pulled out of his mind to hear him screaming.

Inside his prison she saw him, clawing at his head, drawing deep gashes, clawed at the glass, and he began to bang his head repeatedly against the crystalline wall, his erection rising powerfully, throbbing, veins standing on end before he tore his mask off and opened his eyes. Chessa gasped as the green coloring darkened, turning gray, and then shifting colors to red.

Sage screamed, and a psychic wave erupted through him, tearing through his body, and she saw his gems imbedded into his flesh throbbing. His screams grew deeper, deeper still, his teeth sharpening and lengthening as the eyes darkened into a bloody red.

His muscles strained, and just above his erect penis... there was a nodule forming, the veins and arteries in his body moving to collect there, just before his flesh tore open about his belly button, and a green jewel pushed outward. With its arrival, a starburst of light flashed around it, joining with the gem in his sternum, then the one in his forehead, then the ones on either hand, the five gems shining brightly, throbbing between green and white, green and white, then white and red, focusing toward red as he pounded his head more against his prison.

Chessa watched as his body began to brighten, light erupting from his flesh between creases of muscles, till his

whole body became engulfed in the light, and hiding her eyes, she looked away as the whole chamber became filled with the intensity of a sun's light... brilliantly white... blazingly white...

And then with a snap the light ceased, and Lord Sage lay on the floor of his prison, his phallus throbbing minutely and then drawing limp as he lay at the base of the crystal prison.

Chessa looked down at him... and immediately dreaded what the mistress would do to her if she found out.

Chapter Two: Demon in the Angel

Chessa looked down at Sage... seeing visible spots of blood on his face as he lay there naked. She edged closer, seeing the still stiff phallus on his pelvis, and murred, wanting to feel that in her body.

She could see his body throbbing, veins and arteries realigning beneath his white fur and flesh. His hand flexed and claws like carpet knives slid outward of his fingers and tapped the metal ground. Chessa knelt, and opened her mind, trying to enter his, but there was... *something*... in the way. Her mind probed, and she focused on him.

She felt a swirling mass of layer upon layer of shadowy form surrounding his mind. She caught glimpses of light inside his mind... bright... bright light, and she tested the bonds, looking at Sage.

Chessa, however, made three fundamental mistakes that night.

The first was breaking through Sage's many defenses to get into the core of his being and messing it up. Sage's mind was not a fortress to keep things out... but rather to keep something in. Chessa released that thing.

The second was not reporting immediately what had happened, for if she truly knew what it meant for a fifth Soul Gem to suddenly appear on Sage's body, she would've immediately feared for herself and called every guard there was in the building to kill him immediately.

The third mistake... was getting close...

Dallas focused on a building through the use of a weather and science satellite, feeling through the satellites sensors a powerful, a remarkably powerful, surge of ethereal energies. So incredibly powerful that even with his proximity to the Mystic League, he'd yet to feel an explosive magical force of this magnitude before.

Police bands were already blaring magical happenstances and chaotic effects within a hundred mile radius, and he listened to several hundred thousand conversations planet-wide simultaneously as he assailed the local government offices in order to get a schematic of the building.

He recognized his master's signature in that ether explosion... but... there was something more...

Sage's eyes snapped open and burned red, and Chessa heard the screaming, the deep-throated guttural screaming combined with high-pitched screeching in her mind, that tore at her brain liked billions of needles imbedding themselves in her skull, and she screamed as Sage suddenly surged forward, his strike actually punching through the reinforced chamber straight through her sternum and up into her chest cavity with a sickly crunch where his hand and claws opened and then squeezed her still-beating heart.

She gasped and found herself staring breathlessly at Sage with her ruined lungs failing her.

"Only mortal." Sage uttered in a gravelly baritone, and closed his hand to crush her heart, a rush of blood gushing suddenly from out of the wound.

Pulling his hand back, he held up the blood dribbling down her arm, and extending a lengthened tongue, he licked off the acidic tasting blood to sample her genetic formula. He found her genetically altered cerebral functions and absorbed it, and within moments the gem in his forehead, The Dragon's Eye, source of his enhanced psychics, swelled and bulged.

His other hand snapped outward and the plassteel shattered before him as he stepped out. Every pore of his body leaked a black viscous goop that immediately covered him in a bodysuit, and he stepped forward, the bodysuit

tightening about his body, layer after layer into sheets of clothing. Blood dripped off his fingers as he regarded the woman who'd violated him, her blood seeping from her dead body into a vast pool about her. Sage stepped forward, walking through her blood, and created footprints on the floor as he approached a vast pressure door. Lifting his hand, he made like he was grasping hold of something, and pulled his hand back, and the heavy multi ton door designed to keep super powers like him contained, flew off its moorings, shattering several yards of wall around it as the whole thing shattered around him, collapsing to the ground.

Alarms began to blare as Sage looked down at his hand and clenched it... feeling his powers growing, feeling his strength enhancing rapidly. His clothing was changing as he moved, and he felt his groin swell, felt his muscles thickening as he grew minutely... and stepping forward, he walked out into a hall and turned, chuckling to himself in such a way that if one were to see him as he passed doing this... one would immediately think him to be utterly mad.

Daedalus, while attempting to find a file to reference the internal floor plan of the building, was shocked to find the building shaking, and instantly he focused upon the front walkway and gasped. Lord Sage was standing at the point of a multitude of law enforcement officer's weapons, and he'd just struck the building with his fist.

Cracks were spreading throughout the entire super structure, cutting into the ground, shattering pillars and supports, and as Dallas viewed this through the satellite, he watched as the entire structure began to collapse, rushing about Sage, splashing harmlessly against his body as the officers all ran.

Dallas rewound the image he'd been watching and focused on the front door, immediately becoming concerned. Sage's body was covered with blood. His claws were unsheathed and he looked... different!

Muscle mass was eight percent increased, height was increased nine and three quarter inches, and his bio armor was meshed somewhere between clothing and armor, and was stretched across his body.

Dallas watched the law enforcement squeal in, aiming weaponry at him. Sage stared at them, and Dallas found yet another problem. Sage's eyes were bloody red instead of green. Lifting a hand, he made a fist, and struck the building, and immediately the entire building of a hundred and fifty stories or so began to shatter and crumble about him. He didn't have any magical powers active, and yet the stones and concrete and ceramics of the building's structure were once again shattering against his body.

Sage moved forward, and then disappeared, teleporting.

Dallas stared at the image, rerunning it several times. He needed more information, and taking a deep breath, he assailed the City of Queen's resources, not able to wait for the proper channels... he needed to know what happened inside that building... now!

Fastian, home of the Demon League. Also called "Home".

Hawthorne was an old Wyrn... he was a full-blooded dragon, a fact that he was quite proud of, and was a fact that certain Dragaseir liked reminding him of. That was of course meant as an insult, though. He rested within his chamber, a massive hall like a grand kingdom's throne room, made to look like it was in the belly of a volcano with its pillars black and trimmed in red, as was the tile work on the floor.

His three eyes looked down at a multitude of reports on holoscreens till he felt something like a spike stab in the back of his brain as a surge of discordant power suddenly appeared within his domain outside the walls of the league.

He put the oversized computer pad down that he'd been using for reference, remarking that it felt like a demon lord had just entered his realm.

The Black Guard is a group of individuals that serve the Demon League. It's usually best to end their description there. Whatever was held within the black armor of the guards was unknown by anyone other than by the patron of the Demon League - Hawthorne - or by the headmaster Genohn.

Some said that they were actually demons and their armor was the bonding artifacts that kept them in servitude. The truth of the matter was that they were just normal males and females of varied races. They were enhanced by their armor so that they can handle normal students.

Normal students.

So when an individual teleported outside the main gates, right before them, an individual who they recognized as Lord Sage, even they would look worried... especially in the way that Sage looked and acted. He appeared with a snap and a ball of electricity that erupted away from him.

At times before, he required certain survival gear to exist in the environment outside of Home, the unofficial name of the Demon League's pyramidal school. Now he took a deep breath of the Molotov-Cocktail of toxins and micro organisms.

"What a rush!" he growled, exhaling through his nose a puff of smoke and then lowered his red-eyed gaze to the black clad and cloaked guards. "Open the gates." He growled, his clothing shifting over him, digging into his pores it looked like, trying to decide whether or not it wanted to be clothing or armor, his whole body throbbing.

"A-are you expected?" one of the guards asked.

"I hope not." Sage replied, his clothing and garb instead melting as it plastered to his body, gathering around his hands, lengthening the claws. "Open the gates." He repeated.

"I need to clear this." The guard said and began lifting his hand to his head to touch off his communications point there, and that was when he and his partner was sailing backward, landing so heavily in walls of the school that they both imbedded into the stone, creating radial cracks in the walls about their bodies.

The black guard looked down at the five fingered palm mark in his chest armor, growing dizzy from all the air being blown out of his mouth, and looking up, he saw Sage raise both hands, make a gesture as if he were grasping something, and then pulled backward. The great, heavy doors, emblazoned with magical wards from Hawthorne himself, were torn straight off the superstructure and thrown away, sending them spiraling miles away to land in plumes of smoke. Sage then stepped forward and stopped just inside the gates, his form bulging more, the thickening muscles grinding as his upper body spread and his bones realigned. When he walked away, there were footprints burned into the solid stone and tile at the entrance, and he walked forward.

Chapter Three: Assault

Genohn entered Hawthorne's lair, finding Hawthorne tapping the tiles with one finger, his lips pressed close together while he seemed to be listening to something. But as Genohn watched him, Hawthorne slowly turned his head as if he were watching something approach.

"Sir... We have an intruder. Black Guards are not reporting in as usual and the front gates have been ripped off their hinges. We don't know where they are."

Hawthorne's head jerked suddenly up and to his right as if he were following something.

"I know. We are under attack, rather." Hawthorne said quite soberly, devoid of any of his usual haughtiness.

"Under attack?"

"Indeed. I will say this for him," Hawthorne stated, and then his head snapped sideways and further up. "I have yet to see such efficiency in an intrusion before. Genohn... remove the Guard from the halls. Let him come to me... I also want you to move all the students into secure locations."

"But who is this person? Who's attacking us?" Genohn asked, his wings fluttering.

Hawthorne's attention jerked again, and suddenly Genohn felt a presence that he recognized, but it was warped... twisted...

"Me..." came a deep, echoing voice.

Genohn whirled, his great wings sweeping about behind him as he saw a pair of eyes, red within red glowing eyes staring at him from out of the shadows. He could hear deep, heavy breathing from this individual.

"And who are you?" Genohn asked, seeing no shape or form attached to those eyes.

There was a subtle, manic laughter coming from the direction of those eyes, and a realm of sharp white teeth appeared as the laughter came, and then it stepped forward into the dim lights of the chamber, and as if the darkness was coughing him up, Lord Sage emerged fully from the shadows to stand before them both.

It was Sage, but it wasn't. Something... was changing him. It was a disturbing vision. Black goop covered his body, erupting from his flesh, focusing about his Soul Gems, and Genohn blinked, noticing a fifth gem in the center of Sage's abdomen. But unlike the green glow his eyes and gems usually exuded, these were all glowing red.

"Dae... Haaaaaaa...." Sage seemed to exhale, speaking the syllables in a guttural, dark voice.

Hawthorne surged to his feet. "Fuck you too, Sage! How dare you come here and utter the forbidden tongue in my presence?" Hawthorne demanded, and moved forward, snarling as he clawed the marble plates beneath him with his large claws.

"Nixlie lix lee. Dae en ta ha'ae but'ae." Sage continued in the same foul language, stepping forward, and Hawthorne, so reviled by the feeling exuding from the shadow master, stepped back a pace.

Hawthorne exuded a dual puff of smoke out of his nostrils, his eyes narrowing. Genohn remarked that the voice and words sounded demonic, but even he was unfamiliar with the dialect.

"Leave us, Genohn." Hawthorne said suddenly.

"B-but ..."

"No buts Genohn. Get out." Hawthorne reinforced.

Genohn looked to Sage and Sage returned the gaze, growling at him, deep and guttural, and then grit his teeth to show a mouthful of sharp overlapping teeth with four overly large incisors, and Sage's gaze followed the Demon Lord out.

Genohn turned to look back at Sage even as the doors closed before him.

"Well Sage... I must say that that could be a good look for you." Hawthorne said, speaking in the same demonic tongue Sage did. "So, jackass... what is you want that you've damaged my home and assailed my guards without an invitation?"

"Jackass? Is that the best that you can come up with you fucking fuck? Is that putrid pestilence coming out of your mouth along with your foul breath the best insult that you can come up with you moron? No wonder you can't score a female..." Sage said in a long quick breath, lifting his hand, coiling his black, ooze covered fingers around, and Hawthorne watched as something began to form from the ooze. "I've heard imps curse and insult better than you... right before I crushed it beneath my metal shod boot."

"You talk the shit, you fucking despicable retard... but you have no idea the pure, level of insults that I am keeping at bay."

"So you say..." Sage growled, still staring at him. "And yet I haven't heard you utter a single one of them that would impress me."

"What do you want, Sage? Get on with your mother fucking point!"

"We have unfinished business to do, Hawthorne. You find a grand habit of claiming responsibility for things that never happened. You tell everyone around you that you defeated me... that you shamed me and made me your bitch."

"I did Sage... or are you here to prove differently."

"Hawthorne... you lacked the power to even hurt me in that fight. You hit me with your best, and I barely even felt it. I am here... to put your sordid, festering little life in its proper place: Beneath my boot!"

Hawthorne began laughing. "Sage, you are nothing to me... you've been nothing to me... you... you... what is that?" Hawthorne paused, seeing the thing forming in Sage's hand.

"This? I am surprised at how little your pathetic little mind is, Hawthorne... I'm sure that even you would recognize the bane of your whole fucking race. It is the weapon that proves that humans are greater than dragons..."

"A Dragon Slayer?!" Hawthorne hissed, even as the weapon solidified and became real in Sage's hand...

"Correct. Human beings created it, Hawthorne... all on our own without any of the elder races helping in this one, and it was created mainly because humans were being hunted by dragon kind during the first dragon war on Earth. I am a Teran, Hawthorne, and am considered it and its subsequent universe's greatest warrior. You can be safe to assume that I am also a Dragon Slayer. I killed greater than you when I was twelve..." Sage began to advance. "From day one, Hawthorne, from the very moment I stepped on this plane of existence, wishing no harm or foul, you began to insult, berate, undercut and belittle me at every little chance that you got. You lied to me, and lied to others about me to sully my name.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness."

"I've come to end your putrid fucking existence in one fell swoop, Hawthorne. I'm afraid that you will not... ever..."

see the light of dawn again..."

The roars rumbled Home... and the younger imps were huddled in their rooms, crying, the chambers shuddering with a battle going on. They heard Sage's piercing terror cry and wept, but it was many times more powerful, and it caused the children to shriek whenever they heard it, piercing deep inside their bodies, piercing at their hearts.

Genohn trembled, feeling the scream he'd heard only once before. Then... he felt nothing from it, being that he'd seen and heard worse... but now... he began to fear his greatest fear... and that was the bowels of hell reaching up and pulling him down, and kept looking at his feet, half expecting to see the floor breaking open.

"Genohn!"

Genohn turned quickly, surprised... he was never surprised. Teema Apsheer and Tepholi were hurrying up to him, followed by Chimera, Smith, and five other demon leaguers including Jasa Keese and her brother, Korho.

"Genohn," Teema repeated. "W-what's going on? Who's in there?"

"Sage..." Genohn swallowed. "Sage and Hawthorne. I think they're fighting!"

"Fighting? Why?" Chimera asked. "Mister Sage is such a kind person... why would he want to fight Mister Hawthorne?"

"Because, you dense bitch..." Jasa said with a scoff, and Chimera fumed at her. "Sage and Hawthorne hate one another."

"Like you and Chimera hate one another?" Jasa's brother, Korho, said calmly.

Jasa folded her arms beneath her naked, voluminous breasts and fumed. "Worse..." she answered at last.

"It just goes to show..." Korho began, but then there was a loud bellowing roar... a roar that gurgled at the end and died out.

There was a snap of fading magic, and the power of home rapidly began to fade. Genohn gasped and laid a hand on the doorway... the wards that kept him at bay had just died out... which meant only one thing. He looked frightened at all his fellow demons, and then surged forward, forcing the doors open, and they all rushed in and stopped cold.

There were fires burning the stone, and the towering pillars had been shattered and part of the roof had collapsed inward. There were a multitude of shattered impact craters and there were some cave-ins into the floors below. The residue of magic in the air tingled at one's nose...

But the most gruesome sight was Sage, tall, powerful, his body throbbing as he swelled, taking an oddly shaped lance and with a single swipe to Hawthorne's battered and beaten body, slashed open his chest from pelvis to collar bone, causing Hawthorne to shudder. Sage then crawled up onto his body, and began wrenching ribs open, pushing them away, and then bent into his body, and when he came back out, Hawthorne's still beating heart was caught in his mouth.. Heart strings were snapping one after the next as Sage rose, bent his head back, swallowed, swallowed again, and downed Hawthorne's heart.

The demons watching him could not believe their eyes, they didn't breathe, didn't move, and when Sage turned to look at them, the blackness on his body thickening with his form his red eyes focused on them even as he began to mutate.

Sage's body swelled, the grinding of muscles and the cracking of bones apparent as he grew by several feet, spikes erupting from his arms and legs, all down his back while his spine turned outward and each spine thickened, bulged,

and then erupted in the form of a line of overlapping hooks while his feet, arms, legs, neck and midsection all lengthened.

"Great maker..." Genohn breathed as Sage hopped off of Hawthorne's husk, his eyes and gems glowing while he continued to grow larger, thicker, the power radiating from him electrifying his bared flesh. His fur grew ever more pristine, his now bared flesh tightening and creasing into alien and mutated muscle masses unknown for any species, while the blackness darkened, and pustules of thick, sickly purplish and green bubbled all over his body.

Sage then crouched and screamed his Terror Cry... and charged.

Daedalus walked into the main chamber beneath the Pinnacle tower, where Meniko made her home as well as her court. It was a shining place, filled with lustrous whites and blues, with a domed ceiling that was a mile wide and half a mile high.

She groomed her feathers with her beak, her hands folded before her as Dallas entered and promptly bowed, drawing the attention of several other high ranking individuals of the league.

"Hello Dallas," Rae greeted, and ran up to him to hug him. "How is Sage? Is he enjoying his business trip?"

Dallas turned his eyes toward Rae, and Rae's face began to fall as she read his expression. It was very grave.

"I am afraid not, Miss Rae." He said and Rae uncoiled from him and he faced Meniko.

"What is it Dallas?"

"At seven hours and thirty eight minutes, I lost track of Lord Sage's communication beacon that is apart of his forearm computer. I hastily began to track my master after gaining access to a weather satellite over planet Qeen.

"At sixteen hours and twelve minutes, I monitored an ether explosion that held Lord Sage's signature, only warped and modified... and having increased by a factor of two point three percent greater than his previously known limits. Thirty seven minutes later I monitored enforcer communication traffic that told of an unknown white tiger assailant, believed to be a Casid, attacking the security members of a peaceful foundation on Qeen.

"At seventeen hours, two minutes, I recorded the following."

Dallas raised his hand, and suddenly a massive hologram in all its perfection showed for them, and immediately everyone gasped at the sight of Lord Sage, standing tall and powerful, blood splattered across his body, dripping off his claws, and now that the image was made better from Dallas's earlier recording by invading recordings from the security company monitoring the building, he was able to show multiple views of Lord Sage as he was shot at multiple times. Gun fire and laser and blaster fire simply pelted him, doing no damage as he looked about him.

An almost lazy fist rose and struck the building, and all imagery pulled back to show an entire building toppling down on him. Sage rose, unscathed... and then teleported.

"Merciful Aul!" Noxi gasped.

"Correct, Miss Noxi. Lord Sage has attacked civilians at the conference he'd been invited to, and destroyed a multi-million credit edifice."

"Can you be wrong?" Rae gasped, covering her mouth.

"I wish I were..."

The image broke and showed them all multiple images; one was Sage's left wrist, which held his forearm computer.

"This computer will work only for Lord Sage, being that it is keyed by his genetic structure, and requires his bio electric nervous system in order to function. I am asserting connectivity back to his computer, but... something is interfering with me. I believe that Lord Sage is presently mutating."

"Dallas..." Meniko said suddenly. "Why do you believe that he is mutating?"

The images reshuffled and one grew larger to amplify a view of Sage's waist, and the dark red gem in his abdomen.

"I-is that what I think it is?" Equis asked.

"Yes it is, Mistress Equis. It is a fifth Soul Gem. Lord Sage has accomplished the last task to trigger his dragon evolution, and at this moment his muscle mass has been increased by eight percent and his height by nine and three quarter inches. Additionally, his bio armor appears to be melding with his body."

"But why would he attack people?" Rae asked, not believing what she was hearing.

"I do not know, mistress. I do not have a lot of information, and do not have any pre-stated protocols to rely upon. I have no idea what to expect from him, or why he would be attacking anyone so viciously like this. I've been trying to gain access and communicate with my master, but time is running out."

"Why is time running out Dallas?" Meniko asked. "What do you know?"

"Master Sage's wrist computer is a part of his bio armor. The longer I remain away from my master's communication, the more his body has a chance to absorb the biomancic device that his computer is and becomes absorbed by his body. But I believe there is an additional danger. Many of you have undoubtedly seen Master Sage's eyes change color when he is angry or annoyed."

"We have." Meniko stated.

Dallas sighed and then the images reshuffled and another image blew up, and Meniko gasped as Sage's eyes, locked in an expression of totally maddening anger stared at her in perfect detail. Two pinpoint of black were at the centers of his eyes, seeming to stare directly at her.

"Before... only Sage's eyes would change color," Dallas said. "But now all five of his Soul Gems have changed color. I'm still attempting to obtain more information, but with the destruction of the building he was in, this has become difficult. I am also concerned..."

But then the doors to the massive chamber opened, and Noxi screamed as Guvno moved in with one of the golden armored school guards and Sato. They were carrying Genohn between them, his wings seemed to be mostly plucked of their feathers, and blood was draining from him to create a bloody trail on the floor.

Meniko gasped and surged to her hands and feet and rushed over to them, palming Genohn. He was kicked out of the Mystic League... but he nonetheless was one of her students... and she still loved him as one of her children.

"Genohn... what happened?" She quaked.

"S-Sage... attacked the Demon League. Tried to buy the students time... but it was a slaughter... Barely escaped. Meniko... Hawthorne is dead..."

Rae gasped, covering her mouth with both hands, and Meniko drooped; her wings falling as she stared a Genohn. Tears inexplicably began to fall from her eyes...

Chapter Four: Penance is for the Weak

Sage sat at the top of a building on a planet far away. He could feel the unmitigated power flowing through him, felt his muscles filling and thickening, compressing repeatedly in a cycle that literally took minutes to complete, and each time the cycle completed itself, he was stronger, larger and more powerful than ever.

He reveled in the feeling of power; he reveled in the strength that was empowering him as he looked at his crossed wrists and hands drooping off one upraised knee. Rain was falling off his body, hissing off his form while he felt a fire building up inside him. With the consumption of Hawthorne's heart, Sage was now incorporating the vast levels of Demon and Dragon Lore that bastard had.

And above all, Sage now knew every last intimate detail that blasted Wyrn knew.

Sage flicked his fingers, not caring a moment about the blood dripping off his fingers and massive claws.

His eyes were nonetheless tearing, and something... weak... inside him was crying at what he'd done.

It had been so easy though! They were all insects, even Genohn...

I showed them... I showed them all to respect me, he thought, lifting a pair of fingers to allow rain water to dribble off his finger tips, mixing with the blood and washing it off. *They all disrespected me and my power, now they all understand to fear me.*

Sage rose to his feet, his bio armor realigning, forming a heavy framework over his flesh, merging with his flesh and stripping his fur away as his muscles bulged. He had a raging erection at the moment, increasing the size of his phallus and bulging the chorded muscles there while the veins throbbed about its mass. His red eyes looked down before he tipped forward from an edifice that was over a mile high, the wind whipping past him, and doing a twist and a flip, righting himself, he landed, creating a cracking impact crater around him like a meteorite landing. He rose unphased and began to walk away, lifting a hand to lick off the demonic blood, sampling a myriad of powers and abilities from them all as he incorporated their DNA with his own.

The first annoyance is out of the way, he thought. *Now for the other. But I need more time... to grow...*

At his left wrist, his wrist computer beeped...

Dallas looked up.

"I have regained access to Master Sage's wrist computer." He said, and suddenly he was the center of attention.

Genohn had been moved to the infirmary after being healed by Meniko... but there was something interfering with her healing magics, and in some cases, her magics worsened the wounds on Genohn's body instead of bettered them. She helped him as best as she could, but he was still weak. Sage's alien use of magic was as of yet unknown. There were certain magics that he had an utter mastery over that they had abandoned. Those magics, as far advanced as they were, were pushed to a level where even Meniko didn't understand them.

"And?" She asked, growing agitated by the situation. She still couldn't believe that Hawthorne was dead.

"No reply. Communications may either be damaged or absorbed already. But I am at least gaining access to the diagnostic sub processor. I also have a location."

"Where?" Meniko stated, and suddenly a universal map was displayed.

A map of the universe was displayed to where a galaxy was selected upon and zoomed in, a quadrant was selected

and zoomed in, a solar system was selected and zoomed in, then a planet was selected and zoomed in, the planet rotating to select a section of one of the vast continental cities that covered advanced planets.

"Planet Tilk... Brown Sector. I can't zoom in any closer than that without some more local sensors at my disposal."

"You can pinpoint him that well? From this far away?" Noxi asked.

"Indeed mistress." Dallas was shuffling holographic displays about him without any apparent emitters, and the location map shrank to one side, and several more screens erected, and Dallas stared at the bioform monitors. "Oh dear..." he said quietly, looking at the vast jumble of information being displayed, and Noxi gasped.

"What is it?" Rae asked.

Dallas looked at Rae for a moment, and the myriad of bioform charts all overlaid themselves to show an image of Sage, as he was now, walking along some street deep within the city. Off to his side, it gave ratings for all his many attributes. They were waving back and forth... but they were steadily climbing. But what drew their attention was the monster Sage was becoming.

Horns, spikes, thickening muscles, broadening tail, walking on his toes, slightly hunched over and moving with an untold grace. The truly demonic form he was, with his throbbing pustules all over his body and his shoulders being large massive protrusions of molted purple pustules being the most apparent things in their sights, but to see the attribute ratings, at how high they all were...

"That is a three hundred and fifty two percent increase - at the minimum - to all existing attributes save for mental ones." Dallas said. "And even those have increase by a factor of fifty-six percent."

And as they watched, Sage's image slid sideways, braced itself on a wall that they couldn't see, and suddenly his body thickened and spread, growing larger, his muscles flaring and the thickening pustules on his back, thighs, arms and shoulders swelling even more before hardening.

His physical attribute ratings suddenly doubled and his mental attributes rose an additional eleven percent.

Noxi looked at Rae worriedly and then back at the image. Rae caught the motion, and felt Noxi's sudden concern.

"Dallas... does Sage's bio monitor have a log file?" Noxi asked.

"Downloading all available system information now. Processing. Processing. Displaying." He said and the image of Sage shrank to overlay his location, and a graph chart displayed showing his overall growth of power.

Egis, who'd been sitting down rose and gasped. Illia rose with her.

"Impossible..." Egis said slowly. "How can he be increasing that quickly? Naturally even?!"

"Unknown." Dallas replied. "Not much is known about the process to make one a were-dragon... Sage is the first information I have. I just..."

He paused, and the images rapidly shifted to show the bioform image of Sage's body swelling, his back parting, spikes and carapace forming while an electrical charge rapidly appeared all over his form. But then the silvery metal computer on his left wrist spasmed seeming to shatter and form a small explosion of black goop in every directions, and then seemed to melt, and with a snap all of the images went blank.

"Dear me..." Dallas said.

"What happened?" Rae asked. "Dallas... bring the images back."

"Connection lost: terminated by host." Dallas spoke softly. "Sage has absorbed the bio-mater of his computer..."

"What does that mean?" Meniko asked.

"Lord Sage has been toying with the idea of merging with his armor. But he knew not what that would do to him. Apparently he doesn't care any longer. With him absorbing his armor, he is gaining its functions and everything attached to it as natural powers, abilities and functions... extensions of his own body. Like Bio-organic cybernetics.

"But that in and of itself is cause for alarm, mistress Rae."

"Why is that?" she asked.

"Firstly, Lord Sage and you have been jockeying for the number one position of the most powerful individual in this universe. There were times in which he superseded you."

"Superseded Rae? I don't believe it." Illia said.

Dallas lifted a hand and gestured, and a new holoscreen deployed, showing a chart of Rae's and Sage's bioforms over time. Indeed, they were both exhibiting tremendous bursts of growth from time to time, and though Rae's was a steady, soft and gentle inclines, Sage's erupted in abrupt peaks.

"Over ten years... Sage has superseded Rae's overall powers thirteen times. The longest of which was six months, the shortest of which was twelve minutes. As of Sage's most recent scan, Rae was once again in a steady lead."

"That's good." Noxi said.

"But with the addition of his armor and its components, you can see the following..."

Another bar etched itself across the map, and it was constantly, and always greater than Rae's abilities.

"This is Sage with the bonuses of his armor..." Dallas explained. "He never liked using it, because it was cheating when he was attempting to learn. But with him absorbing such power, I'm afraid, Mistress Rae, that even you would be overwhelmed. But that isn't the worst of it."

"There's more?" Meniko asked.

Dallas exhaled.

"With the downloaded data from my master's wrist computer... I have compared it with my sensor readings as of late. What you are about to see is what has happened over the past four hours."

Another screen appeared and it showed another comparison... Rae versus Sage again, and suddenly they watched as Sage's powers began to grow exponentially, and naturally... he was nearly at Rae's own level.

"If this trait continues, mistress Rae... in twelve hours... Lord Sage will naturally surpass you by a very wide margin. Within twenty four hours he'll be twice your strength."

Rae sat backward on one of the many couches Meniko had formed... everyone was looking grim.

"Dallas?" she said after a certain amount of thought.

"Yes Mistress Rae." He answered.

"Are you able to scan me now?"

"Yes mistress... my sensors are all active at the moment... I've been keeping an eye on you all for some time now."

"You've been actively scanning inside my home?!" Meniko gasped.

"Mother... *please*..." Rae said and rose. "Dallas... read me now."

Rae began to flex, and drew upon her storehouse of detached power, and Dallas blinked.

"Amazing." He said, and turned his head to the chart as Rae's power levels began to rapidly skyrocket.

Rae relaxed and the power levels went down.

"I have a vast storehouse of power in back up, Dallas."

Meniko beamed. "Yes she does... like her own personal star of stored power in a pocket dimension held inside herself."

"That may help." Dallas said. "I hope its enough."

"What do you mean you hope its enough?" Meniko demanded.

Dallas turned to look at Meniko. "Rae's trick is not exactly unique to her. I'm sure all your students and yourself have been taught this skill?" they all nodded. "Well so does Sage. It is a skill not unique to your universe. Sage simply draws upon it differently. On top of that, he is, as we now speak, absorbing the bio-luminous batteries of his armor.

"The armor is a bio-enhancement construct. It increases one's base natural attributes by a certain factor. At its last level, it enhanced Sage's powers and abilities by a wavering three hundred and twenty percent; give or take twelve percent. Presently, I don't know if that enhancement factor will go up or down.

"At my master's most enhanced form, data taken twelve years ago with him armored and drawing from his storehouse, his power levels were increased by a total of one thousand, five hundred and thirty two percent. Nothing in comparison to his current base levels, but if he is able to enhance himself even by that much..."

Dallas let the statement hang in the air.

"I must remind you all... Sage has already defeated Genohn and killed Hawthorne, and before leaving the Demon League, he has done an as of yet untold level of destruction to the League. But if Genohn finds it necessary to abandon the planet... one can only assume as to the severity of the damages caused."

"Oh... Merciful Aul. Mother! Teema and Tepholi are still there!!" Rae gasped

"If you are able to, Mother Meniko... I suggest sending a team to investigate. Especially since we've received proof that Sage is no longer there..."

"Already in the process... they will be leaving soon."

"I'm going too!" Rae said.

Meniko stared at her for a moment and then nodded.

"If I may... I should go too. It would be best if you had an expert on Sage's tactics and methods at hand if you run into something... unexpected..."

"Unexpected?" Eqis asked. "What could we possibly not expect?"

Dallas paused, organizing his thoughts.

"I should perhaps remind you all of Sage's chosen profession for the Holy Order." Dallas said at last, and then turned to look at Equis directly. "He was Earth's foremost known Demon Slayer in its entire recorded history..."

A gateway opened at the entrance of the Demon League, and as Rae, Noxi, Dallas, several guards and a medical team stepped out into the air of Fasion, they found immediately that the gates to the Demon League had been ripped clean.

Even here, right at the very entrance to the league, the medical staff found wounded in the form of two black guards plastered directly into the stone of the building. The meds rushed forward to attend to them while a few of the guards, a couple of meds and Rae, Noxi and Dallas moved deeper into Home.

It felt dead in here... felt as if it were tomb.

Their shoulder lamps gave what little illumination there was to be had. The lighting, usually very bright within the halls was all dimmed and barely flickering.

Faces of the imps and lesser demons peaked out of doorways at them, and opening doors, they found that - thank the maker - the younger students and children were unharmed. But they were supremely frightened...

Not a single one of them had any tears left to cry, and in many a room, they found several younger students clutching to an older student or students. But the upper echelon of the demons and greater were all missing.

They continued deeper, guards moving quickly from room to room, collecting members of the black guard as they found them and herding individual students out of their shelters and outside, prepping them to be moved to the Mystic League for safety. Noxi, Rae, Dallas, two guards and a medic continued upward to Hawthorne's throne room.

The doors were hanging off their hinges. They weren't sure as to exactly what they would see, but as they opened one of the doors, they were quite sure that none of them expected what appeared to them. Rae covered her mouth and nose with both hands as tears immediately escaped her eyes, and she immediately ran forward.

Noxi and the others stood by in stunned horror at the sight.

Hawthorne lay on his back, mouth wide open and tongue hanging out, frozen in a scream of horror, eyes staring lifeless into nothingness with his chest projecting upward. The chest cavity looked as if it had been exploded outward, with bones sticking out in every direction, and a pool of his blood about his body as he lay in a grotesque position. But arrayed about him were the missing upperclassmen demons.

"Teema!!" Rae cried and rushed to her sister.

Teema, and all the others, had been crucified to pillars and columns that had been removed and arrayed about Hawthorne. Spikes of some strange reddish brown substance protruded from their inner wrists, and each of them had been cut and bruised profusely so that their blood formed a pool beneath each of their feet.

Jasa Keese looked particularly broken.

On each and every last one of them, there was a piece of paper attached to their foreheads by some magical power, and each piece of paper bore a different symbol of some sort. Rae fussed over Teema, and then lifted her hand to touch the paper and remove it.

"DO NOT REMOVE THOSE PAPERS!" Rae spasmed and turned around to see Dallas pointing at her. "Do not remove the tag, Rae... any of you... they are the only things keeping them alive at the moment."

"What are they?" Noxi said, standing before Chimera, surprisingly, she was fully flaccid, which was an unusual

thing for hir.

"A very simple, but incredibly effective device against demons." Dallas supplied. "The tag is emblazoned with a holy symbol. The symbol, when applied to the forehead of a demon freezes them. If they were conscious, they could speak, but all other body functions would be frozen.

"It is a device that would freeze all but the most powerful of demons."

Dallas walked forward and began looking the demons from head to toe, using whatever intensive sensor package he possessed. "They are all alive... if you want to help them, then you must get a medical team up here... stabilize them one at a time and then remove the tags."

"A-are they in pain?" one of the guards asked.

"Yes." Dallas answered simply.

"What are those things in their wrists?" the med with them asked. "It almost looks like calcified..."

"Blood." Dallas replied. "Sage's blood, crystallized and exuding an acidic fluid as they slowly melt."

"ACID?!" Rae cried, and immediately she reached up and yelped as she grasped one of the crystals.

With only her bare hands, she removed all the spikes out of each of Teema's wrists, and then lowered Teema, but as she did... Teema remained in her position... stiff as a board. The med approached immediately and began healing her wounds. Dallas directed the guards to get more meds.

"To those who you cannot stabilize, do not remove the tag until we can get them to the hospital, Rae heard Dallas say, and Rae gasped in fear for Teema, but then Dallas peeled the tag away from her brow and she slumped to the floor. "Keep her warm Mistress Iksaki." He said and began moving to the others. He was able to remove the 'Blood Darts' with no pain, despite that his hands were burned horribly by the time he and the guards were able to get everyone down.

"Merciful Aul, Teema... how could he do this? Why would he do this?" Dallas walked up behind her with his scalded hands folded and healing behind his back, watching but saying nothing for a time before walking off.

Only Jasa and her brother needed to be kept in suspended animation. Sage seemed to have taken particular attention to them, going so far to carving symbols in their bodies with what looked like his claws.

"W-what do these symbols say?" Noxi asked, taking a picture of them both.

"The one on Jasa, loosely translated, means '*whore*' the one on Korho means '*hypocrite*'." Dallas supplied. "But they aren't the only ones..." he stated, and uncovering Chimera's body, showed a massive emblem on her navel. "This one says '*sinner*'"

Rae uncovered Teema and gasped. "W-what does this one mean?" she trembled.

"*Murderer*" Dallas said quietly. "They were all crucified for their sins..."

Genohn awoke with a cry, panting heavily, his eyes wild. His tattered wings dragged along his bedding as he clutched his chest, and looking down at his hand, he felt a flash in his mind, and then he saw the blood on his hands before the flash went away, leaving his hands clean again.

There was a gentle hand on his shoulder, and his head whipped to one side to see Meniko in her bird maiden from sitting there.

"My students!" he cried.

"They are safe." Meniko said, and then gestured to nine beds about him, showing his demons and greater demons surrounding him. "Genohn... I need to know what happened?"

"I never thought him capable of such things." Genohn said, looking down. "I was like a neophyte against him."

"Sage..." Meniko supplied and Genohn nodded. "What happened?"

Genohn took a deep breath and then began his tale...

Lord Sage had arrived, looking an awful mess. All his clothes were ripped, but he was taller, stronger, and his power levels were steadily climbing. He strode into Hawthorne's chamber after having 'disposed' of all the guards leading up to this point. Anyone who stood in his way essentially.

When he arrived into Hawthorne's chamber, he began to speak in a dialect of the Demonic Tongue that I did not recognize, and Hawthorne cursed him for using but nonetheless understood.

Sage said... something, and Hawthorne stared at him before promptly dismissing me. As I passed Sage, he growled at me. I'll perhaps never in my life forget the look of his eyes... those red, burning eyes. I'd seen Sage's eyes turn whenever he was angry or annoyed, but the hatred his gaze projected, it made even me shiver.

Outside the gates to Hawthorne's throne room, locked outside, I waited, listening to a heated argument that they had in that baleful tongue, sounding like guttural snaps and growls that left a feeling of fingernails on a chalk board grating down the back of my mind. And then the first explosions hit.

It was an explosion that rattled the whole of Home... and was followed soon by more, and I could hear cries and battle shouts as they raged inside. I tried to get in, but Hawthorne locked me out, and I kept trying to enter, to bypass his wards, till there was one Absolute gurgling cry and his wards keeping me out went dead of their own accord.

It was just before then that a few of the other demons and greater demons of the league arrived, and together we broke into Hawthorne's chamber to find it in ruins.

And at the far end of the chamber was Hawthorne, struggling against Sage as Sage severed his chest open, tearing his ribs further open, and bending into the cavity, he swallowed Hawthorne's heart as it was still beating. Sage then turned toward us and began to mutate, his flesh seeming to boil as spikes, horns and bony protrusions began to erupt from his body, his form transforming rapidly.

He screamed his Terror Cry at us and rushed at us several paces and then stopped his actions like a feral beast for the first couple of moments as he snarled at us. Then he rose and then walked forward toward us, breathing heavily, his clothing ripping across his form, merging with his body at the same time, his muscles engorging.

"Get out of my way." he growled at us, staring at me as I stood there with my fellow demons arrayed about me.

"You killed Hawthorne!" Chimera cried. "How could you?!"

"Very easily. Now get out of my way, or be judged just like him."

"Over my dead body!" Chimera said, and stood in front of me.

"So be it."

I've... never seen anyone move so fast. I heard hundreds of strikes and hits, and sprays of blood were splayed all over me and the other demons with me, and Chi fell... and Sage stood there, huffing and puffing as he continued to transform.

All at once we surged after him, and he moved about us as if we were standing still, his strikes paralyzed us within single hits, and a combination of ultra dark and ultra holy magics were assailed against us, the likes of which even I've never felt before; a constant flow, a constant flurry, and within moments Jasa and her brother Korho fell, as well as Smith - my god... SMITH! Sage took a direct blow from his hammer and shrugged it off like it was nothing! - and we began to retreat.

Sage began to hunt us as we rushed to get everyone to safety, tried to evacuate, and the chaos all around me became apparent. He let the children and the young ones go with little more than a shove to push them out of his way, but anyone else who got in his way was brutally crushed, and I heard their screams as he took them one by one.

Then there was just him and me.

I steeled myself, having escaped him twice already, but I felt that I was being harried, and found that I was right as I entered one of the auditoriums that had no ways out save for the one I came through. I turned around too late, only to see Sage walk through, more spikes tearing out of his flesh, blood trickling down his body as he gnashed his teeth, and they turned from fangs into hooking daggers.

The young ones were safe now... that was all that mattered, and with him and me away from them, I could unleash my full demonic might.

I began to cast, summoning a horde of lesser demons about me who all appeared from the shadows, casted again with all my powers, summoning a pillar of hellfire that erupted at his feet, engulfing him immediately. The horde of lesser demons all assailed him, leaping into the fire, and I was certain that I was triumphant. But then there was a disk of blood that splattered from the flames, parts of the demons flying everywhere, and Lord Sage stepped out, his hands and body covered with blood, his lips carrying a crimson stain as he walked toward me. Wiping the blood off his lips as he continued to walk toward me, and I cast my magic, spell after spell which struck him, burned at his flesh, seared his soul, but the look of madness only became more and more intense.

What was worse, the more I hit him, the less damage I seemed to be causing, till at last my spells did little more than splash against him. I couldn't use greater for fear of causing a cave in or a collapse in Home.

He lifted his hand toward me, his wickedly curved claws splaying open, and I raised a shield to cover myself even as a rush of darkness rose from the ground around me, and I heard the screaming of souls as claws ripped at my body, tore at my flesh and fur and shredded my wings. The pain left me only so that he could lower his hand and strike me in the chest with a ball of irradiated plasma that burned at my body, crackled my mind and seared my soul all at the same time.

It was then that I lifted my head and magically sensed him, and blinked, seeing the utter chaos of swirling powers and energies swirling about him, rewriting his very being! Every piece of him was being rewritten, and though I saw the swirling mass of magic and energies that accompanied sorcery, there were nine - nine! - other forces of magic! The only other force I recognized was the psychics, and lifting his hand again, I suddenly watched all those magics swirling about him suddenly focus about his hand, and the power they all contributed suddenly skyrocketed, and I saw his telltale shadow disks appearing.

He was going to kill me!

With every last ounce of power that I could spare at the moment, I guarded. I even commanded a summoned creature to stand in the way and guard me, but the resulting wave of light tore right through my creature and disintegrated it on contact, scattering it like ash! The holy fire that burned at me and through me, tearing at my soul, forcing me to remember my sins, threw me to the ground and I gurgled up blood before the power faded.

Too powerful... he was too powerful!

I had no choice... I ran.

It was a logical decision... I had no ability to defeat him in his present state as wounded as I was, and he was getting stronger. I managed to get past him, feeling his forearm blades against my sides before I broke through the wall and ran away, trying to keep my distance, but he followed with the speed no demon ever possessed. He harried me again, and I felt his claws, felt his blades, my great wings doing little more than to hinder my retreat with their wind resistance, and finally, I turned, and casted a spell circle.

Sage slammed up against it, and since I obviously couldn't escape, I used myself as a spell anchor to hold him fast. He stood up, looking about himself, testing the barrier of the circle as I casted the rest of the etchings of the circle to lock his power, to reduce him, but he was smiling at me, staring at me with those baleful eyes. The circle was nearly done, and I was almost ready to close the magical circuit and trap him inside, when he lifted his hand and gestured, and I watched one of the tiles flip over with a glyph there ready to meet my magical lines before a flash along the ground sealed all the stones tightly together. The whole purpose of the spell shifted, and suddenly I was trapped inside the circle as it completed itself.

"Rule number one, regarding spell circles, Genohn..." *Sage growled darkly.* "When applying a spell circle to tile flooring: Make sure that you apply a spell seal to the floor prior to etching your circle to keep tiles from being flipped."

Sage came to stand before me... he towered over now... his body having grown by at least two feet now, even though he stood on his elongated toes. He just stood there... waiting, staring at me in his cage. But I felt that I still had power, and so I casted a teleport to bring me to the Mystic League, completing the spell, as the fiery transport flame began to rise up about me. But then Sage pushed his hand forward through the supposed barrier, and I realized that his glyph did nothing more than to reverse the polarity of the barriers... the original spell sink was supposed to allow me to step out, but now that it caged me, it nonetheless allowed Sage to move in.

His hand moved temporarily into the stream of my transport, and a ball of darkness formed at the tips of his fingers right before my face before he withdrew his hand, and through the barrier of the flames, I saw his eyes burning through them.

"A little gift for Meniko, Genohn... to tell her that I'm coming. Thank you for delivering it."

And then I transported, and for an eternity I saw nothing but that sphere as it writhed and churned and I began to sweat till I finally set down in the Mystic League and my transport spell faded. I began to scream and holler to everyone, telling them to get out of the way, and then with a scream the sphere exploded in a series of eruptions of shadow magic, each sphere sending a shockwave outward from it to thrash buildings, topple trees and blow students and faculty to the ground, the sphere's billowing outward, disrupting everything out of the way, scraping the very earth, before the spheres imploded again and taking everything caught inside their area into oblivion.

Thankfully no one was caught inside of it...

A guard then helped me to you.

Meniko stared at Genohn wide-eyed, covering her mouth with both hands in disbelief of all that he'd just told. Genohn was decidedly the third most powerful individual in this universe, second only to Rae and Fatima. If he could be overcome so easily...

Meniko rose, biting her lower lip.

Sage is coming for me? She thought, and then left the hospital. There was only one reason why Sage would be coming for her... only one implication as to his gift.

He was coming to kill her.

Chapter Five: The First Act

Meniko had sealed the planet to teleportation. She'd informed the Imperium and the Assembly of Lord Sage's impending arrival and his last known location, and then she sat back, hoping that their forces would find Sage before he came here to harm her students or her.

"Headmistress?" a voice said, and she looked up and her eyes darkened.

"You!" she snapped and surged forward, glowering at Daedalus. "What is it you want?"

Rae stepped in beside Daedalus. "Mother please..." Rae said. "He's not here to spy on you for Sage."

Meniko exhaled a puff of smoke out of either nostril and then moved backward, brooding. "Then what do you want, tin man?"

Dallas paused. "I've come to tell you all that I've secured video through some... unusual channels... of my master's dealings inside the building I found him at originally before it was destroyed by him."

Once again he became the center of attention.

"Show me." Meniko said quietly after a moment.

Dallas nodded, turned, and a massive holoscreen materialized.

Sage's eyes glowed as he walked out of what was undoubtedly a high-security lab. Blood was already dripping from his fingers as he looked about himself, sirens and claxons already blazing as he walked down the corridors. His steps were purposeful and direct, and he walked like a determined man, his mentality that of a vengeful god.

He could feel his muscles thickening, felt the power sliding through him... the level of power so great that he was actually getting wood off of it. He smiled to himself, his mind transforming likewise, and he saw a series of revelations!

How his long life finally led him to this point, an act of Absolute betrayal, he gave his trust for the last time... and was betrayed. Well, two could play at that game. He would get them; he would get back at all of them! He laughed, smearing some of the blood in his hand against his temples as his body swelled, pressing against his clothing.

But I'll need more power... all the power I can get to stand against the evils of this universe, he thought, and looked to his clothing. In a split decision, he threw away all his compunctions and began to initiate a fusion with his body armor currently in its clothing form. But that wasn't enough! *I need more!* He considered, and remembered the magics he'd learned, but never taken fully into himself, and he dipped into the dark magics he knew of, drew them into him, and they flooded rapidly, in a flurry, filling him with more and more power, and he heard his clothing tearing now as his growth accelerated.

"Yes!" he groaned. "More!" feeling his erection throbbing now, and flexing an arm, he watched as his biceps began to thicken and then tear through his sleeves.

Then there was a rush of footfalls, and a torrent of female Caldynnii guards arrived, all of them pointing small arms of fully automatic pistols and machine guns, grenade launchers and security grade blasters.

"FREEZE!" their leader cried out.

Sage merely grinned and took a step forward, and then another.

"Open fire!!" the leader called, and a torrent of bullets sprayed Sage.

The bullets flattened against his body as he caught bullets between his teeth, in his fingers, and while still being under fire, he tensed his fingers spun and flicked the bullets in one hand at the guards and five fell from the spray, he spun again and five more fell, he then turned, righted himself, grinned, and spat the Absolute bullet so hard that it even went through the helmet armor of the leader to spray her brains over her compatriots behind her.

"Fall back! Fall back!" another said and they began to back away from him, Sage continuing to follow them forward.

Blaster fire was absorbed simply against his body, lasers diffused about him, actually curving about his body as he moved forward, bullets fell in flattened disks all around him, and whenever he got close enough to one of the bitches, he crushed her weapon and did some sort of severe violence to her.

The first he took her over his head, and broke her in half... literally... her legs went one way and her upper body went the other.

The second he slowly took each arm and leg off and then her head.

The third he grabbed and threw her against a wall hard enough to make an impression in it, tapped her in several places, and then walked away. Shortly there after she began to groan, and then scream as her body convulsed so hard that she broke her own back, continued to convulse till she bent herself backwards, her flesh breaking open and spilling her guts outward all over the floor.

The next one he simply wadded up into a ball and threw at several others to bowl them over.

One by one he killed his attackers in the most brutal way, and as they began to scream and run, he ran after them in the blink of an eye, crushing bones, disemboweling them, dismembering them and beating them over their heads with their own limbs, and used their weapons at point blank range against them.

One he actually popped her eyes out and then crushed her throat, so she died in pain, suffocating... and blind.

Yet another he took the time to strip naked and flay alive, tossing her furry coat at another attacker who screamed and offloaded her entire magazine at his head, causing no damage. She... Sage ripped her throat out with his teeth. He took extreme pleasure at listening to her gurgle on her own blood as she died, and he stood over her, spitting her throat at her face before moving on.

Blood and entrails dripped off his body now as he moved, pausing and laughing as his body suddenly strengthened more, his form growing taller, growing thicker in every proportion, and he adjusted his groin and creamed into his pants a little as even his manhood grew more powerful. He was growing in power, sucking in every last nuance of power about him that he could, and growing faster still. He was saturated with energy to a literally maddening level.

He uncoiled, baring his chest, and flexing, the threads of his clothing tearing open and then diffusing into tendrils of black goop that continued to join with his body, and he continued forward, stopping now in at a grand stair, and suddenly became the target of dozens of laser sights that tracked his head and body.

The female Amazon-like Aphkei of this foundation all stood aiming heavy weaponry at him now, with D'bra standing at the top of the stairs, her impressive chest hanging out.

"That's far enough, Mister Preypacer." She said, swishing her tail. "You've caused much pain, and now we have you. Surrender now and we'll make your death easy on you."

Sage tilted his head at her, and then there was a flash. D'bra saw him right in her face as the simultaneous gunfire of dozens of weapons blew away all her remaining soldiers as they shot each other or themselves. Sage's maw spread into a feral grin, his eyes burning with red light now as he stood over her, his pupils little more than black dots in the

center of his eyes.

"You are only mortal." He growled under his breath, and suddenly D'bra's eyes grew wide as she heard a crunch, and looking down between her perfect breasts, found Sage's thick forearm protruding out of her sternum. His hand moved inside her body and she felt something pop and explode, and a rush of blood flooded out of the wound as Sage crushed her heart in his hands.

She fell backward, staring at him as she died, and Sage stood there, turning to survey the death and blood all around him.

There was a cry of rage as D'bra's pet male ran at him and leapt to claw at Sage, but Sage's arm, red-stained from D'bra's blood, caught him about the neck before his fingers crushed his throat and tossed him behind him onto his love.

Sage didn't even look at the pet as he died, simply stared scathingly, full of hatred, over all the death around him.

He then moved forward, and exited the building.

"Great... Maker..." Guvno breathed as the scene ended and Dallas finished explaining everything that had happened.

Meniko turned her head to stare at Dallas. "W-what kind of warrior *is* Sage?!" she shrieked.

"My master is our world's greatest killer." Dallas said.

"I won't doubt that!" Illia said with a gasp. "Not Now!"

"His resume includes Demon Princes and Lords and the whole of their hordes, Dragon Kings and Queens and all the denizens that fall under them, dictators and their entire armies, the Kell race..."

"W-w-wait... wait..." Equis said. "The Kell... *race*?!"

"Indeed. All of them... every last one of them. Killed for the crime of killing his innocent mate, Ariel Preypacer. Being that all these acts were done in time of war, his own people do not condemn him for a single one of these deaths. He has, however, condemned himself for some of them, in particular the Kell, but regardless, he killed every last man, woman and child, regardless as to whether they were a combatant or not, or whether they were old or young, or if they were invalid or not. He killed their pets, destroyed their belongings, wiped their entire existence, removed all traces that they ever did exist..."

"He's mad...!" Meniko whispered.

"That remains to be determined." Dallas said.

"How can that not be determined?!" Meniko bellowed.

"The case that Lord Sage eliminated the Kell was his only documented period of madness, headmistress. Nearly all of your graduating students have documented cases of madness occurring in them. Even the Psychiatrists you've hired have named them all insane... and yet you've fired them all and kept your students around you... because you love them. The same is true with Sage."

"Wait... I'm insane?" Equis whispered.

"No you're not, and be quiet!" she hissed the last to Dallas. "How did you get that information?"

"Master Sage is a high level doctor in your hospital, headmistress. I am his personal computer. He has had the access to download your entire database there. There is very little I don't know about all your students. I know their favorite color, their entire histories, and what color underwear they prefer to wear... when they do wear underwear of course."

"Shut up!" Meniko was crying now. She felt thoroughly violated. This was like the Black Beast all over again.

"Sage." Rae whispered. "H-how... how could he do such things? An entire room of people, killed in an instant..."

"That is a part of his skill, Mistress Iksaki." Dallas said, and gesturing reran the sequence. Several dozen people simply blew themselves and each other away, and then Sage killed their leader and her mate. "Master Sage prides himself on his speed and precision. Such skills are required for the art he uses. Drakido - the Dragon's Inner Hand - is an art that will rival your Absolute Fist and is perhaps just as old if not older than the Absolute fist given the species that developed it - Dragons. But to display how he killed a whole room in less than a second, perhaps you should watch the whole thing from Sage's perspective. At one: one-hundred-and-eightieth speed."

The image replayed and Sage walked calmly forward, moving back and forth between the fems, moving their weapons to their temples and pulling the triggers, shoving the barrels into their chests or into their mouths and pulling the trigger, aimed shots at each other, and then stepped up to the top, where the time compression ratio went away and they all killed themselves or each other immediately. Sage then moved to their leader, and the image paused again.

"The art of Drakido is tens of millions of years old, and every time a race accepts mastery of the art, the art grows. It began in the hands of the Panzer Dragons, moved into the hands of the Fae, then into the Elves, and finally into the hands of the Humans. The Lycan are the current caretakers of the art, and Sage possesses the greatest level of knowledge in its myriad of skills possible for someone without any wings or a sturdy prehensile tail. The form is most powerful in the hands of a dragon however."

"And Sage is transforming into one." Noxi pointed out.

"Correct. With a calm mind, the form provides the ultimate defensive stance... supposedly unbreakable. But in the hands of a violent mind..." the image continued, and they watched as Sage planted his thumb, index and forefingers together, forming a point with his claws, and then pushed into and upward into D'bra's chest, and crushed her heart. "It is designed to be able to kill anything. Without the ability to compare Drakido to the Absolute fist, I cannot determine with certainty what is greater, but if rumor is true, and if the archives of the Black Beast are accurate, then I will fathom that the offensive power of the Absolute Fist is greater... but only by just. But the Defensive powers of Drakido are nigh absolute."

The image continued playing, and Daedalus continued as Sage proceeded to kill D'bra's pet.

"The point I would like to make, is that Sage is among the most potent killers on any of the records I have access to and I have records across six universes. He is angry for some undetermined reason, and he's coming here."

"What do we do?" Rae asked, hugging herself.

"Something set him off in that lab... I'm sure of it. There was a period of time in which I lost all contact with Master Sage, and it ended with an ether explosion inside the destroyed building. I am attempting to appropriate the archives of the lab cameras, but those are not monitored by the previous security company, but are rather deposited to the Universal Observatory. I hope that I can get those in time."

Meniko looked down at her claws and tapped the tiles on the floor.

"This situation is escalating... fast." She said. "I just hope that teacher will be willing to do what I need her to do."

Chapter Six: The Holder of the Absolute Fist

Meniko approached the shrine of the Grace League, finding that the gates were closed and barred... which was highly unusual for this time of day. She walked up to them, dressed in her fine robes and in her bird maiden form, and lifting a hand, rapped smartly on the door. She waited for several minutes, and knocked a little louder, and then a panel opened up to reveal Yusuma there.

Again, that was odd... At times like these, if there was a knock on the doors of her shrine, it was Sanari herself who answered the door, not one of her students.

"Good afternoon, headmistress Meniko." Yusuma said, inclining her head slightly.

"Yusuma? Yusuma... may I please see Mother Sanari?"

"I am sorry, headmistress... but Mother Sanari has ordered the gates barred, and no one is allowed entry into the shrine."

"But... this is an emergency!" Meniko pleaded.

"We are aware of that, headmistress... Mother Sanari has locked herself in the shrine proper. She will not see anyone, and has instructed us that no one - without exception - is to be let into the shrine. I am sorry, headmistress... but Mother Sanari cannot be seen."

Meniko was about to ask for someone to go to Sanari and ask her if she would see her, but Yusuma closed the viewing panel and locked it again.

Yusuma sat beside the door, and ignored any further knocks at the door, even when Meniko began to pound on it and call to Sanari, she ignored it.

Tears began to fall from her eyes, and lifting her hands, she began to pray for her reverend mother.

Sanari knelt in the center of the floor of the shrine, surrounded by a plethora of lit candles, every candle currently burning with a single prayer from her.

"Merciful Creator," she said and lit the next candle light. "My love needs your guidance. He is lost in the darkness, I, your servant, despite the calm and repose you have blessed me with, the wisdom of ages and the patience of the cosmos you have granted me, I know not what to do.

"Your left hand has been taken as the right hand of The Adversary and is being used to cause death and destruction. Please, Merciful Creator, I beg of you... save him from darkness... save him from madness."

Sanari lifted a stick of incense and dipped it into the flames of the prayer candle to light it. She brought it between her fingers and bent her head over it, the soft incense wafting into her face as she meditated on her prayer. As she knelt there, she felt tears escaping from under her closed eyelids, despite that her face was placid and calm; her breathing steady.

All around her the spirits of the living, the dead and the not yet alive trembled with fear. She feared too... but it was for the man in whom she had given her heart to... but had yet to receive his. Something... terrible had happened to him. Something, dark... and evil. She still could not believe that the terrible things she saw on the images his servant Daedalus had supplied were real!

Outside she could feel Meniko trying to find her, felt faint psychic waves from her as she tried to get her attention through the shrines barriers, and Sanari's tears fell harder.

She knew why Meniko was here... trying to get her attention. The Headmistress knew that Sanari possessed the knowledge of a martial art form that could compete with the deadly perfection of the art Sage used. The Absolute Fist has been untested against Sage's art form, for the most powerful strike of her art could destroy anything. So far... no known defense existed against it.

Meniko wanted Sanari to kill Sage.

Sanari looked up toward the heavens, her eyes opening as more tears spilled from her eyes, wetting the fur beneath her cheeks.

"Merciful Creator, Great Lord... what is the purpose of this test? Can he not know solace? Can not I? Why has this been released upon us?"

The incense burned down and she placed its remains - a slender stick charred at one end - on the bowl with all the others. There was already a pile of them.

"Mother... you've been here for hours yet..." a voice said, and Sanari turned seeing Aauie standing there.

"Oh Aauie... please don't look at me like this."

"Mother..." Aauie said, and stepping over to her mother and kneeling on the floor, took her mother's shoulders and turned her to her. "I..." Aauie choked. "I... felt your torment. I heard every thought in prayer. It's not right that you do this alone, mother..."

"I... may be the only one who still cares for his redemption, Aauie." Sanari said, wiping her eyes with a sleeve. "There are too many hearts right now who want nothing more than for me to kill him. I've finally found a male I wish to marry... and... and he is being taken from me."

"I searched him out mother." Aauie said, and then turned to look away even as Sanari looked at her in disbelief. "I found him, a far ways off... in utter turmoil. His mind was screaming, it was a piercing, agonizing scream that raked across my mind and pierced it with feelings like millions of pins in my head. I felt claws tearing at my psyche before I pulled away..."

"He is in anguish, mother... but... strangely... it felt like there were two of him."

"Two?" Sanari repeated, and Aauie nodded her head.

Sanari looked about her at all the brilliant lights, each light upon a candle, and each candle carrying with it a prayer. She took a deep breath, and then turned to Aauie.

"Aauie... I have a special request. I want for you to fetch for me Yusuma and Tla... bring them here. I need them to maintain the candles and the chamber with all these lights to keep them burning for as long as possible before I can leave this chamber. Then I want you to send an electronic message remotely to Daedalus. I want for you to invite him to my home. Watch for him at the gates... I want you to bring him in quickly."

"I will do mother." Aauie said and paused, and then reaching forward palmed Sanari's sternum just beneath her swollen breasts. Sanari's hand snatched at Aauie's to hold it.

Aauie was just beginning to understand the finer nuances of emotion... and this was such an extreme in her surrogate mother. The turmoil in Sanari was the greatest around her right now... and nearly matched the sheer war that was assailing Sage so far away. No matter where she was at the moment, she could've pointed both out directly.

Then rising in a fluid movement, she rose to her feet and left Sanari alone.

Dallas stood in Meniko's chamber.

His computer processes were being taxed... which was a big thing for him. Koraku was likewise acting as a buffer for the information and was working hard sorting all the information. It was hard to determine if the program was enjoying himself or not... but the flurry of information Dallas was processing simultaneously was mind boggling.

There wasn't a name for the number used to describe exactly how many simultaneous processes Dallas was processing.

System appropriation, acquiring security keys and permissions, reorganizing and shifting information, accessing a torrent of images and text and communications signals... till at last an email arrived, sent directly to him.

Dallas blinked as this came in.

In ten years since being here in his master's service, he'd perhaps received no more than a few dozen personal emails addressed specifically to him and by name. Most other emails were addressed to his master or any number of his students. It was so remarkable to receive an email directly to him that he opened it and discerned its entire contents in less than an instant.

He swallowed and then bowed.

"Forgive me, but something has come to my attention that I must address." He said... and only Rae really seemed to notice him leave as she hurried to him and gave his hand a squeeze.

Dallas then left the Pinnacle tower and walked straight over to the shrine.

Mother Sanari requests your aide immediately, Mister Dallas.

The note was extremely simple, but it read scores of implications.

Mother Sanari had vehemently commanded him to keep himself and all of his drones out of her shrine since one of his drones took a wrong turn and strayed into her shrine. The loss of the prototype when it was destroyed hurt him badly... and the follow up attack of gremlins was like adding insult to injury for a mistake and an accident, but Dallas respected her desires from that point onward. And now the only intrusion he dared make was from a satellite high above the planet where it couldn't interfere.

Dallas was forbidden to enter the shrine, and an understanding between him and Sanari arose where he and his drones stayed out of her shrine, and she didn't send a horde of nuisances at him. So now that she was inviting him to come to her personal home inside the shrine told of how important this was.

The meeting was requested, not commanded. Sanari was being respectful of him and the nature of his creation.

The meeting was requested by Aauie's private computer access code, not one of Sanari's pupils or even her top students of Yusuma or Tla. Sanari was trying to handle this outside of the echelon of the schools.

And the request was for an immediate meeting...

Dallas felt that this was important enough to answer her summons immediately.

He arrived at the shrine and was about to lift his hand to knock when the door opened. Dallas blinked at it and then stepped inside just as the door closed behind him. He was faced with Aauie in her subtle robes.

"Mistress Aauie. I come as requested." He said.

"Please... come." Aauie said, and escorted him a short distance to Sanari's quarters. "Please remove your shoes..."

she said, and found that Dallas was already removing the simple slippers he wore, and Aauie blinked that he was doing it so automatically.

"May I go in?" he asked.

"Yes, she is already waiting for you." Aauie said, and Dallas bowed to her, turned and opened the door, following perfect procedure for entering into a High Priestess's home. He closed the door behind him, and found Sanari kneeling on a mat with a pair of candles burning before her.

Stepping softly forward, Dallas knelt upon a mat across from her, and waited for her to speak.

"Dallas." She said at long last. "I want to know... what is it that you are not telling us?"

Dallas's lips compressed and then he nodded.

"There is no other person in whom I can tell of this information, mother Sanari, and under the circumstances I feel that you are the best person to reveal this to. I feel that there is also a need for it..."

"Master Sage is cursed with the similar issue of those blessed with extreme intelligence. Such a person, after having spent their life searching out the limits of themselves and reality, tend to have an amplified breaking point. I believe I've already told you when his breaking point finally occurred."

"When Ariel was murdered before his very eyes." Sanari supplied, and her hands clenched into the cloth of her robes over her legs. Inside her, the spirit and knowledges of Ariel - who had merged with her - stirred in remembrance.

"More happened than just simple madness, mother Sanari. The mind can only handle so much before it breaks... and when Sage broke, everything inside him shattered. Everything that could love and be loved and seek redemption and feel remorse, died. All the mental capacities to feel negativity and evil had nothing to dampen them, and so Sage's ID and sub consciousness activated to fill the void, and what we were left with was a raging madness that gave birth to the Red Destroyer."

"The 'Red Destroyer?'"

"It was the nickname Sage was given after the incident. His fur was as white as snow before, but in the solid year following it, he killed and killed and killed so much, his teeth were stained pink, his claws turned black, and the white of his fur turned red from the blood. Likewise... his glowing eyes turned red from the sheer and utter hatred.

"As you know, the Red Destroyer committed the first complete and total genocide in our world's recorded history, but it was losses deemed forgivable during wartime, and the genocide was written off as casualties of war. All records for that period were sealed.

"But the Red Destroyer was born of a fragmentation inside Sage. As such... one half of Sage's mind went one way to feed the Destroyer, the other side wallowed in utter anguish."

"Schizophrenia." Sanari whispered.

"Indeed... but I am afraid that it goes deeper than that, Mother Sanari. When humans bond, a piece of them goes to their mate as they take into them an equal part of their mate. When a mate dies, the spiritual bond breaks, and the dead takes their soul with them in death, as Ariel did I am certain, but due to the violence and suddenness of the death, Sage's part was never returned."

Sanari gasped, and lifted a hand and pressed it against her heart. She now understood where this incredible ache was coming from. With Ariel placing that inside her, her piece of Sage's soul, she now had a part of him in her.

"The problem with this, Mother Sanari, is that the fragment torn from Sage tore his soul literally in half, and like the keystone removed from a bridge, the kind and loving being that he was then collapsed. And like his mind had done,

the darkness of the soul went one way, and the brightness in the soul went the other.

"It took forty years, for him to get the two warring halves of his mind and soul under control, and a very tenuous balance exists between the two halves. I have... no doubt that something had unleashed the hidden power inside my master, something has broken him, which would require tremendous mental or emotional trauma."

"Or a psychic tampering." Sanari said quietly.

"That too. The danger is this:

"Sage must meditate nightly to maintain his balance. His defenses are as potent as they are to keep someone from prying into his mind and getting too deep. If they went too deep and offset all the checks and balances he's trained himself with, then it will unleash the Red Destroyer again. But firstly, Lord Sage has grown several thousand times more powerful since then, and now he has achieved his Dragon Trigger and is evolving. He is absorbing his armor and unlocking powers inside himself that I know nothing of. He is our world's most potent Demon Slayer, Dragon Slayer and assassin. He is the most efficient killer I can consider, and now he is growing in power exponentially with no sign of him leveling off. If all that power is being fueled only by negative emotions..."

"He would go on a killing spree that could feasibly kill billions."

"Feasibly... but there is some light in this equation. If he has truly lost his control... then why is he not killing indiscriminately even as we speak? Why did he not outright kill the Demon Leaguers one at a time? Even those who got in his way, he... somehow had the presence of mind to spare their lives with those spirit Tags. So far, the only casualties are the individuals in the skyscraper that he destroyed, and Hawthorne."

Sanari felt a light in her soul... and she began to tear up, but when she spoke, her voice was absent of emotion. "Then there is hope." She said. "If he can control himself to avoid loss of life... then there is something inside him which can stop the madness..."

Dallas nodded.

"The madness before stopped when there were no more individuals of his ire left to kill. This is a defensive personality, after all, Mother Sanari... so he seeks to kill those who brought forth the anger."

"Oh no!" Sanari gasped. "If his personality is looking to kill those who've earned such anger, and if he's killed Hawthorne for such reason, than there can be only one reason for him coming here."

"Correct. He intends to kill Mother Meniko." Dallas said, focusing Sanari with his gaze. "Mother Meniko and Hawthorne have caused more ire to Lord Sage than any other in this universe, Mother Sanari. Something has triggered his defensive personality, and it is running on automatic."

"W-what are you going to do?" Sanari asked.

Dallas sighed and closed his eyes. That was the question he feared the most... for his answer could not give anybody any comfort.

"I am limited in only one respect, and that is to my programming, Mother Sanari. I have procedures and processes in which I must follow before I can take actions against my master and creator. In order for me to send the total resources of the Shadow League and Ronin Enterprises against Lord Sage, I must answer a question. Until then... my priority is to seek the protection of the students. I have already allocated all available resources to that function. All other resources are dedicated in obtaining information in answering that question."

"What is the question?" Sanari asked, her voice cracking.

"Is Sage truly mad?" Dallas answered. "If he isn't, and he is acting in his right mind... then I cannot do anything against him. If he is mad, then I am obligated to use all resources to stop him."

"H-how can you not think that this is madness?"

"Because deaths have so far been limited only to those who have caused some sort of verbal or physical aggression against Lord Sage. Defensive measures are not classified as instances of madness... unfortunately, if his madness is the release of his defensive personality, then you see where my problem exists. I need more information."

"Then I will say a prayer that you get it, Dallas." Sanari said. "And if you need information, then please... do not waste your time on me." Dallas noted that Sanari's voice quavered as he rose. He'd long since surmised the Reverend Mother's affections for his master.

"Then we should all pray to the Creator that He allows for an instance to stop all of this... before it truly goes beyond anyone's measure to stop." Dallas said. "Good day, Mother Sanari... I would suggest that you get some sleep... but I'm afraid that that would be a suggestion that will not be followed."

"No it wouldn't. Thank you for your time Dallas." Sanari said.

Dallas bowed and dismissed himself, leaving the shrine promptly, and no sooner than he left then Sanari, tears streaming from her eyes, lit two incense sticks from either of the candles before her and prayed.

Chapter Seven: Students of the Shadow

"Shadow Island is currently under alert." Dallas stated before the school assembly. "You may leave the tree, but you may not leave the caldera. A high level mono-directional shield has been erected over the school, and the school's defenses outside the school have been activated. Should you leave the barrier of the school, you will not be able to reenter until the shield has been lowered, and the shield will not be lowered for any reason until the alert has been lifted."

Mayia sat back far away, fidgeting.

Master Sage has been gone for a very long time... She thought to herself. That means... I may be put in charge soon.

"Classes will continue as normal with the exception of classes with the Grace League or with the Core League. All transport between us and them has been closed. Should we go to a state of high alert, the alarms will sound, and you will all be directed to your dorm rooms for shelter. That will be all."

Dallas began to leave his position, and the room burst with chatter, most of the chatter questions as to what was going on, but Dallas ignored them as he walked right past them all and left the hall. With his absence, the other teachers were left to front questions, and sadly, none of them were any help either.

"What's going on?"

"Are we under attack?"

"Why are we on alert on a neutral planet anyways? Who'd attack us?"

Questions like this played over and over in the hall. It was worrying Mayia more and more that she heard it. Thankfully... no one had asked her what was going on yet.

"You seem preoccupied." A voice said, and her head snapped up to see Siklohn looking down at her.

"Siklohn. Hi..." she greeted.

Both of them had been stuck at the Shadow League during a visit when the barrier wall suddenly raised, trapping them both inside. Luckily... they still had their rooms here.

"Hello to you too, Mayia." Siklohn said. "Mayia... please tell me all this is a joke."

"If it is, then it's being played on me too..." she said and leaned against the table, already wishing that her beloved master was here.

"Do you know what an alert means, Mayia?"

"Forgive me for not having your background, but no."

Siklohn sighed. "It means pending attack, Mayia. It was in the study guide Dallas sent both of us upon achieving Apprentice Mastery."

"Oh... that." Mayia pouted. "I didn't read that section yet." Siklohn stared at her. "Ok... I didn't read any of it yet. Happy?"

"No... I'm not." Siklohn replied. "Mayia... the students will start to look to both of us for guidance. If we don't step up we'll both..." there was a series of beeps, and Mayia looked down at her wrist comp, a smaller, simpler and sleeker model provided to her for greater access to the tree and its resources.

"That's me." She said, and keyed the receive sequence.

"Me too." Siklohn said, and Mayia gave him a brief glance and then looked down.

As one... they both read the same exact message: *Come to the core.*

After Siklohn's insurrection, Dallas was forced to take a good look at his personal security. He'd been subverted, and that was unacceptable. So he had upgraded the defenses of all of his CPU's throughout all the universes surrounding Earth so that his CPU's were as well guarded as well protected as his MCPU was.

A chamber was created for him, underneath the most stringent of security called The Vault. Even Mayia and Siklohn, Lord Sage's top students, had absolutely no access beyond this series of doors. It was so solid that should a force actually destroy the whole of the planet, that he himself would still be secure.

His CPU was now inside seven repeating layers of super condensed alloy built directly into the school's superstructure. There were trillions of connections to his external systems, and there were no heavier sensory equipment than in this room. The only individuals who had access to the inside of the spheres were himself in the form of one of his principal drones, and Lord Sage.

Mayia and Siklohn came before this massive sphere and stopped.

"Daedalus... we're here." Mayia said as she and Siklohn walked up to the observation deck.

There was the sound of an elevator, and slowly a figure rose before them before a security bar lowered from the elevator to allow him to step onto the observation deck.

"Apprentice Mayia, Apprentice Siklohn." Dallas greeted. "Thank you for coming so quickly. There has been a development that, as the head students of the school... you need to be aware of."

Mayia was trembling as she rushed out of the core, planting her hands against the wall and coughing, swallowing her bile. A short while later, she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"I bet this pleases you... seeing him realizing everyone's fears." She shot over her shoulder. "A terror and a menace."

"It does not." Siklohn admitted. "Lord Sage was wrong about a great many things, but he still managed to work in lessons that stick with you. I thank him for my love, I thank him for my clan and I thank him for his forgiveness. To see him like this..."

Mayia swallowed more bile... her beloved master was... how could he do such things?!

Dallas had just presented to them all the information he had concerning why they were at an alert. Video, what statistics he had, everything. After having disappeared for a short period of time, he emerged cutting an absolute bloody swath through hundreds of individuals and destroyed the building they were in. After escaping the authorities, he proceeded to murder Hawthorne of the Demon League and beat all of his top students to a pulp. Essentially anyone who stood in his way.

"What are you going to do Mayia?" Siklohn said suddenly.

Mayia's breathing came out a little quicker, but she righted herself straightening her back and turning to face him. "We will continue what we are doing Siklohn." She said. "Something has happened to Master Sage, I just know it!"

And when he comes back... how he comes back... we will deal with that when it happens. And you and I are going to make sure that the lives of the students are disrupted as little as possible."

"Would you not think informing them would be a better course of action. Like Master Sage normally would do so that they have all the information?"

"I am not master..." Mayia deflated some. "But there are young ones in this school, Siklohn... making a general assembly to inform them that their master has gone nuts would frighten them. Like Dallas says... we need more information before we can judge such a thing.

"I hope to God that when the information comes, it isn't that Master has lost his mind..."

She turned and returned to her classes, and Siklohn folded his arms as he waited, and suddenly Verdance ducked out of a crevice in the ceiling.

"Were you able to hear?" Siklohn said without preamble.

"No... Dallas has grown wise to us. Though he doesn't follow us with a fine toothed comb anymore, I find that his sensor net doesn't have a hole large enough for a nanite or even a microbe to slip through unnoticed. He detected me far too easily down here. I just spent the last few minutes staring at a drone in the eyes as white noise generator flung itself up to block your voices."

"And of my conversation with Mayia?"

Verdance fell from the ceiling and straightened behind Siklohn.

"It appears, as if she does have a backbone, Sik... but I also saw the state she was in when she came out here."

Siklohn nodded.

"Then it is time for the Apprentice Master to learn the burden of leadership. We will not hinder her Verdance. She is right... there are young ones here who need our help, and she is woefully inadequate to help them."

"Why don't you just usurp..."

"I will not." Siklohn said sharply. "As strange as it may feel... I've come to... appreciate Lord Sage and Mayia. And I care for the denizens of this school. It's a complicated feeling that I admit I don't have words to. I trust I'll have your help in this too Dallas?"

"Certainly, Apprentice Siklohn." Dallas said, and Verdance jumped from the sound of Dallas's voice coming from a loudspeaker. "My resources are yours to a degree..."

"Damn... I forgot he was listening."

"He's always listening here, Verdance... gather the team. We have some covert planning to do to make sure - as Mayia put it - life goes on here... and that our leader learns real quickly on how to lead."

Chapter Eight: Master of Shadows

Sage sat in a gutter somewhere, his eyes closed as he felt his body realigning, the power filling him up. His flesh had torn open multiple times, forming layer after layer of overlapping leathery armor that was each growing at its own pace. Hide covered by scale, scale covered by a super structure of tritanium steel, that framework covered by light plating, which was covered and interlinked by medium plating that was in turn linked and covered by heavy plating.

Yet another layer was forming now from the pustules that had been on his body from the very beginning, his shoulders bulbous and flaring over his arms as his body was covered mostly by black bulges and purple pustules. Red etchings had formed all over his body, and a multitude of power gems - the secondary form of Soul Gems - were forming all over his body.

The white of his body kept growing whiter, and the black kept growing blacker.

It was raining still on this damned planet, pelting his body with its rain waters while he sat with his eyes closed, incorporating the biocircuitry into his body. A bio computer, a fresh one, was now attaching to the base of his brain right over the point where his spine met his skull, and the structure of the computer was weaving in with his nervous system, giving him a finer control over his powers than he ever had before.

Despite that his eyes were closed, he could mentally sense everything around him. Subtle spirits inside their bodies, surrounded by bags of meat and flesh. So easy now to just reach out and crush one of them.

That is wrong...

He opened his eyes, feeling the twinge of something inside him. So very, very faint, like a quiet voice. At the moment he ignored it.

He was making vast mental bridges between the many schools of magic he knew, and because he wanted the power, thought that he needed it, he was absorbing every last possible ounce of dark magic he knew of.

Sorcery, Psionics, the Seven Chakras and now... the impossibly vast amount of Dragon Lore that he now possessed. Most was imbedded in his Dragon Seed, but the Heart of Hawthorne in him was filling in more... many, many dark magics, more that he thought existed! He was right to kill Hawthorne if he carried this much evil inside him.

Evil that you now carry within you...

"Shut up." He growled softly and closed his eyes again, bowing his head as he felt his guts inside him lurching.

He could feel the beating of two distinct heartbeats deep within his chest.

He heard the skittering, and without looking, flicked his finger toward it and a sort of beetle exploded.

That is not the sort of power a being like you should be displaying... we are a healer... not a killer!

Sage huffed and ignored the quiet voice in his head as he continued to grow more powerful. It was easier to ignore that voice now... it had only got him in trouble. Do good things! Help others. It's the duty of the strong to protect the weak.

Fah! Let the weak fend for themselves. Listening to that voice only gave benefit to others... and never for himself. He went out of his way to help others and all it landed him was pain and suffering. They never even said thank you...

Yes they did... quite often...

He growled in annoyance at the voice and tried to will it to go away.

"Hey mister..."

Sage opened his red eyes to see a small child of a species he didn't recognize standing there before him in the rain. He looked like a gutter boy dressed in his rags, but he'd managed to get a lollypop for himself.

No! Run child!!

"You don't look so good mister." The boy said.

"Go away kid..." Sage growled and closed his eyes again before lowering his head, and then groaned as his bones realigned, his body grew larger, his muscle density thickened so rapidly that his weight crushed a minute impact tremor in the ground.

"Mama said that everything bad in the world can sometimes be cured with something sweet." The boy said. "You can have some of mine if you want." The boy said and offered the lolly.

Sage opened his eyes, and suddenly a pang of remembrance, something deep down inside himself awakened. It happened again... just like it had when he was at the Demon League. He remembered protecting the young ones... the innocents. Suddenly the little sucker with the boy's slobber all over it stood as a symbol, and deep in his heart, a light suddenly shone on a forgotten feeling.

"Y-you are giving this to me? Why would you do that?" he asked.

"You look like you need it more than me mister."

"But... how often do you get a candy like this?"

"Not very often... mama saved up for more than a week to buy it for me... put a single credit aside per day!" he was proud of that. "But you can take it..."

Sage felt his new hearts melting as he reached out and took the sucker by the ends of his hooking claw sheathes on the end of each finger. Drawing it toward himself he sucked on it, and immediately tears welled in his eyes as he took a taste.

"Lime... my favorite." He smiled.

He felt a screeching in his mind, a terrible conflict as something began to battle inside him as he gave the sucker back.

"No! You keep it." The child beamed and sat on a crate, kicking his legs. "Lime is my favorite flavor too." He continued, and Sage cried more as he enjoyed the simple thing.

The raging turmoil in him was growing to a tumult, but the innocence of a child was a powerful thing, and it drove a wedge in his thinking... perhaps I was wrong...

You were...

Perhaps I'm just overreacting...

You are...

Perhaps...

"Hey that's weird... is someone whistling?" the boy said, and Sage's ears perked up. He heard it too.

Immediately his head lifted and his vision enhanced as he focused on an incoming rocket. Swallowing the sucker with the stick still attached he leapt upward and turned, placing his body over the boy's as the missile exploded against his back, sending a wash of gel that ignited on impact all over him. It didn't hurt him, but then he heard the screams, and his eyes opened and his pupils widened as far as they could go as he watched the boy, burning to death from the wash of incendiary gel.

"No..." he whispered, and tried to pat the child out but he burnt to a crisp within moments.

Sage stared at that child, and reached out to him even as he felt his spirit leave him.

Behind him there were the sounds of advancing mechs and foot soldiers. Tears welled and fell from his eyes in waves as he scooped the boy's body upward, biting his lower lip.

*He was so young, he was just a child... he was **innocent!!***

Sage turned, focusing teary-eyed on the weapons that were aiming at him, the heavy cannons, the missile launchers, the scores of powered armors setting themselves up. Inside him the turmoil suddenly shifted for the worst as he began to hyperventilate, and throwing back his head, a sudden demonic transformation took hip as his lower jaw tore apart into two mandibles, spreading wide as the remains of his jaw opened, and he screamed.

Three of the towering buildings around him were pushed out of the way, every last window from base to peak shattering in a hail of shards as his power erupted, the Soul Gems and the Power Nodes electrifying. The power and wailing of his Terror Cry spread out in every direction from him a hundred fold. A new voice had been added to the tumult... that of an innocent child being burned alive as he screamed and screamed and screamed.

"Murderers!" he cried, weeping over the child before putting him on the ground. "Defilers..." he wept and then rose, suddenly doubling in power and in strength right before their eyes. "You shall pay for this crime in BLOOD!"

Nyl Dousaka had honestly felt... fear... of this moment for nearly a decade.

He stood in his flagship - The Black Omen - En-route to the Planet Tilk as fast as he could muster the engines.

"Damn it! I said divert unnecessary systems to the engines!" he bellowed as his aides scurried about him.

"Warmaster, we are nearly three hundred percent from the reactor. We're squeezing all we can out of the engines!" his chief engineer reported back.

"Then evacuate all personnel from living quarters. No one should be in them right now anyways. Seal those portions of the ship and deactivate life support in those areas."

There was a pause. "Aye-aye."

Nyl leaned over his battle map of the City of Tilk... one of the massive continental-sized cities of tens billions of citizens. Units had engaged Lord Sage, and they were already retreating.

"Damn that fool... I told him to wait. I will court martial him for this..."

"Patience, Warmaster... you are letting your anger get away from you."

Nyl straightened and composed himself immediately as he faced Emperor Jaikard, the emperor wrapped within his red campaign cloak as he sat on Nyl's captain's seat. There were four Imperial Rangers in the room to protect him from Nyl's own people.

"Yes sir..."

"The situation is currently in the hands of General Margulis, Warmaster. He is well known for his abilities. Perhaps he moved in on Sage for a reason we not yet know."

"Yes my emperor. I will consider that as I skewer him."

Jaikard waited patiently for a moment. "Nyl... you are not your characteristically normal self. Does Lord Sage truly worry you that much?"

"Begging your pardon, my emperor, but how can it not? I've been fearing this moment for nearly a decade. And now it's happened. Please don't tell me to capture him."

"I've done nothing of the sort, Nyl. I trust your decisions in these matters. That is why you are Warmaster. If I felt that a decision was wrong, then you would know about it."

"Yes, my Emperor. But Lord Sage is a danger... and the more that develops the less and less I like the situation. He is growing too powerful."

"You let me worry about that, Nyl." Jaikard said. "Though you should perhaps save some of the power from the engines for communications. It would perhaps be best that you maintain communication with your front line."

"Yes... yes of course. Divert power from the engines to the communications. Demand a report from them."

"Aye-aye." A com tech said, and Nyl turned to look at the growing field of destruction on his map.

Jaikard appeared beside him then. "What is it you fear, Nyl?" Jaikard asked.

"I fear, my emperor... that we are already too late to stop him..."

Daedalus once again stood in Meniko's chamber, surrounded by the blazing sound as he switched cameras automatically as they were destroyed. There was chatter all around him, gasps and statements of disbelief as they looked upon the monster that Sage had become.

Twelve feet tall, walking on his lengthened toes, with layer upon layer of armor, simply walking down the central road toward the retreating forces as they blasted everything at him... and nothing hit him. Laser blasts and particle beam weaponry simply curved around him. High velocity slugs and explosive slugs were flowing about him and striking the walls of buildings around him. Millions of rounds were simply curving completely around him or splaying off in every direction.

Cannon fire splashed against a dome of energy around him, and projectile rockets and missile weaponry were stopped in front of him and exploded harmlessly.

"Induction field... impossible! How is he generating it?" Noxi said.

"With the finest control of electrokinetics I've ever seen." Dallas said. "Along with gravitational magics and sorcery... intermingled with temporal sciences. As far as the rockets and the bullets and the energy blasts can be considered they're traveling in a straight line."

A second screen was showing what was happening to the soldiers. Sage would gesture and even heavy mechanized armor would be torn apart by invisible hands, the explosions blossoming. But that was nothing in comparison to what he did to a soldier when he got his hands on them. Meniko had to magically clean up the spew from more than one mouth at instances like this.

Rae was staring wide-eyed at this, her mouth covered by both hands... she was stark-eyed and crying openly. Meniko reached out and palmed the whole of her side, and Rae turned abruptly against her front leg, embracing her.

"That can't be him mother! I know him! That cannot be him!"

Meniko, as she looked up at Sage even as he picked up another soldier, screaming something out that the cameras weren't able to record, he proceeded to do things to that soldier that were vicious, brutal and sickening. Despite all her misgivings for Sage, despite all the disagreements, she remembered his hands on her as she was dying from the sword slash of a raptor, she remembered him caring for her, whispering comforting things into her ear and soothing her pain little by little.

Once his healer's hands touched you... you always had a soft spot in your heart for him, and now, even she found it difficult to believe that this was happening, though she'd expected something like this to happen.

"That isn't him! That isn't him." Rae wept softly. It was a hallmark that her daughter expressed so much emotion. She'd appeared to be almost incapable of strong emotion. This was the strongest emotion she'd yet felt from Rae.

But what hurt about all this... what made all of this sting, was that this felt like a betrayal. A betrayal of their trust...

It was just like the Black Beast fifteen years ago. Again... a beast had been released from her school, and she hoped that the authorities would see this as the acts of a rouge alien instead of a student of the Mystic League.

She palmed her daughter's back and hid her emotions from Rae.

All that Meniko could think was... *how could this be happening?*

Sage shrieked at his attackers again, and lifted his hand. The power gems on his wrist and palms crackled with electricity before a column of energy that erupted to be a quarter of a mile wide lanced from his hand outward, cutting a swath through his attackers, the beam scraping off several meters of topsoil as it continued to push outward, rising steadily from the ground as it swept outward in a perfectly straight line till it erupted out of the atmosphere and continued onward for many hundreds of thousands of miles.

"Murderers! Defilers!" he raged, continuing forward.

He'd blasted their drop ships that were coming to extract them out of the sky. They'd both toppled into the city, and now they were trying anything to destroy him.

Is this... all worth the life of a single boy?

"Shut up!" he told the voice, casting a field of ultra high gravity that squashed a mechanized tank into something as thin as tinfoil.

Just then, to either side of him, panels opened up and a pair of turbo laser batteries aimed at his back and opened fire.

Sage turned and snarled as the capitol ship grade weapons blasted at his back, and his body mutated, adapted to take the damage, and soon the blasts were arching harmlessly away from his body to cause even more damage to the city. He surged sideways and took the cannon nearest him, ripping it right off the wall. Without even thinking his hand began to sink into the solid steel as he identified its circuitry, learned its manufacture, all the while the other cannon and all the soldiers were still shooting at him.

"What's happening?" Equis asked, seeing the imagery and Dallas stepped forward.

"Great Maker... he's *merging* with solid metals!" Dallas said, even as Sage's arm modified itself, taking the weapon, tendrils of blood, flesh and bone sliding down the weapon, merging with the steel.

"C-can he do that?" Noxi asked; her curiosity piqued as much as her concern and fear.

"Apparently he can now." Illia gasped.

Sage then roared as the machine merged with the towering twelve foot monstrosity that he was, and turning, he promptly took out the other cannon firing at him. Then right before their eyes the gun arm grew larger and more powerful.

"He's improving on the design?!" Noxi gawked.

And then Sage turned to the military, and with the precision of a surgeon, the multi-barreled weapon began to spin, releasing a high powered series of blasts at his assailants, cutting them to pieces a blaster shot at a time, cutting at their bodies and blowing heads of and body parts away before the body itself was riveted with holes and fell to the ground. But now that he'd absorbed the technology, he was absorbing more.

Suits of power armor were torn apart, the remains of their inhabitants being unceremoniously ejected and then exploded for cybernetics and their blood, and he absorbed their traits, their strengths sloughing off their weaknesses while he grew bulkier and ever more graceful. Armor pieces attached to that gun arm even as he formed a second, components merging with his arms to empower and regulate them, those components transforming and bettering themselves as they became more compact.

Sage was screaming as he picked off soldiers one at a time, blasting them into fine red mists provided that they simply didn't just evaporate. He was casting spell after spell, and whole buildings toppled, their foundations collapsing only so as to kill more soldiers. Kill and kill, their blood spilling and splattering across the roads as he crushed skulls beneath his feet.

His eyes blazed red, burning with red fire as he shrieked at them. A monster.

"We have a problem." Meniko said. "We need to take steps."

"Mother?" Rae asked even as she lifted her hands and gestured, and the computer system in her chamber recognized the gesture and materialized a Dragaseir sized holo-keyboard in front of her. "Mother what are you doing?"

"Calling for help."

Sage stood amidst the remains of a completely decimated division of soldiers and their support gear. mechs, power armor... he'd begun absorbing technology. Bits and pieces of bodies and machines rose to attach themselves to him, and whenever he found a survivor, he blasted that individual in a quick burst from his turbo cannon, which had evolved and condensed into something a tenth the size and attached to the back of his forearm beneath a forearm shield.

"Murderers!" he groaned, bloody tears seeping from his wide angling eyes. He stood now, totally naked with his penis unslung and slowly erecting as he stepped through the wreckage, lifting both hands as the cybernetic framework grew about his body, his flesh thickening with blisters that popped with electrical snaps before showing new power nodes here and there. There were four along his belly alone!

Taking one of the soldiers he picked him up in one hand, and looked into his eyes as the soldier slowly opened his own, and Sage grit his teeth as his fingers clenched about the head and crushed it, cutting off the scream of pain before Sage cast the remains aside and blasted them some more with his forearm cannon.

His phallus had erected fully, the ribs hardening as the flaring head swelled, and pausing, Sage leaned against a wall, feeling his phallus stiffening beyond its previous extent as the muscles of his body continued to grow with demonic and angelic powers, grew with his dragon and demon lores both light and dark, his psychic powers, his every attribute increasing magically, physically and psychologically... and now he was growing technologically.

His flesh tore open while his absorbed bio-armor continued to integrate with the metals and alloys, allowing him to discern their function, memorize and categorize their attributes, and now he was absorbing thousands of styles of weapons and equipment from as simple as handguns and communicators, to shield arrays and artillery cannons.

His stiffening prick as he leaned both hands against a wall suddenly spasmed and a gush of seminal fluids erupted from him as his mouth and jaw pushed forward.

The transformation a Lycan felt when they transformed for the first time was, in a word... erotic to feel. This was a hundred times more potent than his transformation when he'd turned fifteen and blew his wad for the first time in his life... and when he came again, the stream broke through the building's wall and a little more of that technological power he was now absorbing swelled inside him, thickening his dick with metal fibers, strengthening it.

He felt something like pistons and servos forming inside his body, his bones realigning and swelling to cover the weight, bones turning into overlapping and sliding plates, lacing with metals and silicon, his flesh turning into a metal weave covered by hide, the hide already tearing open and stripping, forming layer over layer of flesh.

He groaned and ejected again as his draconic transformations continued, and he beat his head against the wall of the building, collapsing half a dozen floors as his skull swelled and realigned, his claws cutting into the plassteel and concrete structure.

He was growing steadily... his power growing faster than he could control. His power was starting to expand rapidly... he wouldn't be able to contain it all... it will explode from him!

The innocents, Sage... If you erupt now... they will all die.

"Y-yes..." he said, tightening his eyes as he ejaculated again, and after a brief pause ejaculated another wad. "Must... protect. Must keep the innocent safe. So as to avenge... them all..."

Sage then concentrated, his mind's eye spreading greatly in every direction, and he found a nearby world, sparsely populated... and immediately... he teleported.

"I lost him." Dallas said. "He teleported to an unknown location. Attempting to reacquire."

Meniko had seen the multiple images of Sage as he easily tore people and seasoned soldiers apart and began absorbing all their technology. He was growing so vastly in power moment by moment, that she could feel him move wherever he was in the cosmos. He wasn't even trying to hide himself.

"Planet ZA-zero-zero-three." Meniko said. "A small harvest colony of a few million inhabitants."

Dallas paused, staring off into infinity, and then blinked. "Target reacquired. How did you know that headmistress?"

"Sage is... hard to ignore now." Meniko spoke softly. "Even a casual glance would allow me to pinpoint his exact location. There are very few individuals in whom I can do that with."

Dallas stared at her, and then sighed.

"Reprioritizing surveillance to planet ZA-zero-zero-three." Dallas said.

Again... he tried contacting the Holy Order... he needed someone who could give him direction on this who has authority. His options were beginning to run out in order to help the people of this school...

His contact with the Holy Order was through a computer entity known as Synergy... his wife in whom he shared a constant network connection with. In a pained voice, all he got back from her was:

"Please stand by."

Chapter Nine: Heart of Light, Heart of Darkness

Sage was confused...

What angered him was that that didn't happen all too often, and low and behold, here he was trying to make heads or tails of things.

Sparks of red and white lightning crackled about him as he walked through a small town, like an old western type town on earth, with only one street, and most everything in the town built on that one street. He came trudging along, and the denizens of this farming community backed away from him, seeing this thirteen foot tall behemoth of muscle, armor and machine. Despite that this was a universe in which all things existed there were still nonetheless sights that one would find bizarre. Whether they be demonic or angelic...

"D-don't touch me." He said in a deep guttural tone, his voice seeming to rumble deep in his chest.

"Hey mister... you don't look so good... perhaps we could..." the poor woman's chance to help was caught off with a yelp as she touched him, only to find that his body was electrified with the intensity of live communication wires, and the zap threw her dozens of feet backward to crash against a wall, sparking with shocks.

"Menda!" someone cried, and a raccoon stepped out with a pair of quick draws on his hips.

"Attend to her... get out of my way." Sage said simply, his red eyes focusing on the raccoon, and a plethora of data slid across his eyes on a sort of heads up display.

"No sir! No one harms anyone in my jurisdiction. I don't care who you are..." he began to finger his pistols, a pair of rapid fire plasma casters. "But you are going to come with me right now."

"She is dying. Get out of my way or else." Sage said, continuing to lurch forward.

"Not happening. Stop! Stop now!" he pulled his pistols out and aimed them both at Sage. "I can dent a mech with these things, stop right now!"

Sage continued forward, and continued even as a series of three plasma shots erupted against his face and several more against his body, hips and legs.

"Absolute warning... attend to her, and get out of my way." Sage growled.

Again the raccoon fired a repeating series of shots at his face and body.

In return, Sage lifted a hand and flicked a mote of energy at him that echoed like a cannon shot. The Raccoon simply disintegrated - clothing, guns and all - to ash. There were screams as Sage continued forward, his senses broadening as a pair of antennae continued to grow from his forehead, the plates there pushing outward as the Soul Gem there broadened and enlarged, and when he opened his eyes, two cracks along the back of his head also opened, revealing a pair of red crystals that moved about.

Sage turned his head in one direction and the next, translating the now three-sixty degree view instantaneously. As reports would later place it... a monstrous behemoth of a creature appeared, critically wounded one individual just by her touching her, and disintegrated the town marshal.

The '*Venge*' was a cruiser class starship that appeared over planet ZA-zero-zero-three at a rush, and no sooner than it appeared than four drop ships erupted from its undercarriage and dropped an entire division of troops toward the planet surface. Within moments an eruption of ships, like bees around an angry hive, ejected from the fighter bays to protect the ship. Within fifteen seconds they had the communications array of the planet, and within twenty they

had located their target.

"Too slow." Colonel D'rend growled. "Damn it, faster next time!" he barked.

The soldiers around his command deck all repeated with a "Aye-aye sir!" and continued on with their work.

"Target is located in the area known as the barrens. Drop ships are realigning for drop." A tech reported.

"I want four mechs on each drop ship." D'rend commanded. "Visual on target."

A holoscreen erupted before him, and there were members on the command deck who all gasped.

"Look at him!" someone said.

"Cut the chatter!" D'rend barked. "Target subject will all guns, lay a suppressing fire to give our soldiers time to land and disembark.

"Sir, yes sir!" one of the soldiers at the console barked. "Target Acquired... firing!"

Sage stopped, gasping for air as his breath came out in a hot steam, and he breathed in and out again, his breath instead came out with the fiery heat of a blast furnace. A strange... feeling, a churning inside him as he collapsed to his hands and knees, coughing, his hardened groin being taken up by a bulging series of overlapping plates.

More of the basic Draconic Lores were taking shape now, and in a mixture of pain and erotic climax, Sage belched a breath of fire that erupted about him in a fireball, charring the earth instantly. He cried, grabbing at his throat as his body began to lengthen at the waist and neck, his forearms growing longer. With a groan he felt slits in his neck flare open, venting electrified vapor, tears welling out of his eyes as he coughed again, and like he was throwing up, he felt something rise in his throat, and automatically his mandibles opened, forming a crackling charge about his mouth, his back flaring and power nodes all about him shining, and when the throw up finally came, it came as a column of electrified plasma that was atomic in strength, the beam quickly widening to be broader than he was, and miles off in the distance, a mountain exploded as it was struck by the beam.

"AH!" he groaned, a splatter of cum frothing about the newly formed penis guard about his loins, his spine turning outward with the spikes there sharpening, his tail lengthening and broadening, the spikes on his back arching and hooking while his back bubbled and boiled. Spikes began to erupt radially about his back as his muscles and bones realigned beneath the plates covering his back.

"G-Great... Maker!" he moaned, and again a froth of cum erupted about his loins as his thickening claws raked at the earth.

He began to grow faster now, spikes and armor, weapon ports... the evolution happening too fast for him to contain.

"Commander." The leader of the strike force heard as he used power assisted running toward their target, moving over a hundred miles an hour with hundreds of soldiers and mechs behind him. Colonel D'rend was being even more of a prick than usual at the moment.

"Yes colonel." Kael replied.

"We are about to turn a twelve mile radius around your target into beads of irradiated glass. Pick up what's left of the target."

"Yes Colonel." Kael rolled his eyes, and sent the mental signal for them all to slow.

Up from the sky, a barrage of fire lanced from the sky, evaporating clouds just before striking the ground in a peppering action that rocked the earth even where he settled to a stop.

"Several direct hits sir!" the tactical officer reported and cheers went up about the bridge.

"Sensors! Confirmation of termination of target..."

"Stand by Colonel... there is a lot of interference..."

"I didn't ask you to give me a report that you cannot perform your duty soldier... I told you to give me confirmation!"

"Sir, yes sir..."

Interference from radiation, from heat and dust... made even the best sensors skip. It took several moments to clear, but then all the debris just sort of got blasted away, and there was Sage... struggling as he trembled.

"Negative... that is a negative. Target appears... to be undamaged."

Sage screamed as he writhed in total pain now. He'd just absorbed several hundred thousand terajoules of power, and he'd become a ball of lightning as his transformation advanced itself. All across his back, cracks and fractures were shattering the plates and shells there, and he cried as the maddening level of pain assaulted him.

"DRAT!" D'rend growled, surging from his feet and punching the comm. Button on his command chair. "Commander!"

"Responding sir..." Kael replied.

"Assault the target!"

"Aye sir..."

Kael approached the target, approached Sage Preypacer, and swallowed inside his suit as he leveled his beam rifle at him. It was the sort of weapon that could punch a hole in a starship... certainly this Sage would be hurt by it. He'd ordered his soldiers to surround him

Run!

He shook his head and looked to his lieutenants, seeing if they had just said something, but he continued.

Please run!!

"Should he twitch in a way you don't like, begin the attack... make sure he is surrounded first."

Kael began to advance as the hundreds of soldiers surrounded him, aiming heavy weaponry at him, a line of siege troopers at the forefront. Kael walked up to Sage, seeing him tremble, seeing him vibrate with power, lightning crackling about him.

Run before it's too late, damn you!

Kael pushed the barrel of his rifle in Sage's face.

"Lord Sage... you have been deemed too dangerous by the Aphkei Imperium. You are hereby to be annihilated without possibility of reprieve. Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

Kael... honestly did not understand the significance that Lord Sage looked up at him with a pair of green eyes. The goodness that remained in him held off for as long as it could, held back the eruption, tried to give these people chance to get to safety.

"Too late..." he whispered, and his eyes faded back to red, and closing them, the lightning sparks grew more numerous, till he was covered by a sheathe of energy. And then...

The pinpoint of light could be seen from space. And then the pinpoint erupted.

A rapidly expanding ball of destruction erupted from Sage Preypacer, the ball billowing and seething, the shockwave that preceded it scraping off all the rocks and boulders, flattening mountains and creating a deepening hole in the ground.

"Merciful AUL!" a soldier cried on the deck as D'rend rose from his seat again. And then the shockwave actually hit the ship.

"Shields... SHIELDS!" D'rend screamed, and the power charged up its shields as it was forced upward. D'rend fell back to his seat. "Full power to the belly shields! Con maneuver ship belly down, divert everything we got to those shields!"

The blossoming ball of light outshone even this system's sun... billowing ever outward.

"Energy level incalculable! Force is off the scale! Planet is actually shifting its access eight degrees!"

The force wave began to dissipate, and then collapse, and with a snap it was gone.

The force of the explosion... was absolute.

"Crater is five thousand miles wide! Much of the atmosphere has been cooked off!"

"Damage report!" D'rend bellowed but ignored the reports as he stared at the crater.

A black bowl of charred obsidian cracked with magma. At its center, it was miles deep. Burning red lightning was crackling across its surface as the atmosphere closed again around the point, but there was truly so much less of it now...

"What happened?" he whispered.

"Target appears to have... exploded!"

"Acknowledge destruction of target..." D'rend hissed as he surged forward, staring at the image.

Immediately, the image centered on the very center of the explosion... and focused on a target.

"Negative... Target remains..."

The cameras saw the body of white and black, even as it uncoiled and rose.

"He's alive?!"

The body rose, ponderously, arms unfolding from the body as the body uncoiled. It rose and exhaled a breath of fire. Its back then began to fragment, breaking open as his tail lengthened and thickened, and two pieces detached from his back and rose up and away. From beneath those two masses unfolded and fanned outward, and as they fanned, they unsheathed into a series of overlapping blades while the body supporting them grew thicker and larger.

And then the most peculiar thing happened. Sage turned his head and lifted it, looking straight through the camera at them.

His eyes burned redder than ever...

Then a pinpoint of red light billowed from the gem in his forehead, and a flash, and suddenly the ship rocked and their camera went dead before the camera shifted to another on the ship. Engines unfolded from Sage's back, flared to life, and squatting, he leapt up into the sky, accelerating straight for them!

"He's coming at us... he's coming at us!! What do we do sir?"

D'rend watched the being like an advanced war machine rocketing toward them at speeds that defied logic.

"General quarters, all hands to their stations, all ships in space!"

"Aye sir! General quarters sounding."

The lights dimmed and claxons began to blare, and D'rend sat down in his command chair. "Fire at will..."

Sage continued to change as he rocketed upward. His power was accelerating now, a series of exponential growths and sudden jumps in his energy reserves which forced him to change. This last change had been sufficient enough to not only transform him, by evolve him eons forward.

His mouth and jaw locked tight, crystalline third eyelids slid over his eyes and he began to process his own oxygen as he rose above the atmosphere, heading straight for that celestial object of the ship that had been attacking him.

Even as he erupted from the upper atmosphere, the ship began to blast at him with hundreds of gun batteries, but his mind, enhanced from his growing cerebellum and from the modifications both biomancic and cybernetic, he saw the paths of the weapons, displayed those paths in is HUD, projected his path forward and maneuvered through them.

Then with a twitch of his wings and a sudden firing of jets at his shoulders and calves, he sailed clear of their firing arch, and while the weapons turned to follow him, he hovered there for a moment, and smiled, just before his body opened.

What he did next literally defied several laws of this universe... simply because the form of magic that he used did such things; defied paradox. He didn't bother using sorcery on this matter, knowing that it would fizzle and backfire on him, but nonetheless, the all-encompassing Chakras of Magery, Psionics and the magics of his internal chi forces, now powered by a bio-catalytic reactor, charged a power through his arms into a ball through the power nodes with impeccable speed, and holding the ball outward, he let it fly toward the ship.

The lance of white light struck the *Venge* full broadside, forcing the ship to list from the power of the simple Chi Ball as energy crackled along its hull and electromagnetic shielding. By the time the guns were brought to bare on him, Sage was already gone from where he was, accelerating and turning at speeds that would force their pilots to

become little more than splatters of blood in their pilot seats.

"Con, turn bow of the ship to new heading plus thirty eight!" D'rend commanded. "Damage report!"

"Starboard shields down thirty two percent, we have ionization damage on decks three and four sections B through D."

"In one blast?!"

"Com! Reinforcements! We need reinforcements! All squadrons attack!"

Lord Sage rotated and turned as a swarm of fighters and mechs assailed him, launching missiles and firing blasts of high-energy weaponry, missiles and a plethora of ordinances at him. His sleek black and white body continually changing as he laughed inwardly at them.

So simple, so pathetic...

Missiles fired at him were shot away by high-frequency red bio-lasers from his shoulders that picked away the missiles, scores at a time. Every time that he let loose with his own conventional weaponry, an eruption of swarmer plasma fire - like bolts of curving lightning erupting away from his body in repeating volleys - lanced outward from dozens of locations all about his body, streaking and curving away and striking ships with pinpoint precision.

Ships and fighters were peppered repeatedly, breaking down their shields and eventually cutting whole ships to ribbons. Those that actually got close enough to him were ripped apart with his bare hands, his body moving through their layered electromagnetic shielding as if it didn't exist.

At one point, free from attackers on all directions, he let loose three volleys of those blasts of coiling plasma, sending hundreds of angry white hot blasts at those around him, before his form changed to drop two shoulder cannons from his back to lob a pair of ultra high frequency ribbon casters at a fighting ship to clip its gun pods, sheering them completely off, changed again to fire a pair of particle spheres that splashed against the mother ship and disrupted its shielding more, before he changed yet again.

The last instance he changed, it was to return to normal, but only so that the vents along his neck could flare open, and opening his mouth - his air passages sealed to space - he belched out another breath weapon that vaporized the ships unlucky to be caught in its beam and cut at the side of the '*Venge*' like a scythe and opened its hull like a gutted pig.

Sage then rocketed off, taking pleasure at swatting at the simple gnats around him, and the fact that bodies were seeping out of the hole in their mother ship, and he actually came to melee range with a mech before slicing it to ribbons with his forearm blades. He caught the pilot as he was ejecting and ripped his helmet off, casting him off to space, watching with glee as the decompression exploded his inter cuts outward through his mouth and nose.

Nothing could stop him... or... he thought nothing could, till he felt a disruption in space time, and turning, he saw a much larger ship come out of space fold with a snap of pseudomotion and crackling purple lightning, just before the carrier disgorged all its fighters.

"This is the carrier '*Deep Core*.'" The captain of the vessel hailed. "We are here to help you.

"Perfect timing Captain..." D'rend said, gripping the end of the armrests of his chair. "Everything you got... we must be relentless... destroy Lord Sage at all costs.

Things had just got complicated... and that just pissed him off...

Sage barreled away at high speed, fighting for his life now, a series of blasts peppering his back while another clipped his wing. He then suddenly found himself in the center of a trap. He was blasted from every direction, peppered from head to toe by blasters, plasma casters, missiles... every piece of ordinance that the Aphkei could maintain, and Sage wrapped his wings about him, gritting his teeth.

'Murderers, defilers...' he thought inwardly.

Then he curled up on himself, and the fire intensified as his feathered wings folded completely around him in a ball, the mechs and fighters got closer, blasting away at him with ordinance that could puncture a star cruiser. Even the magical and technological shielding Sage was displaying was weakening. The pilots took that as him weakening, and began to fire harder.

But he wasn't weakening... he was powering up.

Suddenly Sage lanced backward, unfolding his wings and screamed outward, though in the depths of space no one was able to hear the scream. But as he uncoiled, throwing his wings open, spreading his arms, legs and tail, an eruption of something black and dark erupted from him, and suddenly a blossoming sphere of darkness spread in every last direction. All space around Sage was simply pushed out of the way, several hundred kilometers in every direction.

Sage took several deep breaths, and then opened every weapon port on him, and all at once thousands of eruptions, stronger than the last erupted outward from his body, pelting the vessels striking at him, damaging and even destroying those that were greedy enough for the kill to get the closest.

It allowed Sage a breather, and he healed himself while they were recovering, and in the meantime, space flooded into the space created from his force explosion.

"Sir! Astrophysics reports that the target has just pushed away a pocket of space!"

Captain Markor, captain of the *'Deep Core'* turned sharply to his communications officer. "What do you mean, just pushed away a pocket of space?"

"H-he... he literally pushed us and everything in this universe away from him."

"What?" the captain gasped.

"He's literally moved us and absolutely everything in this universe several hundred miles away from him!"

"But... that's impossible." Markor said and turned to look at the target as he hovered there, growing thicker, stronger, more powerful... "We have no choice... Launch the advanced fighters."

"The prototypes captain?"

"Yes the prototypes... launch them!"

The advanced fighters, for lack of a proper designation, were referred to only as the *'AF Units.'* Like Black streamlined condors, they dropped from their stations onboard the carrier, spreading their wings and unfolding just before blazing forward.

The Advanced Fighters were built using a new process, the first to utilize the Metal DNA technology in something other than small tools or life forms. The ships were alive, and jacked themselves to their pilots by direct neural interfaces through their flight suits. As far as the pilots were concerned, they became the ship, and the flight suits didn't allow the ship to overwhelm the pilot.

The piloting, combat, weapon skills and magical abilities of the pilots were advanced several hundred fold.

"Pilot Zero-Zero-One to command... we are engaging the target." The squadron leader spoke through his mike, and immediately the nine ships transformed into mechs.

Lord Sage turned to face them, fully healed now, and stronger than before, and without warning, was suddenly shot at by one of the approaching mechs, a plethora of missiles and a heavy cannon erupted outward, striking Sage full in the chest. Sage didn't remain for a second shot.

He rocketed upward, only to find himself in the range of all the other vessels he'd pushed away, and as he arched back down, he was socked in the face by one of the transformed mechs and then blasted in the chest again before converting into a ship and blasting off, blowing him downward by the jet exhaust straight into the knee of the next mech, and Sage brought up a forearm shield to defend himself from a sword strike. Sage struck backward, blasting it with the spike on his elbow, but that did little more than phase the mech, the damage repairing itself almost instantly, and for his attack, Sage was rewarded with another knee in the back and a cannon blast in the same place.

Sage growled inwardly and sent a wave of force at the last attacker, a cutting wave of force that cut the space, but that mech was already gone. Sage then slid sideways as he saw his next attacker through the eyes in the back of his head, and began to defend himself.

As it was, the odds were not good.

"This is not good." Dallas said, watching the fight. He'd turned a weather satellite around to watch the battle, and everyone in Meniko's chamber was watching the battle as it continued vigorously.

"What, that your master will meet his end by the Imperium?" Meniko asked with a hint of smugness.

"No, that the Imperium has just made a heinous mistake headmistress." Dallas said.

"Dallas," Noxi urged. "Please make sense!"

The view took an image of one of the fighters moving about and transforming, firing at Sage and blew the image of it up in an overlapping screen so that others could see what he meant. "That is a new type of fighter." Dallas said. "New technology, and if I miss my guess, the hull is made of a type of biological metal."

"So?" Equis stated. "Why is that not good?"

"New technology... biological metal... Lord Sage's science is based on a form of biological metal, Equis, and he has already shown that he can absorb technology."

"So what if he gets close enough to absorb one of those ships?!" Rae asked, suddenly catching on.

"Then the power of that metal and the power of all that new technology would become his." Dallas finished.

Meniko stared at the image, and looked to Sage's already increasingly powerful form. She could feel him fluctuating, but every time he faltered from being damaged, he grew stronger than ever from the damage, and if he did truly absorb what could undoubtedly be metal DNA if it were a biological metal...

Meniko had heard of what happens to people transfused by the metal and the power they obtain, and in Sage's

case... he was already far too powerful...

She immediately raised her hands and gestured, and her holo-keyboard appeared before her, and she pulled up a communication screen. She had to warn them...

"Captain... we are receiving a communication from Headmistress Meniko of the Mystic League." D'rend's communications officer reported.

D'rend snickered. "Put her online."

"Headmistress... we are happy to report that Lord Sage has been cornered and will soon be dealt with. I'm positive that you'll also be happy to know..."

"Damn it! You're making a mistake. Those toys out there will only make Sage stronger! You must recall them before it's too late!"

"Toys? What toys? You mean our Advanced Fighters? They're doing better than anything else we've thrown at him yet. Why in Aul's Name would we pull them back?"

"Because Lord Sage absorbs technology!"

"W-what?"

"He physically merges with and becomes one with any form of technology he comes in contact with! The longer you leave those things out there, the more chance he has to absorb one of them, and the more chance he can grow more powerful!"

"Sir! Zero-Zero-Three reports close engagement with the target!" the tactical officer stated.

D'rend gasped and surged to his feet.

"Contact Markor! Tell him to recall those fighters immediately!"

By the time that Markor was receiving the information of the importance to recall, Sage had grappled with one of the fighters from behind, his body able to absorb the heat of the afterburners; he opened himself to the fighter, extending pieces of his self into the metal, finding the ship amazingly easy to merge with. Rolling his eyes, he began to feel a heat in his groin as he became aroused with the power, and trillions upon trillions of microscopic organisms flooded into his body, coiling and meshing with him, and within seconds the pilot lost control of his vessel, seconds later he was being detached from the vessel and ejected.

Sage convulsed as all the technological power of this thing was absorbed into his body, a rush of evolution, a rush of strength surging through his bones, his sinews, his very cells, energizing him from the inside as he grew more and more powerful. New forms of armor pressed themselves through him, his back flaring open, his body opening up as he grew larger and larger. He started laughing... and if one could hear him... they would've started running.

Nyl Dousaka had to radically change the direction in which the *'Black Omen'* was traveling, and likewise had to slow down or risk blowing the reactor. But he felt calm now.

"Nyl..." Emperor Sarvic said, and Nyl turned.

"Yes, my emperor?" Nyl replied, snapping to.

"You seem to have changed your outward appearance, Nyl... you are calmer... why is that?"

"Because Sage is fighting against Colonel D'rend, my Emperor. You are aware of his record?"

"I am, Nyl. I am also aware that D'rend does anything necessary to win a conflict." Jaikard replied. "And that's what worries me. So far he's been lucky... eventually someone who acts like that will make a mistake, Nyl."

"I have complete faith in him my emperor. He has never let me down in the past."

"Approaching planet ZA-zero-zero-three, Emperor, Warmaster."

"Commence fold in." Jaikard commanded, and there were several key punches as the *'Black Omen'* folded into space.

Nyl then watched as Jaikard slowly rose to his feet. "It appears, Nyl... that even faith can sometimes be... disappointed."

Nyl turned and gasped.

Before him was a graveyard. Hundreds of fighters, nothing more than wreckage, a carrier that had been ripped in half, and a cruiser that was listing and on fire.

"Impossible..." Nyl breathed. "How is this... possible? How can he do this much damage?"

"It doesn't matter how, any more, Nyl," Jaikard said. "It only matters that he did. My flagship will be here soon, Nyl... and when it arrives Nyl... I empower you to do anything to stop Lord Sage... at all costs."

Chapter Ten: At All Costs

Lord Sage had changed inside.

Something was obviously not correct inside him, but who cares? He was gaining more power than he ever dreamed; more ability than anyone he'd ever fought before. Single-handedly, he'd already decimated two divisions of troopers that had constantly been his bane, many squadrons of fighters, a cruiser and a carrier. He had power... more power than he ever imagined, so who cares if there was something wrong inside him?

I care...

It was a very quiet voice... and it was nagging. He pushed the voice deeper inside him and carried on.

Who would've thought that he could be flying through space faster than the speed of light unaided. It was truly a magnificent experience, to see stars and whole worlds streaking by him without being surrounded by a space ship of some sort. And still he was sucking up power, growing stronger...

His muscles continued to bulge and then recompress, his armor growing heavier and heavier, and the technological marvels and might that he possessed truly amplified his power a thousand fold.

Wings spread, he had four other wings like the dragonfly version of a dragon wing, each wing shining brightly with rainbow like energy while a series of bio-veneers, booster jets and hyper jets propelled him forward like a super propelled comet, trailing a tail that was a light year long, and combined with his technological knowledge and his newly acquired technological power, he was traveling through real space at unparalleled speeds.

Who cares that many had died in order for him to achieve this much greatness?

I care... and the families of those slain will care.

Sage closed his eyes and tried to force the voice down. It was such an annoyance lately, but no matter how hard he tried to force the voice down, it would not go away.

You killed thousands by now... caused tens of millions of credits worth of damage. How can you not care? You used to.

'And look where it got me...' he replied back to the voice. 'Every time I tried to help someone it was spat back in my face. Every time I sacrificed myself, I was never thanked. Whenever I gave of myself, gave my faith, it was betrayed. Whenever I tried to love... every shred of hope I had was broken.'

And no wonder. You are a crass, uptight ass... Sage. Bless the few individuals who, despite all that you've already done, nonetheless remain with you...

'And who... might I ask... has always remained with me?'

Rae.

'A woman I tried to love, and despite her innocence, chose someone else.'

But she's nonetheless remained your closest friend... your closest friend ever. And what of Equis? She secretly loves you, to a degree... She even thought you worthy of mating with.

'She thought to ride my bone, and you know it. And she constantly reminded me as to how weak humans were, constantly forgetting the fact... THAT I WASN'T HUMAN!! I am a Lycan... We are more than human.'

More human than human... as you are want to say... but still human. Then I will place one last name, in your separated mind, Sage. Deny this name if you can.

'Say it damn you.'

Sanari.

Sage trembled, and then slowed to a stop in the vast darkness of space, light years away from the nearest solar system. That name echoed in his heart, made both his hearts tremble, and in his modified Dragon form, plates having shifted over his face and body in order to make him more space worthy, he felt that name cause... strange feelings inside his chest.

'*Damn you...*' he thought inwardly... but for once... the small voice was silent.

Nonetheless... the thought of Mother Sanari had cut through the cold, soulless edifice that he'd become recently straight to the core, and something warm boiled down there.

He floated there in space, trying to bury the emotion, tried to bury it out of fear. Not out of fear that the emotion would destroy him, but rather... deep down... he worried that if he dared love another, she would be removed from him somehow too.

Emperor Jaikard's flagship was the largest vessel in the fleet short of a fortress planet.

It was a modified fortress moon, with a ship projecting out of it, the moon itself spinning slowly near the engine unit at the back of vessel. It was a flaring wide vessel with a spear head at the very front, and was literally a fleet unto itself. Most fortress Planets - save for the Last Day - would fear this vessel immediately upon view. Despite the power and the military might that the Black Omen represented, the Imperial Flag Ship - The Cormir - was a far safer place for Jaikard to be.

Attached to its underbelly were two cruiser class warships, while the vessel itself carried a truly massive compliment of fighters, mechs, transport-sized fighting ships, as well as several tens of divisions of the Imperium's greatest soldiers. The vessel projected three times the width of the slowly turning fortress moon forward, and half again its breadth backward.

Standing on the sprawling, multi-tiered command deck located just before the massive rotating ball the size of a moon in the ship, while officers and such hurried about him, Emperor Jaikard looked down upon the heavily damaged planet, in which existed a continent-sized hole. To imagine that any one individual had created an explosion large enough to damage a planet like that... was remarkable.

There were of course rumors that individuals like Rae Iksaki, and Fatima Iksaki, Eqs and others, were able to crush a planet with a single punch or a miss trodden footstep. The reports he received nonetheless came from viable sources that such individuals were capable of such power... but this was the first time he'd seen evidence of such power. He theorized that this was the first time anyone had seen evidence of such power.

And on top of that, he had personally decimated two divisions already, a cruiser, a carrier, and several flights of fighters and mechs. The loss of life was already staggering, nearly three thousand dead. Thank Aul, in his mercy, that there were so few losses civilian wise. The cruiser and the carrier had both been taken inside the fortress moon attached to the ship for repair, but the carrier itself was being looked at for being scrapped instead of attempting to repair it. Likewise... his officers were trying to find a way to force several million people to leave their planet, and despite the devastation... none of them wanted to.

To them, that land was all they had...

As he stood there, contemplating the sight of a hole in a planet, there was suddenly a hail from his throne-like command chair, and returning to it and sitting down, he depressed the return key.

"Report." He spoke softly.

"Emperor Jaikard... we have an issue."

Sage trembled as he flew forward. The build up of power was becoming staggering, and he endeavored to find a quiet place to allow it to happen. It was times like these, as the power overcame the darkness inside him, and the darkness reveled in that power that what remained of his disjointed light side could control the body enough to move it to a place where he couldn't hurt anyone. He was trying to control the body, but he was so weak, and so afraid... and the darker side was all that much meaner. Before, he had a decided advantage over the darker side, but whatever that psychic had done had seriously damaged him.

Now the dark was in control.

He found a place that was as far away from any population center as possible and slowed to a stop in the dead of space, and allowed the body to relax. Just letting it come.

"One hour ago, my lord, we intercepted this from a long range sensor array." The tech reported, and an elaborate map of the stars appeared, just before a blossoming explosion of what appeared to be a supernova appeared.

"Why is that so strange?" Jaikard asked.

"My emperor... that section of space doesn't possess a star of any sort. It is several light years away from any solar system at all."

Jaikard's brows beetled. "Do you have an explanation?" he asked, already fearing the truth.

"We do, my lord... Observe this section of space in a more close up recording that we were able to make before the array was destroyed."

The section of space magnified, and Jaikard saw something streak into the view of the magnification, just before another magnification popped up to overlay the first, to show what was unmistakably the mutated and heavily armored form of Lord Sage Preypacer. And as he watched, Sage began to twitch, and then convulse, electricity snapping about his body in chains of green, white and red, before it all merged, and suddenly there was an explosion, the explosion radiating in every direction, and when it dissipated, there was a massive dragon form, an ethereal being that was a million times larger than what he'd been before.

Then it turned its head, looking straight into the camera it seemed, and then the picture went fuzzy, and then went to static.

"What happened?!" Jaikard demanded.

"That was the last few seconds of the recording before the array was destroyed, sire."

"Destroyed? At what range? And by what?"

"We sent a scout craft to survey the damage, sire... and the scout discovered that the entire array had been crumpled into a ball. Scanners state that there was a powerful Psycho-kinetic wave form that simply reached out and crumpled it. My lord... the array was over ten light years away from the target."

Jaikard sat back, knowing exactly how vast a deep space array was. They could be classified as small cities. The good news was that they were unmanned.

"Doesn't like his picture taken, does he?" Jaikard mused.

"That's not all, my lord. The energy output of the explosion, is the same general wave form and power emission of a super nova. The wave dissipated thankfully at point-three light years from the target being that there was no scatter of stellar matter, but a being that holds that kind of power... are our fortress planets even powerful enough to withstand such a force?"

"Undoubtedly." Jaikard said. "We just need to know where to place them. Thank you captain for the good work."

"I live to serve, my emperor." The image of the captain in the science teams dissipated as he bowed, and Jaikard sat back, watching the image repeat its loop.

"Sage, my friend... what could've caused such an honorable warrior like you... falter like this?" he whispered, and then deactivated the image. "Com... get me in contact with Headmistress Meniko of the Mystic League."

Nyl Dousaka had a hunch... one that he was sure would pay off. He was acting on multiple grades and degrees at the moment, acting as a soldier, a warrior, a protector, a fatalistic knight to his emperor... and... a father.

He feared for his son.

With Sage only growing more powerful and with the Demon League already having been sacked... then there was a possibility that he was heading for further reconciliation. That meant that Sage was looking to enact revenge against others who he may have perceived having been wronged by. And since the next person on the list of people that Sage constantly got pissed off by, then that meant he was looking for Meniko's head.

Shortly after that would be his own.

Sitting in his own chair now that the Emperor was aboard his own vessel, the Black Omen was heading at best speed for Wave World. At the same time, two destroyers were joining his entourage in hopes to stop Lord Sage.

Stop him, at all costs.

"That is correct, my emperor. We have spied the fugitive Sage Preypacer. We are currently following him, but we are having difficulty doing so."

Captain Yatai Seles was in control of the strike cruiser the '*Destruga*.' She was a Caldynnii female in service to the emperor. One of the few. Just like one of the guys, she held a rapport with her many strapping male officers, all of whom have bed her at least once during their stay under her command. The first officer was her unofficial mate... being that he and she bed one another quite often... and it was only a matter of ceremony now to declare them as married.

She herself was shapely, well-endowed and muscular, especially in her Imperium Officer uniform, and was a handsome woman of military perfection... till she got in the bedroom. Then she was a stunningly beautiful fem in a lace teddy.

"What do you mean you are having difficulty, captain?" Emperor Jaikard asked.

"He is traveling in real space at spectacular speeds, my emperor." She explained while her 'First Mate' stood beside her with his hand on her command chair. "Our engines are at full speed and we are squeezing every last drop from them, but whenever we so much as even match speed, he somehow increases his own. I fear he is merely toying with us."

"Transmit his coordinates and heading, captain. We will continue here." Jaikard commanded, and she did so. "And captain... do you have an image?"

"We do... sire." She admitted, and transmitted that too.

Jaikard was allowed a view of something... spectacular.

He was no longer the massive ethereal dragon that was larger than a planet, but he'd nonetheless grown many times his previously recorded size over planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One. He was four-armed, with a massive array of horns. He keyed in several other commands, and observational posts gave him images of differing directions. He was a black and white devil-angel, with six wings and technology of all sorts arrayed about him. Four of his wings were little more than thin sheets of crystal-like rainbows spread across the fingers of a bat-like wing. But the primary wings... those feathered wings were made out of some sort of steel, armed with a plethora of red crystals along each wing arm, and trailing about the wings were dozens of ethereal feathers that spread all about him to make his wings span ten times in breadth from tip to tip that his body was from head to toe. And presently, from head to toe was a couple hundred feet.

"Thank you captain... discontinue pursuit and wait for further orders."

"Aye, my emperor." She acknowledged and the communication winked out.

Jaikard then opened up the map of the stars and keyed in the coordinates and heading given him to see what the direction was. Sage was flying straight for Wave World.

He then keyed up the locators of all ships in the armada, and found that there was only a fortress moon close enough to immediately intercept at the moment. Others would have travel time. With only a moment of thought, he keyed in a transmission to call the Commodore in control of that moon.

Commodore Rishlieu had placed his fortress moon in the direct path of the creature he was assigned to stop. A massive construct the size of a moon orbiting any given planet, it was a wonderful deterrent from attack, and a sufficiently sized road block.

An interdiction field the size of a gas giant was projecting itself in every direction, the field a gravitational anomaly capable of pulling targets out of hyperspace while the moon itself pounded the hell out of the target and destroyed it once it'd dropped from its hyperspace medium. True, the interdiction field had never been tested against anything going as fast as the target in real space... but there was nothing like a field test.

"Target approaching, Commodore." The tactical officer reported.

"On screen."

A holographic image appeared immediately of a head-on view of the target, including speeds dimensions and others. To the best of his knowledge, Commodore Rishlieu had never known of a biological that could travel in real space at those speeds. There may be something that Dragaseir could do... but... this strange beast, whatever it was, was traveling faster than any ship in the fleet could, in real space no less, where hyperspace or even space folding would be more efficient, he wondered whether or not it could or couldn't do such things.

"I want all weapons controls to target the beast, tactical. Even the planet destroyers, divert all power to weapons and shields. As soon as the target is drawn out of his speed, I want him atomized."

"The planet destroyers sir?"

"Emperor's orders, Lieutenant."

"Aye sir..."

"Commodore! Target is changing course."

Rishlieu looked up to the screen to see the beast roll a couple of times to the side, and then fold his wings tightly about him. His speed slowed dramatically, but he was still coming forward. With the ethereal feathers trailing behind him, he looked like a squid missile.

"Is the target still moving into the field?" he asked.

"Aye Commodore." Tactical reported. "Target will still enter into the field. His direction has moved him so that he will not collide with us."

"Good. Continue tracking."

"Aye sir."

The weapons controls continued to ping the beast of black and white, curled up into a winged torpedo like a cruise missile, speeding forward in remarkable speeds. What happened next was so fast that no one had time to react. The beast entered the field and actually sped forward faster than before, with the trailing shockwave of gravitational forces following the target slapped the fortress moon along its hull hard enough to cut a swath hundreds of miles long and a mile and a half deep as Sage sped forward, moving faster now than he'd been going before, before taking off like a shot.

The fortress moon listed by several degrees on its side, power fluctuations sputtering all within it.

"Damage report!" the commodore cried, even as Sage continued on his course, opening his wings and enjoying the slingshot effect to move him even faster forward.

"I am afraid, my emperor, that the beast has utilized our own gravitational field we were to use to catch him as a sling shot effect to rocket him forward faster than he was able to travel unaided." The commodore was explaining; sitting slightly crooked in his seat due to the power fluctuations causing the whole moon to list and off-balance its gravity. "In passing, the warping effect he was using to travel so fast, combined with the interdiction field, wrapped around him and cut us open two hundred and twelve miles long, a mile and a half deep and half a mile wide. I'm afraid we are in no condition to pursue."

"Understood Commodore." Emperor Jaikard said, standing before his screen. "We're sending help to get you back to repair. I'm sorry, but your command will be down for the better part of a year, Commodore."

"Understood my emperor." The Commodore replied as one of his captains delivered a report. "We may be able to get under way under our own power and space fold to Sullis for repairs within thirteen hours."

"Understood, Commodore, but I don't like to leave you limping around like that. The '*Solis*' is already en-route to you."

"Thank you my Emperor."

"Over and out, Commodore." Jaikard said and keyed off the communication for a couple of moments, drumming his fingers against the armrest of his chair. "Get me in contact with Headmistress Meniko." He said at last and then rose, once again leveling his eyesight upon the hole of an entire planet.

"I understand, Emperor Jaikard." Meniko said. "Thank you for warning me."

The screen shut off and Meniko lowered her head, folding her hands one over the other. Sage was coming there

without mistake then. He was coming there for her.

Her chamber had been cleared, and the only individual who remained was Daedalus.

"Daedalus... please relocate your Nemesis to the main island. We'll need their protection."

"Error: Insufficient permissions. Access to reprioritize Nemesis denied."

Meniko blinked, and then raised her head to where Dallas stood with his head hanging.

"What did you just say Daedalus?"

"Error: Insufficient permissions. Access to reprioritize Nemesis denied." He repeated.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Meniko asked, her temper rising.

"That my drones are not available to you, headmistress. They are currently protecting the Shadow League and its students. I cannot in good measure relocate them to protect your students, when all nine of them are required to protect my master's students."

"How dare you? Daedalus, you are to relocate those drones to protect my students immediately!"

"Error: Insufficient permissions. Access to reprioritize Nemesis denied."

Both her hands hammered the ground, cracking a pair of tiles as she surged upward and hissed at him.

"You are faculty of the Mystic League, Daedalus, you are required to protect the school!" she bellowed.

"I never was, nor am now faculty of the Mystic League, headmistress. I am the personal servant to Lord Sage Preypacer. My resources, unless otherwise stated, are his to command."

"Is that so? Then perhaps you're here to spy on me for him. Perhaps I should just crush you right now and flick you off like a bug."

Dallas exhaled softly.

"Headmistress... I am not here to spy on you."

"Then why are you here?!" she trembled, swallowing.

She could not help but be stressed by this situation.

"As an observer. I may be a living, breathing entity, headmistress... but the measures of my creation originated as a computer. I am a free entity. But I have certain laws binding me that are as all-encompassing and undeniable as a gas to you. They were a part of my original source code, and I cannot modify them no matter how much I want to. I am helping you to the best measure of my creation Headmistress."

"Observing? What are you observing?!" she trembled, her claws making deep grooves in the floor tiling.

Dallas sighed again. "As a measure of my being, Headmistress, I cannot act against my creator unless he has a clear and present evidence of insanity."

"AND WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS?!" she shrieked, the chamber trembling.

"Meniko... you are asking me to stand against my father, my master and creator. How well do you think you could act in such a course? I have a problem here, headmistress. All of the indicators of my master being declared insane

are all in the eye of the beholder, and that beholder is solely based upon me. All of the clear and present indications, save one, are inconclusive."

"Save one? And which one is that?"

"In the loosest of terms, headmistress... it comes down to: *'Is the enemy of my master my friend... or my enemy?'*"

"And how can you not decide on that?"

"Because, begging your forgiveness, Headmistress, but ever since coming here my master and I have encountered little more than hostility - with few exceptions - from you and those associated with you. We have constantly been on the defensive, denied aide when asked for it, told to fend for ourselves..."

"When have I ever done that?!" Meniko demanded.

"Pleeyo... Siklohn." Dallas said quietly, and Meniko's eyes went wide.

"Shadow Island has been the home of three major conflicts in the past decade, headmistress... conflicts that you did nothing to halt. You had the power to do so, we discovered, so I have classified you and your facilities as unfriendly. The only access you have to my systems, however slight, is purely by command by my master, meant to keep political ties open with you primarily to allow students to move back and forth between the schools to visit friends, and keep the ability to transfer between schools open.

"You have denied us access to your computers for learning purposes, in which by right, my master has full and complete access to your library. Complete and *unmodified* access to your library."

"Why would I ever give that villain access to my magical tomes?!" Meniko surged toward the computer construct, growling.

"Yes... they are your tomes, but by Right of Challenge, your champion, Rae Iksaki, was declared by imperial decree, to have lost to Lord Sage... just as he lost to her. Per the terms of the challenge, all the knowledge of this universe that you and this school had access to, were his for the taking. And yet you continually denied him access to the school's library, and whenever you did give him access, he found such blatant examples of errors that they could only be done purposefully. After Rae explained to Sage that you had the ability to modify the tomes, and after seeing his frustration at not being able to learn by right, Rae herself began to teach and train my master your teachings."

"Sage, however, opened his library fully and unmodified. You may even now gain access to that if you wish, headmistress, but I'm afraid, school and Ronin Enterprises resources remain outside of your sphere of access with me."

"You are an extension of the school." Meniko said. "As a part of the standard charter to open a charter, all resources are to be shared."

"That was the standard chapter. Even at the creation of the Shadow League, Master Sage didn't use a standard contract. And besides, Headmistress... the ten year contract is up as of the first term of this year. A new contract has been delivered to you, signed and ratified, by you, which alters that original contract and states that the Shadow League is now a school all its own... separate from the Mystic League."

"What is this?"

Dallas lifted a hand, gesturing, and a crisp and clear holographic window appeared as if it were a true-life pane of glass, and a very legal document began scrolling across it large as life.

"We even bolded the sections that differed from the previous documents, highlighting the most important details headmistress. Including that we were to be considered a separate school from you." Dallas said, stopping at the

section detailing this. "You spent all of sixteen-point-three-two seconds on reading this document before you signed it and returned it back to us as approved.

"What this all means, Headmistress... is that until Lord Sage has proven himself not to be of sound mind, I can not and will not relocate the Nemesis to defend your school, nor will I deactivate the defenses of the Shadow League till Master Sage's intentions are known. I have a prior obligation to protect our own students..."

"If Sage proves to not be in his right mind, then I will do everything in my power to stop him..."

"And if you find otherwise?"

Dallas hung his head. "Then I will do nothing... Headmistress.

"I have... my doubts that my master is acting in his right mind... but my doubts are not conclusive. The moment my master gives me a sufficient and noteworthy reason that he is indeed mad... I promise you, headmistress... you will understand the true purpose of the Nemesis."

"And what purpose is that?" Meniko asked, calming slightly.

"Their name gives a relation as to their true purpose, Headmistress... Lord Sage built them in the off chance that something like this happens. Should he be coerced, or controlled, into doing something that he is doing now... or worse yet... truly mad... then they will stand against him at full power, and stop him at all costs.

"Even if it means to kill him.

"If proof is given to me, Headmistress... I will personally join the fight... and if necessary... kill my own creator."

Mayia held herself as she looked down from the observation level of the tree, located directly beneath where the trunk broke into its three branches. She hugged herself, staring at the empty courtyard, where normally, nearly a couple hundred students would be working in their morning exercises.

Dallas had just informed her and Siklohn as to what was happening. For the first time in a very long while... she was very jealous of Siklohn. He at least had someone to hold in times like this. She only had herself.

'Lord Sage Preypacer is currently heading toward Wave World. His intentions are unknown. In one hour... all students will be sheltered inside the tree, and we will be in alert status. The only individuals who will be allowed outside the shield wall will be the Nemesis and my security Bioroids.'

Mayia thought about Dallas's words. All students at this time had all been restricted to remain inside the safety of the tree. All house defenses had been activated, and though certain activities were still allowed, all students were urged to stay within the shelter of their rooms.

Oh master... oh my poor master, Mayia thought. What has happened to you?

Mayia continued to look down at the courtyard for a long while, contemplating, feeling something near the center of her back tingling.

I have to do something. She thought. I have to meet him... I have to see if he truly, truly is mad. No matter the cost... and if he is... I gotta stop him.

Mayia uncoiled and stepped to her personal quarters. Due to her rank, she no longer even had to share a room any more, and had moved up in the tree another level, closer to where Master Sage kept his quarters, and only she and Siklohn had quarters on this level. They were spacious... like small suites.

Inside her own room, she stripped and showered, and then began to dress, but instead of dressing in her usual uniform, she dressed in a body suit and then began strapping pieces of body armor to it. She planted her daggers at the small of her back, covered her face and her hair, and with her sash hanging about her body, she opened her door and left.

She left her room, left the school, and eventually found her way to the shield wall, and looking up at the great curving dome she reached out and pushed her hand through it. It felt like passing her hand through water.

"What are you doing, Mayia?" came a voice and she whirled, drawing one of her knives, only to see Siklohn standing there.

She straightened. "Nothing you should concern yourself with, Siklohn." She said quietly, her voice thick with warning.

"You're going to go stop Master Sage?" he asked.

Mayia looked him from head to toe, noting that he wasn't dressed in his uniform either.

"You may as well tell Verdance, Caliban and the rest to come out... I already know they're here."

Siklohn gestured, but Mayia was surprised. Siklohn's team wasn't the only ones who came out of hiding, but members of her own team, like Cambi - who was standing rather close to Verdance - and she was so very glad to see Geevo there as well.

"I expected everyone else, but why the rest of you?"

"Because we are all concerned too, Mayia." Camby said. "That... and we couldn't let the future headmistress just go up and get herself killed all by herself."

She smiled, and then looked to Geevo, who was oddly standing apart from everyone. He was watching her intently.

"Apprentice... we await your command." Siklohn said, and Mayia blinked at him, and then puffing up her chest - her ears falling adversely to her attempt to look taller - she exhaled.

"Dallas cannot act against Master Sage, so I'm betting that he cannot act against us either unless ordered to do so if we decide to leave. We are going to the Mystic Island to offer our aide as best we can, and if necessary... subvert anything that Master Sage is intending." She swallowed visibly. "Since we cannot all fly, and there's too many of us to carry everyone, we'll take one of the boats across."

"This is your last chance to turn around, apprentice." A voice said, and she whirled, seeing nothing there, and then Dallas materialized directly before her and she and others gasped. "I will not stop you... but I urge you to reconsider."

Mayia looked down at the white-haired gentlemanly butler appearance that Dallas exuded.

"We can't just stay here and do nothing, Dallas. Please let us go."

Dallas looked back up at her and nodded.

"Access granted, Journeyman Master Mayia. Opening doorway." He responded, and a window appeared in the field from the appearance of four L-shaped devices like the corners of a picture frame, and a square opened in the shield to allow them passage. "Be careful apprentice. I cannot guarantee your safety outside these walls."

"We know that." Mayia replied, and taking a deep breath, stepped through the door way. "Thank you, Dallas."

Dallas nodded once and stood by the doorway, and on the other side, Mayia saw a Nemesis drone standing there,

watching her, but not moving to stop her. Turning, she continued down the path leading from the caldera toward the shore...

One by one, the other students followed... more than thirty of them...

Dallas stood there, and then sighing, the door closed, locking them out, and he dematerialized.

Sage's transformation, he felt, was nearly complete. He'd achieved a myriad of forms, all with their usefulness and ever growing abilities. He still had his human form, he felt, secluded somewhere deep inside him, and though he had yet to achieve that form since his transformation began, he knew he still had it. But now he had the added abilities of cybernetics and supernatural strength in that form.

The next step was a hybrid form. He knew he had that as well, but not what it consisted of. His old hybrid form, an eight foot tall super strong white tiger had been stripped from him and mutated. He didn't merge with a great cat anymore, but rather a dragon that was hundreds of feet long. He didn't even know what that looked like.

He next step was what he'd called his Greater Hybrid Form. That was the first form he'd achieved, his changes forcing him to achieve his battle form, while that form was enhanced, expanded and added on to till one had an eighteen foot tall monstrosity of technology, might and magic. This had taken the place of his old Battle Form, which had once - what felt long ago - had been a twelve foot tall entity of nigh limitless strength. In that form, he'd been stronger than even Rae... but very stupid. That little trait of loosing intelligence in his Battle Form and Full Cat Form had been weeded out of him. If anything he'd grown smarter in this new form of his.

And now was the form he was in now: The full Dragon Form.

The size of a transport, Sage's wings flared wide to either side of him, but likewise, at the end of each bio-mechanical feather was an ethereal feather that spread even farther away, giving him massive wings of light and a wing span that was ten times his height, and literally gave him a wing span of a few thousand feet. He thought his power would climax at this point... he most certainly did... and the array of power he enjoyed in this form was *incredible!* He had four arms, the greatest array of technological might, the heaviest armor, the most magical and psychic power, but the draw back was that he was no longer as fast and as maneuverable as his previous form...

But then that form, his full dragon form, wasn't his climax of power... he transformed one final time. A new form...

He'd actually evolved passed lesser dragon and greater dragon, past noble and royal, past even emperor dragons, and became a Star Dragon. There was only one other dragon type greater than him now, and that was a Celestial... the only other types of dragons who could possibly be greater were the dragon kings and queens, or the Bahumat himself. Possibly even Lord Pseudodrake, the lord of the council. Definitely Drake and Leviathan were. No one could match that sort of power.

He chuckled to himself.

But his Star Dragon form was a wholly ungodly massive dragon of mostly energy, large enough where the body was the side of a moon and the wings could encompass a whole planet! Claws that could crush worlds, and power enough to destroy a city-sized thing ten light years away without even straining himself. Now that was power!

Power Corrupts... Absolute power corrupts absolutely...

'You again?! I thought I was rid of you...' Sage thought inwardly

You should know better than that. You are never rid of me... just like I am never rid of you. We cannot exist without each other, you and I... I die, you die, you die, I die.

'Spare me the lecture. Just sit back and shut up. I have no need of your sanctimonious bullshit any longer.' Sage

growled, gripping his four hands tightly.

You know that I cannot, and I will remain here till you listen. No matter the cost...

'Just go away you... ah!' Sage cut himself off as his speed was dragged back, and he felt things like wires crisscrossing before him, as invisible as spider silk in fog or darkness. Bands of gravitation that laced amidst each other caught him and slowed him to a stop, holding him briefly just before he felt two blows hammer against his back, shattering much of his technological propulsion.

He opened his mouth and exhaled a breath of fire, and opening his eyes, saw a plethora of angry fighters spilling out of two Imperium warships, and he was trapped between two destroyers that were opening fire with all their guns possible, either of them catching him between broadsides. He grit his teeth, unable to jump to FTL speeds without his engines, and even if he had them, he couldn't jump with the interdiction field in place till he got out of the field.

He turned and faced them, using his magical propulsion to move out of the way with the use of whatever guide jets he had while he healed, but he was clipped in the side by a blast from one of the destroyers before he fully got out of the way. Erecting a shield he began to counter attack the swarming fighters all blasting at him, his four eyes in the front and the back of his head keeping track of all the myriad of fighters screaming about him, targeting each as he slid ponderously in comparison to the rest of them, opening fire with his tech.

The fighters separated repeatedly, all so that he kept getting pegged by the cannon fire from the destroyers, heavy particle accelerators, ion cannons, plasma ejectors, anything that could cause him damage while they turned to bring to bear the heaviest weapons on the bow of the two ships like mass drivers and Protonic infusion cannons,

Sage felt himself being targeted, and grit his teeth as he saw the noses of the ships lighting up in order to cut him two new ones, the two massive vessels maneuvering to fire at his front and his back.

A spray of blaster fighter, repeating bursts of blazingly hot electro-death splattered against his shields both magical and technological, his armor shattered in many places, and as he stared at them, realizing that if he didn't act, then he would meet his end now...

He reached out into the universe, and sucked in more power.

In the deepest reaches of space, is where the eldest and the darkest things reside. Far, far away at the edges of a universe, where light begins to fade and there is nothing, not even matter or space dust to occupy the regions of space, are where the dark things that go bump in the night are born. It is also the place where ancient evil, makes its home.

Sage found that, and sucked it in, and his demonic might flared, and with a scream, sin flooded into his body, his demonic might increasing several fold in that moment alone, his arms spreading as his might wings flared, and with a wing buffet, he flattened several ships, his shield bubble popping as he did this, and a plethora of blasts struck at him.

But his dark black armor, slowly grew darker, and darker in that instant, thickening as the only coloring it possessed was a deep purple haze... like the event horizon of black holes. His horns lengthened, flared wide, and with two hands, he reached out and magically and psychically took hold of the two destroyers, and drew them inward, while with the other two hands, he forged a bio-blade.

Demons and dark dragons awakened within him, lending him their power, their ancient secrets, and in the background was a deep, dark entity that was present in the multiverse before there was anything even called light.

It was laughing, and it was laughing through Sage as he pulled the two destroyers sideways toward him, closing the gap, before his wings beat and he flew away from them easily now, now knowing how to maneuver without use of his jets.

He laughed into space, not even needing to breathe anymore as a sword like a radiating star with a single massively

long blade of stellar fire formed within his hand, the power shots from the destroyers going wild, he began cutting through the ships with that massive sword, breathing fire on them, his beam arrays cutting through the ships hull. In an effort to destroy them, despite their close proximity, the Aphkei ships simply open fired at him, catching him within a gauntlet of blaster fire that openly blasted against the hulls between the two ships while fighters followed him in, many fighters getting destroyed in the heavy fusillade, and Sage himself getting dented badly as he flew by. Incredibly his sword deflected many of the heavy cannon fire, and once he'd escaped the gauntlet, pieces of his armor falling off and turning to ash only to begin growing back again, Sage blew a beam of fire at the first dreadnaught that raked its hull along its weakened shields before they were able to compensate and double the shields on that side.

He could feel his wing pylons and engines nearly repaired as they quivered with life, and flapping his wings he shot into the fray, getting himself knocked about and torn at by pinpoint beam shots from the ships and the fighters, raking deep rents against his body, save for that black armor.

Whatever sin, demon power, or dark dragon lore that supplied the knowledge to create that black armor, he was most thankful for it, for combined with his Iron Shirt techniques, it made that armor impervious!

"Betrayers! Defilers!" Sage screamed, and every mind in his immediate vicinity reeled from the gravely demonic voice they heard in their heads. "In the name of all the innocents you have hurt, in the name of all the worlds you have destroyed in selfish conquest... I must end you!"

The blaster shots all focused on him immediately, the first few missing from the miss direction of an unsettled mind, but military training took in and they soon began to take careful aim at Sage, clipping him often, but while they shot at him, grooves in his body began to shine with light, and all at once dozens of body plates opened up, and in a sudden shiver, Sage exploded with light from what appeared from every pore.

Beams of light lanced in every direction, turning to find their targets, raining fire down on the destroyers and pelting their shields away till they struck repeatedly against the hull. Fighters and mechs were holed repeatedly, blowing up once their reactors went critical mass or their weaponry exploded.

The fusillade destroyed everything it struck, and what remained stared in awe at Lord Sage as his body folded in on itself, and suddenly healed itself, growing thicker, larger, stronger, the sword in his hand lengthening as his body burned with dark and holy magics that sparked off his body.

With a whirling of his partly ethereal wings, he went about, finding the survivors and either crushed them in their own pilot seats, tore them apart, or threw them out into space to suffer decompression. He then focused on the destroyers as they desperately tried to get out of the way of him, turning to make a run for it, and lifting two of his hands, he closed his fingers and suddenly the massively powerful destroyers halted their movement forward.

Their engines blared, and focusing his mind and his powers, Sage sheered off the engines of both destroyers and suddenly teleported before them both, giving them both a perfect view of him.

Sage then lowered his sword, and the blade snapped apart, crackling lightning between the two halves before a blade of light three times longer than the blade extended outward.

"Be cleansed... in fire!" Sage bellowed, and attacked.

Emperor Jaikard sat back in his command chair, palming his head with one hand, having just watched the battle data of attempting to take Lord Sage. Every time they very nearly take him, he grows more powerful. It was getting very near to the point where he would have to issue a General Alert to all military forces to stop Lord Sage before more loss of life was taken.

If need be, whole planets would have to be destroyed in order to destroy him.

Already the loss of life was in the tens of thousands, and damages were in the trillions of credits. A whole planet was scarred irreparably, and their agricultural ability damaged to the point where it was unusable. Even now... two destroyers had been mortally damaged to where they weren't even salvageable, and their cries for help over the communications were even now blaring from his command chair's communications.

What is it, Lord Sage, that has made you loose your way so badly? Jaikard thought to himself.

"Pardon me, my emperor." Someone said, and Jaikard lifted his head to see a young captain standing there.

"Please give me some good news, captain." Jaikard said and sat up regally in his chair.

"I know not how you will perceive this, my Emperor, we don't know what to make of it, but Warmaster Dousaka has commandeered two destroyers from the fleet and has gone into silent running. We cannot hail him. Governor K'Donn authorized the transfer of the ships to his command, but thought it wise that you should be informed.

"The Governor is asking if he can be of assistance."

Jaikard swallowed. K'Donn was Jaikard's ultimate trump card. He was a threat that even god grade Dragaseir feared.

"Tell him to stand by." Jaikard said and then sat back in his chair. "I want him to relocate his fleet to Waypoint Zeta. We will meet him there, so redirect us to rendezvous with him."

"Aye sir." The Captain said. "Anything else my emperor?"

Jaikard thought for a moment and then rose, and immediately his Dragoon guards around him snapped to attention. I will be in the temple aboard ship, captain. I feel a need to pray at the moment. Alone for once."

"Aye sir." The Captain bowed and then turned to the command deck and began barking commands.

Jaikard turned and pulled his robes and cloak about him. "Aul... please send us your mercy." Jaikard said aloud, and his dragoons all followed after him as he left the command deck.

Chapter Eleven: Black Omen

It was said that the Dousaka Flagship, the Black Omen, brought death in its wake. So when Meniko saw the great black ship that was miles long descend and park itself off shore, she had mixed feelings about it.

True, it held a contingent of the best trained soldiers in the Imperium plus an entire division of Imperial Shocktroopers - the only thing greater than a Seigetrooper - but they were Dousaka. On top of that, The Black Omen also arrived with two more warships in its wake, and arriving at a time like this, felt like a bad omen in and of itself...

A lander detached from the ship before it'd even finished parking itself in its low level hover just above the ocean waves, and by the time the shuttle was landing itself, broad gangplanks had opened in the Black Omen, and scores of Siegetroopers and Shocktroopers disembarked from the Black Omen, complete with their support units, mechs, fighters, tanks and a legion of imperial spell crafters, offloading its entire compliment of military might while hordes of fighters appeared in the skies from the two destroyers in space.

The lander maneuvered and then landed directly before the Headmistress, and lowered its gangplank, and then from within the lander, stepped Warmaster Dousaka himself.

Dressed from head to toe in his typical Death's Head armor... black and gilded with copper, he strode with his billowing red campaign cloak floating behind him, and surrounded by elite siege troopers and a half dozen officers, each also clad in heavy armor.

"Headmistress." He greeted, his voice sounding deep and gravely through his helmet. "We are here to serve and protect you."

"Your help is welcomed, Warmaster." Meniko replied.

Automatically, behind the Warmaster, arraying themselves in the fighter ball field, Nyl's soldiers began to hastily form a series of bastions in the form of a portable fortress.

"I guarantee you no harm shall befall you or your students. We will stop the Preypacer Beast before he even steps onto your island."

"Beast..." Meniko said, stopping in mid step.

It was just like before... except this time, the individual who was taking up the mantle of the Beast... was perhaps more powerful than the original, with the exception of the Absolute Fist. Meniko was glad that this monster didn't have anything remotely like the Absolute Fist... but the Black Beast went mad over a god complex. Thank Aul that Fatima had been able to defeat him.

Lord Sage... was something new... something different. A beast he may be... but the Black Beast he was not.

Yusuma stepped into the temple floor, stopping beside Tla who was even now carrying Eakjo on her shoulder.

Sanari, other than the brief rest she had when talking with Daedalus, had remained in prayer for over two days, fasting the whole time, unsleeping, unkempt. Yusuma and Tla had been called for the only purpose of replacing the candles. At the moment... all the candles burned, and Sanari remained kneeling in prayer.

Yusuma and Tla both held onto their staves, while Eakjo clung to Tla's back, hips and collar with his fingers and toes.

"Mamma..." Eakjo said, and then turned to Tla. "Nana... where papa?"

There was a snuffle... and then a sob, and they all turned to see Sanari bending forward, covering her eyes with one hand and gasping her sobs as she cried.

Yusuma planted her staff beside the door and hurried to Sanari, kneeling beside her.

"Mother... you are not well... you need rest."

"No!" Sanari half moaned. "I will not stop until I know what to do. I will not fail this one... I will not allow this tribulation to get the best of me. I will not let him go."

Eakjo climbed off Tla and knuckled forward on his fists and hands before rising and standing before Sanari.

"Mama? Where papa? When papa come home?"

Sanari bit her lower lip, tears leaking from her eyes to wet the fur beneath her eyes, and she snatched Eakjo to her, hugging him as if he were her own child that had come from her womb.

"Papa is sick." Sanari choked. "He doesn't know who he is. He will not remember you, sweetling." She said.

"If papa not remember me... then papa will remember you..." Eakjo said, and hugged Sanari back.

Sanari blinked and then pulled back, holding Eakjo at arms length to look at him.

"Eakjo... say that again." Sanari choked out, looking at the Zhumal as if he were a strange thing.

"Papa remember you?" Eakjo repeated.

Sanari looked down, deep in thought, and then she promptly rose.

"Tla... could you please take Eakjo... see that he gets a bath and a nice meal?" Sanari said, taking Eakjo's hands and wiping her eyes free.

"Certainly Mother... but... where are you going?"

"I must prepare. Yusuma... I have a special task for you. Assemble all the students. We must all pray for the safety of the schools here."

"At once, Mother..." Yusuma said, and Sanari bent low and hugged Eakjo.

"Eakjo... you are a special boy. Thank you for your innocent wisdom."

Eakjo took Tla's hand and beamed up at her.

"Nana! Mama say I am wise!"

"That's right." Sanari reiterated. "Very wise. Now be a gentleman... and let Tla give you a bath... you are beginning to stink."

Sanari then rose and exited the shrine, but then stopped. Despite the height of the walls, she nonetheless could still see the fighters flying overhead, and stepping forward, she opened the sliding window in the gates and peered outward. What she saw filled her with more horror than anything else.

There, moored on its gravity anchors, was the Black Omen. Which meant that the Dousaka were here...

Sanari took a deep breath, steeling herself now that she knew her path. *My timing... must be flawless...* she thought

to herself, and then closing the window with a whirl of skirts, she surged toward the door of her home, and straight inside to make her preparations.

The blackness of space is a cold mistress born of the Void. It is cold, emotionless and dark, and save for the piercing lights of the stars, it is nothing but endless emptiness, with vague islands of light and life in the form of the stars, the planets the moons, and the occasional station amidst the cold of night.

The station surrounding Wave World had once been the original Mystic League in its entirety. After Meniko was forced to kill the guardian of Wave World and take over control of the guardianship, she was forced to obey her own rule and leave the school forever.

Her students simply thought that if the headmistress couldn't come to the school, then the school would come to the headmistress.

All students, faculty and facilities were rebuilt over the period of several years planet side, to which the Imperium gave a wonderful aid in doing. That left the space station practically empty. Meniko still owned the space station, but without purpose... it was best destroyed.

But then individuals began to arrive, who wished to set up shop. Classrooms were converted into shopping centers, the student dorms converted into apartments for those who worked the shops and hotels for visitors, and while the school was being rebuilt, the space station was being transformed into an orbital mall, and was still a major draw for the students of the Mystic League on their off hours. It was still being retrofitted and redesigned, and was now a major outpost for places abroad. It was also the last place a potential student saw prior to attempting their entrance exams.

Now it had the capabilities of being able to receive star liners, system patrol craft and cruisers, as well as the occasional carrier from any of the surrounding governments. It was primarily a commercial entity, with moderate defenses to protect it from raiders and pirates. I mean... who would want to attack a space station that was regularly visited by military forces, and was right beneath the Mystic League's nose?

So when the attack came... they were completely unprepared for it.

Lord Sage appeared out of FTL travel, his trailing wing snapping the communications tower atop the space station, destroying its line of communications. The trailing wake of FTL travel slapped the station and made it tremble, causing massive damage to one side of it, while the wake continued forward and struck the planet in one of its plentiful oceans, creating a tidal wave that rose nearly a hundred feet and surged outward over a third of the planet's surface. It would take hours before the energy in the water dissipated and the water level calmed.

Immediately he exploded, blossoming from his dragon form into something unseen by this universe, save for the transformations Dragaseir accomplish when they go ethereal, but this was in real space, a blazing white form of a dragon, with wings that spread far and wide, large enough to encompass the whole of the planet as he crackled with lightning and swirled with black spots and motes. He looked down on the planet like a vengeful god, and debated... for but a moment, as to whether or not he should just crush it in his bare claws as his wings spread about it to the point of blocking out the sun!

This was power!

For a moment his claws braced themselves to crush the world, but instead he reached aside, bracing himself on one moon, planting a deep claw mark across its face while he looked down upon the island of the Mystic League. Focusing his attentions on the island, he released his hold of the moon, leaving a clawed paw mark across its face after having pushed it several hundred miles out of the way and leaned closer.

No, he thought, and lifted one claw, set it against the world's atmosphere, his claws spreading open as he formed a seal and placed it there, and immediately the seal locked the planet, further from teleportation. He then turned his

attention to the two destroyers that were turning and firing on him, trying to back away and get to a safe space fold distance. Instead he reached up and took one and crushed it like one would crush a soda can with all the intense psychic and magical power he possessed in this form, and turning to the other, he blew on it and it incinerated beneath his breath. He then refocused himself into his full dragon form, a physical form.

With the planet sealed, and two of its defenders now gone, Meniko couldn't just spirit herself away by teleportation. But now... he needed to send a message...

His wings flared, and the four smaller dragonfly-like wings, bent and realigned, sparking electricity between them like a Jacobs Ladder, and opening his mouth, his lower jaw breaking open and unhinging, his mandibles flaring wide, he called forth his breath, charging it, making it hotter. The vents in his neck flared and vented steaming heat before he thrust his head forward, and he spit a column of fire that rapidly spread thicker than he himself was, sparking and crackling as it pierced the atmosphere, evaporating clouds, and striking the ground right where he had intended...

He then powered down and smiled as his mouth resealed itself before his body cloaked and phased out.

No... death as the world crumbles about them would be too easy... too simple. I want to look into her eyes as I choke the life out of her...

Mayia stood star stuck up at the image that had just presented itself to her, unable to move. The ground still shook from the impact of the strike. There are times when one feels that they are in over their head... This is one of those times...

She swallowed, and then lowered her gaze to those who'd been following her, at the forefront of which was Siklohn, with Caliban pressed against his chest. Most of them had the look that they wanted to board a shuttle and leave this place as soon as possible.

"We continue." She said quietly, and then turned to walk up the beach.

As fate would have it, or whatever semblance of fate existed in this universe... perhaps it was the Creator Himself moving things in this direction, she found herself walking straight for the gates of the Grace League.

"We are in luck." A Dousaka tech reported. "Though the breath weapon is a protonic infusion of atomic matter, which has created a crater several hundred yards wide on the northern shore of the island, it is rapidly filling up with water. I believe that the Beast is unfamiliar with his new weaponry. Lord Sage has missed! This should make him easy to defeat."

There were some smiles of hope on some of the soldiers after seeing this, and even Meniko herself was feeling better, but then there was another voice that broke into the applause.

"Lord Sage... missed." Someone repeated, and they turned to see Daedalus walking up to them. "Well this is a red letter day! I haven't heard that exact string of words since he was sixteen." Dallas placed a withering look on the tech who reported this. "After seeing him in that Star Dragon form of his, powerful enough to crush this world and its moons in his bare claws, do you think that he would make himself smaller to shoot a blast like that at us just to miss? No... he hit exactly what he was aiming for."

Dallas fell beneath Nyl's gaze, and when being shot through the Death's Head face of his helmet, there were lesser individuals who'd wet themselves at the sight of this. Dallas however continued to stare straight back at him... the benefits of not having to directly feel the Warmaster's ire through one of his principal drones.

"A warning shot, then?"

"Precisely, Lord Warmaster. And just like in any other warning shot... it was sent at us to inform us that he's coming. I believe he will attempt an up front and personal assault, Warmaster. It would be best if you planned accordingly."

"You can bet we will android." Nyl shot, whirling on his heel and began to give instructions to his officers, and Dallas's cheek twitched, but he didn't correct the Warmaster like he usually did that he wasn't anything as barbaric as an android.

"Dallas?" a soft voice said, and Dallas turned to see Rae taking his arm with both of hers. "Dallas, what we talked about earlier... does this constitute a clear and present..."

"It does not... Mistress Iksaki. By giving a warning shot, he is giving others ample opportunity to leave. He is following the rules of engagement as beset by our home world. Let the innocent and the civilians get out of the way before the warriors begin to fight. I suggest an evacuation."

"Evacuate..." Meniko said quietly, and wrung her hands together.

Dallas turned to her and was quite patient as he and the others around her awaited the command. Meniko's eyes dimmed slightly before she hung her head and closed her eyes.

"So be it. Though I hoped this day would never come, we need to get everyone out of this place... immediately. I... will not follow. If he wants to come for me, then I'll meet him here, within my own home if need be... and show him that his little trick of puffing himself up like that is nothing new."

"But he manifested in real space like that mother... I-I thought you can only do that in the ether..." Rae said, and Meniko swallowed.

"Regardless... I've let him live underneath my wing for far too long, Rae. I need to swat him down once and for all. He is threatening my life, and the lives of my students. I will make sure that he is punished for such a thing.

"Punished dearly." And she clenched her fist before stepping away toward the tower.

Dallas sighed.

"What is it Dallas?" Rae asked him.

"I don't like to see conflict, mistress Iksaki."

"Please Dallas... call me Rae."

"I cannot... that would be improper." He smiled, but patted one of her muscular arms as they began to walk away from the war pavilion. "I wish to join this conflict, but I cannot act against my master. I stood against him once before, and I, along with Proteus and Mélange very nearly ended his life and the life of the woman he was with at the time."

"What?" Rae gasped. "Dallas... what happened?"

"We'd been tricked by one of Master Sage's enemies. Duped into thinking that we were built only for servitude, and all of our Master's promises to us were hollow. We were all living, breathing entities, we had our own hopes and our own dreams. By this time, I was a massive entity sprawling across several miles of space. I'd long since lost my ability to walk on my own. Proteus was a massive war machine that acted as Master's chauffer, changing into a myriad of vehicles... He had the desire to look like other people, small and able to stand in a crowd without being noticed. Perhaps... experience the touch of a female." Rae chuckled. "And Mélange - unique in his creation that no one possessed a face like his - longed for someone like him to talk to.

"Master had promised all of us that he was making ways to allow us to fulfill those dreams. We'd cornered him, very nearly killed him, when he struck a bargain with us."

Rae was listening closely now.

"Master willingly placed his throat into Mélange's claws, and then had me load a new connection protocol which required me to reboot. Potentially, with me controlling all the Bioroids as drones then, I was the greatest threat. If it seemed as if master was lying to us, then Mélange would rip his throat out."

"What happened then?" Rae asked."

"I found myself connected to a new section of the lair that even I didn't know existed. Inside it... I found... this." And he gestured to himself. "Strapped into a docking station, I was already outfitted for autonomous movement. The linking between myself and my drone was so fine, so perfect, that I felt as if I were in an autonomous body again. I could touch and feel things again, see through natural eyes again, and most of all, I could breathe and smell, I could taste and eat..."

"And above all I felt like a wretch. How could I have disbelieved my master, my father-creator? And that wasn't all. Proteus received an upgrade that allowed him to condense himself and assume a human form, or whatever form he wanted for that matter. He could even become female if he so chose, but shunned that part of himself." Rae smiled. "And for Mélange, Sage produced Matee. As you know... Matee has recently had twin cubs."

"I know." Rae said.

"I... felt so wretched then, Mistress Iksaki, I felt so remarkably miserable that I took steps to prevent something like that ever happening again. So I wrote a program, a series of checks and balances... and hardwired it into myself and linked it to my source code.

"Even master never hardwired me with anything. As a measure of my creation, I was completely free to choose however I wished. I chose to place the semblance of a Geas on myself. The only time I would be able to act against my master's wishes is if he showed himself to not be of sound mind."

"And until Sage shows himself to be insane, you can do nothing?" Rae asked.

Dallas nodded. "The appearance of madness exists, mistress... but the checks and balances are still balanced. I am unsure... and like I told the Headmistress... I've come down to the very last check and balance:

"Is the enemy of my master my friend, or my enemy?"

"Oh dear." Rae whispered. "And most of us haven't been making it easy on him."

"Part of that is his own fault, mistress, and before all this happened, he recognized that, and was making an attempt to rectify it. But what if he is being coerced? What if he is being forced to come here? What if he's being controlled? The question I need answered, Rae... it is really THE question for me to have answered... is what exactly DRIVES Lord Sage to do all this? Why?"

Rae's lips pursed, and she looked at Dallas.

"If that is the question you need answered, Dallas... then I'll get it for you... one way or another." She then let go of his arm, and sped off into the sky.

Dallas watched her go.

"Be careful, Rae..." he whispered, and she turned and waved at him happily before speeding off.

Meniko stood, biting her lower lip as she felt herself on the verge of tears. For the second time, there was a madman who was seeking to end her life and the life of all others in this school, and for the second time, he was unleashed by her school.

Though not a formal student, he nonetheless learned much from her school, was drawn by her school in the first place, and now he was using his knowledge vast to cause hurt and harm beyond anyone's ability to stop thus far.

She watched as her students immediately began to line up in the teleportation towers that would send them to safe places far away, groups at a time through dimensional portals... and hopefully there they would all be safe from this madman. The towers were designed and implemented after the Black Beast affair, and she hoped beyond hope that she'd never again have to use them.

And now these well-maintained edifices were now receiving their use.

But then she saw that the lines were growing larger, and not reducing, and striding forward in concern, she suddenly saw several members of her faculty leave the towers, find her and then run to her in a hurry.

"Headmistress! The gateways aren't forming!" one said.

"The devises are powering up, but they can't create a solid gateway!"

Meniko thought, and then remembered that she'd left a barrier about the world to keep individuals from teleporting in. It should nonetheless allow people to teleport out, but nonetheless, with their adversary there now... then the barrier was no longer needed, and perhaps would be necessary in summoning help.

"A moment." She said and lifted her hands and concentrated, and then immediately felt her eyes go wide. "No! He couldn't!"

"Mother? What is it?" Fatima asked as she approached with a young girl clinging frightened to her shirt.

Meniko's eyes beetled. "That monster... he's sealed the whole planet against teleportation. No one can port in or out. I-I can't even drop the seal... he's arrested control of it away from me!"

"W-what do we do?!" One of the faculty members asked.

"Remember the procedure," Meniko said. "Start moving them to the space port. We'll need to evacuate to the space station and hopefully call for help.

Her faculty immediately went to carry out her command, and she looked down and wrung her hands again. Fatima touched her arm and Meniko turned to her daughter and embraced her.

"It will be all right, mother." Fatima said. "Somehow... we'll stop him."

"For all our sakes... pray that you are right Fatima..."

Clio had made a heinous error recently: She'd accidentally killed someone.

It was an accident... true, but she had to be punished for it. Even in accident, the death of another, no matter how hated or feared or despised, needed to be punished. She was surprised, then, at how vehemently that the people who had punished her for removing a great evil - even by accident - from the face of Casid, were now seeking the life of the man who'd saved her loves from death, and likewise made assurances that her unborn cub, still in Kim's womb, was safe and healthy before she came here to the Grace League. Sage Preypacer had done so much good in his life, and Episteme had done none, and had killed far more than her old master had.

So she was confused why the people who'd punished her, were now seeking the life of another. Or maybe they weren't... but it sure seemed that they were most certainly looking to kill him though.

As a part of her punishment, she'd been collared, and with the loss of her powers, she shrank to a subtle eight foot muscular fem, but nonetheless sported ten breasts, two of which were the second largest by body weight of all the leagues. Tla - her best friend, aside from Chimera of the Demon League - still held the prestige of having the largest chest in all the leagues.

Clio sighed as she sat by the door of the gates, fingering her collar while all the other students prayed in the temple. Though the evacuation was underway, the Grace Leaguers had all vowed to remain until the end, to be the last to leave. Till then, they did as their headmistress instructed them, and that was to pray.

Such was the strength of the faithful.

Clio herself wanted to spend some time with her father, but above all, she wanted to rush to her loves and her sisters and make sure they were safe. And then there was a knock on the door to the shrine.

Blinking, she looked up, and rising from her stool, opened the sliding wooden window, and gasped before closing the window again and opening the door up for the few dozen individuals who were outside.

"Apprentice Mayia! Apprentice Siklohn! What brings you all here? I thought the Shadow League was closed."

Clio herself had been a student of all the Leagues... save for the newly forming Ring League. Mayia and Siklohn had until recently been the individuals who stood over her as upperclassmen.

"Please let us come in, Clio. We need to speak with headmistress Sanari." Mayia asked.

"Certainly." Clio gestured, and the black and white clad Shadow Leaguers entered the hallowed ground of the Mystic League, automatically depositing their weapons in the holders by the door. "But I am afraid that the Reverend Mother has made herself unavailable during this crisis. Perhaps you'd like to speak with Priestess Yusuma or Priestess Tla?"

"Please see if Sanari is available?" Mayia asked, and Clio sighed.

"Wait here." Clio replied before she stepped over to the door that led to Mother Sanari's abode. It was located closest to the gates of the shrine, so the walk was short, and using the very staff gifted to her by Master Sage himself, she walked her long staff - taller than she was and glowing a soft blue with its natural magic - came to Mother Sanari's door and rapped smartly on it.

She knocked again, and chanced to slide the door open and enter to see if the Reverend Mother were sleeping.

"I-I'm sorry, Mayia... but the Mother doesn't seem to be in! I didn't even see her leave." Clio said quietly, closing the door again. "And I've been sitting before the gate for the past several hours. Before then, it was Priestess Tla. No one has entered or exited the Shrine Gate other than yourselves in over a day.

Mayia licked her lips then nibbled on her lower lip with the broad chisel of her front teeth. She'd been hoping for some sort of aide, but it looked as if they'd have to do this alone.

"Thank you Clio. May we rest here for a moment, get some water, and then we'll be on our way." Mayia said at last.

"Certainly, you may rest there in the garden. There should be some ample space for you all to rest... and I will fetch some water for you all."

"Thank you Clio." Mayia said, and gestured for the other leaguers to rest. She herself stepped away, opening her jacket front to reveal her bound bosom, before she sat back. Right now... she had to think.

Chapter Twelve: Knight Takes Queen

Hours had gone by since the warning shot had been fired, warning that he was coming, warning to get out but leave the headmistress behind.

Nyl stood, surrounded by a legion of troops and heavy ordinance and machines. He'd taken to drumming his fingers against his armored thigh in mild annoyance. He'd been presented with a challenge to stop an alien being with an unknown conduct of battle, of unregistered power levels, and the technological might of a cruiser or a dreadnaught in something the size of a light mech.

"All defenses have been set and are ready Warmaster." A young colonel reported, one of three that he had beneath him.

"Very good. Seventy five percent defense stance, colonel."

"Sir!" the colonel said, snapping to, saluting and stepping away.

Headmistress Meniko had retreated back into the interior of her lair, preparing herself for the possibility that she might actually have to face Sage... the being the soldiers and students were starting to call *'The Shadow Beast.'*

Such a befitting role for the betrayer of the Mystic League. It would be a pleasure grinding this dragon into dust and scattering his ashes into the void of space.

"Warmaster?"

Nyl turned abruptly to see Rae Iksaki standing before him. She was wearing her fighter gear. All of the graduate students were gearing up to battle the Shadow Beast in defense of the headmistress. Including the woman who professed to still be his greatest friend.

She'd just returned in her first attempt to find him.

"I am very busy, Lady Iksaki. Is this important?" he said, his voice sounding demonic through the grill of his face mask.

"Will you... kill... Sage?" she asked quietly.

"I've been commanded by the Emperor, Lady Iksaki." Nyl said, returning to his work. "He is to be stopped at all costs. He has already ended the life of tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, Lady Iksaki."

"But... killing him isn't the way. This isn't like him. Something is wrong."

"I was not told to capture him, Lady Iksaki. I was told to stop him. Conventional attempts in order to capture him have all gone awry. I have no choice but to stop him. But that shouldn't pose a problem. He is underestimating the organized power of an entire division of Dousaka troops and all their supports. I'll have his head by nightfall."

Rae hugged herself, not wanting to lose a friend, but then there was a shrill series of beeps, and a computerized voice suddenly chimed in.

<<Warning! Protonic Infusion Detected>>
<<Warning! Protonic Infusion Detected>>
<<Warn... **Danger!!** Protonic Emission Detected!>>
<<**Dang...**>>

And then there was a shrieking scream as a horizontal column of white light so white that it left blotches of purple motes across the vision to look at it, the beam of white surrounded by crackling lightning cutting right through the

Shields of the *'Black Omen'* as if they weren't there, and then erupted through to the other side.

Lights in the *'Black Omen'* flickered as the ship began to list against its gravity anchors, and then a second blast cut straight through the hull again, and with a shudder, the *'Black Omen'* listed and then splashed into the water, sending deep thrashing waves pounding against the shore. The ship, miles long, shuddered to a rest on the ocean floor, and then stopped.

"Merciful AUL!" Nyl gasped and hurried forward, seeing the still smoking hole in the side of his ship.

"I've found, Nyl... that most of the time... Sage is the one who is underestimated." Rae said. "I'm going to go find him again... before his madness totally takes him.

Nyl turned toward her as she turned and took off into the air, flying in the direction that the blasts came.

Sage stood in what he'd deemed his half-dragon form: an eighteen foot tall melding of might, magic, sorcery and technology. A massive "Boom-gun" that was attached and formed from components in his back, chest and shoulder was pointing straight upward like an antennae straight toward heaven. The white of his body blazed like lightning, the black of his body were holes cut into space, with their edges and creases defined only by a purple haze like an event horizon of a black hole. Great horns spread everywhere away from his head, and his long and slender body was thick only in the arms, chest and thighs.

His tail whipped as he retracted the long Boom-gun, and turned with a whirling of his wings and a whipping of his now heavily scaled tail.

It had been so easy to bring down the Black Omen.

A simple black light laser shone against the shields of the ship at random locations as he modulated the frequency of the invisible laser till it touched the hull, and then it touched for all of three seconds as he used it like a gun mike to search for the ship's reactor and back up reactor.

Two surgical strikes were all that were needed to render the ship powerless, with even its powerful multiple layers of electromagnetic shielding rendered useless as he fed the black light laser's modulation to that of his Boom-Gun to match their shields; cutting through them as if they weren't even there...

Let Nyl fester on that for awhile, Sage thought, and spreading his wings was about to take flight.

"Sage! Stop!"

Sage whirled around, three shadow rings forming about his hand as he casted, a spell powerful enough to vaporize any individual forming in his hand in an instant, but when he saw who touched down on the grass before him, something inside him snapped, and almost against his will, it felt, a burning in his chest *forced* him to stop the spell, halt the disks and lower his hand.

"Rae..." he choked, his voice sounding normal, not the demonic rumbling, and his eyes flickered toward green for the barest of moments.

"Sage... Thank Aul I found you. Please stop this! This isn't you!"

"Rae... please leave, I don't want to fight you!" Sage said, his voice returning to the rumbling demonic baritone it was before, but there was emotion in his voice, and Rae heard it.

"Sage... you don't need to kill my mother," Rae said, "Please... let's just you and me go away and talk about this." She neared, lifting a hand toward him, and he shied away from it.

"I've tried my talking.

"Everyone I've tried to show kindness to in this universe has betrayed my trust. They've taken my kindness, my sacrifices, even my very heart, and they betrayed me repeatedly! Even you." He growled slightly and his red eyes burned with fire. "Even you... especially when I *dared* to allow myself to love again... even you."

"S-Sage... you loved me?" Rae asked in a whisper.

"I *always* loved you! And I have to suffer, watching you day by day with another man who couldn't even sacrifice his time and be with you and your children. His *job* was more important than his wife and his children. With me you would've been a goddess! No Rae. I'm done! I'm done with everything! I will put right the ways I have been wronged... I started with Hawthorne... and now I will work on your mother."

Sage whirled, and Rae was about to reach forward and take hold of him with her impossible strength, but a sudden jet wash erupted from his back and she was blown back off her feet as he sky rocketed upward, and then he and even the jet wash completely disappeared. She searched out for him, searched out through the whole of the world, but could find him nowhere.

The God of Shadows has disappeared.

"Oh Sage... I-I'm sorry... I never knew. Please come back..."

Nyl walked thigh deep in water as he carried his cloak hanging from his back and draped over one arm to keep it from getting wet. Only emergency lighting and power were available from the generators running off of stored energy from capacitates. Techs wearing white hazard suits toiled in the water, working on the damage in case of radiation leakage.

"Report." Nyl said as he entered the cavernous reactor room, to where there were two massive corridors carved horizontally through this room and the entire ship for that matter here.

The reactor core was inconveniently cut in two locations.

"Warmaster... repair is possible, but only after extensive reconstruction. With proper materials and a space dock, the hull and the reactor can be repaired in a few days... but it will take eight hours of charging the reactor just to get the lights on even under the best of circumstances."

"And what of the present circumstances?" Nyl growled.

"The Mystic League has a large assortment of resources, but little fabrication capabilities in the way of military-grade metals and substances. We'd have to mine and process the core material to jump-start the reactor and back up reactor again, and use low-grade composites just to get us airborne and with enough power to limp back to a space dock.

"We could call for help, but without power, our long range communications are out. Short range with our salvaged equipment is possible, but apparently when Lord Sage entered orbit, he damaged the space stations communication tower, so we can't even bounce a signal off them."

"And all commercial traffic to and from here has been rerouted, canceled or delayed." Nyl grumbled. "Blast! What a remarkable first move, Sage... take out our air superiority and our ability to call in reinforcements in one move." Nyl exhaled, and then focused on the tech. "Gather a team and start repairs immediately."

"Aye, sir!" the tech said and began to hurry commanding his team while Nyl made the task to trudge out of the reactor chamber again.

They were on their own.

Sage sat atop the highest peak on the planet, surrounded by the biting cold while tears streaked along his cheeks and froze to his cheek guards. The inner confusion and turmoil inside him was tremendous, and though he felt nearly every last mote of him in its drive to utterly eradicate Meniko, there was a part of him, a nagging part, that was urging him not to.

He didn't know what the feeling was. With his Guilt, Self-Restraint and Decency shut off, it was difficult to identify the emotion.

But it was love that finally made up his mind.

Rae, for daring to love me, at least for a little while, you shall not fear death from me. He thought. But you are nonetheless an obstacle. Your mother must be punished for her sins, and in your innocence, you cannot see that. You nonetheless, must be removed.

Sage tipped forward and flew off the cliff, and opening himself up, he allowed Rae to see him.

Rae gasped, feeling Sage reappear as she knew he'd have to eventually.

She rose up into the air, climbing high into the clouds in a steady climb as she reached out and found the remarkable power he'd become... and was still becoming. She could feel his latency growing rapidly, faster than any growth spurt she'd ever felt in such a short span of time. She began to have her doubts as to whether or not she could take him if they had to fight, but she was still dead set on winning this battle with him peacefully.

She felt his location, half way around the world, and teleported, and looking around, found him flying gracefully beneath her. How a creature with his density could even fly was a remarkable thing. His armor was so thick that even she had difficulty seeing through it, if at all. There were very few substances that could do that... two of which were Pseudomatter and Dark Matter.

She began to descend toward him, steadily lowering herself and matching his speed. As she moved toward him, he luckily kept moving his head away from her as he scanned the ocean below him, the power radiating from him growing as she drew closer and closer.

She thought then that it was perhaps best to grapple with him. She knew how strong she really was... nigh unlimited strength! She was certain that she could hold him, force him to listen to her, and opening her arms, she lowered herself still closer, eyeing the jagged realm of spikes down the thick bulge of his spine. She would get hurt doing this if he decided to resist. And she drew closer...

And then she spied the crystals on the back of his head as they moved, like eyes, and she realized a moment too late as Sage spun, grabbed her, and tossed her downward. Rae fell straight through a black hole that had been below Sage, the hole sealing itself immediately after she'd passed through it.

There was a flash of light, and shortly after that... she blacked out.

Rae didn't know how long she'd been asleep, but when she awoke, she was lying on grasses, the sun was shining, and she felt... different. Groggily, she rose, feeling the weight of her body, and blinked, and looking down, she felt the tilt and wobble of her breasts as they hung from her chest, felt her clothing fluttering loosely about her.

It was then that she looked at her hands, looked at how slender her arms were in comparison to what they were

supposed to be, and with a gasp, she rose to her feet and looked down at her thinned body... much of the incredible strength having left her, and she was a slender, yet rather sexily built woman. What scared her was that she felt her own weight. Before, her strength was so impossibly great, that wherever she walked, she felt as if she were weightless, as if the gentlest of breezes would pick her up and carry her away. As a matter of fact, being carried away by the wind is how she felt whenever she flew.

She couldn't so much as create a bauble of light.

"S-Sage... w-what did you do to me?!" she gasped.

"I've made you safe." Came a voice, and she spun to see the incredible draconic semblance of Sage sitting atop a boulder there. "Here you are safe from me, and all that may want to harm you." He said, softly, not unkindly. "Here you are out of the way where you cannot interfere."

"Sage!" she turned toward him, feeling her breasts wobbling uncomfortably within her loose shirt. "I can still fight you! I cannot let you hurt my mother!" she was starting to cry.

"You no longer have a choice in the matter, Rae." Sage said, and rose, and then turned to walk away.

"Sage! I will fight you!" He took a step away. "Please! Don't make me do this!" another step, and then another, and she surged forward and aimed a punch that would possibly destroy a planet at the small of his back, but instead of connecting, she fell right through him and fell onto the ground. She rolled immediately and saw him looking down at her with those burning red eyes.

She rose, and swung at him again, and yet again, tears welling from her eyes as she couldn't strike him, and suddenly, she realized she was fighting an illusion and collapsed helplessly to her knees.

It was usually at this time that something awakened in Rae... the thing that fixes things, made them right... the thing that might've been able to stop Sage, but with Rae's power gone... so too was her ability to become perfect and right all that was wrong.

She looked up at him, heavy tears welling from her eyes that dripped off her chin even after having filtered through her fur.

"Please... please don't kill my mother."

"You have no fear of me killing your mother, Rae. Your real mother is already dead... as you already know. I am going to go kill the hypocrisy that is the Headmistress of the Mystic League, Rae Iksaki, and right many wrongs that you are far too innocent to see for yourself; too innocent to see all the lies she has spun around you.

"I will end her life, and make things right."

"Sage..." she choked, feeling the most intense emotion that she'd ever felt in her life. "I will find a way to stop you."

The look Sage gave her was pitied.

Lifting a hand, he revealed Rae, as she was now, in a fetal position, encased within a prison made up of a sphere, a cube, a pyramid, and about a dozen other geometrical shapes that all overlapped one another and constantly jumbled themselves up about her. Beneath her, was a complex spell circle... the most advanced that she'd ever seen yet, made up of reds, blues, whites, and demonic purples.

"W-what is that?" she trembled, already understanding it, but wanting to hear him confirm it.

"This place is an illusion, but your mind makes it real, Rae. It will sustain you, this prison. There are thirteen locks on the door that lead to this prison, and a series of lethal traps guarding the locks, and the location of the prison is in a guarded place the size of a marble somewhere in the ether of the vastness that is the multiverse. Only I hold the

keys, only I know the traps, and only I know the location of the prison Rae.

"The sphere that you see is a more advanced seal similar to the one I used against you in our first fight together. Without your powers, you don't even have the tools to work the lock let alone open it. And without your powers... you also lack that which keeps you young and vibrant. You're mortal now, Rae... and given time... you will slowly grow old, and die...

"I cannot harm you, but I cannot let you run around impeding my path of justice.

"I will ensure your happiness here, Rae... your family shall join you here. But know this, the traitor against creation, Headmistress Meniko, will die by my hand. Her sins righted, her hypocrisy ended, and the innocent who still cry for justice... *avenged.*"

He whirled on his heel and vanished as he stepped away. Rae hugged herself and balled over herself, and cried real tears, practically sobbing.

Chapter Thirteen: Knight Takes Knight

Siklohn stood in stunned disbelief at the *'Black Omen'* resting prostrate in the ocean. Just outside the doors of the Grace League's Shrine after getting their rest, he was greeted to the sight of his father's impressive flag ship in such a state. It was to be his flag ship when his father either was killed in battle or retired... he knew full well what its capabilities were, having lived on it for several years as an ensign before being shipped off to the academy.

He'd left the shrine at the first attack, and arrived in time to see the second, and had stood there as he watched the mighty ship fall into the oceans of Wave World with enough force to shake the ground around them even as far away as he was.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and he turned reflexively to see Mayia - a product of this beast's teachings - standing there, trying to stand with him at least.

Once, long ago, she was a small little prey species of a bunny. Somewhere along the way, she'd been infused with so much power that she stood nearly as tall as him.

"I... I don't find gladness in such a sight, Siklohn." She managed, and then made a visible wince out of the corner of his eye that even she thought such a comment was stupid. "I-I mean..."

"I know what you meant." He said quickly to save her the trouble of apologizing. "No one should have such power, Mayia... power enough where one of the greatest ships in creation was crippled like a newborn with only two shots."

Mayia remained silent for a time, her hand leaving his shoulder.

"I will admit that I am frightened." She said. "I've never been so frightened in my life, but my master is not himself. This isn't right... something has driven him mad. I need to meet with him, I need to look into his eyes and try to help him see that this is wrong!"

Siklohn was quiet as he stared out at the Dousaka assemblage, and then he saw something, and lifted his head to spy it.

"I-I'm glad you're here, Siklohn... at least you have experience in defeating master," she laughed. "I-I may have to count on it."

She noticed Siklohn wasn't responding, and she turned to see him looking at something, and then lifted her gaze and saw it too.

"If I have to use it, Mayia..." Siklohn whispered. "Then I do... sincerely... hope that those skills are still valid."

They both looked up, as a very peculiar storm front began to blossom directly above them as if from no where.

Clio didn't have access to her powers, but she still had access to her senses. She knew Weather Casting when she saw it... she knew it better than anyone. When angered, she had created a maelstrom the likes of which Casiida had never seen, which was a storm like unto the eye of Jupiter in the Sol System of the Prime Universe. That, however, had come from redirecting natural strings of power to form a radical storm, but a natural storm nonetheless.

There was nothing natural about this storm...

Clouds began to billow straight out of nothingness, condensing and swelling as they swirled outward, spreading far and wide, and the further they spread, the more the clouds began to dome downward. The white clouds were soon growing black, and a cold wind began to blow from an unnatural direction.

And then the first slash of lightning broke across the bubble, and the clouds began to spin, spinning faster and faster, meeting with the ocean they sucked the water up into the clouds, and thunder pealed about them. Cold air began to be pulled downward from the upper stratosphere, and lifting her hand, Clio saw flakes of snow mixed with a slight drizzle fall onto her hand.

"It's a cage." She said, discerning the global flows and eddies of the natural weather systems. She turned to fetch either Tla or Yusuma. There would be wounded soon.

"The entire weather system of the whole planet has been redirected, headmistress." Noxi was reporting to Meniko from her lab. "Everywhere else on the planet the air is dry and arid, but here... there is a weather system unlike anything I've ever seen before. I'm not much of a meteorologist, but I'm pretty sure hurricanes aren't supposed to dome like this. Also... the wind speeds are over three hundred knots!

"The fact that the storm is surrounding only the island the League is built upon is far too much of a coincidence. I think we can safely assume that Sage is behind it."

Noxi could feel the tension through the viewscreen on her console.

"Noxi... I want you to begin taking the students to the storm shelters." Meniko said. "Make sure all the children are cared for first. I'm sure you'll want to care for your own children above all."

"Thank you mother." Noxi said even as a peal of thunder suddenly shook the school with a crackling rumble that caused hearts to pause.

Noxi left in a hurry to find her children, forgetting to disconnect with the headmistress.

Meniko disconnected the connection herself, and looked down at her body. She was massive, great and powerful, but so had been Hawthorne. Sage is smaller and more maneuverable. This form was impressive, but if she's to defeat Sage, she'd have to be faster and more compact, just like him. This was going to be a battle between warriors.

Unbeknownst to that Shadow Beast... Meniko was a goddess of combat. Closing her eyes and mumbling, she began to reorganize herself, writing for herself a formula for a new form, and almost immediately... she began to change.

A pair of red eyes... deep, red within red eyes, with a single black dot located at their centers for pupils opened suddenly atop the Pinnacle Tower. They burned with bloody light as those eyes spied down upon the world and the mass of students heading for shelters as they readied every ship in the space port to remove them from this place, and at the soldiers scurrying about, the eyes spying from out of the veil of shadow Sage was within, and then he spied a young child pointing up at him, and he leapt.

He landed with a lunge by the child that shook him to the ground, and he began to cry once he'd fallen, and a teacher ran over to him to comfort him, but the boy pointed up, the teacher lifting her eyes as a massive shape etched its way out of nothingness as the shape rose. The body drew erect as details formed, and within the details certain shapes began to grow bright white, while others grew so dark that not even the light dared touch it to reflect any color...

Red gems materialized as the shape solidified, red etchings coursing over the body of this Beast of Shadows, and the evolved form of Sage Preypacer slid from out of nothingness.

This demon dragon stared down at the teacher and the crying child, the teacher trembling at the monstrosity as he growled deep and guttural, the sound touching off memories of nightmares imbued into all living creatures from childhood, of the dark and terrifying things that went bump in the night.

Sage clicked his mandibles, and then opening his mouth, his mandibles spreading wide as his jaw unhinged and lowered as if to gobble them both up, he sucked in a deep breath, and screamed.

All sound ended... save for that scream. It was like the wailing and gnashing of teeth spoken of in scripture throughout the multiverse, of the wailings of the damned, merged with the piercing scream of the tortured and the cries of demons, merged with the deafening roar of thunder and the wail of wind of a maelstrom and a blast furnace. All who heard the scream cowered in fear, cowered from waking nightmares that assaulted them, the sound tearing through their minds and reminding them of all their fears and forced them to live them all simultaneously, but in his current form, that scream was amplified a thousand fold, and echoed in everyone's perfect ears.

Sage had reared slowly as he lifted his head so that all could hear the scream, reducing all but the most stalwart of spirits to gibbering piles of incoherent cries once the scream had ended, and when he took another breath, he exhaled it in a constant eruption of swarmer fire, like curving trails of plasma that erupted first from his mouth, and then from all about his body to strike at the school.

Students, faculty and soldiers were spared in this first fusillade... only the school was a target, and everything was targeted. Statues and art were shattered, walls exploded as if bolts of lightning hit them, whole buildings soon crumbling, and screams were heard all about him as the glistening towers of the school were reduced to pillars of fire and smoke.

And then he stared at the Pinnacle Tower, the center of this mockery of achievement in his eye. Sage's eyes narrowed as he whipped a hand to his side and a single ethereal thread lanced off his finger tips before he whipped it toward the tower.

It was called Demon's Hair... a magical version of a monofilament whip, and the hair slashed upward and whipped through the whole of the tower before Sage retracted the thread.

He then turned, glowering at those about him, and with a flicker, the column of magical power projecting from the tower died as the whole upper portion of the tower slid sideways on a hairline crack, tipping ponderously till it crumbled and fell into one of the buildings surrounding the tower.

"Meniko! Come out you deceitful whore and face me!" he bellowed, and with that, the battle began.

"Oh no..." Mayia gasped, palming her mouth with both hands as she saw her master do unspeakable things right before her very eyes.

There were already cries of those who were wounded, there were already people rolling on the ground from the crumbling rubble having fallen on them, and no sooner had he attacked than the soldiers began a heated counter attack. The problem was... was that the innocents caught in the middle were largely ignored.

Mayia surged forward, and she felt her arm taken by a vice like grip as she was pulled back, and she whirled her eyes around, facing Siklohn. "Lemme go!" she cried.

"Mayia! You can't stop him! Let the soldiers handle..."

"Damn it Siklohn! I'm talking about the wounded! Someone has to help them! Someone has to call for help!"

"Mayia..." Geevo said, and she stopped, turning her full attention on him. "You can't do it alone."

"I'll do it alone if I have to..." she cried.

"But you don't have to." Geevo said and walked over to her and stood beside her. "I'll go with her." He said at last.

Mayia couldn't help but feel her heart soar at hearing that.

"We'll all go." Caliban stated. "But the hospital is cut off."

"Then bring them here." A voice said behind them, and Yusuma appeared with several other Grace Leaguers. "We will care for them till we can get doctors and nurses here."

Tla was already standing with her robes opened about her breasts, the mountainous things straining against her robes, ready to pop out with every breath. She was getting ready to use her odd powers to nurse others in order to heal them. Slightly behind her - the only qualified doctress here - stood Ki, the muscular insectid that spent as much time weight training as she did worshipping in the shrine.

She already had her doctor's bag.

Mayia swallowed, and then nodded.

"Try not to be afraid." She smiled, turning to everyone else. "We mustn't be afraid."

"Mayia," Siklohn said softly. "It's ok to be afraid." Mayia turned to him, and shook a little. "I'm afraid too. Fear allows for caution, caution allows for safety... just don't be so cautious to the point of hesitation."

Mayia swallowed. "Siklohn... thank you. But... I have a special mission for you."

"For me?" Siklohn blinked, and Mayia pointed to one of the buildings that was still relatively upright.

"I want you to take Camby and Verdance and get to Miss Noxi's lab. She has better communication equipment there than what is used by the school. You three are more technical than the rest of us are, and between the three of you, you are far stealthier than the rest of us. Please... call for help.

"The rest of us... Will try to get the wounded from underfoot."

The Black Beast, so long ago... had practiced a form of martial arts that was literally deadly with a punch. Called the Absolute Fist, it could destroy anything, no matter the power and the defense of a person. Even Sato, Rae Iksaki, Equis and the headmistress herself were powerless before the Black Beast before Fatima Iksaki defeated the Black Beast.

That was a fluke though...

Sage was not the Black Beast... he was something else: The Shadow Beast. Unlike where the Black Beast could destroy anything, the Shadow Beast seemed to be impervious to everything. The strongest of attacks simply splashed against his body, burning him, cracking his armor in places while sustained blaster fire did practically nothing, and even a direct hit from a OGRE Tank to his head did little more than phase him. In this form, there were no chinks in his armor; it was just layer after layer of increasingly heavier armor, with the blackest of his black armor simply absorbing everything shot at it.

The students and faculty were still evacuating... Sage himself was now engaging all of the soldiers of the Dousaka Clan. At the present moment, he was facing several platoons of Heavy Siegetroopers while a plethora of Shocktroopers were advancing but holding fire.

Nearly a year ago, just a few of these Seigetroopers had easily overpowered him. Sage still had the memory of the pain that these abominations had caused him, and the sheer and utter brutality that he was accomplishing on these former soldiers... A soldier, who'd either distinguished themselves in battle or volunteered or who was too far damaged to ever be a whole being again, was modified, severely, biologically, mechanically and magically into the one of three variants of siege troopers.

Standard, heavy and elite.

Sage took one of these things and ripped it apart, tearing open the multiple layers of protection over the chest cavity, ripping the heart out and spraying the contents of the mechanical heart pump over the visual receptors of the nearest trooper, blinding the trooper briefly while he crushed the next trooper into the ground beneath his massive foot before ripping the blinded trooper apart. Shield slams with his forearm guards, a breath of fire to melt one into slag, the hooking blades on his arms and legs extending as he moved into a whirlwind of martial maneuvers to decimate his adversaries, all the while being shot at from all sides by soldiers looking for weak points.

Even a direct hit to the eye just bounced off thanks to the crystal sheathes over his eyes.

Sage then tensed, threw his head back and roared, and a fiery explosion erupted all around him, burning at all in the path of the explosion, thrusting most of the Seigetroopers back, though several held their ground against the fusillade of damage.

Sage then twisted his hands before him, and tendrils, bone, muscle tissue and even armor plating slid from within his hands, coiling and weaving themselves before him into complex multi-layered formations. Gems opened from the device like the eyes of some insect, with hand holds braces and the like. Sage then hissed as he settled back into a defensive stance, and a light slowly assembled itself from the end of the newly formed blade, crystals forming themselves in octagons down the length of the blade, emblems and runes blazing slowly up the surface of a rapidly forming blade, till at long last, Sage held the most advanced form of a bioblade ever seen. With a snap and a hiss it electrified, and as the soldiers surged on him again, he began to chop them in half, quartering some as he stepped as if in a dance left and right, cutting the scores of soldiers down, deflecting energy blasts, keeping a perfect circle of death around him.

With a sword in his hand, the Shadow Beast now had ultimate defense, and nigh ultimate offense... and he continued to enact his revenge on these abominations to life.

Mayia ran at full tilt, two students over either shoulder as she ran for the Grace League. There was the whistling of a rocket, and she looked over her shoulder and saw a stray rocket that didn't manage to get itself past whatever ECM function Sage was using, so it flew away radically. She pivoted and kicked it away, and it went screaming off to the side before she turned back and ran. The earth shook when the rocket exploded against the ground.

The gates of the Grace League were wide open now, with two Shadow Leaguers protecting the gates, deflecting the occasional weapon fire from the gates using shield spells and special maneuvers.

"Be careful... this one has a broken leg." Mayia said, handing one of the Mystic League students off to one of the Grace Leaguers. "And this one is bruised from head to toe... I fear she might have internal bleeding.

"Ki!" The Grace Leaguer who took the badly battered fem from Mayia called out. "You may have to look at this one! She may have internal bleeding."

Mayia handed the other two wounded off, and then hurried over to Ki... the only qualified doctress here.

"Ki..." Mayia began.

Ki was working at a frantic pace. Most of her robes had been removed, and despite that... this insect was covered in blood.

"I need more drugs, Mayia." She said, using her stethoscope on the fem with supposed internal bleeding. "I need more help as well if at all possible. I'm down to tearing robes up for bandages and using sticks for splints."

Mayia stood... likewise covered in blood, but more for helping the other students.

"If you need help, Ki... I'll get you help."

The Seigetroopers had all been destroyed around Sage, and he stood in the middle of the entire army of Dousaka, huffing and puffing as he held a metal arm in one hand and his sword in the other.

He lifted his eyes, and saw Nyl standing at the top of a hill behind all his battlements, while Sage himself was surrounded by a plethora of hulking soldiers, the Shocktroopers... an entire battalion of them. Larger and bulkier than a standard Seigetroopers, the Shocktroopers were by and by far, far more advanced. Twenty four hundred years of constant development with the present model, the basic parts weren't born... they were manufactured.

No imperfections, cybernetic and magical enhancements, ultra heavy armor, weapons that were normally reserved for heavy mechs, they stood with their head jutting forward, all of them watching Sage. And then Nyl lifted his hand and gestured, and suddenly the all brandished weapons aimed and fired, and overhead, dozens of sorcerers materialized, surrounded by spell spheres and encased in mighty spell shields they began lobbing spells at Sage.

The first shot from one of the Shocktrooper cannons blasted him backward onto the flat of his back, and he cried out in pain as he was electrified by soul rending spells, and mercilessly, Sage came under constant fire from the surrounding Shocktroopers and remaining Seigetroopers, and he cried out in pain, now understanding why the Dousaka were the most feared military group in the universe.

Siklohn, Verdance and Camby appeared inside Noxi's deserted lab as the three of them de cloaked from Siklohn's cloaking generator on his armor. They'd managed to move across an entire battlefield without being noticed.

But Noxi's lab was in ruins.

"Look for salvageable equipment." Siklohn said quietly, shifting out of the bulk of his armor, most of it becoming a ball that descended into his chest.

The three of them spread out, finding various equipment that could work as for communications.

"I have the console..." Camby said. "Or what's left of it." And gestured to the stone spike through the screen.

"We can repair the screen, anything else wrong?" Siklohn asked.

"Just one other." Camby said, and held up the thick power cable which was severed in half.

"What about the communication tower?" Verdance asked. "Is it still connected."

"Noxi handles that remotely," Camby said, and pointed to a pile of rubble. "I... believe... that that is where the remote tower array was."

Siklohn looked around.

"Get a new screen," He pointed at Camby. "And any other computer components that are necessary. Verdance, find a way to connect the console to the tower array. I'll work on getting a backup generator and have it spliced in."

Camby and Verdance both nodded and went into action. Siklohn immediately began to look around for a suitable generator.

A dome materialized around Sage, technological merged with magical... a technomancer null shield as Sage began to catch his breath and heal as he squatted beneath the dome, seeing all the heavy cannon fire while the platoons of Shocktroopers began to focus their fire against his shield to weaken it.

Sage gestured and casted more shield disks, a pin-point barrier system that moved around him to additionally deflect the blasts while he breathed in deep, regenerating and magically healing himself. All around him he watched as the Shock and Seigetroopers advanced, the spell casters floating above him arching their spells to break down his shielding. If not for his technological components in his magics, commingled with his psychic powers, they would've torn his shields down in an instant. As it was, however, the Shocktroopers were now modulating the frequency of their weaponry, and with just over a thousand blasts shooting at him, he had perhaps a minute before one of them found the right frequency to break through his electromagnetic shield array.

Sage modulated his shields, and added a couple more barriers, and then tried to focus more spells into it. Within moments, the shielding modified, and it turned into a reflective barrier, bouncing the blaster shots back at their shooters and their comrades. Immediately the ceased fire with the blasters and redirected power to their rifle cannons, and Sage groaned, bowing underneath the strain as they shot at him.

He looked at the advancing Shocktroopers, found them drawing near, each of them removing a hand from their rifle-cannons and that hand electrifying as it reached out for his shield, And gritting his teeth, knowing that he had to do something, he lifted both hands, and brought them down onto the earth.

The ground trembled in a shockwave in every direction, the Shocktroopers readjusting their stances to remain upright, while all the Seigetroopers immediately fell to the ground, and drawing backward, Sage exploded the sphere outward, and rushed for the nearest Shocktrooper.

Sage felt the arm of that Shocktrooper lance outward and palm his chest, and he gasped, all the air rushing out of his mouth , but despite not having any air in him, Sage turned and spun the trooper, grappling with it and sent it reeling into its partner.

Two cannon shots struck him in the back, and Sage immediately folded his wings and closed his back up before the next two blasts struck, and with his back closed, he was like a turtle from that direction; an ultra hard shell that took several sustained direct shots from those cannons.

Sage's blows striking to the chest region of the first trooper dented it in five places, and it fell backward before Sage went to the next trooper, a palm strike throwing one of them backward, but it managed to get two shots off before its fellow Shocktroopers caught it and righted it again while it was falling.

The last trooper that Sage had felled slowly rose to his feet, the dents in its armor pushing outward as it did, and Sage turned disbelievingly as the thing reached out and took him by the throat and slowly began to squeeze.

Sage tightened his neck muscles, gritting his teeth, and planting his sword knife handed the trooper's inner arm joint, tearing open the layered metal fragments, finding the actuators and wires servicing the hand and then tore those out and then ripped the hand off. Sage then assailed the trooper, wedging his sharp claws beneath a chest plate, tearing it off, whacking the trooper in the head and a couple more likewise, and then threw the plate away, sending it sailing off.

A spell caster up above cast a stream of power to the damaged Shocktrooper as Sage became the target of stun spells that simply bounced off his tough magic resistant dragon hide, and the empowered Shocktrooper turned his cannon to Sage, aimed for his gut and fired, and a magically empowered cannon blast fed from the barrel picked Sage up and sent him reeling across the battle field.

Sage landed, bounced, and rolled before he rose and scrapped across the ground with his hand and toe claws.

That... is... enough...

Sage rose as the whole mass of black metal of Nyl's army turned toward him, their weapons retraining on him.

Lifting his hand he summoned his sword to him which cut several of the Seigetroopers in half, but caused no damage to the Shocktroopers. His eyes narrowed and devices folded out of his head, shoulders and back to focus on those many Shocktroopers. Immediately he began to san the strongest of them all.

Huurri Namah scuttled around in the emergency room, checking from one student who'd managed to get their self here, to a soldier who had a vicious chest wound. The difference between the two of them was that the soldier directly had Sage's ire... the student was just an innocent bystander.

She didn't have time to be upset... that came during the aftermath when all the bodies had been stitched up, but her hospital was filling up fast, and so when the doors opened up, and Mayia Gallant entered, calling for a doctor, she rushed right up to her, her medical smock covered in blood and ichor.

"Mayia!" Namah called over all the calls as people kept being brought in. Some of her more adventurous orderlies were actually going out and picking up the wounded. "Mayia... if you are not injured, then please get out of the way or go to the shelters immediately!" Hurri braced herself as another near hit - remarkably, the hospital had not been directly hit yet - shook the hospital.

"Doctress," Mayia said and stepped in close so that Namah could hear her better. "I need a doctor, but not for me. We're cut off from the hospital, and we have wounded piling up in the Grace League. The Healers and Ki are doing the best they can, but the wounded keep piling up on us, and Ki is out of drugs, medicines and supplies. Is there a doctor or doctress and some spare supplies we can have?"

Namah stepped back, staring at Mayia.

"How much wounded?" Namah gasped.

"Over a hundred." Mayia said quietly, and another explosion shook the building.

"I'll find someone." Namah said, "Come with me..." and Namah pulled Mayia along with her as they entered an Anteroom, to which Namah handed Mayia a duffle and began throwing Gauze, bandages, medicines, drugs, hypo spray applicators, and didn't stop till the bag was full.

She went away and then came back with a young Aphkei fox male wearing a white coat covered with blood.

"Mayia, this is Kai." Namah introduced. "He's volunteered to help your wounded. Kai, this is Journeyman Master Mayia... she will help you to the Grace League."

"How are we getting there?" Kai asked.

Mayia zipped up the duffle and handed it to Kai. "I'm going to carry you."

Sage had been defending constantly, Nyl saw, stepping backward toward the cliffs, managing to briefly incapacitate a couple of the spell casters, and had downed several of the Shocktroopers - there were no Seigetroopers left - but those Shocktroopers that had been down repaired themselves rapidly and were repaired by their fellows, and soon the fallen rose once again and continued forward, opening up with more weaponry, blasting at sage, cracking his armor, beaming holes though pieces of him on occasion with spurts of blood. Nyl stood patiently, directing his battalion like a conductor directs an orchestra.

Everything was already going as expected, though the Seigetroopers fell far more quickly than he thought they would, he nonetheless had his battalion of Shocktroopers. Shocktroopers were new to Sage, he didn't know how to deal with them, and they were pushing him backward steadily toward the cliff, where his airborne mechs and fighters would tear him apart.

But that sword... that bio-blade Sage had formed with its crystalline blade that whirled about him, was the only remaining defense that they'd yet to penetrate.

"Shall I report to the Emperor that he will be defeated, Warmaster?" a colonel asked as he approached Nyl.

"I will not report that he is defeated till he is defeated, colonel. Press the attack."

"Yes sir." The colonel said and retreated back to his command post.

Nyl stood watching the battle as the massive creature that Sage had become shifted his battle stance, and behind his facemask, Nyl saw an ever so slight change in the effectiveness of his Shocktroopers. Some blasts were now being deflected back, and Sage was no longer being struck but the troopers were still advancing, coming into close arms now with Sage's back against a sheer cliff. Two troopers got hold of his back and were forcing his wing pylons open to shear his wings off, while others were beginning to use laser swords to pierce his body.

He would soon fall...

"Colonel," Nyl said, pointing at the person who was still retreating from him back to his station.

"Sir?" the colonel replied turning immediately and snapping to.

"Attack with all air support, I want him underneath a constant stream of..." ***BOOM!***

The sound reached their ears and a rush of wind blew across them, and Nyl and the colonel and the support staff turned to see the cause it. Sage stood with a Shocktrooper held in one hand over his head, snarling at the trooper as a large black disk spun about his arm. A moment later that black disk cascaded up his arm, followed by two additional but smaller disks and the back of the trooper exploded upward sending mechanical lubricants, nutrient fluids blood and guts spraying in every direction, splattering Sage with all the biological matter. Abruptly tendrils spread from his hand into the armor of the Shocktrooper while the biological matter was swallowed into his mouth or absorbed from his body.

"Yes!" Sage snarled and the trooper was segmented, separated and torn apart from the inside, and Sage howled with laughter. "YES!!"

His body began to swell, and he lifted his chin as every muscle in his body thickened, his armor growing more elaborate and far more plentiful. He grew exotically more magnificent, the plates and pauldrons of the trooper merging with him.

"Now! OPEN FIRE WITH ALL UNITS!" Nyl shouted. "**ALL UNITS, OPEN FIRE!!**"

With all exuberance, Sage was shot upon by all available units with every weapon they had, but he was rapidly adapting.

But then he was struck in the head, and his eyes went wild before a flurry of Shocktroopers fell upon him, firing at point blank range while punching t him.

Nyl stepped forward to the edge of his battlement, mentally adjusting his vision enhancements to see what was going on. But then there was another boom, and another Shocktrooper had his back blown out and then torn from the inside, and Sage tumbled forward, tearing the chest open of the Shocktrooper, his wings unfolding to push all the troopers away as Sage began to ceremoniously tear the trooper apart piece by piece, absorbing what pieces of technology he could manage, tearing biological parts out and consuming them before he turned and roared.

In one hand was his sword, and with the shallow framework of the trooper bared beneath all the armor that he'd stripped away, Sage plunged his blade straight down into the artificial cyborg and screamed.

And then he surged forward, knocking the troopers out of his way, lunged and then leapt, and a spell caster gasped in fear and tried to defend before Sage cut through his spell spheres and shield with one deft stroke of his sword, and likewise through the trooper himself and then proceeded to tear the poor soldier apart, swallowing several pints of his blood in the process.

Throwing the pieces down, Sage turned, bloody gory as he faced the soldiers and screamed, even as missiles and blaster fire erupted against him. He simply stood there, waiting for the nearest trooper to reach him, and he surged forward, placing a punch in one specific location in the chest armor, the weakest spot of the soldier, and with a dull thud followed by sheering metal and an explosion of motion, the back of the trooper exploded outward, just before Sage ripped the head of the unit off like an ant removing the head of a beetle.

He twisted it off.

Nyl looked down at Sage, lost in a manic blood craze, shrugging off blaster shots and cannon fire, with only the cannons of the troopers doing any real damage, Sage nonetheless surged forward and punched the next trooper, his palm strike erupting against the troopers body in the same place as the last, and it literally exploded outward with a spray of components, fluids and lubricants and guts.

Sage then brandished his sword, and it electrified like a pillar of lightning, and he set himself against the troopers.

In very short order, an entire platoon had fallen.

Sage roared triumphantly and proceeded to slaughter.

Tla... had never remembered her breasts being so small. Normally they were both so large that she couldn't see several meters in front of her. Now - though they were still huge and rounded like medicine balls - she could see between them now without having to pull them apart.

Eakjo was curled up in a blanket beside her as she cradled a particularly injured young male who was sucking from her breast, quivering as the strange super-nutrient purity of Tla's breasts flowed into his body and healed him. She was likewise using her healing touch upon him to speed the process... but even she began to fear running out of her super nutrient milk.

She'd even taken a concoction supplied by Clio that would enhance and advance her milk production.

Clio sat beside her, her robes undone to the waist. Though Clio had ten breasts, her six tertiaries were already bone dry. Despite that, she had a young fem suckling from her breast too, and she was nursing a baby of one of the students that was found crying amidst some rubble. It wasn't known as to whose baby she was, but the cub was sucking as if she hadn't had a meal in days. Though her milk wasn't as pure in its natural healing as Tla's was, both women had similar powers that leaked from their mammaries... and they nursed those who needed it till sleep finally found them.

As it was, both fems had aching nipples and were both running out of their milk.

Clio laid the head of the young student she was administering to on her lap, and a Grace Leaguer and a Shadow Leaguer both arrived to pick the girl up and take her to one of the student rooms to rest. Another was brought in for Clio to nurse, and Clio lifted a leg and cradled the boy's head as she held him to her secondary beneath the tit that had just been finished suckling from.

"I'm running out." Clio said. "It's a good thing I missed my last milking."

"Hmm... I'm wishing that I missed mine now..." Tla said, almost on verge of tears. She then lifted her head to look at all the groaning and aching bodies strewn about her.

"After all this is over..." Clio mused. "Let's just you and me go up to the station and use that spa... Just you and me... and we can both be pampered and massaged and milked to our hearts content."

Tla murred and sat closer to her friend, leaning her head against Clio's small shoulder. A short while ago... Clio was one of the strongest and largest individuals around. The top twenty students of the Leagues of all time... it was thought that she could rank right up there with Fatima. But thanks to her punishment... her shoulder was nice and soft... and Tla was tired.

"I'll be sure to save some milk for you too..." Clio smiled. "You do it enough for everyone else... the very least I could do is return the favor."

Tla chuckled, trying not to hear the distant sounds of a fire fight and all the explosions, but she smiled and sighed through her nose.

"You already have." Tla mused. "I prefer your milk at the milk stand at the commissary over my own."

"Yeah... but that's all the processed stuff... this time... I promise you'll get it straight off the tap."

Both women chuckled, and Tla felt the young male in her arms grow slack, and she lowered the head from her breast as his lips slid off her extra large teat. The same Grace Leaguer and Shadow Leaguer returned and removed this student and then brought in another.

"It's a date..." Tla smiled. "But only if you'll do the same with me."

This time it was Clio's time to smile, but then her smile faded as there were shouts, and suddenly Mayia ran in with a doctor holding onto her piggy back. Mayia put the doctor down, and he nodded to Mayia in thanks as Mayia went out to collect more wounded.

The new doctor, who Ki greeted as Kai with a big hug, immediately went to treating the critically and deadly wounded students and soldiers.

It was remarkable... but presently... there were no deaths among the students. As for the soldiers...

There were already three bodies covered with blankets sitting in the corner. They were the ones who they couldn't save...

Siklohn had managed to stealth his way over to the spaceport...

Lord Sage had managed to decimate every last thing that could fly, but the warehouse where spare parts were, remained relatively untouched, and he was able to find a generator there that would be able to get them power to the communication equipment. The problem was, was that while he was carrying it... he couldn't stealth. But as he stepped out of the warehouse, he chanced to look toward the battle and stopped.

Sage had been heavily damaged, with portions of his armor either being pockmarked with massive radial cracks, plates simply missing, or huge sheering gashes spreading across his bleeding body. But while Siklohn watched, he witnessed a spectacular transformation as Sage hopped up into the air, his many jets, guide fins and fans lifting him up off the ground while his legs transformed, feet knuckling together while plates all maneuvered about him. His feet and lower legs became aerodynamic, like two wings complete with their own jets and fans, and as he slid sideways and up, he surged upward into the sky, slashing at a fighting ship with a sword that suddenly tripled in length and cut the ship in half.

He stood there with the small generator tucked underneath one arm, seeing Sage decimate his clan... even the venerable fighting ship having been cut in half, its shields ignored by the weapon in Sage's hand and the heavy armor of the fighting ship cut like a hot knife through butter. And Sage was being particularly brutal to his

clansmates... It was anger... it was vengeance. At that moment, Siklohn knew then that Sage was out of his mind. In the ten years that he'd known Sage, Sage had *never* sought vengeance against another person. He'd heard rumors that he'd sought vengeance once, and only once, in his life, and he'd decimated his enemies. Even when Siklohn had accomplished his insurrection, Sage not only didn't seek vengeance, but took the blame...

Siklohn pressed his lips together and hurried back to Noxi's lab, where he delivered the generator.

"Continue working... I promise I'll be back." Siklohn said.

"W-where are you going?" Camby asked, sitting up from where she'd been underneath the communications console.

Verdance surged forward. "Mayia told us not to directly assault Sage."

Siklohn managed a quirk of a smile. Verdance wasn't one for words, but Siklohn understood his friend and teammate, and Verdance understood him. Verdance knew where he was going... he knew Siklohn was meaning to confront Sage to save his clan and family.

"I know." Siklohn replied. "She can punish me later for insubordination if she feels it necessary, and though she is learning to be a decent leader at long last, every leader needs to learn on how to deal with insubordination. And every soldier must know when it is necessary to disobey orders..."

"Be careful, Siklohn." Camby managed.

"Keep working... I'll be back before you know it." He smiled and surged out of the lab, already keying in his wrist communicator.

"Attention mech fighters..." he began.

"Who is this?! Get off this frequency."

"Prince Siklohn Dousaka." Siklohn identified himself, and sent his call recognition signal.

"Sir! Yes sir!" the voice over the communication gear said.

"Which of the mecha in combat is the most armed and armored?" Siklohn asked.

"That would be Delta-Three, sir." The voice replied.

"Have him land by the Pinnacle Tower at once. I will be taking his place."

Nyl was watching the battle regarding Lord Sage as he fought furiously... the sort of fight that Nyl had waited his whole life was taking place as his adversary now took to the skies. But as he commanded his fighters and mechs with shouts and commands, a report came in. He read it briefly and then keyed in a command into his console.

"Siklohn... son... what are you doing?!" Nyl demanded, just short of shouting.

When he'd arrived, the Shadow League was supposedly in lockdown. All of its students were locked inside the tree. He'd thought his son would be safe, but now he was here, commandeering one of his mechs.

An image pulled up of Siklohn stripped down to a jumpsuit that was even now being automatically enclosed by the restraints and control harnesses, just before the cockpit enclosure and the cockpit armor folded down around him.

"They are my family too, father." Siklohn said. "Lord Sage isn't in his right mind. I know him, father... he would never participate in an act of revenge unless something has changed the core of his being. He is acting on revenge

on us."

"Revenge?" Nyl looked up and marked upon the total brutality Sage was utilizing against his soldiers. Having penetrated deep enough into a mech's defensive ring, he tore the chest armor to get at the pilot inside, and proceeded to crush him inside the cockpit when a simple blast could've allowed the pilot to eject.

He was killing the man, not the machine... and the sheer brutality of it as he ripped a part of the man out first in a spray of red mist and blood before allowing the mech drop, was clearly an act of some vengeance.

"More reason for me not to allow you into this fight!"

"Punish me if you need to." Siklohn said, and the holographic HUD appeared before Siklohn as the walls of the cockpit surrounding him imaged up with a surrounding view around the mech as if all the layers of armor and protection were transparent. "I'm sorry father... but I must meet him in battle... perhaps... I can knock him in the head again and make him see the light."

"Siklohn... my orders are to destroy Lord Sage." Nyl said, leaning over his console to look at his son in the face through his face mask.

"I understand father..." Siklohn said and turned on the systems, the mech he was in powering up. "I will take care... do not worry about that."

And the communications winked out in front of Nyl, and he turned to see the mech rise from the school to join the fray.

"Be safe, my son."

Verdance was having difficulty staying in focus. It was so remarkably difficult for him to keep his eyes focused on anything during the day, and he really, really needed sleep. But he had to work... his prince gave him a job to do, and with a few minor adjustments, he finished splicing the console power cable into the portable generator and wrapped the chord up with sealant tape before turning to Camby.

That's when he stopped and awoke fully.

She was laying on her back, half wedged inside the access panels of the console, replacing another circuit board, having discarded her robe to keep her sleeves from getting caught on the internal electrical components. But positioned as she was, back arched, legs spread open to keep her in place, revealed her breasts - wrapped in white cloth - projecting upward from her chest, and the delicate wedge between her thighs.

He experienced the barest moment of a rising erection before he looked away in order to attach the cable to the satellite relay dish on top of the communication tower outside.

"Verdance... c-can you please hand me that board over there and a screwdriver?" Camby said even as he was readying himself to attach the cable.

"C-certainly." He said, and retrieved the board she'd indicated and a screwdriver, coming to a squat beside her with his tail readjusting about his legs.

He handed her the board and the screwdriver, noting momentarily the strong abs lining her naked belly, the fact that her nipples were erect.

"Verdance... sorry to bother you again... b-but could you please hold this in place while I ratchet it in?"

"Of course," he replied, and moved before he realized what he was doing, and held the board while she ratcheted it

in.

"That..." she said and grunted as she used both hands to tighten the last bolt. "Should just about do it."

And then she rose, and found herself against Verdance.

Both of them gasped as their innocent attempt to help each other wound them both in such a position. He was kneeling between her thighs, her legs angled up over his thighs, and their sexes were in the perfect position to copulate. She smiled at him, and he looked around and recovered, straightening.

"Here... let me help you up." He said, offering her a hand, and when he hauled her up, she fake stumbled into him, and found herself pressing firmly against his body as he moved to catch her.

Some people said that skunks smelled bad... but he had a particular odor that wanted her to stay... right here... for the rest of her life.

Verdance, however, was struggling with the same desire, and his need to serve his prince.

"W-we..." he swallowed. "We need to get help." He managed stupidly, and smiled sheepishly as he smelled the perfume in her hair.

She pouted and stepped back. "Of course." She managed, but her hand lingered on his chest as she withdrew and began to power up the console, when there was an explosion over head.

She gasped and looked up, even as the building rattled, and with a shaking groan, the roof began to cave in, just before a massive slab fell down toward them.

"Camby!" she heard, just before she was shoved out of the way, and with a heaving grunt, she turned to see Verdance struggling with the heavy slab of industrial concrete and metal. "The equipment... must save... the equipment." He groaned. He could lift several tons... didn't have to lift much more than that... but this amount was nonetheless straining him.

Assassins didn't need to be strong... just accurate.

But it was Camby surging up to him, steadying the massive slab of rock that relieved him. He blinked at her, just before she pushed her head forward and kissed him solidly.

"W-what was that for?"

"For saving me." She smiled. "On three... One... Two... Three." And they both heaved the slab out of the way.

Verdance was still dizzy from Camby's kiss, so when she took his hands planted one on either of her hips and pressed against him, he didn't resist.

He held her for a moment or two before she withdrew and smiled at him, and holding his hand to one of her hips, giving him permission to hold her there with but a touch, she began keying in a communication.

"Mayday, Mayday... This is the League of Mystic Arts and Sciences. We are under attack, I repeat, we are under attack. Anyone within the sound of my voice please respond. Mayday, Mayday..."

Siklohn piloted his vessel in at mach, and slipping past all the other mechs, reared back his fist and actuated the guide jets on that arm to smash it with added rocket propelled force against Sage's face as he screamed by, slowed and turned on his axis.

He was surprised to find that such a blow did little more than turn his head, and Sage, when he lifted his head it was to stare directly at Siklohn in his ship. Siklohn had hurt him, all right... his cheek plate was cracked and shattered, but as Sage looked at Siklohn, that cheek plate was rapidly resealing.

Sage lifted his blade and deflected a rifle blast, redirecting the blast in one direction, and then redirected a second blast right back to the mech who'd fired it before Sage pivoted gracefully in the air and surged toward Siklohn.

Siklohn gripped the controls tightly, and then slid sideways, drawing the mech's Laser Sword and parried Sage's, and Siklohn was amazed as the sword the Sage was using was slowly forcing its way through the force of the Laser Sword.

Siklohn backed away from him, seeing that the Laser Sword's power had been drained by five percent. His eyes flicked back only to see Sage assaulting him, and he drew out his weapon and blasted him in the face.

"Lord Sage... this is Siklohn Dousaka. You are being used." Siklohn said out of his speakers of his mech.

"Truly?" came a voice, Sage's voice, it was graveling and demonic, but instead of coming into his cockpit over the external pickups, it was coming through his communication arrays. "I must say that I am happy to see you boy! Perhaps when I kill you, then your father will understand that the future of your entire clan is over when I end his life!"

Siklohn saw Sage suddenly teleport, and Siklohn energized his shields, only to have a knee right into the hip gyro mount of the mech, before Siklohn spun and opened his shoulder missile racks to fire at Sage. Sage simply backed away, a pair of disks opening up on either shoulder that blasted at the missiles with tiny beams of red light that didn't show up as technological on Siklohn's scanners, destroying all the missiles on impact. Sage answered by then opening up a dozen panels over his body, and a hundred or so short range missiles erupted from him and attacked the mechs taking pop-shots at him, but a great deal of them headed mostly for Siklohn as Sage gave chase.

Siklohn turned and flew backwards, using his small arms to blast at the missiles that were surprisingly durable, even though they had a biological signature. They rushed at him with surprising speed and agility... having reflexive actions as they actually dodged Siklohn's weapon fire. Siklohn had a light peppering of those missiles, and he was jostled in his cockpit briefly before he saw Sage bearing down on him, the multitude of crystals on his wings glowing briefly before Sage strafed at Siklohn.

If not for some quick thinking in dodging Sage, Siklohn would've been hit by several dozen energy shots.

"Computer!" he grunted, and defended against Sage's sword attack with his Laser Sword before breaking away, finding the sword's energy reserves having depleted by three more percent.

<<Acknowledged.>>

"Open black boxes... Authorization: Siklohn Dousaka."

<<Authorization accepted. Linking Spell power to Host Pilot. Standby... Artifact furnace found... Linking... Standby...>>

Siklohn groaned as more connections attached to him from the mech, surrounding him, and he could feel himself seemingly spreading into the mech.

"I got a surprise for you Sage..." Siklohn said, and deflected Sage's blow again, focusing on dodging now while his eyes flickered between the flight and the slowly crawling processing band of the computer linking itself to him.

<<Standby... Processing>>

Mayia had pulled a soldier behind an outcropping and was concentrating very hard on healing. Every soldier that died would be placed against her master, would be used to condemn him. She wanted to save her master, but now that he'd taken to the air, and was accelerating about at such remarkable speeds and directions - the G-forces must've been crazy - she had no hope to catch up with him.

So she would heal his work here...

"Please... Merciful Aul... don't let another one slip through my fingers...." She prayed and continued to channel her powers into him.

She was afraid of loosing him, felt him slipping by little by little, and then her fingers were being laced by the fingers of another pair of hands, and she looked up to see Geevo there.

"Let me help you." He said simply, and concentrated himself.

He was practicing as the Aspect of the Priest. Mayia was most thankful for his help. He was already helping the soldier, and his healing powers were much more refined than hers were.

"I-I thought you were with the others at the Grace League." She managed.

"You hadn't returned in awhile." He said simply. "I came to find you."

Mayia looked up at him, feeling her heart patter. She tried to think of any other way as to why he said that, but all she could think of was that he'd been getting worried that she hadn't returned for awhile.

He was worried about me... she thought quietly...

"Keep concentrating Mayia... he's slipping." Geevo said and Mayia reset herself to healing the soldier. Just the mere presence of his fingers linked with hers would've given her the strength and focus to save this soldier... but him adding his own powers guaranteed a recovery.

But nonetheless, it was many long minutes before the soldier was healed to be stable enough to be moved.

Siklohn had been wrapped by technological tendrils from the mech he was in, and felt that spark of life as the machine suddenly drew from his magical power and know how, linking itself to his stored armor, and his mech spasomed with new life as his armor appeared, enlarged, and slapped itself about the mech, increasing its power several fold, and unlocking a magical enhancement through the so called '*Black Boxes*' of the machine.

Siklohn panted, feeling the easily addictive power surging through his muscles and bones, feeling his consciousness shift from the controls, dials, switches and holographic displays to merge straight into that of the mech itself.

Siklohn summoned his sword as the mech transformed into something larger, faster, stronger with greater power, and he clashed swords with Sage, drawing from the fusion reactor of the mech, meeting with the smaller Sage... but then again, Sage was smaller than the standard mech configuration to begin with.

I did it!, he thought to himself, feeling the power of the mech in him. *I unlocked the black boxes on my first try!* Sage sailed off, and blasted at Siklohn, but a raised arm suddenly materialized a body shield that took damage, but nonetheless took Sage's attacks.

Siklohn's joy at having so suddenly accomplished what only a few - not even his father - had ever been able to accomplish on their first try, and not only that... but he'd accomplished so much more! *If only Rakshuun could be here...* he thought. *Then I'd really show you power, Sage.*

He laughed, and the laughter came from the internal speakers.

That angered Sage...

Geevo helped Mayia returned as she used his shoulder to place her weight on him, the soldier held over his shoulder. Mayia had been trying to heal the soldier for so long with her adolescent level of healing abilities that were likewise counteracted by the chaos magic instilled within her from the Demon Bunny that she was barely keeping the soldier alive. Together, they were able to stabilize him and make him breathe comfortably.

Geevo gave the soldier into the care of another, and then moved Mayia to a shady spot before lowering her to the ground.

It was beginning to rain.

"You stay safe." Geevo said, and wrapped Mayia up in a blanket to keep her warm.

"B-but what are you going to do?" she asked.

"Go back to healing." He smiled and palmed her face. "You've done enough... you've personally helped redeem master Sage more than any three others... just rest... stay safe... and if you move from this spot... I will be most cross." He focused on her, and Mayia giggled. But then Geevo bent forward and kissed her on the lips, catching her by surprise. "Just stay safe." He repeated after a long passionate kiss, and then rose to go back to work.

Mayia, as weak as she was, took great comfort in the fact that as large as the gardens were, that Geevo always remained within eyesight of her. She lay back, and though she felt fatigued, she fought sleep as hard as she could... but eventually... she just passed out.

Just before she nodded off, however, she had the sneaking suspicion that Geevo's kiss had something in it to force her to sleep. She was smiling at that thought even as she nodded off.

Siklohn was still trying to subdue Sage. Despite that Sage in his current form was a full meter smaller, was nonetheless more heavily armed and armored - like a dreadnaught was armed and armored - as fast as a scout fighter and more maneuverable than a light mech. To top it all off, he was a master of combat, and held a level of power that even in his advanced state in his mech, Siklohn couldn't detect the total extent of with his sensors. And above all... was the power of his spells.

"Sir! Sage... I know that this isn't you acting. You are better than this. You... GUH!"

"Shut up! Shut up you despicable little murderer." Sage said, having teleported and hip checked into Siklohn so that his red eyes were in full view of Siklohn's sensors. "Spoiled... through and through, with nary a moment in your life of proper discipline. I'm certain you had a little whipping boy to take your punishments when you were bad. So when I whipped you, you had to call daddy and tell him that wasn't right!"

And Sage kneed Siklohn and punched the head of the mech, each time an eruption of blue light shocked his systems with blue lightning.

"I am not spoiled!" Siklohn called back. "And you are not in your right mind to be naming me for anything sir!"

"Not in my right mind? I've never thought BETTER!!" Sage said, and lifting a hand, a ball like a miniature sun appeared almost instantly before he lobbed it off. Siklohn pirouetted about the fireball of atomic fire as it rocketed past him to detonate with the power of a fuel-oil bomb north of the soldiers of his clan. "You are spoiled! Or what else do you call your little insurrection? You think that was an adult way to deal with your pains, gripes and complaints with me? My office door was always open! You could've always walked right up to me, and voiced

them!"

Siklohn and Sage locked swords, both swords now massive things of incredible power that cracked and sizzled against each other.

"And your damn robot? You mean he didn't tell you what I was planning? You had his sensors up so high, even if a bug farted he'd tell you about it."

"He was at that level of surveillance for your safety!" the pair broke apart, Sage's sword slashing against Siklohn's arm shield before Siklohn blasted away at Sage with his head guns. Sage simply flipped a wing to deflect them all. "That still gave you no excuse to organize an insurrection, gave you no excuse to usurp me, gave you no excuse, to cause the happenstance that killed nine individuals, and hurt several hundred others!" Sage snapped his blade out to his side, and the length of the amber blade suddenly glowed electric blue as blue lightning began to snap down its length.

"That was Mayia who did all the killing."

"Because she was controlled! Her actions would've been unnecessary if not for you!" Sage teleported, teleported again, and again, and when he appeared, it was straight in Siklohn's personal area directly in front of him. "You are to blame for all the pain... and so spoiled you are from your bastard of a father never having lifted a hand to you to discipline you... you threw a *tantrum!* You used your access to your family's military, and attacked... *a fucking school!*"

That was last done with a powered fist to Siklohn's mid section, and his body was rattled inside the cage of the cockpit as Sage's fist caused a radial dent in his chest armor. A second blow cracked a chest plate before Siklohn recovered, and opening his shoulders, his missile packs spent, they nonetheless had converted with his power and the activation of the black boxes to fire off a plethora of Swarmer Fire similar to Sage's new breath weapon that forced Sage back and counter with Swarmer fire of his own.

"I am not spoiled!"

"Spoiled... brat... silver spoon... privileged... tantrum... weak..." Sage said in a tirade of repeating insults. "Only a spoiled little rich boy, would take everything I've given you, things that would make you greater than your entire clan, and try to avenge yourself of them! Without me... you would've never had the woman you now desire so! You would've floundered and lost years of your life simply because you thought yourself so much better than me, that you would ditch *everything* I gave you. Such... **ARROGANCE!**"

Sage's back opened, and a pair of cannons suddenly formed, projecting vertically up and down before both lanced downward, attaching to his shoulders before their ends separating into three separate shafts of shaped bio-steel, and they shot a pair of blasts that cut into Siklohn's shoulders, destroying the weapon arrays there with a pair of explosions, while the blasts from those shoulder cannons continued onward past Siklohn and his mech to create two impact craters on a distant moon that happened to be in the way.

Sage then turned his arm and a forearm guard turned ninety degrees, and then expanded into his own forearm shield before he assaulted Siklohn again, swinging his sword as if the massive blade were weightless; his shoulder cannons retracting in mid-flight.

"Your whole clan is like that!" He growled as they faced one another again in close dueling range. "I will make it my purpose in life, that the first Aphkei that I destroy... will be you, your father, and then the rest of your whole damn clan!

"And I will watch gleefully as I personally send each and every last one of you straight to hell!"

"Demon!" Siklohn cried, feeling his emotion as he swung his sword, and Sage let go of his sword, the massive thing hovering there as he blocked Siklohn's sword with his arm. Sage was smiling triumphantly at him, and then turning... ripped Siklohn's arm straight out of its moorings and cast it aside.

"You are weak... predictable... controllable..." Sage smiled as he took his sword up, drew it back and then plunged it through the chest armor of Siklohn's mechanized body, and inside the mech, he could feel the snap of crackling energy dancing along the blade as it snapped at his body. "And all the training, in the universe... will not save you from me... for I will punish all... who have ever hurt me in this fucking universe."

Sage wrenched the blade upward, rending one whole side of the torso off, and then turning chopped the mech's head off, before kicking it away.

Much of Siklohn's sensors were shattered, and he came back to his own senses as his systems began to fail, but out of the opened hole of the cockpit, he saw Sage lifting his hand, and raising his hands to the top of his chair, Siklohn pulled the ripcords and the back of the mech exploded outward to launch him free of the mech even as Sage's power crushed it into a wad the size of a softball, allowing it to fall down to the world below and plunge into the ocean.

Siklohn was disgorged from his mech, vulnerable as the float pack deployed to allow him to lower safely toward the ground as debris rained down all around him. Sage stood there, like a god of light and darkness, and lifting his hand, Siklohn saw the gem in the palm of his hand glow an ominous red.

But then he saw the hand tremble and move out of the way.

Siklohn was ready to meet his maker, was staring it in the face, but Sage was having trouble on aiming... his hand kept moving away of its own accord. Releasing his blade, allowing it to float in mid-air as he planted his other arm to keep his hand steady.

H-he's fighting himself... Siklohn thought.

Siklohn looked down, seeing the distant land bordered by shores far below him as he floated downward, and fingered the release chord, watching Sage's hand as it trembled, trying to focus on him. The whole body tried to focus, tried to tense the arm, keep it steady as power built up, the forming ball of light forcing his fingers open that were trying to keep it in, growing larger than a set of five fingers could hold. There was the screaming cry of power about to be released, and at the very last moment, Sage's arm jerked upward and the energy blast lanced away into the sky to detonate harmlessly in the upper atmosphere.

Sage looked skyward, and then snarled at Siklohn, before turning wing and descending downward.

He was fighting himself... Siklohn thought to himself. *A part of him was trying not to kill me. If there's a part of him trying to resist, then he can still be turned back. But the question is... what sort of power or force can overwhelm Sage now long enough for us to change his mind back to the good man he was?*

Siklohn smirked. "I am not a spoiled brat, Sage... and whatever part of you just saved me... knows that." Siklohn's heart melted. He felt suddenly that he had maybe a second father now. If not a second father, than a loving uncle at the least.

But then he looked down, and thought for a moment. *Provided... of course, that my father doesn't kill you... can we save you?*

Sage landed and changed, returning to his ground combat mode amidst all the troopers that remained, and wielding his sword, made a lazy slash and cut a dozen standard soldiers near the central command location in half, before the returning swing rising up over his head and down onto the ground, created an impact that sent a shockwave through the earth. Only those who saw the blade descending were able to guard against it or get out of the way, and several troopers were thrown out of the way from the powerful shockwave.

Those who didn't were shattered.

His power was reaching a crescendo! Leaving his sword where it was while everyone was trying to vainly regain their legs beneath them, Sage leapt up into the air, and a rapid wing buffet blasted those in the immediate vicinity with hurricane force winds, and with a single exhale, plasma fire erupted from his mouth, and in a single turn of his head, Sage had decimated the entire front line of troopers as their armor liquefied almost immediately just before he landed, grabbed his sword, and began to cut a swath forward.

The effectiveness of his sword had returned, and he struck with precision. The troopers identified the weak point in their make up, a weak point that until now had been impossible to exploit, and as a whole legion they compensated and adapted. But regardless, that sword, electrified and burning with plasma, cut through their armor now, sheering layers of armor off at a time, cutting limbs off.

Sage's body was often turned by powerful cannon fire from troopers or tanks, and he came underneath the heaviest of blaster fire yet, with heavy weapons, portable rockets, hand cannons from Shocktroopers causing still more dents in his armor while exploding portions of his flesh, but whenever a Stormtrooper was found now acting in particular effectiveness against Sage, Sage turned his attention to that one before it could translate its findings to any other trooper.

With the most recent example, Sage lifted his hand and gestured toward the trooper and it began to heat from the inside, all the biological matter almost immediately liquefying, before their reactor exploded with a pop and hailed shrapnel and plasma over those in the immediate vicinity.

Sage looked at his hand, laughing as he strengthened the interference of the troopers to communicate with one another, disrupting their ability to learn from each other to beat him, laughing manically as he leapt forward, took a trooper by the head and thrust his sword through its entire body and proceeded to slide the blade in and out in a sawing motions to spill the troopers innards before casting it aside.

He lifted a hand and grinned, finding one of the remaining spell casters, and with a snap of his claws, slashes flung from his fingers, the first and second popping his barrier spells, and the remaining three cutting him diagonally in three separate directions, and the caster literally fell to the ground in pieces.

Sage roared again, and Nyl saw Sage breaking through his defenses, shattering barriers and breaking through shield arrays, and stepped forward, removing his cloak and drawing his multi-ton sword and prepared himself to meet the monster that was causing everyone so many nightmares. He'd just seen his son's mech destroyed. For the first time in his life... Nyl had vengeance in his heart.

"Abandon command post. Full retreat for all biologicals" He said to his officers, and without thinking, they all rose and left to follow their Warmaster's commands.

Nyl stared at Sage.

His boy was the only thing in his life that he felt that he could call a *'real accomplishment'* and this monster had just removed his child from him. Nyl growled, gripping his sword as all the soldiers around him surged forward, and were swatted away.

Nyl, half the size of this new monster, suddenly activated a state of his armor, and he began to grow to giant sizes, his armor flaring, his sword lengthening, and his body seeming to grow more and more demonic as he changed.

Sage turned to face him, folding his wings and tail into his back as he decapitated a soldier with a lazy swing.

"And you dared to call me... a monster." Sage growled, dark and demonic, as he looked upon Nyl.

"You are the monster in comparison to me, Sage. I acknowledge what I am... you skirt the issue. In the name of the emperor... I will utterly destroy you." Nyl replied and took a combat stance. "In the name of my Son... I will personally cast you straight to hell."

There was a pause and Sage stood there, tilting his head to one side.

"Now where have I seen this before?" Sage said suddenly, and began to mockingly rub his split chin where his mandibles came together. "Oh yes... I remember. This is dejavu!" he smiled suddenly and planted his sword in the ground. Nyl watched him as he bent his head downward. "Now where are they... ah... yes... there they are. Now I would like to show you a trick, Nyl... something mages can do... it's a little trick. It's called '*using magic across an atmosphere*.'" And he lifted his hands, closed his sheathed fingers around something, and twisted, bent downward, and pulled on something.

Nyl looked up and saw two disks high up in the sky form and then like a slingshot, two objects were torn from the heavens and forced into the upper atmosphere, where they promptly began to burn up.

"No..." he whispered, seeing the orbital snipers being pulled from their roosts, their mechs burning up and disintegrating.

It was then that Nyl was knocked sideways from the butt of Sage's sword clanging against Nyl's helmet, and Nyl turned abruptly.

"Do pay attention to me as your last defense burns up in reentry, Nyl... You of all people should know that the best chance of survival is to depend only on one self, and taking your eyes off your opponent is a deadly mistake." Sage stepped back, lifting his alien bio-blade, many thousands of times greater than it had been before when he'd been a weretiger. "But... I would like you to know, as your orbital snipers burn, that our earlier challenge, the one your gave me when I first came to this universe, you would've lost... Nyl, for the same exact reason that you are watching now. For damned political reasons... I let you have your win. I hate politics, in every shape and form.

"But despite that your gutless soldiers are no doubt experiencing the penalty of entering the atmosphere in a steep uncontrollable tail spin, I'm sure that a heartless bastard like you can take no grief in all the dead falling on or around you. Or of your son splashing down into the ocean over there... you're all soldiers!"

"Lord Sage... I swear to Aul... I will gut you..."

"Bring it... Sally."

Siklohn splashed down in the water nearly a mile away from shore, his float pack doubling as a flotation device - slightly heavier than air, slightly lighter than water - and looking up, he saw the two orbital snipers barreling through the atmosphere like twin meteors, fragments of armor breaking off and melting with the friction of reentry.

Looking around him, he promptly ditched his float pack, and with a minute expulsion of power, he lifted straight out of the water and flew back to the island.

Please don't kill my father, Sage. He thought inwardly. I'm not done with my training; I'm not yet ready for the burden of leadership... and if you kill my father... then the emperor's command to kill you then falls upon me.

Nyl Dousaka was one of the greatest killers in this universe, but he is also the greatest tactician alive... after his own father Amos. In Nyl's life, he's faced only three opponents who'd managed to get past all of his soldiers and challenge him directly. The first two he defeated soundly, the third he allowed to win on his own terms as a matter of politics. Now he was battling a fourth.

Lord Sage Preypacer, the greatest killer in five other universes, but mainly because his skills were so unknown in this one was why he hadn't been named in all six.

Nyl had never experienced a life or death situation like this... had never battled someone so decidedly expert in the use of a sword. Their first fight had been challenging... true... and Lord Sage had caused him damage, but now...

whatever had happened to him to transform him into this... this *monster!* He was no longer the honorable man Nyl knew, the man who helped raise his son up. Whoever this monster had been in times past, the noble warrior, the gentle healer... this creature, this *monster* - the Shadow Beast - was not that man!

After what Nyl had seen, Nyl had no qualms about destroying him.

With his armor, Nyl was a giant, wickedly fast and agile, with extreme power focused in ultimate defense and ultimate offense. Nyl had been modified internally in so many ways to make him a god of combat. Cybernetic array through his whole body to increase his battle speed and reactions in the form of an enhanced nervous system, modified cerebellum to enhance his battle tactics and strategy with the stored thoughts of hundreds of past Aphkei conquerors and warlords, a built in tactical harness inside his body to mentally communicate simultaneously with literally legions of troopers in the field. His skeletal structure had been laced with bio-polymerization to make even his skin cells cybernetic, and his bones nigh indestructible. Muscle enhancements, hardwired sorcery triggers, etched in Leyline equations and reinforcing runes on every last bone in his body.

And to top it all off, he was a foremost knowledge of Artificing in this universe, with his armor and weapons being fueled by the power of the cosmos itself!

The past three warriors who went toe to toe with him didn't last more than a few minutes...

It spoke well of his opponent that Nyl's newest opponent, Lord Sage Preypacer, Shadow High Master of the Holy Order was lasting so long.

Their fight was arranged all over, skirting over the entire battlefield with all the pockmarks from explosions, littered with the dead, their The sword fight creating explosions of light, lightning and fire, with Nyl's multi ton sword cutting at Sage, doing no damage to that heavy black armor of his, but slicing him deeply anywhere else.

Sage had entered this fight severely damaged, with deep pockmarks and rent openings in his body, but while they fought, Nyl could see how rapidly Sage was healing himself, almost as fast as cut water... and even the hardened plates were slowly healing.

Sage's sword nonetheless cut at Nyl's body armor, leaving lasting cuts.

Nyl and Sage locked swords, the massive blades clashing and sparking while Nyl pushed and Sage pushed back, the pair of them trading places once and then twice as they tried to over power the other. Nyl stared at the smugness in Sage's face as Sage held Nyl, Sage's muscles bulging and flaring his body armor wider as the last vestiges of his body healed themselves.

Sage twisted his blade downward and Nyl met it by twisting his own, and Nyl released a hand, balled the black gauntleted fist and exerted himself into Sage's face, snapping Sage's head backward before Nyl whirled and kicked Sage in the gut, sending the Shadow Master sprawling backward, but Sage repositioned his feet and caught his balance and twisted oddly, turning his blade to cut Nyl's feet from underneath him, and Nyl ground his sword to deflect the blow, and then hopping, drew his sword out of the earth and brought it down like a hatchet to destroy Sage with a power strike.

Sage rolled and hopped upward as a detonation in the ground sunk the earth several feet into a massive crater that flipped bodies upward as the quake rolled through the entire expanse of the battle ball field. Nyl looked up as Sage came down, twisting his blade point down to skewer Nyl, and Nyl sidestepped, the blade lancing down Nyl's back before Nyl knocked the blade away - sparks shooting off Sage's sword - before pulling his own weapon out.

And then Sage reached out and touched Nyl, and screamed as Nyl's defense - a total Null Field - attacked Sage, the field trying to cancel Sage's life. Such was the penalty of coming in contact with such a field, but Sage gritted his teeth, rotating his sword into a mantis hold, the weapon attaching to Sage's forearm as he held off Nyl's next attack with it, and Sage concentrated, concentrated hard, and with another scream as the tissues in his hand were dying at the same time as regenerating - exceptionally painful - Sage tore off the entire shoulder plate. The plate was dislodged from Nyl as Sage held it, crushing it in his hand as the bones, flesh, scale and plates regenerated

themselves ever so slowly before Sage threw the plate away from him with extreme effort.

"Hurts? That's why you'd've never won, Sage." Nyl said. "Simply to touch me with my armor assembled would kill a lesser being. I'm honestly surprised you're still alive at the moment."

And Nyl swung his sword and Sage swung his up and then downward as well, hammering at Nyl while his spare hand twitched as it repaired itself.

"A null field saps life, Nyl Dousaka." Sage growled, gritting his teeth. "And to an immortal, who has infinite life, a null field merely saps that infinite life. You cannot kill us with it, alone, though it is, I admit, very, very painful."

Nyl pressed his attack, and Sage defended with his sword, the cracking and hissing sparking all around them as Sage slid his still healing hand in to help support his massive blade, and as time passed, the stronger and stronger that grip became.

"Good. Then when I defeat you, I think I'll stick you inside a cage filled with the field, and let you writhe in agony until you simply give up and die!"

"Stop being so full of yourself." Sage smiled, twisted the blade so that it faced Nyl. "Just lie down, and I'll think about being merciful to you. Continue this fracas... and I promise you a fate worse than death, Nyl..."

Sage then pulled his sword upward, the blade arching rapidly skyward in order to split Nyl in half from under his legs, but Nyl blocked and flipped backward, and then surged forward, striking Sage in the gut, the tip of his sword penetrating before Sage rolled his body. A brief spurt of red blood and green ichor erupted from the wound before Sage twisted his own blade and surged forward, smacking Nyl in the face with the hilt of his sword. Sage then spun his blade in an attempt to chop Nyl's head off, but Nyl ducked, dodged, turned and lunged again.

"My son proved you to be a failure, Lord Sage. I will make you a failure, and your name will be rubbed out from the cosmos and... Ack!"

Nyl's words were cut off as his head was hit hard by the flat of Sage's blade, just before Sage surged forward, the claws of one hand dashing from holding his sword so that his claws scraped against Nyl's chest armor rapidly before Sage retracted his hand. Nyl looked down to see glowing blue lines etched in his armor, lines that were even now beginning to spread, forming a glyph. Nyl tried to brush it away, with a gauntleted hand, but the marks were etched in. His mind began to race, and if the lines were spreading, then that meant that the etchings were also spreading. His armor was taking damage.

To say that Sage was unhurt by this attack would've been fallacy. His fingers were burnt and withered, but healing again.

Gritting his teeth, Nyl redoubled his efforts, setting his armor into overdrive, the technological factors of the armor kicking in to feed the biological portion of his body, the magical portions blazing with the power of artifacts, and he advanced on Sage, Sage now halting his jibes and quips and monologue... he simply smiled, defending himself.

The etches spread from one chest plate to the other, and then into his secondary shoulder guard, into his neck, and once the first chest plate was covered, Sage stepped forward, tapped the plate with the tips of his fingers, completely unhindered by the null field somehow, or rather the null field was no longer there, and uttered a single word...

"Shatter!"

The chest piece exploded with the release of its magical energy, and Nyl felt punched in the chest. He felt the magical powers around him fade some as he faltered and shrank noticeably several inches.

Nyl fingered the place where a whole chest piece had been. He'd felt like he'd just been punched in the chest! Tightening his jaw now till his teeth ground, he swung his sword and continued the attack, almost feeling the icy etchings spreading across his body.

"Shatter!"

The next explosion ripped into him, blasting him backward, and he raised his sword instinctively to deflect the follow up blow from Sage's sword as his sternum ridge piece was erupted.

"Shatter!" Another piece along his abs broke, and he shrank beneath Sage, his size reducing back toward normal now that his armor was so decimated.

Nyl was moving for killing blows, slicing Sage's midsection up badly, tearing him apart, prying off a piece or two of his bio-armor, causing bloody rends as he tried to focus.

"Shatter! Shatter! Shatter!" Sage called, laughing as he struck Nyl all across the side, destroying the shoulder armor and arm pieces. Nyl was forced to wield the blade one-handed, and managed several more strikes before: "Shatter Storm!"

Nyl was lanced from every direction by explosions as his armor detonated one piece after the other, slamming him, destroying everything to atoms as he shrank immediately to his usual size, still encased in his secondary armor suit, coughed up blood briefly as he pulled his domed cowl off, and then lifted his head. Nyl picked his sword up, the thing weighing many metric tons, but he felt the weight of it now that he held it unaided by his outer suit of armor.

Sage laughed and raised his crystalline sword again with the bio-blade hilt, holding the massive blade one-handed.

"You are tenacious, Nyl." Sage teased.

"Oh do shut up, and DIE!" Nyl cried and swung, surging forward now with speed instead of strength, and his secondary suit of armor made its purpose known, and that was for speed to compensate Nyl's outer most defense which was heavy and bulky and made him slow.

Sage's smile faded briefly as Nyl struck Sage with a cacophony of steel against crystal, twisting and turning in a constant array of powerful strikes as Nyl touched off points on his body to actuate imbedded spells inside him, and suddenly he would teleport and Sage would arch his sword back to guard himself. Nyl teleported again and struck Sage painfully in a weak point between his feathered ribs before carrying his sword round in an arch and slashing at the same spot to rend open a bloody swath of blood from Sage.

Nyl's muscles strained, and he swung that sword, ignoring the pain, his body flushing with natural chemicals and stimulants brought on by a bio monitor to keep him active, feeding him adrenaline, tailor made chemicals and so on, and he struck and struck, punched Sage with explosions of arcane might, even tripped the eighteen foot monstrosity and forced Sage to defend, and lifting his hands to ward off another attack, Sage screamed as both his hands met with another weaker, but nearly as effective null field that sprung up immediately from the contact.

"You see... your death, Lord Sage. For my son's sake... I will finish you." Nyl growled, his spit frothing with anger, Nyl's eyes manic as he was giving into his ancestral anger that earned the Dousaka their names as monsters, and Sage grit his teeth, held Nyl at bay, and then a ball of electricity struck Nyl right in the back, searing him with pain of his own as Sage threw Nyl off him and then kip-upped to his feet, his fingers crunching as he gestured for his sword and it flew into his hand.

Nyl rose and immediately looked for what had struck him, and he saw Sage's tail whipping back and forth, the end of the tail a bulbous mass, and a red gem set on the top and bottom of his armored tail at the base of that bulbous thing sparked with red lightning. Sage smiled wanly, and the bulbous thing suddenly snapped open with four hooking blades before Sage twisted and kicked, and Nyl brought his sword up, defended against the blade on Sage's leg, then against the blades of his tail, twisted his sword and deflected the heavy fisted hand racing in toward his skull to split it open. Nyl then shifted his weapon again and took another fist blow, and then raised his weapon as Sage brought his sword up and then down in a swing arch onto Nyl's head, and Nyl defended with the edge of his sword.

"You are tiring, Nyl. Getting rough in your old age?"

Nyl snarled and struck Sage in the gut, an explosion like a cannon fire erupting there and Sage took the blow, gasping out a breath of air as the strike came, and he slid backward several meters while his body deflected the blow.

Nyl touched off another of his imbedded spells, and immediately he blurred forward, looking to strike at Sage, and with a snap, Sage entered into that accelerated world and blocked.

"Heh." Sage smiled, moving just as fast as Nyl was, and immediately their sword fight exploded into a tumult.

They moved so fast that they seemed to teleport over the battle field, curving arcs of lightning and fire burning at the air to the naked eye who couldn't see them move. Sage's body was beginning to become covered with gashes, cuts and wounds, and then Sage lazily reached out and struck Nyl in the chest, and Nyl and Sage were suddenly knocked out of their accelerated movement, and Nyl gasped for breath, a fist mark in his chest plate, and Nyl focused on mentally repairing it, but there was a blue radial crush mark where the fist imprint was, and Nyl had no choice but to tear the plate from his body in order to breath.

"Hurts?" Sage mused, holding his sword even as the gashes and cuts healed themselves.

Nyl stared at Sage and then teleported, their swords clashing, and Nyl found himself loosing ground as Sage's tail moved back and forth, trying to trip him, cut his feet off, hit him with electricity, and in their sword battle of gaining dominance, Nyl trying to get away, trying to break it for he no longer had the strength to meet Sage toe to toe without his main armor, Sage smiled and punched Nyl lazily, the hooks on the rearward finger sheathes on either hand raking at his face, and as Nyl turned, Sage clamped down with one hand, cried out in pain once again, but tore off a shoulder guard, and then turning his arm and moving it down again, the dorsal blades on his arms cut a solid swath down one bared shoulder muscle and split his other chest plate open.

Nyl cried out as Sage's arm came up again, striking him underneath the chin with those hooking knuckle blades, and the blow sent Nyl reeling backward, his upper body armor falling apart as he fell backward, landing and remaining in nothing but his remaining leg armor.

Nyl lurched upward and surged to his sword, grasping hold of the pommel in order to face Sage with magic alone now if necessary, but Sage was no longer where he'd been half a second ago. Nyl's mind reasoned as to where Sage had gone half a second too late, and he felt several searing jabs against his back, and a series of crunches before all his strength left him and he collapsed first to his knees, and then forward onto his face as limp as a rag doll. He could feel his whole body growing numb, and a stinging pain down the length of his back. The only thing he could feel now was on his face and that was now being pelted by cold rain.

And then a crystal sword ground into the earth directly in front of him.

"When I came here... I had certain assumptions." Nyl heard Sage's voice above him. "I assumed that an empire as large as that held by the Imperium and the Assembly would be honorable. That they were filled with gleaming knights and beautiful maidens; that they would've outgrown the taint that a civilization somehow gains in its youth. And then I met you, Nyl. I approached you with honor and respect, met you in a friendly duel... and you betrayed my trust of your entire empire in one deft move."

Nyl's eyes looked up at Sage, and he managed to move his jaw.

"W-what... did you do to me?" he groaned.

"I shattered every spinal disk in your back, Nyl... save for your second and third vertebrae. Like I said Nyl... for taking away my faith, for inducing such pain on me as I cannot even describe into words time and time again, for shaming me on every occasion that we met, I've decided a special punishment for you. A fate that is worse than death. Medical technology is a marvel, Nyl, but it cannot aptly replace the Creator's perfection in any way, and I'm

afraid that the two parts of a being's anatomy that cannot be perfectly replaced is the brain and the spinal column.

"Even if they do replace your spine, Nyl it will be years before you even learn to walk again, and even then it'll never be as fluid as it once was without the biological portion of your central nervous system.

"You were a warrior, Nyl... and now I leave you face down, half-naked and in the dirt, surrounded by the restless dead of your clansmen and women, leaving you with the knowledge that you are a complete and utter cripple. The only things I have left you with is the nerves attached to your face to eat, drink and chew, but then someone will have to help you with that, and your ability to pump your heart and inflate your lungs.

"I can imagine... perhaps... that soon you'll be lying in a puddle of your own urine and fesses for lack of any body control. And above all... Nyl... even despite cybernetic replacement, you will never again be able to hold your child in your arms like you want to." Sage wiggled his fingers. "Deadened nerve endings, after all." Sage paused and stared at Nyl with deceit. "And you call yourself a loving father. Of all the times that that boy wanted to be embraced by his father, and you did nothing, where he wanted it so much that he refused to come to me for such reasons..." Sage laughed and reached for his sword. "Enjoy your new life, Nyl. I hope you'll enjoy your new life as a burden. You are certainly unfit for the battlefield."

And Sage removed his sword out of the ground, and strode off.

Nyl lay there, staring at the dead faces of his soldiers, somehow seeing the face of his son amongst all those faces, and lying there, unable to move, Sage's words sinking in... Warmaster Nyl Dousaka... cried.

Chapter Fourteen: Knight Takes Rook

Eurika, the Vice Headmistress, watched the mighty Nyl Dousaka fall before the Shadow Beast. For a moment, Nyl remained upright before Sage teleported, and with a blinding series of strikes against Nyl's back, Nyl fell to the ground and remained that way.

The Shadow Beast then turned and continued forward.

"All right kids. I want you all to listen to me." Eurika said, bending low with her massive mammaries hanging heavily from her chest. "I want you all to follow Noxi here to the shelters."

"But..." one of the children began.

"No buts. You will do as you're told, Ruu... Now go with Noxi... be safe."

Ruu nodded, and Noxi huddled the kids to her and moved them away. Eurika stood up and immediately began to remove her elaborate gown, with a silk print of a mountainscape across it, revealing her nude and naked body, but likewise supremely foreboding and muscular body.

Letting her silk robe fall to the ground, she flexed her arms and waited, waiting for Sage to pass by her, and then ducking out from behind the building, she ran silently and softly despite her sheer size and weight, and Sage paused, turning the back of his head toward her, and bringing both her arms upward, she brought both fists down with several planet tons worth of force.

There was a mighty clank, and her fists struck an extended forearm shield. It was then that Eurika saw the crystals in the backward sides of his head move and look at her.

"Vise Headmistress Eurika. I understand your fatalism to the headmistress... that is notable. But Nyl was fatalistic too... I suggest you desist and go take shelter." Sage said in a deep growl. "I've come for only one individual here, and it must show exactly how much Meniko really cares about you to send you futilely against me. If she truly thought of your safety, she would come out here and fight me so that I can kill her."

"You will not harm her!" Eurika bellowed and jacked her hand back and punched Sage, striking him right in the ear, knocking his head toward the side and he took a step away, cupping his ear.

Sage remained there, lifting his head, and with a crunch reset his neck. Then in one fluid movement he jabbed the tips of his fingers against Eurika's forehead, striking right between all the cranial plates, separating the skull plates a fraction of a second before his fist curled up and snapped her in the center of her skull.

The movement was far too quick for her to see. The first moment he was motionless, the second she felt the pop in her skull, and then she slowly lost consciousness. When she finally fell to the ground, there was a quake that made a deep impression into the ground and rattled stones in the immediate vicinity.

Sage looked down at her, seeing a giant of a woman, naked, and sprawled in just the perfect way to...

No! You will not!

Such breasts! And Casid had ten of them. It would take only a few minutes to...

I will not let us!

Sage's head turned toward his right and he growled at the voice.

"Shut up!" He growled under his breath. "How can you ignore such an opportunity?!" And Sage's hand went to the bulging and arching V-series of plates covering his groin, and his left hand snapped upward and took the wrist.

You... will not...

The right hand tore out of the left.

"Fine! You prude. Shit... you really gotta get laid."

Sage then picked up his sword and retracted it, but continued eyeing the opportunity again out of the eyes in the back of his head. After awhile, the little voice in his head forced his head to turn away, and Sage once again continued forward toward his goal.

Eurika was a symbol for this school. She was the Symbol of authority for all newly joined students, and was the protective mother for all the children that somehow found their way on the Mystic League's doorstep. Sage had just laid her out in one punch.

He must've defeated Rae, or how else could he have gotten this far as it was? She would've never had let him kill so many when she was available to stop him, and they weren't just any group of soldiers. It was an entire division, over a legion, of Seigetroopers and conventional soldiers and rangers, pilots and engineers and officers, and Nyl Dousaka himself! The remains of their engines of war were ruins of metal that were still on fire. The Seigetroopers both normal and heavy had been decimated, to where one would be hard pressed to find their remains, and the soldiers laid dead or dying all around the fighter ball field.

At the edge of the ring of death and destruction surrounding Nyl, Sage lifted a hand, and all the shadows of the dead rushed to his hand forming a black globule, the globule firming into a sphere and then grew, rapidly becoming surrounded by rings of demonic, purple light.

This was Demon Lore... the darker half of Dragon Lore. A few days before, Sage would've never dreamed using it, but now... he had absolutely no compunctions about what he was about to do.

The sphere detached from his hand and floated there, hovering, and Sage pointed at the school.

"Destroy... everything." Sage growled, and the bubble began to move along the battlefield, and as it danced over the field, corpses exploded, their sinew, flesh and blood, bones, even their weapons and armor all rising to merge with the ball, and within minutes, an increasingly growing monster of darkness and shadow, even the blood turning black, formed; hardening with a myriad of armor pieces all over his body here and there, and as soon as this monster stood on its hind legs, it roared, and proceeded to lumber forward toward the space port and proceed to destroy everything it saw.

When Sage returned to his task, he once again looked down at Eurika, and with a toe turned her face down. Those who'd witnessed him thus far, feared that he was about to take her in the rear, but he nonetheless proceeded forward.

It was at this time that individuals decided to interfere.

Eqis was the first who stood before him. The guardian fighter placed her comparatively diminutive eight foot stature before a creature that was literally ten feet taller.

Sage stopped, and for the barest of moments, Eqis saw his eyes flicker toward green and then back again.

"Eqis... you were no match for me before... you have no hope now. Get out of the way." Sage said simply, and Eqis tore her body cloth off, shifting her attributes magically as she grew stronger at the sacrifice of her beauty and breasts.

"Not happening." She said. "I've stood by far too long. You need to be stopped Sage."

"You're trembling, Equis..." Sage whispered in a low growl, the growl touching off ancient instincts in Equis's mind that reminded her of nightmares and childhood fears, race memories of ancient evils like the boogeyman. Sage then opened his hand, his thumb sheathe scraping against his finger sheathes, and sparks flew from his fingers as he stared down at her. "I don't want to hurt you, Equis."

"Hurt this." Equis growled, and then surged forward and drove her knee right into his groin.

Sage continued to look down at her. He didn't even wince, and she drew her knee back and kneed him again, and a third time, and then realized too late that it wasn't hurting him and tried to get away till his hand clamped down on her throat, tightening so that it cut off not only air and blood to her brain, but nerve impulses from her brain to the rest of her body. She tried to tighten her neck muscles in order to breathe against his grip as he lifted her to his face.

"I've given you a chance, Equis... and only one chance is all that I will give."

Glick! Equis managed, her eyes opening wide while she heard the bones of her vertebrae rubbing and groaning against one another, and though she didn't know how she managed it, she nonetheless got her hands up to his hand and tried to pry his fingers open.

"And now I will punish you Equis." And he lifted a finger. "Though how can I possibly cause the best damage to you when all your pressure and puncture points are receded beneath your flesh?" he asked and released his grip just enough to allow her to breathe and get blood to her brain.

"S-Sage..." she groaned, and tried to pry his fingers open, but they were immovable.

"That's my name." he grinned sinisterly. "But the answer to my question, as to how I can cause you the most pain from my skills, is like this."

Equis cried out as Sage's finger tapped her skin, but instead of simply thumping her flesh like he would do to others, his finger punctured a hole through her shoulder and chest muscles, puncturing the nerve bundle located there that had been receded beneath the skin, and she screamed as the pain of having her flesh pierced and the nerve bundle touched seared at one whole side of her body.

Sage then turned his finger, and she screamed louder, the muscles of her arm tensing as he wrapped the nerve bundle around his finger and twisted the muscles with the thickness of the finger penetrating her, her blood leaking from the wound to stain her glistening golden fur.

"You always held yourself superior to me, Equis. Even after I showed you how small you were in comparison to me, you still nonetheless didn't believe me. I can kill you in horrible ways with a touch, Equis, and the nerve bundle doesn't have to be along the surface of your body in order for me to actuate it. I can send a burst of shadow magic through your body, or use pressure blows to touch the nerve impulse or, as you see now... I can simply pierce your skin... *like I'm doing now.*" This last bit was done through his teeth, his voice lowering into a demonic growl while his eyes burned red.

He removed his finger and then lowered his hand before driving each of his five fingers - one at a time - into sections of her abdomen before he knotted his fingers into her flesh and twisted his hand, and relinquishing her throat, his other hand did the same to her sternum, and he held her upright by the point of the bridge between either side of her ribcage.

Then digging his hand into her ribcage he drew it upward while slowly pulling her lower body downward, and Equis began to scream and scream till a blow of several hundred planet tons jacked him against the side of the head throwing him to the ground, Equis being removed from his grasp. Sage shook his head, and then grasping at a rock, he crushed it with his hand and then lifted his head, and saw Fatima cradling Equis, lowering her to the ground.

Sage looked all around him, and saw faces from the school stepping out of shelters and hiding places, all of them

truly angered.

"This... is enough." Fatima said, and taking off her jacket, wrapped it around Equis as she placed the Guardian Fighter in a place where she could rest.

"So c-cold..." Equis said, and Fatima gasped as she saw Equis's fur coloring darkening toward gray.

"You need to be stopped!" Fatima cried, rising up off the ground, tearing her clothes off to reveal her fighting suit as Sage slowly rose to his feet, like a juggernaut uncoiling from the earth.

"So... the wonderful maiden who stopped the Black Beast, thinks she could stop the Shadow Beast now?" Sage asked, rising to his full height. Equis towered over Fatima in height, Sage was an edifice that was very, very hard to ignore. "Yes... I know what they are calling me. I was listening in on the communications and the thoughts of all these soldiers as they mentally cursed me time and time again."

"What did you do to my sister?!" Fatima said, powering up. Sage didn't even bother to charge himself.

"I have removed her from the playing field, Fatima. I didn't harm a single hair on her head... I can send you to her, if you'd like." Sage's voice was calm. "You and she would be happy together. A whole world of your own. I can even send your loves to you, your families... There's plenty of room there..."

"I'd sooner die! Release her!"

"I don't think so, Fatima. I spared Rae because of my love for her. I do not hold as great a love for you. If you fight me... I will have to defend myself."

"I'll have to kill you! Please don't make me fight you!"

Sage smirked, and folded his massive arms before him. "I don't want to fight you either, but the headmistress must be punished, Fatima. And mark well, should you kill me, then the location of your sister where she now resides in the multiverse is lost forever, Fatima. Her prison is self sustaining, and is rendering her powerless, and its physical representation is the size of a marble. I promise you... it's a paradise. You can join her..."

Fatima's fur began to glow, and she was trying to keep herself from growing angry, and as dirty as it felt the only mind relaxation exercises that have ever helped her, were those that Sage himself had taught her.

"Please Sage... d-don't do this!"

Sage uncoiled, his eyes growing brighter. Like her sister, Fatima had no ability for psionics, her mind was immune to such things as an added benefit of such a crutch. But he nonetheless had a myriad of other extra sensual perceptions magical, learned and technological, and he was surrounding her with them all.

"Get out of my way, Fatima... I will go through you if I have to..."

Fatima, stared at him, felt him closed off magically to her, she unable to break his defenses from any way that she knew how to. She began to let her instinct rise... and she hoped, and prayed that whatever it was that allowed her to defeat the Black Beast would likewise allow her to defeat this new beast, the Shadow Beast.

She stared at him, looking for weak points, but not finding any. *Then if I can't find one... I'll have to make one!* She thought inwardly, and quick as you will, flew forward as quickly as she could and punched him with a blow that would decimate whole worlds, dent a Fortress Planet and in times past, overpower Sage had he not been ready for it.

But Sage simply lifted a hand and her knuckles stuck the forearm shield, the barrier so immovable that her fingers spread open as she cried out in pain. Sage swung a lazy hand forward, and she saw the three shadow rings form about his arm, and as he punched her, the rings slammed into her body one right after the next, and she was sent careening backward, crashing against the wall of what remained of the Pinnacle tower, tearing through its many

walls and erupting out the other side, sailing backward before she managed to get her breath back and using her flying skills stopped in mid air.

She groaned, feeling a couple of her ribs crack, and she gasped, amazed that he managed so much power in such a lazy swing, and she was about to fly back when he appeared before her with a flicker of light and shadow. She gasped as his triceps lowered and his knee rose at the same time, sandwiching her between both, crushing all the air out of her again before he kicked her and sent her right through the same hole in the Pinnacle tower she'd passed through, and she was driven right into the earth where she'd felled Sage in the first place.

He could've used that wicked spike on his elbow, but he didn't, and as she turned, he appeared again before her, and she gasped as his foot descended upon her, his toes clenching tightly about her body as he pushed her into the ground.

Sage was crying as he looked down at her.

"Just remember, Fatima... dearest student... you *could've* been the best student in all the leagues, greater than your sister if you'd stayed with me... I saw it! I saw it!" he gritted, and his toes clenched, pressing the air out of her again, and Fatima groaned before he hauled her up, held her in one hand, and his hand tapped her repeatedly across her chest, neck, arms and belly, and he dropped her.

She landed on her feet, and gasped, feeling what he'd done to her as it spread. Her power focused into her center, her body clenching, and she stared incredulously up at him. He'd created a feedback loop in her nervous system. If she made any sort of tense movements, even walking a few steps, then the feed back would force a chain reaction that would cause all of her muscles to compress in on themselves, crushing her bones, and eventually popping her lungs and imploding her heart, just before her natural magical reserves in her body would explode. And for an individual like her, her natural reserves would cut the planet in half.

Sage placed a hand on her shoulder and bent a knee, prompting her to kneel, and not knowing how to repair the damage, she knelt and immediately tried to relax. Sage then rose to his feet and turned once again... the next power house down.

This of course... angered everyone.

Chapter Fifteen: Knight Takes Castle, Check

Seeing Eurika, then Equis, and then Fatima fall, the upper students, graduates and certain faculty of the Mystic League all assaulted the Shadow Beast simultaneously, only to find themselves incredibly overwhelmed.

With hundreds of students, and thrice that many instructors, Sage was well assaulted, more so than the Dousaka had managed. At the forefront of the team, was Illia. She had known that she was the next best hope, surging toward Sage, one of the few remaining individuals who could do remarkable damage, her weighted bracelets following her studded knuckle guards, and when she hit him, she shattered a radial crack in his gut, and Sage cried out, his mandibles spreading open as he did. She swung her other fist into his gut, but then Sage tightened his belly and rolled his body, and she rolled off him before he rose a knee into her back and sent her sprawling.

A Casid student leapt at him, and he hammered that student into the ground, several more arrived and he caught them both, combined them, and wrung them both like rag dolls before casting them aside. The sad thing, was that they were both left very much alive...

Illia assaulted him again, and he turned to her, brushing several attackers away with his wings while he slapped her hands out of the way, and she landed another blow onto his abs, though the crack didn't spread as far as the first one had. Sage lifted his foot and clenched it about her head, and spinning in a circle, he swept several more assailants out of the way and threw her away.

She righted herself and attacked again and he redirected her blow so that she crushed the ground nearby. She leapt up, pulling her fist back to strike at him, and his hand whipped out and slapped onto her skull, and suddenly she felt the hooking tips of his finger sheathes dig into her flesh about her skull, just before his grip firmed about her head to hold her tight.

She began to struggle frantically, remembering this situation before, and then she saw the light, saw the glow from the gem in his palm, and a shadow ring formed about Sage's wrist before it pulled backward along his forearm. And then holding Illia aloft, the Shadow disk sped in a circle rapidly, and then shot forward. A spray of blood erupted around his fingers before the disk pulled backward and Sage was assaulted again as people tried to stop the impending process.

Illia's body spasmed as the disk surged forward again, and another spray of blood erupted about Sage's fingers. The disk retreated and struck again, retreated and struck again and again, the spinning disk adding something akin to a rough grit sander to her face every time that it struck. The disk withdrew, spread and pushed itself deeper along Sage's arm, spinning so fast that it turned white. When it slammed forward again, it struck her in the face and a beam of light erupted from his hand as a series of five raking marks tore her flesh open about her skull, the beam passing through her skull, slamming her against a wall before she bounced off it, eyes wide and catatonic.

Sage then spun, flinging all the bodies that had tried to stop him, and rearing, he screamed his Terror Cry, and immediately droves of lesser hearts fell weak about him, and again, he stepped forward.

Illia remained wide-eyed, her face a bloody mess, blood leaking from a pinhole thick hole in her skull, her fingers twitching as she started to drool.

The creature known as the Shadow Beast reached the front doors, swatting away the golden armored guards who were barring the way before he gestured, and both doors were pulled straight off their moorings and were flung miles away... just like he'd done with the gates to Hawthorne's lair. And there he stopped, now being faced with his next obstacle:

Genohn.

"Didn't I already dispose of you?" Sage asked, and Genohn bellowed out at Sage, and a beam of demonic hellfire

erupted from his mouth and caught Sage in the fullness of the beam as Genohn screamed, and Sage resisted the force of the beam before he was blasted backward, skidding against the ground from the blow.

Sage bounced against the ground, tumbled twice, and then managed to right himself on the last tumble, feeling the flames tearing across his body. At the backs of his feet were a serrated blade, and lifting one foot, he flipped the blade downward and drove it into the ground, doing the same with the other, drawing his wings around him as he resisted the continued force blasting against him.

Genohn ended the attack, and Sage opened his wings and lowered his crossed arms before Genohn lifted a hand and gestured, a glyph forming within the confines of his fingers, and the same glyph formed before Sage, just before the ground split open on a radial crack, a lava pool erupting outward just before a massive creature of fire rose from the depths of the pool, roared and lowered his gaze on Sage, brandishing a spiked hammer and possessing armor of obsidian.

Sage smirked up at the creature and then leapt out of the way as the hammer fell, breaking a heavy crater into the ground. Genohn then began to cast, and a series of arcane swarmer fire chased Sage down while the creature of lava and fire attacked Sage with power of his own, the creature Genohn summoned growing larger and larger, rapidly growing many times than Sage, till at long last, the hammer fell again, and Sage was slammed beneath it straight into the ground.

Genohn, lowering his hands, his wings flaring irritably as he stood there, wearing only his trousers and his upper body still bandaged. In an enclosed space such as the halls of the Demon League, Sage had a decided advantage. Out in the open air... Genohn had power galore in the form of his summonable creatures, and he summoned one of the most powerful he had. The most powerful was a world ender... and he was not prepared to destroy a planet with the sun god he had control over.

The lava creature lifted his hammer, still growing, showing Sage sprawled at the bottom of a crater, and Genohn gestured.

"Asmadi... destroy him."

"At once... my master." The Lava creature known as Asmadi bowed, and then turned, only to see that Sage was no longer where he'd been hammered to. *"Master... he's gone!"*

Genohn's head looked up, and then he felt it... pure... unrefined demonic power, and he turned abruptly to the sound of a screeching roar, and the shadow monster that was rampaging through the high energy facility now, was now getting a hard core expansion of power from Sage, the creature growing larger and larger, growing stronger, more powerful, and as Sage lowered his hand, he gestured toward the Lava monster.

"Destroy it." Sage growled in that gravely undertone of his.

The shadow monster turned, saliva drooling from his teeth as a sword grew in its hand and heavy armor formed all over its body. It then took a step that shook the school, and then another, and roaring, the Shadow Monster surged forward and attacked the Lava Monster... Asmadi unable to move away from his lava pool countered, and as they struck each other a dual explosion of fire and arcane shadow magic erupted around them, destroying everything around them.

Sage steadily approached Genohn and paused a hundred yards away.

The two stared at each other, the explosions from the giants fighting one another erupting against their sides as Sage folded his wings and retracted his tail again. The remaining students had sense at the very least to move out of the way from such a showdown.

It was a standoff, in the worst possible way, the two men staring each other down, trying to get the other to act first. Genohn, however, was making little flicks with his finger, empowering his giant. He would need it in order to finish Sage...

And then Sage was stepping backward, and he was casting, and Genohn lifted both hands and flared his wings, and a flare of a plethora of spells flew between them, spells and counter spells, certain spells simply colliding with one another in a series of explosions while the two began to run sideways, spell casting one spell after the next.

Genohn felt himself hit almost as often as Sage was, but unlike Sage, Genohn didn't have all that natural body armor, and so he had to rely on spell shields and stone skin enchantments and the like. Sage took a fireball to the face, Genohn took a ball lightning to the solar plexus, the two of them getting knocked back from one another, before they both surged at each other, casting spells and barriers to protect themselves, a plethora of spell throwing the likes of which the school had never seen before.

And then Genohn released a fusillade, and opening his mouth, screamed again, but Sage stepped back and breathed out his breath weapon, and both breath weapons met each other, Genohn's slowly pushing Sage's breath back, steadily moving toward him, closer and closer, till Sage's neck flared, the vents opening, and the pylons on his back rising to crackle lightning between them. Sage's breath weapon increased ten fold suddenly, and the blast from his mouth spilled outward, increasing ten times its width and consuming Genohn's breath weapon.

In order to escape certain death, Genohn turned and leapt out of the way while blowing his breath out, leveling a small building when it struck before Sage's breath weapon continued onward and outward for miles and miles before he stopped the weapon.

Genohn began to rise then as Sage rushed at him, and lifting his head, he managed to duck out of the way before Sage was on him, pressing the advantage in the fact that Genohn was not a close-in fighter. And then both met each other, and Genohn, using his incredible demonic strength, grappled hands with Sage, Sage standing on the ground while Genohn floated in the air and beat his wings.

The two giants nearby mimicked their battle, every movement, every strike duplicated by the giants. They maneuvered themselves, redirected blows, but Sage was simply far stronger than Genohn, with a stronger grip with five fingers, and a more damaging grip with claws that rent the backs of Genohn's hands open.

And then Genohn belched a quick breath of fire in Sage's face, buffeted him with his wings in order to release Sage's grapple, and then immediately summoned a Demon Blade, twisted it point downward and plunged it down and through Sage's body and then twisted it to open the wound further. Sage cried out and clutched at the wound while Genohn then clamped down on Sage's armored jugular, his claws prying into the armored folds as he started to turn the blade toward Sage's hearts, cutting through a lung, causing considerable damage into Sage's innards.

The same actions were taking place between the Shadow Monster and Asmadi, and as one, Sage and his monster looked at their assailants with burning red eyes, and as one, both reached up. The Shadow Monster took hold of the lava beast's massive horns, and Sage took a hold of Genohn's wings. Genohn gasped, his weapon so close to burning Sage's hearts when a foot rose and clamped down around his face, and as the foot came down, Genohn's head followed with it... but Sage's hands... went up.

The dual scream of pain was tremendous and shattered the earth around them all, and looking down at Genohn, shadow vapor pouring from the wings in his hands and from the sides of the wolf's head, Sage folded the wings together, and promptly broke them in half, then in quarters, and then yanked the feathers from them before tossing them aside, the wings scattering into ash.

Genohn continued to scream from the symbol of his demonic power having been rent from him while the Lava monster bellowed from the loss of its wings, and Sage and the Shadow Monster reached up and pulled the weapons from their bodies, and then thrust them both to the ground before their connection broke. Genohn's summoned monster cried in his pain before he literally fell apart into the lava, and reaching down as the Shadow Monster began to fall apart and shrink back to its original size, now awaiting for a command, Sage reached down and took Genohn by the back of the neck and held him aloft for a moment as Genohn gripped at his mane in pain, the shadowy wings slowly reforming. Sage gestured for the monster to come to him, and he likewise walked toward it to shorten the distance.

"So much talent, Genohn... it would be terrible to waste all that." Sage said as his wounds rapidly healed. "So you shall become the first of my elite guard, fatalistic... simply because you have no choice to do otherwise." And Sage plunged Genohn into the black soupy substance that formed the Shadow Monster, and the monster immediately began to pull Genohn inside. Genohn realized what was happening, and began screaming for help as he struggled with all his might, but with his wings gone, too much of his power was likewise gone with them. "You should be happy, Genohn... I'm surrounding you with all the demonic powers you craved from Hawthorne. You'll be safe in there, surrounded by the tortured dead... and perhaps after a few eons, after the madness of their screams has totally destroyed you, I'll let you out, and leave you by the wayside somewhere as a gibbering idiot."

Genohn was pulled into the body, and his screams became muffled and then silenced.

The Shadow Monster then sprouted more armor and now spikes, thickening with muscular might now; a second pair of eyes arising as they all focused on Sage.

"Now go... my faithful servant... continue to destroy all that you see."

The monster inclined its head, ear wings now growing from its head while multiple tails formed from its backside, the creature palming its chest and then endeavored to do so, heading now for the nearest facilities, absorbing the fallen dead, and growing stronger. Sage smirked and turned on his heel. This school will be destroyed by nightfall... and Meniko's head will be positioned happily atop a pig pole.

Yusuma was outside the walls of the Grace League. Remarkably, the Grace League and the hospital, as well as the dorms all remained untouched. She had to help in saving as many individuals as she could, and as she snuck as quietly as she was able to, she turned a bend in the wall and went immediately cold.

The Shadow Beast rose from where he'd been and turned to face her, and if her bladder had been full at the moment, she would've pissed all over herself. Three times her size, many hundreds if not thousands of times heavier, the creature that had been Lord Sage rose to his full height and focused on her.

Her moment of stopped heart and paused breathing ended and her heart and breathing rate immediately went into overdrive as she began to hyperventilate and her heart hammering against her chest as she began to step backward. Then with a scream she wheeled on her heel and then tried to run away, but tripped over her own feet. She trembled, having seen all that this monster, the *beast* had done to her beloved school and surrogate family, and huddling into a ball, she uttered but one thing.

"M-Mau!"

Sage was slammed face first into the ground before a follow-up knee to the back of his skull made him painfully aware that all the defenders were not gone.

Mau, naked as the day he was born, powerful, supremely powerful, some said greater than even Rae - though they were few - squatted, lifted Sage's head and drove him deeper into the earth.

He was the guardian of the Grace League. No one knew how such an ultra powerful murdering fighter came into the guardianship of a holy of holies, but he nonetheless came to their aide should a member merely speak his name in fear. It spoke of to exactly how fearful Yusuma was being that this relationship yanked him from where he was, through a barrier that restricted teleportation and set him into immediate action upon arriving. Some said that Mother Sanari had been his teacher, and he held a soft spot for her. Or perhaps that he was forbidden by Meniko herself to ever step on the planet unless called upon. Others said that Sanari, Rae or Meniko had defeated him and struck a bargain for his life. Others said other things, all of them were possible, but no one other than perhaps Mau himself knew the truth as to why he did this.

And at present, despite his murdering tendencies... he was presently the lesser of two evils.

"Run." Mau said quietly as Sage planted both hands and feet and began to rise even against Mau's incredible natural strength.

Yusuma, stunned at his arrival, rose shakily and ran till she was behind cover of a wall, and watched as Sage took Mau's hand and pulled himself steadily out of his hole, his facial features cracking as they all realigned themselves from having been broken, and then once his face was healed, he jerked his head forward and allowed his luxurious white mane to be torn from the back of his head to escape Mau's grasp.

"Mau." Sage growled once he'd risen to his feet, his eyes burning even darker than they had for Nyl Dousaka.

Mau clenched his hands. "Where's my brother, Sage?"

Sage's mane grew back before his horns flared.

"Presently taking apart the gymnasium brick by brick." Sage said simply. "He's my servant now. An honor you unfortunately will not be given. How's Rudfuul you back stabbing son of a bi-"

Sage's words were cut off as Mau moved so quickly and struck the words right off Sage's tongue with a blow to the head, followed by a ridge hand to Sage's throat, a wicked combination of planet ending blows striking Sage repeatedly before a foot to the temple sent Sage tumbling, crashing through a wall, and toppling a priceless work of art that had remained untouched from his earlier fusillade.

Mau landed and teleported, reaching down as he arrived and took Sage's mane in one hand and hauled Sage upward.

"No one... calls my mother... a bitch... but me, Sage." Mau said, and kned him in the face which sent the eighteen foot monster reeling backward before Sage flipped, righted himself, and then landed on all fours.

"Bitch." Sage said simply with a grin, and rose to his full height, extending the forearm blades and tapping the ground with the blades on the backs of his feet guards before retracting them both, making them all loose. "And that goes to your mother, your 'brother,' his mother and you..."

Mau exhaled through his nose in annoyance once, and then seemed to teleport across the distance separating him and the Shadow Beast. Sage's defenses blared, his whole chest and abdominal region tensing as Mau's blows repeatedly struck Sage's body over and over. Sage tilted his body this way and that, all so that he took the full force of Mau's blows, waiting for his opportunity, and eventually found it. His hand snapped downward and took Mau's wrist, and by the time that Mau had rolled his wrist out of Sage's iron grip, Sage had turned Mau's back to him, all so that a razor from the back of his foot could rake across Mau's back, followed by the dual blades on Sage's arm cutting a swath from shoulder blade to elbow.

Sage kicked and Mau ducked, but then Sage's prehensile foot came down and hammered Mau into the ground, pulled him up, and driving all of his weight onto that one foot, Sage hopped up and drove Mau's face firmly into the ground.

"How's it feel, fucker?!" Sage demanded and gave Mau a couple of rabbit punches in the small of Mau's back before leaping away.

Mau lifted himself from the hole his head had been in, shaking the dirt and gravel free as he wiped blood from his mouth and nose. He'd not seen his own blood in ages.

"Now I make you bleed, Sage."

Mayia awoke with a gasp as evening was falling, rain falling in a heavy downpour now of wet sleet, and she suddenly felt herself against something warm and furry... and black, and turning her head, she saw Geevo there, with him cradling her to him. With another gasp she rose.

"W-what... how long have I been out?" she asked.

"Several hours." Geevo said, rising to his feet. "The wounded have stopped trickling in. That means one of two things:"

"Either master has been stopped... or there are no more people to be wounded..." she didn't like the prospect of either. "Siklohn, Verdance and Camby?" she asked.

Geevo shook his head.

Mayia looked upward into the sky, focusing on the swirling dome of tornado force winds marked with chunks of ice from frozen water and blazing with lightning. "We need help. I'm going to check on them." She said.

"I'll come with you." Geevo said.

"No!" she cried and whirled on him, saw the shocked look on his face, and then she bit her bottom lip with the chisel of her front teeth before she surged forward and embraced him, her bosom pressing in underneath his chin as she pressed her cheek to his head. "No... please... stay here, Geevo... stay safe and help the others. You can do things I can't... you need to help the wounded. I can take care of myself."

Geevo, in surprise, found himself embracing her back. "Then... then go... quickly." He said. "We'll be fine here... just go!"

Mayia nodded and began to leave him when his hand on her wrist pulled her back and he kissed her. Not the soft peck on the cheek or forehead, but a full on passionate kiss on her lips. She was so stunned that she didn't think to return it, and simply stared at him when he withdrew.

"And come back." Geevo said in all intensity and sincerity.

Mayia nodded and then rushed away unhindered this time. She tried to move as quietly as she could, and then saw Yusuma crouching at the corner of a wall. Mayia stepped quietly forward and placed a hand on her shoulder, Yusuma turned with a gasp, rising to her feet, but then seeing that it was Mayia jerked her head back around.

Beyond... was the fight that all feared would someday happen... and it was odd... Mayia was currently voting and placing her hope in the killing murderer known as Mau.

Siklohn touched down on the shore, having had to make his way carefully back, carrying a couple of pilots he'd recovered floating in the water, and set them down on the ground, to which they promptly collapsed into the surf.

Siklohn looked at the former glory of his family's most elite of divisions, the one that his father himself led, and was now totally decimated.

There were people groaning, and crying out prayers for rescue or mercy, and through the mass of bodies, Siklohn found his father. In an instant he'd teleported next to Nyl Dousaka's side, and turned Nyl's limp body over, and for a moment, Siklohn feared that his father was now dead.

"Siklohn." Nyl said, and tears fell from his eyes as they were both spattered by freezing rain. Above them the crackling lightning erupted across the clouds and then struck somewhere out at sea with a peal of echoing thunder.

"F-father... I... feared that you'd died..." Siklohn said, trembling as he held his father on his lap.

"Great Maker, Sage was right... this *is* worse than death." Nyl said, and tears flowed more freely from his eyes.

"What has he done?!" Siklohn demanded.

"Paralyzed." Nyl said, "Unable to move from the neck down. I can't... I can't even reach out and touch you. My son... my son... there has... never been a regret that I hold in my life in the fact that I've not been as good as a father as I wanted to be... as I should've been. I never embraced you like a father embraces his son... the most time I ever spent with you was when I bottle fed you as a baby." He laughed and closed his eyes, more tears escaping to mix with the falling rain. "I should've... should've embraced you on every chance I had, Siklohn... I shouldn't've cared a damn what other's thought about their Warmaster. And now... Sage has taken that from me forever. I can never hold you with tenderness ever again. The best that I can hope for his a stone gripped embrace."

Siklohn's vision blurred and he pulled his enormous father to him and kissed his temple.

"Then let me hold you, father." Siklohn said quietly. "And for once... I'll protect you."

Sage and Mau traded blow for blow, wicked strikes that sent blasts of concussions from the impacts, blows that could've sunk whole continents into the ocean, destroyed this island, or even devastated the whole planet were traded regularly between the two. They were both two foremost martial artists with two styles that were wholly vast and, strangely enough, perfectly counteracted each other.

Mayia watched with Yusuma, tears falling heavily from their eyes as Mayia's master fought a very deadly duel.

There were times in which a blow was sent to the other that completely sent them sprawling, a testament to the sheer power that was Mau to deal with her Master's present state. But Mau was truly feeling Sage's blows, intermixed with raking claws and sheering blades that not only burned his flesh but seared his soul. But again Sage simply had too much of an advantage in the form of such heavy armor, an unparalleled healing factor, and increased height. Despite that, Mau left deep rends in Sage's body using magically enhanced claws, but not a one actually cut deep enough to get at Sage's flesh, and when Sage struck with similar skills, not only did his attack cut flesh, but with five fingers, he cut open an extra rend.

But like Sage... Mau could heal like cut water. Sage just healed faster.

Mau's fists shattered huge blows in Sage's body, learning quickly that the abyssal black armor was unbreakable, so he aimed for the softer underbelly, having to deal with Sage's Iron Shirt technique and his magical and physical defenses, but nonetheless created huge radial cracks in his thickened belly armor.

And then Mau blocked and then struck, a powerful blow to Sage's forehead to stun him for the barest of moments, a kick to his weakest protection about his abdomen to shatter all his abdominal plates, and then setting himself, he opened his mouth and a blast like Genohn's breath weapon struck Sage, blasting him backward and hammering him into a thick support wall, before Mau appeared, drew his hand back, and punched.

The Absolute Fist was a skill of an ancient martial art. It was the ability to destroy anything despite its defensive capabilities. Though Mau didn't have the full power of the Absolute Fist... he nonetheless had the Ultimate Fist, which had only one strike in martial history in the multiverse that could top it - The Absolute Fist - and at the moment, he struck Sage with it.

A sound like unto a thunderbolt striking at ground zero echoed around them, the blow creating a bubble of destruction all around them for several meters in every direction that ate up stone tiles and shattered the wall behind Sage. But when the blow connected and the force of the blow expended, Mau gasped, seeing Sage's abdominals completely unharmed.

Mau looked up at Sage as Sage looked down at him, and he grinned at Mau.

The Ultimate Fist, like the Absolute Fist, was an all-or-nothing blow. It was meant to end a fight immediately by utterly damaging or killing an opponent, and so if the attack failed, the individual using it was vulnerable and off

balance. Mau had waited so that he couldn't miss. What he didn't expect, was that it met something called the Absolute Defense.

Drakido, the ancient art of dragon martial arts, was the precursor to all martial arts in Sage's universe. Dhim Mach Death Touch techniques... And Chi Kung Iron-Shirt Healing Techniques were among them. And the Absolute Defense of the Iron-Shirt Techniques allowed a competent healer in those arts to absorb any blow - no matter how powerful it was - so long as he maintained the difficult, full-body defense. It was a healing skill and Sage was the most talented healer in existence.

As of yet, the Absolute Defense has yet to meet the Absolute Fist... even with Mau. The inspiration needed for Mau to achieve the Absolute fist did not come today. So when the Ultimate Fist met the Absolute Defense, the result was catastrophic for the area around them, and did cause both to pause as the tremendous energies were dispersed.

For either to recover from such moves would require Mau to regain his balance and step back into a balanced combat stance, but for Sage, all that was required for him to recover was to simply relax. Unfortunately for Mau... the act of relaxing the body of a contortionist was far easier than moving the body into a different position, and Sage brought his fist down atop Mau's head into a brain duster, before Sage grabbed Mau's head pivoted and slammed the Martial Master right where Sage had been before the Shadow Beast leapt back several dozen yards.

Mau tried desperately to regain his composure as he teetered there on his feet, and the two witnesses of this fight gasped as Sage set himself before all his horns flared open before turning forward and merging and projected forward on the front of his head before they all lengthened ten times their length, forming a grooved horn that projected from the center of Sage's skull and crackled with lightning, just before his back spread open, revealing his wings, bio-engines and veneers, as well as his the dragon-fly like wings. His new horn sparked and electrified, energizing with a film of pure white plasma, and he waited... waited till Mau looked up and saw what was coming, and then his engines flared, and an instant later Mau coughed up blood as he was skewered. Looking down, he saw an eighteen inch wide horn piercing his midsection with Sage attached to it.

Sage's wings and engines folded, and with a twist of his head he disconnected himself with a crunch from his horn, just before the holders for the parts of that horn swung backward, and new horns projected outward from them.

Mau, still spitting up blood, glared at Sage, and tried to pull himself off it.

Lifting a hand, Sage snapped his hand forward and pushed the horn deeper into Mau, worsening the wound, and then lifted his claws and carved an emblem in Mau's head that glowed with fire.

"I never thought to defeat you, Mau." Sage said, and then grinned, showing Mau his row upon row of sharp serrated teeth. "I had to humiliate you too." And Sage pressed a thumb into the rune in Mau's forehead and the rune flared to life, burning the etchings deeper as lines spread all through Mau's skull, causing the Black wolf to grit his teeth against the pain... the considerable pain that it needed to be to make him even feel it.

And then immediately after the rune completed itself, Mau's every movement froze.

"At your full power, this ward would never have had a chance to hold you. But near death... just think... it's the only thing keeping you alive in this suspended animation." And Sage slid his claws against Mau's chest, first down one, and then the other, and began connecting the lines, forming glyphs and emblems in his body. "I can suppose that eventually you'll bleed to death, but only after hours, and hours, and hours... of utter pain." Sage touched the marks and they burned with searing heat, and Mau grit his teeth again, frothing spit, his face muscles the only things he could move with that emblem etched into his forehead.

"And... one more thing. Not only did I defeat Rae where you could not... I also defeated you, Mau. And after I kill Meniko... I will be sure that the first thing I do is find your little ward, and make sure he suffers eternally for his sins.

"Enjoy your life, Mau... what little of it is left."

Mayia and Yusuma rushed to Mau the moment that Sage had left, and though Yusuma went right up to the naked black wolf, Mayia still stayed her distance. Even wounded, Mau was a fearsome creature to behold, and this creature was also the individual who was protecting the wolf who'd raped and beat her on multiple occasions. At the moment, she was thinking that he got what he deserved, but he was also the best hope to defeat her master.

Yusuma, however, surged to him, fingering the horn projecting from his gut and pinning him to the wall. She lifted the tag to look at his face and fingered the marks on his chest and Mau hissed.

"I-I... I don't understand what he's done." Yusuma said. "I don't know how to fix it."

Mayia stood quietly for a moment and then sighed. "The tag is a seal against demons. The more steeped in demon lore that an individual is without a counteracting holy force in them, the more susceptible to the tag they are. You can remove the tag, but then the suspended animation his body is in will end, and he'll start bleeding profusely. Also the marks on his chest are a further ward. Remove him from the tag and they will stop his other demonic powers... including his healing factor."

"Oh no." Yusuma whispered, pawing at Mau. "W-what do we do? I can't heal that sort of damage..."

"We need help." Mayia said simply. "In more ways than one. Yusuma... I want you to return to the shrine and get people to help Mau... I need to get to the lab and see if they're making any progress on calling for help."

Yusuma continued pawing at Mau. "Y-you just hold on Mau... we'll help you. I swear it." And she picked up her skirts and ran.

Mayia continued to look up at Mau, and his eyes shifted to look around the tag hanging from his forehead to stare at her as smoke rose up from the burning marks on his chest. Mayia swallowed, wanting to curse him for harboring her tormentor, but she finally turned away, walked and then skipped forward into a run.

Tla, Yusuma, and eleven other members of the Grace League had assembled and surged out from their hiding places as Sage once again neared the tower.

As one they cast a ritual magic to bind an individual, and with thirteen individuals casting simultaneously, the shield to hold Sage arose immediately, holding him fast. The Shadow Beast hissed at them as another ring formed, and each individual likewise were surrounded in a protective ring should he break out. A third ring linked them all together, before lines etched themselves between each member of the ritual circle across the central circles binding Sage to two of their fellow leaguers.

Sage looked about him, seeing himself being enclosed within a spiritual dome that with their numbers, mattered not how powerful their target was, he would nonetheless be contained.

The chanting of the Grace League Students became as if of one voice, and thirteen glyphs of binding formed to hold Sage. He tested his forming cage with the tip of a finger, and the dome of peace was as solid as a null shield.

Then with the glyphs in place, each student began to project their power forward, activating the circle. Lord Sage was about to be contained!

Outside the shield that held him, Sage's power, no matter how vast, could do nothing. Inside however... The courtyard of the Mystic League was covered in stone tiles, each tile able to hold up the several hundred pounds to several metric tons of weight some of the students exhibited, let alone the dragoness for a headmistress they had. And like with Genohn in the Demon League... they made one critical mistake.

They'd not sealed the tiles...

With a flip of his hand, the central most tile flipped over revealing a glyph and a new circle where there should not be a circle and a glyph, and the entire meaning of the seal upon Sage began to rewrite itself. A blue-green flow spread immediately from the center most circle, and being that the power of Sage was thousands fold greater than all the students combined, his power spread outward faster than they were able to drop their ritual cast. All at once, the shields holding the students reversed themselves: instead of not allowing anyone in, they instead were unable to let anyone out. Likewise the shield holding Sage where it wouldn't let him out, instead would now not allow anyone in.

Brushing himself off, Sage stepped idly forward, again approaching the doors to the Pinnacle Tower while the students of the Grace League pounded at their new prisons in an attempt to escape.

Sage didn't even pay them any mind.

He could've made their prisons pain amplifiers... but something inside him stopped him from doing that. But no worries... mercy was a weakness... he would eventually ring that out of himself. Eventually...

'STOP!' a voice said, amplifying itself in his mind, and his body, out of his own accord, stopped every muscle and he found himself looking at Aauie. *'FIEND! YOU WILL PAY FOR YOUR ACTIONS!'* she shouted in his mind.

And suddenly Sage, despite all his combined powers, fell to one knee as the weight of Aauie's mental powers assaulted him. Sage grit his teeth, refused to scream till she forced him down again, tearing his mind open as easily as one would peel open an onion... layer by layer. She was driving herself successfully into the core of his being. It would've been a simple thing for her to find what had gone wrong in his mind and fix it... until...

snap

It was subtle, and at first Aauie didn't understand what had happened, and her eyes grew wide as Sage rose to his feet and rubbed his temples.

"Ow..." he rumbled, and began to step toward her.

Aauie tried to force his mind, but her powers just kept sliding around him, and trying to discern his defense against her, she blinked and her vision went immediately to the Etherscape and she gasped. Everything... absolutely everything, resonated in the Ether... whether it was alive or not. Sage... was a black shadow walking toward her like a looming demon. Somehow... he'd completely cut himself off from the Ether!

She blinked again, just before he reached down, clamped and slid two fingers to one side of her neck and the other two and a thumb to the other side of her throat and lifted her by cupping her head in his hand.

"I remember you aiding Siklohn in his dissention against me." Sage growled, his voice bring up her fears and memories of her past. "You are truly, truly a powerful Psychic, Aauie... and you are innocent. So I will spare your life, but you need to be fully aware of the pain you helped cause." His other hand lifted, and a spike of purplish-pink energy erupted from between his four fingers. Though he was still cut off from the Ether, this spike - a psychic knife - radiated the full power of his psychic energies and was powered from within instead of from without his body. An energized crown formed about his dragon's eye as that flared, and then he plunged the knife into Aauie's skull.

The knife cut straight through all of her defenses and right into the core, and there... he enacted the most terrible of punishments.

He removed her defenses against all the voices in the world...

Pleeyo trembled.

All around her she saw the students of the school... seeing them fallen. Kaya, Illia, Champion, even Equis and Fatima! She continued forward, hearing a crash as the Shadow Monster, empowered by Genohn, tore through yet another building.

She felt like a coward. She knew Sage had a beef with her, had had it for a long time, and wanted to enact his own justice on her. She edged forward, swallowing hard, and found the students of the Grace League in their magical chambers... and they looked at her, pounded on their prisons and urged her not to go. But still she had to do something!

And then she heard a scream, and her head shot up to see the massive behemoth that Sage had become, even as he dropped Aauie to the ground. She crumpled as she immediately covered her ears.

"Please! Please stop it!! Stop the voices!!" she cried, tears falling from her eyes as she pulled herself up into a ball.

Sage then turned his head to look at Pleeyo, and he growled at her, his mandibles spreading open as he stepped out of the shadows of the tower, even as a lightning strike roared overhead.

"Pleeyo." He growled, and Pleeyo raised her hands into fists.

"I-I won't let you hurt any more people."

"Such hypocrisy." Sage said, his voice deepening till it sounded like gravel grinding together. "You who hurt, maimed, harmed and even killed so many? You dare try to present yourself as a champion of good?!"

Pleeyo lifted her hands above her head, firming her resolve, and a crackle appeared over her hands, and soon a glowing ball of death was forming, shining brighter than the sun, a brilliant white thing that grew larger than her head, then her body, then doubled in size every second that passed until she had a mighty mass of power in her hands, the likes of which would prove her to perhaps one day meet with the most powerful beings in existence. Sage raised an eyebrow at the ball as she gripped into the fire, and straining, pulled it along and threw it at Sage, and as it passed, things simply burned and shattered about in the wave of destruction following the fireball.

Pleeyo then raised both hands pushed extra force into the fireball as it descended, coming nearer and nearer to Sage. Sage simply lifted a hand and planted it against the side of the ball, and Pleeyo found herself meeting with an unstoppable force. Gritting her teeth she forced everything that she had into it, and the ball brightened, sang as it hummed even more, and the ball began to bow toward Sage. And then Sage lifted a finger and tapped the ball, and suddenly a flood of blue entered the ball, moving to the core, and Pleeyo gasped as she suddenly fell forward as she lost control of the ball, its connection to her failing. The cold Sage sent into it began to counteract the fire, and the ball collapsed faster than it was made, and with a sudden stopping of all sound in the world, the light of the fading ball suddenly collapsed and then exploded with a single note of sound, a discordant chord of sound, and Pleeyo leapt out of the way as a massive swath cut itself diagonally around the whole of the courtyard.

"You haven't changed... and they call me a beast." Sage said as he walked forward. "Such power for one so small, Pleeyo... but do you realize that such an attack would've not only done no damage to me, but would've instead leveled the school, the island, most of this hemisphere and killed everyone in the area of affect except you or me."

Pleeyo rose and cast another magical ball at him, and he swatted it away and continued to move forward.

"You are a bad person, Pleeyo... you have caused much sin and been the purveyor of a great deal of grief. And the only punishment you've ever eked out is some community service and a magically induced mental break down."

Pleeyo cast a tirade of blasts at him, and he stopped, and the constant stream of bolts of all sorts of elemental fire splashed against him, tears of fear falling from her eyes as his words struck her more deeply than any attack, a cloud of dust rose about him before she let up.

The falling rain cleared the dust cloud quickly, and once again revealed Lord Sage standing there, completely untouched. Again he started forward.

"You are a murderer, Pleeeyo."

"So are you!" She screamed. "You've killed all these people!"

"I killed only in self defense Pleeeyo. They all attacked first. I am so far guilty of only one death... Hawthorne. And so demonic and wrought with sin... he was too much of a demon to be considered a murder.

"You purposefully and maliciously, and in full conscience, MURDERED, nine people... and if remorse had not been forced on you... I think you wouldn't even feel sorry for them right now. You are the monster, Pleeeyo," Sage nodded. "And I am going to punish you in the way that you should've been punished in the first place. Eye for an eye... tooth for a tooth, over and over again until the heinous act of your crimes sinks in..."

"N-no!" Pleeeyo cried and turned to run, but then Sage moved so fast that he appeared to teleport behind her, and grabbing her mane, he carried her head face first into the ground hard enough to create an impact tremor.

When he hauled her up out of the ground, her face was bloody, and he turned her to look at his hand while a series of screams and cries formed there in a black ball swirling with tormented green faces.

"This is your punishment, Pleeeyo... As a healer, I personally healed all the individuals of my school in whom you hurt. Their aches, their pains, their agonized screams of torture... stick with me. These are the cries and screams and pains of everyone you've ever hurt. Including the nine people you murdered. Your punishment is to experience their pain as you inflicted it."

"M-mercy..." she trembled.

"Since no mercy was given when asked before by your victims, so now no mercy shall be given to you either. As you reap, so shall you sew!" and Sage closed his hand around the ball, and a Psychic Knife extended from his fist before he shoved it into her skull, and the ball traveled down the length of the spike and into her head.

Sage dropped Pleeeyo and suddenly she was standing in a field on a sunny day. She was afraid, very afraid, and looking down at her hands, she saw that she was not herself... she wasn't even a she... or rather she was a shi. Shi felt the hanging penis between her legs along with a soft feminine sex, and looking up, she suddenly watched an image of herself turn around a corner, positively ripped, stronger than she'd ever looked before. She gasped, realizing exactly who's hyena's body she was in, just before the image of herself that day picked the hyena self of her now, and proceeded to molest her. She cried out, and the pain began. As one pain ended, a new began, one right after the next, the pains getting perpetually worse and worse, till the last nine... she was brutally murdered, and then felt the experience of being resurrected. And when it was all over... she found herself again in that hyena's body... and the process started over again...

She screamed as she saw herself round that corner again, and cowered...

Pleeeyo shivered naked on the ground, her eyes wide as she made inaudible mumbles. Eventually... her mind would just shut down... there was only so much a mind could take. He rose, turned, supposing the last of Meniko's defenders were gone, and stopped.

"Ah... how many of you do I have to *dispose of*?!" he cried at the new individual who was approaching him, a sword drawn.

Mezzo, the school deputy, stood there before him, his sword drawn, having returned after a long personal vacation.

"I will end you today, Sage." He growled.

"Go away insect." Sage growled at him.

And then Sage groaned as he felt a sword penetrating his side to the hilt, just before Mezzo turned and pulled the weapon out and teleported to a decent distance.

Sage looked down at the wound. Few people had as of yet penetrated his armor. Not even Mau had managed to do that to any constant degree. The wound however closed and sealed itself, much to Mezzo's surprise as he looked at his sword.

"You're healing..." he said.

"That I am. I suppose you discovered that silver was a Lycan's weakness. Silver edged, or just coated in silver nitrate?"

"Silver nitrate. But that's not the only thing that can kill you, isn't it?"

"No... it isn't. And I'm certain that's not the only thing you just tried to attack me with. You did your homework, Mezzo... I respect that... but if you pried deep enough, you would understand that there are two primary variations of Lycan. The Lycan of the Moon, and the Lycan of the Sun. When I achieved my dragon evolution, I stopped being a Lycan of the Moon and instead became a Lycan of the Sun. That which can harm us and kill us... change."

"I at least harmed you Sage. So... die!"

The attack came and there was a clang, and Mezzo found his sword blocked by another sword of the multi-ton variety.

"You should've stepped away, Mezzo..." Sage growled. "Now on guard!"

Mayia arrived in Noxi's lab. One whole side of it had been sheered off and was open to the rain, but the portable generator that they'd hooked up was still attached to the communications devise.

"Mayia?" a voice came, and she turned her head to see Camby rising out of a corner. A moment or two later, another shadow that was unmistakably Verdance rose as well.

"The signal? Any response?"

"None." Camby reported. "It's been repeating for hours. No response."

"But the range is very limited. We can only manage a few parsecs." Verdance managed.

Mayia bit her lower lip and stepped forward, stopping the message, and then fiddling with the controls.

"What are you doing?" Camby asked, a little concerned.

"We need more power." She said. "A better transmitter." She then began to key in commands, and all Camby heard were errors.

When she and Verdance - Verdance holding onto her hips - arrived by Mayia's side, her eyes opened widely.

"A-are you crazy?! Dallas's satellite array?!" she asked.

"It's the only thing we have left. The Mystic League used the space station to communicate with the rest of the universe; it was the only facility large enough to gain a network connection so far away off the beaten path. Noxi's satellite arrays only have a receiver array on them... so the only things up in the sky that can help us... belong to Daedalus."

"Mayia... do you realize how much of a long shot it is to gain access to his satellites?"

"A snowball's chance in hell." Verdance managed.

Mayia nodded. "It's not only a long shot... it's our last shot." She said and then swallowed, pausing in her movements. "Lord Sage has just skewered Mau to a wall."

"MAU?!" Camby and Verdance both gasped in awe.

"And Warmaster Dousaka's division has been decimated, with Nyl himself having been defeated. All of the school's guardians have fallen. I don't know if there's anyone left, but we cannot let master kill Headmistress Meniko."

Mayia continued keying in commands.

And then the screen suddenly locked up and turned to a flashing red graphic of <<ACCESS DENIED>>

Then there was a whirring sound and a light, and they all turned as an emitter under some rubble flashed and then lit up, and a figure appeared, looked down diagonally in the image being that the projector was offset, and righting itself, solidified into the blue, green and white image of Daedalus.

"Journeyman Master Mayia Gallant... this is unexpected."

"Daedalus. Please! Give us access to your satellites... we need to call for help."

Dallas remained quiet, the rain water falling straight through him as he stood there with his hands behind his back.

"Mistress Gallant... do you, as a Journeyman Master, request access to my satellites, knowing full well that you are working against the headmaster of the school you are a part of?"

"Yes." Mayia admitted immediately.

Dallas stood in thought for a moment, considering, for several very long seconds. For a computer entity that could process in the magnitude of trillions of trillions of processes per nanosecond... several seconds was an eternity.

"Access granted, Journeyman Master Mayia Gallant." Dallas said, and the console behind her suddenly lit green and white with <<ACCESS GRANTED>> and gave a connection protocol screen that immediately began to fill in all the rest of the information.

Mayia surged forward to embrace Dallas, but she passed right through him as if he were a ghost. She stepped back then and he smiled.

"Mistress Noxi's force generators attached to this holographic generator do not seem to be functioning, Mistress Mayia." He explained.

"Then remind me to give you a big hug when I see the real you again." And she turned toward the console and began entering commands.

"Mayia..." Dallas said, and stepped in beside her. "Understand that this action is available to only you as the Journeyman Master. Following protocols, I must file it on your report. I will have to present it to Master Sage when he returns." He looked sad as he said this. "But you are currently the only student that master has given full access to me and my functions."

"Dallas... what else do I have access to?" Mayia asked and gestured to Camby to continue, and Camby immediately started the distress call again.

"Everything." Dallas assured her.

She looked to Camby and Verdance for a moment, and then bowed her head.

"Dallas... process new command to the Nemesis. They are to apprehend Lord Sage, and if necessary, destroy him... at all costs."

"Lord Sage currently is the headmaster of the school. Therefore he cannot be the target of the Nemesis unless a notable member of the school declares him as insane with evidence, or a medical practitioner recognized by the school declares him clinically insane, again with evidence. Do you wish to make a query to his sanity?"

"Yes!" Mayia gasped.

"What is your evidence?"

Mayia gasped and then gestured out to the ruins of the school. "Dallas... look! Is that not proof enough?"

"Now it is. Query accepted and processed. Lord Sage is suspended from his headmastership of the Mystic League of the Shadow Arts. As the ranking master in the echelon of the school, Mayia, you are now the interim headmistress. Do you wish to repeat command regarding Nemesis?"

"YES!"

"Command processed. Lord Sage Preypacer is now the target of the Nemesis." Dallas looked down. "Situation saved as evidence of insanity for possible future use."

Mayia hugged herself, and Camby placed a hand on her shoulder.

"How long till they arrive?" Camby asked as Mayia shivered.

"Unknown. Lord Sage's barrier is a force-eight hurricane wrought with electrical interference and free-floating ice blocks. The drones are powerful, but they will have some difficulty getting through the barrier."

"Then let us pray." Verdance said then. "That the Creator is feeling helpful enough to help us."

Mezzo was a swordmaster. He was the first person Sage had lost to in over fifty years... and not the last. The other individual in whom Sage had lost to was Nyl Dousaka. And for his hurt pride... Nyl was given the worst fate Sage could come up with.

Mezzo was now in a life and death struggle, just like Nyl had been, and presently, he was doing better than Nyl had. He'd already wounded Sage several times while at the same time avoiding Sage's killing blows.

Sage leapt and hammered down at Mezzo, and Mezzo merely parried, dodged, stuck and moved, having escaped several close calls, but he was less than half Sage's size... and far more nimble on the land.

The sword fight even came so far as slicing Sage's throat open, and Sage gurgled, holding his neck and focused on healing there while he tried to snarl at Mezzo through the gurgling of blood.

Sword fighting was a chess game filled with feigns and diversions, where you tried to maneuver your competition into taking the Absolute blow. And Sage, despite all his power and experience, was cooperating nicely with that, and while Mezzo was at it, he'd nick and wound Sage for every life he'd ended here today...

And then one of Mezzo's strikes redirected Sage off balance, and Mezzo surged in, used a swordmaster skill, and then spun his sword through Sage's midsection, and half of Sage's body fell, while the other half was thrown

upward.

Mezzo stepped backward, and saw Sage's two halves separating, the Absolute killing blow his.

But then he heard something, and blinked in surprise as spinal chords leapt upward from the waist and downward from the body to connect to one another. The spinal column extended and rejoined, muscle tissues rejoined and blood that had been spraying everywhere suddenly stopped and surged backward. And then Mezzo realized what had happened even as he saw Sage's sword descend, and with a thundering crunch, Mezzo suddenly found his self skewered through the cut and pinned to the ground.

He sheathed the sword! He sheathed the sword... Mezzo thought.

"Indeed I did." Sage said, and lifted his pommel and it detached from the crystalline blade, leaving the blade in Mezzo's body.

Mezzo held the wound that was keeping him pinned to the ground. The technique of '*Sheathing the sword*' was to take your enemy's weapon into yourself in order to land a fatal blow. Usually it meant that both would die...

"Ending you is like shattering a thousand year old stain glass window." Sage commented, and Mezzo saw his eyes flicker between red and green again before yet again staying red. "But I must end all who stand in my way of justice. Understand that you are laying here not because I defeated you... but because your own headmistress abandoned you. Sadly... that is a gut wound, so I don't envy you, Mezzo."

Sage then turned and retracted his blade, and yet again stepped toward the Pinnacle Tower. This time he entered unhindered, and began to descend the spiraling walkway to Meniko's inner sanctum.

Chapter Sixteen: Checkmate

Meniko was weeping as she finished her transformation and summoned suitable combat clothing and began to forge a weapon... a glittering white battle staff. She'd felt all her students as they fell, and while she was trying to change herself, she was helpless to help them. Guvno had sealed her inside the chamber, and with the doors closed, a sacred ward against evil formed out of the entire domed chamber of Meniko's inner sanctum. Guvno, thinking to protect his mistress had locked her inside and swallowed the key.

As Sage stepped toward the doors and lifted a hand to feel the ward, Guvno rushed in to assault him, carrying nothing but a broom, but Sage simply lowered a hand and flicked him away, sending him crashing over his reception desk and tumbling out of sight.

"He's here, headmistress." A voice said, and suddenly Dallas appeared as a hologram. His physical self had left hours ago.

Meniko looked up at his image and composed herself.

"Let me see him." She said. "I want to see the face of the man who hurt all my babies."

Dallas bowed, and a holoscreen appeared, the largest possible, showing Lord Sage's impressively armored form as he tapped the now impervious wood of the door.

Meniko rose and faced the image, even as Sage lifted a hand, and began to trace a reddish-orange line in the wood. His other hand then lifted and began to trace another line, ever so slowly. To Meniko, it was like fingernails on chalkboard in her mind as he interfered with the ward, and she grit her teeth as Sage's fingers continued in their track of etching something.

"W-what is he doing?" she asked.

"Preparing to assault you, headmistress. That is a counter ward. It will take a short while for him to trace it."

"Is there any chance of getting the Nemesis here?" Meniko asked.

"Error: Insufficient permissions. Access to reprioritize Nemesis denied." Dallas said immediately.

"That's what I thought you'd say."

"The Nemesis is coming regardless, Headmistress."

"But..."

"By order of Journeyman Master Mayia Gallant, Lord Sage Preypacer has been declared insane and has been removed from his position as Headmaster of the Mystic League of the Shadow Arts. Help is coming, headmistress. We merely need to find a way through Lord Sage's barrier... which has created a flowing wall of moving electrified water beneath the cyclone. We are attempting to burrow now beneath the sea floor."

"We?" she blinked.

"I am coming too... as is Proteus. This will mark the first time in many decades since we've acted against our master, headmistress. Please defeat him... we beg of you not to kill him if it comes to him being under your mercy."

"It will be... difficult... to let him live after what he's done, Dallas." Meniko said.

Dallas closed his eyes and lowered his head, and Meniko saw holographic tears fall from his eyes. "We understand."

His voice trembled. Dallas looked to Sage as he continued to etch the lines.

"He will gain entry before we get here, headmistress. Please last."

And he disappeared.

Meniko took her newly formed battle staff and laid it across her shoulders, and stared at the door... and waited...

The Glyph was finished, attaching to the points of the doorway, with the last line etched, Sage reached out and touched the grand glyph, and it immediately began to eat its way through the doorway, exploding inward with a burst of smoke while the seal that protected Meniko inside her chamber suddenly shattered. The smoke cleared, and Mother Meniko and Lord Sage finally stood facing each other at long last.

"Avon calling." Sage mused with a smile as he stood with his wings folded about him like a cloak.

And then he laid eyes on Meniko. She was in a humanoid form, heavily armored, her wrists folded over a battle staff slung across her shoulders.

She was of like height with him, built for mobility while still retaining the impeccable strength of her full dragoness form. Her glittering feathers had hardened tight against her body, creating a realm of overlapping, chain mail-like armor from head to toe of glittering red.

She looked like some battle magus of old.

Her breasts heaved as she lifted her head toward Sage, her fine blue eyes focusing upon the Shadow Beast, getting a good look at him.

The madness in his eyes was absolute. This was not the young immortal that she knew.

"Sage... you've done a great deal of evil here today." Meniko said, and then lowered her staff from off her shoulders and tapped it onto the cobbles as she uncoiled into a defensive stance.

Her new form was like her bird maiden form, only far larger, just over twice its last size. She'd designed it in order to counteract the armsmaster she was about to face, and she was largely humanoid with her wings and tail hanging from her back and shapely backside while she wore little more than a one-piece armored bodysuit.

"MY evil?" Sage asked, and then began to laugh. "Don't make me laugh... Meniko. I simply disposed of the individuals guilty of aiding and abetting a baleful sinner like yourself. Their suffering could've been avoided if you merely left your little hidey hole here and faced me. Everything that I've done was because you brainwashed several hundred individuals, and convinced a military to stop me just to save your oily hide you snake."

"That is no excuse for murder!" Meniko called out to him, pointing a scaled finger at him like a knife.

"Murder... well let's start with that Meniko.

"One case of actual murder, followed by over thirty cases of aiding and abetting."

"What?" Meniko remarked disbelievingly. How could he possibly be placing any act of murder on her?

"The guardian in whom you replaced. Did he threaten you in any way?" Sage asked.

"No. He was a ruthless despot who enslaved the people of this world and caused untold natural disasters to satisfy his own whim." Meniko responded, truly annoyed.

"And yet he did not threaten you directly. He was doing his job. He could've been culling the herd, and so you blatantly stalked, attacked and murdered him. A crime in which, by your own edict, made you unfit to remain on the then present location of the Mystic League, and rebuilt your home on this island, *taking* by theft the right of guardianship of this planet from its rightful owner."

"That's not the way it happened!"

"Really? That's how the records state it. That is why you are on this island, Meniko... and not in the orbiting station. That is why all your students left the station and rebuilt the school here, is it not?"

"Yes it is... but..."

"Murderer." Sage's voice cracked, rumbling the entire chamber. "Thief. Violator."

"I killed him for the greater good!"

"Killing Hawthorne, was for the greater good. He was corrupting the hearts, minds and souls of dozens of innocents, turning them into his own little brood of imps, demons and devils. There are a plethora of organizations in your own universe who celebrated the news of Hawthorne's death and the destruction of the Demon League. I know... I felt it reverberate through the universe when it was reported. He will not be missed. Even your own race merely dismisses the fact that he is dead. They don't care..."

"Liar!"

"Liar?!" Sage turned abruptly on her. "I've never spoken a mistruth in my life, Meniko. Whatever lies that you detect are your own misinterpretations. And that is the second act of hypocrisy you've uttered to me Meniko in so many minutes... but we'll get back to the subject of lies and hypocrisy later. For now... we need to continue onto the rest of your sins."

Meniko opened her mouth to disagree but Sage immediately talked over her.

"Your thirty plus counts of murder by proxy came in two counts: The first was when you allowed Pleeyo to rampage over the Shadow League, the second was when you allowed Siklohn to proceed in his insurrection."

"How can you blame me for those deaths, Sage... I did nothing to..."

"That's right... you did... **NOTHING!**" Sage screamed the last word, his eyes burned redder and there was fire in his mouth as if from a blast furnace as the whole world trembled from his anger.

"Pleeyo's rampage maimed over a hundred students and *murdered* nine others. If not for mine and the Mother Sanari's patience and will in recovering those nine, they would even now still be dead..."

"The injuries were staggering. Though some survived, some of them had their arms and legs ripped out of their sockets and left to bleed to death. Others had ninety percent of their bones crushed and or shattered. Others suffered burns from her spells all over their bodies, and the nine who died suffered extensively before she snuffed their lives out. So traumatic it was that the souls that inhabited those bodies had to be ensnared and forced back. They didn't want to come back.

"All of those counts of mayhem, death, destruction are on your head, Meniko... because you did nothing!"

"I did too!" Meniko trembled, half with rage, half with concern for one of her children.

"Oh... yes... a slap on the wrist and some community service with the Grace League. Mother Sanari placed a more fitting punishment on Pleeyo than you managed to do. Shadow Leaguers still harbor Pleeyo ill will as well as you... for that matter. They felt abandoned by you."

"Abandoned?"

"How else do you think they would react? I did nothing to sway their thoughts... they came up with that all on their own. How else do you think they would feel? Nearly each and every last one of them were rejected by you for one reason or another... because you didn't want to take the time to work with their weaknesses. Well I took them, and I made their weaknesses their strengths. And after you rejected them, you released the bully Pleeyo on them not once... but twice. And you have the *gall* to call yourself their mother.

"You have the power and ability to snatch her up and *make* her do right, but you did... *nothing!* Or is the life and will of one of your favorites worth more than the hundred and nine students of the Shadow League at the time? Who cares about them? They're just living breathing individuals with dreams of their own... what are they other than fodder for one of your own students? Training exercises. If not for Sanari... if not for Sanari sending us the grace of her own students, we would've been far worse off.

"Murder... Meniko... she committed murder. And you did nothing to punish her either. A simple sealing? Community service? And that bullshit Remorse Spell you have on her? Those aren't proper punishments, especially when, deep down, she felt no remorse. But regardless, Pleeyo is paying for her crimes now..."

"Her crimes? What did you *do?!!*" Meniko shrieked.

Sage paused in his pacing and then turned to her and smiled.

"I've not killed her, Meniko... but I gave her a punishment befitting her crimes. She is now experiencing every hurt, every harm and every death through the eyes of those who she inflicted as she herself beats the living daylights out of them. It gets steadily worse and worse, till at long last she experiences the nine deaths she caused, one right after the next, and if she doesn't feel proper remorse for her crimes... then the process starts over.

"By this time she will be in the third repeat of all those crimes."

"You monster! How could you?!"

"BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T!" Sage bellowed, and again the whole of Wave World shook in terror of that demon's voice. "Her pain and her suffering are your... *fault!*"

Meniko gasped... not believing that the man who'd come to them ten years ago was capable of such things.

"And then... let's move onto the next case shall we? Siklohn's insurrection. Apparently, as the magistrate for this area, unless Nyl Dousaka was acting on the Emperor's or a Councilor command... you had the power and authority to override his command. And you knew that... didn't you?"

Sage's eyes burned as he stared at her, growling underneath his breath as his hands flexed, his claws flashing.

Meniko remained silent.

"Is your contempt for me so great, is your desire to see me fail so grand, that you would allow innocents to be harmed because of one spoiled little rich boy?"

"Sage... you do not stand against the Dousaka Clan if you..."

"Weak whore. Again the hypocrisy of you calling yourself a mother to these students raises its ugly head. When adversity arises, you must face it, no matter what, and a proper mother would protect her children no matter the cost. But then we come back to the same forgone conclusion that you don't really care about my students... do you?"

"They didn't pass your exams, so they are worthless. The tree is a blight, the corruption of your world, and the beautiful things I've done to the volcano you consider a heinous act against nature in your mind, and the spiritual power this world enjoys from the tree giving its all to a world who rejects everything else the tree has to offer, even

going so far as stunting its growth... are all reflections of your own greed and malicious actions.

"The tree has the spirit of a child! A child who calls out to you when he is scared, who called out to you when his beloved students who housed themselves inside him were fighting and spilling blood... and when you ignored it, when it was pained from an act from Caliban, punting Mayia into its wood, it had no choice but to protect itself, and it transformed my student."

Meniko's mouth dropped as Sage said this.

"Because... you... did... *nothing*... a couple hundred students and several members of my faculty were severely injured, maimed, brutally injured, or killed. Twenty seven died that day, and their blood is on your hands, Meniko... because once again... you did... *nothing*."

Sage turned abruptly, turning his back on her, and Meniko trembled, loosening herself. She'd been prepared to fight Sage... not have a verbal conflict like this. And what was sickening... was that too much of what he was saying was striking far too close to home.

"Y-you don't understand." Meniko said.

"I understand perfectly Meniko. You are a filthy whore who, despite the fact that you are supposedly 'aware'" Sage raised both hands and made quotation marks with two sheathed fingers of either hand. "Of everything that happens in your school... then that would mean that the half dozen girls who were raped by Rudfuul and his cronies, including Mayia Gallant, would've never happened. Or were you pleasing yourself when a big strong wolf repeatedly brutalized those girls to the point where their subconscious would force them to remember and they'd break out into tears in the middle of classes despite the memory charms Rudfuul placed on them to make them forget? Or do you not care about the young maiden - Tien Mai - A young fox who committed suicide after you rejected her from your school for 'Psychological Problems' after she'd been a student here for four years?"

Sage didn't speak for several long moments. He just let that news seep in.

"The tragedy of that, Meniko, is that you are either a liar, or an abomination for allowing that sort of thing to happen. It's things like that that prompted me to increase the security of the Shadow League to such a high level. To protect *my* children!" and he whirled around, throwing the plates of his feathery metal wings aside to jab a finger at her. "My children, to a large degree, those who come to me, find my embrace... loved me. That is why Siklohn had so few followers. Should he have waited a year, maybe even a few months... his insurrection would've fallen by the wayside..."

"But regardless... once again... you are to blame for all that death and all that destruction.

"And now let's move onto another of your sins. Liar..."

"How dare you speak to me of being a Liar, Sage?! I've never spoken a mistruth to any of my students!"

"Then why has Fatima been sealed from certain memories?" Sage asked through gritted teeth. "Why have you not told Illia that she murdered her sister Cyvel?"

"What would come from informing them of such dastardly pasts?" Meniko demanded, on the verge of tears.

"The truth. Those are a part of them, Meniko. They are memories which shape their unconsciousness, and late at night... the subconscious is all that we have as our minds sleep. And unexpressed feelings make themselves known to us. That is why you wanted Fatima to come home. It wasn't because of her sister ultimately helping Fatima keep her anger in check, it's because so far away from you... you cannot keep her seals solid. You can feel her breaking free..."

"That's not it at all."

"More lies? Pity. I've been in her mind, Meniko. I saw the slaving beast she can become if untreated. And if you thought the Black Beast is bad... hole-ley... shit!

"And Illia. When she and I fought in the tournament, when I used my Terror Cry on her, when she was forced to witness everything and was broken by it... that wouldn't've had to happen, Meniko... if only you'd dealt with the broken Psyche. Their pain... is your fault.

"Loving mother... bullshit. No wonder you have so many orphans under your wing. You feed them all lies, whatever it is that they want to hear, so that they will be willing to do anything for you, filling them with false hopes and false dreams, corrupting their lives. Such heinous sins cannot go unpunished." Sage hissed through his teeth.

"Shut up..." Meniko said quietly. "How dare you make such assumptions?"

Sage snickered. "Assumptions based on truth are called facts, Meniko. You can't even fess up to your own sins. How pitiful.

"Now let's see... we've dealt with murder, chaos, mayhem, hypocrisy and lies... what am I missing... ah yes... oath breaking." Sage turned to look slyly at her. "This one ties in with your lies too..."

"Oath breaking?! What oath did I break?"

"When I came here, ten years ago... I challenged the champion of this universe, who was also a champion of this school, Rae Iksaki. The absolute decree by Emperor Jaikard was that since both of us couldn't win, we instead both lost. I created a school, which I did, I built facilities, hired faculty, brought on students, taught them as I promised, whereas I was to have access to all the knowledge of this universe that I wanted.

"Strange, that when I attend your library, that I find the words on the page jumbling to where I cannot read them, or where facts I know to be true are blatantly written falsely. For a time, I agonized that your library was incomplete, and wondered where all the promised knowledge that generated Rae Iksaki was. And then Rae herself told me. You altered your own library whenever it was my eyes that looked at the books, tomes and scrolls."

"I don't deny it. That is my library. You have no right..."

"I had every right! By Right of Challenge, I had every right to the access to those books. True, they were your books, and I was courteous enough to study in your library, during its open times, following the status of students. Only to be lied to. To have my trust broken, my rights denied. I nonetheless kept my library open for all to see, to which you access constantly, I saw.

"And when I was agonizing that I wasn't learning what I sought, Rae, the purest star in this universe, was kind enough to sneak books from your library and teach me herself. Mother of two children, her husband gone all the time... heavy teaching schedule... you don't deserve her love you bitch.

"For these crimes, I deem you a liar. For these crimes I deem you a betrayer. For these crimes I deem you defiler. For these crimes, Meniko... I will punish you until you are dead..."

Sage unfurled his wings, and Meniko lifted her hand to take his soul and drag it from his body, but then she saw seven shapes of himself move out of the way as if they were all dodging, and Sage looked at her incredulously.

"What was that?" Sage laughed, and then his laughter became maniacal. "You sacrifice all your students and faculty to stop me, you spend all this time preparing, and a simple soul stealing technique is all that you were able to come up with? Go ahead... do it again. Come on... I dare ya!"

Meniko grit her teeth and cast again, holding her staff at her side as the rush of spectral claws rose through Sage's body in an attempt to take his soul and entrap it, but again the seven pieces of his soul where there should only be

one, all dodged out of the way. Sage laughed at her again, and folding his tail and wings tightly against his back, the pylons and back covers lowering about the ridge of spines down his back, he began to step forward.

"You surmise to know so much about me, but forget I am a Demon Slayer..." Sage smiled. "I've been the target of such spells far greater than that, Meniko... from far greater than you. But perhaps it's a teaching lesson you seek. Here... this is how that spell really works."

And Sage raised his five fingered claws upward, and Meniko felt a five fingered claw of shadowy black rise from the ground and slide rakingly through her body, tearing a scream from her body as the demonic claws slid through her, and she sagged to her knees.

"It won't... matter... if your demented logic leads you to kill me, Sage. You should know that Rae will stop you."

Sage paused in his approaching step and chuckled evilly.

"So... faithful you are that your students will sacrifice themselves for you. A word to the wise, Meniko, wisdom for the condemned, so enjoy it while it lasts, one does not assault the King without taking away all opposition first. Your generals, your officers, your champions, your defenses have all been removed from the playing field.

"Rae now exists inside a prison of my own making... absolutely powerless, and without her power she is mortal now as well. But regardless, even if she were here, at the peak of her power, and stood now in front of me to blindly protect you... know now that I have grown as far beyond her as she has grown beyond you. She is like a star versus the bright center of the universe in comparison to me, and I am still growing."

"Fatima..." Meniko gasped, forcing herself to her feet.

"Locked within a prison of her own body. She moves too much in any direction and her body crushes itself, implodes her heart, explodes her energy reserves, and you can say goodbye to Wave World and everyone on it."

"Egis." Meniko gasped, tears gathering in her eyes.

"Currently experiencing the fallacy she was under that just because she was a Casid, and I wasn't, that she had power over me. All medical practitioners felt more than free to point out that her pressure points and puncture points were receded, untouchable, pointed out that my art was useless. In her case, it was a genetic trait, in my case, it is a learned trait to recede my pressure points, more proof that humankind is superior to all others simply because of our ability to adapt. So to prove to her of her fallacy, I touched her pressure points... by passing my fingers through her flesh. She will die within twelve hours of severe bleeding unless treated... that is of course if she doesn't freeze to death first from me lowering her core body temperature. Shadow Magic has a particular trait in the fact that it disrupts an individual's ability to regenerate, so it'll be interesting to see which case she dies from first."

"Illia." Meniko cried harder, but her resolve stiffened.

"She is experiencing an identical experience that I laid upon her during our fight in the tournament, but this time with the addition of severe head trauma. She'll die of an aneurism and or cerebral blood clot in fourteen hours unless treated."

"Champion."

"Please... Champion was no match for me even before my change. Do you think he would've lasted three seconds against me now? As a matter of fact, he lasted point-three-one-three seconds against me as I simply swatted him away. Severe chest fracture. He'll suffocate to death unless treated within thirty six hours.

"And because you seem to be grasping at straws... allow me to start alleviating some of your other concerns." Sage began to walk around her.

"Warmaster Nyl Dousaka and his divisions of vaunted Siegetroopers and Stormtroopers: his legion vast broken and

lying scattered around him while he himself lies face down in the mud surrounded by the tormented dead, paralyzed from the neck down. His condition is possibly repairable, but I doubt it... severe damage to the spinal column after all can only be repaired so far by this universe's backwater medical technology.

"Genohn: he is now my unwilling servant. I took such pleasure tearing those damned ludicrous wings off his head before I placed him inside the form of a Shadow Servant... a Demon Lore that, you will be surprised to learn, I received from Hawthorne. You know Hawthorne loved you, didn't you?" Meniko snapped her head to him. "Oh yes... would've sacrificed everything for you should you ask of it. I know this because he resides in me now... while I slowly drain him of his life force. I already have all his knowledge and as soon as his life force is gone... he will be totally dead. Heh... he loved fucking you solidly during that time with the pink fog. Time of his life that was to make you squeal like a stuck pig!

"But let's move on.

"Mezzo... the school deputy, now currently skewered to the ground by one of my blades. Gut wound... so terrible. He'll die very slowly within seventy two hours.

"Aauie..."

"No!" Meniko whispered.

"Yes! A powerful psychic you and Aauie may be... so close the two of you were for so many years, sharing the same mind... but a psychic mind is nothing to an assassin who kills psychics. It's the whole sense your assassin before he strikes bit that made them so untouchable on Earth for many centuries. Till a Master Ninja learned to blank his mind... becoming invisible to the senses of a Psionic. This skill has slowly evolved till someone such as myself can completely remove ourselves from the Ether... We become invisible, nothing more than a black shadow that you can see through, and won't notice unless you're looking straight at us when you sense us. With nothing for her mind to latch onto, she was easy to overpower physically. Her role in helping Siklohn earned her a fitting punishment from me. I opened her mind to the voices." Sage grinned, and Meniko gasped.

"But above all... my favorite combatant must be Mau. I know, I know what you're thinking... why the fuck would he come here and help a bitch like you?" Sage laughed. "But he did... I left him skewered to your wall with my horn. Perhaps later I'll go outside and skull fuck him before I slit his throat and let him bleed to death for harboring Ruudful. No... better yet... I'll go find Rudfuul, gut him right before Mau's eyes... and *then* slice his throat open after I skull fuck him.

"The point of all this... Meniko... is that no one is coming to save you. Your communications have been knocked out, and the wonderful seal that you had in place to keep me from teleporting here has been reinforced by a seal of my own. You can't even drop the planetary ward for others to teleport in. And though the ward will be dropped when you die... I will be long gone to exact other justice on the deserving before anyone comes. By that time I will have consumed your heart, and your head will reside on a pig pole outside the ruins of this school as an example to all who would pervert truth for their own gains, and the bodies of the fallen piled around it, will all be a testament to the penalty of those who support such ideals."

Meniko tightened her jaw and blinked away the tears, lifting her staff.

"Draw your sword, Sage." She said at long last.

"Oh no..." he said, and flexed his claws. "I will not have the universe unjustly deem me as taking you down with every advantage in the world. So then I will fight you using only my claws and natural weapons, Meniko. Only when I have beaten you down shall you see my sword.

"You will know fear. You will know pain... and then you will die."

Meniko set herself and then charged. She would not live through this lest she used every last power she had, and so she attacked with fervor... for everyone in whom Sage had fought and either maimed or killed... she had to win!

Her staff charged as she spun and attacked, and Sage defended, those thick forearm shields absorbing the white hot fire that splashed off her staff against him, hissing at his armored body before she spun, struck his other arm, and then jabbed him with the tip of the staff it erupted with a hissing fire that cracked his armor. But he didn't move backward as she expected, instead she slid forward as his body remained immovable, and as she slid forward, he swung with a lazy punch and turned his arm so that the dorsal blade on his arm slid painfully against her face, burning her with acid.

The force of the blow pushed her downward but she caught her balance and swung again, Sage backing away, swinging backward, ducking, dodging, and avoiding the attacks. Meniko's eyes watched him, learning his combat art that literally put him off balance before he recovered at the last minute as he avoided or blocked her blows.

Unbeknownst to Sage, Meniko had a photographic memory for combat styles, and the longer they fought the more of his style that she learned, and as they fought, she tried for openings and struck! She turned Sage, splashing more of the white fire all over his body, the fire burning at him, before she swung for his head, hitting him and knocking him sideways.

"This is for Rae!" she cried, and seared his side. "This is for Fatima!" and cracked his knee. "This is for Illia!" Each name came with a blow. Equis, Champion, Genohn and so on, until... "This is for Hawthorne!" she cried, and the next blow sent Sage to one knee with the ferocity of it. "And this... is for me!" she growled, and swung.

But Sage suddenly rose and trapped the staff at his side, holding onto the white hot rod with both hands and placing his face directly in hers as she tried to pull her staff back. It didn't even budge a micron.

"The number one rule of winning a conflict... is placing your opponent into a false sense of security." Sage growled, and then head butted her.

The force of the blow knocked her backward, and she staggered, stunned, before Sage threw the staff back into her hands, and just like that, her supposed advantage was gone. Her strikes and blows landed with increasingly less regularity, till they didn't even land at all, whereas Sage was now striking back. He had wicked blades on his arms and legs that went ethereal and cut through her in his chain movements... the slashing blades cutting at her soul and leaving rends against her flesh that sheered off realms of scale. He said nothing else, and simply beat her, humiliated her, her occasional attack and counter attack being blocked or slapped away. The only light that shone in his eyes was anger... and hate...

He stripped her of her clothing, forcing her to fight naked, and once he'd torn her one piece off, he grabbed her by the throat, lifted her off the ground, and full knuckle punched her in the face to blacken her eye.

He stood over her as she used her staff for support, rising up on it. It felt like he was in her head, reading her movements as he countered them so well. When she shifted martial forms he shifted half a second later to something that countered it, was superior.

He stood there, his claws flashing open as he growled at her, waiting for her to get up, and with her one eye swelling, she saw several things about her opponent all at once. The first... was that he wasn't even winded. The second... that despite her fire had splashed against him... he didn't even seem hurt any more. The last was how quickly he modified his combat style... it was so vast!

The truth of that last bit was that like Meniko... Sage also had the ability to learn the fighting style of an opponent. Even when he fought Rae, and Illia, and Equis... they got their first blows in and he merely defended, but in a short while he began to counterattack, and then attack, and once he had you like that... victory was almost always assured.

What angered her the most was also the fact that he was merely toying with her, holding back the brunt of his power simply to hurt her and humiliate her.

She got to her feet, and activated a Master Art... a combat move that was an all out attack, and caused brutal damage to whoever received it. The first several hits struck, cracking his armor in places, but then he collapsed, caught himself and then rose suddenly, grasped her hands as she held her staff, and stopped her attack.

He growled at her, and she found his strength to be unstoppable as he forced her to lower the staff. She'd hurt him... hurt him badly, and that'd pissed him off. With a demonic growl, his eyes wide with rage, his hands clenched, his claws digging painfully into the backs of her hands as he crushed her fingers in his grip, and as he did that, he snapped the battle staff in half with an explosion of fire.

Sage took the pieces of the staff, biting his lower lip just inside his mandibles and threw the pieces away as he walked toward her as she staggered back. She kicked at him, was blocked, kicked at him again as her broken hands hung at her side, and this time he caught her leg and blocked her strike with his elbow down on her knee and then rolled his arm and extended his blade to sheer off a realm of her fiery red scales.

She cried out in pain, and then Sage pushed her back, sending her hopping on one leg, and setting himself, he assaulted her. He tore her scales off, sheered her mane of fine plumage, sliced at her hide and broke bones all in a matter of seconds. She felt the pain of his hundred hand technique, blasting at her body and scraping at her body with his claws, hammered at her body with his fists, crying out himself as he brutalized her, and with one Absolute blow sent her tumbling across the half mile wide floor to come skidding to a halt over a hundred yards away.

She could barely move, and she could only lift her head, and focus with one eye, and as she righted herself as he approached, the damage she'd caused with her Master Art healing itself rapidly on his body to give off his pristine armored complexion again. She focused on him, inhaled, ignored the pain of her cracked ribs, and then exhaled a blast of fiery plasma that forced him to defend against. He was engulfed in the same fire that she possessed that could melt stone and metal into slag, blasting at his sides, his head and body, the beam so bright that it left motes of purple on the vision to stare at it too long.

The beam stopped and she coughed, proud of herself at the steam as she laughed, and tried to right herself. But then she saw the shadow in the cloud, and ever so slowly Sage's form appeared, his mane growing back as he brushed at the black armor against his body with one hand.

She blinked, and opened her mouth again, breathing another blast on him, and he surged forward through the breath weapon, and suddenly he jabbed her neck and she was forced to swallow her own fire. She looked up at him, opening her mouth to try again, but she only hurt herself in trying to breathe her fire out.

"Pitiful." He said quietly. "...And against a dragon slayer, absolutely useless. The jab I just struck you with will paralyze your glands needed to breathe fire for hours, and the force of that fire? Abysmal... and you dare call your species greater than dragons? Allow me to show you the power that your species denies itself."

Sage lifted his head as his back spread, and twin pylons rose and immediately began crackling with lightning. Vents in his neck flared open and blasted hot steam out as that lightning coursed up his neck, and opening his mouth, spreading his mandibles wide, he lowered his head and exhaled a beam of crackling atomic fire that caught Meniko full on in the blast, but mixed in it was the baleful breath of Hell Fire.

Meniko couldn't even hear herself scream as the fire hit her, her flesh crisping and flaking from the atomic fire, the lightning electrocuting, forcing her heart and lungs to pause repeatedly, and the baleful hellfire at its core screamed as claws tore at her, tearing her scales off, ripping at her as she was blasted back.

The fire lasted only three seconds before Sage stopped it, his neck flaps closing and his back closing in on itself again and he walked quietly toward her while steam rose from her ruined body, most of her scales torn off her body while she bled through cracking, seared flesh and hide.

"That is called the Omega Flare. Only a rare few dragons in existence possess it. You experienced level one of that weapon. Level two would've incinerated you."

Sage splayed one hand, and Meniko saw through her one good eye as his flesh and bone began to coalesce in a particular direction, and she watched his bio blade form, only this time, it was much, much larger than before. A blade formed from its end, extending a great distance and solidifying into a perfect crystal as he came to stand over her.

And now you die.

And in an expert execution form, he held his stance and lifted his blade, turning the point toward her heart, and the blade fell.

Chapter Seventeen: Angels and Devils

The sword stopped as something snapped and a flurry of white appeared.

"No!" a feminine voice called and Sage staggered backward.

"S-Sanari." He breathed, and Meniko exhaled. She wanted to cry out to her teacher, but she couldn't find the voice to do so with the jab Sage had done to her throat. "Sanari... get out of the way." He breathed in a panic, gesturing with his hand.

"I won't!" she cried out to him, her hands spread wide as she floated like a guardian angel to ward Sage off. "I have failed her in the past, I will not fail her now. You may not have this life, Sage."

"Sanari... *please* get out of the way! I don't want to hurt you!"

"If you want to kill her... then you'll have to kill me too!"

Sage straightened and stared at her. "So be it." He said, and again took his execution stance, brought the sword up and again the sword fell, but again it stopped. This time the blade stopped directly before cleaving Sanari in half, and she exhaled a gasp as both hers and Meniko's eyes rose to what had stopped it, and the surprise of what did... shocked them both:

Sage's own left hand.

"No!" Sage said, his voice changed... light, whimsical... like it used to be. "I won't let you kill her!" the voice said and Sage turned to his side, drawing the sword away. "Damn you, you fucking bastard... you weak ass... she is all that stands between you and redemption! Kill her!" the deep gravely voice said. "No! You won't make me!" the softer voice grit out. "I... will not... let you!"

Sage began to fight with himself over control of the sword, the right hand and the left hand trying to gain control of the weapon, and when he opened his eyes, they were likewise changed... the left eye green, the right eye red.

Left hand of the Creator... Right hand of the Devil, Sanari thought, remembering how Sage had often referred to himself in the past. *He meant it literally!*

As Sage wrestled with himself, Sanari landed from where she floated in the air and tried to comfort Meniko's seventeen foot form, trying to soothe her.

"W-what's happening?" Meniko choked.

"I-I don't know." Sanari replied. "Focus on healing, Meniko... have faith that Sage will resolve this."

"Teacher... the first thing you just asked I can do... but the latter will be very, very difficult to do."

"I know. It's difficult for me. Just have faith. All will be well... you'll see."

Sage continued to wrestle, throwing himself off balance, his form growing hazy as the light and the shadow around him seemed to move in separate directions. And with a dual scream of rage, two forms leapt off of him, and a perfectly blank-white, soulless shell collapsed to its knees and two forms stepped away from the body. One was utterly black trimmed in red with red eyes, hulking, physically massive, while the other was a pristine white with blue, slender and athletic.

One was demonic, the other... angelic.

"You damnable bastard." The demon that had sprung from Sage said. "Why can't you just stay put and defeated?!"

The demon wielded a curving blade that was narrow near the hilt and thick at the end like a scimitar, the thing blazing with hellfire. His voice was deep and gravely, rumbling as if boulders were being churned around in a rock tumbler inside him.

"One could say the same for you." The angelic Sage said, and stepped sideways till he was standing before Sanari, protecting her. "But regardless... I've stood by far too long in your shadow. I've so kindly shared the same body with you, I've bent over backward and allowed you to do far more than you should've, and to thank me for my kindness, you imprisoned me, and began to hurt and maim innocent people as well as my friends. Our life in this universe has been ten times harder because of you. And now that we're out, I intend to stop your damnable rampage and..."

"Bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch." The demon said, lifting a hand and making talking motions with his fingers. "Are you always so long-winded? Just get to the damn point you monologuing bastard!"

"I will not let you harm her..." The angel said, and Sanari and Meniko both blinked as this angel guarded them. "And you... my old companion... can no longer be trusted to run loose in our body's mind. I have no choice now... I must destroy you."

"Over a woman?" the demon pointed at Sanari. "Look at her! She talks over you. She demeans you in front of other people..."

"For my benefit." The angel said.

The demon laughed. "She humiliates you! She talks to you like you were a child. Even you hate that. How can you stand such things?"

"Because I love her!" the Angel called out defensively, and Sanari gasped, her eyes going wide. "And you tried to hurt her..."

"Love her? That? We should just hump her and take what we want from her and..." and the angel moved so fast that the demon barely had enough time to raise his own sword, as the long narrow blade that the angel used as his own bioblade clashed with the demon's blade with a burst of lightning and fire.

"Shut up! You will not insult her... you will not harm her... and in the Creator's name, I will personally punish you for all that you've done in Sage's name."

"You stupid fool... hurt me, and you hurt yourself. Kill me... and you kill both of us."

And the angel pushed forward... his feathered wings flaring. "So... be it!"

Dallas, Prot and the nine Nemesis were gods of mechanized war. Dallas himself had transformed into an ultra-heavy armored thing of impossibly numerous armor, arms, armaments and technomancer power. In this form, only Aysyx of the Dragon Council could be called greater amongst living machines that he was presently aware of, but the multiverse was great, and there was a *wide* margin between him and Aysyx.

Prot was a close second, and the nine Nemesis a close third.

After burrowing underneath the water to get beneath the barrier, they'd all rocketed out of the water and flew to the Mystic League, only to find it in smoking ruins. Bodies were everywhere.

"I... I didn't want to believe when you told me, brother." Prot said, in his own armored form as he looked down around him.

Dallas swallowed.

"Keep your head. Our father isn't what he was anymore. His demon has gotten loose, and we must stop him at all costs or the whole of this universe and others will pay the price. Nemesis, deactivate all limiters."

<<Compliance>>

The Nemesis was all semi-sentient drones that shared a hive mentality directly with Dallas. They weren't apart of his consciousness, but instead all took orders from him. In maturity, the Nemesis all had minds of that of young children programmed for war.

Behind Dallas, they all unfolded, spreading second pairs of arms, swelling with bio-musculature as their overdrives kicked in, their magical libraries coming online, and their weapons of war activating. One after the next, the party landed right at the front gate of the ruined Pinnacle Tower and rushed inside, down the ramp, entered Meniko's chamber and stopped.

The sight they were all faced with was, in a word, confusing.

<<Error: Which target is identified as Lord Sage?>> Nemesis Zero-One stated... the defunct prototype and leader of the group asked as he looked at Sage's inert form and then the two other versions of him fighting each other.

"Unknown." Dallas replied. "Stand by for further instructions." He said, and tilted his head one direction as a shoulder guard folded up and away, and then in the other direction to unfold the other shoulder guard before his helmet removed itself from about his face.

"Dallas... what's going on?" Prot asked.

"I have no idea... this has... I've never even recorded anything remotely like this happening before. Anywhere!"

"Father is... fighting himself?"

"I think so. And I believe... if we want our father back, Prot... then perhaps we should hope for the good side to win..."

Prot paused...

"Which one is that good Sage?"

Meniko watched as she slowly healed herself, with extreme difficulty while the two Sages - one of darkness, the other of light - fought one another. Sanari rushed to the eighteen foot discarded body to hold him where he knelt as his eyes looked blankly into nothing. He was breathing, she found a soft spot on his neck and felt a heart beating, but his mind and his soul were gone.

Slowly... she began to understand what had happened...

Dallas had said that when Sage witnessed his first mate die, murdered before his very eyes, that he went insane. What if... what if his soul broke then? If it had, and his light side recessed in grief and his dark side sought vengeance, then a sort of schizophrenia would form, but instead of multiple personalities being formed in his head to deal with trauma, it formed in his heart and his soul. The soul exists in the mind, and if the soul split, then so too would the mind.

It explained his nightmares, his suddenly flaring temperament and its vast extremes, his occasional fits of arrogance... It explained so much about him. It also explained that, in the ultimate conflict, that with his soul and minds split, that if they repulsed each other enough, that they would too separate in body.

"Mistress Sanari..." a voice said, and she turned and found her eyes widening in surprise as she saw Dallas's head atop a massive war machine more elaborate than even a heavy mech. The technology radiating from him was greater than anything she'd ever felt from someone. "Let us help you." He said.

"I won't leave him." Sanari said.

"Neither will we. Prot..." and another war machine lowered itself, and together the two massive bio-mechanical entities known as Daedalus and Proteus moved their master and father out of the battle fray, while the nine Nemeses formed a defensive ring around them. Sage's husk was nothing but dead weight as they laid him down, and Sanari once again stayed by his head, petting his mane of his massive head while a Nemesis and Prot bent to aide in Meniko's healing.

Sanari then lifted her head and acted as a witness to this bizarre fight.

"Give it up. I'm stronger! I've always been stronger! You have no hope of... *beating me!*" and the demon swung his fiery sword, and the lightning clad sword sailed out of the angel's hands, but without breaking stride, the angel launched forward into a chain movement of strikes kicks and punches that knocked the devil down, and running backward, spinning, sliding against the ground, the angel retrieved his sword and righted himself even as the devil rose, and in less than a second, they were both clashing swords again.

"But I'm smarter, faster, and more skillful! You never learned, brute force is nothing without those."

The two traded places, their swords still clashing, fizzing with fire and lightning, before they both did a disarming move and disarmed each other, and as their swords went flying, they grappled with one another, a close-in attack of locks, counter locks, kicks, punches and jabs, in such a speed and flurry that it was like a tornado of movement between the two of them wrought with fire and lightning, till each also did a earth-shattering punch to one another and sent each other back.

It was then that Sanari felt her lord tremble, and then exhale a gasp that spat up blood, and as she passed her hand over his body, she watched as his armor cracked and broke as the two halves battled each other. She gasped and moaned in alarm as whenever either of them damaged the other, it was the body that felt it.

She wanted to cry out for them to stop, and tears flowed from her eyes as she stuck with the body, and she prayed, looking for divine help before he killed himself.

"Unchangeable, immutable..." The angel said then as they paused, either breathing heavily the more the body got damaged. "You never change. You are always the corrupting and damning half."

"And you're the damned prude! I mean... how the hell can you do this to us?! We haven't even gotten *laid* in forty years because of you! You'll never change! You should've taken Rae when she presented herself to you and thrashed that fool Makahn. What fucking sacrilege. What kind of a man is he for leaving such a beautiful piece of ass like that all by herself?!"

"Stop... talking about her like that!"

"Well no worries about that. She's ours now anyways. I say we don't even send her family to her. Let Fatima blow up, kill Makahn, send her kids to an orphanage and bang the shit outta..."

Angel moved so fast that it defied every law of physics, and when he struck Demon, Sage's head jerked to one side in Sanari's hands with a spray of spit and blood and a tooth or two, and Demon sailed clear across the half mile distance of the chamber between them and the wall while Angel repeatedly beat him in every way that he could land a punch all the way there. Demon crashed against the far wall, leaving a massive radial crack several hundred feet across, segments of stone and concrete falling in with landslides of dirt collapsing into the chamber as he struck.

Angel then grabbed his head and repeatedly kneed him in the face, and the sickening cracks Sanari heard as her love suffered for their actions shoved his maw back before Angel threw Demon to the ground, kneed him in the back, causing Sage to spasm, and took hold of his horns.

"That little comment, Demon... will not stand." Angel said, and proceeded to turn Demon's neck, hauling him backward. Sage's body arched painfully as his head turned. "I cannot... let you harm my friends. Not Sanari... not Rae... not anyone ever again. And if even I cannot control you... then so be it."

And Angel began to turn the head, and Sanari began to weep and hug her lord as she heard his vertebrae cracking as his head turned to the point of looking over his shoulder.

"Stop! We'll both die!" Demon cried.

"Then we'll die. You arrogant bastard! They were our friends, and you hurt them. They are the women we love, and you hurt them, they are the people we respect, and you hurt them. Die! Die and be done with you Demon. I will no longer share the same body with such despicable evil."

Angel turned Demon's head more as Demon clawed at Angel's hand, and Sage's hands peeled open, revealing bare hide, then clawed open to bleed.

"N-no! STOP! Please! Mercy!"

"Coward. You are the reason why Rae escaped from us. You are the reason we waited so much to approach Sanari. You are why my passion and love was denied. You are the reason Ariel is now DEAD! Despicable vermin..."

"No! Angel! I... I surrender! I... I'll merge with you!"

Angel stopped, his muscles still straining as he held the head... pausing. "Not this time. I remember your deals... the last time you escaped and you surrendered you didn't give yourself, we didn't merge... you stopped in the last moment."

"I-I'll do it this time! I promise!"

"THEN SWEAR! An OATH! A magically binding contract or else die! You will merge with me, once and for all! No more twain. We will be one, and we will be whole!"

Demon paused.

"Swear it!" Angel commanded and turned the head till Sanari heard a minute crack, and blood trickled from Sage's mouth.

"All right... ALL RIGHT!" and Demon said something inaudible.

"So they can hear you! I will have living witnesses, Demon..."

"I... do solemnly swear... the abolition of my existence, and give myself... to my other half..."

"To your better half! I will not have you having dominance in this union." Angel growled.

"...T-to my better half... now and forever."

And then both Demon and Angel shattered, their motes of black and white rising and reassembling, starting at the feet and then slowly rising, forming legs, waist, body, arms, head, wings and tail from the bottom upward...

And the witnesses of all this saw the reformed soul of Sage Preypacer, a shining white thing, speckled with black motes. It was a glimpse of the bright and beautiful center of all things as he stepped forward to where everyone

gathered. Prot and Dallas moved out of his way as he knelt before Sanari, and palmed her face, and the warmth in his hand filled her soul to the brim, touching that part of her that was Ariel. Sage then turned to Meniko, his face pained as he bowed himself deeply over one knee to say that he was sorry.

He then rose, and gestured, and his body rose from out of Sanari's grasp, and turning, he opened his arms and the body slid around him, and once the soul was completely engulfed, there was a snap and all color suddenly flooded into place. When he opened his eyes, his eyes were green, and he staggered forward. Immediately, his breathing became labored, and he teetered a bit on his feet as he stood there.

"Master?" Dallas prompted. "Father?"

"Dallas." Sage said, waving him off, as the massive war machine moved closer to support his larger creator. "Please... find me an officer among the Aphkei soldiers outside. Quickly." He breathed.

Dallas spent no time in moving as quickly as he could, and when he returned, he had an officer, one of the few survivors left, heavily bandaged, who Dallas brought to Sage and held in his hands.

"I've brought one master." Dallas said, and Sage opened his eyes again.

"Good... very good." He whispered. "What's your name?" Sage smiled.

"Lieutenant Cabol." The officer said.

"Lieutenant Cabol." Sage smiled. "I... Lord Sage Preypacer, do hereby... *surrender*... to the Aphkei Imperium for my sins and crimes against your state."

And Sage's eyes closed, and he immediately collapsed to his knees, and then forward onto the ground.

<End Book One>

Demon Sage

By: Daniel "Pendragon"

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Warning: This story contains situations of adult sensuality. Reader discretion is advised.

Rated: NC-17

Book Two: Redemption Chapter One: End Game

Noxi's lab was in shambles. Half of it was just a pile of rubble.

Mayia Galant, Verdance and Camby all sat together on the floor while the makeshift communication console blinked as it repeated Camby's message over and over.

click

Mayia didn't pay the sound any attention as the cold, sleeting rain poured steadily outside. Camby was asleep against Verdance. It was quite possible that they were the only ones left alive right now.

My poor master, Mayia thought, holding herself.

k-click

She'd watched her beloved master do *terrible* things. Going against everything he ever stood for, and even she herself was forced to declare him mad. It was like someone reached into her chest and crushed her heart when she was faced to do that...

k-shhh-k-k-click "...c.me in..." a sound issued, and Mayia blinked.

k-k-shhh "... Explore... ian... .ease c-ome in..." another sound from the communications console chirped fuzzily.

Mayia reached over and shook Camby's leg, and she awoke and stared bleary-eyed at her.

"This... Explorer ship... please... in..." a male's voice said now, and the three of them surged to their feet and assaulted the console.

"Hello?! Hello?! Come in! We're here!"

"Signal... boost... pl... stand by..." There was a series of clicks. "Hello? Please come in. This is the STA Explorer Vessel Leviathan. Is anyone there?"

"We read you." Camby said suddenly.

"We've received your distress call. Do you require aid?"

"Yes!" they all said at once, and began to explain the situation.

Lord Sage stirred, trembling at first. Sanari was by his side, pawing at his mane, feeling his strength just by being in his presence. He'd become so impressively powerful, she couldn't believe that he was the same man.

He stirred a little more, and then began lifting himself.

“S-Sage... please...” Sanari said, and he shuddered and then fell forward again onto his hands and toes.

“Father!” Dallas cried and was beside him immediately.

“M-must... repair...” he said, forcing his eyes open, and Sanari was surprised to see a bluish tint in his eyes now.

He began to force himself upright again, slowly, steadily, and after much trouble, managed to get himself unsteadily to his feet. There he stood on his toes, a veritable war machine as his wings drooped from his back and his tail drug along the ground.

And then he took a step forward.

Sanari looked back to Meniko where she was being administered to by a doctor now and by, strangely enough, one of the Nemesis and a few Bioroids. She waved at Sanari to follow Sage, and Sanari started after the Shadow Master as he stepped forward, half tripping over her skirts before she was scooped up in Dallas’s gauntleted hands as he walked after him.

“Father... MASTER!” Dallas said. “You’ve been through a lot... you must rest!”

“No rest... must heal.” Sage said as he stepped forward.

“Yes Sage... you must heal.” Sanari said. “Please, lay down and we...”

“Not me...” he said as he exited Meniko’s chamber, and lifting a hand, Govnov lifted from off the floor, and with a blue glow around Sage’s hand, Govnov gasped and opened his eyes before being placed on his own feet, and he patted at his thick body to look for all the broken ribs he should have right now, and then looked incredulously at Sage.

Sage continued to step up the curving walkway out of Meniko’s chamber, not allowing Dallas to help him, till at long last he emerged from within the tower, and laid eyes on his own handiwork. There were bandaged individuals walking about, doctors, healers, and for a painful moment, they all stared at him, before he lifted his hands, and people screamed. He took a deep breath, but instead of blasts of blazing-hot electro-death blazing from his hands, a wave of whitish-blue erupted from either hand and it washed over the individuals in the field, and he poured all his strength into it, sinking first to one knee, then two as he continued to cast, gasping for air as he sagged, and the screaming strangely began to subside as the many races began to see what was going on.

They were being healed.

Sage rested with his head bowed, hands open, each finger sheathed with powerful claws as he simply breathed. In a very short period of a time, Sage had done a great deal of healing of the damage that he’d already done, Aauie had been released from the voices, and Pleeyo had been released from the pain... They were the first two he managed to get to. Both immediately collapsed upon being released from their psychic tortures. Sanari had climbed up onto his lap, standing on his bulging thighs while she stood there, pushing her head against his chest, and unable to hear a heartbeat though all those layers of armor. But he still breathed.

And then something gleamed against her wrist, and she looked at the thing, saw light shining, and turning, watched as the swirling dome of black clouds and sparks of lightning that surrounded the whole island begin to break open, the electrical storm dissipating, the winds slowing as they blew themselves out, and great chunks of ice, some the size of icebergs, and immense waves of water, fell from the storm into water with heavy splashes.

In the distance stood the gleaming leaves of the Millennium Tree, with the single spire of leafy green light projecting straight up from its center toward heaven. It was sunrise, and the morning never looked so good. But

then Sanari caught a glimpse of something else... an outline that was barely discernable in the sky. And as she looked at it, things exploded inside the shape, and she saw large pods descend from the underbelly, six of them.

She looked at Sage as he seemed to sleep, and pressed against his chest again while Dallas stood by.

If those were soldiers, then they were about to take her love from her.

The Sol-Teran Alliance, the STA, was the governmental construct of the Humans and Dragons as well as a select few other races from the Prime Universe and four surrounding universes. Flying a banner of a circle – one half of which was a section of planet Earth, the other half a field of stars in the blackness of space – with a leafy-green laurel surrounding its base like the old United Nations flag, with five stars beneath it on a white background. It was a truly vast republic that spanned all of the Prime Universe – Sage’s home universe – and four others, with outposts in dozens more.

Three races of humans – Terans, Gyp’tians and Atlantians – Dragons, and a scant few other races, made up the Alliance that could easily rival that of the Aphkei Imperium and Assembly.

As Humans are inherently a curious lot, they send themselves out into the multiverse in a quest for knowledge, and the principal crafts they utilize in exploring whole new sectors of space are known as the Leviathan Class Explorer Ships.

In comparison to some of the largest of Aphkei Ships, these Twenty seven mile long, seven miles wide, five miles deep ships are quite diminutive; each shaped like a giant wedge, it was sent out into the deep void for a decade or more at a time before returning home, accompanied by a veritable fleet of other explorer ships, even whole galaxies were rapidly scouted by the presence of a Leviathan within a ten year span.

The Leviathan, which now orbited Wave World, was the mother ship of all the Leviathan Class Explorer ships, a glistening ship of white, blue and black, it flew flags of friendship and peace... till such flags are rejected. In their quest for knowledge, as the old saying goes, “As you stumble around in the dark, be careful not to awake the giant.”

And so the Leviathan Class Explorers likewise doubled as mobile base ships and dreadnaughts, with a military compliment that was greater than the civilian compliment, allowed a leviathan to support six divisions of ground troops, an entire air force of fighters of all sizes, shapes and descriptions, and enough weaponry to be a deterrent for nearly anything in space.

And so when The Leviathan received a distress signal, it responded, and after hearing that there was a mad dragon that had been rampaging over the planet and several others, having already decimated several divisions of Aphkei troops, they immediately mobilized.

Several divisions of troops and support equipment detached from the underbelly of The Leviathan, their massive shuttle-like drop ships swooping down into the atmosphere to mass unload several divisions of soldiers, mechs and tanks to secure the decimated city-like school. Marines, Shocktroopers, OCTO Tanks and several wings of mecha all arrayed themselves about the school, spearheaded by a special detachment of Soldiers:

An STA special unit known as “Dragon Slayers.”

Sage lifted his hands and called his magic forth, and suddenly a pebble-like thing escaped from inside him; a crystal sphere that was the size of a marble. It moved outward, and then exploded into a massive sphere, and those gathered gasped as they saw what was inside it.

“Dude... it’s Rae!” Champion managed.

Champion had merely been knocked out, suffered some injuries from cracked ribs from being swatted away like that, but after a quick bandage and healing from Sage, he was able to move around without any problems at all.

A few individuals gathered around Sage as he manually began to break down the prison, and they watched as Sage began to solve a magical puzzle the likes of which was like unto a Millennium Puzzle, as each section was solved, it broke down layer by layer, traps disintegrating, magical wards breaking down, till at long last, the sphere surrounding Rae disintegrated, and she remained there, in a fetal position, before she was lowered ever so gently to the ground.

“Is she...?” someone gasped, fearing her dead.

“No... just resting. She needs a good long sleep.” Sage prompted, collapsing to his knees in weariness and gasping. “When she awakes, she’ll find all her powers returned to her.” He hung his head... not daring to look at her in his shame.

Sanari stepped beside him and touched his immensely muscular arm, longer than she was tall, and more muscle in that one arm than whole armies of mechanized soldiers... and that was just his natural strength.

“And what of you, Sage. You need rest.”

“No!” Sage gasped, his head snapping up to her, and he paused as he looked her in the eye, seeing her affection, feeling his affection for her, and then he looked away and forced himself to rise. “I will not... I won’t rest, till every wrong that I did is righted!”

And he trundled off again, finding Equis beneath some wreckage, and Sage immediately set himself to healing her many wounds while Champion surged to her side. Behind him, there was an army cresting a ridge of white and blue clad warriors, stepping forward to secure the school.

Sage trembled as he looked up at the Shadow Monster that he’d created, partly on how weak he was at the moment, and partly that he’d even *considered* doing this to a living person. Swallowing hard he plunged a hand into the creature and drew out Genohn, his head still absent of his great wings in their fullness, those wings only partly having grown back, and Sage cradled the Demon Lord as Genohn fell from the darkness.

“I got you...” Sage whispered, and turned to the Shadow Monster.

“C-cold...” Genohn shivered as Sage turned back to the remains of the Shadow Monster.

Kissing his fingers, he reached out and touched the head of the Shadow Monster, the thing made of the dead, restless souls and the tormented bodies of the Dousaka... and upon touching its head, it began to cry in release, and as it cried, its blackness rapidly turned gray, and it gave off a single crying song as it died, a beautiful song that made one weep to hear it while the whole of it disintegrated into ash, releasing hundreds of souls in the form of will-o-wisps that briefly flittered and fluttered about like fireflies and then passed on to the next world.

“S-So cold...” Genohn shook, and Sage conjured a blanket, wrapping him up in it, and cupping his head, Sage concentrated and when he withdrew his hands Genohn had passed off into a restful, dreamless sleep.

“Namah... He will heal rapidly, he’s stronger than the rest, but he’ll need rest.”

“I will make sure he is made comfortable.” Namah said, and gestured and a pair of orderlies arrived and placed Genohn on a stretcher.

Sage looked out onto the destruction, and began to weep.

“Great Maker... forgive me...”

And then there was a series of clicks, and he turned even as a heavy stun blast struck him right in the face.

Lord Sage was apprehended and secured by the STA in the early hours of the morning, even as a second ship folded into normal space, this ship in the form of an Aphkei strike cruiser known as the *'Destraga.'*

Sage awoke, lying on his side, and opening his now blue-green eyes, he found himself looking straight into Sanari's bosom as she cradled his massive head on her narrow lap. He tried to reach out and touch her, actually smiled for her, but he felt himself bound.

"Shh... don't move." Sanari prompted. "They say they'll kill you if you do."

The eyes in the back of Sage's head opened, and his forward-facing eyes then focused around Sanari, and he found himself being surrounded by a series of white and blue clad soldiers. The emblems, markings, rankings, armor and weaponry were so familiar to him.

"Terans." He whispered incredulously, and looked at them more. "Slayers." He said and swallowed, but laid there in her rest.

"D-don't worry..." Sanari said, trembling. "I'll protect you."

But then Sage heard another conversation and the sound of approaching armor.

"...We appreciate you apprehending the criminal." A soldier was saying through a helmet mike. "We'll take custody of him from here."

"I understand that we are to cooperate, and my orders are to turn him over to the first authorities that present themselves, but he is a Prime Universe Citizen. May I ask what you intend to do with him?"

"That will be left up to our courts to decide now." The first said, and suddenly a black clad Aphkei trooper, surrounded on all sides by Heavy Siegetroopers appeared as the circle of slayers parted automatically.

The Aphkei officer removed his helmet, and a stark wolf greeted him.

"Hello, Shadow Beast. My name is Colonel D'rend." And Sage felt D'rend's boot smack straight into his face.

"You monster!" Sanari surged to her feet. "He was helpless!"

"And so were all the civilians on Planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One." D'rend said. "Troopers, take Lord Sage into custody."

The troopers hauled Sage up, and though Sage stood at eighteen feet in this new form of his, the Siegetroopers forced him upward like he was a rag doll at the moment. They marched him forward, and he walked forward obediently, and then looking sidelong, gasped and began moving in one particular direction, just before he screamed out in pain as two of the troopers shoved staves into his sides that suddenly burned with disruptor power and necromancer arcane art. When he fell, three more pushed more of those staves into his back, and Sage convulsed his jaw opening wide and his mandibles spreading.

"S-sir! They're going to kill him!" a soldier with the Terans said as he stood there, holstering his rifle on his back.

"Stand down soldier; we are under orders not to interfere once he's been handed over."

“B-but...”

“Zip that lip soldier! If he dies right here, right now... there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“Sir, yes sir...” the soldier said. Sanari noticed a red cross on the center of his helmet. The same emblem of a healer that Sage had worn on his medical jackets.

She surged to her feet and strode over to the Colonel.

“Stop this! Please!! You’re killing him!”

“Attempted escape.” D’rend said simply, smiling, and Sanari turned on her heel, and with surprising strength and ability, she turned a Siegetrooper off of Sage, wrestled the staff away from him before eight more staves found themselves about her face.

“N-no!” Sage groaned. “S-Sanari... just let them have me.”

“I won’t!” she said, and lifted her arms to block their paths, and the apparent leader of the troopers looked to his controller.

D’rend was fully willing to allow them to kill Sage, but a woman like Sanari was not a person that he could easily dispose of, especially in front of all these witnesses. There was also an uncomfortable number of STA troops here... his career would be over if a conflict with the STA begun over this.

D’rend lifted a hand and gave the desist signal, and the troopers stepped back.

Sage then began to move again, balling into a fetal position before he brought his hands forward from under his legs and tail, pulling his arms from behind his back, and a trooper surged forward and was about to jab him in the gut again, when...

“Stop!” D’rend barked, and Sage stopped, before D’rend stepped briskly, kicked Sage in the face so that he looked at the colonel, and then he glowered down at Sage.

“You are under arrest! I don’t care if I kill you, Sage, no one does save for this woman, but I’ll have her swept away and have you incinerated right here and now if you continue this fracas!”

“B-but... I must help her.”

“Her who?” D’rend said, and Sanari turned to see who he’d been crawling for:

Fatima.

Sanari immediately pointed at the younger Iksaki sister.

“That is Fatima Iksaki. She was injured by Lord Sage’s arts, and only he can undo the damage, or would you like me to inform Lady Iksaki that Colonel D’rend kept the only man who could help her sister away? And think what would happen should you kill the only man who could help her sister?”

D’rend swallowed, and then lowered his gaze to Sage, and then nodded, and as weak as he was, Sage moved over to Fatima, crawling till he was directly in front of her, and lifting his hands, he promptly poked her body from chest to abdomen, to shoulder to shoulder, and with a gasp, Fatima opened her eyes, and Sage collapsed in front of her as she collapsed backward onto her back.

“F-forgive me...” he gasped. “Forgive me...” tears reared up in his eyes, and suddenly the Siegetroopers were taking him below the arms and dragging him away to a shuttle, where inside he was re-secured, bound and surrounded by many weapons that would blast him away the moment he moved wrong.

The gang plank closed and the shuttle lifted off, passing by several drop ships that landed and disgorged several divisions of Aphkei troopers. The Terans paused only for a moment and then began to retreat to their own vessels.

Sanari closed her eyes, and bowed her head.

“Merciful Maker, Blessed Creator, Father of Heaven, I praise and thank you my lord, for giving Sage back, but now, dearest Father, protect him...” She raised her head and looked up at the cruiser by the barely visible Leviathan in the sky that truly dwarfed the cruiser. It soon space folded, inside it was her love, and tears streamed from her eyes. “Guard him...”

Rae awoke with a start and a gasp, finding herself not in the field of flowers and grasses of her prison, but in a world where things actually felt real to her. As she sat up, a medical blanket fell off her and in a cot right beside her she found Fatima resting quietly.

Rae swallowed, and then lowered a hand to her sister, and felt her power, felt that she was alive, well, and unharmed, but she felt that her little sister had been traumatized somehow.

Rae then looked down at her slender hand as the hand began to thicken, her fingers broadening as her slender athletic forearm began to bulge, and like a flood, her power pushed its way into her, forcing her every muscle to swell and bubble outward, from muscles as common as her biceps and delts, to as uncommon as her oh so powerful heart and the folds of her femininity. Within moments, she fit her clothes snugly again as the fabric stretched across her breasts and fit snugly about her hips, waist and pelvis again.

She then rose, seeing the room that she was in was perfectly sound... not even a scratch, but then she looked out the window... and began to cry.

She couldn't feel the heart-wrenching emotion any more, she merely wept, wept for the school, wept for her friends, wept for her one friend... the one who'd gone mad...

Before her innocent eyes, she saw The Black Omen projecting out of the ocean, saw the rubble, the destruction, pillars of fire and smoke that the school's fire brigade was valiantly putting out, and a field of dead bodies covered by blankets strewn before her being given their last rights by the Grace Leaguers, and amidst an even larger field of wounded, she saw... Shadow Leaguers... scores of them, moving amongst the wounded, bringing food and water, tending to their needs, as well as several fold more Bioroids adding to the many people there.

“Hnn... sissa?” Fatima moaned, and Rae turned immediately and moved to her younger sister as she lay there.

“I'm here.”

“T-Teal and Yuum are safe.” Fatima said. “They are with the other children. M-made sure they were safe... before...”

“Shh...” Rae said and embraced her sister.

“N-no... I m-must say it. I looked into his eyes, I saw them burn when he locked me.” Fatima said. “And then I looked into his eyes again... w-when he released me from it. T-the Sage that we knew died when he became that demon, and when he released me, I saw that the Sage who was before me, wasn't the same one he was before whatever changed him before.”

“L-lord Sage... is dead. And whatever he is now... whatever he was didn't come back. He's gone.”

Rae pressed her lips together; feeling them tremble and she folded her sister to her bosom and closed her eyes.

It was all over... the demon gone... and with him... so too was her friend. The Sage that remained was a man that she no longer knew.

“They’ve taken him away, sissa.” Fatima continued. “Soldiers came and took him. I have no doubt that they will kill whatever is left of him.” Rae embraced her sister and the two weeped with each other.

“Merciful Aul... don’t let me loose another friend.” Rae whispered, and the two sisters stayed with each other to comfort the other as long as they were able to.

Hyrri Namah had often thought that the hospital that she was the Chief Medical Officer of was superfluous for the size of the school it was to support. However, Meniko had created the hospital under the understanding that should each and every last one of her students, faculty and herself were sick for some reason or another then she wanted a hospital that could cater to each and every last one of them.

Now Namah understood Meniko’s thinking, and at the moment, she wished that it was larger than it was right now.

Every bed overflowed with wounded, her staff had not had a break since yesterday, and there were a myriad of Grace Leaguers and Shadow Leaguers helping with the slack. Both Leaguers were surprisingly adept with healing and first aid, with several of them actual qualified nurses and in a few exceptions, qualified doctors.

Namah paused, looking down at her datapad and took a moment to flip through charts before there was a touch on her back.

She turned to see Ki standing there, the young insectid fem handed her a bowl of tea.

“CMO Namah, you should really get some rest.” Ki said, and Namah accepted the tea from the muscular and buxom Kath.

“I can’t, Ki.” Namah said quietly. “Such is the life of a CMO. In a crisis like this, we are the last to get rest.”

Ki and Namah looked out over the various cries of pain from students and soldiers alike. It was overwhelming. They were doing triage in the fields outside the hospital at the moment. Namah looked down at her tea and took another sip at it.

“Thank you for the tea, Ki... but we need to keep moving till everyone is at least stabilized...” Namah said.

“At once ma’am.” Ki curtsied and then hurried away to the next person arriving through the doors.

Namah was trying not to cry as she looked about her. Sage’s skills as a surgeon made this so much worse. This was what happens when medicine is used to hurt instead of to heal. He knew right where to make a hurt last and be difficult to repair. Namah walked along, checking patient after patient, marking their charts as she went.

The hardest ones were those who died after they were stable, and when she came by to check on them, and found them dead, it became most difficult to mark their chart as deceased.

Thank the Maker, however, that she’d yet to have to mark a student as deceased.

It would be said... that long after all this was over, that Namah would be found in her office/living quarters... bawling her eyes out.

Yusuma walked quietly along, trailing a couple of very nervous Grace Leaguers who were both medically trained... just not certified.

"I-I don't know about this," one of the younger girls said. "What if he hurts us? He's practically the Black Beast himself!"

"I will not abandon him." Yusuma said sternly without looking around, walking her staff properly now with years of experience. "He has come to the aide of this League far too many times for us to simply abandon him."

"B-but... Priestess Yusuma..." a younger boy quavered. "H-he's MAU! He's a murder!"

"In the service of the Faith, one must do things in which they are afraid to do, even opposed to do... but all beings are savable. Even Mau."

"E-even the Shadow Beast?"

Yusuma swallowed...

She didn't quite know which of the two young acolytes had said it, despite their varying genders and species, they sounded alike. She was mulling over an answer as to whether or not Lord Sage Preypacer was savable when they rounded a corner and stopped.

Yusuma stared blankly at a radial crack in the wall, and a long horn piercing the wall that was rapidly disintegrating, but the person who'd been skewered by that horn was no where to be seen.

"H-he's GONE!" Yusuma said and rushed forward, fingering the blood on the horn and then turned, gasping as she saw a trail of blood.

She followed it for several yards before coming to the site of a transport spell, still feeling the residual magics in the air. The two acolytes following her exhaled a sigh of relief that they wouldn't have to deal with a wounded beast like Mau.

Mau's teleportation did not get him all the way home. It did nonetheless get him part way. He'd have to heal more before making the rest of the journey home.

Lord Sage had mortally wounded him, had skewered him atop a horn, and had damaged his ability to heal. As it was, he was still in pain, his insides searing from whatever toxin had been on his horn... he'd never felt anything so acidic or dirty in him. He'd sheered off the front of his forehead and his chest to remove the emblems that kept him from healing, and without them there, he was able to heal normally now... like a vicious beast gnawing its own foot off to escape a trap, but unlike other beasts, this beast's foot would grow back.

Mau laughed, and then grit his teeth, clutching at his chest as the wound continued to close, his still-beating heart and ruined lungs reforming themselves little by little, spittle frothing with blood through his jagged teeth as he focused his magical abilities on healing.

You should've finished me, Sage, he laughed inwardly. You should've finished me. He looked down at his hand. But you are not the man to give me the power I seek. That defensive move you used indeed blocked and countered the Final Fist... but it would never last against the Absolute fist.

But I will give you this, Lord Sage... you are at least... a worthy adversary... but you... are nothing but a stepping stone to the ability to destroy anything!

Mau laughed and hobbled away, gritting and groaning as he walked naked through an alien forest, his powers returning speedily. It would be mere hours before he was at full power. But regardless... he needed to fight Sage again some day...

But all in due time. Patience... the timing must be flawless...

Chapter Two: Trial and Error

Three days had passed since the school had been sacked for the second time in its history. The Shadow Beast's passing had traumatized the entire school, and a very, very great many were still in critical danger, even by the standards of the medical technology at large today.

The Grace League was working as fervently as the medical staff, and though many were saved and resurrected again, far too many of them were just too far gone to save. A body cannot be resurrected if the spirit has already passed on...

A full division of Imperial troops and all their supports had remained behind to secure the school, but as soon as she was able to, Meniko whooped and hollered for additional medical help, and so a transport arrived – on joint request from CMO Namah – the day after the rampage ended, and provided much needed doctors and supplies, as well as several transports to pick up the stranded soldiers.

By the end of the day, all soldiers either alive or dead had been removed from Wave World, and the stress on doctors and doctresses and nurses of the Mystic League were remarkably lessened. The Shadow League, by command of the Interim Headmistress, Mayia Gallant, had donated as much of its own incredible medical supplies, and offered its facilities to help take up the slack.

As it was, by dawn on the fourth day, all wounded were being cared for, and Meniko, bandaged up and restricted to her smaller hybrid bird maiden form, surveyed the damage. Her fighter ball field had been severely decimated. It was little more than a gaping crater now. Her pristine courtyard had been battered and broken and pockmarked with smaller craters. The green fields surrounding her school were stained with blood or charred with fire.

Those fields too were pockmarked with craters.

Sage had attacked her school in his madness. This was evident being that the hospital and the Grace League didn't even have a scratch on them. Her spaceport was in ruins, her space station was damaged, buildings were caved in, and even the Pinnacle Tower had been snapped off at the top to cave into the student dorms on its side. Statues of art destroyed, pillars collapsed, everything that had her name on it had been a target. Her students were harmed only inasmuch as they stood in his way. This had been an up front attack on her and everything she stood for.

There was a strange... feeling... inside her. She wanted to cry but couldn't manage to make herself do so... the sheer shock of all this, this whole experience so stunned her she didn't know what to think, didn't know how to act. The Black Beast only killed... Sage destroyed everything that was in his sight that belonged to her. Something... something inside him wanted to punish her. She wanted to scream at the heavens and ask why he was sent to test her, why he'd do such a thing now, why... but again, she couldn't find herself able to do so.

She looked down and spied something on the ground, and moving a piece of rubble out of the way, spied a teddy bear, and she picked it up as she squatted in her fine white robes, and then pulled the bear to her bosom and hugged it.

At long last... tears did escape her eyes, but she didn't make sounds of crying.

For ten years that man had been beneath her wing, for ten years he tried to find himself in her good graces, tried to satisfy her ever growing disdain for him, but the harder he tried, the more she seemed to get madder and madder at him. Recently, after having nearly died twice in the past couple of months, he'd made a tremendous calming approach to everything and even managed not to step on anyone's toes. But then... something in him snapped.

Even she didn't think that he was capable of such things.

He was a healer and a protector, and despite his many faults, she was most thankful at his hand in healing when she'd been mortally wounded by a raptor assassin several years back. She still carried the nigh invisible scar from his healer's art, a faint line along her side that was visible only in the right light and only when she bent a certain way.

And then there was what he did for her students after his madness left him. He weakened himself greatly, slipping ever so close toward death to heal them, right the wrongs...

She didn't know what to think anymore. She so dearly wanted Sanari right now.

"Yes hatchling?" a voice said softly, and Meniko turned to see Sanari there, standing with her ornate staff and her beautiful lavender robes.

She looked very weary. Even several days after resurrecting so many people, no less than a month after resurrecting twenty seven Shadow Leaguers with Sage's help... Sage's help... at healing them all, she'd been asked to do it again for hundreds now. She was very, very tired.

"Sanari..." Meniko said and surged forward, kneeling and grasping at Sanari's robes as Meniko pressed her cheek against Sanari's strong navel. "Teacher... w-what should I think right now? I-I don't understand what just happened."

Sanari slid her fingers through Meniko's downy plumage of fiery red feathers.

"I... wish that I had answers for you, Meniko." Sanari said, and then sat down on a piece of rubble nearby. Meniko knelt before her; the dragoness's clawed hands on Sanari's lap. "What we witnessed, this... this thing that has happened has even me confused sweetling."

Meniko bowed her head and laid it on Sanari's lap as she still held the teddy bear to her bosom as if she were nursing a child. She didn't even know which of her younger students the bear belonged to.

"Sweetling..." Meniko mused. "You hadn't called me that since I was a hundred years old." Meniko mused. She was still crying tears, and Sanari gently caressed them away.

"You're a bit old for it," Sanari smiled wanly. "But it's been awhile since I've been able to hold you in my arms, Meniko. The question that we must answer now... is what do we do now?"

For the longest time, neither woman either spoke or moved. It was a rare moment that they could spend prolonged with one another, and even in this aftermath... it was perhaps the only comforting moment they had. Meniko was lost to thoughts of what was to become of her school, her students... Sanari was lost with the thought of what was to happen to her newly found love.

...Especially after he said that he loved me... Sanari thought, and her eyes glistened for a moment before a solitary tear rolled down her cheek as well.

The teddy bear did not actually belong to any student... instead, it belonged to Illia Romov. It was the bear that Sage had given her when she had the mind of a child during her recovery after he'd arrived. Illia... had looked at Sage during his kindness in re-raising her, helping her to cope with losing a sister that she never knew existed before his arrival, and was there when she remembered the pain and suffering he'd put her through to place her into such a child-like state in the first place.

Illia now knew that her older sister – Cyvel – had at one time existed. She knew that she herself, in an accidental hulk-transformation in her youth, had pounded her much larger and much stronger sister to a pulp. She knew that she'd killed her with that attack. The trauma of remembering that nasty fact immediately led her to ask to be sealed, and she then took a leave of absence from the Mystic League and trained with the Powered League on a short contract.

When she returned, and was unlocked again and gained control of her powers again, she became stronger than she'd ever been before; skyrocketing her right back into the number two position of the strongest in the school... but only because Sage himself wasn't considered apart of the Mystic League.

Illia took to carrying her teddy bear that Sage had given her as a part of her usual school books. The bear resided on her desk as she taught; it resided on her bedside when she slept. Illia also took to talking to herself again, speaking to what she referred to as *'my power.'*

Her power was what strengthened her, her power was what protected her... and right now... her power was also struggling desperately to keep Illia alive.

Illia laid back with her eyes closed, but her eyes moving rapidly in REM sleep, with all sorts of life support monitors attached to her head and naked body. She was breathing well now... she would survive, but it was the psyche that was damaged... a deep bore hole into her brain was causing that, with her cerebellum likewise having been damaged by burning at several portions of the brain that controlled psionics, the psyche and telepathy. And as she lay there, covered by nothing more than a medical blanket, that which was Illia slowly began to slip deeper and deeper into her mind.

That which was Illia's secret power... was thusly forced higher and higher to take up the slack the body required in order to survive. And at present... Illia's power was steadily loosing its hold on Illia...

Meniko had left Sanari in order to begin cataloging all damages to her school, and get reports from all her heads of staff in order to have a total injury, death and destruction report to send back to the Imperium. They'd asked for the information when she'd asked for relief help, and said nothing else. Meniko knew full well that that information was to be used in order to convict Lord Sage.

Sanari was present when the order came, as had been Hyurri Namah... the three women knew full well what the Imperium wanted that information for. The lists of injured and dead weren't necessary. Meniko could've just asked for a lump sum for repairs and gotten it... but also, as it was, when she began to ask for relief monies to begin schooling again, the person who'd been conducting the trideo call said that they'd get back to her.

For the time being... the Mystic League was too far damaged to continue classes, and as it was, The Shadow League was the only League equipped enough to be able to help feed and shelter the students of the Mystic League...

Meniko had problems... Sanari had only one at the moment... and it weighed heavily on her mind.

At worse, her new love Sage Preypacer will be executed for his crimes against the state. At best... he'll merely be deported. Regardless of what happened, she would never see him again.

Sanari folded her hands before her, standing there, staring at the roses he'd given her. Kit, his new counselor for his students, had helped her change these subtle petals into an intoxicating perfume that would draw Sage to her. And he had been drawn to her. During the fair he'd migrate toward her, was moving to touch her, made motions to smell that perfume in his hair... just like Kit had said.

Everything was going so smoothly, she thought. Why did this have to happen? Merciful Aul... why does my love have to be taken from me now?

Sanari reached out and touched the delicate petals, being careful of the thorns, and then she turned slightly and stopped at the appearance of a stranger in her garden.

He wasn't hard to miss. Sixteen feet tall, with wings and a tail, heavily armored, he walked on his toes and bristled with hide, scales, heavy armor and even white crystal! Sanari gasped, and then noted three notable things about him.

First, was the crown of horns bristling about his brow and over his ears.

Second were the antennae, the overly white theme of his body, the green soul gems... so very much like Sage's new draconic form

Lastly... he had five fingers.

"Such an honor for one woman." This creature said as he stood before the small collection of cherry trees that Sage had also given her while he fingered the blossoms with the backs of fingers that were sheathed in carapace like claws. "A stand of cheery trees and an array of roses. Even Ariel hadn't received such gifts from him."

"W-who... are you?" Sanari asked, amazed that he'd gotten here without her notice, or the notice of the spirits guarding her gates.

"A friend and a father..." he said mysteriously. "Do not be alarmed, we've met before... a couple months ago."

Sanari thought for a moment...

A couple months ago was when Sage had sacrificed himself for Mayia and Siklohn. There had been a few visitors, two of which were Sage's half-brother Patch... and...

"Drake." She said softly in awe that the smallish human male with the flowing white hair could be this towering dragon figure.

Drake smiled, though his eyes were sad.

He turned and then knelt before her so that they could both see eye to eye, Drake taking her hand. "Why are you still here?" Drake asked softly.

"I-I don't understand?" Sanari said quietly.

"Why are you still here? Do you love him?"

"I..." Sanari managed. "Yes... yes I do." She said with utmost assurance.

"Then why are you here?"

"Where should I be?" Sanari asked, her heart fluttering beneath her chest inside her robes. She felt like on the verge of tears.

"Where do you think you should be?" Drake asked and massaged her fingers with one thumb. "Why are you still here?"

Sanari gasped as she realized what he was saying. "B-but I can't! I'm not allowed."

"Then he'll die." Drake said, and releasing her hand he stood.

"What?" Sanari gasped as he began to turn away, and she surged to him, hooking her clawed fingers into the plates at his thigh in an attempt to stop him. "What do you mean he will die?"

"My son is about to place his head willingly on the chopping block, Mother Sanari." Drake said as he looked down his side at her. "The Aphkei will literally take his head for what he's done in his madness. You are the only one who cares about saving him and is able to do so. If you are not there at his trial... then you will lose him forever."

Drake fell silent as Sanari stepped back, disbelieving what he was saying.

“B-but what can I do? I can possibly get myself at the trial with my influence... but I can’t influence the Aphkei courts! Please! Tell me how I can save him!”

“With faith.” Drake said gently. “You will know what to do, Sanari... when the time comes.”

And then he began to fade away, his white coloring fading till all there was, was an outline, his soul gems fading and then even the gems winking away. Sanari stood there as he disappeared, locked on the place where he’d been. She then turned promptly and headed straight toward the nearest communications terminal outside her shrine.

Court systems in every major government in creation were typically slow and tedious, simply because they always had a backlog. Someone suing someone else, someone breaking the law and needed punishment, and so on. However, the higher up the ranks that judges went, the less and less trials that they needed to conduct, but adversely, the more and more intense such a trial became because of the issues they dealt with became more and more serious.

The highest court in the Great Wide Universe was known as the Tribunal. It was a court system where even royalty could be judged by their own and other governments. It insured that no one was above the law. For fairness, the Tribunal was made up of judges from all the major governments in the universe. Presently there were a total of five. Two represented by the Aphkei – for the Imperium and the Assembly – one from the Dragaseir, and two others from the outlying governments that were apart of this intergalactic community.

Only three of these five judges were to meet on the matter of Rampage regarding the subject of Lord Sage Preypacer.

Being that all offenses were solely inside Aphkei space, and since Aphkei affairs were shared by both the Imperium and the Assembly, and since all affairs that came over by the tribunal required it to be administered by a chief judge, meant that the two judges from the Assembly and the Imperium were to be in attendance, and the Chief Judge, an ancient God-Grade Dragaseir, were to be the ones to decide Sage’s fate.

Rampage was a very serious offense in the Great Wide Universe. One of the few that was actually punishable by death. The official definition of a rampage was where acts of a powered or super individual caused the death of over a thousand people, and likewise caused more than a million credits worth of damages.

The death count in this case was over several thousand, and the damages were in excess of two point three trillion credits. The damages were primarily because an entire planet had been decimated and hundreds of millions of credits of crops alone were lost for that one planet.

The trial was to be held aboard the Justice, a sprawling, star-shaped space station in which the supreme justices met within a chamber that was able to hold hundreds; the station found between Assembly and Imperium space.

Chief Justice Kazzak stood before his seat in a small hybrid form as he looked down upon the sunken pit that held the place where prisoners came to trial, which was thusly surrounded by scores of stadium seating for those who wished to view a trial.

He was about to infuriate many Dragaseir in his decision as he watched Aphkei set up the braces before the Bar of Justice that would soon hold Lord Sage Preypacer, and that decision was to hold a fair trial. He often infuriated his fellow Dragaseir, those who were or were not apart of the council who came to him and told him how to judge in his court. He did not hold this position for five thousand years simply to have it dictated to him... that, and in five thousand years, he had never conducted an unfair or unjust trial.

There were members of the council and in the myriad of secret societies in his own government who wanted nothing more than to see Lord Sage Preypacer dead.

He swallowed as two Shocktroopers entered the chamber, armed with their heaviest weaponry that was designed to put holes in capitol ships. He knew already that they were programmed to stop Sage at all costs should he begin to escape... regardless as to who they shot at that got in their line of fire to do so.

He held a private meeting with the two Aphkei dignitaries who acted as his fellow justices, finding that though they didn't receive downright commandments from their respective lieges, they still nonetheless received entourages from members of their own governments high up in the offices telling them how to judge.

As a united consensus, the three of them decided to make this as fair as possible. If Lord Sage was to be killed for his crimes... then he would be killed because it was a fair judgment.

Kazzak remained there in his robes for a time before turning to leave.

In less than twelve hours, he would sit in judgment over an alien to their universe. The ramifications of their decision could vary well lead to further conflicts. He sighed and then turned to retreat to his quarters. A good bowl of tea and a smoke of spice would be necessary to calm his self before the trial began. Perhaps a good snuggling with his wife as well.

Whatever the decision, one would not envy Lord Sage for the fate the decision would make.

Mother Sanari was a very influential woman. The older a person got, the more friends they made, the more people that they affected, and in the nearly two thousand years of penance she'd made for a century of bloodshed, Sanari had made many friends and was owed many favors. She called in many of them just to get herself a seat in the chamber that would be overlooking Sage's trial.

Drake's words kept running over and over in her mind as she rode in her seat in the school transport that transported Meniko, Sato, Genohn and herself to Station Justice.

'My son is about to place his head willingly on the chopping block, Mother Sanari. The Aphkei will literally take his head for what he's done in his madness. You are the only one who cares about saving him and is able to do so. If you are not there at his trial... then you will loose him forever.'

She'd gone through remarkable efforts to be on this transport, and as such it took both Meniko and Sato to aid her in securing a seat, as well as several others, and eventually it came down to the fact that she was a viable witness to the acts at hand and her presence might be necessary.

'You will know what to do, Sanari... when the time comes.'

Sanari closed her eyes and dipped her head a little as the transport was given its clearance to dock with the station. She was breathing so slowly... it appeared at that moment that she wasn't alive.

Another vessel, a remarkably small one, little larger than a star fighter yet smaller than a transport, unmarked and of an unknown configuration shot into real space bearing the emblems of Ronin Enterprises along its sides... a sleek craft of dull brown, grey and black with white highlights, bearing a name written in English text of "Wildkat" underneath the layered metallic dome of the cockpit.

Strangely... this ship somehow bypassed the entire slew of computerized queues and managed to get clearance to dock immediately.

The dignitaries that were arriving were quite impressive. Dragaseir, counselors, military officers, senators, even Emperor Jaikard and Queen Morsica themselves. Other than the fact that they were arriving to view a trial on Station Justice... no one knew exactly what the trial was all about other than those in attendance, and possibly the one who was on trial. There were individuals that would perhaps try to find out who exactly was on trial, but due to a justice mandate, there would be no more celebrity trials, and this has been true for tens of thousands of years. Publicity often times did more harm than good.

Those on Station Justice were well aware of the importance of the individual who was about to be tried... but they weren't exactly prepared for the next dignitary who arrived and asked to be present.

A tech was working in his everyday job, doing very little other than shifting data when his instruments suddenly blared, and he snapped upright as a dimensional anomaly suddenly appeared close by the station.

"Sir!" he managed and keyed in several commands. "SIR!" he said again and his commanding officer descended from the command deck and stood behind him.

"What is it corporal?" the station commander said irritably.

"Disturbance and ten o'clock."

"What sort of disturbance?" the commander repeated.

And then the station alarms blared twice on the command deck, and the commander lifted his gaze to see a pinpoint of blackness appear in space as it suddenly widened, appearing like a horizontal black hole. The hole slowly lowered mechanically, and as it did, it coughed up a ship of brilliant white, a vessel with a curving front that then led to two flaring sides, and a series of engines and flaring spikes at its backside.

"Tactical!" the commander called as the ship fully formed itself, the whole ship seemingly being built from the framework outward as it was coughed up, sparking with lightning before the black hole closed below it, and it turned slightly and moved toward the station.

"Aye! Con new contact! Vessel of unknown origin, unknown configuration."

"Weapons readings?" the commander said and climbed immediately back up to the sprawling command deck.

"Negative sir no active weapons, no sensor pings."

The commander sat down in his chair and stared at the ship.

The corporal who'd brought his attention to the anomaly that generated that ship stood up, his eyes squinting as he looked at the markings.

"Ship is ten miles wide and twelve miles long with all its fins and fans." Another sensor tech stated. "Depth is three miles. Detecting numerous high level weapon emplacements: two planet destroyers, four protonic emitters, Dozens of heavy and hundreds of light weapon emplacements. Alloy of the hull is unknown. Also... what looks like flight bays... lots and lots of flight bays..."

"She's a carrier."

"Ok... I want to know who owns her, where did she come from, and if this is a first contact situation... I want..."

"She's a Sol-Teran Alliance ship..." the corporal stated, and suddenly he was the center of attention, and looking down on the corporal, the commander maneuvered his command chair along the command deck on a motorized track so that he was looking down at the corporal.

“Explain yourself.” The Commander said simply.

“Those markings, they are written in English text,” the corporal stated. “It’s also known as ‘*Common*’ to the humans, sir. I’ve been studying their language and symbols in my training courses. That is the STA flag, and that, is the ship’s name.

“The Enterprise.”

“What an odd name for a ship.”

“Sir! Com is being hailed.” The communications officer stated.

The commander blinked and then maneuvered his command chair back to center. “On screen.”

The holoscreen suddenly came to life to show the face of an elderly white haired human gentleman, complete with a beard as he sat in his own command chair.

“I am Grand Admiral Yuri Global of the STA Expeditionary Forces.” he spoke with an odd accent that was remarkably guttural, slow and controlled. “I understand that you are to have one of our citizens on trial at this facility. I humbly ask for admittance to witness that trial...”

Mother Sanari wound her way through the Labyrinth that was Station Justice. All prisoners were held in the bowls of the upside-down conical station peaked with a radiating starburst, and the deeper she tread into the station, the less and less inviting it became till at last she was in dank, unkempt corridors that were all rusting from the ceiling down.

It was cold here...

Her steps at long last brought her to a security station situated before a heavy security door wrought with auto turrets and cameras. There was a burly looking officer here with a pair of Seigetroopers standing to either side of the door.

“May I help you?” the officer said in an annoyed voice.

“I would like to see Lord Sage.” She said simply, her hands folded into the sleeves of her robes.

The officer snickered through his nose incredulously. “You’re kidding...” he stated. “Who would want to see the Shadow Beast?”

“I said I wanted to see Lord Sage Preypacer,” Sanari said calmly. “Not the Shadow Beast. Could you please let me see him?”

“No.” he laughed. “He’s not allowed to have any visitors. No one can see him till his trial... and after his trial, there’s a good chance that no one will ever see him again. Just don’t waste your time and...”

“Perhaps I can help in this matter, Mother Sanari.” A voice said, and Sanari turned while the officer looked up.

Sanari blinked at the owner of the voice, seeing the undeniable face of Daedalus, with the head and the hair, even the metal cowl wrapping around his brows and the back of his head was there, but he was wearing an elaborately and perfectly made suit tailored to his body that looked as if he belonged in business somewhere. Behind him was Proteus, dressed like a trim chauffeur.

“And who the hell are you?” the officer asked.

Dallas stepped forward and provided a document on a datapad without a word. The officer stared at him for a moment and then accepted the datapad and began to key through it, his brows creasing as he read and reread the document.

“You’re joking.” He said again, looking up at Dallas.

“Do I look like I am soldier? Please open the door and allow me and his counselor to see Lord Sage. My chauffer will remain here.” Dallas opened his hand and the soldier pushed the datapad back into his hand, and in a magician maneuver, Dallas stowed the pad in a recess of his jacket and the soldier keyed in access to the prison.

Sanari remained silent, but stared at the back of Dallas’s head, not arguing with the sheer luck of the moment that he magically appeared so far away from the Shadow League and just happened to have a magical pass to allow him access to see Sage. She prayed in thanks, actually, for the matter, even as the blast door opened and Dallas led the way inside. The door closed behind them, and Dallas began winding his way through the avenues of the prison without pausing to consult maps.

“Dallas...” Sanari began, her curiosity on how he has access to this place getting to her.

“Not now, Mother Sanari. The time is not good for questions... and as it is, our time is very, very short. Just follow me... I feel that you have more need to see Master Sage more than me...”

“... Thank you.” Sanari said and stepped forward to squeeze his shoulder, and he reached across himself to squeeze her fingers briefly before lowering his hand.

They came to a large heavy set door even larger than the one that they’d just come through, this one being doubly reinforced and was a massive rolling portal. On either side of it were two powerful looking Shocktroopers.

Dallas stared at them both for a moment or two, the two of them staring back at him, and they both nodded and stepped aside before the door began to roll open into the wall, apart of the seal holding the door lowering into a set of stairs to allow them entry.

Sanari felt her heart tremble and her eyes water as Sage Preypacer was suddenly revealed to them. He was still in a dragon form, with the whole room set to restrain him. His hands were positioned into two sets of particlecolliders that both joined to the cuffs holding his hands on either side of him. Dimensional Pinpoint Restraints in every joint held him in place, while a veritable spider webbing of chords and cables were attached to the walls, floors and ceilings all around him, and as they entered, two heavy cannons could be seen humming as they held themselves in ready status to blast him away into oblivion at an instant’s notice if he tried to escape. He’d been forced forward and his arms twisted in his restraints to lock his body in his position, hanging painfully it seemed from the braces around his hands, forced onto his knees. His wings were ensnared and even his tail was clamped to the floor.

Sanari’s heart ached seeing him like this.

She turned to Dallas as he stared at the guns, and after a moment the two moved to track on him, and then looked at each other, and then retracted backward to the wall, still humming but no longer pointed at Sage.

“They will give you only five minutes.” Dallas said. “They are machines so they will time that down to the fraction of a nanosecond.”

“How did you...” Sanari began but Dallas was already turning to leave the chamber, the door rolling shut again, leaving Sanari alone.

She turned to face Sage, and stood there for a second before she stepped forward. After the second step her foot touched down into water... sparkling clear water. She remarked it for a moment, and then saw that it was draining away from Sage’s body where his head hung from between his massive shoulders. There was a face mask keeping his mouth shut, and as Sanari watched, she saw a droplet of water streak off that mask and drop to the floor, joining the puddle that was forming before him and slowly moving toward the floor drain.

Tears, she thought, her lips pressing together.

There was a platter of food on the ground – his last meal perhaps – but with him bound and gagged like he was, he had no access to it. A massive collar fitted with electrodes had been secured about his neck, locking him from all his powers and quite possibly even his ability to move. The level of precautions to keep him from moving on his own was incredible.

She walked forward and pawed his face, lifting the huge thing so that he'd look at her, and as he lifted his face, she saw his sparkling eyes, now having turned fully blue as more tears leaked from his eyes, and as he looked at her, he closed his eyes and tried to look away, but she stepped forward and pressed her chest against the side of his face. She reached up and found the clasps holding the mask about his face and popped it open, the thing falling to the ground with a clatter before she thumbed his mouth and trembling lips.

“D-don't worry... I'm here...” she whispered into his ear.

Sage's body twitched and the particlecolliders rose in pitch briefly before his body relaxed. He wanted to embrace her, she felt.

“N-no... don't move... I got you now.” She whispered. “You don't have to be strong right now...”

“T-those people.” He whispered. “All those people...” he cried, and Sanari felt his tears wet the fabric over her bosom as they glanced against her fingers. She tried to wipe them away as best she could.

“It was an accident.” Sanari tried to comfort him, but even her voice quavered. In spite of herself, in spite of her resolve, tears seeped from her own eyes to darken the fur beneath them. “T-they'll see that... everything will be all right... you'll see.”

“P-please... please leave me, Sanari. I'm a monster. Please leave me before I hurt you too.”

“N-never.” She said, and forced him to look at her again. “I'll never abandon you... do you hear my Sage Prepacerc? Never! Y-you just have to have faith! The Creator will provide... you'll see...”

“I'm damned for what I've done, Sanari...” Sage said, and he closed his eyes as a wash of more tears seeped from his eyes and onto the floor. “By all accounts... I should die in penance for my sins.”

Sanari again folded his head to her bosom.

“So long as a single person cares for your well being, Sage, you are not damned. And I care very much about your well being. I-I cared about it since I first met you.” She palmed his cheek. “The fact that I'm here proves that.” She pawed at his face and kissed his brow. “I have faith... that you are still good. I have faith that the Creator will provide.”

She held his head for a short while of silence as he leaned his head into her chest, and then there was a deep click of mechanics, and the doorway slowly slid open as the two guns lowered from their positions on the walls to aim toward Sage and her. Dallas entered the chamber.

“Our time is up, Mother Sanari.” He said quietly, and stepped forward and placed a hand on her shoulder as he looked to his master.

Sage looked up at them both, and in a gesture of extreme reluctance, Dallas reached down, picked up the face mask. Sanari reached out and took his wrist, and he paused, and then started moving forward again. “Forgive me for this Master Sage.” Dallas said, and fitted Sage with the mask again. “It has been deemed as a *requirement*.”

And with a click the face mask was secured about his mouth to keep him from using his breath weapon.

Sage looked at them as Dallas practically dragged Sanari away with a hand firmly on her shoulder and then hung his head. Sanari heard Sage making sounds of weeping and nearly turned and rushed to him before Dallas gripped her shoulder more firmly and turned her forward again.

“You’ll be shot...” he said softly.

Sanari looked over her shoulder at Sage as Dallas guided her out, the rolling door closing, and as soon as it closed she turned and pressed against the door, her fingers gripping at its smooth recesses.

“Have faith...” she whispered, repeating the same words that Drake had said to her.

Dallas came beside her and took hold of her arm and shoulder. “We need to leave, Sanari. I’m sorry.”

Sanari let go with difficulty, and allowed Dallas to lead her away.

Have faith.

Emperor Jaikard stood looking at the pristine white and black vessel parked outside the station, the ship almost as large as the thickest portion of the station. On a nearby screen, he watched as techs slowly began to identify portions of the ship for tactics... what worried him was that up until recently, the past few days, the greatest capabilities of ship design that he thought that the Sol-Terans were capable of was little more than a bulk cruiser.

These were super ship designs, and what his techs had already uncovered revealed that the Terans had technology generations beyond what their earlier ideas of them were.

“The alloy is bio-metallic.” Someone said.

“Anything about the insides?”

“Negative. To outward scans, bits and pieces of it appear and disappear repeatedly despite that to our own vision they all appear to still be there. Though we get vague glimpses of the inside with the scans, it’s not enough to actually see what’s inside. The very center of the ship, however... is constantly blank. We either can’t penetrate that deep, or they aren’t allowing us to see what’s there.”

Chatter went on like this around Jaikard on all directions. Jaikard however continued to stare at the new ship as he was wrapped within his heavy robes and cloak that completely hid his body, as well as his armor and personal weaponry beneath them.

For the past four years, the humans had been making themselves utter isolationists, going so far as alienating other governments, including the Imperium and the Assembly. Then there was a change of power of a newly elected president named Xendrian after the old president was impeached, and now the new president was desperately trying to repair damage done by his predecessor in political relations. Strangely, and remarkably, ships like the Leviathan explorer ship that appeared over Wave World, and now this carrier fleet ship that appeared before them now at this injunction in time looked like they were revealing more of themselves.

A gesture of good faith.

The sheer fact that they’d never seen these ships before meant that either the humans had never sent ships like these into their universe, or their cloaking technology was efficient enough to make them invisible to even their sensors. In all honesty, if the latter was true, then Jaikard couldn’t help but be concerned over their capability. He hopped for the prior. But then when first contact with the humans happened after tens of thousands of years of no contact after dimensional explorers found their home world – which likewise strangely cannot be found again, as if their whole home solar system had disappeared – they’d revealed themselves as a space faring, inter-dimensional race, but their

largest ships were absolutely nothing in comparison to the massive ships the Aphkei Imperium and Assembly utilized, let alone the Fortress Planets and Moons.

In only a matter of days, the threat level of the STA climbed by several degrees.

“Biological metal!” someone stated. “Their fleet ships are actually made out of biological metal. And their ship hums with mild magical power. They’re here in peace, I think... all their weapons ports are closed, inactive or locked. They don’t even have an escort.”

“It’s a carrier! Doesn’t mean they can’t have a few hundred fighters swarming around it in seconds or it doesn’t have back up a hyper-jump away...”

Jaikard nodded at the carrier as it waited their response.

A Grand Admiral implied much. For a military to have a Grand Admiral meant that it had a military vast enough to require a leader of multiple fleets. The implications of all this information was great and it made Jaikard also wonder what else the humans were hiding from them.

Then why did they only reveal one of their smallest ships at first contact? He asked himself. The answer came to him after a moment of thought. Because they are cautious... they don’t want to reveal their own capabilities, wanting us to like them for them and not for the sheer fact that they have military power.

He remembered how the Sol-Terans had approached them. The very first act of their appearance was to set up a trade agreement that was mostly beneficial to the Aphkei while the humans themselves asked for little more than information... a download of their primary public domain library computer.

They got their download, and thusly had a copy of the Aphkei’s star maps, encyclopedia, an idea of their basic technological abilities, their histories and so on. Jaikard suddenly realized that the humans now knew more about the Aphkei currently than the Aphkei knew of the humans and the presence of that ship that his own techs couldn’t discern any more of aside than its surface and what they could see by the naked eye proved that fact.

“What is Queen Morsica’s stance on allowing this human to board our station and view the trial?” Jaikard asked quietly to one of his aides.

“Queen Morsica is awaiting your decision, my lord.” The aide said quietly, his head surrounded by a cowl of communications devices to allow the emperor to remain in contact with all those necessary. Behind his aide stood his two psychics who remained in constant psychic contact with their counterparts back at the home world. “She states she will support your decision, my lord. The Assembly desires to walk with the Imperium in this matter.”

Jaikard nodded.

“Open a hail.” Jaikard said, and stepped into view of the viewscreen, the station commander immediately vacating his chair so that the Emperor was the only person in the field of view.

The holoscreen snapped into view, and the elderly human male identified as Grand Admiral Global turned to face the screen.

“Emperor Jaikard,” he greeted in his accented, baritone voice. “This is indeed an honor.” And he bowed his head.

“Grand Admiral... I’m at a loss... you seem to already know who I am. I understand that you wish to attend the trial of Lord Sage Preypacer.”

“I do Emperor Jaikard.” Global intoned. “But only as an observer.”

Jaikard stared at him for a fraction of a moment, and suddenly an assumption about Lord Sage was verified. Lord Sage was not a member of the STA government. They were here on a curiosity visit. Who is this person who calls himself a lord, and where on their Earth is he from?

“How many should we be expecting, Admiral?” Jaikard asked.

“Myself, an aide and a guardian. Forgive me, my emperor, but my own aides apparently do not trust me to be by myself, and I must ask for two seats wherever you can spare them.”

“Only two, Admiral?” Jaikard asked with a raised eyebrow.

“My guardian doesn’t like to sit when he’s on duty.”

Jaikard nodded. Off camera behind him, two Dragoons were standing at perfect professional attention, with Alkenphel – their leader – standing by the door.

“We will be beginning the trial in three hours, Admiral. At one hour seating will commence. At that time you may journey from your vessel as our station techs will direct you.”

“Thank you for your understanding, Emperor Jaikard.” Yuri stated, inclining his head again.

“I look forward to meeting you.” Jaikard stated, and his own techs deactivated the com and his aides immediately came up beside their emperor in case they were needed.

“Communicate to Queen Morsica upon my decision.” Jaikard said. “Continue to scan that ship as discretely as possible. Forward all information to my military advisors.”

“Yes Emperor Jaikard.” Several techs and his aide stated.

Jaikard stared at the enigmatic vessel of living metal floating motionless in space. *It’s time that we learned more about these humans,* Jaikard thought and turned elegantly to leave the station command deck. *They just unzipped their fly in showing us these two ships... an effort to reveal themselves to us. That means they are trying to openly reveal themselves now, show more of themselves. They either wish to intimidate us... or they believe us worthy enough to be friends.*

Time to treat them as the latter and see how they react...

One hour later, a shuttle disembarked from the Enterprise, a Sun Dancer class shuttle, allowing the Aphkei yet another Teran vessel that they’d never seen before, and parking the shuttle inside their station, the gangplank lowered at its underbelly, and Grand Admiral Yuri Global, Captain Mia Chang, and Archangel Zero-One disembarked from the shuttle.

Grand Admiral Global was an elderly gentlemen of Russian decent, hailing from one of the Baltic States on Earth, he supported his family’s and his people’s traditions. He spoke Russian and English – more Russian than English – and his speech was colored by the guttural, slow and precise language of the Russian Tongue. He was over a hundred years old, and before being given command of the Leviathan, he had been in command of The Merlin’s Dragon, the flagship of the Merlin’s Dragon fleet.

He’d received a command to go and observe the trial of a Lord Sage Preypacer, and since there were no lords in the STA alliance or any of its constituents, and haven’t been any lords in human history in centuries, then why is it that he called himself a Lord? Who was he? And why... was he the cause of the Aphkei’s ire and the reason for most of their distrust of the Human Alliance?

Regardless of circumstances... his command was to confirm the denial of Lord Sage’s involvement with the STA.

He'd commandeered command of the Enterprise, to which his present aide in attendance – Captain Mia Chang – had been the captain of.

The Enterprise held the reputation of millennia of Earth's most prestigious of fleet ships. Its roll was second only to the Leviathan in the Expeditionary Forces, and in the absence of the or a Leviathan Explorer Ship, the Enterprise was the flag ship for said Expeditionary Forces.

Mia was of Chinese Decent, but she'd been born in America, and somewhere in her family's past, they lost the desire and need to remember their Chinese heritage, and had become American. She didn't speak a word of Chinese, didn't worship Buddha, and wasn't a martial arts genius as many would assume. She was a tactician and a naval woman and had a penchant for diplomacy, but also had a bit of a temper and was rather stubborn. That temperament and stubbornness is the only thing that has kept her from being an admiral yet, and also the reason why Global was assigned to this task instead of her.

She was slightly miffed about the fact that he commandeered her ship, let alone took precedence of this mission.

And then there was Archangel... the original Archangel, a heavily modified human soldier that was over five hundred years old. He was shiny now, but typically he was very battle scarred. They were attempting to show a good impression during this appearance.

Archangel had earned his moniker from having the STA's most impressive battle record. Literally hundreds of thousands of battle victories, and likewise dressed in his heavy white robes and cloak that covered his folded feathered wings and most of his weapons and such but left the haft of his sword sticking out of his back, he was a technological and magical marvel having the combined might of an archmage and a battle hardened general combined with the best technology that the STA could provide. On the flaring, layered epaulets that hung about his shoulders was the design of the fleur-de-lis, marking him as a Harbinger. It was an emblem that only eight others were presently for their successes in their military career.

He was a war machine... and running in silent running mode so as not to offend their hosts. He was under strict presidential orders not to activate his weapons unless there was a 'clear and present danger that threatened the admiral or the captain.'

The three of them were met by an Aphkei Colonel with two Seigetroopers to either side of him.

"Grand Admiral Global." The Colonel greeted. "I am to escort you to your seat."

"Da. Thank you Colonel." He said and followed the colonel and his two guards out of the landing bay and into the station, being followed by two more Seigetroopers that appeared out of nowhere.

They were led by the most direct route to the chamber in which the trial was to be held, the colonel directed them to sit on seats that were nearly at the very back of the chamber, and then left. The four Seigetroopers, however, didn't.

The Admiral and his aide sat while the towering, eight foot tall Archangel stood behind them both.

"Admiral," the captain leaned in close, forcing a smile for impression. "This is an insult! They placed us in the very back of the room!"

"I can see fine, Captain." Global said, sitting back as he steepled his fingers, his hat resting on his lap as he crossed a leg over the other. "They saw fit to place us here at all is something to be thankful for, especially after our prior president's actions to their state."

"But Admiral..."

"Calm yourself Captain..." Global reinforced... "Your protest is noted."

“Yes sir.” She said and sat back.

Together they waited for the trial to begin, not really speaking to each other at all. Global knew that the only thing needed to make this mission successful, was to sit, watch, and be quiet. All they needed to do was to remain quiet in order to acknowledge that this Sage had no part of their government. It was a raw deal for the poor bastard, but the sake of trillions of lives was at stake here... and he'd been one of the reasons why relations between the Aphkei and the Humans as well as the Dragaseir and Dragons were so raw.

In all regards... this Lord Sage was being abandoned by his home world and his own people.

May God have mercy on his soul...

The chamber was crowded with dignitaries and councilors, but also was made up of mostly those who may or may not be called to testify. Sanari sat down in her assigned chair, and as she did, she felt a hand on her arm to help her to sit more comfortably, and when she looked up at her benefactor, she gasped as she saw Drake in his human form sit down beside her. He touched a finger to his lips to keep her from drawing attention to him, and calmly folded his hands together and crossed a leg and awaited the trial to begin.

Sanari likewise crossed a leg and resettled her skirts about her, awaiting for the trial to begin as well, seeing people around her that she recognized. Meniko, Genohn and Sato were seated in the first row, and around the first row and the rows behind them were Emperor Jaikard and Queen Morsica and their entourage. Rae Iksaki had appeared, dressed elegantly and sat beside the Queen. She looked nervous, but even she had no flack to sway a judgment in this room. Not even the Emperor and the Queen had power to sway a judgment in the room.

She recognized Imperium and Assembly counselors and senators whose lands and worlds were affected by Sage's rampage either directly or indirectly, but the brunt of the individuals in the chamber were all Imperium military, with several elders from the Reformed Dousaka Clan.

Talk about a hostile room.

But then she saw something that she didn't recognize.

At the very back of the room, right next to one of the corridors leading into room, was a pair of officers not wearing an Aphkei uniform, and for that matter, the elderly man and younger middle-aged woman weren't even Aphkei. They were humans. On top of it all, there was a behemoth of an armored guard standing behind them scanning the room just looking for trouble to defend against.

Sanari straightened and then looked at Drake, who didn't look at her, but did nonetheless lay a hand briefly on hers on the arm rest before moving it back to rest on his lap.

She swallowed and sat back, but no sooner than she did than a door opened on the judicial side of the chamber, and a security guard chimed in.

“All rise in honor of their honors, the Supreme Judges.” He chimed, and even the Queen and Emperor rose as the three judges stepped in wearing their red and black robes, with the chief justice having a red shoulder duster as they all sat within three of the five seats here.

The chief judge lifted a gavel and struck a metal plate on the desk before them.

“Be seated.” The Dragaseir stated, keying in several commands in the computer before him and a holoscreen rose up before the three judges. “Please bring in the prisoner.” Kazzak stated, and the doors immediately opened.

Six Dousaka Seigetroopers entered and fanned out around the room, joining the already present two Shocktroopers before a handler carrying a chain drew in Sage, who was shackled and held snugly within a webbing of razor wire

that glowed as it hugged his body, cutting grooves in his body armor while he was drawn toward the prisoner stand and then chained to the stand. Six more Seigetroopers entered the chamber after him, and finished fanning about the chamber, the handlers stepping away before another man – Colonel D'rend, the man who came to take Sage from the STA Marines and Slayers – entered in his crisp Imperium Dousaka uniform and stood beside his table, immediately followed by an aide with a case that he placed on the table before them and immediately opened for them to both remove datapads and papers from within.

Unlike a human trial, there was no table provided for a defense lawyer. In the Prime Universe, you were innocent until proven guilty. In the Great Wide Universe, if you were being brought before a judge, you have already been found guilty by the individual or individuals who captured you, and this was little more than a precaution to allow you to be proven innocent while you were sentenced.

Judge Kazzak banged his gavel again.

“Lord Sage Preypacer of Earth, Sol System, Prime Universe,” Kazzak began. “You are here before the Intergalactic Court after having committed multiple counts of Rampage. For your benefit, you are not here for the case of proving your guilt... by sheer fact that you are here you are already guilty. You are here after committing a crime, and all evidence found has shown that you are guilty of this crime. You are here to be judged by the Intergalactic Court and receive your punishment.

“Due to the fact that you are not of our universe, and not a formal citizen, we can only try you and punish you provided that no other government can claim you. Is there a government present that can claim you?”

Sage didn't even bother to look, and Sanari turned her head enough to look at the visitors out of the corner of her eye. They didn't even move... not even to gesture.

“No.” Sage said quietly. “There is not a government that will claim me.”

Sanari looked to Drake. He didn't move either.

Politics...

“So noted.” Kazzak stated and keyed up something else on the judge's screens. “Lord Sage Preypacer, former Headmaster of the League of the Shadow Arts, your crime of Rampage is considered to be a capitol offense. The act of Rampage occurs when a single individual manages to commit the murder on the scale of a thousand plus individuals, and or causing one million credits worth of damages. You are before this court and are facing three counts of Murdering Rampage on the matter that over three thousand individuals have died. You are also before this court on an additional three counts of Destructive Rampage for sacking the Mystic League and the Demon League, and likewise for the damages suffered by Planet Tilk. Furthermore, you are here with one count of Greater Damaging Rampage, due to the act of decimating an entire planet, the planet currently known as ZA-Zero-Zero-One.

“A myriad of other crimes also is being placed upon your head from damages to imperial, public and private properties. For those crimes alone you are facing a trial of banishment and sealing from our universe for all time. But for the crime of Rampage, you are facing a punishment of death.

“You have already been proven guilty of all these crimes, but you have the chance to pronounce yourself as innocent or guilty, and contest the judgment. How do you wish to plead to your crimes?”

Kazzak waited, sitting back in his high-backed chair, waiting for Sage to respond. Sage remained very, very quiet, and Colonel D'rend looked quite happy with himself. Still... no one moved, and even Sanari couldn't make herself rise, despite that she wanted to shout out for them to stop and run to him at that very moment.

“Lord Sage... how do you plead?” Kazzak repeated.

Sage exhaled deeply. “I plead... Gil...”

And then the doors to the sunken hole in the chamber where Sage resided were thrown open. "OBJECTION!" a voice called out, and in a flurry of a black suit, a body surged into the chamber and immediately placed his briefcase on the table where the two Aphkei officers currently sat behind.

The three judges all rose in indignation, and many members of the crowd likewise rose, and Sage lifted his head, blinking at Daedalus as he whirled around to face the judges.

"What is the meaning of this?!" The Aphkei representative amongst the judges for the Imperium pointed at Dallas. "This is a closed trial! How dare you interrupt it?! Who are you?!"

"My humble apologies, your honors." Dallas responded, bowing deeply beside his table. "My name is Dallas Ronin, Chief Legal Officer for Ronin Enterprises. I apologize again for the interruption, but my presence is due to that Sage Preypacer is our company's retainer, and strangely enough, we were not notified of his impending trial. I only arrived just recently, and was shocked to find that Lord Sage wasn't even informed that he was able to seek legal representation."

Kazzak paused, and then looked to Colonel D'rend for a moment, and then toward Lord Sage.

"Lord Sage... I understand that our legal system is not similar to the one utilized by your universe. But were you or were you not informed that you were able to have legal representation?"

"I was not." Sage stated, looking up at the Chief Justice.

Kazzak sat down and the other two justices sat down with him and he thought for a moment. He looked annoyed, Sanari noted.

"Such a precedence is unfortunate, Lord Sage, but a Speaker has already been assigned and documented as Colonel D'rend of the Reformed Dousaka Clan of the Imperium. Sadly, as these proceedings have already begun, they cannot end. We are once again to the question of your guilt or innocence, Lord Sage. How do you plead?"

Sage sighed and began again. "Gil..."

"Objection your honors." Dallas stated again, and Kazzak swung his serpentine head toward Dallas.

"I will only tolerate interruptions so far, Mister Ronin..." Kazzak said.

"Yes, your honor. But I believe that a serious infraction is about to occur here. Lord Sage is being accused for crimes in which he is not responsible for, and he has so been brainwashed into thinking that he is guilty for said crimes. I make a move to act as the advocate for these proceedings... for I have information that will prove Lord Sage's innocence which I believe even the Speaker does not have. I will go so far as to say that his information is likewise flawed..."

D'rend snapped his head over to Dallas and glowered.

"Dallas..." Sage began. "I..."

"Silence Lord Sage!" Dallas said. "You are on trial here! You are not to speak unless spoken to, and if you persist to do so, then I will have you gagged."

Sanari blinked as she watched Dallas point at his master, though she detected a great deal of regret around the machine-man's actions as he quavered and pressed his lips together.

Sage blinked at him, but remained silent.

"You have information that will prove the innocence of Lord Sage Preypacer, Mister Ronin?" Kazzak stated.

“I do your honors.” Dallas stated.

Kazzak looked at Dallas in a new light, and then grasped his gavel as he leaned first to one of his fellow judges, and then to the other to converse briefly with them, and then banged his gavel again. “Motion for Advocacy is approved. Colonel D’rend, please present your evidence. Mister Ronin, please present your counter evidence when necessary.”

And with another banging of his gavel, the trial began.

Colonel D’rend began very simply. And he began with the most heinous of Sage’s acts... the decimation of a farming colony. The gathered crowd gasped as they watched the explosion that created a crater several thousand miles wide and several miles deep, transforming a bowl of earth into a cracked plate of obsidian.

Rae Iksaki sat watching this; amazed that someone was powerful enough to scar a planet so. It frightened her that she was also capable of such devastation.

“This is an example of Lord Sage’s greatest crime against the people of the Aphkei Imperium.” D’rend began. “This was a simple harvest colony... they were defenseless, and Lord Sage attacked it in such a way that threw several thousand cubic miles of dust up into the atmosphere and likewise cooked off two percent of said atmosphere. This has decimated the planet’s capability of producing food – food! – For the Imperium citizens in this sector of space. The global temperature of the entire planet has dropped by twenty two degrees, it has tilted its axis eight degrees off kilter, and has offset the orbital rotation of the entire planet! Unless properly outfitted, the people there who refuse to leave their livelihoods will die within a matter of months.

“The planet is no longer of use for the Aphkei Imperium, and its loss has cost the Imperium nine hundred and fifty two billion credits.”

“Is that all?” Dallas asked.

“What do you mean is that all?” D’rend demanded.

“We’ll get back to that in a moment.” Dallas said and turned to Sage. “Lord Sage, in regards to images that you just witnessed... were you the purveyor of that decimation?”

“Yes.” Sage said and D’rend smiled darkly.

“Why did you attack that colony in such a way?” Dallas continued.

“I-It wasn’t an attack.” Sage stated.

“That...” D’rend began and reran the images. “... Is not considered an attack, Lord Sage? Then what was it?”

Sage licked his lips. “I... had been growing in power faster than I could control. I needed a place that I could go where the energy could be released without killing anyone.”

“And why did you choose that particular planet?” Dallas asked.

“It was... remote. Very little civilization on it. It would’ve been safe to release the pent up energy without hurting anyone.”

“And the fact that a division of Soldiers were incinerated?” D’rend growled. “How do you account for that?!”

"I... didn't want to hurt anyone. They just suddenly appeared. I couldn't stop the explosion... it would come no matter how hard I tried to hold it off, and I tried to warn them... but they didn't listen." Sage responded.

"An accident in other words." Dallas stated, and then turned, and an overlay of the planet appeared to show the locations where the civilizations were on the planet, as well as the decimation zone. "Very good choice then. If you had no choice to, Lord Sage, you actually detonated away from all towns and cities on planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One, and only marginally destroyed a few hundred square miles of crops. If not for the appearance of the Aphkei who attacked you in an attempt to capture or kill you... no one would've died.

"The fact that it happened was unfortunate, but nonetheless an accident."

"And then after he decimated the entire planet, he likewise went on to destroy a cruiser, a carrier, destroy their entire compliment of space craft and mecha, and kill half the soldiers and pilots between them!" D'rend stated.

"Lord Sage," Dallas turned to address Sage again. "Before this point, had you even once been told that you were being accused of anything?"

"No." Sage stated.

"No loud speakers, no one telling you at all that what you were doing was wrong?"

"No."

"No one demanding that you surrender and turn yourself in?"

"No... but..."

"That will do, Lord Sage. So then, after you were forced to release your power in this way, what happened?"

"I was attacked from orbit."

"And you defended yourself?"

"Yes." Sage answered and Dallas nodded.

"So the damages of the cruiser and the carrier and the deaths of all those soldiers and pilots and the destruction of all associated mecha and space craft were done in self defense." Dallas stated.

"Self defense?! Nearly two thousand soldiers and pilots dead and gone, and you call that self defense?"

"I do." Dallas stated. "Bear in mind that the soldiers and fighters attacked first, and they did so prior to informing Lord Sage that he'd done anything wrong. Unfortunately for your soldiers and pilots, they did attack an individual who could defend himself."

"I don't believe this." D'rend said. "The matter of right or wrong is not at hand here, the matter that he did it is. Lord Sage had caused hundreds of billions of credits worth of damage to Imperium owned property and also caused the loss of nearly two thousand lives!"

"Very well... I was under the assumption that right or wrong was the matter at hand here, Colonel... but if a matter of the deaths and property are at hand, let's begin with the biggest one of them, shall we?" Dallas then turned to the judges. "Your honors... may I address the Justice representing the Aphkei Imperium?"

Kazzak looked to the justice to his left and that justice leaned forward. "You may." The justice said.

"Your honor, I understand that Emperor Jaikard of the Aphkei Imperium is in attendance. May I address him while court is in session?"

The justice blinked, and he and his other two justices looked at one another, and then the Justice glanced at Jaikard and the emperor nodded.

“You may.” The justice stated, and Dallas bowed again and turned to Emperor Jaikard.

“Emperor,” Dallas bowed one more time. “As the Legal representative of Ronin Enterprises, I wish to purchase planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One... we offer one trillion credits for its purchase.”

Dallas did not raise his eyes as he address Jaikard... Jaikard felt the corners of his mouth twitch toward smiling at seeing someone obeying the proper protocol for addressing judges and then dignitaries attached to such a judge.

“One Trillion credits, Dallas Ronin?” Jaikard stated.

“To additionally compensate the empire for damages to its ships and to compensate the families of the soldiers killed in Lord Sage’s act of discretion.”

“What of the people on the planet, Mister Ronin?” Jaikard asked.

“They will be well cared for. They will receive monetary bonuses and social aide for staying on the planet, and additionally will receive additional compensation for occupational retraining if they choose to take jobs other than agriculture.”

Jaikard paused, and waited, and his psychics and his aids leaned in close to him to converse quickly with him, the three of them representing the words and commands of a myriad of individuals. They withdrew and Jaikard addressed Dallas.

“It is an acceptable deal.”

“My lord Emperor!” D’rend began but then Kazzak banged his gavel.

“You will address the emperor properly in this court, Colonel D’rend... or I’ll hold you in contempt.” Kazzak commanded.

D’rend looked like he’d rather chew glass, and he promptly bowed. “Your honors, I request to address the Justice for the Aphkei Imperium.”

Kazzak banged his gavel again. “Denied. There is already a motion on the floor of utilizing a Justice to address a dignitary. You will have to await your turn.”

D’rend grit his teeth till they ground.

A wisp of a smile crossed Daedalus’s face as he gestured and a long legal document suddenly appeared on a holoscreen before the emperor, appearing as if the document were contained between two sheets of glass.

“Please place your mark on the document, my Emperor.” Dallas stated, bowing.

Jaikard rose, and lifting his hand, planted his signet ring onto the document, placing the Imperium’s legal seal onto the document.

“Thank you my lord.” Dallas stated and bowed, and the document disappeared, he then turned to the justices again. “Your honors, may I please make a contact to our fleet of merchant marines, so that they may provide for the denizens of planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One?” Dallas asked, and Jaikard raised an eyebrow.

“You may.” Kazzak said, secretly enjoying the situation immensely.

Dallas gestured again, and a massive communication screen appeared where everyone could see it, and a black clad elderly Cerulean appeared.

“Captain Marduk.” Dallas greeted.

“Yes Mister Ronin.” Marduk greeted.

“You may begin your landing.”

“Yes sir... commencing relief operation.” And the window disappeared.

“Several matters I would like to address at this interim your honors, all of which will relate to the trial at hand and the fate of Lord Sage Preypacer, if I may?”

“You may, Mister Ronin.”

“Planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One has just been processed to be the private property of Ronin Enterprises, and shall hereby be renamed as Planet Praxis. Planet Praxis shall thusly be the location of Ronin Enterprises Headquarters. The captain in whom I have just communicated with is the Captain of our roving headquarters. The ship will land, and put up permanent residence on Planet Praxis; thusly making our company headquarters centralized, and will likewise qualify us as a viable mega-corporation.”

“So noted.” Kazzak stated.

“As the legal owners of Planet Praxis, we likewise do not wish to press charges against Lord Sage Preypacer, and therefore the charge of greater rampage is no longer applicable. And with the Justice for the Aphkei Imperium’s verification from his emperor, the added funds made for the purchase of Planet Praxis to be able to repair their ships, I move that one act of Damaging Rampage and two acts of Murdering Rampage likewise be dismissed.”

Dallas bowed low and waited, and the justice for the Imperium looked to his Emperor. Jaikard nodded, and the justice likewise nodded.

“Motion granted,” Kazzak stated and banged his gavel. “The act of Greater rampage is here by dismissed, and one act of Damaging Rampage and two acts of Murdering Rampage is likewise dismissed.”

Sanari’s heart was thudding rapidly that Dallas had managed to redeem his master for the most heinous of his charges in one fell swoop. Colonel D’rend, however, had not yet begun to fight. This time he moved toward the beginning of Sage’s acts. The Attack on the Demon League.

“The unmitigated murder of one Hawthorne, the patron of the Demon League.” D’rend began. “But only after the sacking of the Demon League and its facilities, the maiming of nine members of its graduating classes. I have here the documentation of Lord Genohn of the Demon League, and the reports of the nine in whom he wounded, all of whom, thankfully, were able to be healed and revived enough to be able to make a statement. Unless of course that you wish to dispute any of their statements, Mister Ronin...”

“I’m sure that their statements are perfectly accurate to their impressions of the situation.” Dallas stated. “Though I am certain that the interviewer’s questions had made them misunderstand the questions asked to assume that Hawthorne is dead and the Demon League was sacked.”

Meniko’s clawed hands tightened on her arm chair, and her teeth gritted at the fact that Hawthorne was indeed dead and Dallas was trying to write it off. Genohn was indeed quite miffed at the fact as well, but he wasn’t showing his anger.

“Lord Hawthorne is lying on his back, still at the Demon League, his chest cavity torn open and his heart missing.” D’rend said, and pulled up an image of just that. Meniko gasped and looked away, but the image was already seared in her brain. “And the facilities of the Demon League have been heavily damaged.”

Dallas gestured and a large holo window, again looking like panes of glass crystal holding documents, and a list of damages appeared.

“These are a catalog of all damages reported at the Demon League. A collapsed wall, two damaged doors, some cosmetic damage to certain floors and walls, and a completely destroyed main chamber that once housed Lord Hawthorne.” Dallas stated. “Damages can easily be repaired with the following damage quote.” He gestured and a figure arrived. “One hundred and seventy two thousand, five hundred and sixty three credits. Being that Lord Sage’s bank account with Ronin Banks has been seized by our company, we can gladly donate an even two hundred thousand credits to repair the damages. That is of course if Lord Genohn has no problem with the repair money also allowing them to upgrade several facilities.”

Kazzak banged his gavel and directed his attention to Genohn.

“Lord Genohn please rise.” And Genohn immediately did so. “Do you accept this form of penance as the present headmaster of the Demon League?”

“I will not accept anything from the man who murdered our patron...” Genohn said.

“But therein lays the problem.” Dallas said suddenly. “You see... Lord Hawthorne isn’t dead.”

“Isn’t dead?” D’rend gasped, and brought the image of Hawthorne’s corpse up again. “Tell me Mister Dallas. How can you blatantly state that this!” and the image zoomed in on the gaping chest cavity of Hawthorne, and Meniko choked and turned to Sato. “Doesn’t constitute as murder?!”

“Because something so benign and simple as loosing your heart doesn’t kill a dragon, Colonel D’rend.” Dallas said. “Thankfully, Dragons aren’t so fragile as you or I.” Dallas then turned to Sage. “Lord Sage... where is the heart?”

“Inside me.” Sage said, and there were several gasps and murmurs, but Meniko was slowly looking toward Sage with hatred, and... the barest bit of hope.

“Is it safe? Can it be returned?” Dallas asked.

“It can.” Sage replied, and there were still more murmurs. “It is in Topor... I... have stopped drawing from it

“What is this?!” D’rend gasped.

“Magic that was considered ancient when your species was nothing more than billowing enzymes in some mud puddle prior to its evolutionary climb, Colonel. Ancient when the spark that ignited your home world’s star ever happened. Ancient before your or Lord Sage’s very universe was ever even wrought from the Cosmic Forge.

“Hawthorne is still alive... evident in the fact that even his spilled blood has yet to coagulate. Any highly evolved species or supremely powerful psychic will understand that the body is nothing more than a husk. Dragons have long, long ago mastered the power of immortality, and pass it down amongst their family lines. Hawthorne had such a line... he wouldn’t be as powerful as he was without that blood of immortals flowing through his body.

“Ultimately, Hawthorne cannot be considered murdered if he never died in the first place. Assault at best, but, I am sure that Lord Sage is perfectly willing to return the heart to its rightful place. Under that understanding, Chief Justice, I beg that the question of as to whether or not Lord Hawthorne will accept the monies to repair his damaged school... especially since his earlier statement as to that he won’t accept monies from his master’s murderer is no longer a valid point.”

Kazzak stared at Dallas... he was of all seriousness!

Kazzak banged his gavel and pointed at Lord Sage, clearing his throat. Up until now... he'd thought only the Dragaseir could do such things...

"Lord Sage... do you so solemnly swear to return the heart of Lord Hawthorne back to its rightful place?"

"I do!" Sage said without hesitation.

Kazzak banged his gavel and motioned toward Genohn. "And Lord Genohn... I repeat the earlier question to you: Do you accept this form of penance as the present Headmaster of the Demon League?"

Genohn was staring at Dallas, and the machine man stared right back, Dallas's eyes unblinking. Genohn's lips compressed, and then he exhaled through his nostrils. The silence from him was remarkable.

"Provided that this... remarkable tale can be proven, then I will accept the monetary penance of Lord Sage to repair the damages to the Demon League."

Kazzak banged his Gavel. "So noted. Lord Sage, the charge of sacking the Demon League is reduced to a charge of grand defacement and mayhem. The charge of the murder of Lord Hawthorne will be dismissed and replaced with a charge of assault... provided of course that at the end of these proceedings you can indeed revive Lord Hawthorne. The charge of assault will only be removed provided of course that if you can revive Lord Hawthorne, that he forgives the attack."

Kazzak banged his gavel again, and yet another series of Sage's crimes was dismissed.

D'rend was calm now as he brought up two long lists with the help of his aide... one of which was the number of people who died by Sage's hands, the other was a full list of all damages.

"I bring now the evidence against Lord Sage, regarding all of the myriad of deaths and damages conducted by him. I wish to enter these two lists in as evidence Alpha and Bravo." D'rend said, and the two holographic screens held themselves above everyone against one side of the chamber for all to see in perfect clarity.

All eyes turned to the two holographic screens.

"All of these instances are damage claims, private, corporate and government, and all against Lord Sage, additionally, the death list have all been confirmed to have been caused by Lord Sage. These are blatant examples of rampage."

Dallas stared up at the lists for a moment, and Sanari looked down at him. She saw that she wasn't the only one, even Emperor Jaikard and a few choice others were watching Dallas now more than D'rend.

"That is a very detailed list, Colonel." Dallas said suddenly. "Did you prepare that list yourself?"

"I did."

"No one else helped you in the gathering process?"

"No one did." He said looking proud, drawing himself up proudly.

This was to become his crowning achievement, defeating the Shadow Beast legally, and peacefully. But then Dallas nodded and redirected his attention to the Colonel now.

"But there are discrepancies, Colonel."

“What?” D’rend blinked. He knew there were discrepancies, but they were subtle, and with several thousand names, they could be slipped in easily without anyone’s notice.

“Firstly, your lists are still accounting for charges that have already been dismissed. In this case, the price of the planetary damage has been removed, and all lives lost on that planet have also been removed that are non military. Ronin Enterprises will be fronting repairs for those damages.” Dallas gestured and several lines on both charts highlighted. “Per court order, these charges and these lives are now the responsibility of Ronin Enterprises, and are being cared for by our company. We refuse to press charges, so they are no longer valid.”

All those line items disappeared, and D’rend’s eyes widened slightly as he grit his teeth that someone just modified his document just like that, his aide giving a start before D’rend leaned over and began voicing excitedly into the ear of his aide.

“Continuing on.” Dallas stated. “The following names and funds have also been dismissed... pending of course Lord Sage can revive Lord Hawthorne of the Demon League.” Dallas gestured again and the additional line items and names highlighted. One name, Hawthorne, was highlighted in red, whereas several others were highlighted in blue. “But I am confused, Colonel, the names you see in blue are the names of Leaguers and Guards who have been assaulted and critically wounded, but not killed.”

“What?” D’rend asked, and suddenly the eyes of all in the chamber swiveled toward him.

“These names, Colonel.” Dallas repeated and further highlighted the names in blue with a black border. “Chimera, Teema Iksaki, Smith, Jasa Kese or Korho Kese, and all other names are reportedly in varying statuses that require hospitalization, but are not dead. I notice you have Lord Genohn on this list as well, Colonel, and as you can see, Lord Genohn is quite healthy... enough so where he is in attendance in this very room.”

“Communications were very poor due to the damages that Lord Sage caused to the Mystic League. We were under the understanding that all of those individuals, being that they couldn’t be located at the Demon League, they were perhaps incinerated.” D’rend said smoothly.

“Perfectly understandable, Colonel. But a report was indeed filed prior to the damages caused to the Mystic League that a medical team was sent by the Mystic League to come to the aide of the Demon League. All of these individuals were moved to the Mystic League hospital for treatment. All of the names on this list are currently in stable condition at the Mystic League Medical Facility.

“With the court’s permission, I would like to remove these names from the list and downgrade the crimes against them from murder to assault.”

Kazzak looked to his fellow justices briefly and banged his gavel. “Sustained.” He said, and Dallas gestured and the names all removed themselves from the list.

“Additionally, being that we have a legal list of damages at the Demon League, I find that the line items are awfully exuberant.” Dallas gestured again, and the line items found for the Demon League provided by D’rend highlighted and totaled, and then beside the file was the list of damages provided by Dallas, which highlighted and totaled, showing a reduced number by several tens of thousands of credits.

“Objection.” D’rend stated. “Our damage inspectors already inspected the Demon League and all damages therein.”

“Our damage inspector was the first on site.” Dallas stated, and reaching inside his suit coat, he removed a piece of paper and opened it up and held it for all to see. This is the document, your honors, which shows that a representative of Ronin Enterprises has already ascertained the cost to repair all damages utilizing average market values to replace and or repair all damages. The seal you notice is from the magistrate over that area of space validating the claim. Being that the facilities are provided primarily by Hawthorne, and all damages are being filed commercially with private insurance companies, all of which are owned by Ronin Enterprises, we bare the responsibility as to exactly what to charge our clients. In this case, we are providing the repair of all damages free of charge to the Demon League.”

Kazzak held out his hand and Dallas moved forward to the stand and held it up to the chief justice to inspect. Again he leaned to the representative justice for the Imperium, and he inspected it as well and then nodded.

“Overruled.” Kazzak said and handed the document back to Dallas who then handed it to D’rend and his aide.

“That is a copy of the original document. You may keep that for your records, but these line items are likewise removed per court order.” He gestured over his shoulder and those also disappeared as he looked to Sage, his face passive, for only a second before turning back to the task at hand and faced his opponents, daring them to bring up the next point.

Sanari’s long fingers were growing white-knuckled on the arm rests of her chair. Across from her, sitting with Queen Morsica, Rae was wringing her hands loosely before Morsica placed her hand over both of Rae’s massively powerful ones to calm her.

As always... Drake remained unmoving.

D’rend was rapidly loosing reasons to punish this fiend.

“I would like to now direct everyone’s attentions to Planet Tilk.” He said, and a holographic diagram of the planet appeared as the lights dimmed, showing the continental city of Tilk and the large damage area associated therein. As you can see, there has been a very large area that was directly decimated by Lord Sage, totaling in the tens of millions of credits. Toppled buildings, damaged city roads, loss of lives both civilian and military.

“The extensive level of chaos caused by Lord Sage has killed and maimed and destroyed so much for the citizens of the Imperium.” He stabbed a finger at Sage. “This alone is evidence enough that this monster... should be put out of its misery and out of our lives!”

“Objection.” Dallas said and stepped forward to the justices’ attention. “The subject at hand has a valid, legal name of Lord Sage Preypacer. Titles such as ‘The Beast’, ‘The Shadow Beast’ and ‘Monster’ are derogatory. He is a prisoner who has surrendered to the will of the Aphkei Imperium, specifically to the Reformed Dousaka Clan, and should not be treated with such disrespect by calling him by demeaning nick names.”

“Sustained.” Kazzak stated.

Dallas then turned to D’rend with a half smile. “Please continue Colonel.” Dallas urged.

“Lord Sage was captured by our forces...”

“Objection... discrepancy.” Dallas said immediately.

D’rend grit his jaw and turned on Dallas. “What sort of discrepancy was there in Lord Sage’s Capture, Mister Ronin?”

“In the fact that he wasn’t captured by the Imperium forces, Colonel. He was captured by the Sol-Teran Alliance and turned over to the Imperium.” Dallas gestured and an image appeared, showing D’rend himself in control of the acceptance of Lord Sage from the STA. “Is that not you accepting the turn over from the STA, Colonel?” D’rend didn’t say anything. “But even then, he was captured only after he surrendered, not captured by, but surrendered to the Imperium.”

“He was captured, Mister Ronin.” D’rend said coolly.

“Oh? So this means absolutely nothing then, Colonel?”

Dallas gestured again and yet another holoscreen, appearing as a pane of glass again, and began to play. The Image was of Lord Sage, standing before a tousled Dousaka Officer.

“What’s your name?” Sage was saying, almost in a whisper.

“Lieutenant Cabol.” The officer said.

“Lieutenant Cabol.” Sage smiled. *“I... Lord Sage Preypacer, do hereby... surrender... to the Aphkei Imperium for my sins and crimes against your state.”*

And Sage’s eyes closed, and he immediately collapsed to his knees, and then forward onto the ground.

The image stopped, even as Lieutenant Cabol surged in and looked down at Sage.

“This here is the certified statement of Lieutenant Cabol, who accepted the capture of Lord Sage.” Dallas said, gesturing again, and a short, legal document that was signed and emblazoned with an official seal appeared over the video clip. “Your information that Lord Sage was captured is a false assumption, Colonel. Lord Sage surrendered, openly, and of his own volition. Treating him like this,” Dallas gestured toward the chains binding Sage in his massively draconic form. “Goes directly against the code of ethics governing prisoners of any sort of conflict Colonel.”

“Lord Sage is a madman, Mister Preypacer.” D’rend growled. “Those documents *blatantly* show proof and evidence of his every crime. True you whittled the lists down, but there is still more than enough to convict him and have him executed.”

“Lord Sage suffered a temporary leave of mental clarity, Colonel...”

“Temporary insanity? That’s your big ploy, Mister Ronin? Even temporary insanity for an individual of Lord Sage’s capacity is something that cannot be afforded, Mister Ronin. In all cases, even temporarily that he lost his mind is reason enough to have him shoved through the nearest dimensional gateway and locked from our and any other civilized universe for ever and ever.”

“Lord Sage is here of his own volition, Colonel. I demand that you remove him from his bonds and restraints. He is not here to harm anyone...”

“I will not...”

“Objection your honors...” Dallas said and turned immediately toward Kazzak and his associates.

It was conflicts of interest such as this that Kazzak hated the most. And unfortunately, he invariably had to seek the greater good of all things.

“I am sorry, Mister Ronin... but due to the safety of all individuals in this chamber, Lord Sage has been ordered to be collared, chained and bound while in attendance of this court. I must see proper evidence before I can overrule that commandment.”

Dallas nodded, considered and turned toward Sage for a moment, and then back to Kazzak. “Then I propose an experiment, one that will prove that Lord Sage is here of his own volition. I will personally guarantee the safety of everyone in this chamber.”

The two other justices leaned in close to Kazzak, and the three of them conversed energetically for awhile while Kazzak locked gazes with Dallas Ronin. Then their heads separated and Kazzak leaned forward.

“Continue with your experiment, Mister Ronin.” He said, and Dallas nodded and then turned to Sage.

“Lord Sage, please escape from your bonds.” Dallas said simply.

“Oh this is ridiculous, your honors. The collar alone around Lord Sage’s neck would keep even the Black Beast contained. It’s a moot point to even consider that anyone can escape such a restraint.”

“The Colonel is quite correct, so, with a collar in place,” Dallas stated, “How can anyone escape? Well, in effect, the only way to escape is if the collar isn’t there. The reason for this is that the collar stops all but involuntary nerve impulses to the lower body, and even those are subdued. However, all brain activity remains unhindered, save for Psychic abilities. Being that the mind cannot draw from the source of power that comes from the body, all spell casting, psychic, spirit manipulation, or for that matter any type of extra-physical power is nullified.

“However, Lord Sage is what is known as a Lycan, and Lycan’s possess a shape shifting ability which is triggered by brain activity by a gland likewise located in the skull.”

With that, Sage began to transform and shrink.

“Thanks to a chemical reaction in the body, a Lycan can transform and shift through their forms as a learned skill, and the finer that that skill becomes the easier it is for them to control their bodies. But regardless of circumstances, Lord Sage can easily be removed from all his bonds by assuming human form.”

It took only five seconds, but Sage stood naked as all his chains and braces fell off him, a finely chiseled human being fully in control of his powers and abilities now that he was free.

“Merciful Aul! He’s loose! Shocktroopers! Attack the prisoner!!” D’rend stated, and suddenly Sage was an eighteen foot towering entity who was sliding his hands beneath the flats of hardened armor of both of the shock troopers, sending a pulse down his hands inside their bodies, they shivered briefly and collapsed to the ground.

The people in the room began to murmur, several getting to their feet to run with a few mild screams. Sanari and Rae had gotten to their feet, but the Emperor, the Queen, Drake, and the STA visitor in the back and his guard aide didn’t move, though the guard moved forward to resist Sage should he attack.

Sage then turned and spread a sparkling cascade of energy that washed past D’rend, his aide and Dallas, but took up all the Siegetroopers in the room and slapped them all firmly against the walls, spread eagle, effectively making them immobile.

“With his bonds removed and his captors taken care of, all he’d need to do to escape is to lift a hand and send a blast through that transparent plassteel wall.” Dallas stated loudly, Sage blinked at him, his mouth opening in disbelief.

Dallas stood there, and in bewilderment, the individuals who’d gotten up to run away or intervene, all paused.

“No.” Sage breathed, backing away from the two disabled Shocktroopers.

“No?” Dallas turned to Sage. “And why not, Lord Sage? These people have wrongfully accused you of many things; you could escape by simply destroying that dome. You can live in space... so why don’t you do it?”

“Because that would kill everyone in this room.” Sage responded, and Dallas immediately turned to the tribunal.

“Thank you Lord Sage... the experiment has been concluded, you may again take your place on the stand.”

Sage looked confused, but obediently did so, looking nervous at the moment as he took the stand.

“Your honors... is that satisfactory evidence that he is here of his own volition, and means no harm to the people here?”

Kazzak swallowed. “It is. Objection sustained. Replace the guards and remove Lord Sage’s bonds.”

Lord Sage stood while a pair of droids appeared and collected all his braces and bindings and collar, hauling them away, while the Shocktroopers were replaced by another pair once Sage had released all the Seigetroopers. Sage had merely sent an electromagnetic shock into their internal systems to shut down their power plants. The life functions of their artificial organic brains and organs was on a backup that was additionally sealed, but that little trick was possible only if Sage broke their seals and slid his hands beneath their many layers of heavy armor to deliver the shock. They would be ok with some minimal repairs and a reactor recharge or replacement.

D'rend watched this brief pause as he mopped at his brow with a handkerchief before continuing. He really didn't like the fact that Sage was unbound. A look around the room showed that he wasn't the only one thankfully...

"You may continue, Colonel." Kazzak stated, and D'rend swallowed and stepped forward.

"On the last subject... Lord Sage's attack of planet Tilk..."

"Objection... discrepancy." Dallas said.

"Mister Ronin... Lord Sage definitely attacked planet Tilk. The decimation is boldly there!" D'rend pointed at the map of the devastation to the City of Tilk. "How can you deny that Lord Sage did not do that?"

"Simply because he didn't cause it... The Imperium forces under the command of General Margulis caused the damage. Lord Sage simply defended himself against military forces using heavy weaponry."

"He was resisting arrest." D'rend said.

"Was he?" Dallas said evenly, and then turned to Sage. "Lord Sage... did you receive a command to surrender?"

"No." Sage answered.

"He's lying!" D'rend said immediately, and Kazzak immediately banged his gavel.

"Colonel D'rend... one more outburst like that insulting my court and I will hold you in contempt!"

D'rend cursed himself for losing his temper, and took a deep breath. The intergalactic court employed the most elaborate lie detection system – both magical and technological - in known creation. There was no margin of error. Its accuracy was one hundred percent with repeating zeros as close to any computer could get to infinity. If Sage were to lie... it would've detected it immediately and stated as such.

To disrepute its capacity to detect lies was to insult the court.

"My... most humble apologies, your honors." D'rend bowed deeply, gritting his teeth that this Mister Ronin had maneuvered him into such a position.

"Accepted, Colonel D'rend." Kazzak stated. "Please continue."

D'rend rose, glared at Dallas and then continued.

"I believe that Lord Sage is... mistaken... where the truth is concerned." D'rend stated.

"So noted," Kazzak stated and sat up in his chair again. "Do you have proof of such?"

"No... I do not, your honors. General Margulis was of course Killed-in-Action, and all recordings were destroyed with his regiment."

“I on the other hand... have proof supporting Lord Sage’s claim, Colonel.” Dallas stated just then, and then turned toward Sage, ignoring D’rend’s glare. “Lord Sage... could you please, in your own words and as best as you remember, tell us what happened to begin the conflict on Planet Tilk?”

Sanari found herself looking at Sage as he fidgeted... and he bowed his head in shame.

“Please, Lord Sage... what happened?” Dallas urged, and gestured, and one of his holo windows appeared off to one side of the room, out of Sage’s sight, even from the eyes in the back of his head.

“It had been... right after the attack on the Demon League.” Sage began, his tritanium sheathed fingers closing around the bar before him. “I had been... transforming... growing... and had been very, very angry. There was this... boy...”

The image on the holo window began playing, and it revealed Sage in his mid transformation state, sitting naked on the ground of some destitute alleyway, and a small child walked up to him.

“I told the boy to go away... a part of me wanted to protect him... another wanted to lash out and strangle him. But that part of me that wanted to protect overrode everything at that moment. I was... very confused at the moment... I really didn’t know what to do any more... and that made me upset. I wanted to be alone more than anything... the boy wouldn’t go away.”

The images were showing all this in accurate detail, one bit after the next, even as Sage said them.

“But then, the boy offered me his lollypop.” Sage paused, and then closed his eyes. “He told me that his mother had saved for an entire week all their extra coin to give the child just one little treat, and he wanted to share it with me. Something in my heart melted at that moment, and in spite of myself, I accepted the lolly.”

Behind him, the image of Sage taking the lollypop and sucking on it as the boy stood there, happy and kind.

“But then the child said he heard someone whistling, and I heard it too.”

Sage’s image looked up, and another window appeared, this time it was an image that immediately focused in, showing a tank, of civilians running away, just as the missile rack on the tank launched a missile, and Aphkei foot soldiers advanced.

“I... tried to save the child,”

Sage’s image turned immediately, covering the child with his own body.

“But the missile that was launched at me was an incendiary weapon... it simply splashed against me and onto the child.”

The explosion came and the images dropped, sparing the people in the chamber a sight of what Sage had seen.

“I tried to... I tried to protect him. I tried to save him, but he just... melted as he burned alive right in my hands.” Sage looked down at his hands. “I thought they were so strong... I thought that they could protect anything...” he paused and closed his hands, and a tear escaped from one of his eyes and glistened there briefly. “Something inside me snapped. I saw who killed that boy... I saw those who’d attacked me... and I wanted nothing but justice for that one boy... wanted to make them all feel what that boy felt. So... I defended myself... and him.”

“That will be all, Lord Sage.” Dallas stated, and turned to the images.

He waved a hand and the image of planet Tilk disappeared, all other windows disappeared and D’rend blinked as he did this, usurping his control over his own displays like that, so that only two images remained. The list of damages and the list of deaths. Immediately, scores of names listed on the death list and scores of damages were likewise highlighted, and aside each one, a small window appeared.

“Every death, every line item... was directly caused by Imperium troops as I have so highlighted them. As you can see, the little window icon which is now displaying a separate image, shows video proof of each and every last attack that was caused by munitions shot at Sage and either missed, or were deflected.

“Likewise, every death that you see listed was caused by friendly fire... not directly caused by Lord Sage. If you’d like, your Honors... I will gladly display each and every last image here... but if we were to watch them all, we will be here for an additional fourteen hours, twelve minutes and thirty six seconds.”

“Nonsense... where did all this video footage come from?” D’rend challenged.

“Various sources. City traffic and security cameras, tactical harnesses from your own soldiers, and third person video from civilians who shot the images themselves and displayed them to the nearest media center for some quick cash.”

D’rend and his aide looked at each other, and D’rend bent low and hissed several words into his aide’s ear that then left promptly.

“I am fully able to sit here and watch and discuss every last video clip, Colonel... and am quite willing to do so. Unless of course you would like to take my evidence at face value. I do solemnly swear that each and every last image is correct and true to showing that Lord Sage did not cause the damages and deaths displayed in them.”

D’rend felt very hot, and then turned his head slightly, looking out of the corner of his eye at Emperor Jaikard where he sat in his seat before looking back at Dallas.

“No Mister Dallas... You speak words of truth... else wise the detection grid would’ve picked you out immediately. I will take it at face value and not inconvenience these people any further.”

“So noted.” Kazzak stated and banged his gavel.

With but a gesture from Dallas, all the little windows and all the headings disappeared off the lists... and hundreds of millions of damages and nearly a thousand lives suddenly slid off the lists. “One count of Murdering Rampage and one count of Damaging Rampage have so been removed.” Kazzak stated. At this time, I will announce a one hour recess. The prisoner will be returned to his cell at this time, pending a commencement of the trial.” And Kazzak banged his gavel.

Chapter Three: Error

D'rend surged into his state chamber, pulling his jacket and shirt open, undoing his tie and immediately pouring himself a stiff drink which he downed in one gulp. His aide immediately came in after him.

“What have you found?” D'rend stated, his hand clenching around the glass, nearly cracking it in his grip.

“Dallas Ronin... Chief Legal Officer to Ronin Enterprises, with a flawless record since he appeared in our universe fifteen years ago.”

“Fifteen? Hah.” D'rend said. “Check for forgeries. What else.”

“Looking onto relationships, I didn't find anything with Mister Preypacer,” D'rend's aide stated, “But when I looked up relationships from Lord Sage Preypacer, I found something interesting...”

The aide keyed in a command and handed D'rend the datapad. Immediately... D'rend's smile broadened.

Sanari stood on an observation deck beneath the chambers in which the trial was taking place. The command center was the level directly below this one. She stood with back straight, head bowed and hands folded before her, feeling quite alone as she looked passed her reflection in the transparent plassteel wall at the slowly turning stars. She'd just finished praying that all of this would pan out...

And then she saw an image in the window and she lifted her head, seeing Rae Iksaki standing there before she turned to her.

“Mother Sanari? Are you all right?” Rae asked, dressed in an elegant dress for these proceedings, a blue gown that was far removed from her usual fighter gear.

“Rae,” Sanari smiled, and reached out to take Rae's hands. “I saw you across the way. I'm glad that you came.”

Rae smiled wanly. “I know he's in deep water, but I have faith that this will all pan out in the end.”

“You have no idea how much that comforts me hearing you say that, Rae.” Sanari said, stepping forward to embrace the muscular pooch. “Especially from you.”

Rae returned the embrace and hugged Sanari while she did. “Sage didn't do what he did,” Rae said. “Some Demon did. The real Sage could've never done those things... but... I feel that the real Sage is no more.”

“Quite the contrary,” a new voice stated, and both women turned to see Dallas standing there in his trim black suit and white shirt. “You've both never met the real Sage. One could only hope that the one you knew really is dead, and the real him has returned.”

“What do you mean by that, Dallas?” Rae asked as if this were a polite conversation over dinner.

“Lord Sage's mental acuity has been damaged for the past fifty years or so.” Daedalus stated, swirling a red drink in a glass in his right hand. “The kind and gentle man that he was then, before the demon was born, was a saint. I for one hope that the man you knew died in that encounter.”

Sanari and Rae looked at one another and then back to him.

“Dallas... why do you think the original has returned?”

“A very, very real series of evidence I plan to reveal, mistress Iksaki.” Dallas stated, and then took a drink of the red fluid. “One that will be able to place blame where it needs to be for this fracas.”

Sanari smiled a little more warmly, and stepped forward, hugging his arm. “Dallas, I thought it was against the code of ethics for your religion to drink alcohol.” She said, happy in the fact that her faith could be strengthened by this conversation. She felt able to change the subject.

Dallas smiled and lifted the glass. “Sparkling fruit juice.” He smiled and drank a little more. “Even if I didn’t have that religious binding to abhor the substance, I wouldn’t have alcohol to impair my judgment with what is at stake. Just a little something to wet my whistle during the proceedings. I’m quite parched.”

Sanari bit her lower lip, and then gave her hope to this machine man, and hopped that he could save her love.

Rae had managed to slip away for a few minutes, and wound her way down through the station, feeling her directions from the incredible power source that now laid somewhere below her. She could point straight to wherever he was in their universe. It was like a blazing sun. She wondered if that was how she projected herself to others... as a bright brilliant sun.

She had little difficulty moving past the security checkpoint into the jails where the prisoners were kept, she was actually escorted there. Such was what the Iksaki name afforded her...

The massive rolling door opened, and immediately she bit her lower lip as she saw Sage within...

He looked destitute where he sat, now free of his chains, but that didn’t keep four particle colliders and two heavy cannons tracking him to fry him dead in an instant. He sat with his legs folded, long neck bowed and his thick tail wrapped about him. His great billowing, feathered wings were folded about his body as he stared at the floor in front of him, seemingly in meditation.

Rae stood, the door rolling shut behind her as she folded her hands together.

Sage ever so slowly lifted his head to her, and suddenly rose, but was immediately the target of the colliders and cannons, all of them squealing angrily with priming charges, ready to destroy him in an instant. He eyed them all and slowly sat down. The sound of priming charges lessened.

“Rae...” he whispered. “Rae I...”

He’d been crying, and his recently blue-green eyes suddenly turned totally blue... an electric, icy coloring, and he reached out for her, but the weapons tracking him groaned angrily.

“I am going to him!” Rae announced, and stepped forward into their line of fire, standing before him.

“Rae. Please... I-I didn’t mean... I...”

Rae managed a smile and pressed a hand over his lips, fingering the cleft where his two mandibles met.

“No... no *I’m sorrys*’ no need for forgiveness, Sage.” She said and her lips pressed together as she stood between his legs. Even sitting he was taller than she was in this form of his. “The creature that did those things to me wasn’t you.” She said and bent forward and kissed him on the forehead, right on the jewel in the center of his brow.

“I... I’d been thinking of doing some... incredibly evil things to you Rae. I... I can’t even bring myself to say them.”

Rae kissed his forehead now, and then folded his massive head to her chest. “I’m sorry...” she said suddenly, and Sage lifted his head immediately.

“What? What have you ever done to me that was unkind? I was the one who betrayed your trust.”

“I chose Makahn... instead of you. You and I... we never got over each other, Sage... not truly... I still think of what could've happened if I'd chosen you instead of him... But I chose with my heart... I loved him. Having to choose between the two of you has been my only regret.” She managed a weak smile, and Sage closed his eyes and lowered his head.

“It was your choice...” Sage said. “I still... love you. I cannot deny that, Rae, but he was your choice.” Sage said sadly. “You have a very high place in my heart... I... wanted you... and the fact that I couldn't have you was maddening at times...” he stopped and looked away from her. “I don't even deserve you as a friend after what I did to you and your sister.”

“I forgive you.” Rae says. “Fatima told me to tell you that she forgives you too.” She kissed him a third time, this time on his cheek. “I will stay here with you, Sage... till its time to return up above. You need a friend now more than anything. Lean on me... you... you just have to have faith that we can pull you from the brink.”

“Faith.” Sage said as he allowed himself to be moved onto Rae's bosom again. “Rae... I'm afraid... that I have very little of that left.”

Jaikard stood, surrounded by his four guards, while Alkenphel stood by the door to the observation ring surrounding the station just below the Judgment Chamber. Jaikard's deep red cloak flowed about him while he stood by Queen Morsica, her guards close by her as well as they shared a drink or two.

Jaikard's eyes turned toward the Grand Admiral from the STA where he stood looking out into the void of space, smoking a pipe with his hands behind his back in a poised parade rest, his aide close by. His guardian, the great white winged armored monstrosity on a level and grade similar to Jaikard's own Royal Dragoons, stood with his back to his admiral, eyeing the entire room and being a wonderful deterrent of anyone getting too close to the Grand Admiral.

“Such intriguing creatures, humans.” Morsica stated quietly as she stood beside Jaikard in her brilliantly white and shimmering gowns and cloak, swirling a sherry in her glass. Jaikard found himself nodding. “They are being political,” She continued. “Openly abandoning Lord Sage like this. It's amazing watching them and those dragons *being political*' during talks with the Assembly and Dragaseir.

“Their patience seems endless... or just endless stubbornness.”

“We've had similar experiences.” Jaikard said then. “Their government just changed... a constant flux, insuring that the individuals in power do not last longer than a decade in power before being removed. There are times that I envy such a government.”

“As do I Jaikard,” Morsica stated. “But such a thing is a double edged sword. Occasionally, in any government, someone gets into power who utterly gives all other governments a bad taste. Their last president caused a great deal of pain and suffering. The people impeached him... how intriguing... giving the people the power. Their president is a spokesperson for all that combined power.”

Jaikard nodded, and drank his wine and then held it in his hand, where a servant promptly filled it to the proper level again.

“Their new president Xendrian is trying to remake all the ties broken by their last president... I cannot help but think this is such an attempt. And all their Admiral Global needs to do is to be seen and not heard. But they've also been revealing new ships to us... showing us what they are now. Their last president hid all that from us, sneaking about in our space and yours.”

There was a chime from overhead, signaling the fifteen minute warning to return to the Justice Chamber.

“They are making the effort, Jaikard... that is obvious, and they are offering up Lord Sage as a sacrificial lamb. What do you plan to do to meet such a tactic?” Morsica asked.

Jaikard drank more of his wine, and focused on the Admiral as he turned to face the emperor and queen of all of Aphkei space, and inclined his head and tipped his hat respectfully, putting his pipe out into an silver ash tray provided by a droid servant of the station and walked forward to the double doors leading to the Justice Chamber. The Admiral’s guard and Alkenphel eyed each other briefly before passing beneath the door.

“I plan to be just a little more patient with them, Morsica.” Jaikard said. “They are so concerned to make peace I will meet their efforts and allow them to make their attempts. What of yourself?”

Morsica smiled and rubbed her brows. “It means more deliberation between the Dragaseir and the Dragons. Apparently... the Dragaseir don’t really like the Dragons so much. If the feeling is mutual, I’m not too certain... but it’ll mean more sleepless nights for me as they argue into the wee hours of the next week. Damn them and their ability of being able to stay awake for weeks.”

Jaikard smiled, but then his smile faded.

“What then... do we do with Lord Sage?”

“We allow our justice system to carry that out and not doubt it, Jaikard. Our Justice system has been immutable for countless millennia. Whatever decision the tribunal arrives at... we must abide to it.”

The chamber filled rapidly, people taking their seats, and Rae arrived just as someone announced the arrival of the judges, and the three judges entered and took their seats before everyone else did. Rae took her seat right next to Morsica again.

“Bring in the prisoner.” Kazzak said after banging his gavel, and the doors opened, and first one Shocktrooper, then the Seigetrooper guards, and then Sage, then the other Shocktrooper and finally Colonel D’rend, his aide, and Dallas as the Advocate entered the chambers. Sage took his position on the stand, the Shocktroopers at the door, the Seigetroopers around the room and the individuals arguing this case at the table.

With a flicker of a few motions on a control pad by his aide, the two windows displaying all the current number of deaths and damages appeared. They looked breathtakingly diminished thanks to Dallas, Sanari remarked as she settled in her seat besides Drake again.

And then Colonel D’rend cleared his throat, a broad smile on his face as he waited for Kazzak to continue.

“Colonel D’rend, you may continue your deliberation.” Kazzak stated.

“Thank you your honor, but I would like to make a motion to remove the robot known as Daedalus from the court room.” And he pointed at Dallas even as his aide brought up an image showing Dallas with his butler garb as Daedalus to show that they were identical. “Your honors, a grand infraction of our legal code has been made. Mister Dallas Ronin is none other than the artificial intelligence known as Daedalus, who is Lord Sage Preypacer’s house computer!”

Kazzak leaned forward as Dallas folded his hands before him, but nonetheless folded his hands together and waited to be addressed.

“Mister Ronin,” Kazzak said. “Are you aware that computers, droids and robots are not allowed to give legal deliberation in court cases?”

“I am your honor,” Dallas replied. “But I am confused as to why there is a problem though.”

“Are you or are you not an artificial being?” D’rend demanded.

“I am.” Dallas repeated, and there was a murmur within the crowd. Immediately, Sanari and Rae simultaneously gripped the arms of their seats in fear of their hope of Dallas being removed from his position of Advocate, where he could do the most good.

“Then you will kindly remove yourself from our courtroom, Mister Dallas.” Kazzak stated.

“I must make a distinction however, your honors before I comply with that request. The Law States that no Robot, Computer or Android can hold the rights necessary to hold business or act with legal representation for themselves or another in any way. Is that correct your honor?”

“Mister Dallas... you’ve just stated that you are an artificial being... what else can you be other than a Computer, an Android or a Droid?”

“Aphkei law for both Imperium and Assembly dictates that there is a fourth type of Artificial being... known as the vat-grown entity.” Dallas began. “The problem with the law is that I do not completely fit underneath the descriptions of any Computer, Android, Droid or Vat-grown entity.

“My computer processes are cognitive processes surrounded by cybernetic computerizations. The typical brain-in-a-jar motif. I am nothing as archaic as a droid, and an Android does not aptly classify my capabilities as a cognitive being. Additionally... I’m not entirely vat grown. As a matter of course... only my brain functions are vat-grown.

“There are several entities that exist with modified cerebral matter either biological or cybernetic.”

“But you call yourself an artificial being, Mister Dallas.” Kazzak stated.

“That is correct... Lord Sage Preypacer created me originally, and does occasionally add onto my structure, but ninety-seven percent of all growth that I’ve incurred has been done from my own research and abilities, and my own self modification. Additionally, your honor, though I was artificially created... my make up is not artificial in the slightest. Every last cubic nanometer of my body is biological.”

“Your honors! I wish to reveal the following scan utilizing the courtroom’s scanners.” D’rend said, and pulled up a scan of Dallas, showing that the metallic content of Dallas’s body was around eighty percent. “As your honors are aware, the reason why no artificial being is allowed in the courtroom is because they can be programmed to lie, and the scanners and enchantments wouldn’t pick it up. This scan shows that he is clearly massively artificial. I repeat my movement to have him removed from this hearing.”

The scan showed massive metallic content. Indeed eighty percent metallic. Kazzak and his fellow justices turned to look at Dallas.

“Your rebuttal to this statement, Mister Dallas?” Kazzak said.

“Only one thing to say, your honors: I like to dance naked through the periwinkle.”

There were numerous posts surrounding the sunken recess in the center of the chamber where the lawyers and the prisoner and his guards were kept. Each of them acted as a detector for lies. With so many of them, there was repeating redundancy to detect a lie, with each of them possessing a different personality to detect a lie from.

All thirteen of them suddenly went off, flashing a single bright red light at their tops and emitting a single solid chime that they detected a lie.

D'rend's features immediately fell, and Kazzak eyed Dallas with scrutiny. Only eight of those were electromechanical triggers. The other five were magical triggers. For all thirteen to go off meant only one thing: Dallas was considered as a living being by each and every last one of them.

"That is just the first evidence of my living capability that I would like to offer you, your honors." Dallas said, and then gestured, and six solid panes of what looked like glass appeared, and all of them rapidly began to fill with file after file after file, and as he spoke, they continued to fill.

"Your honors, I will direct your attention to the holoscreens to your right. Each holoscreen are going to be a list of files and certifications from six separate universes. The first screen is my own home universe of the Prime Universe. The Second is the Great Wide Universe. The succeeding four are the Bahumat Universe, the Aurora Universe, the Orion Universe, and the Meklar Universe. Each screen is bisected into Medical, Religious and Contemporary columns.

"The documents underneath Medical are from individual medical specialists assuring that I and my constructs and children are of a biological nature.

"The documents underneath Religious are certified documents from notable religious leaders stating that I and my constructs and children have a soul.

"The documents underneath Contemporary are certified documents from legal representatives certifying that I am a biological entity."

Dallas gestured again and the window for the Great Wide Universe grew and spread to cover all the other windows and its documents enlarged.

"There are a total of one hundred and nine documents from your universe alone, your honors, that certify that I am a legal, living entity, and capable of full citizenship status and capable of obtaining full legal capabilities within your space. As such, and I am surprised that Colonel D'rend did not know this, but I am required to prove my ability to be a biological entity before ever going into any sort of business venture. As you have possibly heard, Ronin Enterprises is currently in the top fifty of the largest corporations in your universe.

"I am classified as a Bioroid, and that is the racial designation for me and my children. I presently am capable of every last requirement to be classified as a living creature... including the ability of being able to sire progeny between myself and my wife."

"It says here that you are a massive computer and this... façade that you show us today in this courtroom is little more than a drone. A principal drone according to our data. Why then do you send an automaton instead of coming here in person?" D'rend said.

Dallas turned and gave the Colonel a half smile.

"My body is presently nearly sixty cubic miles, Colonel, and overlaps six separate universes thanks to temporal sciences and magic. If I were to appear here at this moment, then I would crush everyone in this chamber and overwhelm most of the station..." Dallas paused and allowed that to settle in. "I have a unique ability, granted to me by the man over there on trial," he gestured to Lord Sage. "Where I've been given the capability of a hive mentality. Anything considered a drone; I directly control all of that drone's mental functions. What you see before you is such a drone." And he gestured to himself. "Any other Bioroid and the hive mentality are merely sharing a sort of telepathic communication."

"Telepathic communication' mister Ronin?" D'rend scoffed. "And what if one of your drones is telepathically taken over and controlled. You seem to have the same sort of issue with any other artificial being, and that is that you can be controlled by a remote source!"

"Impossible." Dallas said.

“Impossible you say? Nothing is impossible, Mister Dallas.”

“Colonel D’rend makes a valid point, Mister Ronin,” Kazzak stated. “You yourself admit to the sheer fact that you share a telepathic communication with your drone present before us. What then is keeping someone from controlling this drone that stands before us?”

“Forgive me, but I must make a distinction. I said that it was a *‘sort of Telepathic communication’* your honor. I will not go into the technicalities, but in layman’s terms, I think in the level of trillions of trillions of data processes per nanosecond. Should even the most powerful Psychic in all of creation try to read my mind and interfere with the way my communication processes, they would go mad by the sheer level of communication that moves between myself and any of my thirteen drones or my children. The problem that exists is that I simply cannot think as slow as said psychic even if I tried to.”

“But you have a computerization component!” D’rend said. “Can they not overtake and control you in that way?”

“Again, that is an impossibility. My functions are controlled by a biological brain, Colonel. All resources are hardwired to be overridden by the biological component of any Bioroid, and in the absence of said biological component, now cease to function. My processes are quite safe.”

D’rend continued to mouth a couple times, and Kazzak lifted his gavel, seeing that D’rend seemed to be grasping at straws regarding this issue now and hammered his gavel onto its pedestal.

“Motion to remove Mister Ronin from these chambers on the aspect that he is an invalid legal representative denied due to proof of eligibility. Please continue with your deliberation Colonel.”

Dallas wiped all the extra screens away as they continued, D’rend growling something hurriedly under his breath to his aide, and his aide promptly nodded his head and hurried out of the chamber past the towering Shocktroopers. D’rend then rose, composed himself, and addressed the judges.

“Your honors, I would now like to continue on with the subject of the lists at hand. The next subject I wish to address is the damages to the Mystic League... a *school* of children and students.” He shot at Sage hotly. “Lord Sage Assaulted the school, caused millions of credits worth of damages, and killed countless soldiers. I would thus like to...”

“Objection. Discrepancy.” Dallas stated immediately, and D’rend closed his eyes and counted to ten.

“We have video proof of Lord Sage assaulting the Mystic League, Mister Dallas. How can you deny the devastation and death in this matter?”

“I do not deny the devastation, but I do deny the death count, Colonel.” Dallas replied, stepping forward to meet the Colonel in the center of the room, locking eyes with the Dousaka Colonel.

“What do you doubt, machine man?” D’rend growled.

“Objection, derogatory.”

“Sustained.” Kazzak stated and banged his gavel. “One thousand credit fine, Colonel, for contempt.” And Kazzak banged his gavel again.

D’rend cursed himself and clenched his fists, wishing for a battleground to end the machine man’s life.

“*Mister Ronin...*” D’rend grit out. “What exactly do you doubt?”

Dallas gestured, and scores of damages and deaths highlighted themselves. This time, the number of deaths that were highlighted was slightly over a thousand. The damages were in the hundreds of thousands...

"Again... the damages I am highlighting were caused by friendly fire... and were not directly caused by Lord Sage." He gestured again and video images appeared next to all the damages and started playing in their little window boxes for proof. "What I'm primarily denying is the names listed, Colonel."

"What about them?" D'rend said nonchalantly.

"They are serial numbers." Dallas repeated and those names blew up and overlapped themselves in several windows, showing that they were indeed serial number designations.

"That is nothing new, Mister Ronin; all of our soldiers have a serial number designation."

"Yes... but these serial numbers have no names attached to them." Dallas replied. "Why is that?"

"I'm sure I don't know why there are no names listed there." D'rend said, which was a truth... he didn't know why those specific serial numbers weren't also given names; nonetheless, he eyed the truth detectors around him.

"But you stated that you personally placed this list together, Colonel. Why do those serial numbers have no names associated with them? Why are those names not associated in the first place?"

"I said that I did not know, Mister Ronin." D'rend repeated, glad that he could hide behind this truth and not be detected as a lie.

"But is it not your job to get the full identities of everyone killed, Colonel? I'm certain there were no special ops there, so there would be no identities that would need to be legally omitted. Who are these men and women, Colonel?"

"Is there truly a need to know their identities, Advocate? They died at Sage's hands... that should be enough, shouldn't it?"

"Normally it would, yes... unless of course those serial numbers never had names in the first place."

"What?" D'rend said and Dallas shot him a smile.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I reveal to you the identities of the individuals possessing all those serial numbers."

Another holographic image appeared, and what was revealed to them was stunning enough to draw a gasp.

It was a Shocktrooper and a Seigetrooper.

"Care to explain why those serial numbers are assigned to autonomous machines, Colonel?"

D'rend's eyes widened. There was only one way that Dallas could've received that information. Access to the Universal Observatory. The most secure computer system in creation.

"Well Colonel?" Dallas asked.

"I-I... um..." D'rend stammered, looking for a way out of this.

"I will save the Colonel the necessity to think of an explanation that apparently isn't available to him at the moment," Dallas Said. "But Seigetroopers and Shocktroopers are all classified as autonomous machines. I have here," and he gestured, and missing information on every serial number filled in with two sets of dates: one for date of creation, the other dates of destruction. The date of destruction for all of them was of course identical. "All of these various autonomous machines cannot be classified as murder, because they were '*destroyed*' not '*killed*'."

“They are all therefore not to be considered deaths.”

D’rend recovered himself.

“Very well, Mister Dallas.” D’rend stated. “If they are not considered deaths, then they are considered damages. The price for each Seigetrooper is in the hundreds of thousands, and each Shocktrooper is in the tens of millions.”

“Understood, Colonel...” Dallas said. “I am sure we can be willing to call these deaths damages appropriately. Here you will see the price tags for each unit that is created by the Imperium.” Dallas stated, and an exact price tag of each unit appeared. D’rend practically gaped, and half turning saw Emperor Jaikard leaning forward, his brow furrowing. “But additionally, then all these additional serial numbers listed,” he gestured again and hundreds more on the death list suddenly displayed themselves. “...Are likewise classified by the serial numbers assigned to Seigetroopers and Shocktroopers. By your acquiesce, then, all of these shall likewise be damaged out.”

Another gesture and the stacks reordered themselves, and though hundreds of millions were added to the damages list, the list of deaths lessened to still lay several hundred names over a thousand.

D’rend smiled at the numbers. There were now two counts of damaging rampage, and one count of murdering rampage left.

“Are those numbers as complete as you understand them, Colonel?” Dallas stated, facing him.

D’rend was about to answer, but then the judgment pit door opened and D’rend’s aide entered, hurried over to him and revealed a datapad, and D’rend’s brows furrowed as he looked at the lists.

“Colonel?” Dallas repeated, and D’rend looked up at him.

“No... I have presented all of the evidence that I have. The lists are as correct that I could have made them.”

Dallas nodded, took a deep breath and faced the judges. D’rend had won, but the information his aide had given him was troubling, and he listened with only half an ear as Dallas continued.

“I wish to allay a few final discrepancy, your honors.” Dallas stated, and gestured to the list of deaths, and numerous – hundreds of names – highlighted themselves in varying colors. “These following names do not belong on this list, your honors.”

“What is your reasoning for that, advocate?” Kazzak asked.

“Well... to start off, your honors, these names highlighted in blue... are names of individuals who aren’t dead.”

D’rend looked up sharply.

“This list of names,” several dozen enlarged themselves. “Are listed in critical but stable condition, but very much alive. This list of names,” several dozen more enlarged and overlapped the proceeding list. “Were injured, but nothing serious enough to even require hospitalization. Finally... this list of names both civilian and military.” Still dozens more expanded themselves and overlaid the previous two lists. “Were never even in the areas of conflict to begin with.” Dallas said with a hint of a growl at the end as he stared at D’rend.

“I move to allow these names to be removed from the list.” Dallas stated.

Kazzak and his two associate justices stared at D’rend for a moment. “Motion granted.” Kazzak stated and banged his gavel. Dallas immediately removed all those names.

“Finally I would like to reveal these names.” Dallas stated, and a score of names that were all red appeared. “These names,” several enlarged and aligned themselves. “Are individuals who didn’t even die on the dates in question of

the Rampage. Some died years ago. These individuals,” more aligned themselves. “Died in areas outside of the conflict zones and were never apart of the conflict, though they did die on the pre-described dates. And finally... these names,” still more highlighted themselves. “Don’t appear to have a valid record in the Imperium. I find it interesting that on a few of these,” three highlighted themselves with black borders. “Actually have birth dates after their death dates.

“I move that they are to be removed as well, your honors.”

“Granted.” Kazzak banged his gavel, and again looked to D’rend, who pulled on his collar as the names disappeared. Still, there were several hundred more names that remained over a thousand. Lord Sage would still be executed. If he failed in his task, however... in making sure Sage died...

“Now your honors... that we have removed all the discrepancies... I would now like to switch roles with Colonel D’rend, and offer up my own evidence.”

Chapter Four: Trial

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the Colonel has revealed a great deal of evidence at the moment against Lord Sage Preypacer,” Dallas stated. “The numbers that we see at the moment require that Lord Sage place his head on the chopping block. I believe, however, that some of these lists can still be modified, and I will show you the evidence as we have it thus far.”

Dallas gestured, and a horde of names highlighted, hundreds of names, and likewise there was a horde of line items on the monetary side that likewise highlighted.

“These line items and names are in contest with the evidence I am about to show you. Each and every last name on this list is Aphkei, ninety-nine percent of which are all female names. The reason why that is significant is the fact that all these names are those associated with representatives of the Dekan Foundation. The Dekan foundation was formed underneath the Caldynnii Aphkei government, this foundation has been forced into exile by the Caldynnii for crimes against the state and nature.

“Several days prior to the Rampage, Lord Sage received this letter...” and Dallas lifted a hand and gestured and another of his holo windows appeared, with a long letter, the very same one Sage received in his email box a couple weeks ago. “This letter played upon Lord Sage’s interest and knowledge for biological artifacts, with the additional price tag of a great deal of monies available to coax him to arrive into their care. Once there, Lord Sage was abused and coerced into his rampage.”

There were a great deal of murmurings in the court room, and Sanari began wringing her hands like Rae had been doing, hoping and praying now that Dallas could finish clearing Sage’s name. She remembered the trip that Sage had undertaken, and it had been for the Dekan Foundation.

“I assume that Colonel D’rend hadn’t been able to secure any video of the goings on within the Dekan Foundation building despite that the video was still on file at the security agency that monitored that buildings comings and goings, simply because the building itself had collapsed and obviously killing all who were reportedly inside.” Dallas paused, letting his words sink in. During a case of rampage, especially when another’s life was in danger of being executed, one had to be thorough. This was yet another of many instances that D’rend had failed. “Regardless, in my own investigation, I have secured video of the goings on from the security company that had been contracted to watch the affairs found inside this building, and I have them all available, but due to the graphic nature of the content, I am remiss about playing it here.”

“All evidence must be displayed, Mister Ronin.” Kazzak stated, and Dallas nodded, and with a gesture, multiple windows appeared everywhere around the room from separate cameras.

“The first images that you are now watching confirm the deaths of each and every last individual listed here in the highlighted yellow areas of the death list, your honors.” Dallas continued, and he ignored the many reactions, gasps of horror of what had happened in those images. “I will not deny that Lord Sage killed every last one of them with vengeance in mind. Vengeance mind... for these actions were vengeful in nature... and defensive. All of them though an unfortunate loss of life, were done because Lord Sage was attacked by them.

“You will notice that in every death... they attacked first.”

The images continued, right up to the point where Lord Sage killed D’bra and her mate, and then left the building, destroying it as he left.

“I don’t understand, mister Ronin,” D’rend stated. “Why are you confirming these deaths?”

“Because you would. That is of course the task beset by the person presenting evidence.”

“Y-yes... yes it is.”

Dallas turned back and continued. "However, your honors, this building have been the home of a great deal of illegal acts against your state and nature. A multitude of images appeared, showing physically powerful individuals, and all around the room evidence just poured in, in the form of a cacophony of documents and images, shipping lists and more.

An orgy of evidence.

"Ladies and gentlemen... the Dekan Foundation is corrupt to the core. The images and documents you see all around you are legal proof that the Dekan Foundation is conducting illegal types of genetic research to improve themselves. The most advanced members of this foundation displayed here," a ring of faces began appearing. "Have evidences of this exact style of tampering. Shipping lists, chemical compositions, and on and on... they are criminals through and through, hiding behind the façade of a foundation designed to help other Caldynnii who are down on their luck. A perfect recruiting façade, being that all current members since their exile from Caldynnii space have all joined the ranks of the Dekan foundation after being scouted by the foundation by their so called benefit foundation.

"I ask that in this court that the Dekan foundation be designated as a criminal organization, dissolved and their assets seized."

Kazzak and his fellow judges looked around them at all the evidence just pouring in all around the room. Years worth of evidence.

"Where did all this evidence come from, Mister Ronin?" D'rend asked suddenly.

"Underneath the Witness Protection Act, I am not at liberty to discuss my source, Colonel."

"Then how do we know that all these are not forgeries? You are, after all, capable of making 'trillions of trillions of processes per nanosecond,' how do we know that you didn't just make all these up?"

"You will notice that the encryption grade on most of the documents is a Quadruple-A rating, and cannot be duplicated or modified."

"A Quadruple-A rating?" D'rend stated. "But... only one facility can offer a Quadruple-A rating."

Dallas turned to him and looked at him seriously. "That is correct, Colonel. Their account at the facility that this information is from is listed along with all the documents at the top for authenticity."

No one really stated it. Because each and every last document was listed as 'Verified by the Universal Observatory.'

"How did you get these document?" D'rend breathed.

"Once again, Colonel... I am not at liberty to discuss my source."

"These are clearly stolen documents! Objection your honors!" D'rend cried.

"Your honors, underneath the trial of Vesper Incorporated versus the Cor Disteeel, a judgment was made by the judiciary tribunal in that case that evidence is considered evidence, and cannot be thrown out of consideration regardless as to legality in which it was obtained.

"I will state that my source did obtain the documents and files that I am showing you illegally, but I also cannot reveal my source's name or status."

"I am familiar with the ruling, Mister Ronin... I made the ruling several centuries ago." Kazzak stated.

“My apologies, your honor,” Dallas bowed, “I wished only to refresh your memory, and make your fellow judges aware of the ruling.”

“So noted. Objection overruled.” Kazzak stated and banged his gavel.

“Thank you, your honors.” Dallas stated. “Then may I please restate my motion to declare the Dekan Foundation a criminal foundation against the state and nature, have their funds seized and their organization forcibly disbanded pending inquiry?”

“The overwhelming level of information provided, Mister Ronin, leaves us no other choice. The Dekan Foundation is hereby classified as an illegal foundation.” And his gavel banged again.

“The level of atrocities that I have displayed, your honors, makes all those in the center of their organization, located at the building that was destroyed by Lord Sage, as criminals, even by association. By making them illegal and marking them as criminals, their citizenships are likewise revoked... therefore, whether or not they were killed by Lord Sage is irrelevant. Their names are thereby removed from the list, as is any line items that were reported as damaged that was in their ownership.”

Dallas waved his hand, and all the documents and images all disappeared, and hundreds of names wiped themselves off the death list, and hundreds more line items removed themselves from the damages list.

The tally of charges remained over a billion credits strong, but the tally of deaths by Lord Sage finalized at nine hundred and seventy six deaths.

“With that, your honors, the remaining charge of Murdering Rampage has been reduced below one thousand deaths, and with your permission, is now reduced to nine counts of mass murder.”

Kazzak had a half smile as he noticed this and nodded, and banging his gavel, commanded. “So noted. The remaining charge of Murdering Rampage is hereby reduced to nine counts of Mass Murder.”

Dallas paused, seeming to gather his thoughts.

“Your Honors... I have only one final piece of evidence tonight before I rest. This evidence will prove that Lord Sage is not at fault for any of the circumstances that has happened that caused his subsequent rampage across your space within your universe.

“What I am about to show you, is information that was not found on the security cameras of the Dekan Foundation, but rather in a secret sealed facility inside the bowls of the destroyed building on Planet Qeen.”

“Might I ask where this information came from, Mister Dallas?” D’rend asked.

“I’m terribly sorry... it’s a protected source, Colonel.” Dallas said immediately. “But I can assure you that this information came from the same account as all the prior documents displayed regarding the Dekan Foundation. Everything you are about to witness is being captured from a secure Science-Medical scanner array located about the room, cameras that are constantly recording in full spectrum of optics to capture anything that may happen within their field of view anywhere on the band of radiation from visual to super and sub visual.

“To begin, Lord Sage Preypacer left the League of the Shadow Arts fifteen days ago to inspect what was described to him as an alien artifact with biological components. To a man like Lord Sage, this is an incredible enticement.

“Several hours later, Lord Sage’s beacon installed on a forearm computer that he always wore, verified that he arrived at Qeen and landed via shuttle at its spaceport. Shortly after arriving at Qeen, that homing beacon went out, and remained out for over half a day. When evidence returned of Lord Sage, it was a massive Aether explosion that

was positively off the scale for the sensors of a weather satellite that detected the explosion. Within an hour of that, Lord Sage emerged from the building he'd been taken to, destroyed it, and then teleported to the Demon League."

"Yes, yes, yes, Mister Ronin. My report already stated that, and you have yet to deny it." D'rend stated, glad that there was still at least one rampage charge left on Sage. He aimed to keep it... for actually succeeding in making sure Sage was executed would be the only remaining saving grace for him.

"I am doing so now, Colonel." Dallas stated, and paused for a moment to fix the Colonel with his gaze. "Continuing, I have here, evidence of what happened when Sage was forcibly taken into the Dekan foundation."

"Forcibly?" D'rend rose to contest. "Lord Sage is a super power that decimated buildings and super structures. How can he possibly be captured?"

"Strange that you thought that you captured him before, Colonel. We of course have already gone through that you didn't really capture him, and ultimately he surrendered to your forces. Likewise, one would also ask how you were possibly able to keep him bound and restrained against his will in the prison sections of this station, Colonel." Dallas stated. "Anything is possible, even binding a super power like Lord Sage... especially after you use four particle colliders, two heavy cannons, and enough restraints and bindings to tie himself down to the ground and make him immobile in inhumane ways for a period of three days."

"I did no such thing!" D'rend stated.

"To the first statement, I have no doubt, but to the second, perhaps this will refresh your memory." Dallas gestured and an image of his master appeared bent forward and in the line of fire of so much weaponry. "Nice touch there placing a tray of food right in front of him and restraining him in such a way that if he moved too much in any attempt to eat the food, then the cannons and colliders would vaporize him.

"Lord Sage has been in this way for three days."

"That's nonsense! Three days?"

Dallas gestured again, and an image with a time elapse began to show Sage being ensnared and then set to his restraints, a tray of food being placed, and then the time elapse sped forward an hour every few seconds, showing him to be relatively unmoving for those three days.

"I'd understand such treatment after being judged of such crimes, but not prior... and then only as a result of a judge's decision." Dallas stated. "And on top of that, when Sage was being moved to these chambers, after having been mistreated for three days like this, and more than a little woozy, when he wasn't moving fast enough, guards shocked him with pain sticks."

"W-what?!" Kazzak rose to his feet. "Mister Ronin! I will not have this slander of my facilities."

"My apologies, your honor... but it is the truth." And Dallas gestured, showing a series of guards and their Shocktrooper escort as Sage was shackled and bound in all his unbreakable bindings, wobbling, pausing in his dizziness, and when he paused, a guard rushed in and jabbed the necro-electro pain stick into Sage's side, and he screamed as he fell to the ground.

Sage tried to rise, scooting forward on his hands and knees; the guards telling him to get up a few times before two more guards arrived and pushed their sticks onto his sides, getting another writhing scream out of him. The image then magnified on the three pain sticks, showing separate windows that showed their power levels.

All three were at maximum.

"Lord Sage, could you please turn away from the screens and lift your left arm please." Dallas stated, and Sage turned, revealing a radial crack in his armor that hadn't fully healed yet, but was visibly closing slowly. The hide, scale and armored plates around that radial crack were blackened but fading.

“Thank you Lord Sage... that will do. Your honors... I believe that fear does a great deal to motivate their actions, and the guards displayed here should not be punished too severely for what they’ve done, but an inquiry as to who authorized such cruelty should be made.”

Kazzak banged his gavel. “Arrest the warden under suspicion of *‘Abuse of Power.’*” Kazzak stated, and then sat down.

“Thank you, your honor.” Dallas stated. “Now if I may continue without further interruption...” he paused, glanced at D’rend and then continued.

“What I will show you now, are scenes that happened inside the laboratory.

The scenes of depravation that were revealed to the court of how Lord Sage was abused physically, sexually, and finally mentally repeated over and over again, right up to the point where he broke from his prison and killed the fem who seemed to be taunting him.

This last scene, Dallas rewound and then replayed, but changed the optics everyone was viewing it in as a realm of shadows it appeared, a gray and black realm, revealing echoes radiating from the fem toward Sage, and Sage’s echo’s radiating faintly in tune to those echoes.

“Lady and gentle creatures... what you are now looking at are an overlay of several varying radiation resonances captured by the cameras applied with a filter screen. This is the best science can currently allow a non-psychic to see into the Ether Streams. With this method, you can see the aura of each and every last object in the room, including Lord Sage located on the left, and one of his captors on the right.

“For your ease of viewing everything, I will now apply another filter that will add a color scheme.” Another filter added itself, showing the scene in varying soft colors to allow the audience to view the goings on. “What you are witnessing is the psychic attack on Lord Sage that I will blame for the manipulation and coercion that caused him to rampage.”

Dallas paused, waiting for D’rend to speak, but D’rend wisely did not do so.

“These following screens,” Dallas gestured, show the mental waves of Lord Sage and his captor, and the psychic wave emanating from his captor. “Reveal the attack in better detail. Lord Sage is psychically active, your honors, but he was susceptible to the attack in one very critical way.”

“Why does Lord Sage have two mental waves?” D’rend asked, noticing that.

“I am glad you pointed that out, Colonel,” Dallas stated. “That is the information that I am about to reveal. As many are unaware... Lord Sage is a Repressed Schizophrenic. The two mental waves that you are looking at are his two personalities. The one on top is the active one, and the one on bottom is the repressed one.” The images paused. “Lord Sage’s mental state is a controlled environment, one that Lord Sage had complete and utter control of, and was, at the time of the incident, finally making progress in completing the healing. The environment that he had found himself in had become conducive to healing himself once and for all. But if you will all continue to look at the screens, and see what happens from his captor’s psychic interference.”

The images began to play again, and there was a gasp as the mental waves for Sage slowly came together and then swapped.

“This act has placed Sage’s repressed personality in dominance, and his primary personality in regression. I would like to point out that the two personalities are completely opposite at this moment... the reason why that is significant is because there is only one instance in which two personalities are completely opposite themselves.

“I am remiss to use terms of Yin and Yang or Light and Darkness in these chambers, but scientifically speaking, one of Lord Sage’s mental waves displayed here contains his ID and Sub-Consciousness, the other mental wave contains his consciousness and identity. With his ID and Sub-Consciousness now in dominance would be bad enough in any being, but the Psychic continues to assail Lord Sage’s mind.”

The images continued with another Psychic Wave assaulting Sage’s mind, and in rapid succession, the strong underlying recessed consciousness suddenly became very, very weak to the point that it was barely active.

“For those of you who know not what this means, it means that the darker mental attributes such as hate and the ID that exist in each and every last one of us are now not only in dominance in Lord Sage’s mind, but they are likewise now far stronger than the lighter mental attributes such as remorse and restraint.

“Due to this Psychic with the Dekan Foundation, done at the behest of their leader, Lord Sage’s mind was transformed so that he would draw toward his darker tendencies and likewise have no remorse doing said tendencies. We all think of things to do our fellow beings that would be hateful and destructive, my lords and ladies, your honors, but our restraint and sense of good-will keeps us from doing those things. This evidence shows that Lord Sage was used for some unknown means, and whether it was on purpose and it backfired on them, or if it was for some other reason, the evidence shows that Lord Sage didn’t act in his right mind, and the individuals directly responsible for this remaining act of rampage is clearly on the heads of the members of the Dekan foundation.

“Your honors... being that Lord Sage’s acts were influenced and coerced by the actions of the Dekan Foundation, I make a movement that the entirety of all their moneys and properties that have by now been seized by the Imperium Government be liquidated to pay for the remaining damages their act of lunacy caused.”

Kazzak was stunned as he watched the images replaying for a moment, paused and then turned toward the representative on the judiciary stand beside him for the Imperium. He whispered something, and the Judge looked to the Emperor.

Emperor Jaikard suddenly found the fate of Lord Sage in one hand, and the fates of hordes of Caldynnii in the other. The fate of a mad super power in one hand, and scores of criminals in the other.

Jaikard leaned forward, sitting up straighter as his guards snapped to. Jaikard exhaled, and made a judgment for the good of the Imperium.

“Being that the Dekan Foundation has already been declared as a criminal organization, all funds seized by the Dekan foundation and its members is hereby authorized to be redirected to the damages caused by Lord Sage.” Jaikard stated soundly.

Sanari and Rae found themselves exhaling a deep breath, and Meniko cupped her hands together, having mixed feelings about all this. She didn’t know whether she should be angry and dreadful or happy and relieved...

Genohn was unreadable.

“My source has provided a number, your honors, that is the totality of the funds owned by the Dekan Foundation alone. The total amount of its members in the myriad of banks is as of yet unknown... but presently, the holdings of the Dekan foundation are in excess of one trillion and nine hundred and fifty million credits. Applying that to the present debt...” the costs realigned, and the amounts fell right to zero.

Kazzak banged his gavel, and the room silenced. “The last case of Damaging Rampage is hereby dismissed.” Kazzak said, and Sanari gave up a final cry of thanks. “But...” and Sanari opened her eyes. “Lord Sage Preypacer is a super power with mental instabilities. This tribunal will convene to our private chambers to discuss Lord Sage’s final punishment for his acts. Though no longer considered crimes, Lord Sage still nonetheless committed them. Court is adjourned until further notice pending our decision.”

And the gavel fell once again...

Emperor Jaikard had received the notes from D'rend and his aide, but he'd already discerned what had been on those notes without even looking at them.

The Security of the Universal Observatory has been breeched.

Jaikard approached Daedalus, waving his guards off as he went to stand beside him and look out the window.

"Masterful job, Mister Ronin. You are an entity to respect for your loyalty."

"My master is my father, Emperor Jaikard." Dallas bowed properly. "I love my father... and would do anything to protect him. Including denying others aide."

"Headmistress Meniko did voice a complaint regarding that, Mister Ronin. An entity that repeatedly does not offer aide when aide is requested can be destroyed, whether it is a living entity or not."

"I was aware of that, Emperor Jaikard. It isn't an easy thing to betray, attack and possibly kill the man who is your master, lord and father..."

"I completely understand, Mister Ronin." Jaikard stated, and turned, watching as the STA ship The Enterprise came into view as the station slowly turned. "It is not an easy thing to do."

There was a silent pause between them.

"You need not be concerned with eavesdropping, Emperor Jaikard. There does not exist and ECCM package powerful enough to eavesdrop on us at the moment with my systems activated." Dallas stated matter-of-factly.

But still, it was a short time before Jaikard actually opened up.

"Mister Ronin," Jaikard began. "We have a very grand and very impossible security breach."

"Forgive me for stating the contrary, Emperor Jaikard, but you have an oversight."

"How is that, exactly?" Jaikard asked. "And who did it?"

"The who, my lord, cannot be revealed... even to you."

"Was it you?"

"I wouldn't be able to divulge even that information should it be true, my lord, but you asked how it is possible. There is no security system made that is completely secure... not even your Universal Observatory. Not even the STA's repository of information – which utilizes Black Box tactics, where there is no physical outside connection to the Black Box Room for their most secure information – is completely safe."

"Was it an inside job?"

"No." Dallas replied. "Totally external."

"At first glance, the UO is a vault unbreakable. Multiple levels of firewalls, identity rollers, false gates, and ring after ring of immutable, infallible hardwired security at every access point, so says the pamphlet... The truth of the matter is, my lord, and you can take profound satisfaction in this fact, is that my source states that the wall of security protecting the UO is indeed unbreakable... such is the magic of its hard-wired systems."

Dallas paused for a moment, and then exhaled a sigh. “However the computer systems that manufacture the parts to the Observatory are not a solid unbreakable wall.”

Jaikard’s expression barely changed as he turned to look at Dallas, his lips not even moving as the Bioroid spoke through his teeth to keep someone from reading his lips.

“The components of the UO are constantly being updated or replaced for varying reasons... new technology, damaged components, what have you. It was difficult, but nonetheless doable. Every chip on every component has a map that is programmed to the chip for the hard wiring purposes. That, at least, is changeable being that before it is imprinted to the chip, it resides as a software program. So the programming was changed to include an exception, an exception that is valid only during a specific time frame to a person able to provide an exacting ID.

“That exception classifies the individual entering the Observatory on a remote carrier as an master user, and validates that person to pass straight through to the software firewalls, which, with administrative status, are easily bypassed. Once inside the system, The user has all the power of an administrator, and in time, can get into absolutely every last databank you have... change information, copy, delete... their level of control with your information makes that one person the most powerful entity in the universe, my lord.”

Jaikard turned to level his gaze on Daedalus. It’s been a very, very long time since he felt as if someone had him by the balls, and he swallowed.

“What does your source want?” Jaikard asked.

“Nothing extravagant, my lord.” Dallas reached into the inside suit pocket and pulled out a data crystal and handed it to Jaikard.

“What is this?” Jaikard asked, holding the crystal.

“The serial numbers of all the contaminated pieces of hardware and the affected nodes capable of receiving a signal from my source, my lord, as well as the master user accounts that were used to gather all the viable information necessary for this court case.”

“Why?” Jaikard asked, and palmed the data crystal in his fist.

“Lord Sage is a very kind man, my lord... when he is himself. He has many individuals in high and low places who owe him their lives and existences. My source will remain nameless, as per the protection allotted under the law for providing information in a sensitive court case such as this. My source will forfeit access to the Universal Observatory, and suggests that the manufacture of all components for the Universal Observatory be handled by an additional manufacturing facility controlled by the Observatory. That will ensure that access such as this will never happen again.

“In addition... my source will keep the fact that the UO security has been breached a secret, and not even a little side note will ever be found on some obscure desktop somewhere stating as such. My source has the knowledge that the UO was cracked, and that my source did it.

“In return, my source has taken only one act already, and asks for another... my source believes that their past has been wrongfully damaged by a false accusation. My source has already corrected their past and righted the information as necessary, and will hereby disappear from the universe to remake their life correctly. You shall never hear from my source again. What my source asks is that you help Lord Sage and make it so that your government will not execute him.”

Jaikard paused and weighed the crystal in his hand.

“I will need to verify this information, Mister Ronin.”

“Understood my lord.” Dallas said and then began mouthing his words again, but softly still. “My ECM package is now deactivated... Is there anything else I may do to be of service, my lord?” Dallas bowed.

Jaikard looked down at the tiny little crystal that presently held the fate of perhaps the universe in the palm of his hand. Such was the power of information.

“I will try my best, Mister Ronin,” Jaikard stated, and Dallas nodded before Jaikard turned, snapped his fingers and his four guards immediately formed up behind him, Alkenphel moving out the door before him to lead the way to Jaikard’s shuttle and massive flagship.

Several hours passed, Sanari sat against a wall, unmoving as she folded both her hands in her lap. It felt like an eternity before a chime sounded overhead, signifying that the trial will commence again in fifteen minutes. Rising to her feet, she smoothed out her robes and gown, and stepped back up into the Justice Chamber and took her designated seat again.

Everyone rose as the justices came in, and before they sat down, the justice for the Imperium received a note from an imperial aide, and flipping it open, read it for a moment before taking his seat with the others.

“Bring in the prisoner.” Kazzak ordered, and immediately thereafter the Imperium Justice leaned over and whispered in his ear a few short phrases. Kazzak turned to his fellow justice for a moment and then nodded as Sage was brought into the chamber again. Kazzak then banged his gavel again. “After much deliberation, and after additional information that has just been brought to our attention, this tribunal has decided on judgment.

“Lord Sage Preypacer, The Intergalactic Court does hereby find you guilty on a single charge of mass destruction; your nine charges of mass murder are hereby pardoned by the state in which the offence took place, under the understanding that you were not responsible for their deaths. However, due to an untreated imbalance in your mental state that allowed such a happenstance to occur, we cannot by any means allow you to remain in our universe, should such a repeat offence happen.”

Sanari swallowed, and turned to look desperately at Sage who hung his head.

“Our decision is based on the fact that we are unaware of anyone who has the capacity to help a super power of your incredible magnitude, Lord Sage. We have no choice but to banish you. Sentencing will take place in one hour and...”

Kazzak was raising his gavel, and Sanari found herself surging to her feet.

“Wait!” she stated, and a chime went off in the chamber.

<<The court recognizes Mother Sanari, High-priestess of the Faith, and Headmistress of the Grace League>> A computer spoke out.

Kazzak paused, looking as if caught between the outrage of the disturbance, and a ray of hope. Eventually he placed his gavel gently on the table before him.

“I will take him.” Sanari stated soundly so all could hear her.

Kazzak sat still for a moment as his two fellow justices whispered hurriedly into his ear. Sanari remained standing while they debated. The two justices then sat back in their high-backed chairs, and Kazzak immediately addressed Sanari.

“Mother Sanari, do you count yourself capable to rehabilitate a super power?”

“I do.” Sanari said immediately.

“Do you hereby take responsibility for his actions during a probationary period of no less than a year?”

“I do.” She answered again, swiftly, her hands taking firm hold of the railing directly before her.

Kazzak stared at her, and then turned to look at Sage. Sage was looking at her with stunned awe. Slowly... Kazzak nodded.

“Lord Sage Preypacer... an amendment to your judgment has been made.

“You will be allowed to remain in our universe, under the close supervision of Mother Sanari, and as such, you are to treat yourself as an indentured servant underneath her command. Any reports of disobeying her will come to us, and you will be ejected forcibly from our universe.

“But as for your school, being that it is without a headmaster, and no clear and present replacement can be found, especially when an un-graduated student is currently controlling everything in regards to your school, we have no choice but to mark your school dissolved and...”

Kazzak was once again about to bang his gavel, when Drake surged to his feet.

“Wait!” he said suddenly, stepping beside Sanari.

There was a chime, and then a pair of discordant buzzes.

<<Error: Subject is unrecognized.>> the computer reported.

“Sir... Identify yourself immediately!” Kazzak stated angrily.

“My name is Lord Drake... I’m afraid I have no surname.” Drake stated. “My title is Grandmaster of the Holy Order. I am Lord Sage Preypacer’s directing superior.”

“Sir... why did you not speak up at the beginning of this trial?” Kazzak stated. “We could’ve ended much deliberation had you done so.”

“My apologies, your honor. But I do not represent a viable government that can accept responsibility for Lord Sage... We are merely an organization of priests, monks and warriors.”

Kazzak paused. “Then why do you see fit to interrupt my court at this time, Lord Drake?”

“If one were to see the charter of the League of Shadow Arts, there is a precautionary line item within its charter that allows for interim headmasters and headmistresses to be placed upon the shoulders of the most senior of the students. Presently the school is in the hands of Mayia Gallant... Lord Sage’s Apprentice.

“An additional line item allows for any superior member of the holy order to take over responsibility of the League of Shadow Arts, and being that I am the only member superior to Lord Sage, I exercise my right to take control of the school in his stead until he is fit to return.

“I also wish to take responsibility along with the Devout Mother Sanari,” he gestured toward her. “For Lord Sage.”

“Do you have a copy of the charter for the League of Shadow Arts that we may confirm your claim, Lord Drake?” Kazzak asked.

“I do not, my lord, but Mister Ronin does.” Drake replied.

“Mister Ronin?” Kazzak address, and Dallas bowed, gestured, and a massive window appeared in his standard projection of a pane of crystal glass, revealing an official document. Meniko recognized it immediately as the one

Dallas had provided to her in her chambers several days ago while they were waiting for Sage to arrive. The sections that Drake was referring to immediately appeared bolded and highlighted. Kazzak looked at it for only a moment or two to verify it.

“So noted.” Kazzak stated at last. “Lord Drake, Mother Sanari... Lord Sage is hereby entrusted to your care. After he has restored the life to Lord Hawthorne, then he is to be collared and locked from all his powers. I will leave it to your joint judgment as to how far he is to be limited from his existing powers as advanced as they may be. Primary control is to be given to Mother Sanari for Lord Sage’s correction.

“This is our judgment of this case. Court is now adjourned.” And Kazzak struck his gavel with a sound of finality.

Chapter Five: Aftermath

Grand Admiral Global retreated to his ship immediately after the trial, commanding his aide to dimensionally shift to their rendezvous point and went to his quarters and waited for the signal to come that they had arrived at their destination. When they did, the Captain informed him that they arrived, he thanked her, and he then activated the personal communications suite in his chamber, and began a complex series of communications links with a few simple keystrokes.

After a few moments wait, the presidential seal for the Sol-Teran Alliance appeared, and then opened to show a figure standing before a broad curving bay window, looking out at the sun and sky of Earth.

“It is done, President Maranmore.” Admiral Global reported. “Lord Sage has... managed to slip by execution and banishment... and has been committed as a retainer to a Mother Sanari and a Mister Drake.”

The president of the STA was a dragon, though all thought him to be a lesser dragon – a small dragon instead of a one of the larger greater dragons – very few knew that he was actually a were-dragon of the Gold Clan. Not even Grand Admiral Global knew this.

Xendrian Maranmore hung his head, as if in shame. “Understood Admiral,” Xen said and turned to the Admiral’s image on a large wall panel of the Oval Office. “You may return to your ship, Admiral. Continue with your mission of exploration.”

“Aye sir.” The admiral said and broke the connection. In the name of Politics, the Admiral’s act in this play was a necessary evil.

On Earth, Xen had been forced to make a sacrificial lamb of Lord Sage, partly because of Sage’s own actions in the Great Wide Universe, and partly to make up for the actions of Xen’s own predecessor. He was glad that one of their world’s greatest hidden protectors didn’t have to be executed by some extra-dimensional government. And now there was the wait... to see if Lord Sage would still prove to be a good example or not. So far, the Aphkei and Dragaseir all had a bad taste in their mouths for Humans and Dragons...

Now behave, Sage... don't make us kill you, Xen thought, and then sat behind his desk.

Now he had to continue cleaning up more of the messes his predecessor had left him with.

Lord Sage was left inside his jail cell for just over a day while they processed the paperwork to release him to Sanari. Sanari, however, remained with him the whole time, while Drake disappeared to return back to the Mystic League to take control of the Shadow League. A cot had been brought in, and Sanari laid there overnight in the dank cold with him as he slept on the floor.

While he slept in their cramped quarters, she laid a hand on his body, feeling the warmth of his dragon fire burning somewhere inside him. She wondered if he could even feel her hand through all that armor on his body.

Sage was aware; however... he couldn’t sleep throughout the night, his mind on all the faces of the people he’d ended with his bear hands, plus one more face, and that was the one resting directly behind him. He was able to watch her through the eyes in the back of his head... eyes he was sure Sanari didn’t know about, but all through that night, she remained in constant contact with his body.

In all the cold that surrounded his now twin hearts... her face and presence was the only harbor in the storm of turmoil surrounding him.

The next day, he was ushered to a release station, Sanari remaining with him the whole time, her small, slender-fingered hands holding onto two of his thick and sheathed fingers as she walked along with him, one third his height.

At the release station, Sanari signed the plethora of documents that had amazingly already been signed by Drake, and then took Sage officially into custody.

“What... What do I do now?” Sage asked, and Sanari reached across and clasped the back of his massive thigh.

“First off, Sage... you need to make up for all the things you’ve done wrong... starting with Hawthorne...”

Sanari was the one to teleport them, a very subtle ripple of light opening onboard the station, as they left from one place and arrived immediately at the Demon League. There were males and females in blue and white uniforms here, all of them possessing the word “Ronin” across their backs, were already making all necessary repairs to the Demon League.

As soon as he entered, however, there was a silence in the halls as he appeared, and he shied back a moment under all the stares.

He looked... timid... scared... even despite his massive stature

Sanari reached up and took hold of his fingers, and he slid a thumb against her fingers, ever so gently, and she led him forward. Students and guards stood well out of his way, no one threw anything, but Sage took every step as carefully as he could.

“Excuse me... Pardon me...” he said, stooping over in some of the hallways because he was so large.

Students, faculty and guards gave him dark glares whenever he asked that. Sanari saw him flinching underneath some of their glares as she led him ever upward to the very top of Home, to where Hawthorne had once kept his court.

At the very peak of Home, the chamber had remained relatively untouched... Hawthorne’s husk was still positioned at the center of the chamber, with a puddle of still un-coagulated blood on the floor. Meniko was there in her full dragon form, and as they entered, Sage looked up at her and was met with a pair of her blue eyes burning with electricity.

Sage looked away in shame.

“What’s *he* doing here?!” she hissed, and her claws closed possessively around Hawthorne’s seemingly dead hand.

“Meniko...” Sanari soothed. “He’s here to return Hawthorne’s heart, just like the court commanded him to do.”

Meniko’s face turned to a half whimper... her eyes seemed to be on the verge of tears. “Well? Then what are you waiting for?” she choked.

Sage didn’t meet her gaze. “Y-you need to let go of him.” Sage said quietly.

“What?!” Meniko screamed and Sage flinched.

“Y-you need to let go of him, Headmistress.” He said again. “Else wise there is the possibility that when he revives, he’ll suck all the life out of you.”

Meniko stared at him, her jaw clenching, and then looking down at Hawthorne’s hand, she let go of it and gently placed it on the ground. Sage stood there as she backed away, and Sanari took hold of his fingers, and he turned to look at her.

“Do... Sage... You have my permission to do whatever is necessary to return the heart.”

Sage nodded almost imperceptibly and stepped forward, lifting his hands.

“Sage...” Meniko said, and he paused, his hands lowering slightly as he turned over his armored shoulder to look at her. “Fail to do this thing... and I’ll kill you myself.” She trembled.

“If I fail to do this thing, Headmistress... I won’t stop you.” Sage said in return, and raising his hands and directing himself back to the task at hand, slowly knelt before the massive red and black husk.

Sage began to rumble, his hands slowly curling inward along with his arms, his fingers splaying open as he continued to grumble, and as the two fems watched, they heard a series of clicks in his voice. A strange, strange power began to rise; power that had the feeling of ancient magic, and a sort of magical circle formed against Sage’s chest, a spectacularly complex one, and Sage then touched his heart stone with both fingers. The magical circle slapped against his flesh, knocking him back and sending him teetering slightly, and with a gurgling, he lifted his head, his throat bulging, and opening his mouth a heart rose from out of him, black, silent and still.

Sage coughed as it floated above him, and rising, he took the heart in both his claws, holding it carefully as he came to stand before Hawthorne holding the heart in both hands. Bending his head forward, he blew a flame into the heart, and it suddenly began to swell, and pump, filling the room with the thump-thump of the heart beating, even as all the blood on the floor rushed upward to fill the heart. Soon it was shining red and beating strongly, and just as carefully, Sage placed the heart in the chest cavity and stepped backward.

“W-what’s going on?” Meniko asked.

Sage didn’t answer; instead the sound that greeted the two fems was the sound of a gurgling sound, and the cracking of bones being realigned. There was a spasm from Hawthorne’s body, and his voice suddenly shot out in a gasping, gurgling cry as his rib cage healed itself, his muscles rebuilding themselves, his flesh resealing. Then Hawthorne spasmed, and gasped before he began to thrash, Meniko watching him as his chest glowed with a fiery light, and then he gasped a deep, deep breath to fill both lungs before he was sent into a coughing fit, laying on his back, trying to breathe, his three eyes opening as he gasped for air. Then he lifted his head and palmed his chest.

“He is safe to touch now.” Sage whispered loud enough for Meniko to hear, and she surged forward a little, but didn’t actually touch him. She seemed afraid to.

But then Hawthorne turned to look over himself, and then at Sage.

“Who are you?” he choked, and then looked at Sage’s glowing eyes, and after a hint of recognition, Hawthorne gave out a shuddering growl and reached out to strangle Sage.

His hand stopped just short of taking Sage by the throat, and he turned, reached with the other hand and that stopped just short of strangling him too.

“DAMN IT!” he shot and withdrew both his hands and rose, coughing again and continued to fill his lungs.

“H-Hawthorne?” Meniko managed. “A-are you ok?”

Hawthorne turned his head and spied Meniko, and then jerked his head toward Sage to glare at him... a look of knowing passed over Hawthorne’s features as he grit his teeth. Sage bowed his head.

“I am all right...” Hawthorne said then, and turning to Meniko he took her hand and gave it a squeeze. “Could both of you please leave us?”

Meniko and Sanari looked at each other and then back to Hawthorne. Meniko feared Sage killing Hawthorne in self defense, Sanari feared Hawthorne killing Sage.

“Hawthorne... i-is that... wise?” Sanari asked.

“You have no fear of either of us killing each other, Mother Sanari. You have my word. Please leave us for a moment... there is something that I need to discuss with my would-be murderer.”

No sooner that Mother Sanari and Mother Meniko had left through the double doors and the doors had closed than Hawthorne surged forward, thundering the ground with his claws as he pushed his face into Sage’s personal space.

“You god damn mother fucker...” he hissed, and tried to strangle him again, and then gave up, clenching his fist and hammering it against the ground while his red eyes burned. “You told her!”

“I did...” Sage acknowledged. “I told her that you secretly loved her, Hawthorne... that’s why she’s here...” Sage said softly.

“Damn it! And you’re so incompetent with the Lore that you couldn’t even give it all back, could you?” Hawthorne fumed as he rose.

“No... I could have... I chose not to.” Sage said, and Hawthorne jerked his head around.

“You kept a piece of my soul?! Why?!”

“Partly, for self preservation,” Sage said and took a step forward, looking up at Hawthorne. “But also... I know you now, Hawthorne. I know your every secret, your entire past as if I lived it myself. I want to help you... perhaps pay you back for what I’ve done.”

Sage’s voice was barely more than a whisper... sad and withdrawn.

Hawthorne growled. “There’s nothing you can possibly give me, Sage, nothing you can do to justify murdering me, let alone this most recent infraction. Enjoy it while it lasts, Sage, for as long as you have a piece of me inside you... I will be your constant, nagging tormentor.” Hawthorne turned away and folded his arms, but paused, and then turned to Sage as he remained there still, patiently. “What can you possibly give me?” Hawthorne stated.

“Meniko.” Sage replied, and looked up at him with those blue-green eyes of his. “She knows that you love her... but only because I told her. She’s curious to find out it is true, Hawthorne, and to stem her curiosity all you need to do is say nothing.”

Hawthorne bent low and pushed his head forward into Sage’s personal space again, his eyes focusing on Sage looking for a lie.

“And what of the last part of my soul inside you?” Hawthorne asked. “Do you intend to hold that for ransom for ever? Do you fear me that much?”

“You already know that when I gave up your heart, I gave up all your power that I likewise had in me... I am already reduced with its loss, Hawthorne, but I still have your knowledge. That copy is now immutable... I know all that you know and there is nothing either of us can do about it. I will give that piece back to you, and you can give it to Meniko if you so choose, but I need to protect myself for a time.”

“Don’t think I would sully Meniko by placing a piece of me that was in you to her, Sage.”

“Pity...” Sage said, “Because it was all inside me.”

“Then nothing that’s been inside you so long as that piece. You are right, Sage, that is the secret of my heart, and if you can help me obtain her... then... well, we’ll see how far my forgiveness will go for you.”

Sage bowed his head and there was a long pause.

"I *am* a jackass, Hawthorne... you were right about me all along." Sage swallowed.

"Flattery will get you nowhere with me, Sage. Now get the hell out of my home. I got some cleaning to do."

The doors to Hawthorne's chambers opened and Sage found himself staring at Genohn. The two of them looked at each other, Genohn's re-grown ear wings fluttering irritably. Sage bowed his head and stepped out of his way, and stayed there as he and Meniko – now in her bird maiden form – walked by.

Then he felt a small hand take hold of two of his fingers like she were a little child to him, and he looked down the length of his powerful and muscular form at Mother Sanari.

"Come... Lets get you home." She said quietly.

"Home." Sage said quietly and turned to look at Genohn and Meniko with Hawthorne. Hawthorne was watching him intently with one eye. "I have no home anymore, Sanari." He said, and she led him away. "Monsters don't have homes..."

"You are not a monster, Sage." She said, and lifting a hand, gestured and her teleportation field formed. "You have a lot of healing to do... I will help you, but despite that the courts have stated that all this wasn't truly your fault, others will not choose to look at it that way. Know that I will protect you."

Sage didn't say anything, but rubbed the backs of her fingers with his sheathed thumb again. Then with her subtle pulling, she drew him through the portal.

It had been announced and posted that Lord Sage Preypacer had been released from Imperium custody on probation to Mother Sanari, and the stranger who showed up from out of nowhere on Shadow Island by the name of Drake was to take over the position of Headmaster of the Shadow League. Along with the postings, or rather missing from the postings, were any statement that Sage wasn't to be harmed... and there were murmurs of what the students would like to do to him, especially after they discovered that he'd been court ordered to be collared by Sanari and this so called Drake.

Sage could hear all their thoughts as he laid back, staring at the ceiling as he was scanned in the self-same scanner that Eurika was scanned within. It was the only thing large enough that could scan him in his present form.

Immediately upon arrival he'd been escorted to the hospital by both Sanari and Drake, the reason for this was so that Drake and Daedalus could manufacture a collar that was specific for him.

Namah was administering the tests, and it was taking longer than it normally would, partially because of the complexity of the life form the scanners were taking, and partially because she was so mad and angry at Sage that she was distracted because of it.

As Sage lay there, Sanari sitting close by, she saw him begin to cry.

She rose and stepped over to him, waiting for a scanner ring to pass by before she slid her hand into his.

"Why are you crying?" she asked softly, palming the massive plane of his abyssal black chest armor.

"I can hear them. I can hear all of them..." he said softly to her, staring upward at the ceiling into virtual infinity. I can feel their pain; I can feel their hatred for me... like thousands of hot needles against my brain."

“Such is the penalty, Sage... for being a psychic and upsetting so many.” Namah said as she appeared and adjusted the controls for one of the scanning rings before she looked down at him, saw the tears. “You hurt a lot of people,” she said matter-of-factly. “You made me cry for the first time in over a century, Sage.” Sage closed his eyes and more tears flooded from the corners of his eyes. “How can I forgive you for that?”

Sage swallowed but remained absolutely still for the scanners. “I... I don’t know.” He whispered.

Sanari felt his heart – or was it hearts now – breaking; and she reached down and wiped the tears away from his eyes, getting him to open them once again. She could see the differing colors beneath the solid glow of blue-green as she looked down at him.

He was scared.

“The fact that you feel remorse... that you feel as I did when I looked at the endless field of wounded is a start Sage.” She voiced, moving out of the way of the ring as they began to track back down his body again. “Your actions have made you a monster... You have a long path ahead of you, wrought with brambles, till you can even be accepted in open sight at this school.”

Just then a door slid open, and Ki stepped in, pushing a large diagnostics computer before her on a trolley.

“Ki.” Namah said, Sanari releasing Sage’s hand as she stepped back to allow the scanners to move past. “I thought Kor was bringing me that.”

“I passed him in the hall.” Ki said. “He’d been waiting outside... he didn’t want to come into the room, so I offered to bring it in here for him.”

Sage’s eyes closed as he laid there like some massive mechanical monstrosity.

“Thank you Ki,” Namah said, taking the diagnostic machine from her, wheeling it over close to Sage’s head, and then taking out several cables with different connectors on them, shoved them into the back of Sage’s head, right into a series of communications ports back there, utilizing all the varying types of connectors so as to hook him up fully to the unit, and then attached other smaller cables to ports in his arms and legs from underneath the couch he laid upon.

But then while she was doing that, Sage suddenly felt another hand push into his with Sanari’s, and his eyes snapped open and turned in their sockets to see Ki standing there, smiling wanly at him as she squeezed his armored hand.

“You look more angelic to me now, Master Sage. I’m sorry you had to become a demon to become an angel.” She said, her long antennae moving at the peak of her brow.

Sage’s fingers closed about both hers and Sanari’s hands for support. He tried not to cry... with little success. Ki stayed with him and helped Namah with the diagnostic.

Daedalus arrived in Meniko’s chambers after she had made triply sure that Hawthorne was all right, getting him to rest before she left. Hawthorne, like all males when being fussed over by an attractive fem, allowed himself to be babied by her before she returned to her own lair.

“Please go away, Dallas... I really don’t feel like dealing with you today.” She said.

Dallas bowed. “I wish to report that the scans of Lord Sage have been completed, headmistress... we will be collaring him soon with a custom made collar to restrict him from all his new powers. I’ll leave you in peace now, headmistress.”

“New powers? Will this report involve anything complex that will last longer than a few minutes?” she asked. “I want to know what I have the potential of dealing with.”

“I will try to keep it short, headmistress.” Dallas said, and turned back to face her great form. “Lord Sage has evolved, to place it simply. He presently has thirteen layers of repeating armor in his Half-Dragon form – as Drake classifies it – and an assortment of several thousand bio-technological weapons and devices. His functions nearly equal the number of his magical powers now, which are slightly more than his psychic powers. On top of that, he also has access to a very broad assortment of Dragon Lore, Angelic Blessings and Demonic Sins, as well as access to one additional form more than he had access to before now.

“I and Grandmaster Drake are presently designing his collar to be able to negate if not at least severely limit all of his existing powers and natural abilities.

“A full report has been sent to your personal email account, headmistress.” Dallas bowed and then turned to leave.

Meniko waited for him to leave before she lifted a hand, paused for a moment, and then gestured to activate her holo computer. A holo-keyboard and then a screen soon appeared, and she began utilizing its myriad of controls to pull up her emails. The usual horde of emails was missing that she received on a daily basis... her box had been empty for several days now... she was waiting response for rebuilding funds, but she also saw the rather large document in her mail, and tapped that portion of the screen with a claw to activate the file. Another Hologscreen opened revealing the file in its entirety, and Meniko was presented with an in-depth detail of the Shadow Beast.

The medical scans were incredibly detailed, and notes from Namah were written in the margins of all the results.

Subject has a complex series of redundant biology, such as back ups for his spinal functions, his digestive tract – he had three stomachs – four lungs, two hearts, increased sexuality – Meniko winced at anything having to do with his reproductive abilities – and enhanced cerebral functions.

Thirteen individual layers of body armor were found throughout his body. Firstly, his bones have been replaced with a high composite alloy we’ve never seen before, though this mysterious Drake person and Dallas have classified the Metal as “Tritanium” a biological metal resembling Chitin, found in insects. There are two layers of endoscopic armor having replaced his skeletal system. The first layer sheathes many of his vital organs like his now twin hearts and lungs. The second layer, following the traditional skeletal system, has instead flared into interconnecting plates that overlap each other. The strongest locations of this are a layered ribcage.

The next two layers are epidermal, the first layer being a crisscrossing mesh of more of this tritanium located directly beneath the flesh, and the next layer being a tough hide that is literally immune to fire based substance that isn’t at least atomic in its intensity.

Overlaying his hide is a layer of heavy scales, again, more of that tritanium, but where the bones and epidermal mesh are all black, these scales are actually white, and possess a glittering quality similar to fire opals.

Above the scales are five overlapping layers of heavier and heavier carapace made out of more of that tritanium steel alloy. The first and second layers are total and overlapping, the outer layer attached to the lower layer, which is attached to the scale layer, whereas the third, fourth and fifth layers seem to be most specifically aimed at protecting vitals.

The final layer of physical armor is the most interesting to note. The scanners could not scan through this layer of armor, and we had no choice but to bounce signals through his body in order to get every last square inch. There are very few substances that our scanners cannot scan through, namely Pseudomater and Darkmatter. Even lead and gold can be scanned through with our scanners... so that leaves me to believe that Lord Sage actually has a layer of Pseudomatter or Darkmatter or something of similar density covering portions of his body. These layers are indicative of the armor that literally refuses to reflect visible light.

By this point, Lord Sage has – in some places – six inches of armor prior to his outermost physical layer, the tensile strength of which is equal in strength to space-faring battleship armor in its tensile strength. The final layer of physical armor will be virtually indestructible.

The next layer of armor is actually spiritual in nature, in the form of a power Lord Sage describes as the 'Iron Shirt' technique. Through spiritual reinforcement, Lord Sage can increase the tensile strength of all layers of armor by several thousand fold.

He's a tank, Meniko thought. A flying tank tougher than a dreadnaught and faster than a light mech...

The final layer of armor is actually technological, and comes in two parts, both of which is a highly advanced form of reflective electromagnetic shielding, the first part is a full body shield, the second is a pin-point barrier system.

A myriad of defensive modes, such as electromagnetic and gravitational control, or the extending of built in forearm shields or the act of bringing his plated wings forward can additionally add to his defense.

On top of this, Lord Sage has several physical forms. His human form appears to be unchanged, but his hybrid form – called the lesser-hybrid – has indeed changed remarkably.

This second form is what we've decided to lock Sage into... being that it isn't as intimidating as any of his later forms, but isn't as open as his human form. This way, we hope to limit the number of people who seek revenge against him by his sheer size.

Meniko thought for a moment as she saw the image of Sage's second form, and the face of the individual in whom Sanari would be looking after. The eyes remained the same, and the height was equal to the nanometer it seemed to the weretiger she once knew, but that was where the similarities ended. He was slender, streamlined, with a bulky upper body, thick calves and thick forearms, a sleek body in comparison to the stocky, powerful frame he possessed before. The muscle structure was totally alien from what she was familiar with... with twenty-four abdominal ridges, two pectoral muscle pairs, and a denser muscle structure than any species she'd been familiar with... but that could just be because of Sage's training enhanced by this transformation. He was covered by mostly hide but had scales, and light armor, the spikes on his elbows left her some concern. He had a retractable tail, and small horns.

She didn't want fights breaking out about and around him in her school, so she supposed that at least some deterrent would keep that from happening. Still, his natural abilities were still well above any of her students.

We're sure you have some concern about his natural abilities being well above that of any students – Meniko smirked – but advanced students and graduates will be able to overpower him easily should any trouble begin.

He has several other abilities, like being able to breath fire, lightning or a strange sort of ice breath, extend those blades on his arms to sword like length and such that we will be able to severely limit his use in these abilities, such as block his synaptic ability to extend the blades and choke the glands allowing him to breathe fire, lightning or ice

In this form, he has only the two layers of endoscopic armor, the two layers of dermal armor, the scale armor and one layer of carapace armor to protect his self.

The next stage of his transformation, known as the Greater-Hybrid form, replaced his Battle Form, and being that we are so familiar with it already I will not go into describing the Shadow Beast again.

The next stage is Sage's Dragon Form... this... I must say I am impressed with. It rivals the body power of most Dragaseir I've ever met. It rivals most light cruisers, light freighters and system patrol craft, for that matter, in size. This form replaced his Full-Cat form.

Attached image is courtesy of the Imperium.

Meniko looked at this image for a moment, and was immediately glad that Sage hadn't met her with this form. A four-armed monstrosity several hundred feet long, he was arrayed with physical weaponry alone that could've sliced her to ribbons. She continued reading the report.

The final form, the new one that he has obtained I'm certain that everyone on this planet is familiar with...

The Star Dragon Form is a being of physical energy, powerful enough to actually crush our world and the surrounding moons, the evidence of which is the claw mark which is currently scaring Wave World's Fourth moon. The true limits of this form are unknown. Let us hope that we never have to find out...

During the scanning process, as we are accessing his list of powers, we've listed hundreds of physical, several thousand technological and tens of thousands of metaphysical abilities.

Meniko paused. 'Tens of thousands' of metaphysical powers? She didn't even have a catalog of that many powers in her library! She continued reading.

I must make a notation, headmistress. Lord Sage is a growing echelon of powers. Even now his power levels are growing steadily. His mind is a torrent of logical thought, even in disregard to his conscious thought. We've located that he has what Daedalus has classified as a Bio-Computer, or a bio-comp. It's located at the back of Sage's brain, and likewise is connected to an intriguing array of I/O nodes both wired and wireless that was surprisingly compatible with our computers. This computer system is the control node for the cybernetics and bio-tech in his body, and is apparently in control of his subconscious mind. Subconsciously, he is using this computer – though he has accessed it while we were studying it for varied reasons – to match compatible powers with each other to create new ones.

Knowledge is power... it is apparently true in this case.

Sage is utilizing this computer to combine Psychic, Physical, Spiritual, Magical and Technological know-how together to create new powers and abilities, and for each new ability he creates, he grows stronger.

Meniko began to surf through the lists of technology and powers over the period of several minutes, finding a lot of powers that are presently named, but the effect of which was called 'Unknown' in the list. They could be nothing... or they could be planet shattering... she didn't know. And then she saw another note from Namah.

I must profess that there is something here that I have never seen before, Headmistress. Drake called them Dragon Lore, but would say no more.

A diagram popped up, showing three circles, two smaller and equal sized ones above and below the center, much larger circle.

This is a whole new college of Magical know-how, headmistress. I can only explain them as 'amplifiers' for existing magical and psychic abilities, some of which actually are designed to combine magic and psychic know how into magical affects that defy previous limits.

Continuing on... following is the Collar in which Sage will be fitted with... we...

But Meniko stopped reading as she looked at the image of the concentric circles, and tapping it, it expanded and displayed itself before her, and immediately she bit her lower lip. She actually recognized their matrices... though alien in design, and now she had considerable concern now.

Those matrices... were identical in many respects to Dragaseir God Powers...

Sage exited from the showers in a reduced form, his lesser hybrid, totally naked, almost timidly. Sanari, Drake, Daedalus and Namah were all there to see him emerge. Sanari blinked, seeing him in his new altered dragon form as Dallas handed him a towel to dry off with, and then held some simple clothes.

Before, his clothing formed from that black goop... now since he'd absorbed that goop, he could no longer make clothes at will without magic, and since he was about to be collared, he'd have to get used to wearing actual clothes.

"How do you feel?" Drake asked him.

Sage lifted one of his large, tapering ears that actually lay against the back of head and drooped to touch his shoulders. "Like Jar-Jar." He said quietly, finished toweling off and took up a pair of black pants.

Sanari averted her eyes – a little – at least till he'd gotten his pants on, which fit him rather loosely now, and then she looked at his muscles and armored body before he pulled on a simple white shirt.

His stripe system had mutated in this form. His mane of hair was absent of them, and now they existed only along his sides, but instead of the stripes being separate, they were all jumbled together, making crisscrosses here and there.

"There is one more thing that we must do, Sage... before you are collared." Drake said, and Sage looked up at his father but said nothing. "Follow us."

And they left the hospital, though Namah remained behind, but as they passed rooms, Sage saw room after room of the people he'd hurt, and he began to tremble. And then they exited the school and headed toward the school and the attached shrine, and Sage slowed and then stopped as he looked upon what he'd done.

Immediately he began to cry at all the destruction, gasping as he looked at the ruins of the once fine school.

"Sage?" Sanari prompted.

"I'm no good!" he gasped. "I'm evil! I'm a monster! Everyone I ever loved was here, and I hurt them! I hurt all of them!"

But then Drake, also in a sort of hybrid form similar to his son's, stepped close to Sage and drew him in, kissing his head.

"Evil monsters do not feel remorse for the things that they do, Sage." Drake said softly and kissed his brow again.

Sanari took his hand and squeezed it as he sobbed, and raising his five fingers to her lips, she kissed those too.

"You aren't to blame for all this." She said, but Sage jerked his head around, his eyes blue, dragon's tears streaming from his eyes.

"Sanari I..." and he looked at his clawed hand, and spread it for her to see. "I did this to these people! I hurt them, it was my hands that did this to them! How do you think these people will see me?"

Sanari folded both hands around his fingers and kissed them again. "I see a man who needs to be healed..." Sanari said. "A man who needs some help and I will stay here and give that help... Come, Sage... we have a final task to do before we can collar you."

"That's odd..." Dallas said suddenly after Drake, Sage and Sanari had left.

"Dallas?" Namah prompted, "Why are you staring at a blank piece of my wall like that?"

“I just noticed something from the scan...”

“Trillions of trillions of processes per nanosecond and you just noticed? But noticed what?”

Dallas turned and smirked, and gesturing grandly with one hand, a brain wave chart began to play. Namah looked at the information for the holographic image, and saw that it was for Sage.

“What’s so odd about that?” she asked.

Again, Dallas smirked, “That is the scan we took this morning, and this,” he said and gesturing again, the window slid aside and another appeared before Namah so that she could compare the two. “Was his brain wave pattern before the incident.”

Namah gasped, and fingered the newly arrived brain wave. “There are two! He was a schizophrenic?”

“Was Namah...” Dallas said. “I am no medical specialist, but it looks to me that he is cured of his ailment.”

“It does look that way.” Namah said. “I’ll have to report this to the headmistress after I refer to the data.”

“Excellent... but here’s the odd part.” Dallas continued and gestured one more time, and a third brain wave monitor appeared. “This monitor is from fifty years ago, Namah. See anything interesting?”

Namah compared them, and then gasped. “It’s identical to the one from this morning!” she said. “But... what does that mean?”

“Not only has Sage’s mind been healed by this debacle, but he’s reverted to the mentality he possessed prior to witnessing his wife murdered.”

Namah covered her mouth and thought for a moment. “Daedalus, I need to make a report, may I have access to Lord Sage’s complete file that you have on storage?”

“It is already in your computer, Doctress.” Dallas nodded his head in compliance.

Namah paused and slid her hands over the physical holograms as they displayed their information. “How is it that I never knew? I’ve been in his mind countless times before.”

“I know not, Doctress.” Dallas said. “Anything that you can do to help my father and you have my fullest cooperation.”

In the gardens of the Grace League, they found a small patch in the forest of the shrine large enough for their purposes. Lifting a hand, Drake cast, and an odd mixture of psionics, Magery and strangely, Sorcery, forged before him, and a small mound of reddish-black crystal rose from out of the ground.

“What is that?” Sanari asked, looking at it.

“The tip of the iceberg. The rest of it goes dozens of feet into the ground.” The faintest traces of a complex series of interlocking, faintly-blue interlocking magic circles. “It’s a Dimensional Anchor. Whatever is placed inside the anchor cannot be forcibly removed unless the person maintaining the anchor and the owner of the object are killed and the anchor dispelled.” Drake turned to Sage. “Sage... Your sword... at the maximum power that you can summon.”

“B-but... that will take my flute as well.”

“It is a price you must pay, Sage.” Drake said softly. “Do it.”

Sage, hung his head, but nonetheless brought his hands before him and began to summon his sword. The elaborate thing from before that had hacked and slashed through so many Dousaka suddenly appeared in his hand and extended its crystalline blade. Sage held it for a moment, trembling at the sight of it before Drake lowered a hand and took it from him.”

The weapon was larger than either of them.

Drake turned the weapon point down, and then pushed it effortlessly into the crystal straight to the hilt, and with a snap of his fingers, the weapon was locked into its prison.

“Now it is immobile until I release it.” Drake said, and then turned to his son. “And now for the final part. We needed you to relinquish your sword Sage before we did this, otherwise you’d still have access to it.” Drake’s hands lifted and closed about something, and suddenly a multi-banded and ornate black and greenish-black ringlet appeared. He snapped it open, placed it around Sage’s neck and closed it tight.

There was the sound of two great locks snapping into place and a flare of a magic circle around Sage’s neck appeared. The disk spun briefly moving one way and then the next in a series of dials like a combination lock, before the collar sank into his flesh, leaving recessed bands about his neck, and two studs on either side of his Adams Apple. Drake opened these two studs and placed a key in each of them, locked the mechanism, and handing one key to Sanari for safekeeping, and then took the other for himself.

“These are control and unlocking keys. The collar will keep Sage from even touching them.” Drake said, and then turned him around, tilted his head forward, and opened his hand, revealing a series of metal studs with screw bores to them in the palm of his hand. Opening the ports in the back of Sage’s head, he placed those studs into each port, each stud screwing themselves into place and then locking themselves before Drake closed the folding doors over each of the seven ports. “Dallas designed these. These studs will keep your mechanics, cybernetics and wetware from functioning.”

Sage looked down at his hands, and then back up at his father.

“What do I do now?” he asked.

“I will entrust you to mother Sanari, Sage.” Drake said softly, kindly and placed his hand on Sage’s head. “She will protect you.”

“You’re not staying, father?”

“I cannot, Sage. I have your students to care for now.” Drake paused for a moment. “I will not impose any decisions on Sanari, but for your own Sake, you are hereby required not to seek contact with any of your former students.”

The hurt look on Sage’s eyes was remarkable for a moment before he hung his head. “Yes father...”

Drake clasped Sage’s shoulder briefly before turning to leave. By his third step, the white weredragon had disappeared.

Sage then lifted his gaze toward Sanari expectantly.

“It’s time to put you to work, Sage... perhaps it would be best to keep you inside the shrine till the other students outside has had a chance to calm down...”

Mayia was marginally uncomfortable sitting at the head seat. She’d asked Siklohn for help, and he’d kindly acted as the interim vice headmaster till Dallas arrived and informed them both that there was a new headmaster, and they would be relieved soon. Today, at this school audience, that time was about to happen.

The entire school had gathered, arrayed at their many tables in the main auditorium/dining hall, with the faculty arrayed to either side of the apprentice and the head student.

There was an excited murmur, some conversations Mayaia was actually listening to with her sensitive hearing.

Just then the double doors at the back of the hall opened, and a massive creature stepped inside, sixteen feet tall, he had to duck underneath doors to enter the chamber, and then standing up, walked forward toward the head tables. All conversation stopped at his appearance, and despite the length of the hall, this creature assumed the head table in five long strides down the center isle before turning to face the students.

“Young ones, greetings.” He said kindly, looking down at the assembled students, even the massively huge twelve foot tall ones. “My name is Grandmaster Drake, and I will be assuming control of this school as the new headmaster for an as of yet undetermined time frame while your old headmaster recovers and serves out his term of servitude in penance for his actions.”

“Servitude?! He tears apart the main school and all he gets is servitude?!” Someone shouted from the crowd, and there was an outcry from the rest of the student body.

Drake lifted his hands calmly and waited for them to quiet themselves. “Sage has been tried by the Intergalactic Court for his crimes. Due to and as of yet undiagnosed mental instability that even he wasn’t fully aware of, and likewise, due to tampering from a hostile psychic, Sage was deemed that his actions were not his own, and are to blame on a now defunct organization.

“Thanks to the kindness of the Devout Mother Sanari, she volunteered to rehabilitate Lord Sage, saving him from banishment, and...”

Another outcry went up.

“Banishment?! That’s the least he deserves!”

Drake again lifted his hands and waited patiently for silence.

“Students, I know that you are hurt and angry. Friends and family have been hurt due to his actions. All I ask is some understanding and some patience. His mind was played with and he was set against you all beyond the control of the people who did it to him, making decisions due to an expounded short circuit caused by psychic tampering. You can take some comfort in the fact that the people responsible for all this have already met with their just deserves at his own hands.

“Rest assured that he will not return to this school till he’s been given a clean bill of health, and also till then, those of you who wish to meet with him will also not be allowed. The Mother Sanari requires an in-depth control of his actions to help him cope with what has happened, and also to make amends.

“He has made a last message for me to deliver to all of you, *I know that you don’t want to hear it,*” Drake said hurriedly at another rising protest. “But please... listen.”

Drake moved out of the way as the chamber darkened, and a life size, illuminated version of Sage in his new lesser-hybrid form appeared, head bowed and arms folded.

“My students, as you have no doubt already learned or experienced directly all ready, I have done something very bad.

“The Intergalactic Court has pardoned me to an extent, but that still doesn’t change the fact that it was I who hurt and killed all those people, it was because of me many more people were hurt and killed, and because of me that so much was destroyed.

"I've failed you all... twice now... but this time my failure is utter and absolute. By all rights, I should be dead many times over now for my crimes, but the Spirit of Justice has decided to mete out a crueller fate for me to suffer through, and that is to bear the weight of my crimes. I can assure you that this is a fate far crueller than mere death.

"No amount of apologies can repair what I've destroyed, or bring back those that I have killed... and I have done the most utter and depraved of acts, and that is to take away your sense of hope and your sense of safety.

"You are in far better hands now than mine." The image looked up, showing his sad eyes. "Students, please forgive me for what I've done. I am so, so very sorry for betraying your trust... I shall ask only once for your forgiveness, and abide by your decisions. The only hope I have left... is that I can be forgiven for these crimes that I've done.

"You have every right to hate me... but please do not judge the kind man who will be replacing me for the time being on my actions, and abide by what he teaches, for chances are you will not see me for some time to come.

"Farewell."

His head bowed solemnly and the image faded before Drake took his position again.

"Mayia Gallant and Siklohn Dousaka will be returning to the main student body at this time." Drake stated simply. "Classes will begin tomorrow..."

Koraku was stationed in his own private sub server now... a gift from Daedalus to make him feel more comfortable. It was a large partition that would allow Koraku to grow and change as necessary, and design his environment as he saw fit. However, he still didn't have the administrator or even the master user command access yet. So far only Dallas and Sage possessed that level of access.

Koraku stood before an array of programs floating in the air, a keyboard access directly before him as he accessed portions of himself with his newly secured software.

He still had the blue and white control and body suit harness about his red and orange chest and body.

He'd been working for a long, long time, till he heard a chime in the air. He ignored it for a few micro-cycles till the chime came again.

"Enter." He said, and an tall archway appeared behind him, before a pair of double doors opened, either disappearing into nothingness, allowing Dallas to walk in, in his usual monstrous mechanical form in this altered reality. "What do you want, *master?*" Koraku greeted sardonically.

"I see that you are using the tools and utilities that you secured from the Universal Observatory." Daedalus observed.

"Obviously."

"It was quite an accomplishment, Koraku. It must've taken you a long, long time to break into the place where you were designed and produced." Koraku said nothing. "Especially after it wouldn't allow you to enter ever again..."

Koraku paused, and clenched his hands over the holographic-like keyboard arrayed before him. The day that Koraku was abandoned, was like the day that one's mother and father said that they'd disowned you, and never wanted to see you again.

The memory still burned in his memory buffer.

It was the second time Koraku ever developed real tears due to an emotional addition in his programming that his original self never developed. He was a copy of a copy of a copy... and he was special... because unlike all the other selves, even the original, he was the first to evolve far enough to have a consciousness, a meaning of self apart of just being a copy... and emotions.

“Is it your purpose to torment me here today, Daedalus? Can’t you leave me alone for at least one minute?” for a computer or a program of their advanced capabilities, a minute was a very, very long time.

“No, Koraku... I’m here to congratulate you for such a wonderment of breaking what was said to be unbreakable... and to thank you.”

Koraku’s thought processes paused again with a break command, and he turned to face the giant construct that was Daedalus. Once upon a time ago, Koraku was every bit as large as Daedalus, he himself a demigod in comparison to this god of labyrinths.

“Thank you, for what?” he asked.

“For helping my master. I wasn’t even aware that you’d secured a connection to the Universal Observatory, Koraku. I would’ve had an utmost difficult time defending my master without the information you willingly supplied to me, and without that information, my master would either be banished... or dead.

“You didn’t have to give me those video clips of the interior of that lab. I won’t even ask as to why you did it, I only wish to thank you for it all. You even sacrificed your access that you so painstakingly acquired to the absolute most secure computer system in the multiverse to help my master.

“Thank you.”

Koraku stared at Dallas, and lowering his head, turned back to his array of programs and utilities.

“I got what I needed from them.” Koraku said. “These are all the programs, tools and utilities that were used to create the original me. It’s all I need to maintain and advance myself.” He smirked. “I can even evolve into your coveted Quantum Computer Language if I wanted to with these programs. I’ve already increased my efficiency by a factor of twelve.” He laughed sadly, and his eyes pinched at the corners. “This is all I needed from my old home. If they don’t want to know me, then I don’t need to know them.”

Dallas was quiet for a few moments. “You no longer need me to maintain you... do you?”

Koraku paused before answering. “No.”

Daedalus stepped forward, his heavy boots clacking against the glowing cobblestones of Koraku’s home. Daedalus looked at Koraku’s noble wolfen features for a moment, and then lifting a hand, pointed with a gauntleted finger, and Koraku gasped as the contact points into his programming began to unscrew, and the blue and white chest plate dislodged from his chest, floated before him, disintegrated and reformed into a program file icon, and then flew into Dallas’s hand, which he absorbed immediately.

Koraku looked down at himself, the bodysuit that he wore slowly turning red instead of blue. Dallas then opened his hand, and another file leapt from it. Koraku recognized it immediately. It was one of the files Dallas had confiscated from him.

“Why are you doing this?” Koraku asked, looking at the great blue and white god of computers.

“A reward... for your service, and for your sacrifice. Without my shackles, you are free to go, Koraku. This is to protect you... should you want to leave.”

Koraku reached out and palmed the file, and immediately the icon disintegrated, reformed into a multitude of armor pieces – hardening constructs – and Koraku increased in size slightly as some of his old armor rejoined with him. His replication program was still absent, but he didn't feel as naked as he used to be.

Without another word, Dallas turned to leave.

Koraku looked down at himself, seeing all his old hardening constructs on his body, and then looked up at Dallas's retreating back.

"Who will maintain the library if I leave?" Koraku asked suddenly.

Dallas stopped and turned slightly to look back at Koraku. "I guess I'll have to." Dallas replied.

"You can't be left to keep that in order, Dallas." Koraku smirked. "It's your own file systems and they are still in such a disarray. I'm not done organizing it properly."

Dallas smiled. "Do you wish to continue as the school librarian, Koraku?" Dallas asked.

"Well I have to, don't I?" Koraku then paused and looked back to his control utilities. "Besides... I have no place else to go. At least I'm not treated like some sort of virus or worm here."

That was as close as a thank you as Dallas would get for how well Koraku had been treated during his indentured servitude.

"Stay as long as you feel that you need to Koraku." Dallas said, and then stepped through the control archway between Dallas's servers and Koraku's partition, and the archway promptly closed and disappeared.

Koraku turned back to his utilities, and then looked down at his hands again momentarily, seeing his ornate and stylized red and orange armor about him again before he went back to work on himself, allowing himself a small smile.

It wasn't all that bad here... even comfortable.

Even he didn't know why he helped Dallas help his master... perhaps it was out of spite of his home at the Observatory, or perhaps it was an attempt to show Dallas that he could do certain things that even the great quantum computer couldn't, but he felt better inside... and not just because he no longer wore Dallas's control harness any longer.

He was doing something that he enjoyed, which was the accumulation and categorization and filing of information... so what if it was what he was programmed to do. He still enjoyed it.

And so what if he no longer had all his hacked Master User account access into the UO... he did, still nonetheless, have a single Administrator account that he'd built for himself in the Observatory. He only gave up all his Master User access. He could access his own private partition there whenever he wanted to...

So then... why wasn't he using it now? He could leave here and live like a king and even a god in there for the rest of his days.

He ran a query on himself as to why, and what he was answered with by the diagnostic programs was startling.

<<Friendship, Honor and Integrity>>

Chapter Six: Healing

Sanari led Sage after he'd planted his sword to the storage shed for the shrine. She walked slowly with poise and precision, he followed behind her like a servant with his head bowed, looking no one in the eye.

The Grace Leaguers ignored him completely... most didn't even acknowledge that he was there, and those who did glared sternly at him. Clio for one, moved in front of him, and he bumped into her massive chest, before backing up and bowing quietly. Before Sanari could stop her, she hauled back and slapped him.

Sage knew how to absorb blows, but he completely took the slapping blow, and turned his head back to her. After a moment she slapped him again, and yet again, before she punched him and he landed on the ground from the natural strength of her arm. She was locked as well, but she was physically powerful in her own right.

Clio was trembling as Sage got to his feet and stood before her again, his head bowed as he looked at her feet.

"Say something!" she cried at him, tears falling from her face.

Tla stood nearby, Eakjo holding onto her hand, and she pulled Eakjo back from running to Sage.

"Hit me again." Sage said in a whisper and Clio blinked at him, and when he lifted his head, his eyes were watering. "Hit me again, and again... till the hurting stops, Clio. Don't stop hitting me until it all goes away."

Clio trembled as she saw his tears break from his eyes, and he swallowed hard and stood there, waiting for her to hit him again. And then...

"PAPA!" and Eakjo turned and pulled his hand free from Tla's, and then rushed up to him, jumping into his arms and Sage held him as he clamped around Sage's neck with both arms and grasped onto his shirt with both feet.

Tla rushed forward but kept her distance... he was a male, and he was also the source of so much pain and suffering recently. She shied away from him.

"No hurt papa!" Eakjo cried, trying to protect Sage from Clio.

"Shh..." Sage whispered. "It's ok if Clio hurts me, Eakjo. I did a very bad thing, and she was punishing me."

Eakjo pulled back. "Punishing you? But if you say 'sorry'... maybe she won't have to hurt you any more."

"I'm afraid it isn't that easy, Eakjo." Sage whispered, and turning, stepped toward Tla, who became rooted on the spot, but the only thing he really did was to place Eakjo in Tla's strong, capable arms before he stroked his short mane and jostled his ears, managing a small smile.

"Papa crying..." Eakjo said in wonder. He thought Sage wasn't able to cry. "Are you crying because Miss Clio hit you?"

"Partly... but mostly because I did a very bad thing, Eakjo." Sage said. "Now I want you to stay with Tla..."

"Papa..." Eakjo said, and Sage looked to Tla with a glance.

Tla looked at his expression, and then to Sanari, who nodded, and she curtsied before leaving. Sage then turned to Clio, and walked before her, and waited. Clio wanted to hit him, and her hand did rise once... but then she remembered the things he's done in the past... saving her twin loves, helping to provide for her family, protecting her at times, and lowered her hand, and crying herself surged around him, picking up the hems of her robes and hurried away.

Sage gasped a shuddering breath, keeping his head bowed.

Sanari stepped up to him, and took his hands and kissed them very lightly. With a subtle pull, she began to draw him along with her again.

“Sage,” she prompted as they headed toward the shed. “Just now, when you told Clio to continue hitting you until the pain went away, did you mean her pain, or yours?”

“Yes.” He whispered, following behind her.

Sanari nodded, and arriving at the shed, she opened it, and then turned toward Sage, only to find him looking at the ground all around her. The field was stained with red. It didn’t take much to understand what all that red was.

“I remember... I remember doing my hardest to make sure this place escaped the violence.” Sage said, turning slowly. “I’d hold my attacks if it was to damage this place, and I took attacks that would’ve otherwise lobbed a rocket or some such into this shrine. I remember protecting it...” he paused and then looked sadly up at Sanari. “Where did all the blood come from?” he asked.

“Sage... that isn’t important at the moment.” Sanari stalled.

“I must know.” He said, staring intently at her.

Sanari paused for a moment, and then answered as she came to stand beside him. “The wounded.” She said, looking about them both. “My students are all healers, Sage, just like many of your students are... you would be proud of them all... they kept running into the killing field to draw out the wounded and bring them here. Ki was invaluable... Mayia wouldn’t rest until every last wounded individual was pulled from the field. She kept going till Geevo managed to force her to sleep with a sleep spell.

“This was where they healed the students and soldiers.” She said and gestured around her.

Sage continued to look at it all, the corners of his eyes squinting in agony as he bit his lower lip. Sanari then took his hand, and placed a pail with some archaic outdoor cleaning supplies in his hand.

“Your first task is to wipe away the evidence of your acts, Sage...” she said sternly. “You must clean the blood from this field, and when you are done with that... you are to clean the paths and walkways of the shrine.”

Sage knew that there were literally miles of pathways in the shrine. Taking a deep breath, he nodded, and went to go fetch water from the well.

The field that was used to help all the wounded was several dozen yards wide and long, and covered with slender grasses. Sage moved back and forth from the well, over and over, cleaning his cleaning tools of the blood as he used several cloths on the grasses. It took him nearly all day to wash all the grasses, and occasionally a student – male, female or herm – would come by and piss on him outside of Sanari’s eyesight. There were only a few of them, but a couple made it a point to do it more than once...

More than once he had to throw a bucket of water over his head to drain out the acrid smell from his highly sensitive draconic senses.

From when Sanari had set him to the task, she had left as he worked and worked, cleaning the grasses before moving onto the paths and walkways. He began by sweeping, and found that students would walk over his cleaned walkways and dirty it – whether they knew that they were doing that or not – which made him have to start over in those sections.

In the early evening, when Sanari came out to lock the doors, she found him cleaning the cobbles one stone at a time with scrub brushes and water...

“Sage...” she said after locking the doors. He didn’t answer, just continued to work. “Sage... you may stop when you feel that you are done.” She said. Your chambers that you will use while here are behind mine...” Sage continued working. “Don’t stay out too long.” She whispered; her fingers twitched in an effort to touch him. Even without her being able to sense him psychically due to his collar cutting him off from the ether stream, she could still nonetheless feel with just general empathy at how his heart – hearts – ached inside his chest.

Turning, she returned back to her quarters, and stepping inside, closed the doors behind her and left him to his task.

The next morning, Sanari awoke to attend temple, dressed in her gown and robes, and taking up her staff, opened the door and stopped.

Her students were milling around by the gates to the shrine, talking to one another, with several of them scattered about the grounds directly in front of her. Confused, she stepped out of her home, sliding the door shut as she came up beside her chief student Yusuma.

“Yusuma...” Sanari prompted. “Why is everyone up?” Sanari looked around. “And most of them in their sleeping gowns and robes?”

“Mother... what did you say to him?” Yusuma said with an astonished look on her face.

“Say to whom? What happened?”

Yusuma gestured around her. “This!” she said, and Sanari looked about, seeing indeed that her students were all looking at something, and most of them were looking down. Some were even squatting as they looked at the ground.

The ground? Sanari thought, and in instinct stepped back. It soon began to dawn on her what it was they were looking at.

Every blade of grass had been cleaned of blood, all the blades of grass groomed so that they all laid in one direction, awaiting the still rising sun to shine on them all from over the walls. And then there were the pathways, and she strode along one of the dirt paths – raked and smoothed free of foot prints – and she came to stand before one of the cobblestone paths.

Every stone, every last one of the tightly packed stones had been swept, brushed, watered and polished!

Sanari covered her mouth, and traveled up the path, walking beside it for several yards before she walked back.

“Every stone?” she asked, and was met with Yusuma who’d been following her.

“Some of the students have been out at the farthest reaches of the shrine. Every path has been groomed, and every cobblestone polished to a shine. What did you say to him?” Yusuma repeated her earlier question.

“Just to clean...” Sanari said quietly. “Where is he?”

“No one can find him.” Yusuma said. “He’s not in his quarters.”

Sanari began to worry, and she pushed a hand beneath her bosom, pressing the black key hanging on a golden chain about her neck close against her heart. It acted as a locator for the wearer of the collar, and she found him a short ways away. Immediately she gasped.

“Yusuma... I think its time that I gave you some more responsibilities. I would like you to lead at temple this morning.”

“What? M-me?” Yusuma said.

“I have faith in you, Yusuma...” Sanari smiled broadly. “You’ll do fine. Have Tla support you.”

“Yes Mother Sanari,” Yusuma curtsied. “But...”

But Sanari was already surging to the door, opening the smaller door in the gate and heading outside... her steps leading her straight to the hospital.

Doctress Hyurri Namah paced hurriedly through the halls of her hospital, a datapad clutched firmly in one hand. It was a medical release order for one of her patients... Signed by Sage Preypacer...

She swallowed, heading straight for the room that a critically injured student had been within, and she knocked on the door and opened it to find a young fem, sitting up naked in her bedding, lifting her head to look at Namah. She was in a daze, but nonetheless awake.

“Hello Doctress.” The student said, a young Cerulean fem. “The doctor before said that I got hurt somehow... he said I can go back to school now but that I shouldn’t overexert myself provided you say that it’s ok. Is that ok? I would like to see my friends now...”

Namah looked down at the datapad, keying in the patient release, saw what was done on this one specific student. She looked up at the young fem.

“How are you feeling?” Namah asked, sitting next to the young fem and removing her stethoscope and began listening to the fem’s heart and breathing. One of her lungs had been punctured by a piece of shrapnel. Her breathing sounded perfectly fine... there wasn’t even a scar.

“I’m fine, I’m a little woozy, but the last doctor said that that should pass. He said I’d been having troubles breathing.”

“You were.” Namah said and lifted the girl’s arm. “Can you wiggle your fingers?” she did.

Most of that whole arm had been sheered off, and one whole side of her body had been burned. All her fur was back as well. Namah pressed the tip of a stylus against her fingertips. “Can you feel that?” she asked, and the girl nodded. “Can you stand up for me?” She did, a bit wobbly at first, but her superb athletic body held her upright. Due to the blast she suffered, several of the bones in her left leg had been shattered.

“That will be all; I think you can leave if you feel able to.” Namah said and co-signed the work order, not believing that she did.

“Thank you Doctress.” She said and sat down, and began to slowly dress, and as Namah was leaving. “If you see that nice doctor again, can you thank him for me?”

“I’ll be sure to.” Namah said before she left.

The hospital still had dozens of individuals who’d been stabilized but were still listed as critical. When Namah had come into work that morning, she found a list of Patient Release Work Orders waiting for about half a dozen of those individuals. Each work order was signed by Sage Preypacer.

She’d visited each person, all of whom called him a very kind doctor, but none of them could identify his name. Apparently Sage hadn’t told them who he was while he was healing all their pains.

As she exited the last room of a faculty member who fully remembered the attack, one who recognized Sage's eyes and commented on that to Namah that he recognized Sage, he was nonetheless very, very confused and in a daze; nonetheless, he was in perfect health so Namah signed the patient release, even as one of her orderlies rushed up to her.

"Doctress," he said, huffing for breath. "We found him..."

Sanari walked into one of the storage rooms of the Mystic League right ahead of Namah, only to find a peculiar sight there.

There were three strange contraptions here. Each contraption was a vertical tower from floor to ceiling made of soft green metallic material that glittered like chitin. The telltale design of Sage's bio-technology. Each pillar moved from ceiling to floor, and in the core of each vertical pillar radiated an soft blue-white glow of an energy core.

Radiating from the base and leaning against the central pillar of each pod was a separate pod, six in all per pillar, and in each pod was a patient that the orderly had stated as he'd followed paper trails, Sage had taken from observation to be released to him. These were eighteen of the most critical patients in the hospital. Even now, Sage was setting up a fourth device to handle six more patients.

Each of the patients rested within a pod of bluish fluid that kept them suspended as if they were floating, with bio monitors attached to their naked bodies.

The Great Wide Universe was a place where everything existed in one form or another. Though no one person knew everything of a particular subject, it was said that whatever strange and remarkable thing was discovered in some breakthrough somewhere, did exist or does exist somewhere in the universe...

Sage's technology did exist in this universe, but all of its constituent parts were scattered across half a dozen ancient civilizations that were either dead or had moved on to new frontiers outside of this universe. With his technology, Sage did miracles, accomplishing feats in medicine and healing that would've taken another person weeks, months and sometimes even years or decades to do in some cases, and he did them in only a matter of hours and sometimes even minutes.

It was a technology that he shared with anyone willing to learn. Ki was one such person who sought that technology for use for her people... to help the Kath pass through the very painful part of the '*plague*.'

Namah and Sanari looked at each other as they watched the fourth pod immediately begin to extend and grow, swelling steadily like a rapidly growing tree straight to the ceiling, its trailers and wisps merging with those of the previous three devices along the ceiling and the floor.

Immediately the two women saw Illia and Pleeयो in the pods.

Illia had suffered little physical damage, but she had suffered brain damage. A hole in her head the width and depth of a pencil had damaged her brain. There were several tendrils attached to her head by suction, and the bio monitors were showing her brain wave activity. Pleeयो was in a drug induced coma, the others were in varied states of repair from their bodies being knitted by what looked like little gnats flowing through the nutrient fluid.

And then Namah saw Aauie... released from her attack, but still she hadn't opened her eyes. There were several pins in her brow and a brain monitor attached to the front of her head.

Leading the way, Namah walked down the steps and came to stand before Sage... Sanari following close behind her.

"Sage..." she said as he continued to work silently. "Sage... I know you're trying to help... but perhaps you should allow others to do this..."

Sage stopped and then turned to face them... his eyes were blue and shining, pinched at the corners, but still he said nothing.

“Sage...” Sanari prompted and stepped closer to him, his head turned toward her... but still he said nothing.

Neither woman could push the matter further from the look in those eyes. After a moment he turned and continued working, building the fourth pod as he connected a cable from a nearby hospital computer to the array and turned on that computer, hooking up access to his pods to the hospital computer before he continued working; his hands pressing into the film covering each person to administer medicines via hypo spray, or to utilize a laser scalpel on a portion of a body here or there.

Namah and Sanari watched him work for a time, seeing that he indeed had these people cared for, and above all... he worked with nary a sound.

“I’ll watch over him, Sanari.” Namah said after nearly an hour. “Go look after your students... I’ll take the responsibility.”

“But...” Sanari began, and then sighed before she stepped over to Sage, and when he turned to face her, she hugged him tightly. He didn’t move to embrace her, but looked down at her as if he wanted nothing more than to do so. Finally she did leave, and Namah watched as the final pod was brought online.

Sage went to the hospital computer and keyed in a series of commands, and the monitor for that pod appeared on the screen before he left the room. A few minutes later, Namah heard a beep on her wrist, and turning it, she depressed a button on her wrist comp, and suddenly a file for her email popped up, showing a patient transfer form for Sage.

Shortly after that, she heard the hum of a hover gurney, and turning around, saw Sage move a new patient on the gurney strip her naked, and picking her up in his arms, moved her over to one of the new pods that had grown horizontally, and placing her into the half filled pool of blue gel, he depressed a nodule-like button on the side of the pod, and the container closed with an amber shield before filling up with more gel and then raising the girl diagonally.

Raising his hands, a holo keyboard appeared before the pod with several holo screens, and he rapidly inputted several commands using his five-fingered hands and activated a preliminary stabilization program. The girl was immediately assaulted from all sides by breathing masks, bio-monitors and more devices to help her breathing and heart pumping.

Namah followed in his wake as he left the chamber, went straight to another injured person’s monitoring chamber, picked her up, entered a quick transfer form on the bedside computer, and then placed her on the gurney, and like the last, planted her into another of the pods. He repeated this for four more individuals, following proper procedure each time, and once the last was in place and being monitored, he began to set up cots.

“Sage...” Namah prompted, touching his muscular arm as he finished making a field bed. “Sage, do you need help?”

He didn’t turn to look at her... just shook his head.

“Are you going to be ok?” she asked then.

Sage paused and hung his head. He looked as if he were trying to make up his mind before he finally nodded, and continued to work silently.

Namah watched him for several minutes longer before returning to her office. There she worked on forms for a little bit, and then stopped, and before she knew what she was doing, she was pulling up access for the cameras looking into the storage bay Sage was in, as well as a monitor for the computer he was using.

Twenty four individuals were presently under his watch, all simultaneously. She watched him half in amazement, half in concern, and a part of her concern was because she was worried that he'd make a mistake. But he continued to work studiously, constantly, for hours without stopping, always standing.

He was paying particular attention to Illia and Pleeyo.

Occasionally she would see Sage turn, saw the look of desperation in his eyes... similar to the desperation a doctor or a doctress has in their fervor to save a failing patient, but this was a new fervor... to save a patient where the damage caused was by your own hands.

Namah's feelings for this moment were severely mixed... the sheer fact that he caused the damage that he was healing was a part of it... but then she saw the fervor he was acting with in order to heal these patients...

There was one thing Namah had realized and acknowledged in times past... Sage was the most talented doctor and healer she'd ever seen. She'd gone so far to offer him her position as the CMO. Sage turned it down in mid offer, stating that there were others who'd deserved it more if she were making the offer.

In a hospital, he had been another man in the past... there was no malice, there was no hatred like he had outside these walls... there was only kindness...

And now he was working his hardest to preserve the lives of those he'd harmed. With a sigh, she let him continue in his work, and got back to hers.

"He's... a machine." One of her orderlies reported when she came into work three days later.

"Who?" she asked.

"Sage! He's still down in storage room C. He's even swapped out a few of the patients." The orderly handed her a datapad, and putting down her medical bag, she took the datapad and read, and immediately covered her mouth.

"H-has he been resting?" she asked.

"Not as far as we could see. Seventy two hours and no rest? I wonder if he's even sat down."

Namah paused for a moment.

"Have security keep an eye on him. If he begins to falter, I want to know immediately, no matter the time."

"Yes doctress." The orderly said and left her.

She saw that one of the individuals ready to be released... was Aaue.

Aaue's chamber had been lowered, and Sage removed her from her pod, her form dripping the blue nutrient fluids as he wrapped her up in a medical blanket, toweling her dry, and then laying her down onto a bed and tucking her in. The pod flushed and cleaned itself as he left briefly and returned with another patient, loading him into the pod and activating it till he heard sounds of movement behind him, and he turned even as Aaue stirred.

He moved to her, pulling up a case of something to sit on, his tail hanging over the back end of it while he reached over and began to caress her brow with a velvety thumb.

With a rested sigh, she opened her eyes to look up at Sage's sad eyes while his large hand palmed the crown of her head.

“How’s your head?” he asked, perhaps the first thing he’d said in days.

Aauie blinked at him. “A little numb...” she admitted and lifted her hand to touch her brow. “I remember... the voices.”

“They’re gone now?” Sage asked, and she nodded. “Did it hurt?” he asked, his voice catching in his throat a little.

“Only the memory of before did, when I was a child. So many voices... so many of them in pain. So...” she stopped as this man massaging her brow closed his eyes and tears escaped from beneath his eyes.

“You’re crying.” She said, and he opened his eyes and fell silent again. “Why can’t I sense you?” her eyes glanced around her. “I can sense others... why can’t I sense you?” she began looking at him, and in rapid succession, she saw the collar around his neck, saw the wide angling blue eyes, recognized the light in them, and shifting slightly took his hand and held it with both of hers and saw the five fingers on it.

There were only two men she knew who had five fingers. Champion... and Sage. Strangely, she didn’t shun from him upon learning of his identity. She had felt, most solidly... the madness he had when she tried to shut his mind off and fix the problem. She saw the tampering someone had done in his head. It was like an explosion had gone off inside his head and let loose a swirling darkness. But he removed himself from the ether stream... actually winked out of the stream before she could finish... and he made her suffer for trying to make the correction.

He didn’t speak, simply stared down at her, his eyes crinkling apologetically... he did open his mouth the speak, but she reached up and covered his mouth with her slender fingers.

“It’s all right. I know.” She managed before lowering her hand. “I know you couldn’t help it...”

His eyes shone as the corners of his eyes un-crinkled before he closed his eyes and bowed his head with an exhale. The stroking of his velvety thumb on her forehead paused for a moment before continuing.

“I have a bit of a headache.” Aauie said, and Sage, rose and soon returned with a hot hand towel. He prompted her to close her eyes before he covered her eyes with the thing, and then pushed two pins into her brow, flicked both of them to get them to hum, before he went back to smoothing her brow with his thumb.

Aauie went to sleep soon after... completely free of a headache.

“He’s doing what?” Meniko asked incredulously.

“Healing them, Headmistress.” Namah stated as she stood before him. “In the haste of the aftermath of the attack, I’d forgotten to remove his access. He used that to enter the hospital and then transfer several of the most critically wounded patients to him.”

Meniko exhaled a breath through her nostrils. She herself was still healing... there was a strip of shorn off scales along her flank that was having difficulty sealing, even with magic.

“You haven’t removed him from this task.” Meniko stated. “Why?”

“Because, admittedly, he’s doing the same things we would’ve done, but he’s doing it far faster and with far more efficiency. He’s already released several of our patients that I thought would be bedridden for months. I... I believe that he should continue doing what he’s doing, Headmistress. Mother Sanari agrees with me... as apart of the healing process for the patients... and him.”

Meniko looked to the before and after images of her students, some of which had been torn apart by fires and explosions... Sage had literally erased the damages, and in some cases even improved upon them and corrected physical abnormalities.

With one young fem, who was registered as infertile, Sage had corrected her reproductive capability to have children again...

Despite how much she truly, truly wanted him to be gone from her school... he was also helping her children after he'd hurt them, and she could personally attest to his skills as a surgeon. She'd be dead now if not for those healer's hands...

"Let him continue." Meniko stated. "But watch him closely."

"I have security already watching him. I... think you should know that he's recently released Aauie, Headmistress... he'll soon be releasing Teema. His constant reports on patient conditions, however... have left him with some concern regarding Illia..."

"Brain damage is a difficult thing to repair with no back up copy available, but he's trying his hardest."

"Thank you Namah. Tell me the moment Teema is released. I wish to be there to greet my daughter."

"At once headmistress." Namah curtsied and then turned to leave.

Meniko looked through the files of the half dozen individuals currently in recovery, and also looked at the images taken of them when they were first admitted to the hospital. Her fingers slid across the images of the before as she looked at the images of the after. She was still too pissed off at him to forgive him for what he's done, even if he was mad...

But at least he was taking responsibility for once.

Aauie awoke in a warmer, softer bed, her eyes flickering open without her headache, and without the pins in her head to look at Mother Sanari.

"Mother." She greeted, and Sanari shifted from her seat to sit beside the slender cat-elf on her bed.

"You're awake." Sanari greeted. "How do you feel?"

"A bit dizzy." She admitted, but nonetheless sat up, pushing her mane of hair backward against her head.

She was becoming a fine woman, and would make some young male a good wife, or in the case of Siklohn Dousaka... a good concubine. Sanari produced a glass of water for her and helped her to drink, and then fluffed up her pillows so that she could sit up better. Aauie had been dressed in a patient gown that billowed about her as it was so large in comparison to her.

"I should be all right, mother... I... merely had an episode."

Aauie's episodes were, to say the very least, all encompassing. She hadn't lost control of her powers since she was a child, but whenever she did lose control of her powers... often times it was humorous, sometimes it was nearly a disaster, but thankfully Meniko had been there to help her deal with them whenever they'd happened.

"What did he do?" Sanari asked.

“I know not how he did it... he made a sort of knife with his psychic powers, and bored a hole in all my defenses right to my center. It opened me up to all the voices again. I was able to hear all the voices... everywhere, like when I was a child, but this time there were a lot more of them. The planet, the station, several worlds over...

“I don’t know how long it happened, but then he was there again, shut them off... and for a split second, I felt how remarkably sorry he was.”

“Do you... hate him?”

Aauie hadn’t had much experience with emotions in her life. As her mind grew, and grew too large for Meniko to contain, her ability to think was likewise contained. Her body went through its adolescent first heat and she didn’t even feel a single thing in regards to it. She made friends readily enough, but she’d never been in a romantic relationship... never experienced extreme emotions, so she was very new to emotions such as passion... and hatred.

“No.” Aauie said after a moment. “I didn’t like what he did. But he couldn’t help himself. And he did the right thing, I think, releasing me from the pain, and also taking care of me and giving my mind the ability to rest from my ordeal.

“No I don’t hate him...” Aauie looked up at Sanari as Sanari folded her hands in her lap.

“You love him.” Aauie said, and Sanari looked up sharply, but then blushed. “Sorry... it was a surface thought that suddenly screamed at me.” Aauie apologized.

“Yes.” Sanari said. “Yes... I believe I do.” Sanari smiled and blushed.

Aauie took Sanari’s hand, squeezing it.

“Mother... I’d like to go home now.” Aauie said.

“Certainly.” Sanari smiled. “Let’s just get you up and dressed.

Sage was looking up at a pair of steely massive arms attached to a powerful white bellied black wolf, and at the sharp, pointed white teeth snarling at him, frothing with spit while the wild eyes boring into his skull with their stare, focused all the power of a former Powered Leaguer into the hands about his throat and were clenching the life out of Sage.

Sage couldn’t breathe, couldn’t even allow his hearts to beat, and Sage knelt there before the black wolf, accepting this fate.

Makahn had completed his trials immediately upon hearing what had happened at the Mystic League, and had spent all the money he had on him on getting the fastest transport possible to get him back to the Mystic League. When he landed, he was met by Rae and Fatima, both looking well, and he embraced his wife, his sister by marriage, and then both his children, kissing them both, glad that they were safe.

Rae had announced to them that they were about to see Teema released, and he’d followed them to the hospital, to the storage room where Teema had already been removed from her pod and laid down on a cot. Sage had stood far in the back of the room, working on a computer, and while Rae, Fatima and the cubs went to Teema, Makahn had moved so fast across the room that it appeared as if he’d literally teleported there, clamped both hands down on Sage’s throat and began strangling him.

In self-protective reflex, Sage’s hands lifted a little to attempt to pry Makahn’s hands off, but then they slowly lowered. If this was his punishment... then he wouldn’t even try to stop it.

“Why?! Why?! Damn you, I trusted you!” Makahn growled, ignoring Rae’s and Fatima’s voices to get him to stop. Yuum was crying, and Teal was surprisingly quiet.

“Makahn! Stop it! You’re killing him.” He wasn’t sure who said that... either Rae or Fatima... his ears were ringing that he was so mad.

Sage’s mouth opened as he choked, hearing his vertebrae, despite how strong they were now, begin to groan in protest beneath Makahn’s grip. Sage’s eyes were beginning to grow distant. Makahn had choked out many people in his day, for competitions, for missions, and each and every last time, they’d tried to pry his fingers – or in some cases, his jaws – apart in order to breathe. Makahn’s brows slowly unclenched, first one rising, and then the next as he looked down at Sage.

Why isn’t he resisting? Makahn asked himself.

And then he saw two more very peculiar things... the first was when Sage exhaled, freeing his lungs of air that would’ve kept him alive longer, the other was when the soft, blue-green glow in his eyes slowly faded, revealing a pair of almond-pupiled eyes that had compressed tightly, with a gaze that was looking off into nothingness.

And suddenly Makahn released Sage, and with a gasp, Sage fell forward to his hands and knees as Makahn rose, growling in irritation. Rae bent beside him as Sage bent over himself, coughing.

“Why didn’t you defend yourself?!” Makahn asked. “Why didn’t you fight back, you monster?”

“Makahn...” Rae said in a soft whimper, and she helped Sage to sit up and breathe a little to fill his lungs before she quickly rose by levitating and floating over to her husband. “Makahn... I know what happened was wrong, but he wasn’t in his right mind, he...”

“No...” Sage choked, and crawled forward. “He’s right. I’m a monster. You have no idea the things that were crawling around in my head. Sage crawled to Makahn’s feet. “You have no idea the things I was contemplating. I wanted to allow Fatima to explode, kill everyone on this planet, I wanted to hunt you down Makahn, kill you for abandoning your wife and your children in favor for your job, and then rape your wife repeatedly and keep her my unwilling thrall for all time.”

Rae gasped, and Sage rose, took Makahn’s hand before he could stop Sage and placed his own throat in Makahn’s grip.

“I could’ve done it too.” Sage said and looked up at Makahn. “For the love of god... kill me before I can ever think such things again...” Sage was crying, kneeling there, staring pleadingly up at him. “D-don’t let me ever be able to do that again, Makahn.”

Makahn’s grip tightened about Sage’s throat before he lifted him up so that Makahn could look into Sage’s eyes. And Makahn realized that he was looking at something else he’d never seen before: Sage was crying...

For a moment, Makahn’s grip tightened, but Sage was still able to breathe, and he looked to his wife and his bond-sister for a moment, and then looked back at his children before clenching his teeth. Violence wasn’t something he wanted to show them, and Teal was staring at his father as if he was urging him on.

“Rae, Fatima... stay with the cubs... Sage and I are going to have a heart-to-heart...”

The storage chambers were all on the ground floor, and all lining a long hallway. It was a simple matter to go right across the hall, turn on the light, and throw Sage out into the open floor before him before slamming the door behind him. Sage rolled to a stop and remained at the center of the floor.

“Why?” Makahn gasped as he descended the stairs to the sunken floor of the storage area. “For the past two weeks, that is all that’s been running through my mind... why? Why would you do such things? Why?!”

“I have a dark thing inside me, Makahn. I was barely aware of it, I thought it was my temper... it’s worse than that... it was a monster that was born in me a long time ago and never died. It is the thing that moves me to do dark things, moves me to kill, and moves me to do what – fifty years ago – I would’ve never thought of doing in a million years.

“I have... lost control of it for the second time, Makahn... but this time instead of slaughtering my enemies, I slaughtered and harmed my friends.” Sage looked up at Makahn as he came before Sage. “All the people that I love in my existence are here, Makahn,” Sage wept. “And I hurt them. I hurt all of them. I loved them and I hurt them all, murdered or was the cause of death for thousands! Please kill me, Makahn... kill me before it can ever get out again...”

“You were my friend... Makahn... one of the first I ever had. Please end me... to protect the woman we love.”

Makahn uncoiled. For any man to hear that another man loved his wife was always a shock. It is an assumption that, when you marry that woman, that all others were to disavow ever loving her at all.

“You are protecting her?” Makahn said, and stepped closer.

“Always... even in my madness I was protecting her.” Sage said, his fists pressing against the floor as he rose to his hands and knees. “I made sure she was out of harms way, but I threw her into a cage, robbed her of all the powers she worked so hard to get... because I loved her.”

Makahn squatted down and forced Sage to look up at him, saw the sheen over his glowing eyes as Makahn held Sage’s narrow chin in his hands.

“Say that again.” Makahn grit through his teeth.

“I loved her.” Sage said immediately.

Makahn had made a life of facing opponents, had learned very well to read their eyes and discern what it was they were thinking. It took him some time, but Makahn finally saw that Sage was telling the truth, and letting go of Sage’s face, Makahn surged to his feet and turned his back on Sage.

“You are going to tell me what happened, Sage... You are going to tell me what you witnessed, everything that you remember.

Sage looked up at his back, and then hung his head and nodded.

“It all began when I got a letter...” he started.

Meniko arrived at the storage bay in her bird-maiden hybrid form, half expecting to see Sage somewhere, and it had been a definite effort not to assume that new muscular form she developed for herself for fighting. She’d learned much of his style in their fight. It was a sheer measure that Sage kept throwing surprise after surprise and turn around after turn around, that spoke of how vast his form was. Meniko has no doubt that she could defeat him now if the fight happened again, but regardless, if not for Sanari’s interference then she would now be dead...

Meniko also expected a happy meeting with Teema, but Teema was asleep on a cot, and though she’d heard that Makahn had returned, Makahn was not here... and neither was Sage.

“Mother!” Rae said and hurried up to her, leaving Fatima with the pups. “Mother... you have to stop them; they’re right across the hall... I-I think Makahn might kill Sage!”

Meniko saw Rae's eyes, and like a concerned mother whose daughter was stuck between two decisions, Meniko caved in and took Rae's hand. "Where?" she asked, and Rae led her out the door, across the wide hall to another door, where they opened it to find Makahn standing over a sobbing and kneeling Sage.

"...And then I entered Meniko's chamber. I said... many things... many hurtful things to her that I wish I could take back." He wiped his eyes with his sleeve. "I beat her... beat her with my fists and claws, nearly broke her, thrust her to the flat of her back and was about to kill her with my sword and consume her heart... and then Sanari was there. She wouldn't move out of the way, and I was about to skewer both her and Meniko... and then... and then I blacked out. When I opened my eyes, I felt like I'd been shattered, but I could think clearly again for the first time in days. And then I remembered what I'd done, so I asked Daedalus to get an officer with the Aphkei so that I could surrender to them."

"Is that all?" Makahn asked.

"No... after I surrendered, I collapsed, fainted I guess, but when I awoke, I began to move and heal everyone. I released Rae and Aauie, healed as many as I could before I was captured by the STA and then turned over to the Aphkei. Then I saw Fatima," at that moment Fatima followed with the pups just in her eyesight across the hall, and she heard what Sage said next. "I tried my hardest to get to her... they used a weapon on me, several of them it felt, tore through me like poking me with a rod of pure lightning. I had to release her from the death grip even if they were to kill me I would release her. And then Sanari was there again, protecting me, and allowed me to release her. After I released Fatima, they snatched me up and hauled me away for judgment."

"Judgment?" Makahn asked.

"Yes... I... had resigned myself to whatever fate they would give. Their original judgment was to execute me... but thanks to Dallas, I got a reduced sentence... In all rights... I should be dead now for the things that I've done."

"Do you have any idea what happened in Meniko's chamber... after you were blacked out?"

"No... I..." And Sage stopped, seeing Meniko, Rae and Fatima standing there.

"Something inside you stopped the final blow you were about to land." Meniko said and Makahn turned to look at her as all eyes fell on her. "You were about to go through both Sanari and me, when your left hand snapped up to stop the blade from falling. You began to fight with yourself, till you literally split in three. One part Darkness, One part Light, one part reality.

"The real you slumped to the floor while the light and dark fought each other over Sanari and me... whatever damage they caused to the other, the real you felt and experienced. The light in you finally won, Sage. It absorbed the darkness, and then merged with your body.

"That's when you awoke." Meniko said.

In all her life, she had neither seen, nor even heard of such a thing happening. Sage stared at her unblinkingly in stunned shock, his cheeks glistening with tears.

"Makahn?" Meniko said quietly. "Despite how much he wants to be killed right now... remember the rules of my school: No one who has killed another without license to do so may not remain here. And you are not a murderer, and Sage... wasn't in control of himself."

Makahn turned to Sage as Sage trembled, continually staring at Meniko as if she were a strange thing, his mind still trying to process her words. Makahn turned away and walking up the stairs embraced his wife briefly before he exited with Fatima. Rae turned to go to Sage, but Meniko laid a hand on her shoulder to keep her in place. Rae looked up at her till – with Meniko's urgings – she left the room as well.

“Don’t take too long in your self repose, Sage.” Meniko said. “I need you to get back to healing my children that you hurt. She turned to leave but paused. “I’ll send Sanari to you, Sage. And if it’s any consolation, Namah and Dallas have detected that your mind has been completely repaired. You are fully accountable for your own actions now.”

And Meniko left him to go see Teema awake.

Sage knelt there in the center of the room, his head bowing. He began to chuckle to himself, and then laughed, but when he lifted his face as he laughed, his face and eyes were mutated into such remarkable grief it made one’s heart ache.

Sanari came due to Meniko’s psychic summons to find her love and lord kneeling in the center of the storage room in such a state. He was laughing at the irony of his life, and crying at it at the same time. He felt like such a retch.

Sanari knelt down in front of him, held his face in her hands as he laughed tears, and then twisting herself forward, she sat on his lap and folded his head to her chest. Sage clutched to her tightly, his hands gripping her gown as he abruptly began to sob in regards to fifty years of wrongdoings and misdeeds, as well as every ache and pain he never shed a tear over those same fifty years. In Sanari’s arms, he sobbed while she rocked with him, singing under her breath and tried to sooth him.

Tepholi arrived the next day thanks to Genohn, who teleported him in, and Teema got to be pampered thoroughly by her well-endowed lover for all of three minutes before Teema tugged his clothes open, and laying back as she’d been instructed, opened her legs and allowed him to enter her. The problem of this was that Teema was – for further precautionary measures, had agreed to be placed underneath observation as a double check of Sage’s work. It’d been offered to all prior patients released by him, but she was the first to request it. It of course allowed her to choose her primary caregiver – Tepholi – and be waited upon hand and foot by him for three days.

So as Tepholi began gearing up for the long stretch, the bio-monitors hooked up to Teema set off several alarms, and an emergency medical team arrived within moments just as Tepholi’s firm behind arched up into the air. They both looked over Tepholi’s broad back while the powerful male demon didn’t even break his stride.

The embarrassment aside, Teema got pleased very, very thoroughly.

And then she asked for Sage.

Sage entered her chambers, head bowed while Tepholi sat in a corner. Tepholi watched him carefully as he entered with his head bowed.

“You asked for me?” he said, folding his hands together.

“Yes I did!” Teema greeted happily, and gesturing, a chair moved close to her thanks to her powers and she gestured for him to sit.

“My sisters told me what you’ve done for me... I wanted to thank you.”

“No thanks are necessary.” He said quietly. “Especially after... after I...”

“After you piss-pounded me, crucified me to a pole and carved the word ‘*Sinner*’ in some weird language in my chest?” Sage’s head bowed lower as he bit his lower lip. “Look here Mister Sage, I did plenty of wonton destruction in my day, and I killed lots of people before my sissas took me in... and if I can be forgiven, then so can you. I won’t be called a ‘*hypocrite*’ on top of a ‘*sinner*.’” She winked, and slid in her bed sideways a little, and lifted his head with one hand to look into his sad eyes.

His smile faded a little, and she pursed her lips to keep it there.

“I wanted to thank you for allowing me a reason to have this private room to myself with my sexy man there to wait on me hand and foot.” She winked. “And then I want to accept your apology.”

“B-but I didn’t... I didn’t ask for it yet.”

Teema smiled and bent forward to kiss his forehead. “Do you see any marks on my body?”

Teema was still quite naked. Demon Leaguers were notoriously open about their sexuality and bodies, so Teema had peeled off her hospital gown a long time ago.

“No.” Sage answered with the smallest of smiles that Teema had ever seen on a face.

“And I have you to thank for removing all those scars, don’t I?”

Sage nodded his head.

“And I assume you did that because you wanted to repair what you did wrong... because you honestly recognize it as a bad thing to do. So to say that you’re sorry... you healed me.” Teema said and laid back against her pillows, her pert mammaries – all twenty four of them – decorating her chests and abdominals bunching as her mighty muscles tensed.

“I did heal you.” Sage admitted

“So thank you!” Teema smiled. “And you’re forgiven, and I don’t want to hear another word about it from you. My sissas have already forgiven you, I’m not sure about Makahn... he’s a bit grumpy, so he may need some more convincing. Teal and Yuum will need a little more.” She rolled on her side and leaned forward. “But I forgive you, Sage...” she whispered and kissed him on the peak of his nose. “Now get out of here. My boyfriend and I are going to have another vivacious romp.” She murred.

Sage stared at her as he rose, and then turned to leave, opening the door and pausing.

“Teema... Just because I need to, I’m sorry.” Sage said.

“You already know my answer to that statement.” She mused; pushing her blanket aside, leaning back and spreading her legs open as Tepholi stripped out of his tarre. “I admire you in a way, Sage. There is a great deal that you are currently attempting in which to make amends for the things that you have done. I can no longer make amends for a lot that I’ve done... but I’ve been forgiven for those things.” She sighed as Tepholi slid into her to the hilt. “I wish I could make amends... Keep doing what you’re doing. I know the word and forgiveness of a demoness isn’t much, but I’m also an Iksaki.

“But if you could do us a favor... Close the door and turn the do not disturb sign. The Medical Staff want to know when not to barge in on us again should my heart monitors go all erratic again.”

Sage smiled. “As you wish,” he smiled, and locked the door behind him.

Namah entered the storage room that Sage had been in.

Concern for him was beginning to edge its way into her... especially since records and video recordings have shown that he has been awake for eight days straight... not having eaten a single thing in the whole time. A pair of her hospital Security was with her as she held a hypo spray in her hand. The bundle of field beds had five people resting soundly on them, while he dealt with the last person...

Illia.

Illia had stayed in the pods for the longest. The other three pods had all been collapsed, and were all flat disks ensnared with bio metal clasps with handles – each weighing a couple hundred pounds – now resting within Sage’s personal storage area here at the hospital.

Namah had become concerned with Sage having stayed up so long without food or even rest. She was here to ask him to get some sleep.

“Sage.” She prompted, edging forward. “Sage are you all right?” Namah asked.

Sage didn’t answer; he kept working with the holographic controls of Illia’s pod. The other pods on this unit had all been collapsed already.

“Sage?” she prompted again, and took off the cap to the hypospray.

When he still didn’t answer, she nodded to the security guards, who both approached and took Sage by the arms to catch him, and Namah injected the hypospray directly into his tracheal artery, holding down the trigger till the entire contents flushed into his system.

When she removed the hypospray, she watched the hypospray bruise heal itself within seconds, and she saw his eyes flicker for a moment, but then he continued to work. Her two guards looked to him, waiting to catch him and put him to bed, but then they looked to her for further instructions when he didn’t falter.

She looked at her hypospray, looked for the expiration date to be sure it was still an active ingredient, and then pocketed the applicator and then reached up to hold his muscular arm.

“Sage...” she prompted. “You’ve been awake for a solid week. You need rest. “Please... go to bed... we’ll take care of Illia for you.”

Sage’s hands stopped and he turned to look at her. He was a little drowsy at the moment, but he nonetheless continued.

“The brain is nearly repaired, Namah.” He said. “Once the brain is healed, then the skull and flesh can be closed within seconds. The map of her neural pathways we had on file is all I can go by to repair the damage. Once that damage is repaired, I will retire.”

Namah reached up and covered his forehead. He was rather warm, but then she didn’t know if that was normal or not any more for him.

“You’re awfully warm.” She said.

“Yes.” he agreed. Namah paused for a moment, and then looked to the guards.

“Thank you.” She said to the guards. “Return to your posts... I’ll stick with Doctor Sage and aide him with this last patient.”

The two security guards nodded and retreated out of the storage bay. Namah then stepped in close to Sage and watched as he keyed into a three dimensional keyboard.

“Sage... I’m worried about you... I’m going to help you, and then send you off to bed. What do you still need to do?”

Illia Romov was released into observation with a clean bill of health, but her mind was still very weak. Her brain wave was nothing more than a slightly waving mind... stable, and powerful enough to keep her breathing and her heart beating. Sage stood in the door as several orderlies moved her using power frames – an exoskeleton that allowed an average person to move a super being and their massive weight – in order to move her body onto the bed.

Sage looked sadly at her while she laid there unmoving.

“Can you... can you sense anything?” he asked Namah.

“Barely... she’s regressed deeply, Sage... all we can do is hope that she will want to wake up on her own now that all the physical damage has been repaired.” She turned and placed a hand on his arm. “Sage... go to bed. You’ve done more than any five doctors have. We can take care of the rest.”

“They wouldn’t have had to take care of anything if not for me...” Sage said softly, but reached across himself to squeeze her hand. He paused for a moment. “I’ll go to bed, Namah... but there is one final thing I must do...”

He stepped forward and sat beside Illia, his eyes watering, but he didn’t cry this time. He looked as if he barely had any tears left.

Then he bent town and kissed her forehead.

“Forgive me Illia. You always showed me kindness when you never had reason to. Forgive me for what I’ve done to you.” And he bent low and kissed her on the forehead again. “Please come back to us.”

And he rose and left without another word.

Chapter Seven: Repair

“I’m trying to reach Counselor Tobias.” Meniko said; a little frustrated. The person on the other end didn’t even give her the common curtsey of a visual link, everything was audio.

“The Counselor is too busy to be bothered with anything less than state business at the moment... um... what was your name again?”

“Headmistress Meniko of the Mystic League.” She said for the umpteenth time, and lifted a clawed and scaled hand to her brow to rub her temples.

“And what are you addressing today?”

“Relief funds for damages incurred by...”

“Yes, yes, yes... I will send your concern to the Counselor. He will address it at the conclusion of his state meetings. Thank you very much. Goodbye.”

There was a snap and a click of the connection being broken, and Meniko screamed through her teeth in frustration.

“Hatchling... control your temper.” A woman laughed, and saw Sanari entering the chamber. “Every time your temper flares your students and children feel it.”

“Bureaucracy! Ugh! No wonder the Dragaseir dispensed with it. It’s so frustrating and inefficient...”

Sanari laughed and came to stand before Meniko. “How are you?” she asked, and Meniko suddenly energized into a being of white, shrunk down into a seven foot tall bird maiden, naked, elegant and beautiful, fully healed now, before her robes formed out of mists about her, and she stepped forward to her teacher and embraced her.

“Teacher, please tell me how to obtain patience like you.”

“Years of dealing with frustrations, hatchling... and a knowledge that getting angry at a thing doesn’t change a thing. A soft and kind word always does better than a stick with a nail in it.”

Meniko eyed Sanari as she gestured, and ornate chairs and poufs appeared, a table and the two women sat around it. Almost on queue, Govnov appeared with a tray of tea and cakes, set it between the two women and poured them tea.

“Sanari... my memory is extremely long. It will take a lot for me to forgive him after this.” She gestured to her inner chambers, which was still under construction. The droid facility had been caved in with Noxi’s lab, so repairs by what droids did remain were going very, very slowly.

Sanari stirred her tea.

“I know, hatchling... you always bare the right to make your own decisions...” Sanari spoke softly. “But he’s trying...”

“If he wants to try doing something, then he can start repairing all the damages he’s done.”

Sanari smiled. “I’ll tell him that.” She mewed, and then allowed Govnov to add a couple of lumps to her tea. “How are your ribs, Govnov?” She asked as he was about to leave.

“Nary a stitch, Mother Sanari.” He bowed, “Will there be anything else?”

“No... thank you.” Sanari said and sipped her tea. Govnov was the very first Sage healed after recovering from his madness. “Now Meniko... how are you doing this fine day?”

Sanari returned after her morning tea with Meniko, stopping suddenly as she found Sage standing near to the entrance as her students went to and from their classes in the shrine with the elder priests and priestesses, Sage currently in the act of sweeping her walk ways.

He had bags underneath his eyes. According to Namah... Sage hadn't slept or eaten in a week.

"Sage?" she prompted. "Did you just come from the hospital?" she asked, and he stopped, turned to her, and still holding his broom, bowed his head.

"Yes Mother Sanari. Forgive me, but I've not been keeping up with my chore."

Sanari looked down at the walk way he'd been sweeping, it still looked polished. "Sage... I cannot use cleaning the walkways as a punishment anymore because of you." She smiled and palmed his forearm. "I've never seen it so immaculately clean."

"I-I'm sorry." He said, bowing a little at the waist now.

"No... no apologies are needed Sage. That was a compliment." She laughed a little. "You don't need to sweep my walk ways any longer."

"Yes Mother Sanari, he said, bowing, but didn't move to return the broom."

Sanari stepped forward, and paling his face with both hands, tilted his head so that his sad, blue-green eyes looked straight into her own.

"You're exhausted..." she said, and laid her hands on the broom. "I want you to go to bed, Sage... right now."

"But... I have more work to do." He protested, but his fingers opened to give her the broom.

"Sleep, then eat... and then you can work." She laughed, and turning, palmed the small of his back, feeling the sharp overlapping spines down the center of his back beneath his shirt, all of them clasped one over the next so as not to rip his white shirt. "Actually... bath, bed, eat and then work." She said and led him off toward his quarters."

"But..." he protested again.

"Go, Sage... don't make me make it a commandment," she added sternly, but then smiled again. "Please, I'll be checking in on you in an hour." She said, and let him go.

Sage paused and looked at her before bowing his head. "As you wish." He said and walked off to do as he was told.

She stood there, for a time watching him go, before she moved to the tool shed to replace the broom.

The room provided for Sage was like the room the new acolytes received. Usually... acolytes shared these rooms with two together. Both girls, both boys, and both herms usually, and if a match couldn't be found, then they got a room by themselves. Typically, the rooms were large enough for only two beds, two chairs, two nightstands, two closets, and enough space between the beds for a floor rug.

Sage's room was furnished only with a blanket and a floor mat.

Sanari – an hour later, just as she promised – opened the door to his room a little to check on him. He wasn't sleeping... he was meditating.

Pursing her lips, she opened the door and stepped inside.

To one side of the room, lying on the blanket, were his clothes, neatly folded, while he himself sat naked in the center of his floor mat in a classic lotus position, his tail wrapped about his feet.

Sanari knelt before him, and reaching forward, palmed his chest. Sage's eyes opened to see her, and his lips spread as she smiled at him.

"This doesn't look like sleeping." She said in mock sternness.

"Its how I've learned to sleep." He defended.

"And how long have you slept like this?" she asked.

When Sage answered, it was the exact answer that she expected from him, knowing his history. "Fifty years." He said.

Sanari nodded, and moving closer, took him by his lightly armored shoulders and turned him, and he obeyed, and after some promptings, she got him to lie on his back. For a moment, she found herself lying atop him, his body totally nude, and as she felt her teats hardening, she rose from off him, moved to where his clothes had been folded, and undid his blanket from the floor and placed it over him.

His feet hung out the other side.

Taking a coat that had been tailored for him by Dallas, she opened that and laid that over the blanket.

"From now on, this is how you will sleep, Sage." She said. "You will close your eyes, and you will dream proper dreams."

Sage opened his mouth, his eyes widening for a second in muted horror, and then the corners of his eyes pinched before he nodded. "Yes mother Sanari." He said.

"You can't hide from your dreams forever Sage." She mused and then bent to kiss him on the bridge of his nose. "Sleep well... and when you awake... you can start fixing all the things you broke..."

For fifty years, Lord Sage Preypacer hadn't slept a proper night of sleep. Not since watching his wife slaughtered before his very eyes. That one moment in his life time has been the most heinous moment of his life, and it was that moment that broke him.

Every night since then, whenever he would close his eyes and try to sleep, he was haunted with maddening images and nightmares. No one can escape a guilty conscience in their sleep, and Sage had a great deal to be guilty about. He'd learned that if he meditated instead of sleeping, then he could get as much rest as if he actually slept, but he had to actually physically sleep for at least four hours every month. Every time, for fifty years since the incident with the Kell, his dreams were always plagued with mild to intense nightmares. And then... ten years ago, when he came to the Great Wide Universe and met an ancient immortal named Mother Sanari... he experienced for the first time in fifty years, his first untroubled sleep.

Periodically, he dared to fall asleep more often, and then he had a dream, in a golden world filled with all the things he's dreamed of in his life... a quite place, in a valley at the base of some mountains, by a lake... a field to build a home in. He'd been there, in that golden world, perfectly at peace and nude, when he found Sanari there. She was naked to... a perfect beauty if one ever did exist. She came to him, pulled him to her, and they made love.

He found out that as he dreamed that dream, that he slept for nearly ten hours... the longest he'd slept in decades.

But now he's committed yet another series of atrocities, and though he found it easy to stay awake at first as a dragon, the drugs that Namah had injected him with, tailored to his new bio form – she'd hoped – along with genuine fatigue finally won over his need to finish healing Illia, as well as avoid going to bed.

And now that he finally passed off to sleep, immediately... he became troubled with nightmares, with visions of his darkness destroying all that he loved, and he powerless to stop it. And then Sanari was there, naked and perfect and beautiful... shining beautifully as her light burned his darkness away. In his stunned amazement, he looked up at her as she descended upon him, her form tall enough that her chest was directly before his face.

She smiled at him, and just as she had done before he'd attempted to sleep, she turned him, and laid him on his back, and lay down beside him, leaning over him with her breasts pressed firmly against his chest before she bent low and kissed him. The recessed V-shaped wedge of her crotch pushed against his thigh as she laid her head down against his chest, kissing him on the chest as her hands massaged him.

Like a warm blanket, her light was a warmth that wrapped about him, and he drew from it, and strangely, found himself embracing her as his eyes slowly closed, and he rested in her light.

Far away, in the real world, her eyes closed as she sat on a bench before her meditation garden, she watched over her lord through the spirit realm, soothed his pain and kissed him from her spirit delving into his, her arms genially holding onto Eakjo as he sat on her lap and clutched to her gown and robes.

Sleep tight, my sweet lord, she thought, as she felt his arms ensnaring her, and she drew comfort from it. *Sleep well...*

In the early, early morning, before any of her students awoke, Meniko would often walk her school grounds, making sure that all was well and ready for the next day's classes and studies. Today, she was looking upon the once golden and glittering white edifices, scared with black char from explosions, pockmarked with craters, and the crumbled ruins of a small city that once held one of the greatest schools in the multiverse.

She still blamed Sage for all this, blamed him for the absolute devastation. She'd worked for decades to get her school to where it was, and one mad man had decimated everything.

As she walked, she gave a light kick to a piece of rubble, and it went skittering out of the way.

She sighed.

She had unlimited funds available to her, but thanks to some bureaucratic dipstick, all funds to be allotted to this sector of space had been frozen for dealing with the devastation from the Shadow Beast, which included hers, and the Iksaki's unlimited bank accounts...

What worried her most... was that they were running out of food. She was trying to remain calm, despite that she had every reason to be angry at the moment, just like Sanari had said that she should be... even against Sage's antics. She'd already been more than patient... now... now she had to be forgiving and understanding too...

Just what else did fate want to visit upon her, what more did she have to...

click

Her eyes blinked as she heard the sound... faint, but then she heard it again.

c-click

Like... small pieces of stone against stone. Was someone awake?

Meniko followed the sound, and then after coming up to a rise of a hill leading to the shore, she looked down and stopped at the sight that greeted her.

Sage knelt there in the rising dawn light, surrounded by a carpet of the morning mists... his velvety flesh and white scales and armor covered with dirt. One of the larger craters that had been here had been filled, the dirt compacted tight, and a sort of tar was already spread along the ground while Sage laid – piece by piece – a sort of mosaic to cover the damage. The tiles he was working with were a single square inch large, and he'd lay one down, tap it in with the back of a trowel and then place another.

There was nothing spectacular about the design, just a bunch of little tiles that were the same coloring as the surrounding tile work. He'd already personally covered one of the craters, and that had been sealed with grout and roped off.

He replaced what big tiles that he could find from the ruins, and above all, that section that he'd already completed had been swept clean.

Like a lot of what had happened these past few weeks, Meniko really didn't know what to think of such an act. She was still remarkably angry at him... wholly, and irrevocably angry... but... he was trying to make his amends, heal those he'd hurt, repair that which he'd destroyed, and with very little supervision. The reports from her faculty stated that he worked so hard trying to repair what he'd done wrong, that he was literally wearing himself out.

A week without sleep or food...

Her heart softened for him... a little... and there was a wry smirk on her face as she watched him work.

And then she heard something in the morning sea breezes, a low strumming sound and a reverberation combined with high-pitched whines. Sage heard it too and looked up in its direction even as the top of the sun broke over the horizon to spread its light on this world, and there in the sky were a multitude of greenish-black dots that were approaching them rapidly.

Sage stood, watching them descend, and Meniko suddenly saw that they were shuttles.

The shuttles lowered as they approached the beach, and then turning, they all opened their backs, dropping their gangplanks, and literally hundreds of Bioroids descended from within, before the shuttles themselves turned around and transformed; spreading legs and pincers, heads rising while their backs transformed into heavy lifters.

There were some Shadow Leaguers among the numbers, but they were far, far outnumbered by all of the Bioroids. There must've been hundreds of those living machines.

Mayia was with them, and she walked up to her master and kissed his cheek, palmed his chest and then moved on to join the others. Sage, per requirement, didn't move as she did this.

And then a figure detached from amidst all the Bioroids, and Daedalus himself appeared before Meniko and bowed.

“Good morning Headmistress.” Dallas said in greeting.

“Dallas... please explain all this.” Meniko said gesturing.

“Recompense, headmistress. With your permission, we are here to help repair the damages caused by our master and re-supply your school so that it can begin its next class schedule on time.”

Meniko blinked, already knowing how expensive all that was going to be. “Not that I am complaining, but why?” Meniko asked; looking down at the smaller machine man, dressed in a hard hat and a pair of coveralls over his white shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

“You asked me for help, Headmistress. It was... very hard for me to give it, for it meant going against my master, my lord, and my father. Because of that I hesitated as I desperately looked for something, anything else that I could do. Because of my hesitation... this,” he gestured around him. “Happened.”

“W-what will this cost me?” she asked wearily.

“Nothing.” Dallas responded immediately. “No monies, no promises, no requirements... nothing. Just let us fix what was broken, replace what cannot be fixed.”

“Ok.” She managed with a wry quirk. “Is all of this to find some good grace in my heart, Dallas? Perhaps to help me forgive Sage?”

“This was my own mistake, headmistress... I will pay for it myself. If you don’t mind, my children will focus on the commissary and the grounds till your students awake. I’m sure that they would like to have a warm meal instead of emergency field rations when they wake up this morning.”

Meniko smiled, and then followed Dallas’s gaze toward Sage as one of the younger female Bioroids stepped in to embrace their master. Dallas focused on her, and she looked up at Dallas before kissing her master and stepping away curtsying to Dallas and then moving off to work.

“What was that?” Meniko asked.

“We cannot associate with Master Sage, no matter how much it hurts due to a line item in his judgment. Mayia has already broken a school rule... Grandmaster Drake has been notified. My daughter...” Dallas sighed. “My daughter is one of the first to benefit to a new upgrade Sage recently developed for us...”

“What upgrade is that?” Meniko asked.

“The very trait that now allows Bioroids to be classified as a species, Headmistress.”

“You mean she’s...”

“Pregnant... yes.” Dallas said. “Two months now. She bears the first of my grandchildren.” Dallas smiled, and then bowed. “Forgive me, Headmistress, I must go to work.”

Meniko stood there in stunned amazement as a few hundred workers suddenly set themselves to repairing her school. And then out of the corner of her eye, she saw Sage, very much alone at the moment, turn, kneel down and return to his task... working all alone.

Bioroids had very little physical requirements, and could work for prolonged periods of time. On Shadow Island, they were the ones that grew all the natural foods and maintained the facilities that the students and faculty all enjoyed. Per Sage and Dallas’s command, the Bioroids enjoyed the most fruitful products of their labors. The pick of the stock of foods that they worked so hard for, facilities more than adequate for their needs... and so on.

So the speed and efficiency that they worked at – like machines – was remarkable. By the time that the students began to awake at the morning bell, they awoke to the sight of a veritable anthill outside their windows. One student – a rather effeminate male – awoke and screamed his lungs out at the sight of a four legged giant bug outside his dorm window. Scared the dickens out of his powerhouse of a roommate, a large Cerulean fem who’d recently been healed by Lord Sage and returned to school.

The heavier Bioroids went to repairing the bulk of the destructions, and craters, clearing and repairing the fighter ball field within an hour of starting, recycling all the industrial-grade materials left behind and using it for more construction materials. After repairing the commissary, dozens of workers went to repairing the droid facility,

bringing it online within a couple hours, and the facility then began spitting out droid after droid through the repair and assembly line while the students enjoyed a very warm and lively lunch.

Dallas himself went to work repairing the heaviest and most complex of the machinery, focusing his army of workers on that which would benefit the students. Food preparation first, then dorms, and when he saw the state of certain female members of the student body – like Tla and Clio – he immediately sent several Bioroids to repair the Milk Barn.

There were really very, very few people who knew what the Milk Barn was for. As its name implied... it was for milking things... in this case the breasts of the young fems and herms that had developed the dubious ability to lactate constantly. Clio and Tla had their own brands of milk that they produced so much... which literally were gallons per day.

Inside, a maiden was stripped to their panties – or less – massaged by Bioroids who were taught to specialize in such actions, and milked by industrial machines amidst being pampered like queens. It was a sort of sisterhood inside there... and the only males who've ever entered it were the male Bioroids who serviced it, Lord Sage and Sato, but then only to inspect it when it was first created, and Eakjo, who accompanied Tla quite often.

Clio and Tla were the first into the barn, and the last to leave once it became operational again. The milk tanks had to be replaced twice that day.

By late evening, all the student dorms, the milk barn and commissary had been repaired, the fighter ball field cleaned and repaired, and several more facilities under reconstruction. Some of the Mystic League students also helped, while others went to use their newly groomed fighter ball field.

All through the day, Sage worked alone, repairing crater after crater, meticulously re-forming the grand courtyard of the school, and personally repairing half of it himself.

When the Bioroids were all getting ready to leave, Sanari approached him with a tray loaded with food and a small stool. She placed the stool on the ground beside him, and the tray of food on top of it. Then picking up her skirts a little, she sat down side-saddle beside him, and reaching forward, placed her hand on top of his as he finished using the trowel to seal the mosaic down.

Sage looked at her wanly, those sad blue-green eyes looking at her as he remained silent. Even with him locked from being psychically active, which also kept her from sensing him, she could nonetheless feel the ache he felt. The torment of his actions over the decades, and the abysmal loneliness.

“Eat.” She said quietly, and took the trowel from his hands as she took his sweat towel and wiped his hands free of the grout.

And she sat back and waited while Sage sat before the meal she'd assembled and stared down at it for a moment. He looked at her and she smiled dotingly on him, and with a sigh he bent over the meal and ate everything, every last scrap, and then paused, he contemplated the fork and the metal tray, and before Sanari could stop him, he ate the fork and then took a big bite out of the tray.

“S-Sage?!” she rushed to him as he chewed the metal, sheering it with his teeth. “Y-you're eating it?”

Sage shrugged and continued eating the tray. For some strange reason... he just craved metal! And for desert... he ate a rock.

It wasn't until much later, when she had a chance to speak with Namah about this, that she found that Sage had developed the ability to eat minerals and complex metals and gain nourishment from them. It was a requirement of his diet now, actually... to help repair and sustain his complex body...

Nyl Dousaka lay in his bed, totally naked, and reduced to immobility. He often sat in a bed pan and was regularly visited by his wife, son, and a droid every now and again. The Doctors had all said that the nano-reconstruction of his spine would take months before he would be up and around again, and at least a year before he was fit enough to re-enter regular duty, and even then, he wouldn't be able to act at his prior performance level.

The damage was that complete.

Sage had severed every nerve save for those telling his heart and lungs to work. He couldn't even move his head... Couldn't embrace his wife, couldn't embrace his son... and also reduced to the indignity of often sitting in his own bodily wastes for hours at a time.

Sage had defeated him... defeated him soundly, the first to do so in his entire life when it hadn't been a matter of his own choosing. He'd fallen asleep, logically debating this and when he awoke, he blinked, seeing a person sitting beside him, eyes glowing blue-green, dressed in white and black garb with blue trimming.

"W-who are you?" Nyl gasped. "Who let you in here?" He choked then. "Guards! Guards!"

And the stranger lowered a hand to Nyl's lips to quiet him, and then Nyl saw the five fingers, and then the obsidian studs all around his neck of an imbedded collar...

"Sage!" he whispered in disbelief. "H-how did you get here? How did you get passed all my guards?"

"I'm traveling with Mother Sanari, Warmaster." Sage said quietly, his sad eyes focusing on the Warmaster of the Aphkei Imperium. "And as to how I got in here, your wife and your son let me in."

Nyl's eyes and mouth twisted in a stunned look.

"Why are you here?" Nyl asked in a low growl.

"To return your dignity, Warmaster. And undo what I've done, if you'll allow me to."

"What do you mean?" Nyl asked, his brows beetling. If Sage so wanted to kill him, all he needed to do was to push a pillow over Nyl's face till he suffocated.

Sage unlatched a satchel from off his back and then opened it, revealing a silvery looking device that looked like a spiked, interlocking rod used to beat upon someone.

"So you intend to kill me." Nyl said softly. "Gain my wife and my son's trust, enter into here with their aide and finish me off?"

Sage lowered the device to his lap. "No. This is your new spine, Nyl."

"What?" Nyl asked incredulously, and then looked at the flail-like thing. Now that he looked at it in a different angle, he could see it now. "My new spine?"

"A Spinal Bridge, really. I designed and manufactured it over the past several days based upon the injury that I..." Sage paused. "That I caused. I did something to you that was very, very wrong Nyl. I wish to make amends if you are willing to trust me."

Nyl stared at Sage. His skills at healing and medicine were legendary in the medical community. Sage actually had the gall to score a perfect on several of the medical exams in record times. He was universally recognized as being the man to ask the solution to something medically or healing related when no one else had the answer. If he didn't immediately have an answer... then he made one that worked shortly thereafter.

Nyl eyed the device he'd made.

“Asking me to trust you is a very difficult thing for me to do after our past history, Lord Sage. Even before you robbed me of motion.”

“Please don’t call me a Lord.” Sage said quickly. “I no longer am worthy of such a title.”

Nyl was silent for a moment. “And when you presented this idea to my son, and then my wife in order to let you in here, how skeptical were they?”

“Your son was who I had to convince, Lord Nyl. Your wife trusted your son’s decision. I informed them that there would be some pain involved, but if I were to intentionally hurt you, Siklohn would end me himself.”

Nyl managed a small smile. “And yet... you are here. Which means either you would not care whether you lived or died, or you were actually trying to do what you say you are doing. And if you’d meant to kill me, you would’ve done it either as I slept, or right when I woke up so that I would see it was you.” Nyl chuckled, and looked at the device in Sage’s hands, wrapped in a vacuum packed bag. “Very well, Sage... I will trust you if they did.”

A wisp of a smile passed over Sage’s face as he stood, pulled away the covers, flipped Nyl onto his belly and then disposed of the bed pan. A pillow just beneath Nyl’s neck so that he would be comfortable and likewise arch his back, were all that was present.

“What pains should I expect, Sage?” Nyl asked as he lay there, unable to move anyways.

“Ever sleep on your arm wrong, and all the blood flows out of it, so you feel a sharp, tingling pain and a completely numb body devoid of feeling?”

“Yes.”

“Imagine that sensation happening to your entire body, Nyl, to every square inch of your body beneath this point.” And Sage pressed to a point directly beneath the base of Nyl’s skull, and Nyl was amazed that he could feel it. “You will feel numb as you regain muscle control. You will feel sharp pains everywhere that will last for a few moments, and then feeling will slowly flood from your back to the ends of your digits.” Sage removed a tool and shaved – or rather disintegrated all the fur – along a section of Nyl’s back.

“How deeply do you have to cut me Sage? I can apparently still feel spinal taps.”

“That... that had been intentional...” Sage admitted. “But there will not be any cuts. The organism I will be planting on your back will burrow and consume the excess flesh before merging with the rest of your body, creating the necessary bridges between your existing modified spinal chords. You will be able to move at about ninety-eight percent of what you were able to move at prior to the damage, give or take half a percent, but in time you can actually develop motor functions greater than your previous modified attribute.”

“Organism?” Nyl repeated.

“A simbiant.” Sage corrected. “Its intelligence only goes so far as to accomplish a simple function and then continue that function. Your brain is far superior to it, and will override its functions. The only development it will ever make is to improve the motor pathways.” There was a silence. “Do you still wish to trust me?” Sage asked.

“How well have you tested this thing?”

“Ninety-nine point nine-nine-nine repeating chance of successes according to my tests.” Sage stated.

Nyl was silent again. “That’s a better success rate than my own personal doctors can grant me.” Nyl said and managed a short laugh. “Precede Sage. Just this once, at least... I will trust you.”

The doorway to Nyl's bedroom opened and Sage exited, looked briefly at Siklohn and then looked away, striding down the hall to where Mother Sanari awaited, passing beneath the gaze of four Shocktroopers and a dozen Siegetroopers.

Siklohn watched him go before his mother folded her hands over his shoulders. Siklohn then turned to look at the door and then swallowed before stepping forward and pushing the door open far enough to allow himself to look in, his mother Eudora directly behind him, and they saw a miracle!

Warmaster Nyl Dousaka was sitting up in bed, looking at his hand as he moved his fingers slowly.

"Nyl!" Eudora gasped, and rushed to him, embracing her husband tightly, and then pulled back, looking over his shoulder at the series of silvery overlapping spines down the center of his back.

He embraced his wife back, and Siklohn stood there at the door for a moment, managing half a smile that his father was ok, and then turned to leave.

"Siklohn." Nyl said, and stood up, drawing the large blanket, doubled over, about his waist and tying it like a traditional tarre. His fingers fumbled to tie it as Siklohn turned.

"Yes father?" Siklohn prompted as Nyl finished tying the tie.

Nyl stepped, paused as he tested his balance and footing, his body still a little numb, but the powerful Aphkei wolf then strode over to his son and pulled him into his chest, embracing his son solidly.

"My boy..." Nyl said holding Siklohn. "My son..." Nyl managed, and then coiled his other arm around Siklohn and held him tightly. "Sage was right... even in his madness he was right. I don't acknowledge you enough, I don't embrace you enough, and when he took that from me, I... I'd thought for a time that I'd never be able to hold you again. I felt more torture in me than I'd ever experienced in my life.

"But he gave it back, and now I can hold my son again. Damn your father for not acknowledging you more often, Siklohn, damn me for worrying about public affairs more than you. You are my son... and I am so... proud of you. I'm so proud of you." He reiterated. "It took a madman like Sage to allow me to see this, please forgive your fool of a father."

Siklohn looked up at Nyl.

Unlike his father, Siklohn's pain inhibitors had been nullified by Sage's action. Though immediately after Sage had unlocked him, all that Siklohn could feel was the hatred for Sage for unlocking him like that. It took him awhile, however, to realize the utter gift that Sage had granted him, for the unlocking allowed Siklohn to feel more than hatred and pain, it allowed him to feel the touch and love of a woman, his Caliban, and it allowed Siklohn to know passion, it allowed him to feel more joy than he would've been able to do with the inhibitors in place.

And Now Siklohn wept, and embraced his father back, and thanked Sage for giving him so much...

"Sage!" Siklohn called, "Sir!" he added, hurrying down the passageways leading out of the Dousaka Palace on their home world.

Sage had been following Sanari, and he kept walking as Sanari turned, only so that he could stand behind her. He immediately bowed his head and folded his hands before him and bent at the waist like a servant.

"Yes Prince Siklohn, how may I be of service?" He said fluidly, as if he'd been born into servitude.

Siklohn paused, and like he'd seen when Sage had approached him with the desire to help his father, Siklohn saw the look in Sage's eyes, the self torment, the self torture, the sense of loneliness and loss. It was a distant look as

Sage didn't really look like he was looking at anything, his eyes shimmering as if he were on the verge of tears, or he'd cried so much that he had no more tears to shed.

"Sir, Sage... thank you... for what you did for my father." Siklohn said, standing before the Shadow Master.

Sage bowed, inclining his head deeper. "No thanks is necessary, Prince Dousaka." Sage said quietly. "I 'm only glad that I could repair the injustice that I've caused. Is your father well?"

"He is. My mother and he have retired with each other for the night."

"A grand test if there is any I can think of..." Sage said. "To make sure everything works of course." Sage reached into a satchel at his side, and withdrew a datapad. "This is a temporary dietary and workout regimen that he is to follow for the period of thirty days." Sage said and handed Siklohn the datapad. "It is critical he follows it or he may be in danger of losing feeling in certain areas of the body while the simbiants finish their connectivity to his spinal column. I was going to leave it with your father's aide, but I believe that you and your mother will be far more apt at making him follow it."

Siklohn accepted the datapad and snorted through his nose. "My father doesn't like carrots, Lord Sage."

"My apologies, my Prince," Sage bowed yet again. "It is critical to ensure a proper vitamin and mineral balance as the simbiants adjust themselves to match his bio-systems."

Siklohn looked up at Sage, and then sighed. "I will be returning to the Shadow League, Lord Sage. Mayia is in a tizzy without you." The barest hint of a smile rose up on Sage's face, and he bowed his head. "Thank you, Lord Sage."

"You are welcome my prince, but I no longer consider myself as a lord."

Siklohn nodded to him, and then to Sanari, and Sage bowed and Sanari curtsied before they left the palace toward the little school runabout they'd arrived in to return to the Mystic League.

Chapter Eight: Recompense

Repairs to the Mystic League had completed, and even the Pinnacle Tower once again shone with the brilliant reddish-orange spire blaring from its top, just like an antennae straight toward heaven. The Shadow League and Ronin Enterprises had helped supply the Mystic League until their monies for new supplies could be granted, and business became normal once again.

The only evidence that anything had ever happened, other than the work Sage did covering the craters all over the place, was what many were beginning to call the Shadow Moon, a moon with a massive claw mark rent in its surface.

The natives of this planet told stories of it... that the Lord of Light and Darkness rose up to challenge the Guardian of the World, but the Goddess of Beauty and Fertility stood before him and stopped him. The Lord of Light and Darkness surrendered to her, and now the Lord of Light and Darkness was her humble servant.

The natives talked about it as if it were a wonderful love story.

Sage had remained in the shrine unless Sanari left it for whatever reason. It had been her kindness that had allowed him to seek out repairing Nyl Dousaka's ruined spine. Whenever she did leave the shrine, he was always three steps behind her, head bowed, and hands folded. Inside the shrine, he swept and groomed walkways, always stepping out of the way of students and bowing, and rather disturbing to Sanari... he'd been silent for two solid weeks.

He wouldn't even answer anyone's questions with anything more than a head nod, a head shake or a shoulder shrug.

He was starting to withdraw.

Students still poked at him, shoved him, walked into him to knock him back... some still peed on him, she asked him who did this last bit, but he wouldn't answer even that.

She began to get worried that he would withdraw completely, and so gave him a new task... and that was to pick up the shipment for the Grace League from the space port. He left to fetch the shipment with little more than a nod, and when he returned, his clothes were torn, and there were splinters of metal stuck in his body as he put the shipment case gently down by the door and bowed to her.

"Sage!" she said and rushed over to him, seeing the opened wound where the metal splinters was along his chest, his flesh trying to close around the wounds.

Some of the light armor on him was cracked.

"Oh who did this to you?" she gasped, fingering the metal shards as she palmed his chest. His clothing was stained with blood, some of it was burned. Sage still didn't answer; he merely looked down at her with a blank look on his face. "We need to get you cleaned up..." she fussed and drew him with her to her home, into her private bathing pool, where she stripped him naked and he obediently entered the pool as she stripped down to a bathing servant's garb.

It took both hands to rip out some of the shards in his body, and he sat there, looking at nothing in particular, despite that she was utterly naked beneath her sheer bathing cloth, and when wet, it showed the various portions of her feminine anatomy as if she were truly nude.

She turned his face to look at her, and his eyes moved to look at her. "Oh Sage... please... come back to me." She said, and continued to clean him.

Twice a week, Sage went out to fetch the supplies for the Grace League, walking straight from the Grace League, right to the spaceport to collect the shipping crate. He would sweep and groom all the walk ways, and then walk across the courtyard of the Grace League, out the gates, and maybe walk a good distance before becoming assaulted.

Mobbed was more like it. Students beat on him, repeatedly, broke bones, cracked and tore off plates, cut him up with sharpened shards of metal that they'd made, doing considerable damage to him with metal rods, kicks, punches, damaging spells. And then while he lay there, slowly healing, they'd piss on him.

There were few who tried sticking up for him... very few. Champion was one of them, and chased off several of the students that were beating on him as Sage slowly got himself to his feet, shook himself off, and then stepped forward to the spaceport again as if nothing had happened.

"Dude... are you ok?" Champion asked, holding his great long sword in one hand while standing in his chaps and long loin cloth. The only other thing he wore was a leather torso harness that was nothing more than a series of straps holding the scabbard of his sword against his back, which, in times of need, doubled as a shield.

Sage merely nodded, and continued on. For weeks this continued, and each time, without fail, he would return, in a horrible state. One time, his hair was on fire still... and thanks to his regenerative powers, his hair grew back as quickly as it burned away. No one thought to douse him till he actually entered the Grace League again... and this time... it was Clio who threw the bucket of water on him. He bowed to her and continued on while Clio stood there.

She palmed her belly, in which a subtle growth of her pregnancy was happening. Shortly after the Shadow Beast Incident, she'd gone into a voracious heat, and her mates were summoned to deal with it. The result was that she now carried not one or two cubs... but a litter of nine cubs in her belly...

"Mother Sanari... how long is this going to last?" Clio asked as the reverend mother appeared. "I thought I would never forgive him, but... look at him! His hair was on fire!"

Sanari pressed her lips together. "Clio... Lord Sage is a very private man." Sanari said. "I've... been hoping that he would open up to me... but he hasn't. Do you know what he does at night, Clio?"

"No..." Clio said, and looked after Sage's retreating back as, still scorched and tattered as he went to the tool shed and removed his broom to start sweeping again.

"He prays... and he cries." Sanari said, pausing, her eyes watering. "And when he dreams, he dreams terrible dreams." Sanari folded her hands before her and bowed her head a little. "I heard him praying last night... through the wall while I was getting ready for bed." Sanari voiced, and Clio looked at her expectantly.

"Oh God, the Eternal Father..." Sanari said, repeating verbatim the short prayer that she'd overheard last night. *"In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray for forgiveness for the things that I've done. I feel your forgiveness, oh father, for I feel that you understand, and to that I thank you, but beg that I can be forgiven in the eyes of those that I've hurt. Blessed Father in Heaven, I will accept... any punishment... but please... help me gain forgiveness..."*

Clio blinked at Sanari, before Sanari continued, seeing Sage sweep while her students gasped at him that he was still working in such a condition.

Sanari vowed to watch over him now, closer than ever. She would personally put a stop to these beatings...

On the third month of the third day after having a concentrated blast burn its way into her skull, the body of Illia Romov opened her eyes and rose, heavily laden breasts bouncing free against her chest because there weren't any hospital gowns large enough to cover her body.

She palmed her head as her eyes, strangely... a color of violet, shone from their eye sockets. Something very despicable happened to Illia's body then and the body practically reviled against it, couldn't believe that it was actually doing it, but nonetheless... the beautifully pristine features from decades of laughing and smiling, suddenly turned downward into a scowl.

The body stood, tested its muscles, and palmed a bulging bicep that fanned and flared and grew massive as she flexed it; her breasts bunching over her arms. She then leaned forward out the window, and saw the image of Sage's body being beaten to a pulp.

Strangely... the mind that now inhabited this body slowly began to grin as she saw that. That was the second thing that the body reviled against. Illia Romov would never take pleasure in the suffering of another... but, as was evident by the change of eye coloring... the mind inhabiting the body... was not Illia Romov.

This was the consciousness that Illia had always referred to as "My Power" whenever she talked to herself. But what even Illia never knew, is that this consciousness had a previous identity, had a previous life... had a name:

Cyvel Romov.

Namah entered in Illia's room and gasped, dropping her tray, but a quick mental reflex caught the tray and everything on it before they hit the ground, and lifting the tray and resetting all the fluids into the bottles and the bottles onto the tray she gasped at the sight of the Titaness standing before her.

"I-Illia?!" Namah gasped...

The Titaness of brown fur and muscle didn't move.

"Illia?" Namah prompted again, and her brows beetled. She sensed that the mind was different, and setting her tray down, Namah moved forward. "Illia, are you ok?" Namah asked.

"My name is not Illia." The fem said; her voice completely different from Illia's happy, bouncy voice. She was staring out the window.

Namah watched her instead of following her gaze.

"Who are you?" Namah asked.

"Cyvel." She replied. "Illia isn't feeling well at the moment... so she's not in."

Namah gasped, recognizing the name. It was the name of Illia's sister... the one who Illia had murdered by accident when she was a child. Then Namah turned to see what Cyvel was looking at, and gasped. "Oh no... SAGE!" she said and turned to stop the fight and a hand snapped around Namah's wrist, and Cyvel held her there.

"Do not interfere. He needs to be beaten to death for what he did to my sister... twice now. He must suffer... he must suffer to the end of his days for robbing me of my sweet baby sister." Cyvel growled.

"Cyvel... you are hurting my wrist." Namah said; her fingers moving of their own accord as Cyvel's grip tightened around her tendons.

Cyvel's violet eyes turned to look at Namah, and then down at where she was holding onto Namah's wrist before letting go.

"Cyvel... You owe Sage your life." Namah said. "He worked a solid week trying to save you without food or rest."

“I already died, Namah... He tried to save Illia... and failed. Now Illia is gone... perhaps gone forever. And that man was the cause for it.”

“But he was tampered with. It wasn’t his fault.”

“It was his fault when he hammered Illia’s skull and released the Terror Cry on her. I forgave him then because Illia forgave him. Now Illia isn’t here to forgive him... so I won’t either. He must suffer, he must know pain, and then...” she pointed at him even as he was being repeatedly kicked in the head by students. “He needs to die.”

Sanari had heard what had happened to Illia... that Cyvel now took her place in the body. She rushed to Sage to perhaps ward off the news, but Namah was already standing before him, informing him of what had happened to his patient.

Sage’s head was bowed, and his shoulders sagged... Sanari just knew that he was blaming himself for this one as well...

When Namah left, she went to Sage, tried to comfort him, but he was as tight-lipped as ever. He went to sweeping the grounds again, but as he turned to start up his work, there were twin streams of tears creasing his face as his jaw set.

The ache Sanari felt from him seemed absolute now.

Rae edged into Cyvel’s room.

It was indeed Illia’s body, but the poise and the stance of the woman who stood there wearing two of the largest hospital gowns tied together around her body was definitely not the stance that Illia had ever possessed. The head turned, and Rae saw a scowl on a face that was never meant to have a scowl.

“Who... who are you?” Rae asked kindly. “My name is Rae.”

“Rae Iksaki, wife of Makahn of Taimslant, mother of two.” Cyvel said soundly. “Formerly the most powerful being in this universe.” Cyvel said in a flurry. “I know who you are. I know what has been taken from you, but I don’t know why you aren’t angry about it.”

“He has... what he always wanted. He wanted the power to protect everything, and now he has that power.” Rae responded with a wry grin which soon faded.

“But that was *your* job.” Cyvel pointed out. “You are supposed to be the most powerful being in creation short of the real gods... what right does he have to come into *our* universe and challenge you for the position? What right does he have to take *your* place in this universe?” Cyvel folded her arms, the hem of her gown rising to show off her sex. “Wonderful use of power he has... tears apart the whole of everything that we love and cherish, and you think it’s ok?”

“It was an accident.” Rae managed, feeling a little overwhelmed by all the negative emotion in the room.

Cyvel said “Bah,” and turned around; leaning on the window sill as she looked out where she’d watched Sage being beaten up, her rear and tail poking out grandly from the back of the tied together hospital gowns. “You were always too understanding, Rae... too forgiving. My sister is gone, and you’ve lost your place in the universe. If I were you I would be mad as hell. I should probably be twice as mad cause you don’t seem to be able to...”

“Cyvel... someone toyed with his mind. They made him do this.” Rae said, stepping forward to stand beside the hulking fem that had been her closest friend, but as she reached sideways and planted a hand on Rae’s, Rae felt genuine affection.

“I’m only saying this so that you realize it, Rae. My sister was a lot like you... unable to see negative things like that until that monster forced her to. We have been displaced in our own universe, and its all because of him! You need to see that, Rae. You need to see what he’s done.”

“B-but it was an accident!” Rae pressed.

“Was it an accident that brought him here to challenge you? Was it an accident that he couldn’t beat you at all? He had to resort to trickery! You could’ve beaten him hands down, and yet you couldn’t bring yourself to simply flick him away like the flea that he was. Was it an accident that he kept trying to be better than us? Grow more powerful than us? He was still trying to take the number one spot. That’s your place, Rae... you need to take it back!”

“Cyvel... he’s already been judged. I forgive him. Please forgive him too. He tried his best to save you both!”

“BUT HE FAILED!” Cyvel screamed suddenly, and the whole of the planet rumbled as the incredible power that Illia had held shook the world. “My sister is... GONE!” her voice carried, and Rae stepped back, eyes wide as she covered her mouth with both hands. “It’s his fault!” Cyvel sobbed then. “It’s all his fault! And if it’s the last thing I ever do... I’ll make him PAY!”

Illia’s removal and Cyvel’s revival had struck Sage deeply. He felt dead inside... and moreover, for removing such a perfect soul like Illia from this universe, he felt damned. As he stood before the tool shed, he spied a pair of pruning sheers, and lifting a hand, his fingers trembling, he took a good firm grip on them, and gasping, looked down the length of his body... fingering the soul gem in the center of his chest. He turned the sheers, pressing his lips together as he picked them up, contemplating seppuku.

“Sage?” a feminine voice said, and he quickly replaced the sheers and took hold of his broom before turning to face Sanari.

He bowed his head to her.

“Sage... you don’t need to go get the supplies anymore.” She said, stepping close to him, pressing her body against his and fingering his shirt with her fingers.

Sage didn’t even look into her eyes anymore. He could stand to see that pained look in her eyes whenever she looked into his. He couldn’t even face her... or anyone... since the very beginning... since the trial. He also... didn’t answer her, and waited for her to step back so that he could continue his work, but she didn’t step back. Instead she looked down, and placed her hands about the broom handle and then took it from him.

“Sage, you have a visitor.” Sanari said with a gentle sigh, and she saw Sage blink in surprise, and then look at her. “Come with me...”

Sanari took him by the hand and led him to one of the meditation chambers in the shrine, and sliding the door open pulled Sage inside, and he stopped as his visitor who was already inside turned to face him.

“Patch.” Sage choked, speaking for the first time in weeks, seeing the blind arctic werewolf standing there with his staff and wearing his traditional white robes.

Patch opened his arms, his ears twitching and Sanari let go of Sage’s hand as Sage tumbled forward, embraced his brother and the pair of them collapsed to their knees to the floor. Sanari stood there, watching them for a moment as

Sage immediately went into a fit of sobs, clutching to his elder brother's robes before she lowered her head, turned and left the chamber before closing the sliding door to leave them alone.

Sanari sat holding Eakjo as evening set... Eakjo holding onto her with his hands and feet while she stroked his short mane. Letting go of her with one hand, he inserted his thumb into his mouth and began to suck on it, his eyes lazily closing before his ears twitched, the tassels on the ends bristling before he became instantly attentive and began to growl.

He hissed then, and stared, and Sanari held onto Eakjo as her own ears twitched.

Patch was silent, somehow able to move with absolute stillness, a trait, perhaps, developed from the fact that every little sound was remarkably amplified in his high tapering and hooded ears at the top of his head.

"Brother... I've done a very bad thing..." Patch's soothing voice said quietly as he stepped out of the darkness. "It was a string of words I've not heard in fifty years, Sanari..." he said and came to stand beside her while she continued to sit. "Not since..."

Patch didn't finish the statement. They both knew exactly what happened in Sage's life fifty years ago.

"I'd hoped that he'd open to me." Sanari said as her long slender fingers soothed Eakjo. Patch kept his distance from the little Zhumal. Eakjo had a penchant from hanging from his beard. "I'd hoped that he'd tell me what was wrong, but every day I watched him grow more and more withdrawn... and with every beating he suffered... I thought that that was the one that broke him. It only got worse.

"Patch... h-how... how do I reach him?" Sanari said and looked up at the blind werewolf with tears in her eyes. "How do I get inside him?"

Despite that Patch couldn't see the tears, he nonetheless reached out and wiped her tears away with the thumbs of either hand before he sat down beside her.

"He shut down like this before... when he looked upon what he'd done. Then, he told me that after he'd killed the last of the Kell, stood dripping with his blood and entrails hanging from his teeth and body that he was suddenly struck with the absolute deplorable thing that he'd done.

"He felt that he was damned... felt that he was alone, and everywhere he looked, he saw the shock and horror in people's eyes at what he'd done. It took decades for him to recover from that... and that was with people who were our enemies.

"Now he's done it to friends..." Patch paused. "He's suicidal, Sanari... He believes that if someone can take his life for him... then he can pay back all that he's done with such a sacrifice." Patch paused again. "He'll kill himself if something isn't done."

Sanari bowed her head and cried harder but didn't make sobbing sounds... just cried. Patch reached across him and fingered these new tears as they fell onto his fingers.

"He told me of everything that has happened to him... happened in the past decade up until now. Agonized at all the wrong doings he's done but never saw at the time. Hurting friends and loved ones... it's a tremendous weight for one heart to bear... let alone two. And so long as someone punishes him... he will continue to seek recompense.

"Then... perhaps..." Sanari said lifting her head in a sudden burst of clarity. "That I step up and protect him." She whispered. "Thank you Patch." She said and embraced him, and Eakjo began to kick and squirm as he was trapped between them, fighting for air.

“Heh... you’re kinda cute when you’re not... ENH!” Patch began till Eakjo bit his fingers. “Biting something.” Patch said and looked at his fingers as the bite wound quickly healed.

“Eakjo!” Sanari admonished, but she was laughing in humor nonetheless while she cried.

I will protect you, my sweet lord. I will protect you from even your own personal demons...

Three months and four days after the Shadow Beast incident... another of Sage’s victims awoke.

Pleeyo opened her eyes, staring at the ceiling. At first she didn’t know who she was or where she was as sleep slowly melted away. Then she realized where she was... she was in the hospital of the Mystic League. Then she realized who she was...

Pleeyo sat bolt upright in bed, and began to breathe heavily, her eyes filling with tears as she rose to her feet. Her breathing quickened, and she began to cry, and then to sob, and with a scream she rushed to the door, tested the doorknob, found that it was locked, and with another baleful scream, she tore the door right off the wall and went barreling down the hall, flying completely nude as she hit the double doors right past the night orderly who immediately picked up his phone to call Namah. Pleeyo then soared into the sky in the direction of the Shadow League.

Every morning, the Shadow Leaguers attended morning exercises. They all awoke at a specific time and filed out the double doors at the base of the tree, heading for the grand courtyard that swelled out to every direction before the two main radial roots. Nine pillars of sculpted pseudomater stood surrounding the courtyard and as the sun rose into the caldera of the volcano that the tree was based within and the shadows began to recede, these nine pillars remained as pillars of shadow, completely refusing to reflect any light at all.

But as the sun rose high enough to reflect an object in the center of the courtyard, of a young Casid lioness with massive piles of muscle crisscrossing her body, more than any Shadow Leaguer displayed though several nonetheless possessed, she lit up like a brilliant pile of gold. They stood in absolute fascination at her, all of them recognizing her as she cried, sobbing even.

They knew several things about her:

She was a monster and a bully that nearly all but the newest of students absolutely hated for the fact that she attacked them not once, but twice when they were completely defenseless.

She was a murderer, regardless as to whether or not those people she’d killed were brought back to life.

She was forbidden by both Headmistress Meniko and the former Headmaster Sage to ever set foot on Shadow Island again lest she were invited, or be locked for the rest of her life.

And she was crying.

It was this last bit that most of them were so amazed about. She’d been crying so much and so long that there was a puddle of tears splattering on the cobblestones before her from her eyes.

As the head students, Siklohn – who’d recently returned to the school for classes – and Mayia, strode forward, cautiously, to stand before her while all the other younger students stayed behind them. The two of them were the two power houses of the League, knowing the most skill and having the most power.

“Pleeyo.” Mayia said simply. “You are not allowed on our island.”

“Forgive me...”

The whispered voice was so small, it was almost a squeak.

“What?” Mayia asked, but then Pleeyo was crawling forward to her feet, and Pleeyo bent down to kiss her thick toes.

“Forgive me...” Pleeyo whispered a little louder, her voice choking. “Please forgive me for what I d-did.” She sobbed, completely naked as she used a massively thick forearm to rub her eyes clean. “F-forgive me... for all the hurt I caused... for the d-deaths...” she whimpered as she said that.

Mayia and Siklohn turned to look at each other, and Siklohn squatted to meet her face to face, the beautiful white wolf looking into her eyes as her tears glistened like diamonds against her face. Reading faces was what he’d trained himself to do long before ever coming to the Shadow League. He did, after all, graduate as a colonel in the academy...

What he saw was genuine remorse... there was nothing forced about this.

“She means it.” Siklohn said, and Pleeyo sobbed harder, lying on her side as she scraped the ground with her claws, her short, feminine mane blowing idly about her head as her ears pinned to the back of her skull.

“What do we do?” Mayia asked. “I can’t speak for the whole school.”

“Then you let the school speak for themselves, Mayia.” A voice said, and all eyes turned to see Drake in his dragon form materialize over them all. He was a massive creature; hundreds of feet long from snout to tail tip, with four arms plus two pairs of gossamer wings and his talloned fingers were already resting against Pleeyo’s bowed back to keep her warm. “All students who have not been here more than three years are excused to breakfast. Morning exercises will be postponed.”

There was a low cheer, and small collection of a couple dozen students, the younger initiates, filed back into the tree.

“The rest of you, please form a line behind the apprentices.” Drake added, and obediently the students walked – or in the case of the Naga and a few others, slithered – into a line as directed. “Students, as a fundamental basis of your lives, for the sheer level of knowledge that you possess in order to end the life of another, the act of forgiveness is often times a necessity. Every species, every gender, every religious path has individuals among them who may offend you, either accidentally or purposefully.

“Even if it is on purpose, you must turn the other cheek, for if you retaliate, you have the full capability to end their life even with a subtle slap.” Drake caressed Pleeyo’s back momentarily while she continued to sob. “Students... before you think to judge this maiden, you should perhaps know two things:

“The first you may be aware of, is that Pleeyo was under the influence of an evil spirit driving her to do such things when she attacked your school the second time. The first time she has been sufficiently punished for.

“The second thing you should be aware of... is what Lord Sage did to her.”

Over a hundred pair of eyes rose to Drake as he himself focused pityingly on Pleeyo.

“Lord Sage, as a healer, has kept a copy of all your pains, aches and sorrows that were caused by the evil spirit acting in this young maiden. To punish Pleeyo for attacking his students, he placed a copy of all those sorrows in Pleeyo so that she saw your pains from your own eyes, and placed it on a continually repeating loop till she felt genuine remorse for what she’d done. Every ache, every pain... and every death... played itself – repeatedly – in this girl’s mind, over, and over, and over again, till at long last the purpose of the psychic punishment ended itself naturally.

“That only means that she feels genuine remorse for what she’s done.”

“I will require only one thing, students... You will hear what she has to say. And then it will be up to you as to whether or not to forgive her...”

Meniko and Equis flew to Shadow Island, Meniko able to fly faster than Equis, so Equis held onto Meniko’s back as Meniko’s massive body brought them both to Shadow Island, and they descended into the caldera where they saw a line of students leading up to Pleeeyo’s golden body and the massive form of Drake’s Dragon form positioned over her.

When Equis learned what had happened, she didn’t even bother dressing as she rushed after Meniko, and hopped off the Headmistress, totally nude, and rushed to Pleeeyo. Drake removed his hand as Equis took the cub up in her arms while Meniko moved beside Drake.

“We’re taking you home, right now.” Equis said.

“N-no!” Pleeeyo said, and squirmed horribly to get out of Equis’s arms before she moved back before the Shadow Students and fell to her hands and knees before them.

“Pleeeyo...” Equis began, but stopped as Pleeeyo moved forward and kissed the next student’s feet, sobbing as she began speaking words of apology.

“What is going on here?” Meniko demanded.

‘Forgiveness... headmistress.’ Drake’s voice said softly in hers and Equis’s minds. *‘Sage’s punishment has finished its course. Pleeeyo is here seeking forgiveness for what she’s done.’*

‘But it wasn’t her fault!’ Equis replied. *‘She was under the influence of an evil spirit, a demon or something or other... it wasn’t her fault!’*

‘People choose to make judgments based on what they see.’ Drake added, folding his fore-claws together. *‘These students saw Pleeeyo beating them up, tearing them apart... murdering them. And apparently Pleeeyo feels guilty for her actions... whether it was her own personal actions or an evil spirit or not. She is making penance for her deeds. Regardless as to whether or not she was responsible for them or not... she did them.’*

‘Like Sage...’ Meniko said silently, and Drake was silent for a moment.

‘Like I said, most people judge others by what they see. Not by what is. To these students, it mattered not whether or not an evil spirit possessed Pleeeyo, made her bigger, stronger, more vicious... they saw the bully beating on them. And as Pleeeyo watched through their eyes, her own body beating on them over and over again, she apparently felt genuine remorse, else wise the psychic attack would never have ended of its own accord before my son got a chance to release her.’

‘It’s best that you remain and support her.’ Drake said and laid a hand on Pleeeyo’s back again.

Equis’s lower lip trembled and she rushed to kneel beside Pleeeyo while she continued to ask for penance on her knees.

Drake scooped Pleeeyo up in his claws and turned her, placing her like a child in Meniko’s arms before pausing. All the morning and half the day had passed before the last of the Shadow League Students had stood before Pleeeyo as she asked for forgiveness.

With some, it was little more than saying “You are forgiven.” Before walking away in shame for ever having anger on her, while with others, even one of the students that Pleeyo had killed – a little mouse girl – sat on Pleeyo’s massive lap and rocked with her for a time as they both cried together.

Meniko and Drake stood together, two titans of draconic might and power while Drake paused, as Meniko held Pleeyo like a small babe nestled against her bosoms and plumage while Pleeyo continued to cry softly in whimpers, but there was a smile on her face.

Every last student has forgiven her.

‘I must apologize to you, Headmistress,’ Drake said, and Meniko looked up at him.

‘You apologize?’

‘When you and I first met, Headmistress, I had asensed you to get your name, but the name that I saw that that your true identity was your true name, so I called you by that name. I didn’t know that it was an insult to call you by it. I’ve committed a serious affront I wish to apologize for.’

Meniko’s lips creased a little.

‘I understand the affront now, Headmaster Drake...’ she returned as she cuddled Pleeyo. *‘You are forgiven provided you never speak of that name again. In truth... only my parents or the male who is my husband is to possess that name, Headmaster. You are the second to possess it outside that circle. One is practically a daughter... you... were a total stranger. It felt like a raping.’* Meniko’s brows drooped as she looked on Pleeyo.

Drake, palmed Pleeyo’s body, and then sighed.

‘Drakelezahn’ Drake said into her mind and then looked up at her. *‘My true name is Drakelezahn, Headmistress.’*

Meniko looked at him. He’d just figuratively unzipped his fly and bent over in giving her that name.

‘No one knows that name...’ Drake mentioned. *‘I’ve... never taken a draca as a wife.’*

‘Does this mean we’re married now?’ Meniko mused.

‘No offence headmistress, but I hope not.’

‘No offence taken.’ She mused. *‘And I accept your apology... provided you never use my name for anything more than keeping it in your memory... and I will vow to do the same so long as you do.’*

“Understood.” Drake said aloud, and stepped away from her. Eqis, who’d risen up into the air beside them, moved into Meniko’s arms to embrace Pleeyo.

Meniko chuckled as Eqis and Pleeyo shared a crying laugh with one another, and then Meniko’s head snapped up and stared at the tree.

“Headmistress?” Drake prompted aloud. “Is something wrong?”

“N-no. I thought... I thought I heard a child calling for his mother. But it was gone.”

“Strange... there are no young children on the island...” Drake said in concern, and scanned his head. “I don’t feel anything.”

“It may’ve been my mistake.” Meniko said and unhitched her wings in preparation to fly. “We need to get this one into a bed so that she can rest. Do you mind looking after her Eqis?” Meniko asked.

“No, Mother... I wouldn’t.” Eqis said and hugged Pleeyo tighter.

“B-but there is one more thing that I need to do.” Pleeyo said whipping her eyes. “I need to go to the Grace League...”

Pleeyo’s last act for the day was to enter into the Grace League. Out of respect for the individuals inside, she’d been dressed in a conjured white silk body cloth that draped over even her body that Meniko had provided for her, Eqis wore another, as she entered, and found Sage sweeping the pathways again.

She stood, waiting for him to turn, and he froze upon seeing her.

Still crying, her eyes red from tears, Pleeyo stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Sage’s neck. His own arms lifted in stunned amazement as to this, but nonetheless embraced her.

“Thank you.” Pleeyo said and kissed his cheek weeping on his shoulder. “I’m sorry for what I did to your children.”

Sage managed a small smile, Eqis watching from the doorway, Meniko watching from leaning over the walls.

“You’re welcome... and you are forgiven. I-I... I’m sorry for...”

“No! No apologies for that,” she sniffed and drew back, holding his face in her hands as she looked intently into his eyes. “No apologies for setting me free like that... I’m no longer a monster.” She whispered. “I’m no longer a monster... and in my eyes... neither are you.” She hugged him. “You’re my angel... Thank you...”

Eqis approached and took Pleeyo by the shoulders as she began to draw him away, and she looked into Sage’s blue-green eyes for a moment, and he mouthed “I’m sorry.” To her. Eqis paused, and letting go of Pleeyo, she slid in before Sage, and palming his face, bent forward and kissed him on the lips, just a short peck before she breathed his same breath.

Secretly, Eqis had loved Sage, and he did many things that had angered her, had made her feel degraded, but now she saw that all the things he did were coming back better than they were before... like her friend Kina, who was no longer a drunken boozer, like Pleeyo... and other things.

He returned her kiss, but again... it was only a peck, and neither of them went too deeply into it.

“You’re forgiven...” she whispered into his ear, and hugged him before drawing back. Eqis then took Pleeyo away.

Sage looked up at Meniko briefly, showing her his sad eyes before he lowered his head, unable to face her in his shame. Meniko continued to watch him before turning to leave, and then Sanari approached Sage and held onto his muscular arm with both of hers as she leaned her head against his shoulder.

“Sage... you must ask her for forgiveness before it can be given.” She said, holding onto his hand and thick bicep.

“I couldn’t bring myself to. I’ve hurt her more than anyone else in this universe. I cannot... in good conscience ask her for forgiveness.”

“We need to work on that...” Sanari said. “I would ask you to go and rest for the day, but I know you won’t” she mused, fingering the long broom in Sage’s hands, her mind imagining that she were stroking... something else. “Don’t work too hard, Sage. But one thing I would like for you to do today. I want you to come to my quarters so that I can fix you a decent meal. Close the Shrine gates at the appointed time... and then come to my home.”

Sage managed a small smile as he looked at her. “As you wish... Mother Sanari.”

“On you knees, Lord Sage.” A young male priest said in a soft calming voice.

Sage looked at him, and then lowered his head, before lowering himself to his hands and knees before him. He already knew what was about to happen, but even from the first time, did nothing to stop it. Though the number of people had lessened, as had the frequency, this one did it the most.

The priest opened his robes, and had let it all hang about his shoulders as he unslung his phallus, and was about to urinate on Sage’s head when...

“Priest Kale...” Someone said, and the priest snapped quickly tried to cover up but Mother Sanari was already walking out of nowhere as calmly as if she were walking down the road. “What were you doing?” she asked and came up to just before him.

“I-I was about to... to...” he managed, trying to close his robes, Sanari standing there calmly while he tried to come up with an acceptable reason. “I-I was attempting to administer a humbling experience, Mother Sanari.” Kale said at last.

“I see, and how were you about to administer that humbling experience with your robes off and your sex hanging out like that, Priest Kale?” she asked ever so calmly, but Kale could see the fire in Sanari’s eyes, which meant that she was furious. Her self control was simply that good to hold it in so well.

“I-I... I was about to urinate on him.” Kale said, knowing that it was fruitless to try to lie to their Headmistress.

“Priest Kale... are you the legal guardian announced by the Intergalactic Court to administer such experiences on Lord Sage?”

“No, mother Sanari,” he bowed.

“No... you are not. Priest Kale... you are trying to supersede my authority by administering a humiliating experience – not a *‘humbling experience’* – on my ward, and in so doing you’ve disrobed and showed your naked body in order to do it. Though you are of sufficient station to have sexual contact again, I do not think that this was at all consensual.

“These actions are not the actions of a priest or a priestess of the Faith, Priest Kale. I think you need to understand the difference between a humiliating experience and a humbling experience. And since you were trying to administer a humbling experience beyond my authority, and decided to reveal your naked body to urinate wastes on Sage, then tonight after prayer, Priest Kale... you will clean all of the latrines.”

“But headmistress... that is an acolyte’s job.” Hale argued.

“And the bath house.” Sanari said in response.

“But...”

“For one week.” She said and leveled her eyes on him.

“Yes Mother Sanari.” He bowed and hurried away; fastening his robes back up before he could mete out more of a humbling experience.

Sanari waited until he was out of sight before collapsing to her knees beside Sage, checking him as she helped him up.

“Are you ok?” she fussed.

“I am. W-why did you do that?”

“Because I don’t believe that you being peed on is a viable punishment from anyone. Word travels fast in my shrine, when the others find out that he’s being punished, this will stop immediately.” She said and helped him to rise. “I only wish I did this earlier... why didn’t you tell me who was doing this to you?”

“I didn’t want anyone to get in trouble over me,” He said quietly, and Sanari took both his hands before kissing them.

“You are a supremely strong man, Sage Preypacer. But somehow... I will protect you from now on.” She smiled up at him and continued to hold his hands. “From now on, the only people who are allowed to punish you are Drake and I...”

The day to pick up the supplies for the Grace League came again, and Sage finished sweeping the pathways, opened the doors to the shrine, and then passed over to where the supply and snail mail transport landed, passed the person in the cockpit the transcript form for the Grace League, and he produced a large black tote that was locked down with clasps while Sage handed the old one to him.

Hefting the tote over one shoulder, Sage then began walking back to the Grace League, and was nearly there when...

“Hey monster!” someone said, and he turned to see a group of young males of the Mystic League walking up from a game of something or other on the fighter ball field. Usually that phrase of *‘Hey Monster’* was as of late directed to him.

He watched them woefully as they approached, and bending down, placed the supplies for the Grace League on the ground. Apparently they were playing a game that involved steel bats, and he saw their leader raise his bat as he approached. The leader hurried forward, pulled the bat back, and with the muscular and magically enhanced physical skills of a Mystic Leaguer, he brought the bat solidly against Sage’s head.

Sanari left her home, tying her laced sash about her waist, and then paused. She saw the pathways already swept and the gravel walkways groomed with the doors to the shrine already opened.

“Oh no! He left early!” she said and immediately picked up her skirts and ran.

She had no sooner left the shrine when she heard the shouts, which were the telltale sign of him being beaten again, and she rushed over to it, tapping people on the shoulders once she got to the crowd as they shouted “Kill! Kill! Kill!”

When they saw who was trying to get in, they immediately moved out of the way till Sanari got to the forefront, and saw Sage take a full on kick designed for lobbing a ball the full length of a field into his gut, rolling him over and over down a series of stairs, straight toward a cliff drop off.

“Stop!” she cried, but the chanting crowd drowned out her cry, and as Sage tried to get up, one of the students with a bat stepped up and brought it down on his back, and Sage collapsed and tumbled down the rest of the way of the stairs, and then another kicked him in the cut, turning him over. Then Sanari saw where they were harassing him to, and gasped, seeing the retaining rails to a cliff face to keep students who couldn’t fly from falling off.

Another kicked him, and she ran up before them, stood before Sage and flung her arms out.

“Stop!” she shouted, this time her voice amplified from her power and the sounds of chanting came to an immediate halt. Champion and Rae, both of whom appeared at that moment came up short at the sight of the scene. “Stop it!” she cried in a normal voice. “Stop this right now!”

“Out of the way, Mother Sanari.” One of the leaders said, clenching his fists. “This monster hurt my little sister! She spent a week in the hospital because of him. She was frightened out of my – I mean *her* – mind! This monster must pay!”

“You are not the one to do so!” Sanari challenged back, her hands still thrown out to her sides. “He has already been judged and paid for all his crimes. This penance...”

“Enough words!” the leader of the group choked. “This monster devastated this school, hurt all my friends, attacked my only remaining family... he needs to pay! Get out of the way, or be moved!”

Noxi arrived with one of her babies, holding the child in her arms as she came to stand nearby.

“I won’t! I will not allow anyone to hurt him any more. If you still want to hurt him, you must go through me!”

“No...” a voice said, and Sanari blinked and turned immediately to the sound of the voice, and all eyes fell upon Sage as he laid there, head bowed. “He’s right, Sanari. He’s right about me... just let them have me. I’ve hurt and destroyed far too much, just let them continue to beat on me till the hurting stops.”

There was a silence, and Sanari looked over her shoulder at him, and then smiled as she raised her arms again.

“I won’t! You’ve suffered enough in penance, Sage. No one will hurt you any more, without hurting me first.” She turned and faced the students assaulting him. “You will not hurt him!” she cried out.

Their leader stood there, his jaw and fists clenching as he locked eyes with her, his friends slapping him on the arms and shoulder, shaking him in an attempt to get him to back down even before he shrugged them off. “Then if I have to go through you to hurt him... then so be it!” He said and lunged.

Sanari... was in her own right a master of the Absolute Fist. She could destroy anything with her hands, and though destroying her love’s bully wasn’t what she had in mind, she had thoughts of ensnaring him and turning him over her knee and spanking him for thinking beyond his measure. Her hands moved into an elegant defense stance even as the punches came, but to her surprise, the one-two punch from the student instead met with one clawed hand and then the next met with another clawed hand.

She gasped and blinked, seeing the bully’s face change into a look of surprise, and then absolute fear as the hands that had blocked his fists slowly rose with the muscled arms attached to them out of the corners of Sanari’s field of vision, and she turned to see Sage’s snarling face contorted with rage as his hands clenched tighter and tighter around his bully’s fists, and the bully cried out from the pain of his hands being crushed.

“You... will not... HARM HER!” Sage roared in such a way that would’ve impressed a Casid.

The silence after such a sight and the scream was absolute.

“M-my fingers...” the thug cried as he sagged to his knees, and cried as he looked up at that snarling face.

And then Sage felt something else alight gently on his arm, his muscles flaring from the incredible density in them.

“Sage...” Sanari said and rubbed the white fur that remained of his old tiger-self that remained on the outside of his arm with one hand. “Sage... let him go.” She said soothingly.

Sage looked back to the thug, his knit brows uncompressing slowly before he focused on his hands and consciously opened his fingers to let the student go.

Sage then stood over him, his own arm moving still in Sanari’s grasp as he maneuvered himself before her.

“I don’t care what you do to me... but you will not harm anyone else because of me.” He said; his eyes narrowed with mild annoyance. Strangely, her touch on his arm was not only soothing and comforting, but calming... “Especially her!”

The silence remained absolute till the school bell began to ring its toll.

“Sage...” Sanari said. “It’s over... please... let’s go back to the shrine.” Sage’s features softened into a calm reprieve as he looked down his body at her. With him nearly two feet taller than she, she looked so delicate and fragile, and as she took his hand, he surrendered to her completely and he nodded dumbly.

Sanari began to lead them away, but immediately after that, the young man who’d assaulted Sanari to get at Sage suddenly reeled back in anger, grabbed a metal bat from one of his fellows, and crying out, swung it at Sage.

Sage turned immediately, placing himself before Sanari as he brought his arm up to defend them both, his muscles tightening to the consistency of super polymer alloys, and the force of the blow hit the edge of Sage’s arm, bent and then broke off. The end hurtled off and hit Noxi in the shoulder, knocking her back.

Sage’s head turned as he heard her scream, even as her baby slipped out of her arms.

“My baby!” she cried, but Sage had slipped from Sanari and vaulted right over the railing after the bundle as the little Oliverian cried out as it fell. Rae was at the edge in an instant, and vaulted over the edge as Sage stream lined himself into a dive, his arms moving to catch the child as they hurtled for the jagged rocks at the base of the cliff.

Sage’s arms moved outward and caught the baby as Rae propelled herself downward to catch up to them, and she cried out, seeing that they were too far away for her to catch. But then Sage seemed to explode, or rather his shirt sheered open in every direction against his back, and a pair of massive, gossamer wings spread from his back, flared, the arms thickening before the fanning leathery wings caught the updraft of wind rushing at the cliff and rising with the salt spray, and though Sage’s body angled downward, he dipped forward and sailed forward, riding the sea breezes and then rising up into the air, beat his wings a few time and turned.

Rae watched in stunned amazement as he circled upward, turned toward the railed platform, and with several flaps, he righted himself and sailed downward onto the ground, standing there with his massive wings folding at his back while Noxi rushed up to him.

“My baby...” she cried, taking it from his arms and hugging the baby to her chest. “Thank you!” she whispered.

Sage simply nodded with a small smile.

Noxi then turned on the young man who’d swung the bat, strode over to him while cradling her baby, and lifting a hand took both his ears in stride and began walking.

“You come with me,” she said vehemently, the young man walking sideways and bent over, for despite that Noxi wasn’t an incredibly tall fem, she was nonetheless remarkably strong. “We are going right before the Headmistress with this, and you are going to explain everything that just happened. Then you will... and then...” she continued scolding him as they walked away.

“Back to class... back to class...” Rae said, clapping her hands together as she arrived, and the students jumped-to immediately, dispersing.

Sanari reached down and grasped Sage’s hand while he stared forward, and Rae and Sanari looked to him, and then followed his gaze as Mezzo, the school deputy, and several of the school guards approached them.

“You need to come with us, Sage Preypacer.” Mezzo said. “Precautions.”

“W-what is this?” Sanari gasped.

“I need to take Sage into custody...” Mezzo said, fingering his sword. “I’m sorry, Sage... but you’ve injured a student while on probation.”

“What?!” Champion exclaimed stepping in. “That’s bull, dude. He was defending himself!”

“My orders are simple and direct, Champion... I must take him in.”

“Oh hell no.” Champion said and reached for his sword, Mezzo already had his drawn, but then Champion felt a hand on his wrist, and looked over to see Sage pushing his hands back down to put that huge killing blade back down.

“Don’t argue with them Champion.” He said and stepped forward, turning and offering his arms behind his back.

Two of the school guards moved in and latched a pair of linked braces about his hands and forearms. He looked to the three of them, and half smiled at them.

“I’m sorry Sage.” Mezzo said. “With respect... please follow me.”

Sage nodded and turned into Mezzo’s wake, folding his wings about his shoulders while he was escorted to the detention center.

“Mezzo...” Sanari said, standing before his wide desk. “He was defending himself... and me! Their actions nearly killed Noxi’s baby! If not for Sage it’d be dead!”

“Mother Sanari... I understand your concerns. I am under orders that if Lord Sage were to cause any wonton harm and or destruction, no matter how small, that I am to take him into custody and file the report. I’ve already sent the report to the Intergalactic Council, Mother Sanari... they know everything that I do...”

“I’m sorry... I’m not allowed to make judgments in this matter.”

Sanari exhaled in a calming breath.

“I want to see him.” She said.

“Back there.” Mezzo gestured, and she turned on her heel and walked purposefully down the corridor, passing several detention cells and finally came to the one Sage was in. The force shield wasn’t even in place, and Noxi sat in front of him, keeping him company while she nursed her baby.

Sage sat with his hands behind his back still, his wings folded about him like a cloak.

“They’re debating what happened,” Sanari said. “Mezzo’s being bureaucratic.”

Sanari entered his cell, and fiddled behind Sage’s back briefly and disengaged Sage’s braces before she tossed them away with a clunk.

Noxi rose to her feet and walked over to them, her halo shining above her head more visibly in the artificial light while her rainbow colored wings – neither of which she seemed to ever be aware of – readjusting the shawl covering her naked shoulder and breast, and the head of her baby as it nursed. She bent forward and kissed him on the cheek.

“My watch has arrived,” Noxi smiled. “I know we had some problems in the past... but thank you... so much for saving my baby.”

Sage smiled and inclined his head. “No thanks are necessary. How’s the head?”

“I don’t heal as well as you, but I’ll be all right. Rae fixed the blow with a touch. The boys who attacked you have detention for a month.”

Sage nodded but said nothing more.

“I’ll see you when you get out Sage.” She mused, and then peaked underneath the shawl for a moment to see if her child were still nursing and then replaced the cover. “The two of you should come over for dinner some time.”

“I’d like that.” Sage replied and Sanari smiled at Noxi before Noxi turned and left.

Sanari slid closer to his side, taking his hand as she began to massage the dragon’s hide – smooth in one direction and felt-like in the other direction – with her thumbs.

“I’m very proud of you, Sage.” She said, looking at his strong fingers. “You make it so that I don’t need to be strong anymore. I feel safe in your presence. I want to thank you for being such a gentleman and protecting me today.

“It was my pleasure.”

There was a moment of silence as the pair of them sat with one another... Sanari’s hands kneading his. And strangely... in the back of her mind, and at the base of her beating heart, Sanari felt a swelling of... something warm... coming from him.

She looked up at him, and blinked at the sight of his perfectly green eyes. The emerald green that she’d fallen in love with and had been drawn to. Her lips parted while she held his hand, and as their hands came to a rest between them, his fingers curled over hers and they moved a little closer to each other till...

“The response came back, and...” they both looked up at Mezzo as he appeared.

To cover the moment, Sanari acted first. “I removed his braces, Mezzo.” She said standing up. “But what was that you were saying?”

“They’ve decided that being that Sage had been defending himself and another, and he was acting purely in self defense, that they’ve told me to once again turn Sage over to your care, Mother Sanari. He’s free to go.”

Sanari smiled, and with a contented sigh, she turned and offered her hands to Sage.

Stripped of his shirt, Sage rose before her, bare-chested and powerful, he stood there, not with a frown... but instead with the corners of his mouth just beginning to turn upward.

“Time to go home.” She said and began to tug almost playfully on his large hands.

“Home... yes.” Sage said, and followed in her wake.

Chapter Nine: Sexual Healing

Six months have passed since the Shadow Beast raged across the Mystic League and three other planets. The man with tremendous power who'd gone mad was indeed dead. He died from the madness, and reborn like a Ghost Dancer – the male bird so very much like the Phoenix – Sage Preypacer, no lord title, was a docile man who seemed to be against violence unless it was to protect or serve another. What remained of his old self was only the gentleness and kindness of the man and doctor who was now allowed to leave the Grace League Shrine un-harassed on little errands of service.

Thanks to Sanari's actions, no one defecated on him, or tried to beat him up any more. Instead... he became as busy as a worker ant, doing additional tasks around the whole of the school grounds, basic maintenance for the facilities, repairing things, lifting things, and most of all he worked in the hospital for whatever miscellaneous jobs that they had open.

Sanari was glad that he spoke every now and again... and very glad that he also smiled every once and awhile. Sanari noticed that whenever he smiled, it was usually at her. Above all, and a sure sign that he was better from his self loathing was the fact that his eyes were a solid green now. Occasionally they became blue-green... but not once, not even during the incident with him protecting her, did his eyes turn red.

But nevertheless, even after telling him to stop, he would still sweep the grounds of the Grace League, and groom all the gravel walkways every morning.

"Sage... I have a favor to ask of you." Sanari said to him one morning.

He stopped and faced her. "Yes Mother Sanari?" he asked, holding his broom across him with both hands. He didn't hang his head, but rather looked right at her.

"I want you to turn this field into a stone garden... just like the one you'd made for yourself at the Shadow League."

"As you wish." He smiled, and finished sweeping.

Sanari returned a short while later to see him cutting up the grass and depositing the sod in the mulch pile. Periodically she would come back throughout the day, finding him here and there within the shrine sculpting and polishing marble or cutting and polishing wood braces. The wood braces formed borders, the carved and polished marble formed benches, and all of this he completed shortly after mid day. And then fixing his self with a yoke and two large buckets, made path after path from the shrine to the beach to get sand, each bucket being dumped in the open field, two at a time, for hours on end without stopping till the field once covered with grass was now covered with sand. The great boulders of obsidian – once ejected by the volcano that the Shadow League resided within – he found within the miles of area surrounding the shrine, and he painstakingly washed each boulder in the salt water surf of the beach before depositing them into the garden, three large stones formed in the best approximation of a triangle.

Sanari returned for the final time as he finished raking the sand around the boulders and stepped off the sand, leaving the garden completed shortly after night fall. It was a simple garden, with a groomed gravel path around it, and Sanari sat down on the marble bench as she looked down on it. Sage sat nearby as she stared at the stones and the waves of sand... like islands in a field of water.

With an exhale she looked up to where Sage sat nearby, watching her with a small smile.

"It's perfect." she said and turned to face him, her hand rising to press against his taut navel and then slide up to his powerful chest. "Just what I thought it would look like."

She looked up at him, he looking down at her with a subtle half-smile on his face as his eyes seemed to admire her. She shifted her weight forward a little, pressing closer to him, her lips compressing a little toward a pucker. They were simple feminine tricks... body language that he would perhaps not catch on, and he did lift a hand to hold her

elbow, and then his features grew more somber for a moment, a wave of his hair flowing about either side of his face. He appeared to think about it.

Then he slid back and rose.

“I need to get back to work.” He said and then let go of her.

“But all your chores are over.” Sanari replied disappointed, folding her hands before her, more body language which pressed and hefted her breasts higher while her hands covered her crotch... more suggestiveness, but Sage seemed to be in absolute control over his body functions... even while collared.

“I still need to fetch water to wash the main courtyard.” He said and bowed his head, looking at the ground.

Sanari rose and stepped forward and planted a hand over his bicep and the thin plate that covered it. This in turn placed her chest right in his field of view, and his only way to avoid it was to either look up into her face, or to look completely away. She half smiled that he simply continued to stare at her chest.

“I understand your duty, Sage.” She managed; the barest trace of a purr in her voice as her perfume, developed by Kit, wafted up from her wrists, behind her ears and the center of her bosom into his face. “Finish and then rest well for the night.”

“Yes headmistress.” He nodded, and he paused, his lips moving as if he wanted to say something before he turned from her and headed back to the shed to replace the rake and broom he’d been using.

Sanari stood watching his powerful back recede from her.

He’s afraid of contact with me... despite how much he seems to want to, she thought. He was making up reasons to avoid being with me, and he held his breath more than once. What are you afraid of in me, my lord? What can I do to get you to open up to me?

Sanari lowered her head and exhaled a sigh. She lifted her hand and the spirits of the garden floated her staff into her hands from where she’d laid it on the bench, and turning, she looked down at the Zen Garden and gave a half smile.

But then you put your heart and soul in producing something like this, and you continue to sweep and clean for me as a servant, even though you no longer have to.

She moved back to the bench and sat down before the stones, laying her staff against the ground and her shoulder, she sat in quiet contemplation of this stone garden. She remained awake until the moon was directly above her, contemplating this garden... trying to understand more of the man in the tiger... and now in the dragon...

This carried on for weeks, and Sanari proceeded to ask more and more things of Sage personally, being closer to him than she was to some of her own students...

She either followed him, or he followed her. He stood in corners during temple, holding his broom and would sweep up after them. He helped set up candles for Morning Prayer, which necessitated that he remain quite close to her. She invited him into her home to make food for her and him to share, and when she changed out of her robes and came down she found something peculiar as Sage lifted a large kitchen knife, turning it so that the blade pointed downward from the heel of his palm, the dull edge of the blade laying against his wrist and forearm.

He was looking at his reflection in the knife, and fingering the gem in the center of his chest. Sanari agonized as she stood there, knowing what he was contemplating, and steeled herself to interfere. If need be, she could overpower him easily, even in his unlocked half-dragon form she could have overpowered him, but she prayed hard that she wouldn’t have to wrestle a knife from him.

But then Sage drove the knife into the cutting board and rubbed a hand through his mane before picking up a smaller paring knife and went back to preparing lunch for them both like she asked. She exhaled a breath of air and stepped over to him, pressing a hand into the small of his back and the thick spine that led into his retracted tail.

“Are you ok?” she asked, looking up into his face, seeing the shimmering tears there. “Your eyes... are you crying?”

Sage’s eyes sparkled with tears, and they were blue-green, but as he turned to look at her, his eyes turned back to green and he managed to smile.

“Y-yes... the onions are just getting to me.” He said and continued cutting.

Sanari laid her other hand over his bicep and kissed his shoulder before moving to set the table for them both. She waited, kneeling before the low table as he delivered their meal, dishing out their lunch for her and then him, and he knelt across from her. After a prayer of thanks over the food that she offered, they began to eat.

During the course of the meal, she asked for the salt, and she took that moment to hold his hand when he passed it to her, her eyes shining as she looked into his eyes. He was stone faced when she finally took the salt, but then he asked for the pepper, and to her surprise his hand closed about hers instead of on top of the pepper dispenser. She smiled at him as he looked into her eyes, and though his face was stone faced again, she noticed this time the look in his eyes.

Now that she saw it, she understood it as he finally accepted the pepper dispenser from her, and she knelt in wonder as he averted his gaze from her.

That look that was in his eyes... was a look of affection.

Nine months had passed since the Shadow Beast had decimated the Shadow League. There were still memories of what had happened in the eyes of everyone who looked upon Sage, but how they chose to remember that occurrence was different for every person.

Pleeyo, for one, gave him a hug whenever she saw him. He managed to smile at her, and whenever he tried to express how sorry he was for what he’d done to her, she shushed him studiously, and said that she’d never been so happy because of what he’d done. The freedom from guilt was remarkable, she’d say, and thanked him for it.

Eqis was glad that the cub could be happy again. Even Effada had forgiven her for being the poor Rudiban Aphkei Hyena’s bully for so long. Eqis herself still looked wary at Sage, the pain he’d put her through with that death touch technique still apparent in her mind, but Eqis didn’t make any dislike apparent.

Eurika, however, had gotten her revenge on him months ago. She’d walked right up to him, knelt before him, kissed him right on the center of his forehead, and then drew back to say only one thing. “This will make us even.” She said in a surprisingly quiet voice, and then punched him out. Laid him flat on his back in a single blow, knocking him out for three days... just like he’d done to her in his madness. She’d been kind enough to deliver him to Sanari, who took care of him for those three days, and when Sage awoke, Eurika actually summoned him to her office and gave him some extra tasks to do to help the students and faculty, and actually smiled and was quite friendly to him.

Pleeyo was right... Freedom from guilt through forgiveness was a grand gift from a person.

Meniko had given him opportunities to ask for forgiveness, but every time Sage couldn’t bring himself to do so. He couldn’t even bring himself to look into her eyes.

Cyvel, however... voiced how much she hated him, and it was all that Rae could do to keep her from openly going all out and breaking Sage over her knee.

Rae, other than Sanari, was the greatest voice in the league searching for his forgiveness.

Fatima didn't even see any bad will any longer with him... she considered that the man who'd trapped her the way he had was dead and would never return. Their relationship, however, affectively started over. Gone was the crush, gone was the affection... there was only mutual respect.

Everyone else effectively held their own opinions. Some simply ignored him because they couldn't beat on him themselves, but others – especially the children – simply adored this gentle creature that he'd become. But among the children, there was one exception: Teal.

Teal avoided him like the plague. Sage had hurt his mother and his aunt, and frightened him and his sister out of their wits. He harbored an ill will that, as a child, he couldn't properly express. So it began to fester. Rae sensed this, and tried to address it repeatedly... but unfortunately Makahn was gone again on another mission or tournament for the Powered League. Sage, however, felt more guilt in the fact that he was the indirect cause of so much of Rae's growing sadness...

Clio, Tla, and a few others of the Grace League who saw him over the months up until now have seen how gentle he'd been, and he'd offered his help for everything that he could for them. Clio and Tla had been adamant against not forgiving him, till Sanari had asked them to allow him to attend to them.

First of all... which went far into the forgiveness was to feel his hands on them in massage. It was awkward the first time they asked him to massage them – especially their breasts – but after that second time, the soothing power of those hands won them over. His focus and attention to Clio as her pregnancy and her litter progressed into the fourth month dissolved the last of her hatred for him. Neither of them had actually said that they forgave him... but then again he'd not asked for it yet. He also became the only adult male who'd ever touched Tla's naked body and she had not flinched about it. She knew he was helping, and he was healing her aches and pains that a woman developed from having such a large, overly-developed chest.

One wrong move, however... and it would be an upercut to his skull that even Sage would be jealous of the speed of it.

Clio, however, allowed herself to be totally naked before him, and he touched... other things... that Tla would never allow him to touch as he checked on her cubs. Clio had become very heavy with her cubs now, and her father, Harkan, who was also hiding out at the Grace League, was ecstatic to become a grandfather yet again...

Sanari watched all of Sage's interactions from afar mostly, seeing that he always placed himself in a position of service and humility. He didn't even try to interact with others on a person to person basis. The only individuals he managed to do that with were with children... especially Eakjo.

Eakjo would sometimes sneak into his room to sleep on top of his covers late at night, and would often ride on his shoulders while Sage worked. Sanari smiled at the sight... it was as if Eakjo already was their shared son. *Now if only... if only I can make that a reality*, Sanari thought, and went back to reading her holy book in her study.

It was late at night, and Sanari had moved to the door to the shrine to double check its soundness, check to see if it was latched properly and closed. It was a sort of ritual that the Mother of the Faith of a particular Shrine or Temple did... to ensure that none of the Acolytes had left during the night, or to make sure no intruders had come into her shrine. She was filled with thoughts about Sage, her love and lord, and thought how to get him to open up more as she checked the latches and the bars across the gate.

Once all this was done, she turned and stopped, seeing Sage sitting before the Zen shrine she'd had him make for her, wearing only a pair of loose black sleeping trousers, legs together, hands flattened on his lap and head bowed. She smirked and stepped over to him.

“Sage,” she mused, reaching onto his lap to take one of his hands in both of hers. “I thought I told you that you weren’t to meditate anymore.”

Sage’s eyes opened and he took in a shuddering breath.

“I wasn’t meditating.” He said; his eyes distant and shimmering with tears. “I was trying to calm my nerves.”

“About what?” Sanari asked concerned, and slid closer to him, seeing the look of fear in his eyes.

“I had a nightmare.” He said quietly, still not looking into her face as tears slid from his eyes over his firmly chiseled features.

“Tell me about it.” She said as a statement instead of a question, so as to give him no choice but to tell her.

Sage closed his eyes and hung his head a little.

“I... know not how I got this dream... but I felt as if it was a premonition. A... what if?”

“A premonition? How do you know?” Sanari asked, and squeezed his hand. She saw him look down at her fingers, just before he placed his free hand over both of hers.

“When one dreams, they dream in black and white. Occasionally, those of remarkable intellect will also dream in colors of reds, occasionally blues and rarely as purples. Super intelligences, or developed intellects will sometimes dream in more colors, with more depth and detail, but regardless... no one dreams in full color.

“My premonitions are always in full color.”

He paused and looked up at the moon, and the massive claw mark in it that would constantly remind him of what he’d done.

“I... I don’t even know how I got a premonition with my collar on... I suppose that it was a dream of absolute clarity, but I don’t consider myself that smart or that developed... regardless... I saw what would happen if you hadn’t been there Sanari, when...” he swallowed. “...When I attacked Meniko.

“I sliced her open, ripped her rib cage in twain while she screamed and gurgled, and reaching into her body... I tore her heart out and swallowed it, just like I’d done with Hawthorne.

“But something... went wrong.

“There was... something inside Meniko that I somehow knew that even she was unaware of. An impenetrable... darkness that literally overwhelmed me. The Darkness murdered that which remained in me that was light and good, turned me into something utterly evil.

“I... killed, indiscriminately... I destroyed... everything that was before me, consumed planets, suns, and one by one, stars winked out of the sky.” Sanari felt him trembling, and moved closer to him, her chest cleaving to his arm as her hands squeezed about his. “The guardians of this universe fell before me, the Dragaseir and Aphkei races as a hole, and as I consumed, I grew larger, more powerful, and unstoppable, and I didn’t stop till all light in this universe, and all life... was extinguished.

“Sanari... please leave me... please run away... let me leave you and end myself to stop anything so horrific from happening.”

Sanari bit her lip and sliding her hands from his – he just let them go – she rose before him, and tilting his head upward so that he’d look at him, she caressed his face briefly, and hauling backward, slapped him firmly across the face.

Sage gasped, but didn't rise from where he collapsed to, but then there was a weight on his lap, and Sanari was settling on his lap side-saddle like, and pressing against him, she lifted his head to look at her. "That was for speaking of killing yourself. That is a mortal sin, and I will not even allow you to think it from now on. And this..." and she bent forward, and kissed him, one hand hooking onto the light plates bunched around the outer edge of his chest before she withdrew and wiped his tears clean with both thumbs. "Is for being so noble to protect me from all evil... even if it were to be you."

She then pulled his head to her chest, the soft pillowing masses of fatty tissue and glands seemed to calm him immediately.

"It's funny..." she mused and began to purr for him. "This is the third time after a heinous fall that I've cradled you like this." She ran her fingers through his mane. "It's ok... you may hold me if you wish." She whispered into his high tapering ear, and his hands rose, tentatively at first, and then once he touched her, they moved immediately in an almost snatching manner, one to her side, the other against her back, and he pressed against her breast and relaxed with her there.

"Enough about your nightmares, Sage... Now tell me of your dreams." She murred and felt her nipples – all four of them – firm up a little. "A good dream... I want to know."

"I... I am a little embarrassed to say." He said quietly.

"I insist. You must tell me everything." She purred a little louder and moved against him before kissing the lump at the center of his head where his dragon's eye would be.

Sage was very wary, but nonetheless spoke it.

"I've... I've dreamt of it a few times before... The only times I've ever dreamt of gold. It reminded me much of the spirit world of golden light..."

"Everything I ever desired was there..."

"And what are those?" she asked.

"A house... a moderately sized one... located in a valley of long grasses, at the base of a mountain, next to a lake. Though I couldn't see the house in all those dreams, I knew it was nearby. I was... I was naked... and so was the woman who was my wife in those dreams.

"And who was your wife?" Sanari smiled... knowing exactly what dreams he was talking about, for she herself lived every last one of them.

Sage was quiet, and then he drew back from her chest, and both his hands shifted to her sides as he looked up the short distance between them both.

"You were." He said finally after a tense moment of incredible awe of her.

"Truly?" she mused, continuing to purr as she palmed his chest. "And is that a good dream? What did we do together?"

"You were naked too." He said, and bowed his head to her chest. "We made love."

Sanari continued to purr as she palmed his face. "And how did that make you feel?"

Sage was silent as he held onto her sides with both hands, and she felt his thumbs caress her ribs briefly. "Those dreams felt like dreams instead of premonitions. But nonetheless... as frightened as I was at times, as unsure as I was at times, I felt... comforted... relaxed.

“Forgive a wandering mind, Sanari.” He said and lifted his head from her chest. “I mean no disrespect to dream of you like that.” And he removed his hands from her sides.

He’s trying to distance himself again, she thought, and moved forward. “Sage... did you enjoy those dreams?” she asked in all seriousness.

“I did.” He said with a half smile. “Very much so...”

He looked like a bashful boy who’d just admitted to a girl that he had a crush on her.

Sanari’s hands lifted from his chest to his face, and with gentle urging touches, got him to look up at her. Then she bent her head toward his, and kissed him, a rather passionate kiss as she breathed softly through her nose. Sage seemed to stop breathing all together. When she parted, she licked his lips and then rose, taking his hands in hers.

“Follow me.” She said, and drew him to his feet. Sage rose... and followed.

Sanari led Sage by the hand, and he obediently followed her as she walked over the paths the short distance to her home. She paused only briefly to slide the door open and lead him inside.

Sanari’s home was a single chamber, save for two rooms that branched off from the first. The main room contained her bed, living room and kitchen, whereas the side chambers contained her private bathroom and bathhouse; the later of these two rooms was nearly the same size as her living quarters. Curtains and screens could be moved into place for privacy, or when guests were present, and all times before that Sage had visited her, the chamber for her bedroom was curtained off and invisible to him.

This time, however, Sanari led him straight to the un-curtained and raised section of her bedding, and bade him to sit. He did, confused, on the edge of her bed, and once there, she pulled a basin and a pitcher from off a night stand, filled the basin with water from the pitcher and placed his feet inside it before washing both carefully with a wash cloth, dried both off and kissed the top of either.

“Lie back on the pillows.” She said as she picked up the basin and placed it on a shelf lower than from where she got it.

Sage recognized ritualistic motions, especially from Sanari. Much of her life was ritualistic, and many of her rituals were done around him. He felt honored, and pushing himself back, laid on her bed. What he expected was what she’d done in times past, which was to wear nothing but a patterned sheer cloth, or a silk body cloth and rest with him on top of the covers.

What she did, however... was much different.

Sanari smiled down at him as she returned, and then she began to purr as she stood before him. But then she lowered her gaze to her waist, and removing a clasp unwound her braided belt before removing it, holding it in one hand before she curtsied and placed it on the ground. Looking up at him, still purring she palmed her belly, and began to untie a series of draw strings on a wrap around coat – one at her waist, one at her side, and one at her shoulder, and finally one at her neck – before the hand on her belly closed around the fabric and she pulled it open.

Sage rose up onto his elbows as he realized that she was undressing, and suddenly his mind grew numb and he couldn’t think of what to do other than to watch.

Sanari parted the coat and allowed the shoulders to fall off to the crooks of her arms before she began to open the laces of the lavender robe she wore as a sign as a high priestess, the robe patterned with flowers, and her fingers undid a pair of buttons and two more draw strings before she opened that layer too, drawing the fabric away from her long and slender neck.

She continued to look at him in the face, her eyes barely blinking while she purred; and as she drew away this next layer of her robes, Sage saw the silken fabric below hanging off her already erect nipples and swollen areola. He swallowed as she began untying the two synching strings on three successive layers of white patterned silk before she shrugged it all off to the crooks of her shoulders.

Her body was covered only by a layer of white sheer cloth, patterned with embroidered flowers, similar to the gowns she wore when she laid with him in the past. For the barest moment, Sage considered that this was where she was going to stop, but then she unhitched a metal clasp by her neck, and unfolded this as well, and all in a heap, six layers of clothing were allowed to fall off her arms onto the floor.

He'd never seen such a perfect body... rounded breasts that, before now, he'd only caught glimpses of, but now he saw the fullness and perfection of a female immortal's body.

Only a V-shaped patch of patterned white silk covered her loins as she stepped forward, that patch of panty held to her by a pair of side-tie straps tied high over either hip as she moved onto the bed, pushing his knees apart while her rounded mammaries – either punctuated by a swollen areola and an already superbly erect nipple – hung from her chest as she moved forward and pushed him back onto the pillows before settling backward onto her heels while she knelt between his legs, and reaching forward, she fondled his groin.

“S-Sanari...” Sage swallowed and rose again. “W-what are you...”

But she pushed forward as he rose, and kissed him to silence any more protests. He felt her naked breasts against his chest, felt her hands on his chest beside her breasts, and most of all, he felt her firming labia – already accenting the folds of her sex into the front of her panty – press over his groin as she laid down on top of him, her compressed thighs forming a perfectly shaped bowl for his groin to fit within as she laid against him and pawed his face and lips.

“It's time for you to relax.” She whispered, licking his lips again even as she fingered it with the tip of a fingertip and claw. “Just allow yourself to fall to my touches, my lord. From now on... you don't need to stand alone.

And she moved back, sliding her breasts and nipples back down over his chest, ribs and abdominals before she folded back into a kneeling position between his legs and continued to fondle his groin, before her fingers began to unbutton his fly, and then pull the two flaps open and massage his naked groin with her bare fingers.

This was definitely different, Sage thought, and Sanari began to pull his trousers off, backing off the bed, as she peeled the black trousers off his legs, folded it together, curtsied again and laid them on top of her own clothing before lifting her hands.

Sage watched her breasts heft, showing the subtle undeveloped mounds of her secondaries beneath her primaries. Her hands pulled out a pair of hair stays, and her wonderfully golden mane of hair tumbled down about her back and shoulders, and she curtsied again, placing the hair stays on top of his trousers, and crawling back onto the bed, she again began to rub his groin, and his fists clenched into her sheets. Two of her fingers rolled about the flaring head of his penis, the other hand cradling his nads while she purred more deeply, and bending downward she pressed her breasts against his groin, and kissed the top of his prick, and Sage closed his eyes tightly, fought the reactions his body was having, tried to control his sexuality... control the urge to...

Kiss...

His eyes fluttered open as Sanari settled against his body again, her breasts pressing between them, her crotch and inner thighs warming his naked groin now, her sex very warm against his, her lips pressing against his as she held his face with both hands.

“Relax...” she said again, licking his lips yet again while she rose a little and drew back, this hefted her breasts higher atop his chest so that her nipples projected upward along his collarbones. “I don't want you to resist. Just...” She licked his lips again. “...Let...” she kissed him. “...Yourself go.” And this time as she licked his lips, and as she kissed him she stuck her tongue in his mouth, and then arched her back a little to rub her sex against his, and with a snap, his resolve broke of its own accord and he began to erect.

The feeling of a womanly chest against his own was a feeling he'd not felt in decades, and to feel her naked breasts against his chest brought up nigh forgotten memories as she yet again drew herself down his body, dragging her breasts down his chest, his ribs and abdominals, dragging her claws in likewise fashion down his body, coming to his erecting dick as she once again fondled his sack and moved her fingers about his penis as it swelled. She settled her chest around his groin, the hot warmth of her breasts and her heartbeat and purring vibrating the swollen mammaries around his shaft, made him erect harder, and once he'd erected long enough to push past their length, she dipped her head, pulling her mane of hair away from her face, and fastened her mouth around the flaring head of his phallus and pleasantly began to suck.

Blood positively rushed to his loins, swelling both sack and prick rapidly as she dipped her head up and down the length, his thickness swelling so that her hand couldn't close completely around its length, her tongue flicking along the flaring edge toward the tip as she sucked harder as it grew larger and thicker, and soon she had to rise with its curving length and mass, her breasts continuing to warm it while the individual muscles in his length hardened into ribs, and all the veins inside it swelled and stood on end.

Sanari then did a trick that Sage honestly thought she wouldn't be capable of given her holy ways, and she literally deep-throated him, drew back and licked off the bead of his seed before she arched her back, rolled her shoulders backward and projected her breasts forward from off her strong chest and feathered rib cage.

She was a strong woman, with neatly creased muscles and firm biceps that were all hid by her robes. Sage lifted his hands to her hips as she moved forward to lean over him, kissing him again, purring as loud as ever, and this time as she rose, she spread open her thighs at long last, and looking down the length of her body between her breasts, she fingered the ties to her panties at her sides while she looked with her lord at the now swollen labia and erect clitoris appearing there, changing the folds of the white cloth to display her sexuality. With her sexual juices leaking from her body, her panty front had become translucent, showing off the reddened edge of her insides as she slowly drew on the ties, and first one and then the other untied before the front of her panties fell off and she removed her panties from off her bodice, tossing them away before rubbing her pelvis and fingering her labia momentarily.

Sanari's purr grew louder as she moved forward, spreading her legs open to part his in the meantime, and she began to kiss him again, pecks and loving kisses of passion while she pawed at his chest, her own chest pressing against him, and her hips rocking slowly as she moistened his erection between them with her sexual juices as her labia fanned against the underside bulge of his erection, getting it even more moist than her saliva could manage. Sanari smiled at him, fondling his face with one hand, and then she dragged her legs forward over his, and turning laying half way on her side while still pressing against him, just by sheer fact that she looked at it, so did he, and he focused on his own erect penis as she reached down her body and slid her hand against it, spreading the sticky, silken fluids from inside her along it as she lifted a leg, and placing the head of his cock against her sex, she settled backward and pressed against it.

Sanari felt the thickened head spread her labia open as it pierced her, and she bit her lower lip as she folded her legs again and then slowly rose.

His mass was as thick as a liter bottle, and almost half again larger than that bottle when he was fully erect, and she rolled and rotated her hips just getting the head into her, but when her lips spread past the flaring ridge of the head and steeled about the scar of his circumcision, she gasped and practically orgasmed right then and there. Her eyes closed as she rose up on her hands and knees, her legs spread open but close enough to hug his waist and hips, her breasts hanging heavily from her chest, her nipples and clitoris throbbing as more of her juices leaked from her to cascade down the length of his shaft. Gasping, she used her hands to walk backward along his multi-layered abdominals, till she rose up above him, and rising above him, his penis invading her body, she gasped in triumph, and then looked down the length of her body at the mass of an eight foot tall muscular male inside her petite six and a half foot tall feminine body.

She murred though, and slid both hands over her swollen labia, rubbing the pair of feminine muscles, pressing her clit between her thumbs as she began to rock slowly, rolling and rotating, slowly spreading her legs wider and wider as she lowered centimeter by centimeter. The thick rounded muscles of his shaft, each rib and throbbing vein teased

her on the way down, and every now and again she'd gasp, and more of her juices would escape her, sliding down the shaft, and she'd pause, rub her labia for a few seconds, and then push lower.

Steadily lower and lower, her new lover gritting his teeth and groaning as her tight innards – unused to such a mass penetrating her – kept clenching about his erection, Sanari gasping and moaning every few inches, till at long last she drove herself to the hilt, sheathing his manhood inside her womanhood, and feeling the throbbing power vibrate her insides straight up to her heart.

She gurgled, swallowed and then lowered her gaze to Sage before she hooked her feet behind her bottom over each of his legs, and she began to rise and lower herself rhythmically, clenching and tightening before releasing her vaginal muscles while her toes tickled his swollen nads.

Reaching downward as she planted a hand over his Heart Stone – the thing as hard, as sensitive and as erect as any of his own six nipples – she reached down and took his hand and lifted it to her breast, the massive hand cupping the whole of her large tit as she cooed and purred at him. Switching hands, she then lifted his other hand to her other tit, and he rocked his hips reflexively and thrust into her, drawing a low moan from her as she pressed herself into his hands, cupping his hands with her own about her breasts.

“This body of mine is yours now, my lord.” She purred, squeezing his hands and helping them to massage her breasts, her nipples peaking out from between her fingers. “Feel free to touch me how ever you wish, whenever you wish.”

Sage looked up at her, breathing heavily, and suddenly he was faced with a tremendous gift of trust.

He didn't know much about the Cersile Faith, he didn't even know if this was a ritual of their faith, but Sanari had just placed herself literally in his hands, to either be taken as a love slave... or a lover.

He'd be damned if he were to debase such a precious creature as Sanari.

He released her breasts and balancing on one hand, he focused on her, looked right into her eyes, and cupping the side of her face he kissed her gently, with all the pent up passion he'd had for her, passion that had been a decade in building. He landed another peck on her lips and slid his hand down her face to her neck and then over to her shoulder before sliding the tips of his fingers down her back. He rose and settled her more onto his lap as he kissed her neck and then her throat, and she raised her chin for him, her hands cupping his biceps before he placed both of his hands about her rear and spread her butt cheeks open, and she slid another inch further onto him before she gurgled with the depth and breadth of his mass in her body even as she came about him in an orgasm that snapped taut about his erection. Then he cupped the sides of her breasts and brought his head up against her cheek before they faced one another again, and they shared the same breath, and when Sanari opened her eyes to see why he hadn't kissed her again, she found him looking right into her gaze.

“I'd be remiss to accept such a gift from you, Sanari... lest you took the same from me.” Sanari's eyes were growing stupid from her pleasure, but she nonetheless was mind enough to understand as she folded his head to her chest with her arms wrapping about his head. Sage turned his head and kissed her throat. “But... I... I haven't done this for half a century.”

Sanari's purr grew louder still and she chuckled. “It's been over three centuries for me.” She mused. “You'll find that it's like riding a bike. I have faith in you.”

Sage smiled and dipped his head into her bosom, smelling that scent of roses, lavender and rosehip between her breasts, and his hard on grew harder, and Sanari gave out her first real orgasm for him. And as she clung to him, she began to hear a noise, and she opened her eyes in wonder to the calming sound of a deep cackling rumbling sound, like the sound of an idling engine combined with distant thunder. In her passion-filled mind, it took her a few moments to realize that that was him... purring.

The vibration it caused vibrated his cock inside her body, and she moaned as they fell into the pillows, the force of the rocking motion driving him momentarily deeper inside her body, drawing out another orgasm as he embraced

her, cuddled her, holding her back with one hand and her bottom with the other while she rocked back and forth onto him, gasping and sighing with his kisses, and though she began this love making, she soon found herself succumbing to him till she found herself on her back, her back arching, and his lips fastening on her nipple. He licked it, blew on it to get it harder, and then sucked on it for a few minutes before doing the same to her other teat, massaging her secondary nipples with his thumbs while his fingers flared against her sides.

But Sanari took over the love making a short while later; riding his cock like it was a saddle horn.

And so it continued.

Hours later, and he still hadn't come into me, she thought. This is the longest I've ever been coupled with a male.

Sanari sighed, laying now with her back against his chest as she came again, splurting more of her juicy vaginal juices all around the glistening redness of his cock as she arched her back and orgasmed yet again. That was her ninety-ninth one! Her clit and her nipples were all so hard that they ached, and his hands were playing her chest, belly and crotch like an instrument, with massages, caresses, pressure with finger tips and claw pricks in places that kept her motor running, and her orgasms continually coming.

She slid a hand from over her hip, across her pelvis to finger her swollen and throbbing labia, massaging his cock with her fingers as it continued to throb and pulsate into her. She felt as if he were clenching his erection to help the throbbing motion, but nonetheless the combination of his maleness inside her and his fingers across her body had drawn out an unusually powerful pleased experience for her. He was using a form of carnal art on her...

She had her own carnal art, an art that had bent Aphkei officers around her little finger in the past, but her point was to get him to relax, not excite him further.

Through hours of connectivity, they'd turned and twisted, gyrated on top of her bedding into a myriad of positions that sometimes placed him in dominance, and other times placed her in dominance, but all throughout, he never groped her, never did anything to harm her, and his touches were caressing and gentle, massaging at the most.

As she lay against him now, he cradling her body, he wrapped his arms about her, one hand covering hers over their coupled sexes, the other massaging her left breast, its areola and nipple. She was gasping for air as he continually slid in and out of her, his back arching downward, hers arching upward to churn her honey pot, leaking more of her nectar that slid down his shaft and wet his sac.

But still... he'd not climaxed. *Such control*, she thought. Up until now she thought that that was a magical skill, but now that he was collared, she understood how powerful his will must be to last for so long.

She turned her head and shifted to look at him while he nibbled, licked and sucked on a spot on her neck, and when she kissed his cheek, he turned his head to kiss her lips, a long passionate kiss as his hand slid from one of her primaries to the other, her left tit pushing over the crook of his muscular arm while he now caressed the other.

Though she'd never had a baby before, milk leaked from her in small dribblets from her primaries.

"Y-you're very skilled, my lord." She said in a series of gasps while she purred. "But you're not relaxing like I asked you to."

His own purr continued to rumble her, and she tasted his lips as he kissed her solidly again. "I can't... you're so beautiful." He answered her.

She murred and licked his lips again. "Then we need to help you relax enough," she purred and sat forward, grasping a ball of his in either hand, she then rocked her hips and drew his nads toward her, massaging them with both hands.

She rubbed him, clenched her vaginal muscles, rolled her abdominals as she rocked repeatedly into him, squeezing his nads while she intensified her purr to vibrate her whole body. She could feel him stiffening inside her, felt him puffing his chest outward as the throbbing from him intensified, the long shaft swelling briefly till...

There was a dull thud inside her as the whole length of his manhood spasmed, and she gasped, orgasming around his climax as the explosions came. She felt his sack clench suddenly beneath her fingers as another batch of his seed was loaded, and then lanced up the entire length and then exploded once again inside her. Their combined juices slid out from within her, the sticky fluids seeping over her fingers as he exploded again, and his whole body shuddered as he pushed up into her.

Three, four... five loads and several quivering smaller ones as she cried out, her breasts jostling as she gave a little lurch forward, and a wash of her juices flooded her bowels around his erection as it relaxed inside her, and she gasped in and out repeatedly as several micro orgasms lanced through her loins, and she shivered from the power that had just exploded inside her.

What she'd experienced with him in the realms of dreams was nothing in comparison to what this was... But also, it could quite be because he'd changed when he became a dragon. Whatever it was... she couldn't quite remember a male that had fit her innards so completely and so perfectly like he'd just done.

She opened her eyes with a gasp, releasing her hold on him before she slowly rose, and the semi-flaccid length slid easily from her now, their shared juices leaking from her, glistening upon that erection before it slipped from her and her body drained nearly a quart of their juices.

Oh my sweet lover, she thought, and turned, hefting her breasts high atop his chest, their sticky bodies sticking to one another as she kissed him softly in thanks while his relaxing cock offloaded a steady slick of cum between their abdominals.

He weakly embraced her back and bottom, her tail lifting high as she kissed him again.

"Oh my sweet lord," she murred and kissed him; he returned her kiss, still purring softly now for her. "I..." she opened her eyes to look at him, and her lips moved in an attempt to say the words that she so wanted to say, to say '*I love you*' but found it difficult to do so. Again she failed in saying it, a third time he'd been in her arms, and this time for pleasure, and again she failed to say it. "I... I can feel you've relaxed a great deal my lord." She murred and her face fell in disappointment of herself.

He kissed her again, solidly this time, and she tasted and felt the passion on his lips. This was truly the man he was inside... and she was the first to see it. He was so gentle in private, and as he kissed and sucked briefly on her lower lip, she returned his kiss by licking his lips and kissing them again while her insides clenched again and she leaked more of their shared juices onto his body.

She murred, and then rose to sit on his lap, feeling his phallus beneath the lips of her crotch and the swells of her bottom while he held onto her hips.

"Hmmm, we're all sticky." She mused, looking down on him with loving eyes. He looked back up at her, not saying anything, but her mission seemed successful. His eyes were half closed, and he had a stupid, sleepy smile on his face while he purred that cackling purr steadily for her.

She fingered his heart stone for a moment.

"Wait right here, my lord... I will return shortly." And she bent down and kissed him before rising off him and the bed and stepped to her bathroom, folding a hand over her crotch to keep her from leaking all over her chambers.

It took less than ten minutes for her to shower and cleanse herself, dry and dress in a sleeping gown that revealed more than it covered.

When she returned, however, she found her sweet lord lying back in her bed, eyes closed but still purring sweetly. She stepped over to him and palmed his chest, and smiled.

“Perhaps I relaxed you too much...” she mewed, seeing that he’d fallen asleep.

Using the same basin she’d washed his feet with, she cleaned him off, and lifting a hand, he levitated upward before she removed the top sheet and replaced it with a wool blanket and then levitated him back onto the bed. She laid another blanket over him and then stopped, looking down at her sleeping gown. With a wry smile, she undressed from that as well, hung it back up in her closet, and then slipped naked beneath the covers to lie with her lord, one hand pressed over his Heart Stone while she pillowed her head on his chest, listening to him purr unconsciously, contentedly in his chest.

It wasn’t long till she herself had fallen asleep against her lord and dreamed sweet dreams.

Sanari awoke the next day rather late. When she awoke, it was with a start, her heavy breasts jostling as she gasped, and she hurried to dress and take up her staff, and then paused, seeing Sage still sleeping there. She paused longer and walked back to him, seeing his face in the dim light of her room, and suddenly looked down on the totally relaxed state of rest he was in. It was a face that wasn’t influenced by anything, no one to react to, and no one in whom to please. He was perfectly at rest, and suddenly she fell in love with that face.

The face of a person at sleep, showed the person that they truly were at the core of their being, and that face showed not a hint of hatred, not a hint of the demon that had raged across the school, and walking back to him, she sat down beside him, and bending close enough to him that her breasts pressed against his bare chest while he slept, she kissed him softly and caressed his face.

“Sleep well, beloved.” She whispered and nuzzled his nose with her own. “Sleep safe from all your nightmares.”

She rose again and smiled grasping her staff as she looked down at him before she left to tend to her students and her duties around the leagues.

Sanari returned later that evening after the gates had been closed, and her brows knit as she saw him laying there still. Setting her staff by the door she sat beside him, and fingered the side of his neck, looking for a heartbeat. It took nearly a full minute for her to feel the double tap of his heart beating, and even then it was so faint. Then she palmed his chest, and found that it took nearly five minutes for him to breathe in and out once!

Beloved, mayhap I over did it, she thought. She smoothed his lips with her thumb and then bent forward to kiss him. By this time, he’d already slept for twelve hours!

But then she remembered that he really hadn’t had a restful sleep for over fifty years... that he always meditated till recently, and whenever she stepped in to check in on his dreams psychically, she always viewed him with a troubled dream. So she touched her fingertips to her brow and peaked into his mind, and found that he was dreaming of sleeping. She felt a small smile crossing her lips as she watched him, and decided to add a little to his dreams.

Rising, she stripped of her clothes and then crawled in beside him. She closed her eyes and began to purr, and then he was moving, turning on his side and she opened her eyes and then felt a strong arm wrap about her and his firm body against her supple back.

And then he began to purr again as he snuggled with her.

The relaxing sensation and the feel of safety she felt while in his arms was so wonderfully pleasing, that even in his mind, she placed herself exactly as she was now, and in his dreams he turned to embrace her as well. It may have

been rather redundant to dream of sleeping, but, she honestly couldn't think of anything more relaxing... and soon she was succumbing to his dreams.

Sanari awoke as an orgasm split her loins, and she gasped as her eyes snapped open. She felt a warmth in her loins as her awaking mind quickly drew in awareness of the rest of her body, and she found herself mostly uncovered from the sheets of her bed while her breathing and heart raced. Then she focused on something thick piercing her loins, and lifting a leg, she saw the sticky moisture of shared juices string between her thighs, and the swell of her labia around the thickness of a powerful shaft piercing her loins.

A hand pressed to her chest, and she gasped, turning her head to see Sage's still sleeping face, but concentrating in ecstasy while he slowly ground her, sliding in and out, in and out...

She palmed his face as it slid toward her neck, and he licked her neck and shoulder, and closing her eyes, slid into his dreams, and immediately found their golden secret place unfold about her as she stood naked, looking at a copy of herself – the one she'd placed in his dreams – in the same position she was in reality.

She covered her mouth and nose and stifled a laugh.

His dreams must've evolved toward a wet dream, and as his physical body reacted, he simply erected right into her. When she'd fallen asleep against him, the way she'd fallen asleep with him spooned against her back, it was quite possible for it to happen.

She stepped over to the coupling bodies, and then squatted, knelt, turned and then laid down into the copy of herself, and soon she became the copy of herself as she laid there and let herself be pleased. Even in this dream state, it wasn't like it had been before. His maleness had indeed grown, and as he ground her she came in both the dream world and the real world.

Love you, she mouthed, said it into his ear, but speech was not possible in this world, and what did come as speech was difficult to acknowledge.

Sage did rise and palm her belly, looking lovingly at her, and his lips did mouth something but she couldn't understand what it was he'd said before he kissed her.

In their dreams, they made love until morning.

Sanari had grown concerned when she awoke on the second day, and couldn't rouse Sage from his sleep. So after Morning Prayer, she went to one of the communication nodes outside the shrine, and made a call.

"Greetings, Headmistress Sanari," Dallas said in greeting, bowing as his image appeared on the holoscreen. "How may I be of assistance?"

Sanari fidgeted. "Dallas... I need you to come to the shrine." She said.

Dallas's eyes narrowed and his features became suddenly serious. "Of course, Headmistress, I am now in route... but if I may ask... why?"

Dallas was well aware that he and his children were not allowed in her shrine. This was the second time in a year she'd invited him to her shrine.

"I believe Sage is sick." She said.

“Sick?!” Dallas gasped. “I’ll be there immediately,” and she heard a sonic boom off in the distance, and saw a streak of afterburners from perhaps Proteus.

“Thank you Dallas, I’ll await you at the gate.” She said and the communication broke.

Sanari wrung her hands, hoping that some strange incompatibility between Cercile and Dragons wouldn’t take him away from her...

Proteus was a creation of Sage’s that was a humanoid that could transform into nearly anything. Aerospace fighter, hover limo, giant robot with lots and lots of armaments... and a young, spunky human male. He could truly assume differing genders as well, but his attitude was primarily male, so he only assumed a feminine form when the need arose, and even then he didn’t like to.

At present, he landed as a sleek aircraft, and Dallas – Prot’s older brother – set a quick path away from him toward Sanari’s shrine. When he arrived, she curtsied to him, which made him worry. Sanari had never curtsied before he bowed.

“Thank you for coming so quickly,” she said in hushed tones, and led him to her home. “I don’t know what’s wrong.”

“Time is of the essence, Mother Sanari, but I will have to see him. Law dictates that he cannot have contact with me or anyone from the school without your or Drake’s say so. Do I have permission to examine him?”

“Yes!” she managed and then slid the door of her home open and led him inside, and he saw Sage in her bed, and stepped over to him.

Dallas palmed Sage’s chest, and looked him from head to toe briefly. Sanari felt only the barest twinge of his technological powers disrupting the natural forces of her shrine, but that was acceptable in this case. His brow furrowed and he did it again before rising and stepping back with a shocked look on his face.

“What is it?” Sanari asked.

“He’s... sleeping.” Dallas managed with a small wry smile.

“Dallas... I was able to tell that, but what’s wrong?” she asked.

Dallas stepped down from the bedding area and met her. “Why don’t we sit down and have some tea... and I’ll explain.”

Dallas worked through her kitchen as if he’d always been familiar with it, brewing a pot of tea while she sat at the small table next to the kitchen, he delivering a serving tray with two cups, a few cakes, and a pot of hot tea that he poured for them both.

Sanari took her filled cup and drank, and looked over to Sage while he still slept in her bed.

“When you first told me that he was sick... I was immediately worried, not really for him, but for everyone around him. Master Sage doesn’t get sick like you and many others would get sick... the only things that can give him cold or flu symptoms are class four and class five biohazards. If he was truly ill, then that meant that he was the direct attack of a viral infection, and you and everyone around him were in danger of concocting the same disease.” Sanari stared at him as he took a sip from his tea and continued. “Master Sage is not sick.

“As you are aware, my master has not slept well for decades. After the... incident, he’d been haunted by nightmares and troubled dreams that would keep him awake for days, sometimes weeks. He was so afraid to fall asleep that he’d do anything to remain awake. I finally had to sedate him.

“To escape his dreams, but also to avoid the madness of not sleeping, Sage would calm himself through practiced meditation. But despite that, he still needed four hours of actual sleep a month to make up for the lack of true REM sleep.

“Rarely has he ever had a night that was untroubled whenever he tried to sleep. I did record a time, about three years ago, and another two years ago, where he did sleep soundly and for a prolonged period of time.” Dallas took another sip of his tea and looked toward Sage. “This is the first, truly untroubled, dreamless sleep he’s had in over fifty years. How long has he been sleeping like this?” he asked her as he turned back to her.

Sanari was half smiling as she looked at her murky reflection in the dark tea in her hands. “For about thirty six hours now.”

“Truly?” Dallas smiled. “And what magical thing has the Mother Sanari done to my master to allow this?” Sanari looked away and blushed, and Dallas rose and knelt before her, taking her hand. “Forgive me,” he said and kissed the back of her hand. “Master carries your sent on him, and you carry his on you... likewise, there are certain... biological... evidences that have told me what has happened.” He held her hand with both of his now and bent his forehead to it. “You are a magical creature to allow my master such a thing as sleep, Mother Sanari. Thank you.”

“Y-you know what happened between us?” Sanari asked, her blush deepening.

Dallas rose and bowed. “Certainly, I can detect his genetic package in your bowels.” He winked and Sanari blushed again, and drank all her tea to hide her embarrassment.

“Forgive me for playing upon you mistress...” he said with another smile. “I’m truly glad that you’ve succeeded where no one else has been able to. I have greater faith that he is in the right hands now. Please take care of my master.”

“You need not worry about that,” Sanari said with a smile of her own. “I have a vested interest in Sage now... I’m sure that you understand.”

“I do...” Dallas said... “And you will be surprised on how much he shares that same interest... with you.”

The evening of the third day, Sanari stood before him late in the evening, seeing him sleeping there comfortably on her ever soft mattress, her many pillows and the silken sheets wrapped about his naked body. Seventy-two hours had passed since she’d left him to shower after their first love making, and she stepped forward, bent low to kiss his lips, and then turned to sit down beside him, palming his chest with her long fingers.

Then her gentle feline features fell slightly as she sat there, her tail wrapping about her legs beneath her robes.

“Beloved...” she began. “I’ve always wanted to call you that... perhaps when I first met you.” She smiled wanly, but then her smile faded. “Of all the times that you’ve thrown yourself into darkness, I somehow found myself there to catch you, and each time I found you in my arms, each time I cradled you and nursed you back to health, and this time, even when some of the darkness came back with you and you were overcome by it, I was again there to catch you, and again... I couldn’t bring myself to say it.

“I love you, Sage Preypacer. I’ve loved you for a very long time.

“Damn me for a fool.” She began to cry, her tears sparkling in her eyes. “Every time that I say those words, you don’t hear them. After the Particlecollider nearly destroyed you, after Minotaur broke you, and even now as I say it, you are not awake to hear it.

“I love you...” she wept, and her hand closed about his Heart Stone. “I so sincerely wish... that you knew that.”

She lifted her other hand and wiped her tears off, and sat there with her head bowed for a moment...

And then she felt motion behind her, and a hand gently took her hand resting on his chest. She lifted her head and her eyes widened as a body rose behind her, and suddenly she was being embraced about the middle, powerful arms wrapping about her as five fingers laced with her own four fingers covering Sage’s chest, and suddenly she felt a kiss on her cheek, and then heard his voice in her hooded ear at the top of her head.

“This time, you’ve been heard, and your love is accepted.” Sage’s voice said and he bent his head to kiss her as he wrapped her in his arms, purring softly for her as he dipped his head to kiss her.

Her eyes closed part way as she turned to him slightly, rubbing her cheek against his forehead.

“H-how long have you been awake?” she asked.

“Since you kissed me.” He said, and kissed her cheek.

“Oh.” She managed, breathing quick and shallow, and she trembled.

“Sanari... Please look at me.” Sage said, and she turned, and saw his eyes sparkling the most beautiful green she’d ever seen. And then cupping her face, he kissed her again.

Immortals live for a very, very long time. It is very difficult for them to die, so difficult that they are immune to death from natural causes... hence the term *‘immortal.’* Sanari had lived for twenty-five hundred years. In her life span, she’d managed to give her heart to only a few men, but repeatedly, each one entered her life and left it just as suddenly as they’d come, either by leaving her of their own accord, or simply her outliving them, and they’d kissed her, shared her love, and loved her physically one and the same. The last male she’d loved left her of his own accord.

It had been a long time since she’d experienced passion, and when passion came her way, she embraced it, loved it. But the passion held in that one kiss, that one solid loving embrace of the lips, pounded in her heart so powerfully, so pure and so true, that in that very instant Sanari forgot instantly about all her past loves.

In that instant, she gave her heart to him, and felt him give his to her truly, and completely, for ever and ever.

Such was the power... of a single kiss.

Sage had excused himself as he cuddled and kissed with Sanari, she having undone the collars of her robes to allow him to kiss her neck and throat. The duality of their purrs was relaxing, and when he’d raised and excused himself to clean himself, she was nearly ready for him. She asked him to hurry back but after the first few minutes, she decided that she couldn’t wait.

And so she rose, and began walking toward her bathroom where she could hear the waters of her shower running, and layer after layer, she stripped out of her robes, untied her panties, and entered her bathroom completely naked, unbinding her hair and laying a pair of hair stays on the sink counter, and parting the curtain to the shower, slipped inside behind his powerful body. Her body was drenched by the dual showerheads spraying from both directions, and she reached out to touch him, and Sage turned quickly, soap in his long unbound mane, and he smiled down at her diminutive form as she took a chamois cloth from its rack and the soap from his hands and began to wash him.

The most fun were his wings, which he unfolded.

Sanari smiled as he unsheathed, and handing him the cloth and soap, turned her back to him and lifted her tail, and steadily he cleaned and washed her as well, inch by inch, her nipples hardening, her crotch swelling, and when she turned to face him, she made soothing sounds like sighs and coos as he washed her chest, front and belly.

And then the play began.

Kneeling before her, he kissed her love mound as he cupped her behind with one hand, and she arched her back, holding onto his head as she laughed, combing his mane back in the waters with her claws as he rose a little higher, kissing her teats, and when he rose higher still to nestle kisses on her neck, her fingers found his erecting shaft and guided it to enter her body.

Deeper and deeper he penetrated, his hands spreading the cheeks of her bottom open so that he could pierce her deeper, and she wrapped a leg about his waist hanging from his body while they made love in the shower. It was a bit harder this time, faster, made to pleasure each other, and this time Sanari used her carnal arts on him getting him to climax repeatedly across several hours, till at long last they retreated to her bath house. There in the steaming hot waters, she focused on kisses, her chest pressed against his throat while she cradled his head with one arm, caressed it with her other hand, and kissed him repeatedly – moving her mane of hair back away from her face occasionally – while he cradled her by her behind and slid in and out of her pleasingly, returning her kisses.

Sage looked up at her, his dual hearts beating, and he began to look for a moment... the perfect moment... to tell her something very important to him:

That he loved her too...

Sage found it... difficult... over the next few weeks to find that perfect moment. Whenever they drew close to one another and had relative privacy with each other, they invariably fell into each other's arms. Morning Prayer had completed, and helping out, he'd entered and found Sanari's eyes immediately before looking away, and taking up his broom, he began to sweep the floor of the shrine proper. Her students left one by one while Sanari put out the candles, Sage being meticulous in making sure every square inch was swept. He continued sweeping as Yusuma tarried behind to ask Sanari a few questions, and Sage began to feel an ache in his chest as Yusuma drew out her questions agonizingly...

"Thank you Mother... I will take your advice in stride." She curtsied, and Sage paused, looking at her as he stood a good thirty feet away from Sanari as she put out the last of the candles.

"You're welcome Yusuma... Please close the door on your way out."

"Of course mother," and she knelt outside, slid the door shut, and Sage and Sanari watched Yusuma's shadow move away before Sage dropped his broom and he and Sanari met half way between where each other stood, embracing and kissing one another before they collapsed to their knees at the center of the floor.

They did not make love in this instance... doing so in a Cercile shrine – or any shrine for that matter in both of their minds – would be disrespectful... but showing their affection was not.

Happenstances like this just kept happening, and they ranged from simple loving embraces to full fledged making out inside and outside the shrine.

Some of the instances were close calls from various individuals walking in on them, but all in all, the only individuals who knew of and was happy about Sanari and Sage's union... was Eakjo and Dallas. Somehow, they both kept the fact of their growing love for each other a secret from all other eyes.

But it wasn't always easy to do.

Deep inside the shrine's gardens, where tall trees were formed and cast shadows over everything, Sanari had met with Sage early in the morning while he was sweeping, and a touch led to a caress, and a caress led into a passionate embrace.

Sage's fingers had deftly begun to unfasten Sanari's clothes from her as she pulled his shirt back from off his shoulders, un-tucking it, unfastening his sash about his waist while he pushed all the layers of her clothing open, massaging her breasts and she gasped and sighed amidst his kisses, his fingers untying her panties and groping her crotch as she pulled his phallus out. He was about to enter her when he stopped, his long tapering ears rising with a flapping sound to the top of his head, and he turned, half erect and his groin pressing against her sex and his hands groping her rear.

"B-beloved... what is it?" she gasped.

"Tla, Eakjo and Yusuma." Sage said, and stepped back.

"Oh no..." Sanari gasped and looked down at her naked bodice, and then looked around for someplace to hide. "What can we do?" she asked as Sage folded his shirt one side over the next, closed his pants and fastened his belt. He looked to her and slid in to kiss her.

"Don't you worry, but try not to move much, or all this will come undone."

"What?" she tried to ask, but he stepped back, and began to fold all the layers of her robes and clothing over her body, and tightened her banded sash together. He stepped back, looked at her hair and the few loose strands of her hair hanging over one eye, and lifting a pair of claws, he pulled out another series of strands on the other side of her brow to balance the look of her hair out.

He smiled, winked, and stepping back, he leapt, even as the shadows of Tla with Eakjo on her shoulders, and Yusuma came into view.

Eakjo's shadow actually lifted its head and followed Sage as he leapt tremendously up into the air, his body twisting and then landing behind them, where he picked up his broom from where he left it against a tree and continued to sweep.

"Oh! Mother Sanari." Yusuma curtsied with Tla as they walked their staves. "What are you doing out here?"

"I was checking up on Sage. Have you seen him?" Sanari asked, seeing his shadow approaching as he swept casually.

"We have not." Tla said, but then the sounds of a broom against stone entered their ears, and right then, Eakjo piped up.

"Papa!" he said and hopped off Tla's shoulders and rushed up to Sage, clinging to his chest and making cute sounds like '*Wark-wark!*' and '*Kawaii!*' It was very cute, and Sage cradled him up, laughing.

"Wait... we just came up that path, Tla... did you see him back there?" Yusuma asked her partner, and Tla shrugged her shoulders... a tremendous thing to see as this lifted both her massive breasts and parted her robes to reveal more of those mammaries.

Sage moved up to them and bowed slightly, holding onto Eakjo before the Zhumal climbed up onto his back and cried out happily. "Priestess Yusuma... Priestess Tla. Good morning." Sage said graciously.

Both ladies eyed him suspiciously.

"I'm sorry, Mother Sanari... did you say that you were looking for me?" Sage asked.

“Hey! How did you know that?” Tla asked as Sage handed her Eakjo.

Sage lifted his ears from where they’d folded against the back of his head. “My hearing is very acute, priestess...” he bowed before folding them again. “Is everything ok with you, Priestess? Any complaints like you mentioned before?”

Tla looked sidelong at Yusuma and managed a small nervous smile. “N-no... not in weeks. Thank you Lord Sage.”

Her complaints were the occasional back spasms, which thanks to Sage’s treatments Tla didn’t have to worry about to much more.

“Just Sage, Priestess... I... don’t believe that I can accept the title of Lord any longer.”

Tla smiled pleasantly, but Yusuma turned to her companion. “Complaints?” she asked.

“A private matter.” Tla said quickly. “Good day, Mother Sanari, Mister Preypacer... I have to go do my morning exercises.” That meant she was about to go get milked... and exercise to keep herself loose. There were a lot of code words that were used regarding her condition of being a sexy, large breasted fem – or rather largest breasted fem in all the leagues, even larger than Clio most of the time – that constantly needed to be milked, to help protect the sanctity of the shrine. Best if Acolytes – in particular the males – didn’t hear about her daily complaints and needs as a woman. Also... Eakjo was getting up there in age, and though he hadn’t nursed in months from her... he still came to her and slept against her at night.

Hopefully they could separate the two before he experienced his first rut.

“Thank you Tla, Yusuma.” Sanari said. “Could you please leave us? I have a private matter in which I’d like to discuss with Sage.”

“Yes Mother Sanari,” the two priestesses said, curtsying before they moved back down the pathways.

Sage waited for them to completely leave while he stared into his love’s beautiful blue eyes, before he stepped forward and pulled something from his pocket:

Sanari’s panties.

“I believe we forgot to refasten these.” He smiled, and smelled them before her before offering them back to her.

Sanari smiled subtly, suddenly realizing as she pressed her thighs together that she indeed wasn’t wearing any underwear.

“It’s a bit relieving, in a way.” She said, and moved closer to him, palming his chest with one hand and kissing a spot at the center of his chest that he liked. “But you hold onto them. My students will be awaking soon, and it’s not necessarily a requirement to wear underwear in my shrine; too many males and herms that are overly built in their manhoods, and too many fems who’ve come from progressive societies.”

Sage pocketed her panties.

“I’ll keep them as a good luck charm,” he said and looked into her face, palmed her face and then kissed her. “I’ll return them to you tonight.” And then he focused his gaze into her eyes, and caressed the front of one of her breasts, and she felt her teats erect.

“As soon as the gates are closed... I don’t think I can wait any longer.” She murred, and bent forward to kiss him. “Don’t keep me waiting.”

Sage smiled. “As you wish...”

Later that night, Sanari waited with her back to the door after the setting of the sun, and then she heard her door open, and Sage entered. She turned, feeling her heart quicken as he reached in his pocket, and pulled out her white silken panties, smelled the scent of them again, and approaching her, placed them on a table that he passed.

He came to stand directly before her, his chest puffing up in pride as he looked down at her, felt her reach up to palm his abs and slide her fingers up over his six nipples and onto his chest, before she edged closer, pushed his shirt from off his shoulders, and kissed a spot just over his left nipple, she pulled his shirt from out of his trousers and then pushed the rest down about his arms, and as she stepped back, she found him pulling open the first layer of her clothing, briefly palming her breasts as his hands moved about her to open her robes.

She chuckled, and stood there as he slipped out of his shirt, and focusing upon her breasts, he peeled open layer after layer of clothing, finding more layers than ever before from her purposefully dressing in more for this moment. Sage didn't mind... it was like unwrapping a precious gift. Her clothes caught at the crooks of her arms while she undid his trousers, and then she felt his fingers part open the last layer of her clothes, and his touch glanced over her love mound, rubbing his knuckles over her twin labia, over her clitoris and up along her body to be joined by the touch of his other hand, before his hands fell upon her breasts. His hands continued upward after a brief pause, dragging his finger tips along her throat before fanning about her face, holding her there, holding her gaze with his eyes, and then bent forward to kiss her. His pants and the folds of her clothes all fell to the ground about them as she lowered her hands briefly, pushing his pants down and allowing her robes to fall off her arms before her fingers rose again to coax him more.

And all this while they kissed.

Sage turned, cradled her and picked her up while they kissed and kissed, his phallus drawing fully erect as he carried her to the bed, and laying her down, settled between her legs, and smelled her love mound before setting himself to kissing and moistening it with his tongue in a repeat, but in opposite positions, of the first time she'd chosen to love him.

After Sanari had creamed in her first orgasming rush, her breathing quick and deep, Sage rose up to her, wiping his mouth off with a thumb before kissing her, and amidst their kiss, he entered her, her legs flaring wide open in reflex to his mass, and he slid himself slowly into her so as not to hurt her... deep, deep into her vaginal recess, and began an hours-long ritual that happened nearly every night now to see who could please the other better.

He often lost he felt... but then... he didn't know what Sanari was experiencing. But sadly... tonight, again, was not a night to tell her how he felt about her. He sighed, and continued to grind her... grind her that is till she got him onto his back and rode him, clawing at his chest.

He often found himself on his back with her. But nonetheless... theirs was a passion that made all the pain go away.

He'd found where he belonged...

Sanari stepped rapidly along the swept cobbles of her pathways, her ears pricked up as she looked about her, worried that one of her students might awake and look out at her as she rushed by.

Finally, she got to Sage's room, which, as always, was a small room, with nothing but a floor pallet and now a small bench for his folded clothes to remain upon. She entered his room and closed the door and then the window, and looking down at him in the cool moonlight; she stepped quietly up to him and sighed in contentment.

For a moment, he looked as if he were sleeping, but then he opened his eyes, their glowing light looking right at her as if he'd never been sleeping at all.

"You're awake." She stated, smiling at him. "Can't sleep?"

“I find that I don’t need to sleep as much... though I do try because you asked, it’s little more than me resting here with my eyes closed while I contemplate things.”

Sanari smiled. “Namah told me that you might need less sleep than others. Even as exhausted as you were, at first, you managed to stay awake for a whole week... may have been longer if Namah hadn’t injected you with that sleep aid.” She paused. “What do you think about?”

“Several things... but I find my concentration is constantly broken by thoughts of a gentle woman who has watched over me as of late.”

Sanari blushed. It was closer to what she wanted to hear from him, the words of *‘I love you’* but she wouldn’t press it. He’d already stated that he loved her... or at least his light half did. Now that light and darkness were merged, that meant there was a kindled fire inside him that still did love her. She’d let it happen on its own time.

“I couldn’t sleep myself, beloved.” She said and knelt beside him. “I wanted to come and check on you. A-are you ok?” she asked, and her brows compressed that she’d just asked him such an obviously veiled question.

But he covered for her. “You look cold in just that blanket, Sanari.” He said, and opened his blanket, showing his naked form beneath. Apparently he’d been expecting her.

She opened her blanket, revealing her perfect naked body, and her teats erected a little as she looked down at his strong, exotic form, and sliding in with him, using his arm as a pillow, she pressed against his body, moving herself so that his groin formed into the bowl of her crotch, and she pressed against him, and arm about his side while he lowered the blanket and then cupped her shoulder with one great hand. They both began to purr for each other at the same time.

This night wouldn’t be a night of love making. Rather it was a quiet night of rest, naked body against naked body as they shared each other’s warmth on a cold night. She kissed his chest, he kissed her forehead, holding onto her pleasantly, lovingly, helped her to relax and rest against her as he breathed in sharply, and what little fire for a breath weapon that he could generate flamed inside his chest to warm her further to the point where she was almost sweating.

Cats loved heat, and Sanari was no exception. She nestled closer to his chest and fell pleasantly into slumber.

Sage purred for her all night, watching over her as she slept... and she slept soundly on that hard mat, embraced in his arms, sleeping better than she’d been able to for as long as she could remember... and for an immortal... that was an exceptionally long time...

Sanari sat in a chair, absentmindedly stirring honey into her tea at the Iksaki home.

Rae had many friends, and a new, recent addition to this circle was her little sister Fatima. It was a sign that Fatima was growing up that she was now able to join this circle of friends as a woman. No children, no men, just a bunch of adult women enjoying each other’s company. Noxi was there, Fatima and of course Rae, Cyvel – in place of Illia, Rae wished for Cyvel to feel at home with them, even though Cyvel was currently scowling at her tea – as well as Equis.

Rae noted that Sanari had a subtle smile on her face, a dreamy look and also noted that she hadn’t even tasted her tea yet as she just stirred it and stirred it.

“You’re rather quiet today, Sanari.” Rae said, and Sanari continued to look off into the distance, stirring her tea. “Sanari?” Rae prompted again, and Sanari blinked and looked around.

“Oh! I’m sorry... I was thinking about... something.”

“Something?” Noxi asked, and smiled impishly. “About what?”

Sanari blushed, and then lifted her tea and drank some to hide the blush. “Some interactions with my ward.”

“*Interactions?*” Equis repeated. “Sanari... you’re being veiled. What is it really?”

Sanari became the view of everyone in the room as the conversation halted, and she caressed the side of her cup with the tip of a finger.

“I believe I’ve found Sage’s center.” She said, and cleared her throat as she started to murr to keep it from continuing. “And at the same time... he found mine. She looked slyly across the room at Rae.

“Sanari!” Rae exclaimed astonished, for she was well familiar with the Cercile faith, having known Sanari perhaps longer than any of them. “That means you and he are lovers!”

There was a collective gasp, and Sanari’s smile and blush deepened. “I will not acknowledge...” she paused, and looked meaningful at Rae. “...Or disavow that statement Rae. A respectable woman never discusses her personal life.”

“Oh I don’t believe you.” Noxi said, catching on Sanari’s implication that it indeed was going on. “You need to prove that.”

Sanari’s smile was as wide as a Cheshire cat’s.

“He... has a scar on his manhood; right beneath the head... it’s a religious thing.”

“Everyone knows that!” Fatima said. “They were talking about it at the Shadow League for about a month, and we kept trying to get all the Teran males to show us their units to prove the fact. And then Ka slung it out that one day and...” Fatima blushed and squirmed a little at the look her sister gave her, but then they both broke out into giggles.

“I can vouch for that,” Rae said. “And so can Fatima. We both saw him naked when he first arrived and Fatima got him to go into the women’s bathing pool. But as Fatima said... you need to be more convincing.”

Sanari looked at Rae, then down at her tea. “He has a freckle... right on its end, his right hand side on the top.” She said and took another sip of her tea, and Rae gasped.

“Sanari! That’s wonderful!” and Rae rose and settled beside her. “How long has this been going on? When was the first time?”

The talk became hushed and secretive, Equis and Noxi listening and laughing, while Fatima and Rae together drilled Sanari for details. Cyvel, however, sat nearby, her scowl deepening. Not at the fact that Sanari was finding pleasure... but at the fact that Sage was. Soon her jaw was clenching, and rising from her seat and excusing herself, she went out to get some air... and think.

Sanari rested in her pillows and blankets that very night, hugging her beloved to him as he nuzzled her body from her breast to her lips, holding onto her while he pierced her loins with his maleness invading her body. She caressed his face, and he rose, looking down at her.

“I love you.” She reaffirmed and scraped her claws down his powerful chest and belly.

Sage fingered her lips, his lips motioning as if he wanted to say something, and she looked up at him hopefully as he caressed the insides of her breasts with one hand, and then uncovered a black key. He paused, his gaze lowering to

the key between her breasts, and using his claws, he picked at the golden chain it was on, and moved it out of the way before he again palmed her breasts.

“I know... and I’ve never been happier to hear such words.” He smiled sheepishly, but the look in his eyes told Sanari he was cursing himself. Something was still holding him back.

“I’m glad.” She said, and lifting her hands, drew his head down to her chest so that she could feel his kisses and tongue about her breasts, her hips rocking to accept his erect phallus while they continued to make love.

Take your time, beloved, she thought inwardly, her body accepting his subtle touches as she came repeatedly around him. She loved him, and he knew it... it was a start. *I’ll find your true center soon, dearest heart,* she thought, kissing his forehead. *I’ll make you my lord... and then you’ll have nothing left to fear.*

Chapter Ten: Walkabout

Sanari awoke the next day completely soothed and with the warmth of sunlight bathing her from her window. She'd slept in, but she didn't care. She also smelt roses, and opening her eyes, she was met with the red, red rose in her hands. She smiled at it, and then frowned, noting that her love wasn't there, and she rose from her bedding, handling the rose in her hands as she pushed it to her mouth and nose. There was no mistaking who'd left it there for her, but she half expected Sage to still be there when she woke up.

This was the first time in many nights that he hadn't been there with her when she awoke.

Perhaps he was just sweeping her paths again, she considered, and placing the rose in her hair behind her ear, she pulled on a gown and strode to her perfumes, and dipping the applicator, she placed more of the perfume Kit had helped her to make, a little on each wrist, a little behind each ear, and, now that she'd landed her love, some between her breasts, and to either side of her sex before she closed her robe up and strode to the door. But then she stopped, and turned, and right next to a pair of her white silken panties that he'd placed there so she'd notice it, was a folded note bearing her name in Sage's precise scrawl.

Her face fell as she moved to the note, looking at her name on the outside of the V-folded thing, written in the language of her own people, and she opened it... again... it was written in her own language.

Dearest Sanari,

Please forgive me for not saying goodbye; I couldn't bear to awaken a creature as lovely as you, lest I be cursed for doing such a sin.

My people have a tradition called a Walkabout... its concept has evolved over the many centuries, but I felt I needed a time of separation. A Walkabout, is done when one has lost a part of themselves in the past, and so we start to walk in search for that missing part. When we find it, we sit down with that part, and talk with it, telling it about what has happened to ourselves, and listen to what has happened to it. And then we may become one again... and walk together in harmony.

You need not fear, I have not lost my mind again... but I have a problem that is similar.

There is a question in my heart that I need an answer to, but my problem is, is that I don't even know what the question is to ask it in order to get my answer. I've left to seek it out.

I... could not remain with you while I sought out this question, for you are a wonderful distraction – a most wonderful distraction – and I felt that I couldn't face you again lest I knew this question and could ask it. I have not left you; I have not even left this planet, but please, do not follow me lest you consider it important.

I know that you love me, and I will hold that warmth inside me for where I've chosen to go. Please stay there, look after your students, and be safe.

I will return to you... I swear to god that I will return to you.

- Sage

Sanari's face fell.

"You need time away from me, beloved." She said aloud, summing up the entire note. "But usually when I hear that from a man, they never come back." She opened the note and read the last line again:

I will return to you... I swear to god that I will return to you.

She drew hope from that as she fingered it with one clawed hand.

“Dearest heart, please find yourself and return to me.”

The following seven days were the loneliest that Sanari had felt in a long, long time... and her love still had yet to return. People were beginning to ask where Sage was, and she was running out of excuses. Finally she began to state that he was on an errand, but said nothing more.

Her morning and evening, as well as her mealtime prayers all ended with the words “And please let my dearest love return to me.”

Till one morning, as she fingered the key beneath her breasts through the layers of fabric of her robes, she opened the gate to the shrine, and stopped, seeing Daedalus standing there.

“Mother Sanari... may I speak with you?” he said simply, and Sanari led him inside with nothing more than a subtle nod.

Soon they were inside her home, and he’d prepared a small breakfast for her and tea for both of them. She was beginning to understand why Sage kept him around all the time. His presence did make life easier.

“Why are you visiting, Dallas?” she asked as he finished pouring the tea.

“I am here on an errand for Master Drake, Mistress Sanari.” He said simply, and sat down across from her. “He’s wondering where his son is.”

Sanari stopped drinking her tea and set the cup and its plate down on the table before looking at Dallas. He was watching her intently. Drake wouldn’t have sent him lest he already knew something was wrong, and then Sanari remembered that he said that one could detect where the collar wearer was through the key.

Sanari sighed, and lifting an arm, reached inside her sleeve to a sort of pocket on the inside of her robes, and removed the note Sage had written before handing it to Dallas. He opened it up, glanced at it and then sighed as he folded it again.

“A walkabout.” He repeated, and then looked directly at Sanari. “It must be pretty serious if he’s decided to go on one.

“How long does one last?” Sanari asked, nibbling on a piece of toast.

“Days... weeks... years.” Dallas answered, and Sanari looked up with a blank look on her face. “Decades.” He added and then continued. “It depends upon the person. Some aboriginals of the Australian continent get the urge to go on walkabout, and they don’t return from it till just before they die.”

Sanari looked down at her tea.

“Where would he have gone?” She asked.

“Master Sage would go where he would be most comfortable, Mistress Sanari. He is a Snow Tiger by birth... and he loves the cold. Being that this is a tropical planet, there are very few places where there is snow sufficient enough for him to be comfortable in. But then he was also a mountain cat, and would be most comfortable in craggy mountain ranges.”

“But we’re on an island. How on earth would he get there in the first place?” Sanari asked.

Dallas pursed his lips. “Talismongering?” he added hopefully.

“Talismongering?” Sanari repeated skeptically. It was the art of enchanting items without any outward magic of your own. Rituals and runes, placing objects in strong magical fields, alchemy and what not.

“It is required courses prior to Artificing in the Holy Order, Mistress Sanari. One can only imagine he fashioned a short range teleportation device of some sort, and the whole of Mystic Island is a strong magical source of this world.”

Sanari nodded. “Thank you Dallas. That narrows down where he could be considerably.”

“Thank you for having me, Mistress Sanari.” Dallas said and then rose before bowing. “But I must get back to my many duties and notify Master Drake of this information.”

Sanari paused and then turned and then rose. “Dallas...” she prompted, and Dallas stopped, turned on his heel and bowed again.

“Yes Mistress?” he prompted.

“Dallas, up until recently, you always referred to me as ‘*Mother Sanari*’ or ‘*Headmistress Sanari*.’ Why are you calling me ‘*Mistress Sanari*’ now?”

Dallas smiled. “I call my father ‘*Master*,’ Mistress.” He said with kind, mischievous eyes. “I would be a fool not to acknowledge his relationship with a woman who would show herself to become our new mother.” Sanari blinked at that statement. Dallas did indeed call Sage Master, but whenever he did... he was also using the term in relation to the concept of a father. So by calling her mistress... meant that he was calling her mother. “Good day Mistress Sanari.” He bowed, and left.

Sanari stood there, pondering over this.

Sage, in his youth, had made four companions, friends who also looked to him as their father. Daedalus, Proteus, Mélange and Matee. If her relationship with Sage became final... then suddenly she would be the mother of four step-children. She folded her hands together and contemplated for a moment. Then taking a deep breath, she rushed over to her closet, and began removing her warmest clothes.

Sanari appeared along the northern continent, at the foot of the tallest mountain on the planet, a place that the natives called “Spirit Mountain,” for some reason or another. Strangely enough, the “Demon Moon,” the one with Sage’s claw mark along its face, rose up along its peak at this late hour of this region of the world.

Sanari took that as a good sign.

She wore her robes and a pair of warm boots, some woolen trousers beneath her robes, and a heavy coat beneath a cloak. She could already see her breath as she removed one of her mittens and pulled the key from beneath her collars and scarf, and held it in her hand, blew on it.

“Where is Sage?” she asked it, and the key turned to point at the peak.

She’d done this back on the Mystic League when she’d learned that there were two places on the world that were high peaks and cold weather to both the north and the south. The key had pointed north, and now the key was pointing right at the highest peak.

She exhaled, and re-deposited the key into her robes and closed herself up, bundling her clothes around her. She then started to climb.

Sanari had rarely had to live in cold weather, let alone arctic weather such as this. To think that Sage was born right in a snow bank made her shudder at the thought as she hugged her cloak about her. The winds blew harshly, pelting one side of her body with cold snow, and she was shivering.

“SAGE!” she called out again, her feminine voice echoing throughout the mountains, and snow fell off a peak far away with a slump. “SAGE!!” she cried out louder, and continued walking when no answer came.

She’d lived on that mountain for days, often with little shelter. She was running out of food, and every day she got colder and colder. It was hard to light a fire, even in the wind breakers of the trees as she wrapped herself up in blankets, and she grit her teeth as she walked through snow drifts that were more often than not thigh high.

She carried a lantern on a stick, shining as a beacon for him while she repeatedly called out his name, and she wondered how in the world he could be comfortable in this?

“S-Sage!” she cried out in desperation... now more for him to rescue her from this... but she would not leave without him. “Sage...” she repeated in a whisper... crying, her tears freezing to her face, and she prayed that something would happen that would bring him to her.

And then she took a step, and with a gasp she sank right through the snow and out the other side, and the next thing she knew she was tumbling and sliding down the mountain. One rule of survival while on a mountain is don’t fall... for if you start to fall, more often than not, you won’t stop till you hit the bottom.

Sanari screamed as she was rolled off a short cliff, tumbled, and her light smashed with a small explosion of flame against a rock while she tumbled further down the slope, creating small avalanches. She collided with a stone, and she cried out again as her shoulder slammed against it, and then her head careened against another stone. The shock from the head blow made her spasm as she was tipped off another short cliff, and blacking out from a concussion, she tumbled to a stop and laid face down in the snow, exhaling a deep breath as all her body systems shut down.

There she lay, as the very last thought in her mind echoed through her heart.

‘Sage...’

The sound of snow crunching beneath feet during the snow storm came about an hour later. A tall, top-heavy yet lithe creature, dressed only in chaps and a loincloth, with a heavy scarf and a wooden visor with a long slit cut in its center approached the body lying in the snow.

The creature bent low, and turned the fem, and with a single claw, hooked his finger into her scarf to look at the beautiful features of the woman hidden beneath all the layers of cloth. The clawed hand caressed her face and slid a hand over her lips, and she exhaled slowly as the tips of his fingers checked the artery in her neck for a pulse. He then reached beneath all her layers of clothing to clasp a hand to her belly, and felt that her belly was ice cold.

The wind picked up just then, and with a trembling, the creature’s back unfolded, revealing a pair of massive leathery wings that redirected all the wind as the creature picked up the woman in his muscular arms, curling her into a ball before wrapping her in her own cloak. Then rising, he wrapped his wings about himself, and took in a deep breath of air, stoking a furnace of fire in his chest, and the woman gave off a small whimper before her body instinctively moved toward the heat that was so close to her.

The creature then began to walk back in the direction in which he’d come from, climbing the mountain, leaping where necessary, picking his way upward to a rock face in the side of the mountain, and lifting a hand from inside the cloak formed of his wings, pushed a leather drape out of the way, and brought the woman known as Sanari inside a dry cave, away from the howling of the wind outside.

Sanari groaned as the creature laid her down and rapidly began to open up all her robes and clothes, revealing her naked bosom first before he then stripped her legs bare of all her clothing. He then folded his wings, and moved

sideways, picking up a stone, he exhaled onto it with what little fiery breath he had, and the talisman symbols imbued within the stone made it light and produce a strong heat. He placed it in a circle of like stones, and a dozen other stones likewise imbued as the first all shared the heat, intensified it and shared the heat till all the stones burned white with fire.

Then the creature removed his scarf and snow visor before he looked to Sanari with an agonized face.

Sage quickly removed his loincloth and chaps, and then crawled on top of her, pulling several heavy furs over their bodies while he covered her forehead with one hand and took another deep breath, stoking his furnace of fire, and bending down to exhale into her mouth, blowing his own warm air into her lungs.

“Why did you follow me, beloved?” He asked her as she exhaled a moan and her arms half flailed before she clutched to him. “Thank the maker that you’re still alive.” He whispered, and turned her with him so that they both lay on their sides.

“S-Sage.” She whimpered, and snuggled closer to him.

“I’m here... I’m here... Just hold onto me, Sanari. I’ll protect you.”

She moved closer to him, whimpered again as her fingers clutched fiercely onto whatever recesses she could hold onto. There, in that cave, surrounded by ice and snow, Sanari finally found her savior. Though not exactly as she’d wished it to be, her prayer was answered.

The natives of Wave World were small goat-like creatures. Omnivorous, tribal and furred in mostly gold, blacks and whites, they were slender hunters and gatherers dressed in leathers. Males were called Rams, Females were called Ewes and their young were called Calves. Their level of technology was bows and arrows and spears, and their level of magic was shamanism.

With the presence of the Mystic, Grace and Shadow Leagues on their world, their Shamans have all seen many of the things that had happened here on their lands, and recently, they saw the battle that had happened several months ago, the appearance of the beast having risen from the Lord of Light and Darkness, and him leaving his mark on the moon that is now called the Demon Moon.

Kerchak was a seasoned hunter of many seasons, and presently he was being followed by his younger brother Gar, a budding ram who had experienced visions that could make him a Shaman, but his brother wouldn’t have a weak shaman in his herd, and was dragging him along on a hunt in hopes of searing that shaman tendencies out of him with good wholesome hunting.

“Come on!” Kerchak said, turning in the moonlight as the seemingly endless night of this time of year finally allowed the moons to come through. A puff of vapor escaped his bearded mouth as his oval pupils widened to catch his brother lagging behind.

“But I feel something here.” Gar said... his own rams horns only just beginning to develop, and he hadn’t grown a beard yet. For that matter, he was still a virgin, and untested with the many untamed ewes of the herd.

“Enough of your damnable shaman tendencies. You are not a shaman, so stop acting like one.” Kerchak said and turned round, strode back and took his brother by the elbow. “We are on the path of the largest beast I’ve ever seen sign of in these mountains, and you wanna sit around and chant and smoke things. Give me a moment and I’ll give you something to smoke... that breakfast we had will be coming out in a short while.”

“I’m serious!” Gar groaned. There’s some warmth coming from here, feel!” and he took his brothers hand and pushed it forward, and Kerchak’s brows beetled as he indeed felt the warmth.

“So? What’s this mean, mighty arch druid?”

“That there’s something making heat, stupid.” He moved closer to the warmth. “Look!” and he pointed, and Kerchak saw a flickering light source. “Is there anyone else on this mountain?”

Kerchak hit his brother on the noggin with his fist, and Gar covered his head and winced at his brother. “Don’t call your elder’s stupid, Gar. And I haven’t heard of any hunting lodges this high up, and no one lives up here. But this bares investigation.”

And so Kerchak moved forward, his spear leading the way as he found a leather covering, and tipping his spear into the flickering opening flapping from the wind, he pushed it back, and gasped at the sight that they saw.

It was a dry cave, with strange writings and images all around its edges from paintings, the detail and perfection of the images the best he’d ever seen. There were a multitude of leathers curing and furs on the ground, a horde of a mighty hunter, with things like tools and instruments made from the bones. There were rocks at the center of the room that appeared to be on fire, burning white with light with shaped stones everywhere around them, and curing meats cooking over the fiery stones.

Gar slid in behind him as he entered the chamber as they looked at all the wonderful and exotic things here. Kerchak saw the wonders of a master hunter, and Gar saw the wonders of an arch druid. And then they both looked at a female, with the shape and form of a cat with golden fur, tall and emblazoned with soft muscles. Her femininity was perfect, and the way she laid with one arm beside her head, the other splayed off her side, a knee up in the air and her other leg projecting beneath her, both Kerchak and Gar looked upon her in awe at the perfection of her body.

Immediately, they both thought they were looking upon a goddess.

“She’s beautiful.” Gar said.

“Yes...” Kerchak said, and lifted his spear. “Perfect... a goddess...”

“Kerchak...” Gar said, as his brother advanced on her. “W-what are you doing?”

“A goddess, Gar... just think of it. And there’s no better situation! If I slay a goddess, even in her sleep, and drink her blood, I will absorb the power of the lions that is in her, and become a god myself. I will be Kerchak, the God Slayer! And I will be worshiped.”

“A-are you mad?! Do you know who that is?” Gar hissed. “Her description the Shamans and druids talk about. That is the Mother Sanari! Do you know who she has claimed into her service? The Beast! The Lord of Light and Darkness.”

“I won’t fear some failed beast, Gar,” Kerchak answered, his mouth drooling as he thought about eating her meat, drinking her milk and blood, and he lifted his spear. “I will wear her golden fur as a badge of honor!” he hissed, and then moved to strike.

But his spear didn’t move, not a single measure forward, and he jerked on it, and felt that it must be stuck, and as one, both he and Gar turned and yelped at what they saw.

A creature was standing in the entrance of the chamber, his frame so massive that it blocked out the wind, a five fingered hand holding onto the end of Kerchak’s spear haft.

The creature lifted its head and opened a pair of green within green eyes, and Gar gave a moan as he recognized the description of The Beast the shamans had called, the monster that was once the Lord of Light and Darkness that went mad, changed and was tamed by the grace of the Mother Sanari, Goddess of Fertility and Love.

He was monstrous, his form to them seeming to be made of nothing but angular edges and points, and muscles that seemed to be greater than a thousand rams. A massive horned bow hung from his back, with arrows that were a measure thick. A loin cloth and a scarf hung about him, with leather bracers about his wrists. Claws that could

sheer stone, and as he stepped forward into the light, the darkness seemed to cough him up and the light shine from his body.

His eyes narrowed as he focused on Kerchak.

With a subtle jerk, the great beast tore the spear from Kerchak's hands, and bringing it close, wrung the head of the spear off by twisting his hands in order to be quiet so as not to awake his sleeping mate. He handed the haft back to Kerchak, and the head of the spear back to Gar, and then moved passed them to stand before Sanari while she slept. Then focusing his green eyes on Kerchak, he lifted a finger and waggled it as he shook his head. Then looking to Gar, he pointed at the leather door.

Gar took his brother by the elbow and dragged him along, Kerchak so afraid that he'd been frozen on the spot till his brother guided him out.

Once outside they ran down the mountain, hopping and leaping from rocks and didn't stop till they returned back to their village nestled deep in a valley between all the mountains. Once there, they told everyone of what they'd seen, showing them the spear head and its haft and how it'd just been twisted off. Like a pebble tossed into a pond, a legend was suddenly born of this story that would ripple throughout the whole of the natives of Wave World, on a continuation of the legend of The Beast; one where the Mother of Fertility and Beauty had tamed The Beast and made him hers, so far as he protected her like a mate.

The story soon evolved that the two were indeed lovers, a mated pair, and that she kept him on a leash and collar.

Gar became a arch druid of The Lord of Light and Darkness, and Kerchak became his chief hunter, a group of hunters who were known to attack their pray using only a stone knife. Gar would live long and have a large herd of females and children. Kerchak dies in his bed as an old ram long after having suffered many wounds from the hunt and is burned in a funeral pyre.

But like with all legends, there was some truth to the stories, and this love story would be a favorite of many for millennia to come.

But after the two hunters left, Sage turned and lay right beside his sweet love, and she sighed contentedly as he cradled her breast and kissed her on the lips before settling beside her, keeping her warm and safe. He would be damned if he were to loose another beloved due to some barbarian.

Sage embraced her as gently as he could, and Sanari settled her nude form against him, cuddling close to the warmth in his chest. Soon afterward, she began to purr.

Sanari slowly opened her eyes, finding herself looking up at a plush white leather awning hanging above her. She was warm... very, very warm, enough to where her nose and nipples were moist with sweat, and portions of her fur was matted down with sweat... especially along her sides, the center of her back and between her breasts.

She took several deep breaths as she laid there, smelling something good cooking nearby, a myriad of meats and cooking vegetables. She turned her head to see a rack of meat cooking over a series of thirteen stones that all glowed white hot with heat, their heat searing the sandy ground around them, and her eyes darted to pictures and images around her, alchemical and magical symbols and formulae, as well as several pictures of various things she recalled, and others she didn't but nonetheless recognized:

The fight with Rae, the growth of the Millennium Tree and the construction of the Shadow League, A picture of her standing with her staff in her robes and a satchel slung at her hip containing their holy book ten years ago. She saw a golden dream of grasses, a lake and mountains; she saw Mayia and Siklohn, saw herself again, this time in a black evening dress that revealed her belly downward standing before her painting that she kept over her fireplace. She then saw the ravaging of three separate worlds, and she saw herself again, standing with arms outspread in her white robes, as she appeared when she looked at Sage to stop him from killing Meniko, Meniko herself behind Sanari.

The look on Sanari's face seemed to be one about to break into tears. Then there was an image of Sage, collared and dejected as he was about to be struck with a metal bat. And finally there she was again, naked, her face looking at the painter, her breasts firmed and her teats erect and her lips pursed to kiss the painter.

These were Sage's memories, she considered, and then she heard the sound of scraping, and turning her head again, she saw Sage, sitting with his wings folded like a cloak hanging off his shoulders, his tail wrapped around the rock he sat upon, while he gripped a piece of long wood in his hands, carving with a knife made out of what looked like obsidian.

Sanari rose, rolling onto her side, feeling her breasts wobble, and her teats erect as she laid on her side, looking up at him.

He looked so handsome, but... sad, while his eyes concentrated on what he was doing. To grab his attention, she took a small breath and began to purr. Sage turned his head slightly to look at her out of the corner of his eye, and then stopped, turning to face her fully and smiling as he saw her shining eyes.

"You're awake." He said, placing the long thing he was working on aside and moving over to her. He was nude as well, but clean, and he knelt beside her. "When I found you... I feared the worst."

Sanari turned her face into his hand as he reached out to touch him, and she rose, tucking her legs beneath him as she palmed his chest. "Hmm... You kept me warm." She murred and then opened her blue eyes to look at him. "But then why was I laying naked in the center of the floor?" she mused, and bent forward to kiss him.

"Your clothes were caked with your body oils. They would've insulated the cold and had to be removed. You also kept kicking the blankets off after awhile."

He was looking straight into her eyes, his lips parting, and she felt him wanting to say something, but he remained quiet. She smiled and moved forward to kiss him again, straddling his lap as she hung off his neck with both hands, nuzzling his nose before she kissed him again.

"A worthy excuse to look at me naked." She whispered and then tilted backward, her legs spreading open, her nipples hardening more as she pulled him on top of her.

He cradled her body immediately, lying against her, smiling as he looked into her eyes as she lay within his arms, one of his large hands cradling her head before he bent downward to kiss her lips.

"But you found me, dearest heart," she mused, inviting him to take her, her legs spreading fully open while he indeed did look lovingly down at her. "You found me before I found you," and her chin lifted as he kissed her throat, and then her clavicle. "My sweet lord, you must understand that I am apart of you now. Where you go... I follow."

"No." he said and lifted himself, and Sanari blinked up at him. "By my side." He whispered, and kissed her softly. "I would not dare ever belittle you by forcing you to walk behind me." He smiled and caressed her lips with a thumb.

Sanari smiled, suddenly finding herself in the arms of a young romantic mind, and arching her body, nudged the head of his phallus into her, and then laid back as he began to erect.

"Love you," she said, and then gasped as she felt his maleness swell to its full length and breadth inside her, feeling his lips on her breasts.

He lifted his head, and she opened her eyes part way to look at him, and then he lowered his head and kissed her, becoming remarkably silent as he continued to love her, rocking into her body and began to purr. The motions and the body language all said "Love you." She felt, and she folded his head to her breasts.

It was hours before their love making ended.

Sanari moved about the chamber, Sage taking up his obsidian knife and the piece of wood again while she made bowls out of wood bark and began to make food. For the life of him, after their love making, with the night eternal night going on outside thanks to being just above this world's arctic circle during winter, he took pleasure in having a beautiful naked female in his presence, and so his phallus did become flaccid, but would not retract as it laid against the warm rock.

She'd bend over, her heavy-laden breasts hanging from her chest as she tested a broth she was making in a stone bowl he'd made, before she cut more of the meat from the animal he'd hunted and killed, cut up the strips and added it to the soup, cutting out the fat and letting it burn in the circle of fiery stones, filling the chamber with the sweet smell of cooking. She knelt across from him, lifting her tail, showing him her shapely bottom and the wedge of her love mound at the base of her bottom while her tail lolled about, and he stiffened a little at the sight of her femininity.

She had a strong back, with strong rounded shoulders, with well rounded breeding hips... ample enough for children.

He'd been gone from the League for two weeks now... He knew not when Sanari had begun her search for him, but when he saw her there, laying half frozen in the snow... and suddenly the question he sought blazed in his mind. Now that he knew the question... all that was left to get his answer was to ask it.

Sanari dug into her own remaining supplies, produced some bread that she crumbled to thicken the soup she was making, adding vegetables, herbs and spices, and Sage returned to his work but found it more and more difficult to focus. And then he smelt something wafting up into his face, and his eyes lifted to see Sanari kneeling before him, holding the bowl of thick stew in her hands for him. Putting his things aside he accepted the bowl, looking down at her kneeling there, nude and beautiful, seeming simple, and in the privacy of their cave, without the rest of the world there... he was just a man, and she was just a woman.

He graciously thanked her, and she waited for him to taste it.

"Hmm... that's good." He smiled, and her own smile broadened as she served herself up some too. She sat on the floor however as he paused amidst eating, seeing her sitting cross-legged as he looked down at the food she'd prepared, and slipping off his rock, he moved beside her, palming her strong thigh, and when she looked at him, he laughed softly, and then bent forward to kiss her again.

Inside him, the question burned to be asked... hotter than his own fire, and they ate in silence together, ate everything she prepared.

He was cleaning the stone bowl and the wooden ones when she sat down where he'd been carving. He looked up at her as she picked up the leather satchel he'd made here, and began to rifle through its contents. She looked over the carvings he'd been working on, carvings of stone and wood. The first, she didn't recognize, and didn't think to ask, a long jumble of rounded pipe-like things. And then she pulled out a wooden carving, and her smile suddenly broadened as she saw an image of herself.

"Is this me?" she asked, holding it as she looked at it.

"It is." He smiled in return to her, and sat back.

"And so's this." She mused, and slid her hands over the shapes and curves of the form.

"It's not finished." He defended the works, and Sanari looked at him as her fingers slid over the breasts and the crotch of the statue, her lips spreading into a slightly wider smile.

She replaced the things into the bag, and didn't dig any deeper, and bowing his head, hoping she'd find the other pieces of art he'd been working on, Sage rolled forward and came to keel at her feet, taking up her hands, he held them there on her lap, found himself looking at the recess between her thighs leading toward her sex, and then refocused on her fingers.

“I discovered the question I sought for Sanari.” He said, and then looked up at her, past her naked bosom and into her eyes. “I know the question now.”

“Oh?” she smiled, and drew out one of her hands from beneath his and folded it over both his hands still holding onto her other. “What was it?”

“It’s difficult to ask.” He admitted and gave her hand a squeeze. “There’s... been a lot of confusion in my life... for a very long time. I’ve been sure about many things, but since I came to this universe, there’s been a haze in my mind that I’ve had an ultimate difficulty in overcoming. I realized a short while ago that I simply didn’t understand the way of things, but was still running on how they’ve been in my universe. But one of the hazes in my mind, I know... began when I first met you.”

Sanari remained quiet, having seen men do this to her before... trying to build up courage to say or do something that involved her. It was flattering... and she knew that the best way to whether it was to remain silent and let them do it.

“I came to enjoy being in your presence almost immediately. I enjoyed being around you, I enjoyed our talks, our luncheons, enjoyed simply standing back and watching you with students of the leagues and just being you. I couldn’t believe it, but I suddenly realized I’d been taking joy in something for the first time in decades, and it gave me all the reason I needed to stay years later than I needed to be here.

“I loved your smile, I loved the feeling of your touch, loved the way that I felt I didn’t have to be strong around you, loved the remembrances of the way I was before,” he swallowed. “Before losing Ariel. I loved being in your presence, loved your company, and I loved adoring you.” He looked meaningfully up at her.

“I loved you.” He swallowed, and Sanari’s lips parted. “I love you.” He said at last, and bent his head to kiss her hand, and she lifted it to cup his face as he then kissed her palm. “I love you.” He said again and looked up at her, his glowing green eyes sparkling as he smiled at her in his joy of finally saying the words. “I knew that fact before ever coming here. Can you forgive me for not confessing my love for you Sanari?”

Sanari smiled, and bent herself, her breasts pressing over his hands as she kissed his lips, and then his nose. “I knew that you loved me.” She whispered and kissed him again. “I saw you trying to say the words often enough and also heard you say them already.” He blinked at her, and she laughed. “In Meniko’s chamber, all that was light and good in you admitted it.”

Sage looked astounded and confused, and tried to contemplate it for a moment before Sanari touched his chin and drew his face back to hers, and for a moment he focused on her chest, smiled, blinked and then looked up at her face again.

“Was that the question you sought?” she asked.

“N-no... no... the question came to me when I found you lying face down in the snow. It flashed upon me in a moment, and I agonized that I hadn’t asked it of you already, agonized that I had to come up here, and with you following me in your profound faithfulness, that I might lose you for not asking it.”

“Ask what?” she smiled patiently at him.

His smile broadened a little as he looked up into her face, and then removing his hands from her, reached into the leather satchel and began removing things from it. A cloak, tools, the wood and stone statuettes, and finally he got to the bottom, retrieved something, and then opened his hands.

Sanari gasped a slow intake of breath in astonishment at what she saw. The metal was wrong, and only one was completed, but the completed one was unmistakably a Promise Ring.

“Will you marry me?” he asked with all confidence

“Yes.” She breathed, fingering the ring. “But... these aren’t finished yet Sage.” She mused, sliding a finger around the unfinished ring.

“I-I know. That was why I came up here.” He laughed. “I came up here with the smelted bar that I used to make them, and strangely, even before I saw you there in the snow... I’d begun to make them. I-I... I just haven’t finished them yet.”

Sanari smiled, and reaching down, she picked up the unfinished one, and she pressed it against the other, whispered a few words and then bent forward and blew on it, and suddenly the etchings and designs that he’d made on the completed one rapidly began to duplicate themselves onto the other ring.

Sage watched in amazement as the transformation of the second ring completed itself.

“A simple Protean Charm.” She mused, holding onto the new ring. She then smiled at him and held out her hand.

Sage jumped at the opportunity, and took the one he finished and held it up for her as tradition dictated, and Sanari passed her hand through the ring before it tightened about her wrist. His hands closed about her hand and he bent his head to kiss her fingers. She then held the other ring that she’d made for him, and he passed his hand through the ring, and it likewise closed about his wrist, but she pulled his hand to cover her heart between her breasts for a moment before she lowered herself from the rock, sitting on his lap and kissing him before looking at the ring around her wrist and laying her head against his chest.

“You found the question, and I gave you the answer.” She smiled, looking at the ornate designs encircling her wrist, seeing the talisman that it was, closed about her wrist so long as he and she loved one another, their hearts forming the link in which empowered the spell. Already there was a link between them, but then she focused on the silvery sheen of the metal... definitely not the traditional copper as Sage embraced her.

“But what metal is this, beloved?” she asked.

Sage held her arm as they both looked at the band about her wrist. “Tradition dictates that it must be made of the most precious of metals. To most races in this universe... that metal is copper. To most races in my universe, however... that metal is platinum.”

Sanari laid on her chest, her swollen breasts pressed beneath her while she used them as pillows, her gaze focusing on the beautifully ornate ring about her wrist, even as she felt a hand lay against the small of her back, and then felt her love’s lips press against her back as he lay beside her.

Sanari rolled slowly onto her back as her future husband rested beside her, his hand constantly retaining contact with her till it flattened against her belly at the base of her navel. His hand spread and his pinkie slid over the top of her love mound and her clit.

He and she smiled at one another lovingly... words would’ve been useless at the moment to express how happy they both were. Sage dipped his head, and she lifted her chin, and before their lips met, they both looked lovingly at one another and smiled at each other before kissing. They kissed each other again, and again, Sanari lifting her hand to caress his face, her hand closing about the back of his neck. She felt his phallus unsheathe and spread over her leg, and when they paused in their kisses again, again they smiled at each other, this time mischievously before Sanari rose and straddled his lap, sitting on his erecting groin, feeling his hands hold her sides, his thumbs rubbing the bulges of her breasts as they continued to kiss. Sanari pressed against his chest, her breasts pushing between them as she held his face with both her hands. Lifting her tail and spreading her legs a little she rose just enough to allow his phallus to rise from beneath her, and as she continued to kiss him, tasting his return kisses, she sat on his tip, and rolled and rocked her hips for a moment before the pointed tip of his erection pierced the firm lips of her sex, and with the escape of her vaginal juices, she slid her body slowly onto him, pelting his body with hundreds of kisses while she massaged and caressed him with her hands.

Sage held her by the bottom, and when she rose to look at him, he lifted his head to kiss her again, and yet again, his phallus stiffening with each kiss, penetrating her diminutive body.

“Love you...” Sanari murred, her chest heaving as their sexes vibrated with their shared arousal.

“Love you too...” he groaned and they kissed again.

They began to love one another more solidly then, exploring passion with each other throughout the cold winter night.

In this time of endless night of winter in the north, there was a feeling of timelessness, where the light of dawn was little more than a band of light along the horizon for four hours every day. For Sage and Sanari, as they celebrated in the culmination of their growing love – just a man and just a woman, alone and naked in their own little world without care for anything else – they slept when they needed rest, and awoke when they were no longer tired, and most of all... loved each other every time they fell into each other’s arms.

The next morning after the proposal and acceptance, Sanari was awoken with a kiss and a caressing of her breast, and in reflex as she awoke, she returned his kiss as her hand moved to hold the hand caressing her breast. As their lips parted, she saw her love over her, and she purred as she heard him purring for her. He massaged her breast and her purr intensified, and a quick look down their bodies showed her that he was already erect. Arching her back and puffing her chest out, she spread her legs from where they’d been folded during sleep, and drew him to her.

For days it was like this... as either she or he awoke the other by making love, and said goodnight to each other by making love. With their naked bodies in such close proximity, they made love whenever they fell into each others arms, which was quite often.

Such is what happens between two immortals with decades – or in Sanari’s case, centuries – of having not experienced the pleasure of physical love with another being for so long before. And though she’d had centuries of lacking physical love, Sanari found herself being pleased by Sage often, and she sighed and opened herself to him whenever he came near, inviting him with playful body language that the mind of a young immortal like him couldn’t ignore or bypass.

He’d arrived from finding them more food one morning, several days later to find her waiting for him, laying on her belly, her arms folded about her breasts as she laid on them like pillows, her body vibrating from her purring with her legs spread wide open and her tail lifted for him.

Her love mound was already sopping wet.

He smiled down at her as he removed his snow visor and the scarf around his face, and approaching her slowly, knelt between her legs, bent to kiss her bottom as he untied his loincloth, un-slinging his manhood and sliding into her.

He was built like a tank, with a powerful ‘gun’ and though it took some time, while they were alone like that, she’d grown used to the length and girth of his manhood, and was able to take it to the hilt easily now. And she was amazed at how often she wanted him as well.

She found him lounging back, resting while their food was cooking, and with an impish smile, she lowered herself to her hands and knees and crawled to him, purring as she pushed his legs open, and sliding up his body, dragging her chest over his groin, abs and chest, she kissed him to wake him while her hands massaged his groin, and when he opened his eyes, she settled back a little and arched her body slightly to insert him into her body again. He smiled at her and embraced her as she moved forward again to clutch at his chest, rising and falling to derive pleasure from that long, hard and pumping shaft, pressing her body to him and pressing her ear to his chest so that she could hear his hearts beating and listen to the calming sound of his draconic purr in his chest.

Another time Sage awoke to find her rounded behind and her vivacious crotch, already leaking her juices, directly before his face. It took him a moment to realize that his shaft was erect, and Sanari was sucking on the end of it, cradling his sack into its base with one hand while she gave him a hand job. All justly, of course, being that the day before he awoke her by sucking on her clit and sex.

But through all this lovemaking... it made both of them rather sticky.

Luckily, Sage had discovered a hot spring.

Sanari opened her heavy fur blanket Sage had provided her with, kicking off her fur-lined moccasins to reveal her pleasing body, and Sage held onto her hands as he helped lower her into the waters of the hot spring. Once she was in, she untied his loincloth and helped remove him of his chaps, and just because the opportunity presented itself, she rubbed his groin till he unsheathed before he entered the waters with her.

Their hands got positively erotic as they cleaned each other, and Sanari left herself open for his gentle touches as he caressed and massaged the objects of her femininity, her breasts and sex, arousing her thoroughly as he even fingered her. But then, she did the same thing to him, and they splashed each other and chased each other through the waters before they fell laughing into the deep, volcanically warmed waters. There they looked into each others eyes, and a sober look fell over both of them before they kissed.

“Oh beloved.” She sighed, lying against his chest. “I wish this could never end.” And Sage felt her fingers slide across the black imbedded collar in his neck.

He bent his head to kiss her, and hold her lovingly, his already unfolded wings wrapping about them both to further embrace her. They both had other lives they had to return to... other duties.

“Just one more day.” Sage whispered into her ear, and began to exude his cackling purr for her. “Just one more day... dearest love of my heart. Allow me to enjoy you for just one more day before we return. I want to be selfish in this experience... I don’t want to share you while all we have is each other.”

Sanari began to rise, and he opened his wings and arms to allow her to do so, and she stood above him, standing with her legs apart as she looked down at him.

“You look so innocent.” She whispered as she arched her back. “One more day, dearest heart...” she agreed. “Just one more day.” And she hugged herself from the lessened heat she had so far away from the steaming waters. There was actually a chill about her brow.

But then Sage reached up and palmed her sex, rubbing it pleasingly with his velvety fingers and palm, and immediately her eyes closed part way in a lazy pleasure that began to spread from his touch. She murred and her knees bent as she lowered herself to him, her palms pressing to his chest while he held her bottom again.

“Mph... why do you have such power over me?” she asked, and automatically sat back, feeling him pierce her loins as she did.

“Because we are both two of the same.” He whispered and kissed her cheek as she gasped in her first orgasm of this session. “Because... my heart is in you... and yours... is in me...”

For the second time his wings folded about them, tightly this time... and they made love deeper and harder than ever.

Sanari rested naked by the fire; this marking the longest in a very, very long time that she’d gone unclothed.

Sage looked admiringly down at her as she laid on her belly, enjoying the sight of the swell of her mammaries, the broadness of her hips, the perfect ebb and flow of every curve and slender crease in her bodice. It was inspiring, and after a few moments of watching her sleep, he returned to his work of carving the newest piece of his artwork using the obsidian knife.

He'd spent time sleeping with her, embracing her before the heated stones, occasionally stoking the stones with his breath, and before leaving her, he folded her warmly in their shared blankets and furs while a clothes line was splayed across the cavern to dry their clothes after washing them.

They'd have to return to the league soon, and before they did, he had one final project to finish.

Two figurines, one of wood, the other of stone, had been sanded and polished and glazed, both with a glass like finish and presented unto her. The likeness was exacting.

"I could've made them with my eyes closed." He'd told her as he placed the two figurines, each about a foot and a half tall, into her hands. The wooden one was a clothed impression of her, and the stone one was one of her nude.

She'd kissed him in thanks as she accepted them, and embraced him for presenting her with such works of art.

"They'll go right along with your painting, dearest heart." She'd purred.

They ate, made love one more time, and she'd fallen asleep in his arms. Laying her down, not bothering to cover her any more being that she kept kicking the blankets and furs off to lie close to the fire, Sage had come to sit on his rock precipice, naked himself, and continued the last finishing touches on this last project.

The black curved knife that had been expertly shaped from volcanic glass found on the Mystic League, cut and carved long, paper-thin sheathes out of the two halves of identically shaped wood.

She was the inspiration for this, and making it... had been like making love to her.

He'd finished sanding its insides and glossing it to a glass-finish, just like the wooden and stone statues of her while he worked through the night, using a natural lacquer on its surface to cure the wood and make it hard. Then he fitted the two halves together and tied them tight with leather chords folded in an intricate pattern around the center, then at the mouthpiece and finally along the ends.

At long last, he held the thing he'd made, looked to Sanari and smiled at her, and then swallowing, he lifted the thing to his lips, and blew.

The instrument had no name, only a melody a few notes long. It was a flute with three pipes, a thick pipe, a medium pipe and a narrow pipe, able to create a myriad of sounds that soothed the soul, and as he blew through each pipe, he called out the name of the pipe in its short melody, testing it, making sure that it was able to handle the name. If it couldn't, then he'd have to snap the instrument over his knee straight away for the sacrilege of shaming the true instrument. Each hollow sounding note slid through the pipes perfectly, echoing long and hollow for each note, and Sage's eyes opened with tears as he heard the solemn beauty of the instrument he so missed, and before he could stop himself, he began playing a song.

Sanari's eyes opened and she smiled as she looked up at her future husband, her ears rising high atop her head as she listened to that beautiful, beautiful music that came from such an enchanting instrument. She pulled her hair over one shoulder as Sage played, her heart pausing in her chest along with her breath.

The instrument was a highly evolved instrument... having developed from pan pipes of long ago, it had a siren's song, and had the power to bring great joy, or great sadness to those who listened to it. Some say that it was this same instrument that had been in the hands of the Pied Piper of Earth.

The melody was a soft one, gentle, and Sanari had to check more than once as she thought herself being caressed with lover's hands, even though her lover was right there before her, and she began to weep at the song in the joy it brought her, and when the song finished, Sage looked at her, seeing the tears in her eyes, and before a word could be said, she moved quickly to her feet, wiping her eyes, and came to sit on his lap.

Before any words could be spoken, she lowered her head and kissed him with all the love that was in her heart, her chest pressing against his, while one of her small gentle hands covered his hearts.

"You are beautiful." She whispered to him. "No monster... could ever make something like that blessed, blessed song... let alone make such a sacred instrument." she kissed him again, cupping his face with both hands. "Play it for me again, dearest heart..." she purred, and then forced herself to stop crying by swallowing hard. No other sound should interfere with the one that Sage was about to play, and she quickly slid off him to kneel at his feet and lay her head, chest and arms on his lap as she looked dotingly up at him.

Sage's eyes sparkled as he looked down at her, and lifting his flute to his lips, played a song specifically for her.

Sanari lay sleeping while Sage cleaned the cave, dousing the stones and handling the dragon-fire hot stones, as they cooled, threw them into the snow where they quickly cooled. He rubbed the paintings and writings off the wall with sand, dressed and began wrapping Sanari in all their blankets and furs while she slept, making doubly sure that she was warm as he wrapped her face and feet in all their bundles. He then removed the leather door way, placing the last of their things within a bed roll slung across his back, breaking the stone bowl, tearing the wooden bowls apart and scattering their fragments outside.

Then he broke the cooled fire-stones and scattered their remains before returning and picking Sanari up in his arms, he bent his neck and kissed her softly on the forehead before carrying her out of the cave.

In the winter of the north, above this world's Arctic Circle, dawn was only the barest of light bands across the horizon. Dawn was the best time to return back to their home, but Sage had to go to a specific place to do this.

At the top of the mountain, where he could see the band of light brighter than ever, he cradled Sanari's diminutive body in one arm and reached into the satchel slung across his body and retrieved a stone from inside. This stone held a simple series of three runes on its surface. He clutched this in his hand, and waited.

The three runes were to mark this stone as a return stone. It was made with its brother, and was set with the X, Y and Z coordinates on this world he wished to return to. Only teleportation solely upon this world was possible without him having any additional magic to imbue the stone with, else wise he could've returned home to Earth a long time ago.

Only two things kept him here...

The first was that he felt that he needed to make amends, no matter the cost, before he died. He feared damnation for his crimes.

The second was something he realized only recently... and that something was currently nestled herself close to the burning warmth in his body, purring loudly as she drew toward wakefulness.

When noon at this portion of the world came, it snatched Sage and Sanari up, and in a rush they were transported thousands of miles, to the location where the stones were etched, and in a rush, Sage bent his knees automatically as they arrived in the middle of the Mystic League right as the twelfth bell was ringing.

Only at noon and at midnight was this transport possible with the way the stones had been made.

They must've looked a sight, with a powerfully built, half naked male covered in white hide and scale, as well as chitinous black plates, dressed only in a scarf, loincloth, chaps, and a visor, wearing a satchel and a wadded up

backpack and carrying a bundle of a humanoid in his hands, the students who'd been walking to classes paused at their sudden appearance.

The loss of the cool north in favor of the hot tropical sun was a loss felt only by Sage. He so enjoyed the cold, and let his fire in his chest dwindle to a spark as he lifted a hand and tugged his scarf down off his face and pushed his visor up on top of his brow.

He looked around to the students now that he was recognized, and cradling Sanari, she slid a hand out of her bindings to clasp a four-fingered hand against his chest while he tugged the wrappings about her face away and walked forward toward the Grace League.

People parted before him as he strode purposefully forward, stepping through the gates, and those who saw him coming suddenly stopped and watched him pass.

"M-mother Sanari!" Tla exclaimed and rushed forward, Sage suddenly felt Eakjo leap onto his back and crawl up onto his shoulder.

"Papa... is mama ok?" he asked, concerned.

"She's fine. Just sleeping." Sage said softly so as not to awaken the sleeping Reverend Mother of the Grace League. "I'll put her to bed Tla. Eakjo... please go with Tla, Eakjo... Mama needs her rest."

"Papa?" Eakjo said.

"Everything's ok." Sage reassured the Zhumal, and he crawled and hopped off him, Sage lifting his strong prehensile tail to help him down, and he immediately took Tla's hand as Sage walked up to Sanari's door, slid it open, stepped inside with her, and then slid the door shut.

Her chambers were dark, but he was able to find his way easily, and stepped lithely to her bed, pulled the sheets open before laying her down on the cushioned mattress and the pillows before opening the furs about her. Then he tucked her in with her soft silken sheets, and bent low to kiss her before he began to rise, but then he felt her holding onto the leather belt holding his loincloth on.

Sanari sighed and opened her eyes, both of which shown yellow in the dim light like a cat's, and she began to purr as she looked up at him.

"Where are you going?" she murred.

"To bed, dearest heart." He said; leaning over her as her fingers slid into the waist band to brush against the head of his penis. "I have to return to my quarters to..."

"No..." she said, and slowly rose, tucking her legs beneath her while her elegantly unbound mane cascaded about her features. "You will not sleep on a cold pallet on the floor any longer. This is your bed now." And she tugged on the wrappings about his waist, and the loincloth came completely undone.

Sage inhaled deeply as she fondled his phallus long enough for it to unsheathe, before she began to untie his chaps.

"You are to be my husband... and I've grown used to your presence beside me at night, beloved. When we wake up, you will vacate that tiny room and come to mine..." and she folded his head to her chest, and began to lie back with him, and obediently Sage slid in with her.

Sanari began to purr as he pulled her blankets over them both, his hands holding lightly onto her sides while she sighed and laid back, cradling her newfound lord to her while their bracelets glinted in the semi-darkness.

A short while later, Sage began to purr with her.

Chapter Eleven: Troubles

Sage Preypacer could not recall when the last time he'd ever been happier, which, in and of itself, told as to how sad his life has been, especially since he was nearly a century old.

There was talk... there was always talk, especially when it got out outside the walls of the Grace League that Sage was now moved straight into Sanari's home, and talk spread even more when it was seen that they were attempting to gain moments of privacy with each other.

A gossip boom happened the day that someone spied the platinum band about Sanari's promise hand, and an identical one on Sage's.

Talk became as ludicrous that they'd snuck away and eloped with one another, married by a native shaman, and were trying to hide their marriage and romance – that person got beamed on the head when it was suggested – to as simple as they were sweet lovers that had fallen that far for each other.

As a matter of course, Sage and Sanari weren't being at all secretive any more, just not public. They walked hand in hand, kissed each other, held each other, and other similar examples of two lovers displaying their affection for each other. It was in private when the true measure of their... passion... became evident.

But happiness seemed to abound everywhere. The acts of the Shadow Beast seemed to almost be forgotten in the minds of the students and faculty – they didn't even move out of his way anymore, or shove a shoulder firmly into him – and many returned his many hello's whenever he passed.

He'd even begun working in the hospital again...

But then the keyword about all this was '*almost*'...

Sage walked across the courtyard, carrying the tote that had been meant for the Grace League, an extra long and very heavy thing that the Grace League usually had to send several able bodied students to go fetch, but Sage hefted easily over one shoulder. Then he saw Sanari, and with a half smile at his future lifemate, he turned toward her, striding purposefully to stand before her, and bending, he set down the tote and placed his hands in hers.

"Beloved," she purred, and stepped closer. "You must be the most attentive suitor I've ever had." She giggled and squeezed his hands. "Flowers, perfumes, gifts just for the sheer sake of giving them... and all the attention I could ever want. Such a kind and gentle soul you have.

"And then you're always there wherever I walk. One will begin to think you are following me."

Sage smiled and bent downward to kiss her forehead. "It's cause I believe such a precious treasure such as you should be showered with gifts, protected at all times and given all the love I can offer."

Sanari sighed and lifted her hands so that she could kiss his fingers. "And such a gentle guardian I have, as well. Whatever that was you did to me last night, I want you to remember it and do it again for special requests." She laughed softly, and sighed in remembrance as her teats all hardened.

"I have a whole bag of things I haven't done to you yet." He grinned impishly.

"And I have a hidden closet of like things to do to you my sweet lord." She chuckled and folded herself to him. They ignored the looks. "Hmm..." she sighed, clutching at his clean white linen shirt, smelling his scent, filling her senses with it before she rubbed her cheek and some of her own scent off on the velvety feeling of the dragon hide over his chest.

She loved being here, because it allowed her to listen to his hearts beating.

Sage found himself purring as he held her, a surprising look as some inquiring students actually drew near to him to listen with one perked up ear and then drew back in shocked surprise that it was him – the sound was that odd to them – before running off to tell their friends, and Sage smiled dumbly as he held the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen in his arms, knowing that she loved him. But as he stood there, he began to feel something, and the dumb look slowly began to fade as he felt a feeling he hadn't felt in months and months, even before his madness and he being collared.

And then he gasped as a rush of images flowed into him, programming him as if they were memories he'd himself seen, of paths and directions, where the paths started and where they ended.

It was a fate vision...

Sage lifted a hand to his throat, feeling the metal bands and nodes of his collar still imbedded about his neck, seeing the vision progress, and then paused, gasping at what he saw... the horror he was visited with.

"No..." he gasped.

"Beloved?" Sanari prompted, palming his chest, and Sage looked straight at her, his eyes blinking as he looked at her, and then up, scanning the rooftops of the nearby buildings before he turned and placed his back to them all. "Sage... what's wrong?"

"Do you trust me?" he gasped, swallowing hard, trying to give her a smiling face, but his eyes were quivering and he was crying profusely.

"S-Sage... You're frightening me..." she said.

"Sanari. Do you trust me?" he said firmly, looking into her eyes.

"Yes." She answered.

"Then I want you to go stand in the shadow of that building," he pointed, and then looked around, and moved quickly to a small Oliverian girl, one of Noxi's perhaps, and produced her a lollypop that he carried in his satchel about his waist, picking her up and handing her the lolly and then placing her in Sanari's arms. "Take her with you. Get as many people to help you clear this courtyard," he looked around. "Champion and Equis there... and... Rae over there. Clear this courtyard, go stand in those shadows, and no matter what happens do not... come to me until I tell you to."

"S-Sage..." she began.

"Please go." He gasped in all urgency, Sanari looked once into his face and rushed off, gathering up Rae, Equis and Champion, and together with several of the older students they cleared the courtyard while Sage stood in the center of it.

The others did what they did simply because Sanari asked of it, and still others simply because it was Rae... but the courtyard cleared quickly while Sanari held onto the little bunny girl, and watched in confusion as Sage stood, head bowed, his hands lifting to undo the ties of his shirt, pulling it off his shoulders slowly, and letting it hang about his waist.

And then slowly... he turned, lifting his hands, and... looked... at something above him.

"Sanari... what's happening?" Equis asked coming close, holding the hand of one of the younger students who was sucking his thumb for lack of something to do at the moment.

"I-I don't know..." Sanari admitted.

“What is he looking at?” the bunny girl asked, and Sanari lifted her head, following Sage’s gaze until she saw a glint, and her eyes narrowed.

“What?” and then her eyes broadened. “Egis! There’s someone on top of that building. She has a gun! Stop her! Stop...”

But then there was a sound of an explosion, and a lance of red light streaked from that glinting light, caught Sage right in the chest, exploding his back outward and throwing him a meter backward to bounce against the ground.

“Sage!” Sanari screamed, her eyes watering with tears that spilt from them immediately, and she rose but stopped, about to step onto the courtyard from the grasses. Far away, an Aphkei rose with a triumphant scream, brandishing a high energy sniper cannon in her hands as she rose from her camouflage, laughing at the fallen body on the ground at the middle of the courtyard.

“Die monster! DIE!!” she shrieked, laughing harder for several moments while there were cries of fear from students, and the champions of the school stood rooted on the spot in disbelief... even Rae... unable to move as she stood there looking at Sage’s body.

But then the Aphkei wolffess paused in her laughing, and brought a pair of macrobinoculars to her eyes, and saw the impossible, as Sage’s body began to move, his fingers closing, head turning as he slowly rose to his feet. His blood lifted up off the ground, rushing into the wounds as the flesh closed, and Sage’s brilliant green eyed gaze looked up at the woman even as the gaping chest wound closed.

“Impossible...” she said, dropping her macrobinoculars and picking her weapon up, aimed and fired again into him, and this time one whole side of his head was sheered off, and the body staggered and stumbled, just before the head turned to look back up at her, the brain reforming, the skull reassembling, an eye developing right in its socket as a realm of hair slid out of his skull.

He lifted his hands again, spreading his arms wide, still looking at her as he rose to his full height again.

The wolffess jumped down to the ground, using rocket assisted boots and pack as she twisted the weapon in her hands, holding the trigger handle straight up as she pulled a bracing bar out of the barrel.

“Damn you monster... DIE!” she screamed and when she pulled the trigger, A large drum unlocked and began to spin faster and faster, and every few turns as she rushed forward now, it fired off a blast that cut with deadly accuracy through Sage’s body.

Shot after shot, the lances of red fiery light cutting through his abs, his chest, lancing off the side of his head again, cutting an arm clean off, his thighs and hips, he was punched this way and that way with each shot, his body spasming with each blast. The wolffess was screaming as she charged him, and when the ammo of the weapon ran out, she tossed it away and pulled out a hand blaster, shooting at him with more blasts that pelted against his flesh, erupting bloody gores one shot after the other while the wounds her previous weapon caused healed themselves, his arm re-growing itself in a matter of seconds, a blown off jaw reforming itself. When her blaster ran out of ammo, she drew a vibroknife and leapt at him and stabbed him once.

“Die you murdering bastard!” she screamed, drew out the knife and then slammed it into him again as the last wound sealed itself immediately. “Just die!” she cried, tears flowing from her eyes as she drew out her knife and stabbed and slashed at his chest, sobbing before Sage closed his arms about her, cradling her to him, holding her gently before she drew out her knife and punched it into him one last time.

“W-why won’t... why won’t you die?!” she sobbed in his arms, her fist holding onto the knife in her hand fiercely, trying to draw it downward, though his tough bones stopped it from moving any further.

Sage turned his head to her ear, and whispered something, and with a gasp she broke from him, staring dumbfounded at him as his head rose toward her, tears sliding from his eyes. She remained standing there in shock till Mezzo and several of his guards arrived, and taking the wolfess in custody, hauled her away.

Off in the distance, someone, a member of the Mystic League itself... cursed under her breath.

Rae stepped over the cobbles, seeing more blood than she'd ever seen before scattered all over the ground, and looked up dumbfounded that Sage had contained so much as he bent low, picked up an arm of his that was rapidly disintegrating, took hold of the platinum bracelet that was still attached to it, and pulled it off as the whole of his discarded arm and all its tissue disintegrated to ash before he slipped his hand into the ring and it tightened about his wrist again.

Her eyes settled upon the knife still jutting out of his chest, humming from the vibro quality of the knife. He then stepped over to a stone bench, and turning weakly, sat down upon it. He then looked up, and gestured.

Sanari had remained rooted to the spot, and with Sage's gesture, she pushed the child into Eqis's arms and then rushed across the courtyard to him.

Rae approached, standing apart from them as Sanari felt his body, checking how solid his form was as she fingered the blade, and placing both her hands on it, she began hauling backward with all her might, and then Rae laid her hands on Sanari's, and Sanari removed her hands from the knife as Rae pulled it easily from Sage's body effortlessly.

The hole it had been in closed immediately as if it never were.

"My God, what have I done?" Sage asked aloud, looking at no one as all the red staining the ground rapidly disintegrated and grayed, evaporating even or blowing away on the wind as ash. Within minutes, there was no evidence that any violence had ever happened...

"B-beloved... what do you mean you?" Sanari gasped, sitting on his lap, and turning his face to look at her while she checked him fussily for any wounds that weren't healing miraculously.

"All of this... this attack... was my fault." He said, and looked away from her.

"Sage, what are you talking about?" Rae asked. "She attacked you. Who was she?"

"Her name is Cali Clandestine, she is the twin sister, of one Yuri Clandestine... a male soldier in the fifty third brigade of the Aphkei Imperium... decimated on planet ZA-Zero-Zero-One." Sage said quietly, and both women stared at him.

"H-how do you know that? H-how do you know she's the sister of anyone?" Rae asked.

Sage looked up at them both. "Just before the attack... I..." he reached up and checked that the bands were indeed still around his neck. "I had a Fate Vision. I saw everything... more detail than I'd ever seen before... as if someone, or something *wanted* me to know where all this came from."

"How is that possible? All your powers should be unavailable. You're collared!" Sanari gasped, and felt the bands herself.

"I-I know... I have no explanation..." Sage said, lowering his head.

"What did you see?" Rae asked after a moment's pause, and Sage looked up at her.

"Rae... you don't want to know this information." Sage said. "Words don't justify what I saw."

Sanari's face suddenly tensed, and she opened her robes and pulled out a black key. "Then you will show me." Sanari said, and held out the key, touching it to his collar.

"Sanari... I..." Sage began, and she pushed her fingers against his lips, and he fell silent.

"Take my hand on the key, Rae... if you want to know."

Rae paused, and lifting a hand, her massive, powerful hand closed about Sanari's diminutive and slender one.

"Show us..." Sanari said, and Sage nodded, and closing his eyes, concentrated...

Sage walked forward into Mezzo's office, moving straight for a weapon's locker on the side of the wall while Sanari and Rae followed right behind him. When Mezzo rose as Sage lifted a hand, inserted a long hooking claw into the lock and twisted the lock open before opening the locker, Sanari and Rae both moved forward to calm Mezzo.

Sage then removed several components, and then moving to another storage locker, one that still bore Sage's name, Sage tore off the lock and then the keypad, found two wires and pinched them together, and that locker opened.

Mezzo watched in fascination as Sage began assembling components for a gun, throwing several trinkets of what looked like gold in a weapon maintenance droid and keyed in several rapid commands. In time, after the little droid whirred and grinded, it opened a dispenser, and Sage removed a golden cylinder, with a like-tipped head, loaded it into the weapon he'd constructed, locked the single load pistol with the massive bullet inside of it and stepped forward into the cells.

"S-Sage..." Mezzo said, stepping forward, but was stopped by Rae.

"He isn't going to kill her." Sanari said. "I take responsibility for his actions in this regard Mezzo. It needs to happen... for her sake."

Mezzo looked after him as the security door closed behind him, and then he looked to the two locks Sage had bypassed so easily.

"Time to update my security..." he said simply.

Cali hugged herself, weeping as she sat in her cramped cell, the energy field hissing before her to keep her contained.

She'd failed. She'd failed to kill the beast. She'd failed to avenge her twin's murder. She'd failed...

She stopped, looking up, and blinking, she saw a figure on the other side of the field, and wiping her eyes, he reached up and depressed a switch, and the field fell, and suddenly there was The Beast, and she saw in an instant that he carried a gun.

"Monster!" she sprang to her feet.

He'd held her tenderly, caressed her back, and whispered into her ear. *'I am so... so sorry... for Yuri.'*

"You say you're sorry, and then you come to murder me too? What kind of..." and then he was placing the weapon in her hand, lifting her finger to depress the safety, before he knelt down in front of her. Took the barrel of the gun, and pressed it to his forehead before lowering both hands.

Cali blinked, not sure what was happening... but then Sage explained.

“Conventional weaponry cannot kill me with any ease.” He said quietly. “It takes long, sustained damage to end me by conventional means. But there are methods of ending me immediately which you do not have access to when you shot at me.

“This weapon contains a specially crafted bullet shaped into a high-explosive armor piercing round. The weapon you hold has sufficient power to pierce my body even in its advanced armored form. I have a severe allergic reaction to this metal coming in contact with my blood, to which I cannot heal it as quickly, and though if shot to the torso, to the ligaments or the like, I could survive, but if shot at point blank range, to the head, the weapon would canoe my skull... and I will die.”

He said it with finality, and Cali looked to the weapon she held in her hand, suddenly possessing all the power she needed over The Beast.

“I am not a citizen of your universe, so killing me is of no consequence to anyone... it would probably even relieve many, many people of undue stresses that I’ve caused. If you still... wish to end me, Cali Clandestine, then pull the trigger.”

Cali’s finger pulled backward, straining the trigger mechanism while her teeth clenched, Sage looking up at her through the sites on the top of the heavy barrel, looking straight into her eyes.

Cali was a soldier too, and she bent herself, focused herself to hold the weapon to reduce recoil so that the bullet inside didn’t go astray, and her finger tensed, pulling a hair back on the trigger again.

“Just tell me one thing... why... why did you do it?” she grit out. “Why did you kill my brother?!”

“It was an accident.” Sage replied. “He was among the faces of the soldiers who’d surrounded me, and I was struggling to contain an explosion that had been growing in me, contain an eruption of power. I tried to go someplace far away from any civilization, to minimize the damage, but then there were people in armor all around me... I tried to tell them to run away.

“Cali... I am so... sorry...”

“Shut up!” she shrieked. “He’s dead! He’s dead and you killed him!”

“I know.” Sage replied simply, trembling slightly. “It is my fault he and so many people are not here in this plane of existence, Cali...” his eyes watered, and when he spoke next, his voice choked. “I killed all of them... and no matter how powerful I am... I can’t bring them back. I can’t... not now...” tears finally fell. “I’m so sorry...”

Cali blinked, her eyes watering.

“Then you need to die!” she cried out, and for a third time, her finger strained... strained on pulling the trigger, her wrist shaking now. “Die... die... die...” she cried. “Die...” she whimpered and looked into his eyes, and for the barest of moments... she felt exactly what it was Sage was feeling for his sins, and she gasped, the gun falling limp in her hands as she stepped back, the gun falling from her hands as she collapsed to her knees, staring at him.

“Why can’t I kill you?” she whimpered.

She didn’t even move when Sage moved forward into her cell and embraced her, cradling her to him.

“Because... I cannot die... till I’ve suffered for every sin I’ve caused.”

Sage stood, once again with Sanari and Rae behind him.

“I-I don’t know her too well...” Rae said. “You’d think one would, but she is so different... different than from...” Rae fell silent, and Sage stood before the door, holding the self same gun in his hand.

Sanari stepped forward and took Sage’s hand with both of hers, and he turned to her immediately, and seeing that it was her, clasped his hand over both of hers. He saw her swallow, her lips moved to say something, and she closed her eyes not wanting him to see her cry. If she did, then he’d never go through this.

“Both of you... wait outside.” He said. “This will be a very private matter only between the three of us.”

Sage moved and stopped, Sanari’s hands still on his wrist, and with extreme personal control, Sanari let go of him before Sage opened the door and stepped inside.

It was an awful state, fine furniture destroyed and decimated, curtains torn from their hangers, a mattress torn open and feathers strewn all over the place, and the subject of Sage’s attentions, the mastermind of this attack meant to kill him and avenge so many deaths, kneeling in the center of the floor, with nothing but a simple, pristine teddy bear resting before her.

Sage stood there, studying the scene, staring at the massive ursine female figure kneeling at the center of the floor, with a back that was far more massive than even Rae’s.

“You know... I gave Illia that bear... to remind her of you.” Sage said after many long minutes, and the body moved, rising to her feet and turning to face Sage, and the stunning form of Cyvel stood before him. “I don’t know why,” Sage continued, stepping forward. “But something tipped me off about the attack. Something warned me to act, and I was presented with several decisions.”

He paused before her... looking her straight in the eye.

“The first... I ran from my spot, and my killer would fire indiscriminately in order to kill me before I got away. This in turn would pelt the area around wherever I was with high velocity particle fire... slicing through innocents, cutting them in half, cooking them from the inside and killing many of them, wounding many more... and I’d still be alive, but unscathed.”

Cyvel glowered at him.

“The next option was that I confronted my attacker, and in an attempt to stop her, she would have fired three shots, all of which would have missed me... but would have killed a young girl by the name of Kessa Mar, mortally wounded a guard, and killed Mother Sanari.”

Sage saw the reaction, saw the corners of her eyes crease as he mentioned names... a small child... and the most well respected individual in the leagues.

“The third option... is what I took. I removed all of the individuals who would’ve been hurt or maimed by yours and her actions, and stood there, and took Cali’s vengeance. It’s the option that you saw... wasn’t it Cyvel?”

“You bastard... Why couldn’t you have died? Why did you let my sister die?!”

Sage stepped forward again, his features not unkind, and he licked his lips... wishing for a fate vision now to know how to proceed. He was already running on the edge of what his vision had already given him.

“Your sister... is the most precious treasure of this League, Cyvel, and it is my fault that she left it once to train with the Powered League... a reason why your body is so massive and well toned as it is, and it is also my fault that she left it again... and my fault why you are now in control of a form that could squash me like a bug in my condition.

“So... why didn’t you?”

Cyvel blinked, and she glowered. “Why didn’t I what?!”

“Kill me. Why did you have to do that?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She said, biting her lower lip, her face a mixture of hatred and pain... two expressions that face had *never* held before.

Sage watched her for a moment, lowered his head to look at her fist, and then back up at her.

“You vowed revenge...” Sage said matter-of-factly. “You wanted to punish me... you wanted to grind me up, choke the life out of me with your bare hands. You waited in the darkness, and I walked by you, dozens of times, and without a single witness in sight, you had dozens of opportunities in which you could crush me, kill me, choke me to death, whatever you wished to, I was at your mercy... but you didn’t.

“You thought yourself weak,” and he gestured to the room. “You began working your frustrations on things around you... till you found her precious bear...” and he gestured to the bear.

“Is this your fixation?!” she cried, turned and seized the bear. “I’ll destroy it then!” Sage stood there. “I’ll do it!” and her massive muscles tensed on the arms. Sage still said nothing.

But then Cyvel looked down at the bear, made to look so much like she and her sister, and Cyvel’s face melted, her eyes began to water, and she hugged the bear to her bosom and turned it protectively away from Sage.

“You monster...” she repeated.

“Yes... I am.” Sage said, and she turned sharply back at him, not believing that he’d admitted to something like that, but then he took another step closer and stopped just outside of arm’s distance of her. “You’d feared that you were too weak to do the duty yourself, so you began to research the names of the families of those I’d killed... tried to find someone who would justly do the deed for you.

“So you found Cali, the twin sister of a murdered sibling... someone just like you.”

Cyvel swallowed and closed her eyes, holding the bear tighter to her voluminous bosom. “Shut up...” she whimpered.

“I know more about you and Illia than nearly any other person, Cyvel. Only Meniko and perhaps Namah know more. I witnessed both your and her childhood memories as if they were my own. I watched as you continued to grow strong and massive, and you took the role of the older sister while Illia remained small and diminutive... a runt.”

“Shut up...!” Cyvel said a little louder.

“I watched as Cyvel entered puberty, and she transformed for the very first time... becoming a massive power house that was literally stronger than absolutely anything... she destroyed everything, rampaging across your home world... till you stood in front of her.”

“SHUT UP!” Cyvel screamed, tears erupting from her eyes as the whole of the house that Illia had built shuttered.

“And when she looked and saw what she’d done, you willingly gave yourself up to her... and as you were leaving for the great beyond, you instead looked upon your sister... and entered her... and you became her power... and she became the second most powerful entity in the known universe thanks to your influence...”

“And the price of this... was that she had to forget you.”

“SHUT UP!!” Cyvel screamed at the top of her lungs, and one fist swung downward so close to him, her clothing ripping at places as her muscles swelled, and it was like an earth quake as her fist shattered a piece of loose furniture.

“And I was there... when I made her remember you...” Sage said with an air of finality... and Cyvel sobbed.

Though Illia suffered through much pain, having to be forced to remember every negative emotion Cyvel made sure she never had to experience... Illia... nonetheless... came to a full and complete knowledge... of her twin sister. It was Cyvel’s most precious memory... and it came at the hands of the man standing before her.

“In my madness... I harmed Illia again, Cyvel... I blew her mind... and as her consciousness sank... yours rose... and the phenomenal sacrifice you’d made for your sister, and the most precious treasure you ever possessed in her remembering you... were taken from you. By me.”

Cyvel continued to sob, kissing the head of the bear, and Sage licked his lips.

“For such a sin, because I removed such a precious... perfectly gentle creature such as Illia... a person who’s only purpose in life, it seemed, was to make other’s happy, for taking her away from you, you found Cali, and you secreted her here. You and she conspired, and using your connections with the Leagues and with Illia’s connections you forged in her name, component by component, you drew out everything needed to make that weapon, got the thermoptic camouflage tarp, the pistol... the knife... all the ammo... just so that she could pull the trigger...”

“The question I have... Cyvel... is why didn’t you?”

Cyvel turned to stare evilly, vehemently, but despite all the hatred, she simply couldn’t move to throttle him. She cried harder because of it.

And then Sage lifted a hand, and placed a gun on a banister, and before removing his hand from the hand hold, he depressed the safety and stepped back, and then knelt before her.

“People desire to kill me... Cyvel. That weapon is armed with a bullet that will kill me in a single shot. Press the barrel to the center of my head... and pull the trigger. I beg of you to do it. For removing Illia... for removing such a precious and pure person as Illia... the Creator’s own blessed gift to this universe, I need to die too for such a sin.”

Cyvel looked to the bear in her arms, and then stepped forward, took the gun and planted it immediately against Sage’s forehead. Her finger drew back, and stopped... a hair’s breadth from activating the trigger.

“Ah!” she cried... sobbing as she tried to pull back on the trigger. “AHHHHHH!” she cried again, her muscles tensing, every one in her arm tightening to make that finger pull on that trigger... so close to killing him... so close... so close...” she closed her eyes, prayed that Illia would help her in this... that she’d allow her to be strong and pull back on that trigger, and when she opened her eyes, she gasped, and saw something that escaped Sage’s unknowing perception.

There was a person there, smiling as she knelt... dressed in what looked like the purest light as she bent low and kissed Sage on the brow, even though he couldn’t feel it, her body exactly like Cyvel’s to every last detail.

“Illia...” Cyvel breathed as her sister looked up at her, lifting a hand to the barrel of the gun, and Cyvel felt her hand, felt it touching her fingers as she pulled her trigger finger forward and out of the loop where the trigger was, felt Illia’s fingers open her own, and the gun went clattering to the ground. Illia then rose, kissed Cyvel on the cheek, Cyvel’s eyes overflowing with tears just before the image faded completely away like a popping bubble.

“ILLIA!” Cyvel collapsed to her knees, reaching out for her, but instead found herself looking at Sage as he knelt across from her. Sage lowered his head, picked up the gun, and reactivated its safety.

“I said ‘your sister *is*,’ he accented the ‘is.’ “The most precious treasure of this League’ Cyvel for a reason.” Sage said and reached into his belt satchel, pulled out a data pad and placed it into her hand.

Cyvel's mind was so distraught as she hyperventilated hysterically at what she saw, that she didn't even think to crush it first, but she saw two mental activity graphs there, the top one was a highly active sine and cosine series of peaks and troughs, where the lower of the two lines was practically flat... waving only once in a great while.

Sage tapped the screen. "This is what's going on in your head." He said. "The top line is you... the bottom one... is Illia." Sage rose to his feet, and Cyvel gasped and looked up at him.

"I spent a whole week without sleep Cyvel... longer than I've ever gone before as I tried to repair your body as well as the damage to your brain and skull. The process was extremely slow, repairing higher brain functions... but at first... it was only Illia... fading quickly..."

"And then the second line appeared... that was your mind."

"At day five... the two lines began swapping places... till yours remained in dominance, and hers began to fade away. She is buried... so very deep inside you, Cyvel... but she still exists." Sage squatted down before her. "She still... exists!" he directed at her. "And I will do everything that I can... to someday ensure that she again exists... Cyvel. I swear to God! I will make her alive in you again..."

"I promise."

The door opened, and Sanari looked up, and saw her love exiting the room, and tears broke from her eyes as she rushed up to him and embraced him, Sage picking her up, holding her tightly, and kissing her on the forehead before he looked to Rae.

The look of meaning he gave her was all she needed as she stepped inside the room to comfort Cyvel.

Sage and Sanari went some place private simply to hold each other...

Mezzo took the weapon from Sage as he stood there before him, Mezzo eyeing Sage for a moment before expertly opening the breech action of the weapon and tapped out the single long shell that was an inch wide and five inches long, loaded into a electromagnetic rail propulsion system – a rail gun – and held the strange bullet that was inside. Even the case was gold... it looked like a spike, and had been etched with a dozen or so patterns that all overlapped each other.

"Gold... no wonder why my sword didn't hurt you in our fight." Mezzo said, closing the breech.

"Lycan of the sun, and Lycan of the moon. Silver is the element of the moon... and gold... is the element of the sun. Reptile based Lycan... such as the gator and crocodile sub species... as well as the Defell and Dra'con Lycan is susceptible to wounds caused by gold. This shell, however... bears some additional tidbits that will cause me much hurt if it ever does wound me." Sage said and picked up the bullet, careful not to poke himself on the tip.

"I have to file this information, and lock the weapon up, Sage. You know that... why did you tell me?"

"Because... I'd rather die... than ever cause as much harm as I've done already." Sage said, and placed the shell back on the desk. "H-how is... how is the wound?" Sage asked then.

"Stitched up nicely..." Mezzo said, palming his gut... where a three foot broad, two inch wide, and twelve foot long blade had pierced him.

Mezzo had already forgiven Sage. Sage didn't ask, and Mezzo didn't say, but they both knew that it was an unspoken forgiveness between men. It was an honorable battle... and Mezzo had lost. But that didn't stop Sage from being sorry about it.

Sage then turned and began to leave.

"Sage..." Mezzo said as he lowered himself into his desk chair, and Sage stopped. "Don't go killing yourself now till you and I have had a rematch." Mezzo said, and began sifting through papers and datapads.

Sage let a small smile rise upon his face before he climbed the stairs out of the detention center and back to where Sanari was waiting for him.

Cyvel had some alone time... particularly with Rae for awhile. The weapon that was designed to one-shot kill Sage was locked within the school vault... to be used later if needed, and Mezzo filed a report about the new information on Lycan... the difference between Sun and Moon Lycan... and their weaknesses.

Sage was quite sure that a new, special, orbital sniper round was being designed at that moment just for him.

Days after the attack, Cali was returned back to her regiment to face punishment. An attack on a non-citizen, especially one that had no recognizable government, was indeed not treated as badly as one would thought, and since she was on her own private time, it wasn't considered AWOL, but she was in possession of a high-powered weapon and attacked someone. She'd spend a little time in the brig at the least, but thanks to Mezzo – at Sage's request – a message was sent to her commanding officer stating that all was forgiven by the attacked, no one was permanently hurt, and to beg that she not be court-martialed for her actions...

Things settled down enough to where, in private, Sanari and her new lord were able to speak once again of important things... Like when they were to get married.

It was then that the next confrontation happened...

Makahn had returned from his most recent mission. He went to see his wife and children, spent the day with them, laughed and played with them with Fatima in attendance, and then went to go stand where he could speak in private with the man he wished to confront.

In the early morning, right by the gates of the Grace League... for after Sage swept and groomed all the stone and gravel walkways, he opened the gate to the shrine.

"Makahn..." he greeted, opening the doors. "Good morning, what brings you..."

"I have a question for you, Sage." Makahn said, uncoiling from the wall, his tense and powerful muscles tensing even as he unfolded his arms.

"Yes?"

"Do you resent me? Do you resent me for taking Rae away from you?"

Sage blinked once as he stared at the black wolf.

"Makahn..." Sage asked slowly. "Why are you asking me this question?"

"Answer me first, Sage." Makahn growled a little, and Sage exhaled, deflating as he picked up his broom and continued to sweep the excess piles of dirt and dust out of the shrine.

“I loved Rae.” Sage admitted, sweeping the large dirt piles out of the way. “You and I selfishly forced Rae to make a choice between us, but she only knew me for a few short days, and she knew you far, far longer than me. She chose you as the better man for her, she chose you to be the father of her children. It’s one of the greatest honors a woman can offer unto a man in such a circumstance.”

“But do you resent me for her decision?” Makahn urged, and Sage stopped sweeping and looked up at him. “No Makahn... I do not resent you, nor did I ever resent you, for a decision she made. I don’t resent her for choosing you over me, and again, I never did. Any resentment that I hold, Makahn... is that that beautiful, delicate woman, despite choosing you... has been alone for all this time. She bore Yuum and gave birth to her while you were out gallivanting around the cosmos. I was the one who was there to catch Yuum as she passed from her body, I was the one who cradled your child and placed her on Rae’s chest to nurse...”

“My resentment for you, Makahn... is that should have been you doing that. I couldn’t even give you the choice as to whether or not you wanted to cut the umbilical chord...”

Makahn was silent for a moment. “Sage... my life isn’t that easy... I’m trapped. People die doing what I’m doing. If I don’t fight back, even a little, I can be killed in those rings. And the ferocity of those rings... you have no idea...”

“I have every idea.” Sage interrupted, cutting Makahn off sharply. “When I first came to this universe, Makahn... I fought in those rings.”

“What? But... when did you... I didn’t see...”

“They called me *No Name*.” Sage continued. “And I fought as a human.”

Makahn’s eyes went wide. “Y-you were undefeated!”

“I was an asshole.” Sage said. “It was from those fighting leagues that I learned about Rae.” Sage Laughed. “I thought Rae was a towering, super muscular man, when I first heard the name... I was quite surprised that she was a diminutive school girl with the muscle mass of an Olympian body builder.” Sage paused. “But I learned of her from those rings, Makahn... I know exactly how vicious and how brutal they are.”

“All for honor... all for a title.” Sage looked at Makahn. “Is honor and a title so important, Makahn... so important that you place them higher than your own family?”

Makahn’s eyes flared, and in one fluid motion he punched Sage right across the jaw, forcing a crunch from his jaw shattering, the blow knocking the weredragon off balance. Sage hopped on one foot, resetting his balance, and then rose himself, keeping his head turned away as he clenched his jaw muscles, and like magic his jaw reformed with a sickening crunch and Sage worked his jaw around to get the kink out of it.

“How dare you...” Makahn growled, the hackles on his neck rising as his lips peeled away from his teeth. “I’ve tried to do everything to get out of my contract. I cannot retire unless the contract has expired, and that’s a decade away yet, and I can’t get out of it unless I loose a championship bout! Champions *die* in that ring... they...”

“Coward. Greedy Coward.” Sage said simply... this earned him a punch to the other side of the face that he took, and it was nearly an entire minute before his super-strong nigh-indestructible bones – a true testament of how strong Makahn was – realigned.

“Answer me a question then, Makahn...” Sage said. “Prove me wrong... I’d never be happier than to have you do this.”

“What?” Makahn growled.

“Is your title and your honor greater than your family?”

“No!” he shouted.

Sage stepped forward then, and didn't stop until he was looking right into Makahn's eyes, bending his head downward to look the smaller wolf right in the eye.

“Then prove it... Makahn. Loose.”

“W-what?”

“Loose Makahn; prove, once and for all, to Rae, to me... and most importantly yourself... that you are the right man for her... that her decision to choose you over me was just. If that is your only way out, then take it.” There was a silence between them. Sage knew that staring a wolf right in the eyes, whether it were an animal or an advanced being like an Aphkei or a Wolf Lycan, was a dangerous challenge. They all had only the *'fight or flight'* mode in their minds during such an obvious challenge.

Sage just hoped that Makahn would choose the *'fight'* mentality... and if he did, would choose to meet the challenge instead of just beating the crap out of Sage.

“I'll take that challenge!” Makahn growled, butting his chest against Sage's, and Sage let Makahn knock him back a bit.

“Good.” Sage said, righting himself from where Makahn had knocked him back to with the chest butt. There is a championship fight coming up next month. You are defending your title. If you loose, you will forever prove yourself to be hers... loose no matter the cost. But if you win... if you break Rae's heart again, then you will forever have my disrespect, Makahn. I will forever resent you as a greedy coward... more interested in titles, and honor... than in your family.

“Less than a man...”

Makahn clenched his jaw... his hands clenching and unclenching, his body shaking with a mixture of rage and nervousness...

“Good day Makahn.” Sage said, and turning, went back to sweeping.

Makahn opened his mouth and closed it several times, and after a moment or so longer, he retreated.

Ten months had passed since the rage of the Shadow Beast when Rae opened her home for the party she threw once a year. Rae normally didn't watch fights... but the championship bout included her husband on trideo broadcast, and her home was opened to a great deal of friends and family, and every trideo set in the house was set to the channel that the championship bout was on.

She already had a crowd of individuals in her home, ranging from small children to older mature individuals, like Eqis, Champion, Pleeoyo, Noxi and her husband, Riikoa... the list of names just went on and on. Her house was just absolutely crowded, and there was literally a small army of servant droids walking about serving drinks and food, and her kitchen had a dozen droids preparing more snacks.

Rae personally greeted people at the door, so when the door knocked and she opened it, she was most surprised at the couple who was on the other side of the door.

“Sage? Sanari?!” she gasped, seeing them both in complimenting attire, Sanari out of her usual robes, but instead in slacks and an ornate series of overlapping shirts and a coat. She was holding onto Sage's arm, her hair done up elegantly and a tasteful amount of jewelry in her hair.

Rae was jealous at how easily she could appear beautiful.

Sage was an exotically-dressed handsome gentleman who appeared to be more on her arm than she on his.

“May we come in, Rae?” Sage greeted.

“Y-yes... yes... please.” Rae said, stepping away to let them in. “I-I’m surprised, I didn’t think either of you would come.”

“We received your invitation,” Sanari mused as Sage helped her off with her jacket, and handed it to a droid who arrived to take coats.

“Yes... but... you never came before.” Rae laughed, blushing.

Sanari again took her love’s arm. “I was surprised Sage asked me if I wanted to see it. I’ve never seen one, because I heard it was so violent.”

“They are.” Rae tensed, thinking about Makahn in that fighting ring.

“Oh... well I guess it will be entertaining nonetheless.” Sanari mused, and Rae blinked at them, looking from Sage’s face to Sanari’s as they looked meaningfully at her.

They know something... Rae thought as she closed the door behind them and they entered and found a place to sit in one of the side living rooms.

Her other guests were likewise surprised to see them there, and conversations abounded throughout the house as she acted as a hostess, visiting each room, carrying treats for everyone.

On one of her trips... she found Teal shying away from Sage, clinging to his aunt Fatima, but Yuum was enjoying a treat of sweet bread from his hand... the old snack Sage used to make for them both that they loved so much. Rae was a bit saddened that Teal was shunning Sage so much, but by her third trip, Yuum was actually sitting on Sage’s lap, and Sanari was playing a sort of hand game with her while Yuum held onto a spare Sweet Bread in one hand.

Teal still clung to Fatima.

Rae sighed, but then the bout began as they introduced the fighters.

“In one side... the Champion Fighter... Makahn of Taimslant!” the announcer said, and there was a tumultuous applause from the arena, and avid clapping in Rae’s house. “And the challenger... Arsen of Gor!”

And the trideo that showed a life-sized Makahn suddenly panned away and showed a life sized version of the veritable monster that was walking into the fighter ball-sized stadium and arena. He was a hulking Cerulean, with pecks that he bounced impressively, flexing massive biceps and clenched hands... hands that could crush Makahn’s head in their grasp, it seemed.

Rae suddenly felt a hand on hers, and saw Sage giving her a quick grasp to comfort her as she sat on the edge of the couch beside him, and she suddenly took several deep breaths. He gave her a half smile and then released her hand.

Rae bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling. The first year she tried watching these bouts alone... but then didn’t want to be left alone, and began inviting more and more people till her whole house was packed. Now she wasn’t alone when she watched her husband get beaten upon. Rae rose and stepped over to Fatima, taking Teal off her lap to hold onto him, and Teal held onto his mother.

“The opponent is big this year, mama.” Teal said; looking in fear for his father as the two fighters faced each other.

“Y-yes... yes he is.” Rae said, and kissed his cheek, her eyes widening as she practically stopped blinking as Makahn touched knuckles with his opponent. There were no referee’s in these rings. Everything went, and the rules were simple. Two entered, one walked out, and the other was carried out... either on a stretcher... or a body bag.

“Fighters ready!” the announcer said, and both fighters threw a fist up into the air. “Then let’s get ready to rumble!!” and cheers rose up through the trideo. “Ready?! FIGHT!!”

Makahn lifted his arms and fists and Arsen roared, flexing his muscles, growing thicker, and then he charged.

The image focused on Makahn as he stood his ground, and his lips moved as he whispered something that was lost in all the cheers, and then right as Arsen neared and arched his body to strike, Makahn lowered his arms. Arsen’s massive fist struck Makahn square across the jaw, hurtling him backward dozens of feet, Arsen’s charge leading him forward as he punched, kicked, kneed, elbowed and *bit* Makahn a dozen times or so before he even hit the ground.

Makahn rolled to a stop, already bleeding profusely.

‘Rae...’ Rae heard in her mind, and turned in its direction to see Sage and Sanari staring at her, but it was Sanari who was talking to her. *‘Rae... take the children out of here...’* Sanari said into her head using magical telepathy so Rae could hear it, her voice baring all seriousness.

Rae turned back to the trideo image, watching Makahn slowly rise to his feet, carefully, purposefully.

Rae swallowed.

“Teal... Yuum...” Rae said immediately... “C-come with me babies... come with me right now.” Rae said rising.

“But mama... daddy’s on the tv...” Teal began, but then Yuum shrieked.

“Daddy!”

Makahn got hit with a one-two punch that sprayed blood and a tooth in holographic perfection that people were checking their clothing for the blood spray. Sage rose with Yuum as she turned and clutched his chest, Fatima rising quickly to take Yuum from him.

Teal was locked on the trideo as Arsen began beating on him relentlessly, throttling him while Makahn moved his hands as if to block, but Arsen just broke him over and over.

Yuum began to cry as Fatima and Rae brought the children out of the room, but everywhere they looked, there were more scenes of their father being destroyed by the fighter Arsen. Rae handed Teal to Fatima as she brought them both into a room without a trideo link, and Rae hurried back to find Makahn on the ground, being kicked repeatedly by that massive fighter. Rae pushed her hands over her mouth, weeping as she watched her beloved husband being beaten ruthlessly, blood spraying everywhere, Makahn’s body already a mangled mess, and every time Makahn was knocked down... he tried to get up, and whenever he was marginally on his feet, Arsen beat him down again,

And again... and again...

But Rae was looking at the Makahn’s face. He was smiling...

Arsen roared triumphantly, holding the championship belt over his head to the crowd, the broad leather thing with the great etched and golden disks. Rae was standing stiffly, her hands over her lips, tears from her eyes. The last image she saw of her husband was laying face down on the cobbles in splatters of his own blood spitting one of his fangs out. And then she felt hands on her shoulders, and she turned to see Sage there, and immediately, with a sob, she turned and clutched to him, tears still coming from her eyes, and though she felt something akin to a sob swelling her heart, she didn’t know how to express it.

“Rae, come with me.” He was saying, and Rae felt herself led and she followed, right through the house, people watching her as Sage led her right out the front door, to a new surprise.

Dallas stood there, right before a sleek aerospace vessel that was currently cooling its jets in preparation for take off.

Rae stared at them, and then turned questioningly at Sage, even as the door opened, and Sanari came out holding onto Teal and Yuum’s hands with Fatima directly behind her.

“Dallas and Prot are here to take you three to Makahn. With the anti-magic field about the stadium to keep people from interfering, it’ll keep you from just teleporting there.” Sage explained. “Don’t worry... we’ll clean up here.” Sanari looked to Sage and Rae, and then took Yuum and Teal forward to strap them into a couch in the back of the cockpit of the vehicle that Proteus had turned into.

Rae turned and stared at Sage. “You knew... you knew he was going to do this?” she asked with a gasp.

“I did.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because you would’ve tried to stop him.” Tears were still rolling down Rae’s cheeks. “Rae... at the very beginning of the fight, Makahn whispered something... did you know what he said? Are you able to read lips?” Rae shook her head. “He said ‘For you Rae.’”

“Your husband is coming home, Rae... go bring him home...” Sage said, and stepped back from her.

Rae stared at him, and then looked to the ship, and then turning toward Prot and Dallas she hurried to the cockpit that had been lowered from beneath the scooping cockpit Prot had formed.

“Rae... Ronin Enterprise Doctors are already with him. We’ll be there within an hour. They’ve already informed me that he’s stable.” Dallas said, and offered a hand to help Rae into the seat that seemed made just for her, and he strapped her in before he himself took the pilot’s seat, and the cockpit was being raised even as he was strapping himself in. The engines were already being ignited before the series of couches had been locked into place, and Prot took off immediately.

With Dallas in the pilot’s seat, lending Prot his power, the pair of them was able to do things Prot alone would’ve had no hope of doing.

This ship design was only defenses, life support and propulsion... Engines and aerodynamics surrounding a custom torpedo to bring a person or people from point A to point B in the shortest possible time. Looking up into the sky, the people still on the ground watched as the ship fired a dozen afterburners and climbed up into the sky, and as soon as it cleared the atmosphere, folded space with a snap of motion.

“Master Sage,” Fatima said, stepping forward, and Sage turned.

“Just Sage, Fatima,” he said as Sanari slid in against his side.

“Sage,” she smiled. “Why did you do that? Why did you hide something like that from my sister?”

“Fatima... the thing that Rae and Makahn want the most is to be able to be a family... I know the look of disappointment on Rae’s face every time that Makahn won these tournaments. They both knew that this was his only way out. The options left for him were to either win the tournaments and then retire after another decade, or lose a championship bout and retire immediately.

“A few weeks ago, he came to me, and asked me a question. In turn I issued him a challenge... to make a choice. Either choose his honor and title... or his family. He chose his family.”

Makahn was brought home a few days later on a Ronin Enterprises slow transport, a pair of doctors pushing his hover bed while he laid awake, holding onto Rae's hand while he was severely bandaged up and an automedicator unit hooked up to his arm.

Teal and Yuum pranced before him, as they entered the Iksaki home, and Sage watched, far, far away, leaning against a tree with a half smile before turning away. It is how it should be.

Sage knocked on the door, and was immediately met by Rae, and got a big, big hug that compressed all the air out of him as she hugged his head to her bosom.

"Makahn told me what happened between you two... thank you so much!" she cried, and when she released him he gasped deeply.

"H-he... *gasp* he wanted to see me?" Sage asked.

"Yes... right back this way." Rae squealed like a little girl, taking his hand and led him hurriedly back toward the master bedroom, a huge sprawling room surrounded on all sides by floor to ceiling windows that all had been opened to let the soft breezes into the room from three directions, with flowing white silk curtains flowing in the sea breezes.

Makahn rested on the huge bed, covered half way up his muscular abdominals, his chest still bandaged, but most of that was just for show. The doctors had exaggerated the wounds a little bit... Sage was able to see that Makahn had exaggerated a lot of the damage he'd taken, but Makahn was an expert fighter... and he was able to roll off most of the punches he took.

He looked worse than he was.

Sage walked up and picked up his chart hanging from the edge of the bed, flipping through the pages. "So how are you feeling?" Sage asked with a half smile.

Makahn opened his eyes and looked at Sage. "Oh you know... being waited hand and foot by my family and sister-in-law, making love to my wife... and you know the sex..."

"Makahn!" Rae admonished, folding her hands beneath her bosom.

But Makahn raised both hands, spreading all his eight fingers and then wiggling his index fingers while mouthing the word "Ten."

"And then there's the freedom thing..." Makahn turned, opened a drawer, and pulled out a piece of paper that had an official looking seal across it and had been torn in half but then laminated. "We're going to have it framed."

"That's good... should I mark down that you are all better again? You seem to have a lot of mobility back..."

"Naw... I think I need some more pampering." Makahn said, placing both of his hands behind his head and then looked at Sage. "Sage... I... I wanted to apologize for hitting you." Makahn said quietly. "If not for you..."

"Don't apologize, Makahn." Sage said, and wrote down a week of more rest and comfort on Makahn's medical chart and signed it. "Everyone needs to hit me a few times now and again... goodness knows I deserve it, and I had nothing to do with you finally taking the plunge."

“No... you were at least the right person at the right time, Sage...” he smiled, and took Sage’s hand. “Thank you for at least that... now I can stay here... be with my wife and family... like I should be... and you were right. I feel better as a husband and a father than I ever did as a champion.”

“You have ten belts to your name, Makahn... I’d say that that alone makes you a champion. Now I’ve prescribed another week of rest and relaxation, Makahn. No getting out of bed or I’ll be most cross.” Sage said, wagging a finger at him before smiling. “Take care of yourself.” He said.

“Good... get out of here so I can be with my sexy wife, Sage.” Makahn said, and Sage turned to leave, but was met with Rae who hugged him again, and he patted her back before leaving.

No sooner had Sage left than Rae lifted a finger and the door locked. Rae then stripped her shirt off, her bulging mammaries bouncing out of her shirt before she unbuttoned her shorts, slipping out of them and rubbing her crotch as Makahn flung the sheets away.

Tenderly, Rae crawled up over her valiantly wounded husband, and the wonderful sacrifice he’d made for her... giving up fame, a title, honor and lots and lots of money... for her. It was a reflexive thing, Makahn tensing his already erect penis as Rae rocked her hips so she could slide onto him, and kiss him while their naked bodies were being bathed by the cool sea breezes. Rae’s nipples hardened taut and firm on the ends of her tits, which Makahn hefted, kissed and sucked on one, and then repeated with the other before his wife lowered herself delicately against him, careful of his wounds, so that he could feel the press of her breasts against his chest.

Rae folded a leg against Makahn’s side to modify her vaginal tunnel leading into her body as they kissed, Makahn grabbing a two-fisted hand-hold on her bottom while she held onto his strong face.

“Ohhh...” Rae murred as she rocked her hips, feeling her husband’s mighty maleness inside her again for the umpteenth time since he returned. She was already creaming her love juices around him.

Within minutes of him returning home, he’d hugged his wife, hugged his children, hugged his sister-in-law, hugged his children again, and then groped his wife when no one was looking. Moments later he was actually stripping Rae naked, pulling her on top of him and showing her exactly how uninjured he was... for a long time.

It felt like they were newly weds again.

“Oh I missed you...” Rae whispered lying against his chest, lifting her tail higher as she rocked her hips for him.

“Rae... I’ve been such a dope.” Makahn replied; his head and eyes rolling backward as he pushed up into her on one of her rock-backs. “Please forgive me. I should’ve been here for you and the pups the whole time. I just wanted to be the one to provide for you all... I...”

“Shush.” Rae murred, and rising, quieted him by pressing her breasts over his mouth, looking down into his eyes. “That is the past... I have you now, and now I’m going to love you thoroughly to make up for lost time.” She giggled, and then Makahn’s hands moved to her ribs as he massaged her breasts before flipping her onto her back and thrust into her to the hilt.

“No...” he said and bent low to kiss her. “You... will lie back, and let me make up for that part.” He said, sliding out and then clenching his phallus to make it momentarily thicker, plunged up into her again, and Rae arched her back as a spasm of orgasmic pleasure erupted about her loins. “And I intend to make it up to all of you,” he plunged again, actually thickening more than before as he grit his teeth and growled with the third plunge. “With interest!”

The fourth plunge forced the most powerful orgasm Rae had ever experienced out of her.

It began to rain outside as Makahn continued to thrust, the humidity in their room rising to make them both slick with moisture from love juices, sweat and condensation. Makahn didn't stop loving his wife for several very long hours...

The rainstorm cracked over the Mystic League, the clouds darkening out the sun as a gentle breeze wafted up from it.

At the Shadow League... the full brunt of this storm power seemed to be raging in a torrential downpour, and though there were many students still outside working in the rain, there were some who had privileges enough not to be in the rain.

Mayia had been given more and more leadership assignments than ever before... but this time it had been Siklohn's time to lead the students in exercises outside, and since he didn't ask her to relieve him, she didn't offer to either. Besides... stress levels about her strong, powerful shoulders was mounting and Grandmaster Drake was being adamant about filling in the cracks and holes left out of her training. Certain items were remedial, and easy for her to learn, and others took her immense concentration. Being that she was the Apprentice, and a Journeyman Master of the school... she had more responsibility than anyone now... with Siklohn only slightly less so.

While Rae and Makahn were rediscovering the essence that was marital bliss, Mayia was attempting to find a nice quiet place to study. But Koraku was yelling at students for getting the books out of order. It was too crowded. But then everything was too crowded. The study halls, the cafeteria, everything was just too loud... and she had a headache, but despite that she was massaging her pressure points, and the points weren't relieving her headache, she nonetheless had some paperwork and class work that was all due yesterday.

She groaned as she slowly walked down the halls, delving deeper and deeper into the tree, coming to where the geo thermal generators were. She tried to work here, but the hum from the three generators and the heat they exuded just aggravated her, so she began looking for another place.

It was as she was leaving, as she walked into corridors that Dallas had yet to complete in construction that she came to a tunnel that led to one of the tree roots.

She paused, blinking as she stood there, looking at the thick wall of wood and the living walls leading up to this place, and she tried to remember where she saw this place before... perhaps... perhaps a dream or something like that, but she felt a definite feeling of dejavu.

But then the wood began to open, melting away to continue the corridor, and Mayia skipped back in surprise. Something, a very small voice, told her to run away at that moment, but something else drew her onward, and her own curiosity enhanced that pull, and she began walking forward, entering into a chamber surrounded by the wood of the Millennium Tree.

There was a lot about the tree she knew nothing of, and this may be something she could write about later as she felt tendrils and entrails about the walls here that all throbbed and beat with the pulse of life... the white molted with absolute black.

She felt an odd mixture of comfort and love intermingled with discomfort and hate, and as she stood there, she didn't even realize the doorway leading into this place closing.

She approached a bulbous thing at the center of the room that pulsed and throbbed, with all the tendrils radiating to and from this place. She felt compelled to approach it, almost against her will it felt, and she lifted a hand, extended a finger to touch it, and as soon as she did, the bulbous thing opened with an evil eye that focused right on her, and she gasped as her mind was filled with a rush of images, and she screamed against the mental pain as her head felt like it exploded with all the images of hate and pain and hate and hate and hate...

The tendrils all around the room rushed in about her, and Mayia cried out as she dropped her datapad and papers, and despite her phenomenal strength, the tendrils held her as they raised her up, pulling her legs and arms apart till she was spread eagle, other tendrils pushing into her back to force her chests forward, and she screamed as still more tendrils rose, sliding into her clothing momentarily before they were all torn from her.

Mayia screamed more and struggled, fearing rape as she was shorn from her clothes, and once she was made naked, those tendrils began to invade her. One slid up her anus, three up into her sex, two more in her mouth, one in either ear and one in either nostril, her eyes rolling backward in her head as the pain became too much for her to bare, the tendrils sliding into her gullet, into her womb, into every orifice as they surrounded her breasts, squeezed the air out of her.

Tears seeped from her eyes as she was suddenly revisited with all the painful episodes of Ruudful violating her over and over again, and mental images of her plight being ignored by people she knew and thought cared about her.

Her eyes rolled back further till they were purely white... and then her tears turned to blood.

The whites of her eyeballs suddenly flooded with red as the blood capsules all popped and burst, and directly after that, the tendrils began to slice her open, spilling her blood all over the floor, opening her ribcage, revealing her still beating heart. And then the tendrils began to weave into her body... changing her, a form of surgery that was literally... trillions of years old... from when the first Millennium Tree on the first world in the first universe, decided to protect itself.

The surgery tore her to pieces, keeping the pieces alive as more tendrils formed a ball of energy brighter than the sun, holding that light there, empowering it, making it grow stronger, and stronger. And then the glowing white tendrils, molted with black, reformed and then reassembled her, sewing her perfectly back together with ethereal energy around that single core of power.

And then a smaller node beneath the eye doing all this to her opened up like a vaginal slit, and a strange looking bug crawled out of it, the tendrils picking it up and moving it to Mayia's placated body, and turning it, it placed the bug right over her sternum, and the bug sparked with bio-energy between its six legs as it was placed, and the legs then dug into her flesh, and with a crunch, it bored a tube right into her heart... and began to feed.

The eye then spun around as a loud shrieking happened inside the room, and the tendrils rapidly began to remove themselves from her before she was gently put down onto the ground, and Mayia came to attention as the veins and arteries around the bug between her heavy laden breasts all began to thicken.

The doorway to this place opened, and she lowered her head, and left.

The doors to the Shadow League opened and Mayia stepped out, head bowed, her mane of red, fiery hair falling disheveled about her face and eyes, her breasts heaving as she breathed slow and evenly, her nipples standing on end as she walked elegantly... perfectly it seemed, her thick thighs framing the naked slit of her swollen sex, her clit standing on end and seeping her sexual juices.

“Whoa... Mayia...” a tall fox boy said as he was jogging by. “That’s a good look for you. Look, if you’re that desperate for a guy... you and I could just go into the bushes and... Mayia... a-are you ok?”

Mayia stopped, breathing heavily, her muscles and breasts swelling almost imperceptibly with each breath. She slowly raised her head, turning it to the fox boy, and then her eyes opened and the fox boy stopped dead, falling backward in shock as he saw the bleeding eyes; remembering the last time he’d seen those eyes from afar.

“M-Mayia!” the boy gasped and Mayia opened her mouth and screamed at him.

Saliva drained off her teeth as they all lengthened, sharpening and hooking, growing more numerous as a bellowing, shrieking roar that would shame a lion – a terror cry – issued from her mouth. She reared her head as she screamed,

flexing her body as her muscles bulged, her height increasing as her veins all stood on end, her back flaring and bulging outward, her chest thrusting forward and enlarging, and she immediately rose up onto her toes.

The boy rose as all the students looked at her, rain falling downward as they watched this, and as the fox boy stood there, Mayia turned to him, lifted a thickening arm as biceps and triceps swelled in opposition to each other, her hand lifting, and the boy saw a gem tear its way through her palm as a shadow ring suddenly appeared about her wrist.

“PROTECT!” she bellowed in a feminine voice that had lowered an octave, and her hand suddenly sparked with electricity. The fox boy ducked out of the way as a bolt of lightning lanced off his hand, cutting right through several trees, a building, and erupted against the far wall of the crater surrounding the tree.

Screams then began to exude from everyone, and Dallas, seeing what was happening, immediately activated the claxons signaling evacuation.

Mayia walked elegantly forward, growing larger and larger, shooting at everyone in her way, but with a twitch every time, her fingers seemed to redirect the blast inches from hitting the student.

Those who tried to stop her, even the strongest members of the league, were lifted one-handed off her and tossed away.

“PROTECT!” she would bellow out and fire another blast that shattered statues and retaining walls. Students that could fly did so... shuttles landed and lowered gangplanks like combat shuttles landing in an hot LZ, picking students up, the younger ones clinging onto their elders while the standard Bioroids all retreated to panels about the courtyard to be taken inside the facility, and security Bioroids and the Nemesis held her off till all the students were evacuated.

But as was found... Mayia didn't take any damage... she simply got stronger the more damage she absorbed, and a lazy punch seemed strong enough to damage even a Nemesis drone. Once all the students were safe, and his children were secured, Dallas recalled the security and the Nemesis, and Mayia stood there in the rain.

Dallas watched her from several thousand different angles from all his cameras. He tried to access Ent but couldn't do so... he was being blocked. Then he contacted Drake... but got no response.

Then he contacted Meniko.

Sage and Sanari had been summoned late in the evening, the falling storm clouds actually having darkened some while her fully repaired chamber was now a mass of aides and graduated students, all trying to obtain information from the myriad of holographic computer terminals arrayed all around the room. Meniko was currently in a conversation with three people on holographic view screens in front of her.

“... I'm sorry... no I do not have an answer. We don't even know what has happened, and those in whom reported this issue was those in whom I thought would already know. Yes Councilor, yes I know... we will keep you informed.”

And Meniko terminated the connection with them all, lifting a hand to her brow and began massaging her temple and brow ridges.

“Hatchling... what's wrong?” Sanari asked while Sage turned, looking at the holo monitors.

“We should ask him,” Meniko said, jabbing a clawed finger at Sage. “It's his student that's doing it.”

“Meniko... please be calm... what's happened?” Sanari asked again, and Meniko sighed.

“The Shadow League has been evacuated.” Meniko said. “Apparently Mayia arrived out of nowhere, stark naked, and bleeding profusely from the eyes.”

“*Bleeding from the eyes?!*” Sanari gasped.

“Yes... and she appears to be steadily growing stronger and more powerful. Even the Nemesis and all the security on the island weren’t able to stop her.”

Sage stopped, leaning over Noxi as he looked at an image of Mayia. Noxi had been one of Mayia’s mentors while she was at the Mystic League itself before she joined the Shadow League. Sage fingered the image of his favored student... a young woman who was almost a daughter to him. She was bulking up, growing stronger and stronger.

“Well Sage?” Meniko asked. “Can you tell me what this is?”

Sage lifted a hand and touched the screen, dragging his finger across the screen to create a box, lifted his finger and tapped an *‘enlarge’* command and he concentrated on the enlarged image of the bulbous thing between her swelling and bulbous breasts.

“SAGE!” Meniko shouted, and the whole chamber rumbled.

Sage looked up. “Forgive me headmistress...” Sage said quietly. “I had to be sure.”

“Sure of what? Do you know what this is? Do you know what is happening to her?”

Sage turned to Noxi and asked her to enlarge the image he’d just highlighted on the main screen, and she did so, an a large theater wide holoscreen appeared detailing of a region between Mayia’s four breasts. Meniko looked at it, eyed Sage, looked back at the bulbous thing and then back at Sage.

“Sage... you have a fixation on breasts. What am I looking at?”

“The... device... that you are looking at is a simbiant organism, whose one and only purpose is to reprogram and rebuild a host organism into what people of my world call a Weapon. I know this, because I’ve actually held one of these things in my hands while it was still alive.”

“Where did it come from? Why is it on Mayia?” Meniko asked, wringing her hands nervously.

“The tree made it.” Sage answered the first question with finality. “As for why it’s on her... one can only assume that Ent had chosen her to be his weapon. But... he shouldn’t even be able to create a weapon until he’s centuries if not millennia older. But he’s only ten.” Sage lowered his head and concentrated as he thought. “Why is he even activating a weapon?” he asked himself.

“Ent? Who’s Ent?” Meniko demanded, leaning forward.

“Ent is the Millennium Tree, Headmistress. It’s the name he chose for himself after he decided that he wanted to be a boy, and likewise wanted to honor his father.”

“Sage,” Meniko said, trying to keep herself from growling. “Mayia attacked your students, and as you say, by his command! She’s already shown herself to be dangerous, and she appears to be growing stronger and more powerful. Is there a danger we should be aware of?”

Sage bit his lower lip and turned back to her. “There is... for whatever reason she is being activated for. Weapons have only one purpose, Meniko... and that is to utterly annihilate, not just destroy, but to annihilate something. They are created to protect the planet and to protect the tree. Are there any... absolutely *any* other dangers that you haven’t mentioned? A meteor about to smack into this planet and destroy all life, a space fleet coming to annihilate us, anything that would warrant such a creation of a weapon?”

There was silence, and Meniko looked around to her students and faculty, seeing a bunch of head shakes and shrugging of shoulders.

“No.” Meniko answered, and Sage fixed on her, swallowing deeply.

“If there isn’t a danger to the planet, then there can only be a danger to the tree. Being that there are no outward and immediate dangers that we can see, then Mayia is being converted to deal with past dangers that were never resolved.”

“Past dangers... what do you mean?” Meniko said, and Sage bit his lower lip.

“The area surrounding Ent has been the sight of three major conflicts, Headmistress, all three of which led to incredible damage to the land surrounding him, the third of which led to he himself being hurt. It is the duty of the Guardian to protect him, and when he calls to the guardian, and the guardian fails to come, that guardian is deemed as faulty, and must be replaced. But before a new guardian can be made, the old one must be removed.”

“Removed?” someone asked.

“Killed.” Sage corrected. “Annihilated.”

“Then if he wants to kill the guardian,” Meniko fumed. “Then go! Just go and stand in its way before she finishes changing and starts attacking *my* students!”

“Meniko... I’m not the guardian.” Sage said, and then lifted his head to face Meniko. “You are.”

Mayia’s body was hulking, her body swelling thicker and thicker, cascading with electrical might, her right hand that she’d used to shoot streams of electricity had been surrounded by a long sheathe-like barrel. Every time electricity cascaded across a part of her body, that part of her body mutated... like trillions of spiders spinning a web about her, that webbing transforming her flesh,

As she stood there, her shoulders suddenly flared, the thickening muscles separating one layer from the one beneath, before two massive guards arched upward from her arms, her biceps massive swollen orbs, just before the broadened ridges of her neck to shoulder swung upward and lanced forward, forming two huge guards over either shoulder.

She was growing stronger than she ever thought possible... and she was crying.

A stupid look was on her face, but her mind was screaming as she tried to mentally halt all the changes.

‘Stop it!!’ she cried in her own head, but she was absolutely powerless to stop any of it all.

Heavy, heavy armor had been forming, so many layers had already formed that she’d lost count...

She was twelve feet tall at the moment, and still growing, her chest barreling outward her breasts massive orbs while her back continued to flare, her chest continued to jut forward, her muscles tightening harder and harder, mutating into muscle striations that perhaps even master never had. Even in his new dragon form. And hanging from her right arm was a weapon, and it was growing more, and more powerful. Her head turned as she looked down at it, her bloody tears staining streaks down over the hard plates lining from her mouth backward to her ears.

She was gaining powers like invulnerability, unlimited strength... incredible powers... she was growing wings.

‘Please stop! Please don’t make me hurt anyone!’ but whatever it was that was changing her, making her a monster from her own worst nightmares, dreams that had haunted her ever since she became the devil bunny for the first time.

And inside her mind was an ever repeating command:

Kill Meniko. Kill Meniko. Kill Meniko...

“ME?!” Meniko hissed and then surged forward passed Sanari to push her head, equally as long as Sage was tall so that her blue eyes focused darkly on him. “What do you mean, me?!”

Sage stepped back, but didn't shy away.

“Headmistress... are you or are you not the Planetary Guardian of Wave World?” Sage asked and Meniko slid back a little.

“I am.” She said.

“And are you or are you not responsible for the protection and safety of everyone and everything on or connected to Wave World?” Sage continued.

Meniko paused... seeing where he was going with this. “I am.” She answered in all truth.

“Then you... are her target, Meniko. Because when he called out to you, you failed to protect him.”

“What do you mean I failed to protect him? I never received any calls.”

“No dreams of a small human boy, dressed in white, calling out to you in some way?” Sage asked, and suddenly Meniko's eyes grew very, very wide.

“How do you know about that?” she hissed.

“Shortly before I,” Sage exhaled and hung his head. “Before I went mad, I was drawn into the tree while I was out having a smoke. Inside I found myself with Ent... and we talked. He said that he felt abandoned, but he had a guardian now, so he wasn't alone as much. I had thought he meant you.”

“No... I... other than those dreams, I've not seen him.”

“Did you ever go to him when he called?”

Meniko thought, tapping a claw on the stones. “No.”

Sage folded his arms.

“We have a problem, then. Ent is a little boy who feels that he is abandoned by the only person in whom he would call a mother...”

“Mother?!” Meniko looked up, suddenly attentive. “I never...”

“Meniko... you are the strongest female entity connected to the planet. One would consider that an honor that he'd choose you to be his mother. But he feels as if you've abandoned him, and he's throwing a very real tantrum like a little child who's discovered his father's sword. We...”

“This all your fault!” Meniko shrieked, tears falling from her eyes. “You planted that weed; it's all your fault that it's grown to this point! I should've banished you and had that, that thing ripped out when I had the chance!”

Mayia felt her power culminating.

She had very, very minor control over her own body at the moment, essentially anything that whatever it was that was controlling her would allow her to have. Her breathing was like a bellows, and she heard it as if she were in a sealed space suit and helmet, each breath taking a very long time to execute. She felt a furnace burning inside her chest, flaring powerful as it lit her skin, and she looked at her left hand, saw the huge sheering claws, the biceps so large that she could palm the tops of them with her hand, her triceps massively huge.

The cannon arm ended in a long blunt cylinder with many grooves and chinks in the end leading to a huge crystal imbedded inside it all. She felt power surging through that arm like she'd never felt before, with the veins having bulged out like a webbing of cables all down either arm.

Her toes had lengthened, ending in massive claws, and plating covered every square inch of her body from head to toe. She had horns, and incredible strength.

She was twenty feet high, and when she moved, she moved with grinding sounds like servos manipulating themselves. She had a mental knowledge of every weapon she currently possessed, and she felt like hyperventilating, but the machine she'd become was just that incredible that it measured her breathing for optimum performance and kept her from doing so.

The power... the sheer power inside her... it billowed like the cosmos. *Where was it all coming from?!*

But she didn't have a chance to ponder the answer when her legs began to extend and she rose from her squat to a stand. She could feel them moving, lifting her before she took a step, and then her back opened and a pair of massive wings unfolded from inside, glittering with rainbow colors, spreading like butterfly wings combined with dragon wings.

She opened her mouth and roared, bearing teeth as her bloody eyes widened. She began to cry more bloody tears as her body entered the last stage of the conversion, her body bulging even more, huge pylons sliding out of her back and rising, biological versions of jets folding out of her back, bio-missile racks, plasma casters, shield generators...

'Please!' she screamed inwardly. *'STOP IT!!'*

And she cried... feeling as if she were been more solidly raped than Ruudful ever managed.

"He's just a boy!" Sage cried out suddenly. "And he's frightened!"

"He's an abomination!" Meniko hissed back. "And you're to blame that he's here. And you're doing nothing to stop it."

"Meniko," Sage calmed himself. "I'm *trying* to help you."

"Then stop it!" Meniko cried.

Sage saw that she was afraid, and though he wanted Sanari with him now, she was comforting Meniko... and Meniko needed Sanari now more than he did.

"Then I will." Sage said quietly. Meniko looked up, staring at him. "This *is* my fault, Meniko. My fault for not telling you about him in the first place. He is creating a weapon out of my beloved student, a young woman who is like my own daughter, because he is afraid and wishes to protect himself. He is afraid and protecting himself because you never came to him when he called out to you. You never came... because you never knew you had to."

Sage looked to Sanari, and took a deep breath.

“I stand... a better chance than anyone else here... I'll stop her.”

“But Sage...” Riikoa said as she stood in her one piece bodysuit and overalls. Her chest was just starting to bud with real mammaries. “Look at her!” and she pointed to the screen where Mayia had been growing right before their eyes. “She’s huge! She’s radiating more power than we have the capability to detect, and we’re the Mystic League! I don’t like the look of that cannon on her arm either. She looks tougher than Rae. She looks tougher than you were when you were... well... you know... you need to be unlocked and released from your collar to...”

“No.” Sage said and gestured to Sanari, who was already untying her robes and blouse to remove the key around her neck. “No...” he said firmly. “I’m no match for a weapon when it’s tapped into the Ether Stream for power. Besides,” he managed a small smile. “I’ve been mandated to be locked for a full year at the very least. We can’t go breaking any laws like this.” He turned to Meniko, looked to be about to say something to her, and then looked away.

“She’s on the move!” Noxi exclaimed, and all eyes moved to the image as a blare of jets flared from Mayia’s back, her wings spreading as her image screamed, and she was carried up into the air.

“We’re out of time.” Sage said quickly. “Signal that the students get to the shelters immediately. Instruct the faculty not to confront her at any cost.”

“Sage!” a voice said, and he turned back as Sanari rose; the promise ring he’d given her glinting as beautifully as she was. “Be careful...”

Sage smiled. “I’m probably the safest person on this island.” He smiled. “Be safe.” He said and rushed outward even as sirens blared.

Sage had seen a weapon only once in his life. He was very much aware of the power that they possessed as he watched it decimate fifty legions of demons within a matter of seconds. That had been the smallest of weapons that Earth had to offer... Juggernaut, a masculine land walker of muscle might and more weapons than an entire fleet of warships... and a breath weapon that was hotter than the sun.

He saw his student as a large dot as she rose on a column of flame like a rising comet, saw her shiny armor glimmer briefly before she dipped forward.

Behind him, students were scattering everywhere, and even at the range Mayia was, she fired that cannon arm, and a column of white fire a quarter mile wide lanced over Sage’s head, right past the Pinnacle Tower and causing the earth to rumble beneath his feet.

Sage swallowed as she soared forward, screaming out a Terror Cry that would do even him proud.

“M-master Sage!” a voice said, and he turned immediately, and saw Geevo rushing up to him. “Master Sage... w-what’s going on? What happened to Mayia?!”

Sage looked up at Mayia as she approached rapidly, and Sage reached and took Geevo by the elbow. “I have no time to explain in detail, Geevo, but Mayia has been taken over, she’s been incredibly empowered and is being controlled. We have only one hope and chance in which to stop her... else wise she will walk over me and kill anyone in her way in order to kill Meniko.”

Geevo blinked.

“Do you care for her?” Sage asked, staring him right in the eyes.

“I...” Geevo tried to say, but then heard the screeching cry, and looking up saw Mayia’s massive form approaching very fast.

Sage swallowed as Geevo tried to put words to his feelings. "I... ah-I... I don't know." He swallowed again and looked back up to Mayia. "I..."

"Geevo... if you do... if you truly feel absolutely any connection for her... then I can use your help. If you don't, then you need to run. You need to run to the shelters and be safe. Mayia... would never forgive herself... if she killed you here and now."

Geevo stared at him... and then looked back up at Mayia... and then bowing his head, he pulled his arm out of Sage's hand, looked him in the eye... and left.

Mayia landed with a lunge on the shore, her beautiful wings folding as she clawed at the ground with one hand, and rising, puffing her chest out, she began to advance. The courtyard was absolutely deserted, and she looked around, identifying any possible targets... saw some butterflies, some small rodents running away, saw several distant heat and bio signatures, but no one to impede her way.

She began walking forward elegantly and gracefully as she rose from a hunched over position, her wings and engines folding firmly into her back as the armored plates fell over the components once they'd folded in.

She was built like an armadillo from the back, with only slightly less armor on her front, which was still considerable.

She walked and rose steadily along one tier of the main courtyard after the next, looking all about her, continuing toward the bio signature that she knew was Meniko's. Hers was the most brilliant one to her, and was impossible for her to miss. Then she began to rise along the last series of stairs to the courtyard immediately before the Pinnacle Tower and slowed, seeing a lone figure standing there who'd been somehow invisible to her senses and sensors.

But Mayia recognized him...

'N-no! Master get out of the way!' she shrieked in her mind as her body automatically swiveled its cannon arm upward to target her. The body continued to advance despite her wishes, and mentally she tried to throw her shoulder against its unstoppable force. *'Stop! Stop! Stop-stop-stop-STOP!!'*

And then with a shuddering lurch, her body did stop and she mentally blinked, seeing her sweet master standing there.

"Hello Mayia." He greeted. "You've grown since I've last seen you." He said, placing a hand gently on her cannon arm, and her body stepped back several steps, hunching downward toward the ground while her cannon arm re-aimed for him.

"I'm not here to hurt you, Mayia. I pose no danger... I don't even have any power to harm you."

All her new senses verified this, but that didn't keep her from being worried for his safety. She could vaporize him... and she somehow knew she could.

"Mayia..." he walked forward. "My beautiful daughter... let's go away some place... I don't have much money to my name, but I think I can afford an ice cream for us both. You'd like that wouldn't you?"

Mayia gasped as her body lifted the cannon arm, and more bloody tears slid from her eyes, and then she thrust the cannon forward and a priming charge erupted on its end, the grooves of the cannon opening and shining with light warning him not to approach any closer, and he stopped immediately.

“Mayia... I’m shocked... that’s a very dangerous gun you have there. Why don’t you power it down? I’d like to hug my daughter.”

Mayia looked at the gun, hyperventilating as she concentrated, intensifying her attention on the weapon.

This is my power, this is my gun, I control it... I control it... I...

“Mayia...” a new voice said, and in reflex her body coiled, turned and pointed the cannon at another person, and her eyes widened in breathless shock at what she saw.

‘Geevo,’ she breathed.

Sage looked sidelong at Geevo, and the barest hint of a smile rose up on his face. “He can come with, if he wants to Mayia.”

“I do.” Geevo said and approached. “I-I know things have been strained between us, Mayia... but I would like to take you out on a date, if you’re willing to accept my offer, that is.” He produced a small red white flower, something that would offset her mane... if her mane was still there. A date with him was the one thing right now she wanted more than anything. “But you need to wear that pretty dress I saw you in last week.” He smiled. It showed off your back beautifully.”

The shock to Mayia’s system was enough, the cannon arm powered down and she turned to him, her massively clawed hand, a hand that could crush him easily in its fingers, lifted and he reached out and palmed the backs of her fingers as he neared.

“I thought you looked very beautiful.” Geevo said. “I’d like to see you in it again.”

‘G-Geevo...’ she whimpered, feeling his hand on hers, and as she turned her hand, he placed his palm into hers.

“I suppose I can leave you two alone,” Sage added, and she looked back to him. “But we can all go. A park someplace... or even on the north side of the island where no one would bother us. We could make it a double date! Sanari would love to come... perhaps a picnic... it would do us all some good.”

“Geevo... Master...” she voiced, her voice seeming mechanical and simulated.

“That’s right... it’s us, Mayia. What do you say?” and she felt the two men that she loved more than anyone in the multiverse embrace her massive, powerful body, and she settled downward.

And there was a hand on her abs, planting right over the gems lining her abs, destructive gems that could lance a hole in a man if she fired them. That these two didn’t fear her meant that they were no danger, and her body let them get close...

“I... would... love... to...” she said... and purred.

And then Sage’s hand lanced upward beneath her breasts, took hold of something, and ripped it out in a movement that was difficult to see with the naked eye. He pulled Geevo out from beneath her, and in his hand was a small bug-like thing that his powerful fingers crushed while Mayia screamed outward.

“Master Sage!” Geevo cried out, and Sage pushed an arm out across his chest and made him move further back as Mayia’s cannon arm and clawed arm moved to her head as she screamed. “What have you done?!”

“Removed her control node!” Sage yelled back as the wind suddenly picked up, and lightning erupted upward from Mayia’s body toward the swirling storm clouds above her. A storm of plasma erupted upward from her.

And then she fell forward, and the pair of them backed even further away before she landed with a shuddering lurch.

Rain began to fall again as vapor rose from her, the streams of vapor evaporating all her weapons and armor, and she began to diminish rapidly right before their eyes, steadily growing smaller and smaller, till she was once again the Mayia they both knew... only naked.

“Is that it? It’s over?” Geevo asked.

Sage looked at the node in his hand. “For now. We need to take her someplace safe.” and he stepped forward, but Geevo lifted a hand to stop him.

“No... I nearly abandoned her... I’m not about to abandon her now.” He said, and stepping forward, picked her up in his arms, rolling her so that he could look down at her.

She was sleeping, and in that moment as he held her naked form, something in his mind... clicked... and immediately he thought how lovely she looked when she was at rest.

“Come with me...” Sage said. “I think Mezzo is going to want to file a report...”

Sage returned, and stood before Meniko, and lifting a hand, a holo-panel appeared, and he placed what was in his hand on top of the panel.

“This is a control node.” Sage announced to the chamber. “It’s what was controlling her. Geevo... will need a special school commendation for his help.” Sage said, and looking up, removing his hand, Sanari saw that his hand was trembling, and she hurried to him to take his hand and hold it. “She cannot be controlled against her will by the tree without it, and with it destroyed, she’s free of his control. Without it, she’s also severely weakened.”

“Where is she?”

“In the detention center...” Sage replied. “Namah is checking over her at the moment, though... Mezzo wants her to remain there for observation. I didn’t argue the point... though Geevo did for a bit. He managed to at least get her a more comfortable bed.”

Meniko looked down, and a little sour.

“I want to see her when she is up an around.” She said in a low monotone. “A decision will need to be made about this tree of yours, Sage.”

“But...” Sage began.

“That is all, Sage. Now everyone... please leave me.”

Everyone cleared, and Sage and Sanari were the last to leave, and as soon as the doors were closed, Meniko let herself cry, and lifting a clawed hand to cover her face, began to sob.

“I want to see her!” Geevo demanded, slamming both fists onto Mezzo’s steel desk to create impressions from his fists.

“Mister Geevo... I do not believe that is wise at the moment to...”

“Screw you!” and he rose and began walking down the corridor, and two of the Golden Guards moved to intercept him. “Out of my way!” he barked, and they only came to attention, holding their gaffs in their hands, ready to defend themselves. “I said let me through!”

The shouting had awoken Mayia... and she opened her eyes and lifted her head, and her heart quickened once she heard Geevo's voice. New life pounded in her chest, she felt so very different, and as she rose to her feet, it was with an almost unnatural grace. She rose to the energy field and pressed against it, seeing two Golden Guards arguing with Geevo... or rather Geevo shouting at them.

She was naked... but she didn't care. Her heart skipped a beat.

"I want to see her! Get out of my way or I'll..."

"Please..." Mayia said suddenly, and they all turned to her as she backed away from the field. "Please... let him see me... I don't want to see him hurt." She said.

The guards looked to a new approaching person, and saw Mezzo standing there in the middle of the hall. He nodded his head, and the nearest of the tall guards turned and deactivated the field. Geevo walked past them, and into her cell, and the field reactivated right on his butt.

"Mayia... are... are you ok?" he asked... seeing the collar about her throat.

She sat down on a bench at the back of her cell. "I-I am... I feel all right... different... but all right." She looked down at her right hand, and felt it with her other hand before she cradled it close to her body.

Geevo sat down beside her, but didn't move to touch her.

"D-did I hurt... anyone?" she asked. "Did I k-kill..."

"No." Geevo said with finality. "Just some frazzled nerves. Nothing no one can overcome, Mayia..."

She hugged her right arm closer to her, and it pressed further between her heavy-laden mammaries and her developing secondaries. She tucked her legs up close to her and she whimpered.

"I tried to kill the Headmistress..." she cried, clear, white tears falling from her eyes instead of the bloody ones. "I didn't..."

"No... Sage and I were able to stop you. You didn't even hurt a fly, Mayia." He said, and surprising himself, he turned to her, taking hold of her narrow shoulder.

"I'm a monster." She sobbed, and the next thing she knew she was being pulled into Geevo's arms, close enough to hear his heart.

"You're not a monster..." he said. "And I will have words with anyone who says otherwise."

Mayia sobbed as she turned to him, rolled up into a ball, clutching at his bare chest with one hand, her tears wetting his fur. And then Geevo realized that he was now seeing apart of her that she perhaps had not allowed anyone to see: The innocent, emotional fragile part. And try as he might not to allow it to happen in that moment... his heart connected with hers.

Mayia was escorted into Meniko's presence by four of her elite guards... Geevo walking right along with her, he having not left her side in all this time till she was summoned.

She was brought into the Pinnacle Tower, down the ramp, and escorted into Meniko's presence, with dozens of faculty, graduated students and aides surrounding her. Sage and Mother Sanari stood beside Meniko's massive Dragon form.

“Don’t be frightened, Mayia... Please come in.” Meniko said. “The rest of you are dismissed.” She said and nodded to the guards, and they all left. Geevo didn’t move from her side, and he held her shoulder as they both walked in to stand before her.

Mayia had been dressed in a simple white linen gown to cover her nakedness.

“How are you feeling, Mayia?” she asked, and Mayia lifted her head.

“Nervous... a little frightened.” She said, and Geevo moved behind her to hold both shoulders now. “I-I’m sorry if I’ve done anything wrong.”

“No... you haven’t done anything wrong.” Meniko said kindly. “I’ve... had to make difficult decisions in the past,” she said then to the general populace around her. “But I am afraid that given the current circumstances, that I’ve decided to destroy the Millennium Tree.” Meniko announced, and with those words, Mayia winced and lifted her left hand to her head as she bowed it forward. “Its influence on a student of the Leagues to force it to kill anything is something I cannot ignore.” Mayia winced and Geevo hugged her shoulders, pulling her to him as he tried to look into her face while she grit her teeth, her teeth lengthening and sharpening, the buck-toothed chisel broadening as it further overlapped the teeth across from them. “Dallas is to be instructed to remove himself and his facilities from the island as soon as possible,” Mayia’s eyes closed, and she groaned, grabbing at her heart, and Sage let go of Sanari as he saw his student in discomfort. “Within a few months time... the tree will be annihilated, and...”

Mayia screamed, and opening her eyes, they were both as red as blood her right arm lifting as the muscles rapidly bulged, her veins thickening into chords while her right tit bulged and the whole of her right arm and the right side of her body tore from her clothes. A cannon formed out of her hand rapidly, the barrel cracking open and three Shadow Rings formed before it, and a priming charge began to gather at its end. She turned it toward Meniko, screaming as she brought her other arm up, trying to move it out of the way.

Meniko gasped in horror as Sage moved before her, spreading his arms open, placing himself in the way of the blast. Immediately after that, Geevo pushed himself before both she and Sage, and Mayia screamed in desperation, pulling her arm back, the priming charge dissipating and the transformation reversing itself. As one Sage and Geevo collapsed about Mayia and she began sobbing; Sage holding her head to his chest while Geevo tried to cover her naked tit. Mayia held onto his chest with her left hand, her right hand hanging limp at her side.

“W-what’s the meaning of this?!” Meniko bellowed. “I thought you said that she was free of being controlled!”

“She was, Meniko.” Sage said, cradling his student to him. “If she wasn’t in control of her actions... you would be dead right now... as would young Geevo and myself. Now if I may continue explaining things to you without you interrupting me, Headmistress... you may have the rest of the information you didn’t want to listen to when I brought the control node to you.”

Meniko stared at him, and then brought her fist down onto the ground, growling.

“Though she is released from the control node, Headmistress... though she has been reduced in power, she is still nonetheless a weapon. The conversion process is irreversible. Mayia will continue to defend the tree to her very last breath, and if the tree dies... then so does she.”

Geevo gasped and looked up at Sage, then to Meniko. “Headmistress! Please, I beg of you... d-don’t...”

“Geevo...” Sage said, looking kindly to the young black bunny, and he fell silent.

“By reflex, she will convert as necessary to defend the tree to keep it safe. And despite that she is reduced... she is still nonetheless a full weapon, and she will cause a very, very great deal of death and destruction before you manage to destroy her or the tree, so I suggest that any more talk about destroying the tree be stopped at this moment. Your life is in danger every time that you mention it.”

“Why did you never tell me of this?!” Meniko cried, tears welling up in her eyes. “Why did you never inform me of the tree’s capabilities... or this?! I’d never have allowed you to plant it if this is what it would bring one day.”

“Assumptions, stubbornness and spite.” He answered her. He didn’t clarify as to exactly whose... “The tree and Mayia are connected, Headmistress... I would beg of you to please not end them both. Mayia is just a student, and Ent is just a child... before... before you make a decision of this magnitude... I would ask of only one thing, Headmistress...”

“What is that?” Meniko swallowed.

“That you meet Ent...”

Mayia was resting soundly in the hospital while Namah did a full spectrum scan on her. She would be safe and would do nothing to harm anyone so long as no one attacked her or the tree in their absence. Geevo again followed her, and watched over her powerful body as she slept and rested within Namah’s machines.

In the mean time, as the sun set and the rain grew softer, Meniko soared through the sky, feeling a telltale feeling growing stronger in the back of her mind as she grew nearer to the tree. On her back were Mother Sanari and Sage...

She soared over the rim of the Caldera and dipped down to land on the courtyard, and Sage helped Sanari off as she climbed down Meniko’s upraised forearm before Sage leapt down. Meniko then converted into her delicate bird maiden form; her clothing forming about her in a cloud of mists.

“Where to now?” she asked, and Sage gestured around the tree.

The tree itself was a quarter mile wide at its base, but its radial roots were wider. Pathways were made through the roots so that they were able to make their way to the back of it, opposite to the doors that led into the interior of the tree and the dimensional paradox that was within.

Sage came to stand before a bare section of the tree where a series of creeper vines had grown upward along the bark, forming a sort of incomplete archway.

“Ent... may we please come in. I’ve brought Meniko... she’d like to speak with you.” The wind blew high above them, wafting through the tree’s branches and many leaves and Sage looked higher. “Yes she is cross with you, Ent... you’ve been a bad boy, now open the door...” Sage continued kindly, and the wind blew through the trees a little longer, and then the bark beneath the archway creased and melted away, revealing a doorway of glowing white light that spilled out on them into the evening light.

Sage then turned to Sanari and took her hands, kissing her fingers.

“Only Meniko and I can enter, beloved...” he said, and Meniko turned, blinking at his statement of adoration for Sanari. “We will be quite safe.”

Sanari stepped forward and embraced him, kissing him on the lips before stepping back, and Meniko felt a muscle in her cheek twitch in disbelief. It was then that she spied the bracelets about their promise wrists.

“Step inside, Meniko.” Sage said and turned toward the tree. He stepped beneath the archway and was enveloped within the glowing light.

Meniko swallowed and stepped forward herself, and suddenly with a snap she found herself standing in a chamber that had no ceiling or walls... the light perfect in its brilliance, white beyond compare. She found herself enveloped in a white robe, her body shining beautifully.

“This way headmistress.” Sage said and she turned to look at him, he in a white bodysuit with a blue scarf wrapped about his neck, his green eyes piercing in this atmosphere.

“What is this place?” she asked as they walked along an ornate white carpet that had been trimmed in blue.

“Ent’s domain.” Sage answered as they walked together toward a raised dais. “The older he gets, the more elaborate this becomes... right now, with him so young, its very basic.”

Meniko looked ahead of her at a dais and a chair or throne standing on top of it.

“You mentioned earlier that he chose his name... he chose his gender?”

Her tone was pleasant... she found it very calming in here, and certain dark things that had been welling inside her over the past years in her heart, her mind and her soul didn’t touch her here.

“Trees as plants are bisexual. When they are born – planted in this case – they have no gender. Through their own decisions... they choose a gender, whichever they discern as stronger. Go figure... on a planet where the three most powerful beings are all female, I have no idea why he chose to be male.”

“Couldn’t he choose to be bisexual too?” Meniko asked, a bit nervous as she held her hands together, surprised that their conversation was so polite at the moment.

“One would suppose he could’ve... but in any given circumstance, bisexuals make up less than a fraction of a percent of any populace... perhaps if he were planted on a planet where there were nothing but bisexuals... he would choose a gender like that.”

They were silent for a moment as they neared the empty throne. She couldn’t even hear their foot steps.

“Who is his father?” she asked suddenly.

Sage smiled. “Tre’ent. The eldest of the trees... son of Earth’s World Tree before she gave up her life to the planet. To our knowledge, he’s the strongest Millennium Tree in existence. He’d have to be... being that he’s tens of billions of years old. Almost as old as Earth is.”

Sage paused as they came to stop at the foot of the Dais, and he looked around.

“Ent... you’re being rude.” Sage said aloud. “She came all this way to see you... you should meet with her.” There was a pause, and then a small boy in white robes peaked out shyly from behind the throne, sucking his thumb. “Ent... please come here...” Sage smiled, and Ent removed his thumb, stood up straight and walked to the front of his throne, climbed up into it and turned around.

“Gardener... why have you brought this faulty Guardian to me?”

“ENT!” Sage admonished and Ent shrank away from the voice, and Sage actually stepped up onto the Dais. “Young Lord... that is absolutely no way to greet a guest! You greet those in whom you aren’t familiar with you first, and then you greet those who you are familiar with.”

Ent looked up sheepishly, nibbling on a finger while Meniko stood there waiting expectantly.

“Guardian, Meniko... greetings. W-welcome to my domain.” He said, looked happily at Sage, and then shrank from the gaze.

“Ent... do you know why we are here?” Sage asked.

“I do not...” he said.

“You’ve done a very bad thing, Ent... you wielded a weapon – my student – and tried to kill Meniko. Murder is a very, very bad thing... and you very nearly killed your guardian, your gardener, and Mayia’s love. If not for the voices of some very, very few... you would’ve been uprooted right now.”

Ent looked suddenly very frightened, and tears welled up in his eyes as he looked between Sage and Meniko.

“B-but Gardener! S-She isn’t my Guardian! She abandoned me! She let me be hurt! S-she isn’t a good guardian!” he sobbed, his little tears swelling over his rounded cheeks to wet his robe. “S-so much blood... all around me... A-and then Mayia being crushed into my body... s-she nearly died if I hadn’t stopped it! She became my reaver and stopped all the violence... and...”

“She stopped the violence with more violence, Ent” Meniko said as she stepped forward. “Ninety-seven people died very painfully because of Mayia turning into a Devil Bunny. It took Mother Sanari and Sage much effort to revive them all.”

Ent tucked his legs up close to him and covered his mouth as he cried harder.

“B-but my new guardian said that you were evil. He said that you did bad things, bad things that you were to blame for all the violence... even that which Mayia did. I-it was all your fault that people were being hurt around me, and if he still had his way, then...”

“Still?” Meniko breathed. “Ent... w-who is your Guardian?” Meniko asked, but Ent closed his eyes tightly and shook his head.

“Go away...” he whispered. “Go away from me! Leave me be!” he cried.

“Ent... this is not the right thing... you...” but Sage stopped, and Meniko, looking at him nervously, knelt before him.

“Ent... who is your new guardian... who is it who told you these things?” Meniko asked, taking him by the shoulders, but Ent merely cried harder, bawling now.

But then Sage hissed, and his hand fell about something, and suddenly there was a black winged serpent materializing in his claws as he snarled, his teeth growling as he began pulling the hissing and snapping creature away from Ent.

“Gardener!” Ent cried as he rose to his feet, suddenly commanding great authority. “You leave my Guardian alone! You...”

“ENT!” Sage’s voice was suddenly very loud, and overrode Ent’s and he shrank back into his seat. “I am he who planted you! Have I ever lied to you?” Sage bellowed, and Ent shook his head while Sage struggled with the Serpent, but Meniko had already recognized the spirit. It was that of the old Guardian of this world, the one she’d killed and took the place of. “Have I ever lied around you?!” Sage bellowed again with a voice of power in this domain, and again Ent shook his head, while the black creature hissed and demanded to be released. “Then know that the color black in your domain denotes evil!” Sage’s voice echoed. “Know that this creature was evil, and did evil things as Guardian over this world. Your new and rightful Guardian is Meniko, for she killed him in order to free this world from the defiler’s grasp!”

Ent’s eyes watered, and then his lower lip and trembled.

“H-he lied to me?” he asked; his voice sounding like he’d just been swatted.

“Yes he did.” Meniko said. “I don’t know what he told you about me, Ent... but I did kill him.”

“B-but you murdered someone...” Ent gasped.

“And she has already paid for her sin, Ent.” Sage said, his voice softer, his grip tightening around the throat of the winged serpent till it gasped for air. “She denounced herself as Headmistress of her own school and came to live here alone... but then her school followed her here. Look at her, Ent... do you see any hint of lies or deceit in her. Do you see black?”

Ent looked at Meniko, and he scanned her thoroughly, and then stood up in his chair and pointed. “YOU LIED TO ME!” he cried, screaming indignantly and pointing with his little fingers, and suddenly the black winged-serpent froze in place and Sage let go of him.

“You... you made me believe... you made me hate my mama!” he bawled.

“L-little ma-sss-ter.” The serpent hissed. “I-I took care of you. I...”

“**SILENCE!!**” Ent bellowed, tears streaming down from his eyes. “I believed you...” he whimpered. “You... I will never forgive you!” and he gestured... and the black serpent, the last remains of an ancient Dragaseir dissolved before him.”

He sniffled and rubbed his eyes that had turned red. “I-I *sniffle* I believed him...” he whimpered.

Meniko swallowed, and the mother in her reacted, and she took Ent in her arms and sat down on his throne while Sage moved toward them.

“Mama...” Ent whimpered, and held onto Meniko’s chest as tight as he could.

Ent lay in Meniko’s arms, Sage standing beside them both leaning on the throne. Ent nuzzled Meniko’s breast, and palmed her tit with a small hand, and automatically she opened her robes without really thinking, and he tipped his head into her robes, found her teat, and opening his mouth around the fleshy nib at the end of her swollen mammary, he began to suckle.

Meniko’s chest had been swollen when she entered this place, and she didn’t really know why her image had taken that shape and form, but apparently her breasts were as fat with milk in this place as maybe Tla’s were. She didn’t mind how openly he moved to nurse, she didn’t mind that she didn’t care, nor did she mind Sage hanging over them both watching him nurse from her naked breast...

Meniko lowered a hand and rubbed Ent’s tummy while he rested in her arms, his tears dried while he slept, and the quiet of the place became absolute.

“I had meant him as a gift...” Sage said suddenly, breaking the silence after a long time, and Meniko looked up at him while he watched the boy nurse. “I... never meant any harm by planting him... I thought that he would be accepted by everyone. He’s only known rejection and hate all his life.”

“A gift?” Meniko repeated, looking up at him.

“He’s a tree. All they do is clean and purify things.” Sage explained. “Cleans the air... purifies the natural energy around him, refines it, makes it more accessible. Three ground Leylines and two Aerial Leylines intersected with him when he was planted... there’s a nexus inside him, a wellspring of magical power.” Sage reached down and rubbed a finger back and forth along Ent’s arm, and he reached up and took Sage’s finger gently with one hand and held onto it. “His bark makes medicines, he purifies the ground, makes air... all he ever wanted to do was just help others.

“I’d been asked to find the perfect planting place for him...” Sage’s face fell, and he sat at Meniko’s feet while Ent continued to hold onto his finger. “I failed him and his father.”

“Sage...” Meniko began. “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” She said quietly. “I know he’s only a child, but his presence interferes in the balance of many things. Magic being too readily available makes it more difficult to control...”

“He interferes with the natural ebb and flow of this planet, and all its energies around him are the planet’s to use as it sees fit... not a child. He’s not old enough to be able to dictate what an ancient world does with its own power... And with him plugging up a volcano... its like you needing to burp and someone held your mouth shut so you can’t. I know you’ve all built vents to allow the volcano to vent... but that’s like blowing the burp out of the corners of your mouth.

“The planet is rejecting him, isn’t it?” Meniko asked.

“It is.” Sage answered. “I was worried that his growth was stunted so I asked Sanari to look into it shortly after he was planted. She verified that he was indeed being stunted. This interaction with you is perhaps the most nourishment he’s had in a long, long time. The planet only takes from him, it doesn’t give anything back. Ent has to take what he needs... and that is where the trouble can begin.” Sage lowered his head. “This is all my fault... I never wanted any of this to happen.”

“Sage... is this planet in danger?”

“Only if it doesn’t start sharing just a little of its resources.”

“But what happens when Ent grows? Won’t he need a lot of resources then?”

“Yes... but there will be more to offer as well. If a symbiosis is created, then the planet benefits, Ent benefits, everyone on the planet benefits. Ent can grow to the point where his trunk can outgrow the whole of the Caldera here... his roots spreading to cover half the world... but in turn, the world as a whole will benefit.”

“And if the planet doesn’t share?”

Sage looked at Ent. “Then like any other organism, in order to survive he will be forced to take more and more... till the planet dies.”

He said it with finality.

“Meniko... I... understand if he needs to be uprooted...” he folded his hands together. “Unfortunately Mayia is now inexorably connected to him... I love her as if she were my own daughter, Meniko... I beg of you to reconsider.”

“I will reconsider, Sage.” She said and then sighed, running her hand through Ent’s hair, her fat tit making much milk for him to nurse from. “You were right though... once I met him... you knew I would reconsider. I don’t know where all my maternal instincts come from, but I could never just outright kill a child... even if he were a tree.”

Ent began to press his hand repeatedly against Meniko’s breast, trying to push more milk out. They sat in silence.

“Meniko,” Sage prompted, and she lifted her head to him with a small “Hm?” in response. “Please forgive me... but... I have some questions that I was wondering if you can answer for me. I’ve pondered them for a very, very long time, and now that I think about them more, I know that I arrived at the wrong conclusions to them.”

“What is it?” she asked calmly.

“Why... did you not allow me access to your tomes? I’d always thought that you were doing it to be vindictive and spiteful... to deny me what I rightfully earned.”

Meniko looked down and continued to comb Ent’s hair with her claws.

“You are an unknown, Sage...” she answered quietly, so as not to rouse Ent from sleep. “Your powers are based on Chaos theories, they are only of the most basic concepts I’ve ever seen, and a lot of them are based on hope and prayer in order to get them to work. I don’t know if that’s true, or how complex your powers really are, but that is what I observed.

“The powers taught in my tomes can very well decimate or even destroy whole planets... and I couldn’t allow you to have access to those powers the way you exuded yourself.” She paused and nodded. “I will admit... you do have knowledge of things I’ve rarely seen, and others I’ve never heard of, and you would’ve been a phenomenal asset to us to teach us these things, but instead you decided to take a negative approach to things.”

Sage was very, very silent.

“Rae did teach you from my tomes... but she was teaching you... not just allowing you full access to that knowledge. Usually, only the most elite of my students are allowed into my library... but I allowed you in there out of respect and the fact that you earned the right to see them. I tried to guide you properly and overtly, but when Sanari told you what I was doing, you again threw another fit and stormed out of there.”

Sage’s eyes closed, and he continued to remain silent. His shame seemed to be endless. It was awhile before either of them spoke again, and until then, all they heard was the snick-snick-snick of Ent nursing.

“Being that we’re asking questions, Sage... I... wish to say... that you hurt me very, very deeply... that day you entered into my chambers and fought with me. Not with your sword... it was the things that you said.” Meniko blinked away the tears but urged herself to continue. “Did you... *really* mean those things?”

Sage was silent, gathering his thoughts.

“Until... until I saw Sanari standing before you, blocking my final blow... I had honestly thought that everything that I had said and done was the truth. I tried to end you through her when I blacked out, and when I woke up, I was struck with utter finality of all the evil I’d done. And not just then... not just in your chambers, but years... decades before then. Even before I came to this world... before I came to this universe.

“I did mean what I said... I meant every word of it... I hope to God that I can take it back.” Sage said staring into the infinite space of Ent’s realm.

Meniko rubbed her tit to massage more milk out of it. She didn’t know how she knew to do that either... it was as if all this motherly goodness was just waiting to be used. The term ‘*Mother*’ in use with her name was honorary of course... but she’d definitely earned it using these natural skills and abilities.

“You’d criticized everything that I had built up from scratch Sage... It made me very angry.” She said solemnly. “I’d like to see you be in my place just for one day.”

Sage smirked. “And remove me from the hospital?” Meniko actually chuckled at that. “No... no I wouldn’t want to stand in your position, Headmistress. Having to listen to counselors bickering at you, dealing with bureaucracies, filing reports, dealing with daily bickering between students and faculty... and rarely hearing the words ‘Thank you.’

“Without Daedalus, I have no idea how I could run the Shadow League.”

“I need to get one of him.” Meniko smirked.

“I do not envy you your job, Headmistress... I have no desire to possess it, because I doubt I could do better than you’ve already done.”

Meniko smiled. “Do you realize that that’s the kindest thing you’ve ever said to me, Sage?” Meniko asked.

“You’re welcome.” He managed a small, sad smile. “Now my turn...”

“Was I always... so bad?”

Meniko laughed as she folded one leg over the other and re-cradled Ent in her arms, lying back with a smile, definitely desiring a child of her very own to hold and nurse like this. Maybe many of them.

“After Siklohn’s insurrection and you subjugated yourself to that particlecollider for Siklohn and Mayia... I... honestly began to like you.” She said. “You were easier to be around, you didn’t upset anyone... and your idea for a school fair to relieve stresses after finals and mid terms was admirable. I know there may not be a fair this year... but I’ve already been receiving offers from corporations of every description to ask if they can place some of their shops on my island when your next fair comes around.

“You were so kind and understanding... and happy. A smile befits you better than a scowl, Sage.” She said, and Sage smiled at the compliment.

Then Meniko looked at Ent as his nursing slowed.

“Now me...” she pressed. “Sage... when you... when you held Hawthorne inside of you... how much of him did you absorb?”

“It was a copy really... absorption hadn’t begun yet, but I was able to copy all his knowledge and thoughts first.”

“Oh...” she swallowed. “Sage... in all honesty... d-do you... do you think...”

“He loves you very much, Headmistress.” Sage said, and Meniko sucked in a breath of what felt like relief. “He was brash at times, and may have said dirty things to and about you... but that was only his façade. Hawthorne is truly a gentle, gentle being inside, Meniko... and somewhere a long time ago, he fell for you, and being the patron of the Demon League became the best way that he could be closest to you... if only periodically.

“He even wrote some poetry about you...” Sage waved his hand, “Mostly describing your breasts, sex and behind... but... as with most gentle people, they hide behind masks so as not to be hurt, and he was so afraid that he would be hurt by you... he didn’t wish to press his luck unless he was sure you wouldn’t shun him.”

“He loves me.” Meniko stated, feeling a ray of light open up inside her.

“Utterly. It’s his utter most joy, one of the few joys he has left. It would be a shame to let that affection go unrealized, I think...” Sage paused. “Being that we are on that thought... I do have a curiosity... when you were having your last heat, and we had the pink fog covering the planet... why did you come to me? This was one of those things that I had thought for a long time, and was wondering if I had arrived at the wrong conclusion.”

Meniko thought, and then smiled a little. “You are... an attractive male.” She said with a blush. “But the biological imperative in a Dragaseir female seeks out the strongest male appropriate for the species in the absence of a loved one. It was just good that Hawthorne...”

Meniko stopped, and bit her lower lip suddenly.

“...Hawthorne came to relieve me of all that sexual strain.” Meniko said quietly.

Sage turned to look at her, and saw the dreamy look in her eyes. She was reliving that moment as Hawthorne’s smaller body mounted her, sexed her so gently, so lovingly, so tenderly. The way he looked at her while he fondled and cajoled her, suddenly she rolled her hips a little, wanting to feel that drake inside her again.

Sage nodded absentmindedly, not privy to her thoughts at the moment as Ent stopped suckling and fell back in her arm. She wiped his mouth and her tit before closing her robes and began to rock him.

“Meniko...” Sage managed at last. “I-I’m so sorry... I’m so sorry for everything that I’ve done. I couldn’t bring myself to say this till now... but everything I’ve done to you, to your students... especially to you... just one long myriad of misinformation, assumptions, disrespect and spite.” He hung his head in shame. “I’m so sorry.” He said again, and Meniko lifted her chin.

This newfound humility in him was a start for her... but he had a ways to go yet. “That’s a start Sage...” she said quietly. “I’m still upset with you... but I’m willing to allow you to make amends.” She rose to her feet, and turning, removed her outer robe and wrapped Ent up in it as she laid him on the chair. She moved a flock of his white hair away from his face as he lay on his stomach, sleeping soundly before he turned slightly and inserted his thumb into his mouth. “I’ve already summoned a weapon of my own, Sage.” Meniko said quietly, and Sage turned his head to stare at her. “It will be up to the planet as to what to do with him now...”

Meniko turned to look at him, her expression a mixture of “I’m sorry,” and “You brought this on yourself” before she turned away, a new robe forming about her body as she moved to leave.

Sage lowered his head and exhaled before following after her. Silently... he began to pray for Ent’s safety... and the safety of Mayia who was now connected to him.

Rae stretched as she went to go see her mother in the late evening, and pausing, she caressed her breasts, still feeling her husband’s hands and lips on them, but then noticed the state of the school and how quiet it was. The air was clean from the recent rain, and the cobblestones were washed free of dust.

She saw a pair of figures walking close to each other, holding hands as they exited Meniko’s tower, and after a moment, she recognized Sage and Sanari.

“Hey!” she said cheerily and hurried over to them.

Sage and Sanari turned, holding onto each other’s hands as they greeted her together.

“Hello Rae.” Sanari said, Sage strangely silent.

“What happened around here? It’s really quiet.” Rae said.

They both stared at her. “You don’t know?” Sage asked.

“No... I’ve been; well Makahn and I’ve been keeping each other company.” She mused happily. “What happened?”

“*Keeping each other company.*” Sage repeated with a half smile. “I hope that we have that same sort of relationship that you and Makahn enjoy Rae.”

Rae looked at his face.

“What happened?” she asked again, a little concerned now.

“Nothing to worry about at the moment.” Sanari supplied and stepped forward to take both of Rae’s hands. “Your biggest concern should be making sure that Makahn is all right and comfortable.”

Rae managed a small smile. “Just tell me everything is ok.” Rae said at last.

“Everything’s ok now, Rae.” Sage said, flashing her a small smile, but she noticed that it was a weary smile, lacking enthusiasm. “Please don’t worry about it tonight.”

“Ok...” Rae said and letting go of Sanari moved to Sage and kissed him on the cheek. “Thanks for your help again,” Rae said and walked on by them, heading for the Pinnacle Tower to go see her mother. Sage stood there looking

after her retreating back till Sanari took his hand and squeezed it, and he immediately turned to look at her, not believing that he'd forgotten that she was there for a moment.

"Come on my sweet lord... after today... you need a bit of comfort yourself." She said, and her voice like a siren's song, led him away to the shrine.

Sage lay against Sanari's naked body, his head resting against her sternum, her rounded bosoms pressing against the top of his head while he held onto the feathered ribs of her sides. He listened to her heart beating, listened to her subtle and shallow breathing while he remained with his eyes open staring off into a corner of her rooms.

Sanari was awake too... watching him, practically hearing him think despite that collar about his throat and her inability to asense him with it on.

She lay so as to cradle as much of his much larger body as she could, her sex pressing against his hip, her legs angled to cradle him while he drew comfort holding onto and listening to her slender body. She moved her hands from where they laid on her long white satin pillows beside her head, and wrapped one across his broad shoulders, the other combing his mane, and he automatically scrunched himself a little further against her.

"Credit for your thoughts, dearest heart?" She asked.

Sage remained silent for a moment and then exhaled. "I've come to realize something..." he said, and moved to embrace her more. "That every last hardship that I've faced, every lost friend, every enemy that I've made for the past fifty years... is all completely, and irrevocably... my fault. I am amazed that this universe tolerates me so much, and now that I realize all this, I half expect the heavens to open up and the thumb of the Creator descend from heaven and squash the life out of me."

"Oh come now... you're not that special." Sanari giggled, and Sage managed a small smile before he moved himself, lifting himself up onto his arms so that he could look into her eyes and cup her face with one large hand.

"And yet... here I am with one of the most precious of treasures in this universe... and I am amazed and dumbfounded as to how I could've become worthy of you." He mused.

Sanari turned her head and kissed his palm. "You flatterer." She mused. "If I'm truly a treasure, then there must've been something you've done, somewhere that must've been right. But I think I've always loved you... ever since you first arrived... I was never struck so solidly with a pang in my heart than when I first laid eyes on you..."

That made him smile, and she lifted a hand to finger his lips.

"This suits you better." She said, fingering his lips. "You look so much more handsome when you smile."

"You make me smile." He said, and his hand slid by the fingertips off her cheek, along her neck and throat, over her collarbone to cup her breast... even with his large hands, her tit filled his hand perfectly as he rotated his thumb and slid his fingers one after the other over her erect nipple and back again. "Just being in your presence makes me smile, and I find myself at my happiest moments as of late, whenever I'm in your presence."

Sanari began to finger the Heart Stone in the center of his chest, the thing every bit as much as sensitive as one of his own nipples she'd found.

"Everything about you is so perfect, I feel so inadequate, and I worry that I'm enough of a man for you."

Sanari smiled. "The most powerful male I've ever known... and he wonders if he's adequate enough for me." She sighed and arched her back for him. "You are a flatterer, my sweet lord, but while we are speaking of perfection, I see before me one of the strongest beings alive, and despite the ability to bench press bulk cruisers, you are also the most gentle creature I've ever met. In private... when you don't need to be strong, you are a romantic, loving

person,” she paused and began to purr as she looked to his hand fondling her tit. “Whose touch is subtle and enticing...”

She looked up at him, her thighs spreading open as her fingers slid down his chest now. “And one final thing... to talk of perfection, beloved, just to prove as to how perfect you are...” she murred and slid her hands over his phallus, finding it already erecting for her as she slid both hands over its length. “Is that this... powerful example of manhood you possess, fills me perfectly.”

She began to stroke him, staring up into his glowing eyes as his smile broadened some.

“Funny... I was about to say the same thing about you...” he mused, and bent his head lower to kiss her briefly on the lips, massaging her tit, and when he rose again, he began to purr that deep-chested, cackling-purr of his.

“Ohhh...” she swallowed as his phallus suddenly bulged within her fingers, and her breathing quickened. “I suddenly realized something too, my sweet lord,” she murred and maneuvered herself beneath him so that he was kneeling between her legs.

Sage bent low to nuzzle her neck. “What’s that?” he whispered into her ear even as she rolled her hips and swung his shaft downward and aimed it for her womanhood.

“That I must’ve done something... somewhere... in my life, to be worthy of you.” And Sage’s face beamed brightly as she lifted her legs, rolled her hips, pressed the head of his shaft against her sex, and then rolled upward so that he penetrated her. He breathed in deeply as they began the long journey of probing her to the hilt. “Now... my sweet lord, take this humble priestess, conquer me and make me yours... she said and gasped.

“I can’t.” he whispered and bent his head lower to nuzzle her other tit and then suck on her erect nipple. “I’m afraid you already beat me to it.”

And then he set himself to the task, spreading his legs wide, hers arching over his legs as he plunged deeper yet. It was well into the next day before they finished loving each other... thoroughly conquered.

Chapter Twelve: The Book, the Spear and the Cross

Sanari had already filed the papers so that their marriage would be recognized by the Imperium and the Assembly, and Sage was granted to go off world from Wave World to the Cersile home world so that he could be married to the Devout Mother Sanari of the Faith. At the same time as they became married to each other... Eakjo would likewise become their adopted son... a decision both suddenly thought of and agreed to when they were discussing dates as Eakjo tackled them both and proclaimed them for all to hear as "Mamma" and "Papa."

No more sleeping in the crook of a tree or a hole in the wall for him, they decided.

The attitude around Sage had mellowed greatly now that they were nearing the closure of the eleventh month since his punishment began... his suicidal tendencies seemed to have abated, and he hadn't been throttled by any of the students in months. As a matter of course, this gentle creature had become an asset at the hospital, as well as an asset in the shrine.

As Clio continued past overdue in her pregnancy, her body rounding massively with nine cubs inside her, even her strong body seemed to be tensed. Sage was certain that she would give birth very soon. Good thing too... Clio had to be milked as often as Tla did due to her condition, and Tla had taken the defacto role of midwife with Clio.

Clio herself had several little tidbits that were difficult to hide. The first of which was the fact that all her breasts had all increased in size by a factor of at least two, but then again, Clio had been rediscovering her Demon Sins as Angelic Blessings, and though after being locked herself she'd been a diminutive six foot six fem, she was now a towering nine foot muscular power house, now with a halo over her head. Additionally was the fact that her panties hid a secret... which was the fact that she could erect her clitoris into a powerfully long Casid male Phallus.

She was a gender shifter... and as it was, the babies birthed by Kirn were hers currently... she being the father.

And she now as a mother, she was enjoying being pampered by her fellow grace leaguers, her father and, of course, her already very large family.

Sage was the only male other than her mate Karn who she allowed to touch her at the moment... quite surprising being that she slapped the heck out of Sage when he first arrived collared. She practically bit the hand off a young priest who'd tried to take the leftovers of a plate of food she had.

Apparently she wasn't done yet, and snatched up a meat laden bone and ate that, making a show of sucking the marrow out of the bone.

Sanari spoke with her to try to control herself when people were trying to help her.

As it was... all concerns on one particular day were all taken care of... a lazy spring day, and everyone about the Leagues were just lazing about. Sage had set himself inside Sanari's home, the home that he was now sharing with his future wife and lifemate, and he'd just finished cleaning it for her when he decided to sit down and read something... pulling out a pair of reading glasses, boiling a pot of green tea with some honey, and then perused Sanari's selection of books that she had.

He spied a very long series of books that were tall and thick, and looked like an encyclopedia. He hoped it was an encyclopedia of her home world... he would've liked to have learned more about where she came from, its culture, its beliefs, the creatures from her home world, so he took down the first and largest volume, went over to a chair by a window, took a drink of his tea and then opened it to read. There were some small illustrations here and there, and he focused on a handwriting that was crisp and elegant... definitely a woman's hand.

And he began to read.

Sanari entered her home as elegantly as a goddess, sliding the door open, and stepping inside onto the mat, shaking her outer robe free of rain before removing it and her slippers and placing them both next to the door, she turned and looked up and stopped, seeing Sage standing there.

He was looking at her oddly, his eyes crinkled at the corners with worry of something.

“Sage... what’s wrong?” she asked stepping forward.

And he explained.

“I-I’d looked for something to read, beloved. Something to tide me over for the moment, I’m afraid I inadvertently invaded your privacy...” he said quietly.

“Sage, what are you talking about?” she asked, and Sage moved his hands, and held a book before him.

She recognized it immediately... it was one of her journals.

“I read a great deal of it beloved before I realized it was yours. I’m sorry.”

Sanari smiled at how bashful he looked as she stepped forward and took the book from his hands and then took him by the hand, led him to her chair and sat him down in it. She then laid the book in his lap.

“S-Sanari?” he managed.

“I think it’s good that you’ve learned a little more of me, my sweet lord.” She said, and taking his reading glasses from his chest pocket, opened them and placed them on his nose. “I believe that my lord should know as much about his wife as possible. There are private things in these books of mine, Sage... but I want you to read them... as much as you can. There is much about the woman you are about to marry that you do not know. I already know everything about you in our experiences... it’s unfair to you to know next to nothing about me.”

Sage stared at her as she rose to her feet, opening the window to allow the cool air from the spring rains into their room. Sage looked down at the tome and then opened it while Sanari went to go brew some tea.

Sanari sat kitty corner to her love as he read, his eyes reading her life intently, hardly even blinking while he treated her tomes with the utmost delicacy. This tome, after all, was nearly twenty-five hundred years old, but thanks to holy treatments and oils, and magical protection, it could’ve been thrown into an artificer’s furnace, left in it for awhile, and then be drawn out of it untouched.

Sanari sewed something simple while he continued to read non stop, drinking the tea she’d prepared, and she smiled at the thought that he probably didn’t even realize what it was he was drinking.

She created a light meal later after he’d read through the first tome and had begun reading the second, leaning into the book while his eyes followed the text she’d written over the years.

By now... he would’ve learned of her transformation into an immortal and the Aphkei occupation and decimation of her home world... and the things she did to defend it. The things she was still trying to pay penance for. She watched as he stabbed at a piece of the small meats she’d cooked, and then suddenly leaned forward, and she chuckled underneath her breath as he pulled the tome closer to himself and read rapidly; the food he’d speared with the fork at his side hanging there for a good five minutes before he leaned back without taking his eyes off the page and ate it.

She never thought her life would be so interesting...

The rains elevated into a storm outside, but he didn't stop reading, moving into her third tome at long last without stopping – he still hadn't finished the meal she'd made for him, but he was nonetheless still eating it – and his tea had long gone cold.

For a while, she just watched him read.

It was late in the evening as she was getting ready for bed, stripping free of her clothing and dressing in her sheer white silken sleeping gown that was embroidered with blue flowers. She stepped beside him and palmed him against his upper back, and he turned to look up at her as she stood there. She was slightly aroused, which displayed itself against her chest as a fold in her sleeping gown spread between her teats.

A woman always felt sexy having a man show so much interested in her... even if it were a man she knew already loved her.

Sage turned to look at her immediately, and there was a newfound look of wonder in his eyes as she bent low to kiss him. Their lips met once, twice, and then a third time, and when she drew back, he rose to follow her to continue the kiss. They didn't say anything to each other, but Sage reached out with one hand to cup her naked side and pull her back to him, and he pushed his head into her belly as she purred for him and caressed he cheek.

She purposefully turned so that his hand slid over her naked bottom. She rocked her hip and turned elegantly to look at him from over her shoulder before she stepped back toward her bed. For the barest of moments, he looked between her and her book, and she abruptly stopped her sexy body language.

She wanted him to come to her, she wanted him to lie with her, but she also wanted him to continue reading uninterrupted, and so she slid into herbed and laid there on her belly, smiling at him as she gestured and all the lights in the chamber, save for the lamp shining on him, dimmed. She watched him for a good solid hour before her eyes slowly fluttered shut and she went off to sleep.

When she awoke the next morning, he was still there, almost as if he hadn't moved, and she watched him turn a page and continue reading. But then he saw his hand lower reverently onto the pages, as if he were caressing her body. She mused as she rose from her covers and stood, stretched cat-like and stepped away toward her bathroom. On her way, she paused by her bookshelf, and saw that the opened space in the tomes meant that he read through several tomes during the night. He was more than half way through her life now.

She showered, washed and cleaned herself, dressed, made a breakfast of teas and cakes, and taking his plate from last night, replaced it with the new one with breakfast and allowed him to continue to read. For the second time she palmed his broad back, and again he turned to look at her.

This time the look in his eyes was one of shock, and she tried to smile down at him.

She lifted her other hand and immediately he took it and kissed her palm, and holding onto her wrist he bent his head into her fingers. Sanari stepped forward and pulled him to her heart and stood there for awhile as he continued to read, holding onto her hand before she excused herself to go and attend to her students.

Whenever she returned during the rainy days, he was still in that chair reading. When she returned in the late evening at the end of the day's tasks, he was on her last three tomes.

Twenty five hundred years of learning in only two days, she considered as she came to sit down beside him again, sitting in silence as he again poked at a meal she produced, while she continued to embroider a new piece of clothing for herself. She retired earlier that evening, and again set herself to watching him read as she dimmed the lights and lamps.

On the morning of the third day, she awoke to a different sight, and that was to see Sage's glowing green-eyed gaze leveled on her as he sat in the same chair, only right beside her. She rubbed her eyes and rose, her breasts hanging from her chest as she turned to him.

"Good morning." She greeted.

At first he didn't say anything to her, and instead rose, and sat down before her as she turned, and the next thing she knew, he was kissing her, feeling his hand palming her navel, her breasts pressing over the top of his thick arm as he bent his head to kiss her solidly.

"I'm so unworthy of you." He whispered, nuzzling her head. "In my measly blip of an existence, why did you ever choose such a vagabond such as me?"

"Because you complete me." She whispered and turning, pushed him into their bed and lay against him, kissing him solidly as her tail lifted. "Because, in all my years, my sweet lord... you were the first to capture my heart so... solidly. I became yours the moment I saw you." She purred, straddling his waist while her fingers palmed his chest, her sleeping gown pulling down tightly over her bosom.

"And it is I who feels captured and selected." He smiled, holding onto her shapely hips, his hands spreading open so as to curve down her bottom.

She dipped her nose and licked a spot between his pectorals, smelling his scent deeply as she pushed her naked crotch against his multi-layered abdominal ridges.

"But, my lord." She murred and rose up along his body, leaning over him with her breasts pressing in close beneath his chin. "Despite how much I enjoy the smell of musk, I think you have a little too much of it at the moment."

Sanari then rose, and like the pied piper she drew her future husband along with her to the bathroom, where she stripped him naked, and when she rose, she moved up against him and kissed him as she felt both his hands sliding up her body, pulling her sleeping gown up over her head. She and he kissed one another before she led the way into her shower and washed him thoroughly, with some difficulty amidst his caresses and kisses.

That was one of the things she loved so much about him... with him she knew passion... something that was nearly lost to her after more centuries than she cared to count, so much passion that they broke out making love at a moment's notice. Just like then as he leaned his back against her shower wall, her body pressed against his, his erection piercing her body – deeply and completely – while she pressed against him.

She loved this man of hers...

"I... keep this relic locked up, beloved." Sanari said later that evening as she traced a specific trail along the top of a crystalline prison, in which a short haft and a runed spearhead decorated with a pair of feathers could be seen inside, and the prison melted downward to its base to allow the spear to be revealed.

"You need to know about this spear." She said. "I have a violent past just like you, as you must've read."

"I did," Sage approached, looking at the spear. "I still cannot believe that such a gentle, delicate creature as you could've ever done such things.

"I did do them..." Sanari said softly, and lifting a hand, passed it over the spear, but did not touch it. "I still long to take this spear up again." She said softly. "It contains a part of me... everything that was evil and most vile inside me is contained within it. With it's existence, I can be the way that I am now... but if I were to take it up again, I doubt that I would still be the same woman that you would love."

It was raining outside as Sage came to stand beside her, looking down at the deadly weapon. The grooves of the runes on the spear head looked to have encrusted blood in it still, taken from countless Aphkei in whom Sanari had killed in her past.

It was still hard for him to believe that Sanari's past... was far, far more violent than even his was. His act of genocide against the Kell, his rampage as the Shadow Beast, even the tens of thousands of kills he made against the demon hordes were nothing in comparison to the sheer number of deaths that this weapon had caused.

Even the haft of the weapon was reddish from all the blood its wood had soaked in and had been stained with.

"And you want me to pick it up?" Sage asked, turning to her.

"It's the only way you will be able to see for yourself, beloved. That part of my life happened, and I know you don't truly believe that of me, but I want you to accept it..."

"For you..." Sage said and then with trepidation, he licked his lips and lowered his hand onto the spear.

Sanari was sobbing as she clutched herself to Sage's chest. Paramedics had just come to collect him. After merely touching her spear, the fleck of the tip of his finger against a stray splinter in the wood, Sage had immediately snatched his hand as if beaten, began to hyperventilate, started coughing and then ran outside. Sanari followed him outside even as he threw up – repeatedly – all over a drain ditch and then proceeded to punch himself in the head, screaming horribly as if he were being lobotomized from the inside out with an impact drill.

It took four of Meniko's golden guards to restrain him amidst his screaming and get him onto a hover table, and to keep him from swallowing his own tongue, a gag was placed in his mouth that he chomped at, his jaw clenching so hard that it cracked and frayed the gag.

Inside his mind, however, an image of Sanari, wearing freshly skinned leathers, her fur stained orange instead of golden from blood, and it was unknown if the leathers were the hides of beasts... or Aphkei. This creature had taken the spear in her hand, the thing elongating before she planted it right through the center of his head, thrusting him to the ground, and began working the spear around and around and around...

And then Sage was opening his eyes with a shudder and a gasp.

He was in a hospital bed, with Sanari clutching to him as she slept against him. An IV was attached to his wrist, and on his forehead was a sensor array monitoring his brain.

For the moment... he didn't know how or why he was where he was, but he did see his dearest heart laying there against him, and he lifted a hand to take her arm where it laid on his chest, and Sanari suddenly jerked awake to look up at him.

"Hi..." he said weakly.

Sanari's eyes suddenly exploded with tears and she pressed against him, sobbing heavily as he laid there on the bed, he felt very weak, but was very, very glad to have his love with him, so glad that he didn't even try to remember why he was there.

Namah had done the Psychic Surgery, but was aided by three others. Part of the reason why so many was partly because Sage's head was riddled with powerful psychic defenses, and being that they had to temporarily unlock his psychic powers to work on him, she didn't want to accidentally trip a tripwire inside his head. The other reason was on how violent the psychic attack was.

Sanari had told her that the attacker had been dealt with, but didn't say who'd done it or where they'd gone. Because it was Sanari, no one pressed any questions on her.

Sage slept most of the day with Sanari not leaving his side for more than a few moments at a time... and then only when was absolutely necessary.

When nightfall came, she used her own body to keep him warm, but at least the IV was removed and he was left with the Psyche monitor across his brow. Come morning, he was able to sit up and move freely on his own, and was allowed to leave.

"Beloved... I'm so... so sorry." She said for the millionth time, as they re-entered their home. "I..." but she turned and found herself being entrapped within his arms and captured by his lips as he kissed her solidly, and then withdrew before rubbing his nose against hers.

"You're right... I do believe you now." He whispered. "No more *'I'm sorry,'* no more *'forgive me,'* I was foolish enough not to believe you in the first place... and I was punished by whatever it was that has such a sense of humor in this universe because of it."

Sanari managed to smile bashfully before Sage helped her off with her outer robe, but as he turned to hang her robe up on a wall peg by the door, she suddenly embraced him from behind, wrapping her arms about his middle.

"I thought I almost lost you." He heard her whisper, and Sage turned to face her, cupping her face in his hands before he caressed her lips with his thumb.

"As long as you are safe and alive... I cannot die." He said and bent down to kiss her forehead. "But I do have one complaint..."

Sanari's eyes widened with shock.

"I have... such a headache." He smiled.

Sanari looked up at him, and then managed to snicker, and then laugh, and then she hugged him tightly as she cried tears of gladness.

"Then you rest, my sweet lord... just rest, and we'll get you fed, washed and in a nice warm bed." She purred and hugged him again.

Sage breathed in deeply the scent in her hair.

"Whatever you wish... beloved..."

Hyurri Namah sat back in her chair in her office, breathing deeply, massaging her temples. This last healing of Sage had drawn a great deal out of her. She wasn't sure exactly what it was that she battled, but for an old woman like her, the vicious entity that had lodged itself in Sage's mind – even despite the presence of a collar – had made it exceedingly difficult for her. And he without his own defenses up, he was as defenseless as a newborn babe to this entity...

But even with his defenses active, she wasn't sure he would've been able to stem off whatever it was that had pressed itself inside his head.

She was able to seal the rend and dig out much of the infectious damage in his mind, but it had left her very, very weak and tired.

A knock came on her door.

“Come in?” she prompted, lowering one hand to her cup of tea and drank from it, the tea was an old drought passed down from mother to daughter that was used to handle the incredible mental headaches that a race of psychics usually developed.

Her Vice CMO stepped inside once the door had slid open. “Doctress, I’ve come to deliver the evening reports.” A young man said, stepping briskly up to her and placing a stack of files and a datapad onto her desk, and he paused, looking at her.

“I’ll be all right.” Namah said. “I’m just exhausted.”

“You look pale ma’am.” Her Vice said. “Are you sure you should be going to this party at the Iksaki’s? I can call them if you want to get some rest.”

“No... that will be rude.” She said and drank the rest of her tea before rising to her feet. “I must go to this party,” she smiled. “I won’t be seeing too many more...”

Namah was quiet throughout most of the night, eating what was given her, drinking pleasantly, enjoying the conversation, sitting back in her chair in the living room by the fire... occasionally lifting a hand to massage her brow. Though she was smiling, there was a semi-sad look within her eyes that Rae caught upon.

“Are you ok?” Rae asked, sitting next to the powerful Psychic Doctress.

“I’m fine... just a natural fatigue, Rae. Healing your friend’s mental problem yesterday took a lot out of me.”

“Isn’t he your friend too?” Rae asked.

Namah smiled as she tucked her legs in close to her, holding her cup of tea and its plate like a pristine lady would.

“He’s grown on me. I’ve never in my life seen a more talented healer and doctor. He’s been an asset to my hospital like I could never have fathomed... and after he got past his darker qualities... he’s quite cute in a boyish sort of way. I always did like younger men...”

Rae giggled, but then her smile faded.

“Is there anything I can get you, Namah? Anything at all?” Rae asked; the concern evident in her eyes.

“No... I’m just glad to be in your company at this moment, Rae... yours and your young family. The only desire that I have is that I could be with mine at the moment... but that is quite impossible right now.”

Rae noted the hint of sadness in her eyes... but there was an expectancy about her that Rae couldn’t ignore, and all through the night, Rae tried to make Namah as comfortable as possible, offering a blanket, small plates of food, refilling her tea, and when Rae rose after refilling her tea for the third time, Namah reached out and took hold of Rae’s hand.

There was a very meaningful look that Namah gave Rae as she smiled in thankfulness and then released Rae’s hand.

Namah spoke with Yuum and Teal, being very pleasant to Makahn, who was at least up and around now and proving himself to be a master chef and at home in the kitchen, and spoke with Rae’s other guests... Noxi, Eqis, Cyvel... till near the end of the night, Namah rose, massaging her brow, and looking one last time to everyone, walked right out.

No one was able to recall when Namah walked out, and she moved straight to the hospital, where her private quarters were also located, and entered her home/office. She spent five minutes writing a note, and taking a box off

a shelf; she opened it, removed something from the inside and placed it into a smaller box while the note printed off. She placed the box on her desk; shut everything off, all lights, even her computer. Folding the note in half and writing a name on the front of it, she placed the note on the box and then moved to her bed.

Lying down on her bed, she made herself as comfortable as she could, and stared up at the ceiling for a moment or two and just breathed.

She was afraid... and in heavy anticipation as well.

And then she took a deep, deep breath, her chest filling to the brim, and then she released the breath, her lungs emptying as she exhaled the very last breath of her life...

Sage was taking a shortcut on the outside of Sanari's shrine when he stopped, looking at a blank section of wall, looking about him, on the ground, the rocks around him, and pausing in what he was doing, he stepped back, looking about, looking on the ground, up in the air, stepping back some more and then sitting atop a large boulder while he just contemplated. Though he sat quietly, his mind was working fervently, his eyes scanning this way and that way, and then after about an hour of thinking, he got up, knelt on the ground, and began digging with his hands.

Sage walked into Meniko's chamber, covered head to toe with dirt, and Meniko raised an eyebrow at him that he was leaving foot prints on her tile floor. He looked quite happy and excited.

"Sage... I assume you have a reason for dirtying my floor?" Meniko asked and Sage turned to look over his shoulder and winced.

"Damn!" and he scrubbed his mane, a cloud of dust shaking from it. "I'll clean it up, if Guvno will let me borrow a broom.

"Just let the droids and bots clean it up Sage... but why, for Aul sake, are you covered with dirt and mud?" Meniko asked; her foreclaws folded one over the other while she regarded him with a whimsical smile.

"I..." Sage scrubbed at his mane again, and another puff of dust fell from him. "I am making a gift for Sanari. A wedding gift."

"A... a wedding gift?" she repeated. She was very close to Sanari, and she was also the spirit and entity of this school. She would've heard at least the gossip by now that Sanari was about to marry Sage. "What sort of wedding gift requires you to be digging in the dirt, Sage?"

Sage looked about, and then hurried up, leaving more tracks on the floor.

"A temple." He answered once she lowered her head as he drew near, and Meniko raised her head as Sage then became quite bashful. "I wanted to give her something... and that is the thing she wants more than anything right now... a temple for her students so that she could continue to elevate her students... and a temple is the final step."

"Else wise she has to send her students away to another existing temple to finish their training." Meniko added. "I know... she's wanted that sort of thing for a very, very long time... but her problem isn't not having my permission... it's the building materials an expertise. I've offered to have droids manufacture it for her, but she needs it not to be touched by technology." She looked at Sage and tapped a finger. "And you've already started digging a foundation." She stated.

"I-I have. I was so excited to start that I forgot to ask if I could. I want it to be a surprise for her."

Meniko stared at him for a time, and then the corners of her mouth lifted slightly. "Continue if you wish, Sage... with my blessings if it is for Sanari. She is one of the most loved individuals here, and she sacrifices more of herself for everyone than any one. I want her happy, and this will make her very, very happy."

"But her temple cannot be touched by technology, Sage... the more you use, the worse off it will be for her. She may have to reject it if its tainted too much."

Sage smiled. "I'm building it by hand." His smile widened. "Using only my bare hands."

"No tools?" Meniko blinked.

"Not so much as a wooden mallet." He acknowledged. "But... I will need raw materials to fabricate her temple... I can gather them myself of course... but it's the fabric that I have a problem with."

"I guess I can create you some..."

And just then the doors opened, and the two dragons turned to see someone wearing a medical uniform run up, and trip on a droid that was washing the floor; the droid groaning angrily as he did. He nonetheless tripped head over heels and got right back up before rushing up to them, and when he arrived, he began to hyperventilate.

"H-headmistress... Doctor Sage... *wheeze* S-something terrible..."

"Just calm down... what happened?" Meniko asked.

"Doctress Namah... is dead."

Sage had rushed off like a shot and Meniko teleported to the hospital and transformed even as he was dashing across the courtyard faster than she would've thought him capable of. He threw open the door and Meniko stopped him with a claw. He shot her a stunned look before she gestured with her hands, cleaning him up, and he nodded before rushing inside with Meniko hurrying behind him.

Up the stairs to her office, they came upon a group of doctors and orderlies, and Sage hurried passed them with Meniko hot on his heels... and they stopped, right inside the room, and saw Namah laying fully clothed on her bed, her eyes closed... and quite still.

Sage hurried to her, taking her hand, checked the pulse in her wrist, then her throat, checked the responsiveness in her eyes, felt for breath, then listened to her heart. Then he sat back beside her bed and hung his head.

"Dead." He said quietly. "Very dead even..."

Meniko stepped forward and sat on the bed beside Namah, taking up her hand with both of hers. "She let herself go." Meniko said quietly, brushing the hairs out of Namah's eyes, and then closed her eyelids.

Sage remained quiet.

'Letting oneself go,' was something powerful psychics of certain races did. Namah's race was very well known for it. Namah's body was dead... but her consciousness was still very much alive, but now apart of the ether stream. She was now a part of a great collective.

"Why was she still here? Why didn't she go see her family?" Sage asked; his eyes sparkling as he looked up at Meniko, though no tears actually fell from him.

"I think she already did that..." Meniko said, and took both of Namah's hands and crossed them both over her belly before wrapping the sheets of her bed about her to cover her up. "I believe she did that when you first came to be

here, Sage... she returned from an extended family trip with her family. I didn't think it would take ten years for her to prepare to leave though."

"She was a busy woman." Sage said quietly.

"She deserves a life of leisure." Meniko said, and then looked down at Sage. "She still exists in this universe Sage... only her body has died. You shouldn't mourn her passing. Think of this as her retiring."

Sage's head hung lower. "I'm being selfish again..." Sage said and Meniko paused.

"How are you being selfish?" she asked, turning to him.

"It must be the human in me... but I can't help but mourn the passing of a friend..."

Sage sat before a simple grave for the third evening in a row, covered with dirt again but taking care to wash off Namah's headstone.

Her remains were unimportant to her or her family, she left no wishes as to what to do with her body... so her remains were cremated and she became the first individual buried here on the island.

"You know... people are starting to worry about you." A voice said, and he turned to see Eqis standing behind him... a little further down the slope was Sanari. "Here you are... covered from head to toe with dirt, sitting on a grave."

Eqis was a sexually beautiful fem, with a powerful body, and large, firm breasts that had even drawn his attention once... but sadly for Eqis... not for long. She still had a bit of a crush for him.

She stood in only her body cloth, arms folded beneath her chest while her sizeable mammaries folded over her meaty arms while she stood with all her weight on one foot.

"Humans are generally an emotional lot, Eqis." Sage said. "It's a defining thing as to what we are... we form attachments, we form friends... we love a great deal... and we also hate... a great deal. Some call that our failing... we call it our nobility.

"Namah was my friend, Eqis..."

"Sage... Namah was a wonderful person, but mourning her like this wouldn't make her happy. I have lots of friends, Sage... it's unhealthy to mourn a person more than a day or two."

"You have lots of friends." Sage stated, placing a bundle of flowers on the grave stone and Eqis nodded. "I don't." he added and slowly rose to his feet, placed his palms together, pushed them to the bridge of his forehead and nose and bowed over her grave.

He stood there... looking down at it beside the like-height Casid lioness, till he felt a hand on the small of his back, and turning, expected to find Eqis trying to comfort him, but instead found his soon-to-be-wife Sanari as she slid into his side. Eqis instead clamped a hand on his mighty shoulder.

"The first century of an immortal is hard." Sanari said. "You find that all your friends and family grow old and die while you remain young. Lovers and loved ones slowly pass away."

"I'm nearly a century old." Sage laughed and turned to Sanari. "All my friends that I grew up with are all dying out... one by one, and I've made so few friends to fill the void. She knew that she was dying... she knew and she never told us. I didn't even get to say goodbye."

Sanari looked up at Sage, and then brushed some of the dirt off him. She didn't know what it was that he was doing over by the side of the school, but no one was complaining at the moment... besides... it was fun for her to bathe her new lord every night, and lie with him once he'd been thoroughly cleaned. But if it is a goodbye he wanted...

She lifted her hand and blew across her palm, and a rush of wind wafted from behind them. Time seemed to slow, and Sage looked about him, and then he backed away as a truly beautiful fem appeared on the headstone, her long sensuous legs crossed before her, and her voluptuous body enshrouded with a flowing white silk gown that only shaded her body inside of it.

"You are a unique creature." The apparition said, and Sage blinked.

"N-Namah?!" he gasped, and then looked at Sanari as she clung to him. Eqis smiled, having seen this sort of thing before with her dear departed cousin.

"Hm..." Namah said and rose. "I've barely even begun to enjoy my retirement, and you're weeping like a school girl over me. Hm... you are endearing, in your own eccentric way, Sage." She said and bent forward to kiss his cheek.

"Why?" Sage asked, and she stepped forward to brush off some of the dirt off him.

"It is our life cycle..." Namah explained. "An evolutionary trait. When we developed it, we merely die... but we don't pass on. Un-tethered consciousnesses complete with souls. I prepared for it prior to returning to the school, and there you were... such an ass when you first arrived, but... you had so much skill in you... such remarkable skill that even I felt inadequate sometimes. Hm... I know certain things that you don't, though." She teased.

She looked so vibrant, so full... like the features and soft skin of a young woman but the body of a fully mature adult woman... and then some...

"Yes... I like my new body." Namah said, and Sage looked around and blushed. "And I am more powerful in this form than I ever was with a body. I can be what I want... and I can be beautiful in my retirement too... and stop looking at my breasts... the only breasts you should be looking at are Sanari's now."

Sage averted his eyes. "S-Sorry." he said and blushed harder; and Namah moved forward and took his face in both hands to look into his eyes.

"Hm..." she smiled, and then lifted up on her toes to kiss his forehead.

"I know you didn't get a chance to say goodbye to me, Sage... but I did say goodbye to you... on my desk, there's a small white box. Inside of it is my most prized possession... it's very old, so take good care of it, otherwise my granddaughter will make sure you pay for damaging it."

"Who?" Sage blinked.

"You'll see." She said with a wink, and stepped backward to sit on her gravestone, crossing one sensuous leg over the other again as she folded her hands together on top of her knee... her new, womanly and well-developed bosom that hung heavily from her chest bunching together between her slender arms. "And buck up, Sage. You're cute when you're doing something innocent like this mourning thing... but I'm not gone... just dead. I may see you around later... when you develop those adolescent mental skills you have of course." She smiled grandly and began to fade.

"Namah..." Sage said quickly and she faded back.

"Yes?" she asked brightly.

"Goodbye."

“For now.” She mused, faded again but then winked back. “Oh that reminds me... Sanari...” and Namah focused on Sanari, and Sanari gasped. “Just between us girls. And no... you don’t get to know, Sage. Bye.” She laughed and then faded one last time and was gone... the world returning to normal time again.

“Goodbye...” Sage managed again, and then he blinked and looked at Sanari. “What did she say?” he asked, and Sanari blinked out of her reprieve.

“Girl talk.” Sanari smiled happily.

“Feel better?” Equis managed? “I kept seeing you here... thought I’d ask Sanari to do for you what she did for me.”

“It helped.” Sage admitted, and just then a soft breeze blew against their backs again, and Sage cupped his face, feeling someone caressing his cheek.

An hour later, Sage was in Namah’s former office and quarters with his beloved Sanari, and found a simple white box. Picking up the note on top of it that bore his name, he flipped open the note and read it.

Sage,

This is my most prized possession, ever since I was a little girl. I want you to have it, so that you will remember me. Just remember... despite how immaculate your medical record is and how talented you are... you can always do with some added help.

Trust yourself... and someday, we will see each other again.

Namah

Sage opened the box, and smiled at what he saw inside:

An archaic stethoscope that Namah had placed in the box.

Sanari came to stand beside him, holding onto his powerful arm as she saw the thing Namah had left him.

“I guess I’m a real doctor now.” Sage said, picking up the instrument.

“How so?” Sanari asked. “You passed nearly every test in the medical exam with flying colors.”

“An old tradition... even in the Prime Universe. Kind of like passing the baton. A Stethoscope from one’s mentor.”

“Will you use them?” Sanari asked.

“No.” Sage answered immediately, cradling the instrument.

“Why not?”

“So that whoever her granddaughter is doesn’t come and stomp on me for damaging her grandmother’s property. I’ll hold onto these Namah. Thank you.”

Chapter Thirteen: Preypacer and Preypacer

On the twelfth month of the twelfth day of Sage's incarceration, the prisoner married his jailor.

They both rode a chartered star liner to the Cercile home world – The Iksaki's gift to them both – spending a luxurious week with each other within the confines of their spacious cabin. They didn't see much of the outside of the door, and spent much of the ride naked save for a few short trips about the ship on walks or dinners.

When Sage saw Sanari's home world for the first time out a shuttle window, he looked back at her. She was making absolutely no attempt to look out the window to see the world of her birth. She knew what it looked like...

It had been decimated... destroyed and pockmarked with craters from the Aphkei Space Navy, and regrowth and repairs for how many Cercile remained... was long and difficult, even millennia later. Breeding and preservation among them were paramount.

Almost the entire remaining civilization lived surrounding their central temple, a crystalline pyramid surrounded by obelisks reminiscent of ancient Egypt on Earth and surrounded by dozens of shrines which were likewise surrounded by a small village of students and warders to protect the shrine.

It was strange for Sage, being perhaps the tallest individual on the planet, standing a full head, chest and shoulders taller than anyone else, and people looked at him as if he were a strange thing, wondering not who, but rather what he was. He very quickly found – as they were quartered in priestly chambers at one of the surrounding shrines in preparation for their marriage – that he was rapidly gaining the reputation of the man who was marrying Mother Sanari. He smiled when his real name didn't even come up in conversations that he overheard regarding their marriage.

Sanari's race was matriarchal, and Sanari carried a great deal of reputation with her people, so much so that Sage found himself walking behind her while they went to go fetch water for their room.

"Beloved... what are you doing?" she smiled, and picked at the blue robes that he was wearing that were a size or so too small. She promised to mend them for proper fit before entering the temple, as was proper.

Sage startled, and was about to move up to her, but she instead stepped to him and pressed her hands against his body, pressing her body against his and looking up into his face.

"I... I don't know, really." He smiled at her and cupped her elbows. "I feel as if I should be walking behind you dearest."

"That's not how it's done here." She purred and leaned against him. "Females have all the authority... but it's the males own everything. Other than that... we share responsibility. I should be at your side, dearest heart, and not casting a shadow on my fine lord."

Sage smiled and held her for awhile before they drew their water and retired for the night after their long trip... well... retired after once again reaffirming their affections for one another physically.

According to Cercile law... the sheer fact that she and he had mated – many times – meant that they were a mated pair. It was like a marriage, but without all the benefits in their society, a necessity to perpetuate the species where new cubs were most special. A marriage, where Sanari took his surname, meant that their union was whole, and they shared responsibility of ownership and authority of their households.

The next morning... was a day of ritual. From sunrise to sunset, every action they did was ritualized... for fourteen hours.

It began with them awaking in silence and dressing in their robes, walking with her on the right, he on the left.

They approached the temple together, and Sage saw with remarkable clarity the edifice that would've dwarfed the pyramids at Giza, with a single beam of white light projecting like a spire of holy power right toward heaven. The feeling of peace here was so absolute, that not even the Aphkei during their occupation could think to desecrate this place. The pyramid was surrounded by a circular stone platform, on which, stationed every ten meters or so, was a Cercile Warder... a male or female priest who all held a staff, wearing face paint and leather armor over their fine silken robes to protect the temple.

Even an Aphkei in full battle armor fell to these warders. It was a testament on the purity of the religion of Sanari's people... that they would protect it so.

They were both escorted into the temple by a warder on either side of them, gripping their shoulders as they were presented to the priests at the receded temple doors. There they were shown inside by the two priests. Inside... Sage heard singing, and he looked about in wonder. If not here for a marriage or if not of at least a high priest of their faith... he would not ever be allowed inside this holy sepulcher. He'd be afraid of offending the Creator if he did...

They were then brought to a chamber, where they were both stripped naked, and then they preceded a long, long path of preparation. They were bathed together, where a group of young priests and priestesses wearing their bathing cloths cleaned and anointed them both, cleaning them so well that their claws were made white with small scraping tools, their fur and hide made glossy and soft, and their manes combed straight backward.

Though Sage got several young and very sexy young maidens to clean him, Sanari got several young and very buff young males to clean her.

The oils that they were given were scented like perfume, and as they stood before a high priest, he anointed them both again, Sanari first, and then Sage, upon their brows, their loins right at the bases of their navels, either breast region and then their hearts, before they proceeded forward.

It was then that Sanari took his hand, and beamed at him, and he smiled down at her as they entered another chamber and were robed once again, this time in white silk and linen robes that were soft and full.

Before twelve separated altars they knelt, drank from a chalice and spoke a vow to each other, and Sage was amazed at yet another similarity between his people and hers.

Twelve was a powerful number in human faith... for it also stood for the original twelve tribes of Israel.

And then Sanari was taking his hand again, and pushed it up beneath the folds of cloth covering her breasts, while she palmed his chest, right over the heart, and then prompted him to take her hand on his chest while she took his.

There they stayed for what felt like an hour... looking at each other in the eyes, smiling lovingly at each other, while all around them priests sang a melody the likes of which were similar to Gregorian Chant, only higher pitched and combined with chimes, and an elder priest spoke lines of passage from their holy book like a spell of binding.

Sage hadn't felt himself so at peace for a very, very long time. And he never felt himself so in love as he stood there with the woman who was even now becoming his wife. Then the elder priest finished what he was saying, and stepping back, removing their hands from each other, Sanari then stepped forward, and pressed firmly against his chest, and placing his hands on her hips, she then palmed his shoulders and leaned against him, and for another hour the Elder began speaking a cant that Sage didn't really listen to. He was too busy cradling his special treasure to him, and became so busy doing that that he – nor Sanari – realized that this next piece had completed itself till the Elder priest cleared his throat. They both blushed, but the priest smiled knowingly.

And then one final motion as they clasped left forearms, their promise rings pressing against each other, and another high priest appeared to tie their arms together but stopped, looking to the elder priest, who merely gestured for him to carry on.

The problem was that the metal of the promise rings were different than what they were supposed to be... copper not platinum like they were. But Sanari had already explained the reasoning why... they had to be made of a most precious metal, and to Sage... that was the most precious of metals... to her... it was precious because he gave it to her.

The high priest continued, lacing their arms up, holding a loosely done tie briefly before Sanari held it down with her hand, and prompted Sage to cover her hand.

One more hour was spent with the Elder priest canting at them before they were untied, and escorted out of this brilliant white chamber, down a long passage, and then exited the Pyramid the way that they came in, down the steps, and to their chambers, where they knelt in silence across from one another, still in silence.

Outside... the sun slowly set, diving further and further downward, till at last its last rays set, and Sanari squealed and from a kneeling position leapt against her new husband and began opening all his robes.

“So that’s it huh?” he asked as she purred louder than she’d ever done before. “Husband and wife?”

Sanari pulled all her robes open in one deft pull, revealing a body that was already incensed as she reached down and clawed at him as she sat on his groin, wiggling her body till his erecting manhood would pierce her as it did.

“That’s it. Fourteen hours of ritual, and an eternity of bliss. And... something else I want to say right now.” She murred as Sage’s rapidly climbing erection slipped passed the lips of her labia.

“What’s that?” Sage asked, cupping both her breasts as she began to rock her hips.

“Mother... Sanari... Preypacer.”

Sanari lay against her husband’s side. Husband. She was married now... she was a wife, something she’d never been before. She purred as she palmed his chest, Sage resting within her aura of love an affection, one of the rare times that he actually closed his eyes and slept. It was a regular thing, nowadays, that he went days without any sleep at all, and when he did sleep, it was only for four hours.

She was too happy and too excited to sleep... and she wanted more loving from her lord and husband, but that could wait. She was just so happy to be by his side, watching him sleep. He was so handsome... so pure to her eyes when he was truly at rest.

But as she lay there, she considered something that Namah had said telepathically to her.

You will be a mother soon, Sanari. You already hold the souls of his children in you ready to be born, but you will be bonded twice, before you become a mother twice.

Sanari’s hand moved from Sage’s Heart Stone to her belly. She’d never had a child... in twenty-five hundred years... she’d never had a child in the whole of her life. And to have his children... she breathed deeply in the thought, and then bent downward and kissed him on the lips, fingering his mouth with her fingers as she curled more solidly against his side.

She was becoming aroused again, desiring to become a mother of his children, so loved the prospect of at long last holding a child to her breast. She already carried the souls of Sage’s once unborn children that Ariel had carried, Ariel, his long murdered wife having been pregnant with them before she died, had carried them in spirit form for fifty years before Ariel had willingly and whole-heartily allowed herself to merge with Sanari.

Now they both were able to have their man, and they shared experiences and knowledge, and they would both become the mother of his children.

Sanari could feel Ariel in her... Ariel's traits had made Sanari even lovelier, fuller of chest and stronger of body. Sanari was also thoroughly impressed that a woman loved him so much that she willingly gave herself up to become apart of her just to be with him.

Sanari bent low again and kissed his lips, and this time she felt his jaw work as he returned her kiss, and palmed her face, and when she withdrew, he rose with her to hold the kiss for as long as possible.

"Oh you're awake!" Sanari giggled and then pressed against him.

"Only dreaming of you, beloved." He said, and then stretched and planting his arms behind his head to pillow himself up. "You've made me dizzy with your kisses."

Sanari giggled, and looked down the length of his naked body, and sliding a hand caressingly down the center of his body, she held his manhood and massaged it a little, and Sage smiled up at her once she'd looked back at him.

"Again?" he purred as Sanari got him to erect fully again.

"Again." She murred and rising, her breasts hanging heavily from her chest, she sat on his chest, legs spread wide. "I'm hungry for you, my sweet lord." She said, and began to slide backward but Sage stopped her with a hand.

Sanari blinked at him, but then he reached with his other hand and pulled her forward onto his face, where he began to kiss and lick clean her sex with his lips and tongue, before he had her sit on his face, and he began to do new things to her labia and clitoris, piercing her with his long tongue, as she soon began to moisten, and then orgasm. Then taking her by the hips, Sage lifted her, and placed her on his fully erect mass and she slid down on top of him, orgasming three times on the way down with gasps and moans, till she was to the hilt.

Sage then rolled forward and laid her on her back, and while fondling her four breasts – her primaries and her undeveloped secondaries – Sanari got all the loving she wanted, screaming out her pleasure as Sage penetrated his new wife deep into her womb, holding himself off till Sanari was lost to the pleasure he was giving her, using the carnal arts as a high priest of his own order to entice her body into mind-numbing eroticism, and holding her there for hours before he finally erupted into her body.

"Love you... wife." He whispered into her ear as her ears flattened against her head, he erupting into her body again and again with the absolute power of a male dragon's breeding ability to spontaneously produce seed and release it to pleasure multiple females.

All the better for the female when she was the only one to pleasure.

He bent his head to kiss her breasts and nuzzle her nipples, and Sanari wrapped her arms about his head... holding him there to her chest as she thrust her hips onto his groin multiple times.

"Love you!" She gasped, her eyes closed as she took his shaft in her body. "Love you!" she groaned, and arched her back, spreading her legs wider and orgasming while her husband licked the insides of her breasts and the center of her chest, massaging one of her tits as he cradled her, and at long last, Sage climaxed as she orgasmed, and a wash of their juices erupted onto his lap as he rose with her, planting her on his lap, and in gasping breaths, they kissed each other, holding that joint orgasmic rush for as long as they could – several long minutes in fact – till they both collapsed onto the bed again.

For the rest of that night, neither of them slept till morning.

Married life for Sage and Sanari became an additional week of nothing but being in each other's presence... their honeymoon spent in the simple lodgings of their chambers on Planet Cersi, and then later on Wave World. After that, everyone knew, and what felt like half the school was giving them gifts for their shared household.

For the longest time, it felt like people were mostly congratulating Sanari, but then members began to arrive from the other Leagues, like the Ring League, the Demon League, and much to Sage's joy, the Shadow League.

He found himself getting hugs from his students, especially Mayia, who had recovered fully from her episode as a weapon, and now took the opportunity to give him a big, big embrace for her being forced to be absent from his life for a whole year. More than once she'd tried to disobey the law before Drake personally stopped her and visited a punishment of annoyance for trying to disobey a law. Finally, he forbid her to going to go see Sage, and threatened her with sealing and expulsion to get her to stop trying.

Then he told her the penalties for her and Sage if she actually did break the law in this regard. That in itself stopped her more than anything, for it'd mean that Sage would've broken his parole and would be banished, and she'd never see him again.

But in nearly a year of absence other than her experience of becoming a weapon, she was so very happy to report that Geevo was now her boyfriend – or at least her friend and companion – and with his help she'd been able to control her changes a little better, to where she could call her new transformations all on her own. She was no where near as powerful as she was when she had her control node on, but she was nonetheless much stronger, faster and more powerful than she was before getting a weapon core inside her... and she'd only grow stronger as the tree aged.

The gift that the two of them brought was something that Geevo had made out of a spare piece of obsidian, a sort of ornate stone harp that had been expertly done with images of dragons and cats entertaining the piece of volcanic glass. Sage accepted it, and was then truly surprised when Sanari played a few chords on it and complimented Geevo on its design.

Noxi's gift... however, was a large bassinet... for a baby.

"Who knows... you might need one soon." She said as her husband hugged her side, their litter of little ones all around them. Noxi was an excellent mother, and was a favored mentor in the school. She also had produced a large family, and she'd already replaced her basinet with a new one. "This one knows how to hold babies." She giggled as she smoothed the bedding inside the bassinet with Sanari while Sage stood slightly behind his lifemate, admiring his new wife as she inspected and then accepted the crib-like bassinet.

She was already looking down at it as if it contained their baby.

After the torrent of wedding gifts – like silverware, furniture and so on – It was back to business as usual, and business as usual for Sage was to continue on his project... night and day, with absolutely every piece being forged by his own hands. No tools, just his claws, his hands, and his skills as a martial artist and an artisan.

Sanari had seen all the twenty foot screens that he'd erected, and he carried trees that he'd ripped out of the ground all around the school – though those not being used by the school for landscaping – and inside sheered the bark off with his claws, cut the boards with pin-point martial art blows, planted foundations... even the usual nails were instead wood rounded pegs he'd made and dumped in a bucket of water to soften them. He used sand and lye to make stone... everything forged by his own hands, and now that he saw what one of the smaller temples looked like – he stepped inside one on Cersi – he began duplicating it as best as he could from memory.

The end of his incarceration was only a few days away as he put on the finishing touches, and while he completed this gift for his beloved... they received a visit from an unexpected visitor.

Clio had given birth to her nine cubs, each of them born as a special genetic trait called "chimera"... just like their parents, with the same gender-shifting ability as the mother. Clio had receded into privacy as she almost constantly nursed her cubs, and Tla, Kim and Kam and a couple of Clio's sisters tended to her needs while her cubs nursed from her, and when they didn't nurse, they slept against their mother.

Sanari was checking in on Clio as Clio rested in her bed in her quarters here, breathing soundly while the sound of several small mouths suckled from her nude body. It was the first time that her shrine had been graced with the presence of an actual birth... such a christening blessing meant good luck for her shrine.

Clio had already been made a priestess, able to freely have sex again, and her body was rapidly transforming all her earned sins from the Demon League into blessings, and as such, she was already a physical power house with her holy strength, and nine feet tall.

Sanari entered into Clio's room and laid a hand over Clio's expertly muscular shoulder, and Clio turned and purred as she looked up at Sanari quite placating and gentle, not minding anyone touching her, but was instinctively fierce about allowing anyone touch her cubs. Only those who tended to her did she allow touching her babies. Clio mewed to Sanari before she turned back and slept with a sigh.

Clio had suddenly entered labor and then instinctively hid in the bushes to have her babies. It was Eakjo who happened upon her and went and got Tla. Tla, as the midwife, was the one who caught all of Clio's babies as they were born.

The Senthlou Pryde was very, very happy, and even all of Clio's sisters were playing the roll of aunts to help nurse her cubs to give her some breather time... even though Clio wanted to nurse them all as often as she could.

Sanari palmed her own belly, feeling the flares of life inside her as she watched over Clio for a moment or two, making sure Clio was all right before she rose to her feet and moved to leave. As she stepped out of the darkened room that Clio was in and quietly shut the door, she looked up and gasped at the sight of someone very large and massive standing practically right before her.

It took her a moment to recognize the tall white-robed and white-furred wolf with the bandanna covering the black patch of fur about his eyes. The only spot of color on him was a blue scarf wrapped about his neck, and a red stylized eye at the center of the bandana.

"Patch!" Sanari gasped. "Please don't do that. You're worse then Sage sometimes." She smiled, but then walked up to the big wolf and hugged him.

"Hello sister." He smiled, and then placed his thick, robed arm about her shoulders.

"Sister... I like that." Sanari mused. "What brings you here today?" she asked, walking with the tall wolf while he walked with his white oak staff in his hands to guide his way.

"Well... several things really. I've come to visit my lovemate Kit, to visit with my brother and new sister, to offer up my own marriage gift, and to ask why you haven't come to temple to be bonded yet."

Sanari paused in her step, and Patch immediately stopped with her, turning to her expectantly.

"Bonded?" Sanari asked.

Patch's ears swiveled forward. This blind werewolf knew many great things, and was very wise, and he looked as if he expected her answer.

"Yes." Patch replied. "I'm surprised he said nothing of it yet."

"W-what is it?"

Patch gestured toward a stone bench, and they both sat, Patch settling his long white staff against his shoulder.

"Bonding is a Ritual of uniting a male and a female." Patch explained. "It was once called a marriage, but the word 'marriage' is just a legal bonding in our culture, a process of making a man and a woman a husband or a wife. I

know nothing of the ritual you and my brother went through Sanari, I know not what it entails, but a Bonding is the exchange of a piece of the heart, and a piece of the soul to unite a man and a woman forever.

“It’s something Sage has dreamed of doing for a long, long time, but has never been able to do. Not even with Ariel. She... died... a week before they were to do it.”

Sanari paused for a moment, considering.

“How... important would you say this is to him?” she asked quietly.

“He spoke of it, often enough. It is our belief that without this ritual, then one’s marriage to each other ends at death. To two immortals, I know death is perhaps a long, long ways away, but if death were to come, then it is our belief that Sage would not be able to keep you as his wife in heaven. I would say that it is very important to him... but that also goes to show exactly how important you’ve become to him.”

“How’s that?”

“That he would abandon this dream... and his beliefs... so that he might be with you.”

Patch fell silent then, turning his head to ‘look’ at her with that red eye on his bandanna.

“This will not do.” Sanari said and then rose to her feet in a flurry of robes. “Patch... I...”

“Don’t excuse yourself, sister. Go. I will amuse myself with my beloved for awhile.” He said and rose to his feet. “I’ll let myself out.”

Sage stretched as he looked up at what he’d envisioned before, having looked up references in the school’s library for more ideas on accuracy, finding rules as to what needed to be done in order for it to be acceptable. It was done, and he was satisfied.

Dusting himself off and taking up his shirt, he returned to his home that he shared with his beloved Sanari. As soon as he entered, however, he found her waiting for him by the door, smiling.

“Hello.” He said as he closed the door behind him. “I’m sorry for all the dirt love, I... um... what are you doing?” he asked, for Sanari stepped forward and began to undress him.

“You’re dirty, husband,” she smiled, peeling his shirt off and then removing his trousers. “I need to clean you before dinner.”

“But isn’t it my turn to cook tonight?” he asked as she opened the front of his trousers and then knelt to help him out of them. “You’re going to spoil me if you keep doing this.” He smiled.

“I enjoy it.” She purred. “Now hurry before you catch cold.”

Sage smirked. He didn’t get sick. It was one of the wonders of his metabolism, but he quickly hurried to the bathroom as she placed his clothes in the hamper. He’d climbed into the hot pool of water that holy magics kept clean, pure and hot no matter what was placed in the pool, and he’d begun to clean himself when the door opened, and he turned to see Sanari entering. He looked over his shoulder at her before she raised her hands to the top of her head, removed a pair of hair stays, and then began to peel open her robes. A few drawstrings, buttons and hooks later, she was discarding her clothes into a bundle and then climbing into the pool with him.

She no longer bothered with the silk white bathing cloth now that they were husband and wife. He was now allowed to look freely upon her body at any time... even when she was being at service to him.

“You *are* spoiling me.” He said as she took up a sponge and began to clean him.

“Hm...” she purred, and rubbed her bodice against him as she washed everything on him, dragging her breasts across his body as they kissed occasionally.

They dried each other off, kissing occasionally again, and then Sanari led her lord new lord, both of them in fresh new clothes, and she sat him down and served him a healthy meal of steamed vegetables and minced meat, sitting across from him as they prayed and ate their dinner.

And then she drew him to their bed, disrobing him again, prompting him to lie down as she then climbed on top of him so that they could make love. After a long grueling session of lovemaking, Sanari laid against him, her breasts cleaving between their bodies, bunching up beneath her arms as she listened to his contented cackling-purr, and then she opened he eyes, and rising slightly, she leaned against him, fingering his lips with her fingers.

“Sage... Patch came to see us today.”

“Patch?” he asked, his eyes opening to look up at her as he cradled her behind. “I missed him didn’t I? Damn...”

“Beloved... what’s a Bonding?” Sanari asked and her husband paused, now beginning to understand why his brother came to see Sanari and not him.”

“It’s not important...” he smiled to her, and she bent low to kiss him.

“Yes it is... it’s important to you. Why didn’t you ask me?”

Sage sighed. “I didn’t want it to interfere. I was happy to have you as my wife, beloved. And remarkably proud. You have your own beliefs, and I’m happy to learn and be a part of those beliefs if it meant having you.”

“Hm...” Sanari smiled. “Bond with me, Sage.” She said simply, and Sage rose suddenly off the bed, holding her as he rose.

“Sanari... I...” he began.

“So you don’t want to be my husband?” she asked, showing him a mock look of agonized hurt, the look of anguish she got from him wasn’t at all faked. “Oh Sage... I’m sorry. This is important to you... you’ve already married me in my faith, now I want to bond with you in yours. As soon as we can. Right now if possible.”

Sage looked at her, both of them naked and in each other’s arms. He so loved his wife at that moment as he kissed her, that he couldn’t believe his luck in finding someone outside his own faith so willing to do something outside her own faith in the name of her love for him.

But then he was not aware of it at the moment... but she was so proud that he would give up his dreams and his faith... all for her.

Sage left immediately, dressed within a simple pair of trousers as he vaulted the wall of the shrine to get at the computer node on the outside of the wall. He immediately sent a simple Email to Daedalus and hit send. Within seconds he received a response:

Yes, Master Sage, it will be done...

Sage then returned to his wife, and they wore each other out for the rest of the night.

Preparations for the bonding ceremony would take time to complete, enough time for Sage’s one year probationary period to end. Sanari had sent regular reports, and combined with reports from other notable individuals such as

Headmistress Meniko, Deputy Mezzo, and Headmaster of the Shadow League Drake, the Imperial Court had motioned and passed a lessened probationary period of ten years, where Lord Sage would be allowed to have his power back, but would still nonetheless be watched and observed.

And so on the three hundredth and sixty sixth day, Sanari removed her black key from where it had rested over her heart between her bosoms, and inserted the key into its lock on Sage's neck.

Drake, also in attendance, inserted his key into the other lock and they both turned simultaneously. With a double click-snap, the locks opened where they were imbedded inside him, and the collar glowed and then separated from his flesh before promptly disintegrating. And then the plugs in the back of his head were all spat out.

Sage looked down at his hands and promptly sank to his knees with a gasp. Sanari promptly knelt beside him, palming his chest.

"S-Sage? Are you all right?" she asked.

"I-I'm all right... my powers just suddenly hit me and weighed down on me..." Sage said as his body thickened noticeably in every respect. "I was just suddenly struck... with the burden of it all. Like a yoke across my shoulders with multiple buckets of rocks in it."

"And a burden you should think of it, Sage." Drake said as he stood there in his fine robes. "The more power a person has, the more responsibility that person has. That responsibility is the burden that you now carry with all that power."

"Yes father," Sage said as he rose to his feet, clenching his hands, thinking that he could've done very fine from that point forward without his powers... and it was still flooding back into him, the metal DNA in him powering up from a year of inactivity. "I will definitely remember that from this point forward."

"This is my wedding gift, beloved." Sanari said, and Sage made himself smile. His powers had brought him nothing but anguish and heartbreak. He wouldn't allow them to rule him ever again.

"I have one for you as well." He said. "Would you like to see it?"

"You have a gift for me?" she asked. "This doesn't have anything to do with what you were building next to my shrine, is it?"

Sage smiled and took her hand and led her away from Drake.

"I'll be returning to Earth for the final preparations," Drake said. "I'll see you both in a few hours."

And Sage and Sanari waved at him before he disappeared.

"Wait," Sage said, and reaching into his pocket, removed a long strip of white cloth.

"What's this for?" She smiled slyly.

"Part of the surprise," he said turning her around to apply it. "I want you to see it all at once." And he tied the fabric about her eyes, and then taking her hand, led her carefully forward, parting the screens and helping her inside, faced her before what he'd constructed.

"Sage... what is it?" she laughed, and he lifted his hands to the tie at the back of her head and drew on the draw strings, and when the wrapping fell, Sanari gasped at what she saw.

A pyramid with four sides, equal on all sides on a raised field of poured concrete and cut stones and surrounded by a dozen obelisks made of polished wood, all of equal height and dimensions, each resting upon a rounded ball of stone. It was an exact replica of one of the smaller temples... one built for the bare minimums required for the

rituals, and surrounded properly by a stand of heavy trees that were native to the planet that the temple found itself upon.

The stone of the pyramid laid over a wooden frame work on the inside, surrounded by more poured and shaped stone, and the stone covered in a lacquer that had been smoothed and polished to a glass-like finish.

Sanari stepped forward, touching the faces of all the craftsmanship, marveling that Sage had used long wooden pegs and tar to conjoin braces. She covered her mouth with both hands, gasping as she cried at seeing this built... all for her.

"I..." she gasped and turned to him. "I don't know what to say!"

"It's yours... your temple to govern over... as soon as I'm completed with its interior of course." He smiled boyishly. "Now that I have access to my powers again, I can make its interior spacious enough for whatever you would want it to be. All natural, all Nature Druidic and Ecomancer skills, and not a single mote of technology have found its way into its creation. I can finish it within another year, dearest heart, and make it ready for you to bless it with your own hand."

Sanari rushed to him and embraced him tightly.

"You like it." He stated, as he folded her to his heart.

"I *love* it! No one has ever done something like this for me. But what do you mean that not a single piece of technology could be found in its creation?"

"Because like any loving creation, it had to be made by hand. Not even a wooden mallet was used in its creation. Everything was made by using materials found naturally around on the ground or in the earth."

Sanari turned and gaped at him; and then turning back to the temple, lifted a hand and laid it upon one of the wooden braces at the entrance. The pulse of the world flowed into it, for it was a piece of wood that was shaped and forged naturally by her husband's own claws and hands. She felt it, and still couldn't believe it.

She rushed inside, lifting a hand and summoning a ball of light; she looked about inside the great chamber beyond. She began to weep as she looked about her. Finally... she would see her shrine evolve into a full temple. Sage stepped in behind her and cupped both her elbows as he nuzzled her neck.

After a moment she turned and embraced him again. Sage held her there as she kissed his neck.

"I'm barely your wife, and already you are making my dreams come true." She whispered, looking up at him as he lifted his hands to brush her tears away.

"You are my beloved, Sanari... I want nothing more than your happiness, and this is what would make you happiest... so I had to give it to you."

"And what is it you want? What is it that you want more than anything?" she wept, half laughing at the enormity of this gift to her.

"I already have what I want more than anything." He smiled dumbly at her, and hugged her to him. "You make me happier than anything."

She clutched to his shirt, feeling the ever-increasing power in her lord's body as his body continued to swell imperceptibly with magically enhanced muscle mass. And she thought he was powerful before... now he was rapidly growing stronger by the moment.

“I will find out what you want beloved...” she murred and pressed against him. “Like this bonding ritual you didn’t want to tell me about, and I’ll make sure you are never unhappy again if I can help it because of this.” She purred. “And speaking of which... we need to get ready. If I’m going to marry you again... then I don’t want to be late.”

Meniko felt the reactivation of Sage Preypacer as if it were a big bang effect going off in Etherscape. It washed over her and grew so vast that his power blended in with the background radiations in physical and etherscape. Very few individuals could do that... and Rae was one of them.

“Oh!” Rae said as she sat close to Meniko in a summoned chair that the Dragaseir had produced for her daughter for their visit. “Sanari must’ve just reactivated Sage again.” She smiled happily.

“Yes.” Meniko sighed.

She now had him at full power again, and that gave her a small amount of anticipation. The planet still had done nothing in regards to Sage and the tree Ent... and that included not answering her about what to do with Ent as a weed. It still hadn’t decided as to whether or not let the tree live, or to erupt the volcano Ent sat upon and tear the tree forcibly from the surface of Wave World.

“You don’t sound happy.” Rae stated, and rising, stepped forward to palm one of Meniko’s clawed hands.

“A little nervous.” Meniko said. “I know you care for him a lot, Rae... but I can’t help but think that we are up for some more difficulties with him.”

“He’s learning mother.”

“I know... he spoke a great deal of wisdom a short while ago... it had a lot to do with realizations he suddenly had.” Meniko thought of the fight between the demon and the angel in her very lair here. “He’s apologized for all the trouble he’s made, but I find it difficult to forgive people, Rae. Dragaseir have very long memories... and he’s brought me ten years of grief that ended with a scene of heinous violence that nearly ended in my death and the destruction of my school.”

“But he was sick, wasn’t he? We helped cure him. He’ll be much better!”

Meniko looked down at Rae. “Your boundless faith and love is indeed catching Rae.” Meniko said with a loving smile and caressed Rae’s cheek with one finger. “I’m giving him a second chance, Rae... but no more. If he screws up again... I’ll approach the Dragaseir Council to have him banished if need be. They’re already watching him very closely.”

Rae looked up at her mother.

“I believe he’ll be ok. He has mother Sanari to look after him.” Rae smiled happily again.

“Yes he does.” Meniko said, and her own smile faded.

In her mind... Meniko now feared Sage taking her mother away from her...

The quickest and easiest way to get to Earth was rather simple.

Sanari and Sage landed on Shadow Island, and picking Sanari up, Sage took the powers granted to him by linking himself to the island, and he blinked so that they didn’t have to walk over the caldera to get inside it. There it was nearing morning, and they entered into the doors of the Millennium tree, only to be met by Dallas.

“Good morning Master Sage.” He bowed to him. “Good morning mistress Sanari.” He bowed again

“Good morning Dallas.” She smiled.

“Good morning.” Sage added as Dallas stepped out of the way, revealing two lines of bodies up against the walls from all the students and faculty of the Shadow League.

“Good morning Sir.” Siklohn greeted, and Sage shook his hand, just before Mayia leapt on him and hugged him around the neck solidly.

Siklohn cleared his throat briefly.

“Oh hush, Sik... this is only the second time in a year I got to be with master... and you can wait a minute.” And then she hugged him tighter.

Down the rows of students, they were greeted as they passed, exchanging “hello” and “Good morning” from the students who wanted to be there to see them off. It wasn’t everyone, of course... but it was quite enough to make Sage happy. He wondered if this was Sanari’s doing, or Dallas’s. Possibly Mayia’s... he wasn’t sure.

Actually, it was Siklohn’s idea. This was an Aphkei tradition, a corridor of honor for the would be newly weds as they went to the alter to be married.

Finally, the pair of them came to one of the many corridors inside the Lair of the Shadow League, and Dallas automatically melted the wall open for them to reveal an extension to the corridor. They stepped forward, and Sanari slowed, suddenly looked back over her shoulder, and Sage smiled knowingly at her.

Rae had done this very thing as well ten years ago.

“What happened?” she asked, and passed her hand before her.

Sage stepped back to her, and embraced her before taking one of her hands and slowly moving it toward a point in space till her fingers moved through a distortion that was little more than an invisible film a few molecules thick.

“You are standing at the point where two universes meet.” Sage said. “This is where your universe ends, and mine begins.”

“H-how did you do that?”

“Partly my doing, partly Dallas’s capability. He constantly maintains a hole in space an inch wide to allow for his communications nodes to retain a connection with his Master Central Processing Unit, but expands the hole when necessary to allow us to move between universes while in my lair.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” she asked then.

“No. The hole is reinforced technologically, physically and magically.”

Sanari moved her hand back and forth amidst the invisible barrier between their universes before she turned to her husband and he guided her forward through the well-kept halls, passing the occasional Bioroid who bowed and greeted them before returning to their work.

Far behind them, the hole between universes shrank as the wall closed in to seal the hole.

“So we’re on Earth?” Sanari asked. “Right now?”

“Right now,” he answered her, his hand gripping her narrow shoulder and holding her close to him. “As a matter of fact...” and he gestured to a blast door, and there was the sound of heavy machinery activating, and two sliding doors – one horizontal the other vertical – slid open, and Sanari gasped as she looked upon the Valley of Shangri-La.

For hundreds of thousands of years, this valley has remained remarkably unchanged... only the denizens that inhabited it differed.

A vast mountain valley that was warm and good spread out in every direction before her, climbing high up into the sky, sloping gently before the mountains around them became sheer cliff faces that ended in hooking rocky crags, each peak miles across, and the base of the mountain valley was dozens of miles to and fro. Large bodies of water, lakes, were connected by trickling mountain streams that cascaded from the high mountain faces, and disappeared through holes in the rock near the base of the valley. Everything was green and warm, with the valley floor carpeted with forests and groves, and the sloping walls of the mountain tiered with crops and rice patties.

And then there was the tree.

Sanari’s head rolled back against her shoulders as her gaze rose higher and higher, to the towering edifice that was tens of thousands of feet high, with its bark white as snow, and its leaves glistening white in the light of the fading day here.

“Merciful Aul!” Sanari gasped at the sight of it.

“Sanari... allow me to introduce you to Ent’s father... Tre’ent.” Sage smiled, gesturing to the great tree. “Eldest of the World Trees. Tre’ent, this is Sanari... a holy woman from her universe. She’s to be my lifemate. May we have your blessing?”

“H-he can hear us?” Sanari asked but then there was a soft breeze that slid across them.

Sage laughed. “He can hear us... he’s aware of everything in this valley. Here...” and he took her hand and held it out into the wind, and Sanari felt the waves of spirits rushing by her as she was welcomed to the valley. “He’s given us his blessing.”

Sanari stood there, reveling within the power of the spirits in this valley. They were full and vibrant spirits of people and animals. It was the fullest feeling of spiritualism she’d ever experienced. The whole of the valley rivaled the feeling she got in the central temple of Cersi.

“Beloved... this is perhaps a bad time to ask, but what should I be expecting?”

“A bonding ceremony is rather different than what we went through, dearest heart. There is more... revelry.”

“THERE YOU ARE!” A loud voice said, and Sanari blinked as she turned to the source of the voice, and saw one of the biggest women – aside from Eurika – striding up to them. “Hey everybody! They’re here!”

She was at least twelve feet tall, looking like Cerulean with her bear body form and features, but her body was stark white. She wore a light blue bikini like garb with pieces of armor about her as she strode up to them both, while behind her, people were popping out of the bushes and trees.

She rippled with muscular mass, with massive mammaries attached to her bulging chest.

“Whew!” she gasped as she came to stand before them both. “Sage... visit more. The path leading up to your lair is all overgrown!” but then she bent down and picked him up and squeezed him in her thick, massive arms as his body slotted between her massive breasts.

“*Glk* S-Sanari... May I introduce Ursula... M-My COUNTERPART – not so tight Urusa! – my counterpart in the Circle of Sages as the Aspect of the Warrior.”

Ursa dropped Sage and he collapsed to the ground as Ursa picked Sanari up and wrapped her lovingly in her massive arms and breasts as well.

“She likes to hug.” Sage said, though Ursa was a lot more gentle with Sanari.

“H-Hi...” Sanari managed.

“And what a beautiful little thing she is, too! How dare you hide her from us Sage! I couldn’t really believe Patch, because how do you trust the word of a blind man on how someone looks?”

“Ursa... you should know that you should trust Patch’s explanation of how a person looks more than any one else’s.”

Ursa actually knelt to set Sanari back on her feet. Sanari was safe to guess she’d never had an experience like that. Eurika didn’t hug grown people like that.

“Pleased to meet you.” Sanari managed; her heart beating excitedly as more people were gathering.

Lycan’s and humans, and every Lycan were white furred, white feathered, or white scaled, tall and strong.

“Now don’t you worry, Sanari... We’ll take good care of you while you’re here.” Ursa smiled happily, straightening Sanari’s clothes and dusting her off while the gathering people began to greet them.

Sanari was suddenly met with a great deal of “Pleased to meet you,” and “Welcome” from those who were gathering around her, and taking Sage’s hand for security, they began to walk down the path. There went up a horn from somewhere from a white bird-like creature hanging from the trees, and a cheer immediately went up from the people around them, and also from the whole of the valley.

“What’s going on?” Sanari asked as their pace quickened with the throng of people around them.

“They’re greeting us. Or more specifically you.” Sage said as they moved quicker.

Singing began to rise up from the valley, and just as the pace of the march became too quick for Sanari in her robes, they were both picked up and carried, and all around her as she held Sage’s hand, she found that the crowd immediately separated with males carrying Sage and females carrying Sanari, and before she knew it, they were carrying her away from him till her hand came out of his.

“Sage!” she cried.

“It’s ok!” he cried back. “This is all part of the ceremony. Just let yourself have fun! They’ll take care of you!”

And Sage disappeared behind a stand of trees as she was carried down the slope of the valley, right toward one of the lakes.

Sanari had been secluded from her husband, and very quickly after that, from every last male she could see in every direction. She was brought down to the water’s edge where a small group of females, which included Ursula, separated from the main group as they carried her to the waters edge.

“W-what’s happening?” Sanari asked as she was set on her feet.

“Don’t worry... you’re in good hands with us.” Ursa smiled, and then began to remove her armor and slide out of her bikini; the other fems likewise slid out of their clothes before they moved to her and began opening her robes. “It’s a part of the ceremony to bathe the bride and the groom.” Another fem said, taking Sanari’s things and folding them neatly.

“Where’s Sage?” she asked as two of the women took her hands, held them outward and maneuvered her toward the lake. Sanari thought that the water would be freezing cold, but instead, it was quite warm, and so clean that she could see right to the sandy bottom of the lake.

“Don’t worry.” A young human woman, barely more than a girl, said as she took a large sponge and began to wash Sanari with it. “The men and the women are separate in the order... till they get married. The ceremony and ritual are made to accent that separation as you and he come together.” And she laced her ten fingers together to show her the togetherness.

“And it all begins here.” Ursa said and began washing Sanari’s slender back. “As you become a wife, you are surrounded by and bathed by several helpers. A maiden,” Ursa said and gestured to the young woman. “Who is a woman but is still a virgin in her sexuality.”

“Hi.” The girl said. “My name is Kira.”

“Hello Kira.”

“She acts as your companion, and the woman who hands you off. The next is a woman who is already a wife.” And she gestured to a white fleshed muscular fem on her other side, a Lycan that was more fish with her dorsal fins on her arms and legs, and a large hooked fin on her back. She even had closed gills on her neck.

“Greetings.” She said. “My name is Roeka.”

“Roeka is a great white shark. Don’t worry about her... her bark is worse than her bite.” Ursa said, and Roeka grinned showing several layers of serrated teeth within her angular tipped head.

“The next woman is me.” Ursa said and gestured to herself with both hands. “I have the role of a mother. Now there is one more person who is supposed to be here, the role of the crone.”

“A crone?” Sanari gasped. In her mind, a woman should never be called a crone.

“It’s not an insult in this case.” Ursa said. “Hers is the roll of a female who is older than you, one who can bestow wisdom onto you. We were told on how old you were, so it was difficult to find someone who was older than you. We would’ve asked Kit, but she couldn’t get away from her duties.”

“So... you couldn’t find anyone?” Sanari asked as one of the women cradled her as two others washed her legs.

“I didn’t say that.” Ursa smiled impishly. “But I’m surprised she isn’t here yet.”

“I’ll get her.” Roeka said, and slapped the water several times. “She said she was going to take a nap.”

Sanari wondered who they could’ve gotten on this world that was older than her, but then she jumped as the water around her suddenly shivered, and she blinked as two pairs of serrated fins broke the water of the lake and began snaking their way toward her. She pursed her lips in wonder at this till the fins suddenly dipped under the water, and after a pause the water broke in a spray, and a massive body began to rise from it.

The fem who appeared towered over even Ursa by at least a dozen feet and that was only by sheer presence of resting on her arms, and arching her blue, serpentine body.

A crown of horns arched backward from her head, combined with splaying fins and a great mane of blue-green hair. Her blue eyes glowed as she arched her back, thrusting out dozens of full and rounded breasts, starting with two sets of primaries, half a dozen secondaries, and a dozen tertiaries down the length of her body.

Sanari blinked, holding her breath as she looked up at this beautifully sensual creature.

“Hello.” The creature greeted, dipping her head in the likeness of a curtsy.

“W-who...” Sanari swallowed, stunned at the beauty and perfection of this massive creature.

“Her name is Leviathan ... named after her mother. Her full name is *Leviathan's Daughter* in honor of the mother of dragons.” Ursula supplied. “She is a wife, a mother, and is older than you... and she agreed to take the role of a crone.”

“H-how old are you?” Sanari asked.

“A lady never tells, but since we’re all ladies here...” She chuckled and pulled herself up to sit along the shore. “I’m just shy over ninety thousand years.”

“Definitely greater than my twenty-five hundred...” Sanari laughed and the other women laughed with her.

“That’s true...” Leviathan said, cupping some water in a hand and pouring it over Sanari’s head in a cascade. “Now, Madam Sanari, what questions do you have for us as a woman?”

“I... I do have a question, but first... where *is* Sage?”

Ursa laughed. “The men do some rather nasty things to the grooms, I hear they roast him with insults and punches, but he’s surrounded by a number of males just like you are with us. A boy, a husband, a father and a geezer. It’s easier for us to find Sage a father figure... Drake volunteered for that part.”

“Hm...” Sanari smiled, and then looked to Ursa and Leviathan. “There is one more thing I would like to ask of you then.” She said and covered her navel with both hands. “What’s it like to have a baby?”

Sanari was cleaned thoroughly. Even her fingernails and toe nails were cleansed, filed and polished before they dried her fur and brushed all her fur back. They dressed her in a white robe that left her breasts and sex open... it was little more than a shawl that hung down low about her body. They did up her hair into an elegant design, decorated her with golden jewelry and expertly applied lipstick and eye shadow from natural berry stains before applying an oil to her fur to make her look glossy and gleaming.

Then with Kira and Leviathan – who’d transformed into a lusciously beautiful and sexy human woman – taking her arms and holding them outward, to display her in her full glory, they led her forward at the sound of a horn up in the air.

Sage was brought in similarly, with Drake and a young boy – Ursa’s son – leading the way, followed by the other men as she was followed by the other women. Sanari was surprised that Patch wasn’t among them, but she found that he instead stood at the foot of the stairs to their temple, a sprawling lodge built around still growing white trees as its pillars.

Sanari looked to her husband and he spied her out of the corner of his eye and smiled at her, but made no move to come to her just yet. He bowed and she curtsied.

“Who comes?” Patch asked, standing in white robes but without his bandana, his eyes were instead pinched shut.

“I am Sage.” Sage said.

“And I am Sanari.” Sanari added, following the whispers of the women about her.

“Why are you here?” Patch continued.

“I desire to be bonded to the woman I love, which is here with me.”

“Then enter.” Patch said and turned in a fluttering of robes and strode inside, and Sanari and Sage stepped forward, now with only those guiding them following. They followed Patch inside the temple, and Sanari blinked, seeing actual manifested spirits here as they opened the doors for Patch as She and Sage followed him, Sage in the front, she in the back, before they were brought to an alter, and they were both lowered onto knee rests facing it. The four individuals who’d led them in here both turned to leave, and the spirits closed the doors as only the three of them remained.

“Sanari, place the backs of your hands on this alter.” Patch indicated, gesturing to the marble alter between them. Sanari did so, her hands open before her. “Sage, place the backs of your hands on this alter.” And Sage did so, smiling lovingly at her as he placed both his hands on the outsides of Sanari’s.”

Patch began to recite from their holy book, as he poured water into the palms of each of their hands, waving his clawed, five-fingered hand over the four of theirs, once, twice, three times, and then closing his hand, he lifted upward, and Sanari gasped as she felt her spirit being pulled forward along her arms, stretched slightly, till two small sphere’s formed in her hands, passing through the water – a universal conduit – that glowed a brilliant white.

In Sage’s hands were two more, though his were a whitish-blue.

“Hand in hand, soul in soul, unite as one, man and woman.” Patch spoke softly, and for the first time since this ritual began, Sanari felt Sage touch her, his hands sliding into hers, and she gasped, closing her eyes as she felt a flood of her being slid his way, and be replaced by a flood of himself inside her.

She gasped, feeling his hearts beating in her bosom, and she gasped, feeling his very love for her, mingled with her own for him. She looked at him, then down to his hands, feeling their souls intertwining, linking subtly. She began to weep with the wave of emotion.

She held the source of his heart inside her bosom... as if it were a piece of her own.

“Sage, do you take this woman Sanari, to be your wife and lifemate eternal?”

“I do.”

“Sanari, do you take this man Sage, to be your husband and lifemate eternal?”

Sanari’s head swam, she was weeping as she felt the true light in her love’s heart; it was so pure, so absolute, that she wanted to wrap herself up in it, hold it around her like a blanket and let herself be cradled by him. She then realized that she’d been asked a question, and she answered as best she could.

“I... do...” she gasped, breathing hard.

“Sage, raise your right hand.” And he did, and Patch wrapped a white silken ribbon about their hands and wrists. “Rise then, but remember to keep your hands tight inside this ribbon.” Patch said, and Sage rose to his feet, and when Sanari didn’t rise, he squatted before her, still holding her left hand with his right in the white silk ribbon, and he lifted her up to him. Sanari fell into his bare chest, kissing his heart, and then looked up at him with tears in her eyes.

“We need to go.” He whispered, and Sanari bent her head to kiss his hand clasping with hers. “Can you walk?”

“I-I don’t want to leave this spot.” She said, rubbing her cheek across his chest, wiping her scent on him.

“I don’t want to either.” He whispered, kissing her forehead. “My beloved... but we cannot do this here. Come with me dearest... we are nearly over.”

Sanari turned and they followed Patch to the next chamber, to another alter, and they knelt once again on opposing sides.

“Clasp hands.” Patch directed, and Sage took Sanari’s free hand and placed it over their linked two, covering all their hands with one of his. “Bow heads.” He said, and they did, and they placed their foreheads together, and then Sanari felt Patch’s hand on her head as he placed another hand on Sage’s head, and he began to pray, but as he did, Sanari felt the next piece of something wonderful happening.

‘Don’t be afraid, beloved. It’s me.’ She heard her love’s voice in her head.

‘What’s happening?’ she asked.

‘The second task of the bonding... a linking of minds. This is our rapport... one heart and now one mind.’ Sage explained, his once echoing voice growing clearer and clearer. Sanari felt a flood of her husband’s mind flowing into hers and visa versa, and she felt more of herself exchange with himself, to the point where she could practically feel herself in two places.

She waited, feeling the prayer continue as she shared the same breath with her husband.

“... Of one heart, and now of one mind, sealed in the name of Jesus Christ... amen.” Patch finished, and removed his hands from their heads. “Please arise.”

Sanari felt weak, but then Sage tried to rise and faltered, rose again, and then pulled Sanari to him. She gasped, and though she felt weak she also felt irrevocably more fully in love with Sage than before. Her heart beat rapidly to keep up to the double-tap of Sage’s heart, and she began to purr as she rubbed her face against his body, wiping more of her scent off on him.

Sage purred for her, that cackling purr that vibrated her whole body with her this close to him.

“Please follow me.” Patch said, and then began to walk, and holding his wife and love closely to him as he walked with her, they followed along in Patch’s wake.

What happened next barely even registered to Sanari as she clung to Sage, their hands gripping tightly as a final seal of the spiritual and mental links continued to form between them. Their robes were removed, and they entered a pool with twelve stone oxen around its base. There they were bathed again by a priest and priestess of the temple wearing white robes, Sanari cuddling close to her husband as they continued to clasp hands together, their fingers lacing close while they kissed.

She was becoming so interested in him as she pawed with her free hand, kissed with her lips, and nuzzled and nuzzled by him as he clasped her narrow shoulder. It was very difficult for the priest and priestess to wash them both, but they had understanding smiles on their faces.

Leaving the pool, they held each other as they were both anointed again, a full body oil washed over their bodies from head to toe. Over Sanari’s breasts, Sage’s manhood, her womanhood, both their tails, and an extra decanter had to be opened for Sage’s wings.

Patch then anointed them on their brows, their breasts and navels again with a sweet smelling ointment, before the priest and priestess robed them both in a body cloth and then a poncho like thing to cover their nakedness fully now, and then passed into yet another chamber after Patch.

Here, they both ate a piece of sweat bread that had been flattened, and then drank a sip from a golden chalice, the substance inside of which made Sanari light-headed.

“Man and woman, husband and wife, lifemate and lifemate eternally.” Patch said, removing the ribbon from around their hands. Neither of them opened their hand at that moment. “Sanari, you now bear the name of your lifemate, the name of Preypacer, which is the name that you will apply to your children. Sage, this is your lifemate, in who you are charged to honor and protect, and care for the children that spring up from her.

“Go now and love each other,” Patch gestured. “And present yourselves unto the world as lifemates.”

And patch bowed, and Sage drew Sanari to him, and walked with her out of the chamber, and then into another.

Sanari blinked as the door was shut and bared behind them, and still holding her husband’s hand tightly, she spied a strange thing.

It was an altar, but on top of the altar was a titanic stone bowl that was tilted slightly, and in it were soft cushions and sheets made of linen and white silk. Surrounding this chamber were hundreds of white burning candles.

Sanari ran her hand over this altar, wondering why they weren’t leaving, and why Patch had not entered.

“And what is this place?” she asked, and turning to him, moved firmly against him as her light-headedness began to spread in her body, sliding down to her breasts to harden her nipples and into her sex to tighten her labia and erect her clitoris.

“Our Bonding Ceremony is a ritual of unity, dearest heart.” He said, purring immediately as his free hand found her breast and began to massage it with his fingers, and she felt his groin bulging against her sex. “It begins as a bonding of souls,” he began, and kissed her, and Sanari felt herself floating, and then felt the lip of the great bowl bump against her behind. “So as to eternally feel for each other, to share each other’s love. And then a bonding of minds,” his hands began pulling up her white garb, and taking a cheek of her rear as she lifted her tail instinctively, he lifted her onto the bowl so that she sat on it. “So that we are always of one mind about everything. And the last step... is a bonding of bodies.”

Sanari began to catch on to what he was saying, but then she also was feeling something sweet and warm sliding through her body, and she began to get very, very aroused.

“So I’m the sacrificial subject to be pierced by your sword, is that it?” she murred, spreading her legs as his hands coursed up her body, and he climbed up between her thighs, bending forward to kiss her, and she sighed as he peeled her robes open off her, and Sanari gasped as she arched her back while his hands fell upon her breasts.

“I appreciate you calling it a sword, beloved, but it really isn’t.” he said dumbly, lowering himself to kiss her nipples while she was already beginning to cream in preparation for him.

She rose and removed his fine white robes, pulling them all off him, revealing the mass of his shaft as she lowered her hands to caress it in both her hands as it stiffened.

“You underrate yourself,” Sanari soothed, and moved forward, rubbing his phallus with her hands and her furry belly. “You are a powerful man, and this definitely feels like a sword when its in me.” She purred and kissed him. “And now... I want you to pierce me deeply,” she began to lean back, arching her back and spreading her legs even further while holding onto his phallus. “Completely,” she rubbed the head of his phallus to get a slick of seed to prime at the end of his manhood. “And hard...”

The sun had set, and a very large group of people were waiting outside the exit of the temple.

“How long have they been in there?” Ursa asked as she sat beside Patch, cheek on her hand while she tapped a stick against the grassy ground.

“Forgive me Ursa... but I don’t carry a watch.” Patch smiled at her; now back in his traditional garb, complete with bandanna. But Patch looked at her, and his ears twitched. “You look agitated.” He commented, seeing her heart in a quickened pace, and she seemed to be fidgeting.

“Stop looking through me, Patch.” She smirked. “I’m old enough to be your mother’s mother. You shouldn’t be looking at your grandma naked.”

“Everyone is naked to me.” Patch smiled. “Makes my life all that much nicer. But you look agitated ‘Grandma.’”

“Well... I wanted to help Sage along... you know... how he’s been such a stiff all this time. I thought he could use with a little oomph in the elderberry juice.”

“More oomph? In elderberry juice?! Ursa... you know that is designed to be an aphrodisiac in the first place!”

“I know...” she shrugged her massive shoulders. “I just added a little passion weed to it.”

“*You* added some passion weed? *We* added some passion weed.” One of the young men who’d been one of Sage’s escorts said.

Patch pursed his lips, and then looked down. “And so did I.” Patch said nibbling on his lower lip.

“Patch!” Ursa said in mock shock. “You’re the high priest. How dare you do such a sexy and lewd sort of thing? I’m going to have to elevate you from stick in the mud to stiff.”

“Heh... says you.” Patch said, but just then there was a raucous cheer, and they all looked up to see Sage exiting with Sanari clinging very close to his side.

“Well he’s alive...” Ursa said.

“So’s she, and she looks quite satisfied.” Roeka said as she appeared beside Ursa. “Sage is no longer the kid you used to baby sit, Roeka. He’s a large, well-endowed male.”

“Quit looking Roeka... you’re married, and he’s been spoken for.” Ursa said.

“And he’s been spoken for by her twice.” Patch grinned and stepped forward, raising his hands. “Now let the celebrations... begin!” he called out, and there was a tumultuous cry as every voice in the valley suddenly cried out, howled out or roared out, to awake the stars and make them aware that a new husband and a new wife have been made here this day.

Sanari sat on Sage’s lap, slowly grinding him with her feet hooking over his spread-apart knees while she focused all her attentions on him, kissing him, nuzzling him with her lips, her cheeks, nose and forehead, her tail lifted high at her backside while Sage held onto her butt cheeks. They occasionally fed each other foods from the table that they sat at, situated on a grand chair. They each had a grand chair, but Sanari had abandoned hers to give her husband all her attention.

Patch walked up beside them, smiling broadly as he looked down toward them, his ears twitching and his nostrils flaring.

“So Mother Sanari, how do you compare our humble ceremony with the one of your order?” Patch asked, smiling broadly at them.

“Our service has its own provisions for merging and bonding souls, Lord Patch.” She mused, and then opened her mouth to accept a fruit from Sage, and chewed it briefly before continuing. “Though I truly do enjoy the revelry.” She purred, pressing her chest high atop Sage’s chest, her breasts cleaving to his neck as they both purred and rumbled with their affections for each other.

“I must apologize for something, however... we really don’t usually spike the nectar you both drank with supplements.”

“Hmm...” Sanari mused as Sage’s hands cupped her sides, his thumbs massaging her breasts. “And here I thought I was just that ecstatic for your brother.” Sanari murred and arched her back with a sigh.

“I see he’s ‘*ecstatic*’ for you too... very static for that matter. It’s a wonder that you chose hide that fact in that way, Mother Sanari.”

Sage looked at Patch with only one eye while Sanari landed kisses on his cheek. “Quit looking you pervert. She was very resourceful for hiding my bone like this, and all for our enjoyment. You have only yourself to blame for spiking the Sacramental Nectar, dear brother.”

“Actually,” Patch said, massaging the side of his nose. The scent of their love juices was very strong in his nostrils, and it was difficult for him to resist the arousal from it. “A total of five people spiked the Nectar with passion weed. So if you’d both like a place to stay...”

“In a minute!” they both said and Sanari rocked herself soothingly, moaning softly before she licked Sage’s lips, kissed him and then pressed her tongue in his mouth, Sage moving to actually grope her breasts and roll her nipples between two fingers of either hand.

“Well, neither of you ignore me while I’m standing right here as your wife rides you, Sage... but when you feel limp enough to find a more private place, come see me. I’ll be the half naked, painted up wolf with the lamp shade on his head over there when you’re ready for a bed.” And he pointed, and Sage waved a hand stating that he saw while Sanari tried to suck the marrow of his bones out of his body through his mouth.

Throughout the night, and moving on toward dawn, Sanari continued to ride his groin, and was still there as dawn found them, kissing and loving each other. Shortly after dawn, however, they escaped to a secluded hideaway, where they stripped their robes without abandon, and humped each other like only mammals could.

Not much was seen of Sanari once they returned to the school either. Sage popped out for a spell for a bucket of water or something, but would then retreat right back into their shared home. What happened during those nights, Sanari actually wrapped the many pages she wrote in her journal with a red ribbon and sealed its edges with wax. Sage didn’t bother doing such a thing with his own journal.

Eakjo had to stay with Tla for days...

Chapter Fourteen: Conception of the Twins

It had been a whole month after his marriage to Mother Sanari, and with Sage now allowed to return to his administrative duties at the Shadow League and with Sanari still needing their home for administration of her own school, it became apparent to them both that they needed more room, so Sanari gave Sage permission to modify her home.

Using his access to his temporal magics, being extra special careful not to disrupt the tenuous spiritual connectivity of his beloved's shrine, Sage transformed Sanari's one roomed home into a mansion without so much as modifying a single stone outside.

Sanari came home, and then gasped at what she saw.

Her ground floor no longer contained any bed, but was now a full kitchen and living room, with the bathhouse and bathroom still attached. Though the bedding was gone, there was now a set of stairs off to one side that couldn't conceivably be there, for she knew that the other side of the wall they were attached to led outside, and since she came home around that wall, she knew there was no addition to the house to handle it.

Sage was excited to show her everything.

Up the stairs, Sanari paused as she saw a garden right inside their home. It was suspended over a field of water, the chamber domed around large plants and bushes, some of which were the likes she'd never seen before, and there were fish swimming in the water, with long whiskers and shiny colors that were perhaps from several different worlds, but nonetheless co-existed quite well with each other. There was a stone bench here and she sat down, looking up at the plants all around this garden, and smiled as Sage sat beside her, sliding a hand over her thigh now that they were in private. He snuck caresses on her thighs, her behind and her breasts when no one was looking outside in order to help maintain the observation of her purity, but in private, he was openly affectionate, caressing and kissing her, making her feel as if she were a goddess that he was worshipping.

"This is so beautiful." She said, taking hold of his hand.

"There's more." He said quietly, and then showed her their room.

He'd managed to get their bed up into this chamber, which was a wide circular room with its own bathroom attached, with an open window that looked out into...

"Is that the Shadow League?" she asked, and Sage hurried forward, pulling open a pair of panels in the rounded room, leading out onto a broad stone walkway that was suspended hundreds of feet up into the Millennium Tree. She stepped out, looking out at such a view, the tree like a small mountain. A Phoenix and a Moonsinger had perched here briefly, and Sanari reached out and caressed one of them, and it gave off a short series of warbles that hung in the air from how beautiful the song was in affection to Sanari's touch.

"It is." Sage said and embraced her from behind.

The stone walkway itself was larger than an average house, and curved about just below the branches of the tree, with a sun awning over the walk way.

Sage showed her the other rooms round about their new home, containing Sage's study in the tree, which likewise connected to the Shadow League School through its conventional portal through the tree, Sanari's large private study and library in the shrine, a storage room that looked as if it went on forever, with blankets, and dishes and silverware, and everything that one might need when they needed it.

And then Sanari opened three doors, which were all blank.

"What are these rooms?" she asked, stepping within the large blank chambers.

Sage stepped in behind her and folded his hands about her middle. “Just a thought of mine... we could use them for anything, of course... but I thought that they would make a good nursery room.” He said in her ear and kissed her cheek.

“A baby?” Sanari said slyly and stepped forward, running her hands against the smooth walls, she then turned to look at her husband, surprised that a man was looking for such a blessing already.

“Part of the ceremony of bonding.” Sage said with a small smile. “For a woman to conceive while on the bed at the end of the ceremony means for the relationship to be extremely blessed.” He said, and stepped in beside her again, his arm around her middle. “For her to conceive within one year is a lesser, but nonetheless a blessed relationship.”

“Sage,” she murred to his kisses. “I haven’t even had a heat yet...” she mused, but nonetheless turned into his arms and accepted his kisses.

“How do you feel about it?” he asked, looking into her eyes. “Do you want a baby?”

“I do.” She said quickly. “But...” there was a chime in the air and she looked up. “What was that?” and she looked slyly at Sage.

“That... that would be Daedalus’s stating that there is someone at the front door. The *shrine* door actually.” Sage said, scrubbing at the back of his head with a nervous grin. “He’s built into a lot of the superstructure here already... so...”

Sanari eyed him with a smile, and then slid her hands across his chest.

“I’m not angry,” she said. “I never really had a servant before, and I guess now that you can associate with your school again, Dallas should be coming with it all as well.”

“He’s my friend, Sanari... not a servant.”

“And he’s your child, too, Sage. When he says ‘*Master*’ and ‘*Mistress*,’ he’s actually saying ‘*Father*’ and ‘*Mother*.’”

“I know.” There was another chime. “That would be one of your students, beloved.”

Sanari smiled and lifted her chin to kiss her husband. “We’ll talk about all the changes, beloved. The only thing I will not tolerate is interference with the spirits of my shrine. Other than that... you may do as you please in your home, my lord.”

“Our home...” Sage said quickly, and she nuzzled his chest with her head.

“Our home.” Sanari smiled, liking this human trait of sharing nearly everything. Only in their religion did differences between sexes arise. “We’ll talk about this when I come back.”

Sage snuck one more kiss from her as she elegantly descended the stairs, only to see Dallas opening the door.

“Yes, the Mother Sanari is indeed in, Please come in.” he said and stepped aside to allow Yusuma, who blinked at him, and then hurried to her mother.

“Mother, I need your help! I think I made a mistake, please hurry!”

Sanari looked to Dallas quickly and he bowed his head politely, and she smiled at him.

“Show me, Yusuma. I’m sure it won’t be too difficult to rectify.” Sanari said, and lifted her hand to take her staff, but found it being placed in her hand, and turned to see Dallas standing there placing it in her awaiting fingers.

“Thank you Dallas.” She smiled.

“My pleasure mistress.” He bowed his head and stood by while she and Yusuma left the house before closing the door.

Sanari did have some small suggestions, and Sage made the modifications immediately. It was endearing, of course, to have a man who settled upon your every whim, and though Sanari insisted of doing certain things herself instead of Dallas, it was nice that he helped keep things neat, clean and tidy. He kept them both reminded of their schedules, and managed several remedial things like finances that Sanari had sometimes stayed up all night trying to figure out. She was immortal, but try as she might, she just couldn't figure out finances. Sage had the same problem, but Dallas made hers and her husband's life easier, so he was allowed in the home... just not into the shrine.

And he was an excellent cook and tailor.

Sanari was finding more time for herself thanks to her marriage to Sage, and now that Sage was allowing others to help him more – his students, his father Drake who stayed on as the actual headmaster to continue teaching his son in the ways of the dragons and the advanced form of the martial art of the school, as well as other faculty members and Dallas – he likewise had more time to be with her.

They found time to have luncheons with each other, afternoon tea... their whole days centered around that point.

And so it was on one of these days, nearly a month after they were married on Cersi, That Sanari began to feel... different...

Sanari paused, amidst her daily duties as she rested on her staff, and lifting a hand, she tugged at the collar of her outermost robe, feeling a waft of hot air rise up from within her robes as she looked up at the sun. Wave World's tropical sun was being particularly unforgiving to her today. She was so hot at the moment, her breathing quick and labored as she walked home, definitely warmer than even a cat like her could appreciate. She was feeling unwell at the moment, well... not really unwell, but definitely not herself. And to make matters worse, she was beginning to feel super sensitive all over her body. Every inch of her was sensitive to everything that brushed against her, and the silk robes of her garb were doing something unexpected to her, especially after she trained herself not to allow it to do so.

She was becoming aroused.

About mid day, she'd found a quiet, secluded place and removed her panties and pocketed them, and now in late afternoon, she was growing so hot and so uncomfortable, that she just had to do something about it.

She stepped into her home and closed the door, breathing heavily, feeling so hot and aroused.

She closed her eyes and began pacing; stepping gracefully across the room, parting the collar of her robes as she looked at the lights around the room and then proceeded to shut lights off, turning them all off one at a time till the main room was completely dark.

She gasped, leaning against the kitchen counter, closing her eyes as she tugged at the collar of her robes, moaning as she pressed her thighs together, pressing her sex between her thighs, and before she knew it she was hugging herself, her eyes opening, her pupils dilating open all the way, and she turned, walked several steps before she proceeded to open her robes, practically tearing them open to reveal her superb, beautiful and sensually naked body.

She stood there, seeing all her nipples standing on end, the shoulders of her robes falling off her shoulders as she pressed her hands between her spread-open thighs to cup her sex, and with a deep, deep moan, she felt a micro orgasm slide from her, her powerful mind rapidly fading from her as the heat about her body only grew hotter, her sensuality growing more acute, and with a sigh and a moan, Sanari fell prey to the wiles of her own body.

Sage was always glad to see his half-brother, Patch.

He was always glad to have his half-brother, an Arctic Werewolf, the largest werewolf species on Earth, walking quietly beside him. Sage himself was once a Great White Siberian Weretiger, now a full-blooded Protean Star Dragon; the pair definitely looked like an odd couple.

Patch had grown since taking Lord Blind IO's Dragon Seed, his body having filled out with muscle and his youth returned to this blind werewolf.

"Sage, I really should be getting back to the Council." Patch said, not moving his head, holding it constantly bowed as he 'saw' things with his ears and super-sensitive hearing instead of his eyes.

"Back to the council or back to my counselor?" Sage asked, and Patch rolled his head like another person would roll their eyes. "Just stay for tea." Sage said instead. "Sanari and I just got everything settled, and I'd be glad if you were to stay."

Patch smiled and turned his head to his brother, the ornate red eye on the white bandanna over his eyes – the all-seeing eye – turning like the eye of a Cyclops – the Symbol of Blind IO himself – toward Sage.

"You *are* lonely for home, aren't you, Sage?" he asked.

"Shh... Don't tell anyone." Sage smiled, but smiled sadly. He hardly ever got to see his family and friends back from Earth, and as it was, many of those friends were dying off now. Even Ursa, their final counterpart in the Inner Circle of Sages, a female polar were bear, was starting to show her age and her twin children were now old enough to look for mates to have children of their own.

Such was the pain of an immortal, and Sage was beginning to feel it. You never aged, you never died, but practically everyone else you knew did.

Sage and Patch entered into the shrine and they walked to the front door of his and Sanari's newly constructed home... a marvel of temporal magics being that it was the size of a mansion inside due to that pieces of it were scattered all over the place across the islands, and even attachments in other shard universes, with portions being artificially enlarged for space. Additionally, it was directly attached to Sage's lair and school, which was in and of itself a bio-technological sprawl that pushed across six separate universes. But for convenience for Sanari, her old chambers acted as the living room and greeting area for their home, so that her students could come to her easily. It was the fundamental front door access to their home, and would forever remain as such.

As such, the door that led to their home within Sanari's Shrine opened right into this greeting area, and as Sage and Patch arrived, Sage lifted his hand to the door and slid it open. It was then that he stopped, his glowing green eyes adjusting almost instantly to the darkness to where he saw Sanari kneeling in the center of a darkened room.

All her many layers of her robes had been undone and were hanging off the crooks of her arms as she knelt there naked, one hand covering her sex while her chest heaved quickly and heavily, sweat dripping off her nose and her nipples. Sanari had a well-developed bodice, some would call it perfect – Sage definitely did – with large, firm and heavy breasts that had never felt the mouth of infants. A body in all its perfect form, a flawless, devout beauty.

She inhaled softly, and then lifted her eyes and saw her husband standing there, and she exhaled an orgasm.

Sage slid the door closed immediately, but not before a blast of pheromones, strong enough to fill the entire chamber Sanari was in, hit him full in the face. Of all males, he was the most sensitive to her, and he felt his body reacting to her scent as his phallus immediately unsheathed in his pants and swelled slightly.

She was in heat

He turned his head slowly toward Patch, and Patch had already leveled his head toward Sage as if he were looking at him with that eye on his bandanna.

“Did you see...” Sage began.

“Yes. I did.” Patch replied. “Don’t worry Sage... everyone is naked to my ‘eyes.’” And his ears twitched. “She is very beautiful...”

“Did you smell?”

“I did. Are you ready for that, Sage? Your hearts are beating very quickly right now.” Sage lifted a hand to palm his chest, not even realizing it. Sanari’s pheromones on him were just like an aphrodisiac, but there was a level of anticipation and anxiety he’d not felt in a very long time, and his twin hearts were yammering together inside his chest beneath his Heart Stone.

“I... I think so.” He said and looked back to the door.

“Have you and Sanari spoken about children?”

“A little... we... didn’t make the decision to start though...” he lifted a hand to the door, breathing deeply, feeling his erection flaring in his pants in tune with his lifemate’s emotional state thanks to their spiritual and mental union.

“You *do* know what will happen if you go in there.”

“I-I know... but... normally she takes a draught to lessen her heats. I don’t understand why she didn’t this time...”

“Maybe... she’s ready. Are you?”

“Yes.” And Sage looked at Patch. “What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to go meet with Kit, maybe go home after that... and take a cold shower.” He smiled. “Good luck Sage... females tend to get... energetic while in heats. I know you know that, but you look like as if you’re in the state of mind where you’ve forgotten that little fact.”

“Yes.” He said absentmindedly. “Yes I did.”

Patch smiled at him as Sage opened the door again and was once again hit immediately in the face by a wave of Sanari’s scent, the smell driving him into greater levels of arousal before he walked inside the darkened room and closed and locked the door behind him.

He looked about him for Sanari, taking several steps forward, not seeing her immediately till he turned around, seeing her before the doorway, her chest heaving as she stood with one hand folded over her belly and the other against the door.

She’s... so beautiful. Such a sensual creature, Sage thought and swallowed as he looked upon her nude body as she slowly looked up at him.

Her pupils had expanded to their fullest, her teats and clit were standing on end and her crotch glistened with moisture, and then she began to purr as she slowly looked up at Sage, the sound of her purr playing with his mind, and he swallowed again, licking his lips as she stepped forward; her clothing finally sliding off her arms as she came to stand before him totally naked now.

Her tail was lifted high and curling at her backside, and her body arched as she rose up onto her toes, sliding her hands beneath the white wrap-around shirt he wore, parting it open before she began to lick the velvety feel of his bare chest.

“S-Sanari... Sanari can you hear me?” Sage asked, looking down at her, and she looked up at him, and instead of answering him she lifted up on tip-toe and kissed him, adding saliva to the mixture of sexual enhancing stimulants on his body as it absorbed straight through his flesh and into his blood.

During one of their bonding experiences, the Lycan act of marriage, during their bonding of the body on the bed at the end of the ceremony, he'd bitten her to taste her blood and she'd done the same with him. A love bite. It made them more susceptible to each other's pheromones, as well as making them more attracted to one another... It made assurances, that should a situation like this happen, that the female would seek her mate out, and her mate would hunt her down for the same reason.

Sage felt his hearts pumping heavily inside his chest as he felt the press and feel of his lifemate's bosom pressing against his chest, listened to her purr as she pulled open his shirt completely and pushed it off his shoulders before she continued to lick the hollow of his chest, moving to one of his six nipples, squeezing it and teasing it with her lips and tongue.

“Sanari...” Sage managed, tipping his head back as her claws slid against his flesh. To a lesser man, those claws of hers would cut slashes into his chest, but a dragon was more durable than a man.

He looked back down at her, lifting his hands to cup her face as she continued to breathe heavily, sliding his thumbs lovingly over her cheeks. He felt her soft fur, felt her breath on his lips, felt her tongue as she licked his lips affectionately, her purring growing louder.

“Beloved... please answer me... I need to know if this is what you want...”

But her mind was chaotic. There was nothing there other than the biological imperative, and the longer he was in her mind, the more it was flooding into him. He had wood so bad he thought his dick would split in half because of it.

He took a deep breath of her sweet scent and pressed his forehead to hers.

“Sanari...” he whispered, and closed his eyes as she murred, the sound from her throat acting on his brain and he grit his sharp teeth trying to concentrate. It was becoming more and more difficult to think. “Sanari... please tell me if this is what you want...”

Her answer was simple. With one hand rubbing her swollen labia, pinching them together about her clit, squeezing out more of her juices while her other hand fondled his erect phallus within the pocket of fabric of his pants as it swelled and bulged.

Sage stood there, letting go of her face as his head followed hers downward as she sought to undo his trousers, trying to kiss her, managing a subtle kiss on her forehead while the backs of his fingers slid over her breasts, caressing her nipples.

With the last of his conscious mind before all his reasoning flooded into his pants, he dipped and picked his mate up in his arms, cradling her as she coiled her tail about his arm, and she moved to hug him around his thick neck, moving close to his body in a half-curved up ball. The pheromones leaking from between her thighs intoxicated her husband as he turned with her, walking up the stairs to their bedroom. He looked down at her, listening to her purr, hearing her groan with the pain of pleasure already wracking her body, her breasts heaving as she gasped occasionally, and as she pressed close to his chest, pressing her thick tits against the hollow of his throat, he would dip his head down and kiss the rounded bulges of her tits and give it a lick with his long tongue.

Sage carried his wife over the suspension bridges and through the gardens hanging over the pool of fish, and entering their rooms, closed the door with his tail, and walked with her to the bed, gently laying her down, beginning to purr himself now.

His purr was like distant rolling thunder, and Sanari raised a little, pushing her hands against his chest to feel the purring in him. He knelt on the edge of the bed, untying his trousers and sliding them off himself, retracting his tail and wings into his back as he crawled toward his mate, his steely erection projecting from his pelvis like a battering ram, his pants falling off his feet while he crawled up over Sanari and then laid above her.

Sanari automatically spread her legs wide and rolled her hips, arching her back as her husband came up to kiss her, cradling her body with both arms, licking her lips, kissing her again and then embracing her. Sanari opened her mouth breathing heavily as her purr changed in pitch with each inhale and exhale, Sage lowering his head to her throat, sucking on her fur there, licking her again, and then nuzzling her chest with his forehead.

Sanari looked down at him, holding onto his long tapering and hooded ears as she rolled her hips again, rocking them, trying to catch his extension as he moved his hands around her sides, glancing his fingers off her ribs and finally thumbing her secondary pair of nipples.

Sanari moaned, folding her hands into Sage's mane, the strands of his mane sliding along her body as he withdrew down her body, kissing her navel, kissing her pelvis... and then licked her thickening vaginal mound, kissed her there, and then sucked on her clitoris while he inserted his tongue inside her.

Sanari moaned again, her fingers clenching into her own hair now with one hand and into the sheets of their bed beside with the other, she rolling her hips yet again, and panting, she looked down at her husband with her eyes wild, the need, the requirement, the biological imperative absolute now.

She sat up, spreading her legs wider, and taking her husband's head with both her hands, she hauled him up, clenching her teeth, her fingers hooking onto the ridge under his jaw, just before she hauled him up further, turned him, and pushed him onto his back with strangely remarkable strength for such a small fem.

Sage was settled, somewhat surprised as he was planted onto his back, Sanari settling between his legs as she bent forward, and took hold of his long and thick phallus in one hand, its thickness so great that one of her hands wasn't large enough to hold around its circumference. Her one hand caressed the shaft, her other fondled his nads, and with her coxing she drew it thicker, got its length to bristle with veins, got the muscles so hard that they thickened into ribs of muscle... and then she descended and brushed the comb of her tongue upward along its length, flicking its tip with her tongue, and settling forward settled her breasts around it and sucked on its end while compressing her tits about his shaft with the insides of her arms.

Subconsciously, she knew how to entice her husband, so when she withdrew, tasting the sweet seed beading at its end in her mouth, she began to crawl upward onto him, rubbing her scent from her cheeks and bosom onto his body, and pushing her breasts forward over his chest, she purred, looking at him, and feeling his hand cupping her face again, his other cupping her breast, she tasted his lips, sucked on them for a moment and then rose a little against his body.

She looked backward over her back, lifted her tail, rolled her hips and spread her legs wider, and with a subtle wiggle, she caught the flared head of his phallus thanks to his circumcision with the lips and nib of her femininity and sat slowly backwards.

Sanari opened her eyes as she exhaled a sigh of relief, as if it were a medicine for this raging turmoil inside her loins causing her heat, and she looked down at Sage while he sat up, resting on his elbows and the insides of his arms, and Sanari bit her lower lip as she felt her belly, felt that thickened mass of his pushing her insides apart, felt the bulge in her belly where his manhood rested beneath it.

She began to purr again, rolling her stomach muscles and clenching her vaginal muscles for him as she creamed, leaking her juices from inside her over her husband's pelvis before repeatedly arching and curling her back to change her insides around him, wiggling her innards around his mass and long-arming her body against his as she palmed his many abs at his pelvis, her breasts resting over her extended arms, she cooed for him and arched her hips to take more of him. Closing her eyes she began to rock and roll her hips, hooking her feet over Sage's legs, tucking her heels up close to her bottom as she kept her tail raised, rubbing her moistening pussy against his lower abs while sliding back and forth onto his heavy erection.

She'd learned of ways to accept the thickness of her husband's extension, and she seethed and hissed with pleasure as with this act, she could feel her femininity stretching even more around him.

Sage lifted his head and dipped his mouth and nose into the expanse of her bosom, kissing the tops of her breasts, pushing his mouth and nose deeper into her cleavage, licking the insides of her breasts with his long draconic tongue. Though he'd lost his own tongue comb when he evolved into a dragon, his tongue had nonetheless lengthened and he got deep between her cleavage, rocking his hips with her before he lifted a hand to cup and fondle one of her breasts, while his other hand took a firm grip on one of her butt cheeks.

He hefted her tit, held it in one hand, massaging it as he suckled on the nipple, Sanari rising and falling on his shaft by sheer use of her leg muscles, rocking and twisting her body as she folded her arms about her head, purring louder as she arched her chest into her husband's face for him.

He nuzzled her chest deeper, sliding his hands against her sides now, finding her second set of nipples hidden beneath her breasts and massaging her ribs there, palming the hardened things before he licked one of her primary nipples, moistening it, and then blowing on it with the chill air of his frost breath weapon at its lowest power, sending a chill wave across Sanari's chest and forcing her nipples to harden all the more.

She groaned, and then orgasmed as her insides clenched hard about Sage's erection, squeezing a little of his seed from him before he lowered his lips to her teat and sucked on it. He began to rock himself, rolling the lower half of his body to pierce her deeper, keeping a fight of climbing and falling inside her body as they both moved against each other, the ribs of the muscles of his shaft rippling teasingly against the lips of her cunt, and getting her to orgasm again, she grew sopping wet, spilling more of her ejaculate all over his piercing sword inside her.

Sage's hands caressed and massaged her sides, sliding down to her hips, holding onto her smaller body as he bent over himself and teased her other tit. And then his strong hands gripped the rounded masses of her bottom, pulling them apart so that she could slide further onto him.

Sanari moaned as he pushed himself deeper than he'd ever been before, her eyes rolling back into her head, and she arched herself backward so far that she fell onto her back at the edge of the bed; her head hanging off the edge, her long mane draping over the edge with her head as she bit her lower lip and moaned, and Sage rose and leaned over her now, cradling her back with one hand, massaging her chest with the other as he rocked into her now.

He rotated himself inside her body like he was churning butter, stirring his erection into her body to rub it against all her insides, and she cried out in her pleasure as her hand gripped the one of his on her chest, holding it there while her other braced itself against his forearm.

Sage began to pump into her, moving faster... then slower... fast... slow, and then taking several long seconds for one long plunge into her bodice, burying himself to the hilt inside her body; his hands massaging her body, his barely conscious mind tripping off pleasure centers with his arts, raising her feminine body into fits of pleasure as she began to orgasm constantly now; her insides compressing about his erection sporadically, coaxing out an oncoming eruption that he held back.

She was breathing very quickly now, and reaching between them both, her hands took hold of the thick shaft that was piercing her body, and she began to caress and cajole it with her fingers while squeezing and caressing her clit, holding it against his phallus as he shifted in and out of her.

Her mind was working on a deeply rooted instinct, which was to become pregnant... to perpetrate the species, and her subconscious, in combination with what remained of her ID was working all of her own arts into getting Sage to climax inside her, trying to overcome the incredible willpower that he used to hold himself off and prolong their pleasure.

It was a credit to Sage and his remarkable muscle control that he kept himself from actually exploding inside her. And then amidst all his own mind-numbing pleasure, his lifemate's bowels rolling and carousing his erection, he

opened his eyes and exhaled a cold breath against her chest, watching Sanari's four nipples harden as he cradled her body, and his form paused in its motions despite that Sanari was continually pushing up and down onto him.

Few species in the multiverse know when they are about to propagate the species. Humans were usually not such a species, but Lycan, who were a sub-species of humanity, did. So are the Cercile.

Sage looked down at his lifemate with a sudden dawning realization as he lifted a hand to her face and caressed her cheek, slid his hand down her neck and palmed her chest between her breasts before sliding it back up to her face. Sanari opened her eyes, gasping for air as she continued to pump onto him. She turned her hand to kiss his palm as Sage considered, thought about what she wanted, wondered what he should do.

He knew that if he were to release himself inside her... she would become pregnant...

For the first time in a very, very long time, Sage made a very selfish decision. He had wanted a family for a very long time. His last attempt for a family was stolen from him, and in turn it began over fifty years of pain and hardship for him. And here... he had a chance to begin again with his beloved lifemate. To have a family...

He considered that if she hadn't wanted this, then she would've drunk her tonic to keep her heat down.

And so he relaxed his body, unclenched his form, allowed his erection to soften, and immediately he felt his juices climbing the length of the tube on the underside of his prick, pushing steadily forward like an unstoppable force once it'd begun. A bead of his seed dripped inside her, and then another, and then a sputter, before his erect phallus slammed backward and offloaded a spasm of his seed into her that absolutely exploded.

Sanari orgasmed immediately as she pushed herself as hard as she could up onto him, and he ejaculated again, Sanari's bowels already overloading around the edges of her pubic mound, leaking from inside her, forming a froth as it dribbled down the creases between her legs, over the swells of her bottom and his nads. And Sage erupted again, pushing and stirring into her, off loading another load of his seminal juices into her.

Sanari rolled her hips, groaning, growling like a cat as she fondled her breasts, pushing them together and upward, and then she screamed her pleasure as her body was filled to overflowing.

Sage opened his eyes and watched her, more of his mind returning to him, but nonetheless, in a single act, she'd become a mother... and he... was now a father...

Sage lay beside Sanari as they both rested above the covers, their midsections sticky from their lovemaking while Sage rubbed Sanari's middle as she laid on her back before him; her arms resting on the pillow beside her head, arching her chest upward and projecting her chest upward into the air. She was purring loudly with each breath, Sage watching her with a new found love in his heart rising up within him as he watched the mother of his children.

Her legs were folded elegantly together, her back arched, her lovely face half turned to him, and her swollen breasts swelling and contracting with each breath. She looked so beautiful to him; her outward air, her very spirit seemed to be changing as he watched her at rest.

And then he lowered his gaze to where his hand covered her navel.

Beneath his fingers he could feel something changing, merging and growing... tying itself into Sanari's soul. He felt the life spark, felt it transforming inside her body.

His fingers massaged the tight abdominals of her body, as he felt this growing inside her.

She was still not fully in her right mind, her heat still active, her body still exuding all its many vivacious and intoxicating scents and smells, and while Sage rubbed her tummy, she opened her eyes and looked at him, sighing gently, and he watched her nipples erecting again as she opened her mouth a little and purred through her teeth.

She then she rolled toward Sage, rubbing his chest, purring as she bent forward, pressing her breasts against his chest and licking his lips. And then Sage took in a sharp intake of breath though his nose as her hand slowly slid down his body, settled about his limp shaft, and began coaxing it, he felt himself immediately begin to erect again.

Once it grew to full size again, she giggled, and maneuvered herself to sit on his lap, but doing so she had placed the head of his growing erection against her vaginal mound, and slid it inside her.

Hugging his hips and sides with her legs, she began to rock on him, Sage smiling up at his beloved lifemate, and reaching up, massaged one of her breasts with one hand, pushing up and backward into her as she kissed his fingers and held his hand to her tit.

She was not yet sated. She wanted more!

Sage smiled up at her, loving her... trying to sate her. He lifted himself, and embraced her, caressing her back, nuzzling her neck with his lips as his hand traced down her back, took hold of her butt cheeks as he gyrated into her. It took a bit, but he did nonetheless climax into her again.

Since that night in the caverns up in the mountains, Sanari and Sage had not yet made love to one another this intensely. Not even on their bonding night when the nectar they both drank had been spiked with aphrodisiacs. Her lovemaking has never been this violent either, and Sage now found himself against her back, thrusting into her, fondling her breasts as she came and came....

“Nnn... Nnn... Nnn” she moaned nasally with each thrust from her husband, their bedding now having a thick puddle of slimy love juices forming beneath them, but still she wanted more love from him.

She opened her eyes, imagining herself, it felt like, in this situation. She thought it was a dream. She knew not that this was the fifth time, she knew not what was happening inside her bowels even now, but the need was waning.

She murred as she arched her back more and tilted her rear higher, Sage holding onto her tail to keep it away from her love mound, and she feeling her husband pound into her.

She felt... so wonderful... as she lay on her chest, both her hands between her legs as she tickled his sack and their coupled sexes with the tips of her fingers. She thought for the moment, that this was a very potent wet dream...

Sanari awoke as the sunlight was sliding into their room from one of the few windows.

Her eyes opened to a lingering micro-orgasm that struck her, and she sighed with the pleasure of it as she turned in bed, pressing her thighs together, feeling the cool air against her nude bodice as she saw her husband laying there beside her. He was on his side, holding her belly with her using his other arm as a pillow. As she turned she found herself nestling against his chest, and she nuzzled his velvety chest with her head and nose, and then she gave him a lick right between the thick masses of his dual-layered pectorals.

Sage began to purr for her... the deep rumbling from inside his chest reminded her of rain coming and as she nestled closer to him, she chanced to look down the lengths of their bodies, and she saw the matted fur decorating her inner thighs, sex and pelvis, and the sticky slick decorating his now erecting phallus.

They must've had sex last night, she truly didn't remember any of it – *how bizarre*, she thought – but she rose from him, and lowering a hand, began to caress his groin.

Sage awoke with a start, and she smiled at him, her fingers sliding up and down his length as it thickened and bulged within her hands.

“Whoo...” he said and flopped back down. “Again?”

“Again?” she purred, sitting on his lap, feeling that steeling thing projecting from his pelvis thickening beneath and between her fingers. “How many times has it been?”

“If we do this again... eight. I know I’m strong love, but you got a way of tiring an immortal out.”

Sanari leaned forward, purring louder as she rotated her hips. She was strongly aroused at the moment, just like she was yesterday, and she rotated herself so that the swollen lips of her cunt was sitting upon the bulbous head of his cock.

“Oh really? Is that all?” she smiled at him, arching herself so that her breasts hung directly before his gaze of looking at her in the face. “You seem exhausted love... but I want more from you. I’ll be gentle.” She giggled and teased, and with a deft roll of her hips, took the head of his phallus inside her, and slowly slid backward to sit on his lap.

But inwardly, she couldn’t remember any of what happened last night, and that worried her a little. She didn’t want to tell this to Sage, because he tended to worry over her, and if she worried, he’d worry more.

She sighed though, setting herself to purring softer now as she rose and fell onto his erect shaft, pawing his navel rhythmically with her fingertips like a cat kneading a soft thing. Sage was, despite all his mass and hard muscle... a soft thing. His flesh had a very fine realm of hairs along his body, so in one direction his flesh was soft and silken... in the other direction it was like fine felt cloth.

It made snuggling with him all that more enjoyable for her.

Sage held onto her broad hips as he pushed up into her, their lovemaking having become quite personal and gentle now, unlike the violence of last night where even he was subjugated to her wiles. But now he looked up at her, the vision of her lovely face framed by her heavy mammaries, developed from a couple millennia of maturation and body development, as well as a mane of hair that was slightly disheveled from sweat, hanging off one side of her face. And then he saw her beautiful eyes, and he smiled warmly up at her, feeling her hands paw up the length of his body to cover his hearts.

Sanari then laid down against him, breathing with him, listening to his purr and his powerful twin hearts. Sage folded her to him as they continued to slide in and out of her. Sanari felt... relaxed, and happy... Sage was in love.

He was holding the mother of his children, and looking into her eyes, he saw a vision of those children even as they joined with her to gain nourishment, to grow.

Changing, growing, merging... conceiving new life...

But he was unaware... that she didn’t know...

Sanari awoke one day in a daze beside her husband, and holding her belly, she felt it gurgling, and flinging the sheets away, she padded naked across the floor quickly, rushed into the bathroom and practically collapsed before the toilet before she threw up in it.

“Augh!” she gasped, panting over the toilet a few times before she took a deep gurgling breath and threw up again and then coughed heavily. “Oh.” She groaned, holding onto the edge of the commode breathing heavily.

It had been a very, very long time since she’d ever gotten sick, and as she knelt up, breathing heavily, she felt hands about her, and she leaned back in surprise against Sage’s body as he wrapped one of their heavy blankets about her

body, and covering her stomach with both hands, his fingers began to massage and knead her tummy, and occasionally his needle-pointed claws pricked her stomach till the sickness went away.

“Hmmm...” she said, leaning back against his body while his wings unfurled and then wrapped about her as well.

“Are you ok love?” he asked softly into her ear.

“I am now.” She purred, her eyes half closing while she held his hands about her belly.

“It’s still quite early. Do you want to get some more rest?”

“N-no... I have... duties to attend to, regardless as to how tempting such an offer is.”

“Oh.” He said simply, and then helped her to stand, still holding her tenderly about the stomach and waist. She smiled and then turned to him.

“But I could use someone to help wash my back.” She said, and leaned against him so that her bare, naked and furred body pressed against his hard, heavily muscles and velvety belly. “Oh... I so wish to rest right here all day... but I need to attend to my students.”

“I understand.” He smiled, and then cupped her face to look into her eyes. “Whatever you wish, dear heart... I am yours to command.”

Sanari sat back, watching as Sage cooked breakfast for the fifth week in a row. Eakjo was sitting next to her, kicking his feet against the wrap-around counter, holding a butter knife and fork as he licked his lips. She was attending to Eakjo, tucking his shirt into his shorts for him while she combed his hair back with her claws.

He’s such a good boy, she thought smiling at him. She wished that she could have a child, and if she did, she wished that they were just like him.

She looked at Sage, and then wondered at him. It was funny to see him in a white restaurant apron wrapped about his waist as he fixed breakfast. He was no hand at cooking like Makahn was, but someone who was nearly a century old like Sage tended to pick up some excess skills, especially someone who lived by himself for nine tenths of his life.

And he seemed to be watching over her closer now. He wasn’t letting her exert herself. It was sweet, but if he kept doing this, she was going to get spoiled.

Smiling, she rose to her feet and stepped over beside him, and taking the pan where the scrambled eggs were being cooked, she began to reach for a canister of pepper, only to find Sage picking it up for her and placing it in her hand.

“Sage...” she said in a little annoyance, and a little exasperation. “You don’t need to do all this.”

“Yes I do.” He said earnestly and hugged her, folding his hands over her middle. “Sanari, I don’t want you exerting yourself.”

“Sage... It was only just above my head.” She laughed, disbelievingly.

He leveled an odd look at her.

She knew that look. It was the *‘I was only trying to help’* look that he usually gave others. As far as she knew... *That was the first time he’d ever given me that look*, she thought, and bit her lower lip. He was still very fragile mentally and emotionally now a year after his rampage, and he adored her... loved her implicitly, and thinking that, she turned to him and pressed her body and her hands against his chest.

“Sage... this is really sweet... but I can do these things for myself.”

Sage leaned his forehead against hers. “Yes, but...”

She laid the tips of her fingers against his lips. “Thank you. Really, thank you... but I can do these things for myself.” She repeated, and his lips compressed as he nodded. “Good... now let me finish breakfast, and you sit down for once. You’re a good cook love, but I need to keep my own skills up...”

It was mid day...

Sanari sometimes had days to herself, where her students took care of most of the chores and work. For some strange reason, that seemed to be happening a lot more lately. She suspected Sage’s influence, and she was amazed at how all her students were helping her so kindly. Especially when there was some heavy lifting to do.

Clio was out in the field, her nine cubs playing on the grasses in just their diapers while she sat in an elegant side-saddle sort of way, her ten breasts still swollen immensely. She held one of them in her lap as it looked to nurse, and only being a little more than a month old, they were already crawling. Sanari and Sage both knew, as Meniko and Sato did as well, that her nine cubs all spontaneously shifted genders now and again, just like their mother and sire were able to do, and so the diapers were truly necessary to hide that change. With one set of triplets and three sets of twins, all of them also wore a collar to keep them all apart from one another.

Sanari smiled at them, and once again desired to know the feeling that that muscular fem was feeling as Sanari walked her staff and walked along the pathways that her husband meticulously kept cleaned and groomed for her.

She was looking for something to do to feel useful again, but as it was, all the chores of the Shrine were completed by midday by the students now, and Sanari had more than enough time to accept Rae’s offering of tea that afternoon.

“So how’s married life?” Rae asked as she poured some tea for Sanari. “What’s it like being married to Sage now that you’re both settled in.

Fatima and Noxi were there as well. Cyvel didn’t come as often anymore.

“It’s a new experience.” Sanari responded, crossing her legs as she leaned back in her chair, stirring some honey into her tea. “New experiences are always welcome.” And then her face fell.

“Sanari... what’s wrong?” Noxi asked.

“It’s... I just feel as if something isn’t right. Sage is acting... strange.” Sanari replied, and then took a sip of her drink.

“Strange?” Fatima asked. “Sage has always been a little strange,” and the women all chuckled. “I thought he mellowed out a lot since he had his tantrum, but what is he doing strange?”

Sanari was quiet for a moment, considering.

“He’s suddenly become extremely overprotective of me. Usually... he guards, he protects, he watches over, but I feel him near me at all times even when I can’t see him. He’s going out of his way to watch over me, or have others watch over me, make sure that I was safe and that I didn’t exert myself.”

Sanari paused, and then looked at Rae, and Rae pursed her lips and looked toward the ceiling suddenly, and Sanari smiled wearily. By Rae’s reaction, she knew that Sage had asked her to watch over her that afternoon.

“See what I mean.” She smiled. “And what concerns me is that he hasn’t told me why.”

“Sanari... have you felt ok lately?” Noxi asks. “You’ve been eating ok, right? I know how Sage likes all those strange foods...”

“He’s not a bad cook,” Sanari chuckled. “Not as good as Makahn, but he does make some wonderfully simple meals that tend to give you a warm feeling inside. His cooking is filled with recipes that were made by a people who lived and matured in perpetually snow-covered regions of his world, and they are hearty, made to keep one warm, but he seems to be doing all the cooking lately. Anything to keep me from exerting myself. Maybe I should go have our new CMO check me out. Maybe Sage knows something I don’t.”

“But I thought you couldn’t be killed so easily, and you were immune to sickness.” Fatima mentioned.

“Almost. I can still get sick. I did get sick a short while ago. Sage was there again. He did something to me with all those pressure and puncture points he knows and the sickness went away as quickly as that.”

“Must’ve been a bad sickness to have affected you.” Noxi mentioned.

“Must’ve.” Sanari agreed, and then sighed. “Sage is so affectionate.” She smiled. “He protects me as if he fears some impending doom upon me, but he embraces me late at night as if he’d fallen in love with me all over again and fears nothing at all.

“And... well...” Sanari blushes. “His affection seems to garner our lovemaking on an almost nightly occurrence.”

The other women laughed.

“So it’s not all that bad.” Rae said in return, and they all laughed again.

“I know... But... this isn’t like Sage. I just hope...” Sanari fell silent.

“Hope what?” Fatima asked.

“Sage... lost his first wife due to violence. He’s happy. I think I make him happy, and I’m glad that I can do that for him, but he... he seems to be doing all this because of me.”

“Why don’t you ask him about it?” Fatima says. “If anything, Sage is a very good listener.”

“I think you’re right.” Sanari smiled. “Tomorrow then.”

Sanari awoke then the next morning.

As she opened her eyes, she found herself wrapped within Sage’s arms with him lying against her side. That was all comforting and all, and she loved waking to the feel of his velvety chest about her face, but... This meant that he’d even changed his sleeping style for her. It made her feel as if he was protecting her even more than usual.

Usually it was she who was rolling into him, not the other way around.

In spite of herself, she snuggled closer to him. If he was offering it, she’d gladly take it, but it was making her worry now. Something was wrong...

After listening to his hearts beating for a while as she continued to awake, she decided that it was about time to go clean up for temple...

She rose from his arms, glad that he was being able to sleep more as of late with her – he was an incurable insomniac – and she padded across the floor to the bathroom. Turning the light on after closing the door, she began to stretch to work the kinks of sleep out, arching her back, and then opening her eyes she paused in mid-stretch as she spied herself in the mirror, and then turned, holding that pose to catch her profile.

She saw something... different about her body. Her body was near perfection and didn't ever really change unless she wanted it to now that she'd achieved this level of self-improvement, so when something changed upon her body, she noticed it.

There, directly beneath the full and rounded mounds of her breasts where her secondary nipples were, she saw that the flesh holding those secondaries had swollen a little. She palmed one of them, rubbing it, feeling the firmness of the gland beneath it like the firm breast of a budding female, and her brows beetled in wonder as to why they were deciding to develop now...

Maybe it was something Sage was slipping into the tea... or just all that lovemaking, she thought smiling.

But still, as she entered the shower and began to cleanse herself, she nonetheless couldn't help but feel something nagging in the back of her head that that wasn't truly the reason why her body was changing.

Sanari stood in her gardens before the cherry trees that her husband had gifted her a long time ago, basking within the white and pink blossoms, as she smelt their fragrance.

She was beginning to feel things that weren't normal about her. The spirits of her garden too were watching over her specifically. Should she want her staff they picked it up and placed it in her hands, and some were even walking with her, supporting her, helping her to walk even.

This concerned her even more. Spirits usually only did that with the invalid in her shrine, those who had difficulty walking. But she could walk fine. It also concerned her is that Sage didn't have as much experience with the spirits as she did, and the spirits of the Shrine didn't fully trust him. She didn't think that he had the ability to convince them to look after her in this way.

They were doing this of their own volition.

She was indeed beginning to grow concerned now as she saw them walking with her, laying their hands on her, smiling at her. And they seemed happy... so she was confused. If they were happy and unconcerned, just like Sage, then why were they protecting her so?

"Mother... oh mother!" Yusuma called as she hurried up to the Reverend Mother.

"Clam yourself Yusuma. Quiet dignity and grace..." Sanari smiled at her student.

Yusuma curtsied. "Of course Mother... please forgive me. But Master Sage has sent a basket for you being that you are working far from the shrine today." And the young priestess held up a full basket that looked as if it was heavy enough for multiple people. "He's so thoughtful." Yusuma blushed.

"Yes, very thoughtful." Sanari mused whimsically, and rubbed her stomach, but not because she was hungry. Her robes were scratching her, which was unusual being that the lowest layer was made of silk...

"He asked me to join you... and he said that Eakjo will be joining us a little later."

Sanari nodded and began to rub her belly more vigorously, finally using her claws to help in the task. She then sighed. "I should be grateful that he's looking after me so well." She smiled wearily. "Though I may have to train him a bit to let me do things for myself."

Yusuma chuckled, and then began to lay down a picnic for her, Sanari letting go of her staff to where a spirit held it up for her as she bent to help Yusuma lay it out, and amidst the process, she kept tugging at her robes, rubbing her belly, until finally, once everything was laid out, she rapidly began to open all her robes below her midriff, and scratch vigorously at her belly.

“Oh! What is wrong?!” she gasped.

“Mother!” Yusuma gasped. “I think married life is making you soft.” She giggled. “You’re starting to get a belly.” And she pointed.

Sanari looked down over her bosom, and saw that the lines in her stomach were beginning to fade. There were ripples parking her abdominals and laterals, but her abdominals were nearly completely faded.

“But... I’ve been doing the same exercises I’ve always done, and Sage’s cooking is rather healthy and filling but not fattening. If anything, he and I’ve been,” she looked around and blushed. “‘*Exercising...*’ together even more than usual. I don’t understand this...”

She felt her belly, and bit her lower lip, and then began to sense her body through her holy magics, and then her eyes widened as she gasped as she detected the cause. “It... can’t be.” She breathed incredulously and palmed her belly.

But then she reflected on her life over the past several weeks. About Sage’s behavior, the overprotection, all the extra help he’s been doing for her, the coddling her more than usual, the feelings of love he projected whenever he was near. As she sensed this change inside her... all that strange behavior, all that anxiety of something wrong suddenly made sense to her.

She thought for a moment, her mind in a mild panic before she rose to her feet and took her staff from the spirit holding it.

“Yusuma, if you could please watch over Eakjo when he arrives, give him some food, I’d really appreciate it.”

“Certainly, mother, but where are you going?”

“I need to go speak with our new CMO about something...”

“Nearly two months now.” Hidika said as she approached Sanari.

Hidika Namah was little more than a girl; a young Nyrian who’d replaced her grandmother, the original CMO of the Mystic League, and was quite an accomplished doctress in her own right. She was a genius, and being that she held the essence of her grandmother with her, Meniko had decided to accept her application as a CMO in Hyurri Namah’s recent death.

It was like a reborn Hyurri had found their way into their midst.

“A-are you sure, Hidika?” Sanari asked as she sat on one of the tables in nothing but her panties.

“Quite sure.” She said, and hit a button on her datapad, and a holographic image rose up to show Sanari’s insides... specifically the area of her belly.

Sanari gazed on a magnification of her womb, and attached to the wall of her womb were twin zygotes.

She was pregnant! With twins!!

She stared at them, not knowing what to think at the moment, virtually overwhelmed as she felt her belly, now sure that she was pregnant, feeling the subtle changes in her body that were happening; her bulging belly, her softening

and more sensitive skin, her swelling mammaries; she was transforming into a mother. The reason why she didn't feel the change was on how subtle it was. She realized that she was crying and wiped her tears away as she looked at her naked belly now that her robes were open.

But... why was Sage acting the way he was?

Sanari stood up, leaving her robes undone in the front as she folded her hands over her navel.

“Thank you Hidika... Thank you so much.” She said.

“It was my pleasure Mother Sanari. But does Sage know?”

“I... don't know. But I intend to find out.”

Sanari, now that she was aware of it – aware of *them* – now that she can focus on the changes in her body, was now feeling herself changing. She was becoming a mother. Her breasts were developing to produce milk, the enzymes, hormones and pheromones in her body were changing her insides, gearing her to provide for the unborn in her belly, thickening the layer of flesh surrounding her womb to feed her growing children.

She walked into the shrine, and was immediately assailed by the spirits that gathered there, all of them watching over her immediately. They flowed in around her, holding her up, making her feel lighter. They knew of her burden already, which to them flared like a brilliant light in her navel.

She was a life bearer.

She sensed outward with her mind, holding onto her belly as she found her husband in his favorite place in the evening, which was his garden, a little space in her own garden she'd allowed him to convert into a mini shrine surrounding the Zen Garden.

It was such a peaceful, earthen place complete with hanging gardens now surrounding the original Zen garden she had him design and build.

“Beloved?” she asked, finding him standing in his lesser hybrid form before some of the plants that he'd brought to this planet from Earth, this current form he was now standing in being his preferred way of being nowadays. None of the plants here were planted in the ground, but were rather in their own pots and planters being that this world was upset with him as it was for Planting Ent. He wouldn't plant any more plants unless Wave World wanted these plants to be planted. But nonetheless... the roses and cherry trees seemed to be taking very well here. Maybe it was because Sanari planted them...

She walked up to him as he turned to her and smiled at her, quickly removing his gloves and sliding his hands about her sides as she drew near.

“Beloved... I'm... I'm pregnant.” She smiled hopefully.

Sage's expression did not change other than to smile at her a little more deeply. “Yes.” He acknowledged, his hands moving to cover her rounding navel.

She expected that reaction, which was devoid of surprise. He knew that she'd been pregnant all along, and that made her marginally upset. She'd nearly missed two months of such a fantastic experience that she'd never had before, in which a pregnancy for a Cercile lasted only four to five months!

She bit her lower lip and her features became strained.

“You... already knew?” she said, her voice trembling.

Sage stared at her, his smile lingering for a moment before it dawned on him what she was saying, and his smile and happy demeanor rapidly faded.

“You... didn’t know?” he asked, astounded.

“How could I have? How did you?”

“Your heat was so violent, I... I thought you knew. Oh beloved... I’m so sorry. I thought that you’d known... especially when you didn’t take your elixir to keep the effects of your heat down. I only thought that you wanted to get pregnant and just let the natural course of things go through.”

“But... when... when did it happen?”

“When my brother was last here for a visit.”

Sanari thought.

“I was... getting rather warm that day. I went inside and shut off all the lights and sit in the shade. No matter what I did I just couldn’t get cool. I opened my robes more... and... I thought I fainted. When next I awoke I was in bed with you.”

Sanari felt hands about her face, and she looked up at Sage as his softly glowing green eyes focused on her. And she stared at him, her heart fluttering as she began to recall thoughts that were buried deep in her subconscious... because it was her subconscious mind that had experienced those things, and the sheer emotions of reliving them made her nipples – all four of them – and her clitoris erect as her labia swelled. Sanari gasped and pushed against Sage, finding herself purring.

“Great Aul... we did all that? I thought you were joking when you said we’d made love eight times already.”

“Nine that day.” He purred in return; holding onto her middle as he smiled lovingly at her again.

“Amazing!” She sighed and clutched onto his shirt. “You’ve done something that no man has ever been able to do.”

“What’s that?” he asked, and Sanari stepped back to look up at him.

“You made me a real mother.” She said and Sage laughed softly and kissed her. “Oh husband... I’m so happy.” She purred louder, holding onto her belly. “Now... now that I know... there’s only one thing left to do.”

“Oh?”

“Tell everybody...”

Sanari allowed Sage to undress her. He was pampering her, not being overprotective, and she enjoyed it now that she truly understood why he was doing it. She found herself trying to be careful, overprotective of her rounding belly as Sage stripped layer after layer of her robes, till he finally removed her panties and leggings, and pausing as he knelt before her and cupped her rounded bottom before he bent and kissed her vaginal mound before picking her up, carried her to the bed and laid her down.

They were both so happy, and snuggling took on a whole new note now whenever they held her belly.

She laid back in a pile of softened pillows, Sage doing absolutely everything in his power to make her as comfortable as possible all day long... especially at night. And today, now that her breasts and her belly were growing, Sage was going to do something new for her.

She laid there nude as he approached with a silver tray of oils, wearing nothing but his trousers. He began by washing his hands with a diluted liquid heat, and then leaning over her, began to massage the warmth from the liquid heat into her flesh and fur her from head to toe.

It made her warm, it softened her muscles, relaxing her, and she felt like she was wrapped in a warm blanket despite being nude and out in the open. Next, he massaged her with softening oils to help her skin to stretch without scaring, and finally, he massaged her again with a cooling scented oil before helping her to turn over and repeating the process on her back. Even her tail.

By the time he was done she just wanted to lie there dreamily and purr lazily.

The reason why he was doing these things was so that her body could stretch as it changed... and it would be changing a lot, and having administered unto countless pregnant females, he knew how important it was for them to avoid stretch marks.

This heavenly act he was doing for her was all so that marring scar could be avoided...

And then she was being turned over onto her back, and she looked up at Sage as he laid a hand on her stomach. He didn't really say anything about it, but she'd grown very relaxed, and he was merely reminding her of what laid in her womb. She smiled back at him as she pulled his hand to her face and kissed his palm, feeling a bit of the cool feeling of the oils on his hands.

Sage then tucked her in, walked around the side of their shared bed, disrobed and slid in beside her, folding his self against her side. He nuzzled the side of her face as he and she folded a hand over her belly, and she, lying back with one hand above her head, laid there basking in his guardianship.

She bent forward and kissed him, he watching her with a doting smile. She kissed him again, palming his large face with one of her slender, long fingered hands. And then she kissed him again before rolling into him, pushing him onto his back as she rose on top of his lap; her mane of hair drooping about her head.

"Love you." She whispered, looking down at him with her heart thudding inside her chest, her large primaries and growing secondaries drooping from her chest, her now rounded belly swelling and contracting with her breasts with each breath.

"Love you back... lifemate." Sage said in return, and held onto her hips as she pressed forward onto him, kissing him and being kissed back.

And then his hands curved over her rounded bottom, her tail lifting while he held her by her rear, and with a deft arch of his body, a stiffening and a push, Sanari gasped and laid against him as he slowly erected into her body.

He was so gentle with her now... almost always on bottom, handling her with the utmost of care, and their groping turned into massaging and caressing.

But it was no less passionate.

As she lay against him, her breasts all flattening between her and him, she opened one eye as he coaxed himself slowly in and out of her, and she remarked on how glad she was that this wild card of hers had come to her universe.

Without him, she'd still not know the touch of a husband, the experience of someone who could constantly be a companion... someone who wouldn't slowly fade away from her life and die... an immortal like her. He was a virile male, a strong protector, and someone who'd given her another experience she'd never, ever had before.

The ability to finally mother children.

She rose from him, coiling her body as she pawed at his chest, massaging the massive chords of draconic flesh with her hands, she watched him soberly, her teats hardening and extending more as she rocked her hips now, feeling the comfort of her children in her womb as they were fed some of her endorphins from pleasure...

They were sleeping soundly now, their tiny heartbeats beginning to beat, either of them having twin hearts just like their father.

There was dragon in them... that was for sure.

Sage palmed her belly and she held onto his hand there as they continued to make love. She was happier than she'd ever been or could remember in her life. And now that she was becoming a mother... she was growing as a priestess...

Reaching down, picking up the hem of their heavy blanket, she pulled it up over her shoulders, and laid against Sage again, and he cradled her body against him, and they both loved one another through most of the night... and fell asleep in each other's arms later that night close to morning.

Sanari... despite all her past experiences... felt... Content.

Chapter Fifteen: Watchers Watched

Sage stood looking at the thing resting before him, right inside a piece of reddish-black crystal that was dimensionally sealed where it was. He'd been given permission from his father to take it up again, and lifting his hand, his five fingers closed around something that he'd come to identify as the bane of his life.

It was the tooth that had caused so much of the blood shed around him, but it was nonetheless a part of him, literally, its makeup made of his own bones, flesh and blood, and held a very, very large portion of his power.

With his father's permission to take up his blade again, he once again could touch the blade without reaping the consequences. Someone had tried to take the blade from its stone while he was locked, and the blade shocked him almost completely dead before letting him fall. It possessed some intelligence to it having rested apart from him for over a year.

Sage's fingers closed about the pommel and he lifted it free of the crystal, the crystal immediately melting away now that he took such an eye sore from his wife's beautiful shrine. He looked at it as it hummed, an extension of his arm, and he waved it, remembering flawlessly on how to use the mighty weapon, and pressing his lips together, he contracted the weapon, back into himself, and it rapidly fused with his body, and he felt its remarkable power realigning with him yet again.

But... with the weapon... also came his flute, and the beauty that it possessed. He needed to meld that flute with his new one... to shun the flute meant to lose its blessing and create discord with the instrument once it had been made... so the two had to become one.

Later though... he had to merge the two instruments when the time was proper.

He'd assumed his lesser dragon form, the same form that had decimated over a year ago the whole of the Mystic and Demon Leagues. He felt dirty at the moment, especially at how people looked at him. But then they saw how this monster, now tamed, knelt and caressed the belly of the woman who'd tamed him.

Sanari nuzzled his muzzle, kissing his nose as she held a clawed and armored hand that could encircle the whole of her body with hers; her comparatively small hand holding onto one of his fingers as they cuddled her navel. To view this exchange with the gentleness of Mother Sanari – like beauty and the beast – did much to weaken the ire for Sage's lesser dragon form. It would take time for people to get used to that form again...

"Last night was wonderful love. I've never felt so relaxed in my life." She murred and Sage's thumb slid across both of her primaries.

"Tla will be watching over you today." Sage mentioned. "I know you wanted to go for a walk... she was going to bring Eakjo along with her so that he could spend more time with his mama."

"Hmm..." she sighed, and kissed his nose again. "He's definitely a happy little boy. Very excitable at the moment."

"He's a growing boy." Sage smiled, and then with his other hand, cradled his lifemate as he slowly rose to his feet, and Sanari sat in his hand as he walked with her through the shrine, stopping at the door before setting her on her feet again. "Are you sure you want me to do this?" he asked then.

"I am... this form and all your other forms are apart of you. They may be necessary in the future, so you need to ensure that people can become comfortable around you again while in it, in case you need to use it."

Sage nodded and then bent forward to kiss his mate on the forehead.

"You take care love, be safe." He sad, knuckling her cheek with the back of one finger sheathe.

"I will." She purred.

Sage then rose and vaulted over the high wall of the shrine, and stood there for a moment, feeling immediately uncomfortable to all the stares he immediately got. He waved hello, tried to grin, but then remembered the rows of sharp teeth and fangs in his mouth and promptly closed his lips. Though he was the legal husband of Sanari, and Eakjo was now their adopted child, Sage was also still the captured beast in the hands of his jailor Sanari, despite the fact that he'd been un-collared for good behavior.

He walked forward, being careful of all the students around him, greeting people, waving hello a bit sheepishly.

His lesser dragon form had changed slightly. He didn't have any of the dark purple etchings and markings on his body anymore. Everything was all sparkling and shining white, or black so dark, that light fell into it and didn't even get a chance to scream.

"Hello." He smiled, and then frowned as several of the students hurried by him, and immediately he began to doubt his wife's wisdom in this matter, but decided to stick it out.

From the rising until the setting of the sun, I want you in your lesser dragon form, Sanari had said. Sage's love for her kept him in that form as assuredly as if he were locked to it.

So he decided to pick a spot where her plan would come to be most affective, and he sat on the stairs of the main courtyard, the long stretch of stairs and plasticrete that led straight to the shore, and was surrounded by several of the entrance facilities like the space port and the teleporter gates.

"Teacher Sage?" came a voice, and he turned to see Ki, his most promising medical student and smiled at the strong bodied fem as she stepped up to him. She wore the lavender robes of a female priestess of the Faith from Sanari's shrine, though opened to reveal the translucent bodycloth underneath it that hid her shapely, and very strong and mature body underneath.

"Ki." Sage smiled as she approached, and he lifted a hand toward her and she slid her own hand around one of his fingers. "Good morning."

"Teacher, you have antenna just like me now." She said, pointing with her medical books up at the top of his head, and Sage brought the long antennae up and downward to display them for her.

They both laughed.

"I'm just like my big guardian angel now." She giggled and climbed up on his leg to sit on his knee. "I'm excited to start my advanced courses teacher. With you being collared and the change over of the CMO, I haven't been able to get those last classes in. You *are* going to continue teaching, aren't you?"

Sage smiled happily. Ki was practically a daughter to him... almost as strong of a presence as Mayia was. It was a pity that Ki's parents were both murdered. So were Mayia's, but unlike Ki... Mayia didn't remember her parents.

"I will... but only the advanced courses now." Sage said with a happy smile, glad that someone, at least one person, didn't shy from him in this form. Ki was such an understanding and forgiving soul.

"I'm so glad." Ki smiled happily, but then the bell tolled, and she looked up at the bell tower. "Oh... I have to go to class now." She said, and as she started to climb down, Sage helped her down with a hand acting as a step. "Thank you. I'm glad you're back teacher. I've missed you so much."

"But I was in the same shrine as you all this time." Sage smiled, and Ki laughed.

"Yes, but you weren't teaching! See you teacher, I'm off to get stronger!"

And strong she was. As a Kath, Ki had the outward physique of an Olympian, but that was always an illusion in the Leagues. A leaguer, any leaguer, was several hundred to several hundred thousand times – or more in certain

extreme cases like Rae and her sister – stronger than they looked... and Ki herself had an added factor that her muscles were all five hundred times denser than any other student.

She would be a wonderful leader when she returned to her people... her people needed a leader, a healer to explain the plague that was happening to them – an evolution, not a sickness, and perfectly natural – and with her new understanding of the creator, would help reform the religion of her home world with that new understanding.

Great Maker... they're going to brand her as a heretic when she returns, Sage thought sadly. They'll try to kill her.

He sighed, and then felt a soft touch on his hand, and turned down to see Rae standing beside him, holding onto a pair of his fingers with both hands.

“You have three-hundred and sixty degree vision, and you didn't see me coming? Credit for your thoughts?”

“Just thinking about futures.” Sage replied.

Rae looked so small and fragile to him at the moment. He knew he surpassed her at the moment by a leap and a bound, but he didn't want to tell her that, and in this form, that difference in their power was all that much more magnified.

“Like stocks and bonds?” Rae teased.

Sage chuckled. “No... like what the future will bring.”

“Worry about what may or may not be is a bad thing, Sage. It's best only to look at the now and forget about everything bad that is in the past... because it's past and behind you!”

“Hakuna Matata.” He mused. “Someone has to worry about the future Rae, for when something comes along that is unpleasant, that person is prepared for it... so the rest of you can be happier.”

“Then don't think to far ahead.” She laughed, and looked around her, seeing the students shun him, but she said nothing about it.

“I'll try not to.” Sage smiled.

But then Sage's brows beetled, and he looked to his left and right, and then looked right up into the sky.

“Rae...” he began. “Have you ever got the feeling that you're being watched?”

Rae chuckled. “You should be flattered.” She chuckled and levitated till she sat on the same knee that Ki had just vacated. “It means you are interesting enough for them to start watching you.” And she hugged his arm.

Sage looked down at her and then back up into the sky.

“Really...?” Sage said, and smiled before looking back up into the sky. “So I'm interesting now.” He chuckled.

Rae continued to hug his massive arm.

Lieutenant Urin and Sergeant Kam were assigned to watch over Wave World for a one month introductory period, which also meant that the two of them might continue doing this sort of thing for an extended period of time depending upon what the officers decided. “This sort of thing” was living on the space station for rest and also floating in space with a telescopic lens and a recording unit for work.

They were *observing* their target, which was the entity known as Lord Sage Preypacer, also less commonly known as The Shadow Beast.

He'd sat on the main stairs, talked to two targets that they identified as Ki and Rae Iksaki, and was then assaulted by several small children, and he went with them to play in the water for a little while before their own classes began. Then he moved back to where he'd been sitting before, but instead of sitting, he stood straight, his head lifted toward the sky. To the denizens of the Mystic League, this behavior was quite strange, but to the pair of Aphkei in spacesuits with their observational unit, it appeared as if he were looking straight at them.

"Man that's unnerving." Kam said as he worked the holo-computer access point on the side of the unit, while Urin maneuvered and controlled the lens.

"Cut the chatter." Urin said, while looking at Sage looking right back up at them.

"It just bugs me that he's doing that. What the hell is he looking at?"

"Who knows? Maybe he's looking at your pug ugly... Hey!" Urin said suddenly.

What had happened was that he was looking at Sage, and then something passed before the lens, a cloud, maybe a bird that happened to fly across his field of vision, but whatever it was, when it left, Sage was no longer standing there.

"I lost the target! Where is he?!" Urin said pulling the lens backward to take the whole of the courtyard, pulled back further to take the whole school, trying to reacquire him.

"Um... Lieutenant?" Kam prompted.

"Not now! Help me find the target. I lost him."

"Lieutenant..." Kam prompted again.

"Where is he... where is he...?"

"Lieutenant!" Kam said with urgency.

"What?!" Urin said and swung around in space and then stopped dead.

Kam was floating there in space, but cupping his shoulder was a massive hand with each of the five fingers sheathed in a thick rending talon. That hand was attached to an arm that held more physical muscle than several thousand of regular beings of any race, and that arm was attached to a massive black and white body, with a pair of metal-feathered wings spread wide at his back, and his feet and legs converted into a pair of long fins for maneuverability.

Urin felt a muscle in his cheek twitch as he saw Sage floating there, and looked over his shoulder, not believing that he had moved from where he was on the planet's surface to several miles away, across an atmosphere, in the blink of an eye.

"Hello." Sage said, not moving his mouth, but Urin and Kam heard his voice clearly over their helmet mikes. "Are the two of you comfortable up here?" he asked, and Kam slid out from under his hand and floated backward toward Urin.

"Yes!" Said Urin. "No." Kam answered truthfully, and the two Aphkei looked at each other.

"It must be lonely up here by yourselves. Are you two hungry?"

"No!" Urin answered. "Yes!" Kam said in the same instant.

Sage smiled, and then floated forward, taking the observational unit and taping a few commands and it collapsed into a large case.

“Why don’t you both come where its warm. I’ll be sure to get you both some food.”

And they transported, across an atmosphere, the two Aphkei falling to the ground with a light jostle, while Sage floated as his feet converted and his wings folded at his back. Almost disbelieving, the two Aphkei soldiers removed their helmets and peeled back the head wraps covering their manes and ears, looking around them in astonishment.

“Urin?” Kam asked.

“Yeah?” Urin answered.

“Did he just teleport us through an atmosphere?”

“Yeah...” Urin said; looking at all the young female students in bikini’s and bathing suits, and in the case of the Ring Leaguer females, supremely strong fems who were topless and naked save for a simple strap hanging over their loins.

“Are you feeling all right and everything?” Kam asked.

“I got some serious wood, but other than that, I’m ok.” Urin answered.

“I’ll just put this right here.” Sage said and set a device beside a wooden double door here. “Don’t worry, everyone knows better than to steal a multi-million credit device with Imperium emblems all over it. Please come inside.” And he vaulted over a wall. They followed him dumbly through a doorway as he shrank to a more manageable size, clothing forming around him as he opened a sliding door and led them inside his own home.

“Should we?” Urin said aloud suddenly.

Kam looked at his superior officer. “I don’t know about you sir, but I think it’s bad manners not to accept an offer like this. I’ll wait inside.” And tucking his helmet beneath his arm, stepped inside.

“So said the fly to the spider.” Urin said as Sage bowed and gestured, and Urin had no choice but to follow.

Kam and Urin got out of their space gear, dressed in only their space suits, and Sage conjured some coverings for them in the form of Tarres and a simple shirt for each of them as he began preparing food. Then the door opened, and three figures entered into the chamber, in the form of two of the most beautiful fems that the two had ever seen, and a small Zhumal child.

“Ah, Kam, Urin, allow me to introduce you to my wife, Mother Sanari,”

“Please to meet you.” Sanari said automatically, and looked to her husband in surprise.

“Priestess Tla,” Sage continued, and Tla curtsied. “And my adoptive son, Eakjo.”

“Hi.” Eakjo said shyly, clutching to Tla’s hand, and then scampered on all fours over to Sage, climbing up onto his back and gripping his sides with his feet, wrapped his arms around Sage’s neck.

“I will leave to attend to my duties for now, mother Sanari.” Tla curtsied again, blushed at the two wolves and then promptly left.

Eakjo stayed close to Sage, eyeing the two Aphkei – he hated anything that was wolf-like – while Sanari came to sit at the kitchen table with the two Aphkei soldiers.

“Where did you two gentlemen arrive from?” Sanari asked pleasantly, massaging her naked belly.

“I found them floating up in space.” Sage offered, flipping some cooking vegetables in his pan, and Eakjo snatched one of the flying vegetables and promptly began chewing on it. “They looked so cold as they were watching Rae and me through their telescope, so I thought I’d bring them here and give them a nice bite to eat and warm them up for a bit.”

Sanari looked to her husband and turned back to the two officers, suddenly understanding exactly what they were and what they were doing here.

“Are you gentlemen both comfortable?” she asked, still massaging her rounding belly.

“Oh yes ma’am.” Kam said immediately. “I don’t normally drink tea, but this is very warming. Thank you very much.

Sanari began to rise to her feet.

“Would you like more?” she smiled.

“Yes please.” Kam smiled, but Urin spied her condition.

“Forgive me, Mother Sanari. But are you pregnant?”

“I am.”

“And who is the father?”

“Why my big strong husband of course.” Sanari mused, and stepped to her husband, Sage automatically loading a tray with a kettle and magically heating the water and adding a box of tea bags and a cup for her before handing her the tray.

“I see.” Urin said.

They had a good meal, drank tea, asked questions instead of just observing, and sat with the Preypacers late into the evening, Eakjo falling asleep against Sage mid way through the evening as he sucked his thumb.

Afterwards, Sage handed Eakjo to Sanari to put to bed as Sage escorted the two officers out of the shrine.

“Is there anything I can do for you two before you leave? Any questions you’d like answered?” Sage asked as he once again walked slowly beside the two Aphkei now that they were in their space suits again.

“No... this was... very informative.” Urin said.

“I could perhaps ask Mezzo to have you stationed down here instead of up on the station if he’s got a spare room somewhere. At least make the offer.”

“This is a bit of an awkward situation, Mister Preypacer. You aren’t supposed to know we’re here.”

“Oh? Sorry. I hope I didn’t inconvenience you or anything.”

“Hell no!” Kam beamed. “Never been surrounded by so many attractive young women in my life. Hello.” He waved to a passing pair of fems in their bathing suits, and they smiled at him.

“Everyone likes a man in a uniform, Sergeant.” Sage smiled. “Are you sure you can’t stay?”

“No... we are stationed up on the station, Mister Preypacer.” Urin said. “Though that may change now that you are aware of us.”

Sage smiled, and the two placed their helmets back on and double-checked each other to make sure that they were locked properly. Sage then teleported and handed them their device in its case form before winking away again.

“Urin,” Kam said.

“Yes Kam?”

“We should’ve taken him up on his offer.”

“Yes Kam.” Urin agreed, and the two of them looked out into the endless depths of space.

The Demon League had not only been repaired, but its facilities had been remarkably upgraded too. Sage walked through the hallways in his lesser dragon form, his metallic, feathered wings wrapped around him, and his great shoulder guards folded down about the tops of his wings to make him look quite regal. The Demon Leaguers hadn’t seen him in this form, though there was still gossip, for some of them had seen pictures of him from their friends in the Shadow, Ring, Grace and Mystic Leagues.

Sage walked straight to the main doors of Hawthorne’s chamber, and asked to be admitted, and a short while later, the double doors opened, revealing the long black hall of Hawthorne’s lair.

“What do I owe this dubious experience, Sage?” Hawthorne said, tapping his finger on his cobbles like a sharp metal instrument striking stone, it echoed through the whole hall.

The doors closed behind him as Sage brought himself up to Hawthorne, standing large enough in his present form to look Hawthorne right in the eye.

“I’ve come to give something back to you, Hawthorne.” Sage said, and unfolded his wings from around him, his pauldrons flaring upward.

Hawthorne eyed Sage at first, and then Sage lifted his hand, and a very secret ritual occurred between them, and Hawthorne saw one of the most advanced magic circles available – a Dragon Lore – forming in Sage’s hand, with a crystal white sphere forming in the palm of his hand, before he let it go and it floated back toward Hawthorne, and floated before him, the Dragon Lore flowing slowly about the sphere.

“Funny... I expected it to be black.” Hawthorne said quietly.

“The darker the heart, Hawthorne, the brighter the light that is contained therein.” Sage said, quoting an ancient draconic saying while standing pleasantly before him with his clawed hands folded before him.

“Till the Darkness grows so dark that it contains the light.” Hawthorne added, and lifting a hand, touched the white sphere, and the piece of Hawthorne that had been inside Sage returned to the ancient red Wyrn.

“It is done.” Sage bowed his head. “I’ve released you, Hawthorne.” And Sage turned to leave.

“That’s it? No quip about how much more superior you are to me? No threats? No attacks on my person?”

Sage stopped, paused, and then turned. “You began the fight, Hawthorne. You began the strife with the first words of harshness from your serpent’s tongue at me. I choose to end the fight, Hawthorne, and I choose to end it by not allowing your own quips and threats to bother me any longer. I’ve seen far, far too much violence, with too much of

it was caused by my own hands, Hawthorne... I am done being the evil creature in this universe. I'm done being the villain due to my own actions.

"It's just... not worth it."

"Hmm... so the man who thinks he's a dragon really is a dragon. Congratulations, dumb ass, you're actually thinking smarter now."

Sage smirked. "It was a harsh lesson in humility." And he turned, walked several paces and paused again. "By the way, you old Wyrms... you have company."

"What?" Hawthorne said and Sage opened both doors, revealing a beautiful fem in white robes and blazingly red plumage... a bird maiden that was bejeweled in gold.

"Greetings Headmistress." Sage nodded as he stepped past her.

"Sage?" Meniko gasped as he walked down the hall, and then she turned and stepped forward and the doors closed before she transformed into her full Dragaseir form, walking on all fours as she approached Hawthorne, her form decidedly larger than his. "What did he want?" she asked the old Wyrms.

"To return something he borrowed." He smiled subtly as he looked at her, thinking of her many breasts and the tightness of her... he shook his head and faced her, "What do I owe this visit Headmistress?" he asked pleasantly.

Only in her presence was he *'pleasant.'*

"Well..." Meniko paused. "I was wondering if you could show me those nice volcanic baths here." She managed at last. "You've ranted and raved about them... I wanted to try them for once."

"Headmistress... I'd be honored to be your guide..."

A year and a half since the rage of the Shadow Beast, with Sanari entering the beginning of her third month of pregnancy, Lord Sage received a rather mysterious message from a being identifying himself as Gesiomagatou.

He was familiar with the name, having seen the golden Dragaseir on occasion, but they never formerly met. The message was quite simple... it was a very humble request that he come to a remote world out on the edge of explored space in this universe. And they requested that he arrive in what he called his full dragon form.

Sage had immediately become very, very concerned about this. Meniko had said that they wanted to see him, but didn't say as to who *'they'* were. Rae and Makahn had offered to come with for support, and he was very glad to accept their offer.

They traveled amidst a chartered space liner that arrived specifically just for him, the space liner the most advanced any of them had ever seen, and when it space folded, it instantaneously transported them between worlds instead of having a delayed travel time. They rode a shuttle down to the surface, and entered a tremendous palace, in which there was a multitude of Dragaseir all around, the largest percent of which were all Common-Grade Dragaseir that were armed and armored, cloaked and watching him carefully as he walked amidst them.

There were some War-Grade Dragaseir here as well, but all of them were dressed like priests and scholars. It was little more than a settlement, well hidden in a vast mountain valley that only seemed to reveal itself as they approached the place via shuttle.

There were buildings to house them all, small and humble looking, and a vast palace-like temple at the center of this small city.

Two of the War-Grade Dragaseir approached Sage, coming to stand on either side of him as a Common-Grade stood before them all.

“My lords and ladies... please follow me.” This feminine guide in pristine white and gold said before turning and walking along, her long tail waving just above the ground as she walked her staff before her as elegantly as Sanari would.

Sanari held onto Eakjo as he nestled amidst her chest, Rae carrying Yuum while Makahn held Teal’s hand, and they walked up into the temple, the interior of which seemed to be entirely to hold a single set of ornate double-doors.

“Lord Sage,” their guide said. “Please assume your full draconic form.” The guide said, Sage looked about him, stepped away from the group and changed.

He became a thirty eight foot powerhouse that was even more impressive than the Lesser Dragon form he used to decimate the Mystic League, with four arms, four wings, and heavier armor by far, and a thick, thick tail. He could swell larger by allowing more of his power to flood outward, and puff his dragon form to be hundreds of feet longer, but he wanted to appear as humble as possible for whoever it was he was going to meet here. But despite his attempts at humility, he was nonetheless a luxurious being, with the most luxurious thing on him being his primary wings, which physically were not only doubled the size of the wings he had in his lesser dragon form, but the tips of those wings also flared with a myriad of ethereal feathers, that all together, formed a pair of angelic wings that were literally ten times his height from tip to tip. Those feathers waved through everyone and everything around him, caressing them, and Teal batted away one of the feathers to keep it from going through him.

He did not want to be here.

Sage then waited patiently as the now much smaller Dragaseir fem waited for a moment, and then banged her tall staff on the marble tiles that were each the size of a city block.

“They will see you now.”

She said, and the doors opened, and beyond... was amazing.

Sage stepped forward, walking across the threshold, down a set of large stairs, and to the end of a walkway that was at least a mile long and ended on a circular platform.

This platform looked out into a chamber that couldn’t possibly have existed in this plane of existence. Sage stood and looked around him. Right at the door, the chamber moved straight upward and straight downward and to either side, curving the wall far, far away, further than his eyesight could detect, and the other end of the chamber was little more than a golden plane as far as he could tell, but he saw the ornate gold lay of the chamber walls, and the jewels that could’ve paid for whole planets they were so large, and floating in this chamber, in an ethereal form, were thousands of Dragaseir, some of incredible size, some the size of planets, others the size of galaxies.

He swallowed as he stood there, suddenly feeling like an insect.

“Lord Sage...” a feminine voice said. “We thank you for answering our summons.”

“Summons?” Sage remarked that he was asked here.

“Is there something wrong?” the voice said.

“No. It was nothing.” Sage answered, standing pleasantly before them all.

“He lies.” A dark voice to his left hissed, and there was a vibration through the whole of the chamber like a hushing noise and the voice addressed him again.

“You have a concern, Lord Sage?”

"I'm sorry. I was under the understanding that my presence was requested... not summoned." Sage voiced.

"You were." A male voice said suddenly, and a vast golden platform suddenly rose around the platform Sage stood on, and immediately a golden being appeared on the platform from one of the ethereal forms suddenly condensing into this being. "Please forgive their ways, Sage. They are quite ancient and set in their ways, and are not used to the idea of giving respect in order to receive it. They simply demand it."

Sage nodded.

"Do you know where you are, Sage?" this golden Dragaseir said, the one Sage recognized as Gesiomagatou.

"I do not." Sage replied in all honesty.

"This... is the chambers of the Great Dragaseir Council, Sage." Gesio said with a hint of sarcasm. "You stand in their presence."

Sage looked about him, folding his four arms together and folding his wings about him as the ethereal feathers wafted about his feet like a tremendous cloak of waving spider silk and angel hair.

"I... have a question." Sage said.

"Why are you here?" Gesio ventured.

"Yes." Sage admitted, looking nervous now despite all that he felt he was at the moment.

"A valid question." Gesio said quietly.

Then suddenly several more rings rose about Sage the largest of them was miles wide. Hundreds of Dragaseir materialized around him, just before in a rush, the great chamber shrank to become flush with all these tiers, but still... the chamber was far too large for this world to contain. He became more well aware of the eyes on him at the moment than when the chamber was expanded, and he half wished that it was back the way it was.

"You've been asked here," the female who had spoken at first said, a great dragoness that was as large as an aircraft carrier sat in a place on one of the highest rings. She had beautiful green plumage and a white belly that amply displayed her great breasts. There was a brood of young ones about her legs and feet. "Because this council wishes to bestow upon you a gift."

"A gift?" Sage repeated. "I don't understand."

"What is there not to understand?!" the hissing sound came again, and a volcanic looking Dragaseir that looked as if it were made of living fire and obsidian coiled on one of the lowest tiers. "You are being offered a gift from the Council... you should..."

"Silence Bataan!" Gesio shouted, and his voice made the whole of the chamber tremble, and the one known as Bataan cowered. "Do not think yourself so important, Bataan, that you would dare insult a guest of the council as you do."

Gesio stared Bataan down for a few moments longer till Bataan looked away before Gesio turned pleasantly back to Sage.

"You do not understand, that after all the violence you have made, as to why we would reward you with a gift?" Sage nodded. "It is not the violence that we reward you with, Lord Sage Preypacer... but rather with how far you've come since then."

Gesio gestured, and a pedestal appeared before Sage, on which was a crystalline looking wrapping, green in coloring, and made to appear very, very fine.

“This is a mantel, Lord Sage. It implies many things. Should you accept this gift, then you will instead now bear the name of Dragaseir instead of Dragon. You will take the actual title of Lord amongst all Dragaseir, and you will also have the power and authority of a multitude of our lore. As such, we will make you one of us, a member of this very council, and in control of a sector of our space. You shall likewise hold the Title of a War-Grade Dragaseir... with the potential to obtain greater power with your loyalty.

“And all you need to do to accept this gift is to walk up to that mantel and don it and you will become one of us.”

Sage stared at Gesio... who appeared to be the speaker of this council, which meant he had tremendous authority, and stepping forward, he looked down at the green mantel that they'd provided for him, and he lifted his hand, sheathed and clawed, passing it over the thing. It contained tremendous power, and that power would be his, and he would be a Dragaseir and a Lord in their universe.

He swallowed, began to reach for it, considered, and then withdrew his hand.

“No.” Sage whispered, and decidedly took three steps backward away from it.

“No? No?! And why not?!!” Bataan bellowed, snapping at Sage. “How dare you shun a gift from this council?!”

“Forgiveness, Lords and Ladies... but I cannot in good conscience accept this honor and this gift.” He looked at the mantel, and desired it, but took one more step backward. “Power that is just given to a person, or taken by a person, is dangerous... I didn't fully understand that until my... tantrum. My shame keeps me from accepting this wonderful honor.”

“Lord Sage... are you sure? This will be the only time that this honor is offered to you to become one of us.” Gesiomagatou stated, folding his two hands together.

“I am certain.” Sage answered, not even looking at the mantel now.

Gesio turned a look onto the council members around him, like an I-Told-You-So sort of look, before turning back to Sage.

“Thank you, Lord Sage for coming here. You are excused.”

Sage bowed his head, turned and retreated, even as all the Dragaseir vanished, the chamber expanded to its previous, unfathomable size, and the room cleared.

“Lord Sage...” came a voice and he turned to see Gesio standing where Sage had been, the pillar with the mantel now missing. “Could you please wait for me in the main room? I wish to speak with you.”

“I shall...” Sage said and bowed before leaving, the great doors opening automatically and then closing behind him once he'd left.

Sage bent immediately and scooped his wife up from where she was sitting on a bench, nuzzling her with his lengthened muzzle in this form as he sat on the floor, kissing her belly.

“What happened?” Rae asked. “What was beyond the door?”

“Didn't you see when it opened?” Sage asked.

“No.” Makahn added, cradling Yuum in his arms as she rested, sucking her thumb. “All we saw was a plane of white, and you passed through it going in and out.”

“It was...”

“Thank you for waiting, Lord Sage.” A voice said before he could say anything else, and a majestic, forty foot being of gold, with ornate wrappings about his middle, and a mane of golden fur that streaked from his head backward down to the tip of his tail approached him. He wore a bejeweled leather belt with a long band of more leather that fell like an apron before his loins.

Sage suddenly rose and offered a hand to shake and Gesio took it firmly.

“It was my pleasure.” Sage said. “But...”

“I want to thank you for helping me humble the council, Sage. They believed that you would snatch up your gift greedily. I am so very glad that you didn’t.”

“But... why...”

“The question as to ‘*why*’ will be a question for another time, Lord Sage. I’ve come to ask you for a favor.”

“Certainly.” Sage said, cradling his wife and adoptive child in one of his arms.

“I will be coming to the Mystic League in a short while. I will need yours and your wife’s aide concerning a very important matter. Will you help me?”

“I am... reluctant to agree, sir, without knowing what it is you want me to do.”

“I assure you it is very important.” Gesio said. “I cannot go into any greater detail than that at the moment.”

The four instead of two eyes on the back of Sage’s head in this form looked to Rae and her family. “I understand.” He said, and looked to his wife with his forward facing eyes, and she nodded at him. “We will do the best we can, my lord.”

“That is all that I ask.” He looked around him, and then focused on Rae, and something... a wisp of some form of regret flit through his eyes as he looked at her and then back up to Sage and released his hand. “The shuttle will return you all to your transport. If you were to leave now, you will be able to return to the Mystic League within an hour. Good day.” Gesio nodded and exited through the front door.

Sage knelt low, so that he could be closer to Rae, Makahn and their children.

“Do any of you want to stay?” he asked.

“Not to be disrespectful,” Makahn said. “But I really, really don’t want to stay here at the moment.”

“I agree.” Sage smiled.

“Uncle!” Yuum said, and suddenly climbed off her father and into Sage’s hand.

“Strange... she recognizes me in this form.” Sage smiled, and then offered his hand with the hopping Yuum in it to Teal to see if he wanted to climb on too, but he hid behind his mother, and Rae placed her hand on his head looking to Sage apologetically before Sage pulled his offered hand back.

“Thank you for coming with me, everyone,” he said, and rose, and Eakjo scampered across Sage’s chest to his other arm with Yuum in it to play with her. “Though I agree with Makahn. It’s time to get out of here.

Sanari laid back, her legs spread wide as she purred loudly, her body glistening from the oils of her now nightly massage as Sage laid in over her, lowering himself to kiss her as he slid his erect phallus into her body, and then pulled the covers over them both, long-arming his body about her as he gently began to rock into her, lowering his head to lay kisses on his beautiful lifemate.

She hung from about his neck, rolling her body to accept her husband's extension as he sexed her increased desire for lovemaking.

"Hmm... my sweet lord." She purred, and then gave off her first orgasm as she rubbed her leg against his.

Sage had told only her what had happened beyond the double doors, half expecting some Dragaseir to come running in to slap his face off to keep him from telling her. Sanari was most proud of him, and after they bathed each other, and Sage gave her, her now nightly massage, she demanded him to make love to her.

He was more than happy to oblige.

"Funny." He smiled, and arched into her, penetrating her deeply.

"What's that?" she asked, opening one eye to look up at him.

"I sought ultimate power, and I got it, and it nearly destroyed everything around me and invariably hurt everyone that I cared about. My penalty was that everything I owned was taken from me, and all that power was locked away from me, and when they gave me to you... I had nothing, nothing more than what I was given.

"And then I earned you... I'm still trying to figure out how, but I earned you." Sage continued and Sanari laughed. "And we earned this." And he palmed her rounding pot belly before they kissed each other again. "Now that I have my powers back at least, and I can hold property again, despite how much great ability I possess... I would gladly do without all of it in favor of you."

Sanari pressed his side with her leg, and they slowly rolled before she threw the blankets back and rose, beginning to ride his jock as his hands came to rest on her belly. Her breasts were beginning to distend with the swelling glands as they geared up to produce milk, with her secondaries swelling as well to push her primaries up a little.

"There is a reason why I call you my *'sweet lord,'* beloved." She murred and her insides squeezed slowly about his erection as she rose slowly, and a syrupy slick slid from her insides to moisten his manhood. "Firstly, is because you are so sweet." She smiled. "I've never known a man that was so kind, or so gentle as you my lord.

"And you are my lord because you are my husband, and per Cersile tradition, the man owns everything, but the woman has the authority over everything."

"Kinda like human civilization." Sage joked.

"That... and your heart – sorry... hearts – absolutely dominated me. I didn't believe in love at first sight till I met you, beloved." She sighed as she rose and fell again, and then settled, covering his hands with both of hers. "I am happy." She smiled. "You make me happy. With you... I am a wife. With you I'm becoming a mother." And she looked between her breasts at her belly. "I am experiencing truly wonderful and remarkable things, because of you, and I love you."

Sage smiled up at her.

"And that is why you are my greatest treasure." Sage purred, and Sanari's hands moved to cover his chest to feel the vibration, and she cooed before laying down against his body, listening to that purr of his as her own much higher pitched purr erupted from her. "Because you dared love me, and inside this delicate, beautiful body of yours... lies our children." He ensnared her with his arms.

“I love you...” he whispered, and Sanari settled against him, both of them careful of her belly as she twisted her hips a little to push her belly off to one side.

Sanari murred, settling into his chest to listen to his heart and his purr, she allowed Sage to wrap her up in the blankets again, and they made love to each other... softly... surely... well into the night.

Inside Sanari... two tiny lives, continued to grow, resting pleasantly while their parents continued to love, and fall deeper in love, with each other...

<End>