

Death. Streets washed with fresh blood. Gutters filled with the discarded remains of the tasteless. An urban complex of sewerage mixed with what could barely pass as homes ran through the city. Where the red, cobblestone streets were its veins, its inhabitants were its blood, and they bled thoroughly with each passing day.

Life was miserable. Murder was prevalent. To walk out in the day meant one of three things: You were a part of a Syndicate and therefore, could not be touched; you were strong, or, you had fallen into the den of wolves from the neighboring Sectors.

As crazy as every Sector was in the slums of the Nex Megalopolis, none could compare to the vile dumping grounds of Sector 7 and Sector 4 of the City of Spades. Here, you will find the depraved souls that feast on others, the hideous monsters that call themselves ‘thinking creatures’, and worst of all –

“Why are you talking to yourself?” A woman asked her male partner nonchalantly as she bit off her leather gloves.

“Oh. For the voyeur watching. I supposed you can’t sense them.” He spoke in a mellow, gentlemanly voice as the sound of a rugged, painful moan originated from beneath them.

A perpetual grey haze enshrouded the tightly knit urban landscape of Sector 4. The origin of the haze was said to be caused by the incineration of the Hungry, whom roamed the streets at night. It was no more than a smokescreen for the duo, who had captured and dragged a victim off into an alleyway.

They were both tall figures, with grey hair and pale robes that were whiter than white itself. They appeared like pages, and a grey suit was worn underneath, where breast pockets filled with feathered quills could be found.

56 unique characters appeared and fizzled out of existence along their apparel, translating to nothing but pure gibberish.

The grey-haired woman then spoke as their victim continued to gasp into their paper gag.

“That again? How the Archivist can read our present through the books? Is that true after all?”

“I am simply offering exposition. It is but the curse of being connected with the books.” He said, removing the gag from their prisoner who writhed on the bloodstained cobblestone.

“Wait – Wait! What more do you want from me!? I – I brought a bride! You wanted a lover and I brought her, so why am I being punished!?” He screamed at the top of his lungs, much to the duo’s pleasure.

“Hmm...” The man, who called himself the Expositionist, plucked the letter ‘F’ from his apparel and flicked it onto the man, immediately causing multiple characters to emerge along his flesh, a symptom akin to the Paged Disease.

“No, no, no NOOOO!”

“Ink, my dear. Hand it over.” He politely asked.

"On the platter. The quill is ready." She offered a small vial reminiscent of Inflow Direct's Serums, save that this was connected with a feathered quill.

The Expositionist leaned over the wailing man and placed the tip of the quill's end against his forehead, before he began to compose his words into a picturesque image across his victim's body. The ink seeped into his flesh like acid.

"Bastard... Where am I supposed to find a pair of lovers in this Sector!? It's impossible, you bastards! Librarian bastards! You're kidding me!? Stop – STOP STOOOOP!"

"So... will... be... *this...*!"

Then, with the flick of his pen at the finale, the man's flesh was converted into paper as pages fluttered through his open chest.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!"

"Everyone's a book waiting to be opened and read. You did well bringing the bride." He patted the man's head before he perished, having lost every ounce of blood. "But you failed to bring the groom. Ahhh... So this is the troublesome effect of the Archivist and her Library."

"Future is changing. Sect of Gears predictions are unreliable. Act X are scrubbing their territories of the Gears harder than usual. Archivist must be meddling with the books now... Stir Cube will not be happy." The woman retched at the mention of the Archivist. "What a boring Library. It's better to get the information and magic directly from people than that outdated dreamscape." She began to compile the pages one by one.

With each paper that was stacked, the entire composition glowed ever brightly. Before long, the page was engulfed in a triumphant light before a book of their victim was created.

"Useless magic. Useless everything. We were better off hitting the Train Conductors for their Train Cores." She said, immediately tearing the book apart. "Flames would be better... But they're all afraid of fire. Weirdoes."

"The gravity-hammer wielders are defending the trains now after the last incident. But, well done, Mrs. Scraper! Maybe you'll be offered a promotion to one of the Authors one day!" The man wrapped an arm around her shoulder, to which she promptly dislocated from the elbow down.

The man did not react and simply grinned as she walked deeper into the alleyway. Further down the walls were caked in climbing ivy, which pulsated as fresh blood ran through. On the other side of these walls were restaurants that specialized in a particular cuisine despised everywhere else in Elysia.

People.

The sapient minds of the living.

"Don't be foolish. The pages and materials required to compose a living tale would cost me my life multiple times over. I am content with the harvest. Also, keep your voice down. We're meeting with the bride."

Twist and turns of their dilapidated world eventually led them towards a slope that connected with the underground sewer lines. This was where the surface dwelling Hungry resided during the day, and where they rallied before the hunt at night.

Tunnel after tunnel, the world slowly decayed from rock to flesh. The eyes and combined flesh of the living made up the walls, beginning as a simple sprawl of ivy and nerves. Because they were spread so thinly even a single breeze would cause immense agony for those that were assimilated by the Hungry into their walls.

“Ooooh. I still get chills entering this place. Not long ago we were sworn enemies. Eaters of our materials.” The Expositionist hummed, dragging a finger along the walls, and poking at the giant eyes of those trapped within.

The eyes could not blink or evade. They could only endure their torment.

“The White Apostle was convincing. Because of him, we were gifted the golden seeds of the Forbidden Apple.” The woman whispered as they approached a large clearing where the bloodied waste accumulated and drained further into the depths of the City of Spades.

“The first step to making our wishes come true~ Tales can do the same.” The Expositionist hummed delightfully, approaching the central mass where a large, heart-like creature beat.

And anchored into its flesh was a soundly sleeping woman.