

“Veylis! No! Please! Do not do this! Do not–”

“I love you father, but I must cure you. I must cure your weakness, and through your ascension, may the rest be made worthy. There is no other end. There is no other end. There is no other end.”

-Jaus and Veylis Avandaer

24-12

Declarations (I)

“Your own father...” Avo said, forcing the words out. His templates recoiled with horror and Calvino murmured something unintelligible. “How? How could you do this?”

“For the dream,” Veylis said, honest in her sorrow. **“For the promise of a greater mankind. I love my father, and I have seen him reshape the world—lift our people from ruins. Made gild the legacy of rusted gods. But as a mere mortal, a mere Godclad above that, it wouldn’t have been enough to deliver us from our own weakness. So I sought to change that–”** “It wasn’t his choice,” Avo hissed, disgust rising by the second. “You forced him into this. Made him–” The collective scream of Jaus Avandaer cut him off. Jaus screamed as a symphony unto himself. He was a parted man. Parted in infinite instances, The progression of time ensured his germination.

Avo gazed upon the man’s face, upon blonde locks strained slick with feverish sweat, of bloodshot blue eyes weeping with despair, of pearly teeth exposed in a constant scream, of pale features rendered sheet-white by constant suffering.

With each passing second, he birthed a new iteration of himself—a new link to the chain of suffering. And so too did they experience all the torment that their predecessors, themselves in the past, did. Through his root, he internalized all the patterns of reality. Everything. Stitching omnipotence into his form.

But a mortal vessel made for poor kindling, and so the fires of divinity could only sear, and the fragile shell of a mortal mind served as a glass vase for an immeasurable weight, so it could only break.

As the moment played on, the instances of the man dissolved, and Avo watched Jaus—a single version of himself composed of countless screaming faces, painted by the infinite colors of existence—cry out in metaphysical lament.

“Veylis! No! Please! Please–”

The screams began again, and Avo recoiled. His templates begged him to look away. Faintly, he thought he heard Calvino and Kant weeping. But he forced himself to meet the Godbreaker, the savior, the name so many utter when times are darkest.

Jaus.

Knowing suffering is one thing. Beholding it is another. But feeling it... feeling just a trickle of the man's agony leaking across time into Hysteria...

COG-CAP - 89%

Most of Avo's templates shattered outright. Kant disconnected. Draus lasted the longest before dissolving like dust. Only Avo remained. Avo and Calvino, letting the atrocity scar them.

An indelible mark severed Jaus from final ascent and granted his metaphysical form a final death. Some form of relief granted by Zein. Jaus was more chronology than man within the confines of the Ladder, and his purgatory was perpetual.

"How can you endure this?" Avo asked turning back to glare upon the temporal fissure that was Veylis. For as long as he lived, he knew himself to be a monster. Knew himself to be a beast that preyed on men. But Veylis...

She was beyond his capacity to match. And from the whispers of her mind, she didn't even do it out of cruelty.

"I know," Veylis said, voice soft. **"I will be judged in the end. Whatever trial or fate awaits, I accept. For my father's dream must be delivered. No matter the cost. Whatever the cost. Even if it breaks me. Even if it breaks him."**

[She's motherfucking insane,] Benhata gasped.

Corner disagreed, though his terror was no less than the Glaive's. **[No, consang. She's just a true believe. A faither. An extremist.]**

"You show me this," Avo said and found himself winnowing his mind of all empathy—all humanity—to endure the screams. For the first time, he found himself fully reaching for the beast, and though the monster mantled his mind and shielded him with pleasure, his cushion was merely sensory, while his dread remained existential. "You show me this and ask me to join you? Side with you? Help you?"

"Of course," Veylis said without hesitation. **"I can see it. Your disgust. Your pain. I know what you feel. I know it more. My mother—she was always weak when it came to him. Her love was... devotional. Protective. As if he was something fragile. Something she was terrified of losing. But we all must sacrifice for the Final Design."** A beat entered their conversation, but Jaus' torment was perpetual, his cries carried across time. **"The Stillborn. I wished to integrate it with the structure. To better enforce the shape of my father's eventual selfhood. It was meant to be a mold. Something to merge with the Ladder. To become its likeness."**

“But why not just use it?” Avo asked. “Why not just use it and surpass the Tenth Sphere? Surmount this reality. Why does he have to suffer? Why can’t you or someone just—” The patterns of time around him changed and restructured the world once more. The Flayed Ladder remained before them, but Jaus vanished. A reverberation spread through the paths and the spire was expanding like a heart, threads of light passing like a needle through the shapeless void around them, passing through reigniting starts and soaking away the entropy of the Sunderwilds.

A realm of tranquility came into shape. And constructs were birthed from the light. Vast ring-shaped structures. Miracle-infused Dyson Carriers. Disks that could encompass entire systems. Worlds fully converted to silicon and vivianite, simulating realms of Nether-supported paradise. Enormous beacons of ethereal brightness broadcast tidal waves of ghosts through the black, and within them resided memories of voidships and worlds entire, shifting between realms of mind and matter with a thought.

Even at a glimpse, Avo knew this to be the fullest realization of Noloth’s potential. The merging of the Deep Nether and the material rather than just the stacking.

As one galaxy brightened with detail, more followed in its wake, ruptures receding with the darkness, the indelible wounds inflicted on existence stitched back together. As one, the myriad stars oscillated in luminosity and their shifts in radiance became melodic frequencies.

Existence was singing to itself. Speaking to itself. And inside each star was a metaphysical anchor. A Soul. An administrator of reality’s design. A *Gatekeeper* for how things ought to be.

“Down the paths of my father’s folly we go, then,” Veylis said. “Take in the world a mere two centuries from now. Take in the wonder. Take in the splendor. Take in the peace. Reminds you of the world that was, does it not? ‘The future is past-made,’ as my father quipped.”

The paths continued to lay their tracks, and Avo found the center of the galaxy coming into focus over the Ladder. A great fissure—once bifurcating all of totality, was slowly receding, retreating. The cracks of that primordial singularity where the original sin was performed resembled cracks inlaid with gold, but its depths still festered, still had spots of black dotting patches of Soulfire.

Time progressed. The stars closed in. Existence flourished with animation, flesh-made leviathans sharing the coldness of the expanse with vessels of twisting geometries, while the difference between world and ship vanished entirely. Yet, as they gathered around the singularity, the first flickers of conflict flared once more. The first projectiles were lobbed between stars and celestial bodies, each attack a metaphysical jab; subtle and intended to disrupt. But every retaliation spilled over into another, soon the stars were flaring, bending the laws of existence to shroud their subjects from harm.

As the war began in fullness, symbols came alight over each of the stars. Symbols resembling those of the Guilds. Symbols for the factions of a coming war.

“Two centuries is the longest his dream can endure. Even with the aid of his Gatekeepers. Most paths I’ve walked saw the outbreak of war near instantly—and the utter annihilation of Idheim in over half those simulations. The Gatekeepers are subverted by those they are supposed to serve—the Guilds are loyal to Jaus, but only so far, and as they too have tasted authority, they will not give themselves to another entity without... stipulations.”

Avo worked to untangle her meaning. “Stipulations. That Jaus allows them to common their own Gatekeepers? Or design them?” **“That he based them off the voider minds. One of my father’s rare mistakes. Something even their polities might agree was folly.”**

No retort came from Calvino as the EGI listened and acknowledged the statement. *{She continues to retain significant support among portions of the polity. Especially those who wish to discuss terms of reconciliation with Omnitech. A process that only she is capable of facilitating.}*

“I will not disparage them for starting the war,” Veylis said, the world sighing on her behalf. **“How could I? Strange as things are, they were but our children, but the instruments and governors we imagined to be perfect, yet were laid low by the folly we left within their programming. Ours is the sin. The original sin.”**

Existence was boiling now. Patches of the void were rupturing once more as stars imploded or shattered, dying as splotches of Rend leaking from bursting Frames and oozing Souls. Another future. Another apocalypse. The cycle persists. But this time, chaos swept across everything, and what little remained amidst the winnowing dark existed as disparate campfires that flickered out one after another with the continuation of time.

In the end, existence was broken once more.

“Sin from sin,” Veylis said, echoing her father’s words. **“It cannot be fixed factionally, for the rot is born in the individual and the responsibility they should bear cast onto the shoulders of another.”**

“And your solution was to make Jaus bear all of this?” Avo asked, incredulous.

Veylis chuckled. There was no humor in her laughter. “No. He will watch. He will dictate. He will uphold. And he will be the whisper in every mind, the wind at our backs, the consequence that follows our actions, and the very force behind our blows. He will not save us. He will judge us. Punish us. Guide us. Until all are wise. Until we can all save ourselves.”

Disbelief exploded inside Avo. The longer the conversation continued, the more surreal things seemed to get. “You’re... trying to give everyone *your childhood.*”

“I am trying to ensure humanity has a proper mentor for the final phase of its maturity. We have gone long enough as we are. Like feeble children or base animals. Like slaves desperate for a kinder master. Through the Stillborn, we mend the damage inflicted by my mother, reconnect my father to the Gatekeeper and the Nether, grant him deserved ascent and allow the Ladder to truly serve as its namesake. A ladder for humanity. All of

humanity. Something we can climb. In his image. To only be granted power when we prove ourselves worthy before the wise eyes of one: Jaus, the Final. Jaus, the Mentor. Jaus, the Deliverer.”

[Holy shit,] Chambers whimpered. [This bitch is motherfucking insane.]

Unknowing and uncaring of the template’s remark, Veylis continued. **“You ask me for my dream? My vision of the future? I do not want us to be the property of artificial nannies. Never maturing. Never growing. An eternal burden. Within us lies potential and weakness at war, but the former can be cultured, and the latter culled by augmentation. I wish to see a world made balanced in will, mind, and might. A perpetual detente shaped toward endless ascent and judged forevermore by the righteous will of my father. And with each who prove blessed, my father will share with them his power, his Heavens, and closer to totality will we all walk.**

“I will not lie. I do not seek perfection, for perfection for one is misery for another. Neither do I seek paradise, for such is just another cage, and I will not suffer pampering. Not by design. Not from another. Humanity can prove themselves worthy of divinity. Can rise beyond their differences and govern themselves through a dialect of war. War internal. War external. War, held in check by an ultimate God of Justice. By a Monad above demiurges. Jaus. And in the end, we might find ourselves masters. Masters unto ourselves. Worlds unto ourselves. Gods unto ourselves and no other. For the only rule that one should be bound is to oneself, and so I pray our chains are righteous-made and wisdom-blessed.”

Avo had no words. None.

He had expected...

He didn’t know what he expected with Veylis. He didn’t know what he expected at all. Zein, perhaps. The Godslayer was her own character—no one else in the world was like her. But her daughter—she was ever bit the individual supremacist, but with a complex. A near-fanatical worship of her father. And seemingly uncaring of the contradictions in her logic.

“Do you see now, Dreamer? Do you see the world of highest design? Do you wish to live free? There is a reason I mark foes as esteemed enemies. There is a reason. I will not see anyone destroyed when victory comes. But we will all be made to grow. All start on different rungs in the eyes of Jaus. And when the finality comes—”

Avo interrupted her. "You keep talking about self-rule. You talk about... proving oneself worthy. Have you looked inside? Inside another’s mind? Have you tried living as them? Felt their joys? Their fears? Have you carried their hate? Have you been saved by another? Had someone sacrifice for you?" Veylis paused as she pondered the question. **“I have beheld their behavior. I have studied their actions. Their victories. Their failings.”**

“Only from the outside. Have you seen the colors?” More apprehension on her part. **“I do not understand.”**

Avo let out a slow wheezing breath and looked at Jaus. Poor, poor Jaus. Poor pitiable Jaus. No one got what they deserved in New Vultun, in life, but to behold such an inflicted fate was beyond the beast’s ability to blunt. Veylis was blind. She wanted her father to be a solitary judge. A distributor of power. A state above states and god above gods.

And to ensure her vision came to be, she crucified him. Not only in flesh but spirit. And then his wife had slain him—but not completely.

“Blind,” Avo muttered. “You’re blind. You think what you’re doing is right.” **“I am aware of my sin and accept what punishment my father might deliver upon me. Even oblivion.”**

He could only stare at her. “But you believe this to be worthy martyrdom still.”

“Is it not?”

Again, he had no words. Was it her childhood that left her so warped? Was it growing up during the Godsfall? Facing the unspeakable acts of the faiths? Was it Zein? Or did this come later? After years of isolation as a Godclad? After making herself the so-called High Seraph—the Monad of Highflame.

“Death is nothingness,” Avo replied, finally. “Death is simple. You don’t learn after death. You are either used. Or you cease to be. This isn’t a chain. This is a noose. You are hanging humanity. You are hanging humanity using the corpse of your father. You are hanging humanity on from a tree of virtues only you believe in.”

And Veylis scoffed. The sound came from everywhere. Deep. Loud. Scornful. A screeching chorus. **“And you would what? Let them be as they are? Continue to repeat their mistakes?”** A beat followed. **“Ha. But I’ve told you too much. Shown you too much. Been too generous. Tell me, Dreamer. What dream do you hold? What coming paradise would compel you to sacrifice everything.”**

Avo’s response was simple. “I do not wish to sacrifice. I wish to show humanity the truth of things. I wish to marry consequence to freedom. I wish to cut your noose.”