

The Red Giants were unaffected by their restraints unlike the Blood Moons. Their hundreds, to thousands of rebirths had made them numb to the agony. A total of ten Red Giants were imprisoned directly across from the Blood Moons, yet their cackles surrounded Frost as though they were everywhere.

It resembled a mocking applause. Red Giants clearly took pride in their ability to worm under the skin of those they saw as inferior. Their mouths watered ravenously as the Amalgam approached, her steady footsteps somehow echoing louder than their voices.

They couldn't sense anything emanating from her. Her emotions were tamed. Not even the scent of wrath lingered on her body. The Amalgam simply approached with an unchanging expression.

"The Blood Moons are our most wrathful. How many years did it take to bring them to where they are? Consider yourself lucky that our Replications are gone. Look at how they yearn to be reborn." A bee Insectid Red Giant chittered, speaking to the Blood Moons rather than the Amalgam.

Frost passed their cell, not giving them a glance. She saw them as nothing more than noisy insects. Who she approached was the same person she saw in the recollection. It was an Arachnid who sat in the centermost cell, her limbs impaled much like everyone else.

Then, an Ant Insectid Red Giant cackled:

"You have no use for them. Neither for us. Our minds can be taken away, but we will always serve Marduk. You're an Archetype that killed more than us, yet we are the ones being punished? Chchchch. There is no fairness in the Nexus."

They understood well of the Amalgam's power. But they only knew her by the hearsay of their kin and the flames that devoured the City of Spades. It did not help that the Amalgam presented herself as entirely non-threatening.

"Inflow Direct stole our magic and culled thousands of their own. C3 and C4 are barren wastelands. The hypocrisy of the Nexus mirrors Marduk's warning. Do you believe that we – the Red Giants of Scarlet Logic – fear death?"

"The only thing we fear is futility. We are strong together. All of us. Our prison is temporary. Our wrath is forever!"

They kept speaking as if to explain themselves. An unforeseen drive caused the words to gush as the Amalgam neared the Arachnid Star. She still kept quiet in her approach. Deep down her emotions boiled but she bottled them up for she knew that it was all futile.

The Red Giants were unapologetic. They did not see themselves in the wrong. Moreover, they reveled in the processes of Scarlet Logic. The torture of the initiates. The senseless murder of those they 'saved'.

"The people we 'collected' joined the pits under the Nest."

"The spires only grew so large because we could reconstitute their bodies."

“We heard the children cry in the walls.”

“The collective beating of their hearts.”

“Their bodies belonged to us. Who could say no to a Red Giant? When we can kill them senselessly. Pain and fear can break down the sturdiest of minds. How many do you think were taken from the backwaters of this world?”

“The people that thought they were ‘saved’?”

“Are we really the enemies? The Ateliers turned a blind eye to us.”

All Red Giants confessed their heinous deeds to the Amalgam. They tempted death for they knew that the scythe dangled at their throats.

They sought to go down in a blaze of glory. To have the last laugh. Their pride and spite of everything was not born from the mistreatment they received from the world, but rather from a core, disfigured part of their inner selves.

Frost wanted nothing more than to kill them right here and now. But she refrained and stopped at the cell of the Arachnid. The bars were plucked like reeds. A deafening clang reverberated throughout the pit as they piled up to the side of the Arachnid.

“Release me. Send me to the other side. Prove that you are nothing more than a monster. You’re like us. Kch, kch, kch. So much like us!” The Arachnid’s double mouth dribbled with phlegm as she laughed maniacally. “You kill because it’s necessary. You despise this world like us. All of us know that this world must change. Why should the weak live if not to serve the strong? To live is to struggle eternally. To walk on blooded roads! We are Stars! The world should be grateful that we exist!”

The Amalgam’s gaze landed on her as she stood above the large Arachnid woman. Her body was similarly sized as Snap’s. But the Amalgam’s eyes looked downwards rather than up at this self-proclaimed Star.

This infuriated the Arachnid. Just as her mouth parted – an overwhelming sense of dread washed over her.

“You are under the misconception that I am ignorant like your kind. A star that only exists is a meaningless existence.” Frost remembered Divas Pass.

How Scarlet Logic could have prevented the tragedy but turned a blind eye.

“If Red Giants believe that their presence is a gift then what value does it have to the recipients? Why should they be grateful when only a select few even know what you are?”

Frost planted the Traumatic Clock against her chest alongside the diaphragm of Die Agnosis. The Red Giants were silenced as the shadows became thick. An unrelenting force chained them in place as darkness invaded their vision. The only light now were the beaming eyes of the Amalgam.

“Who are you to speak?” The Arachnid hissed as she looked past the Amalgam’s shoulders. “You’re a human when the majority of us were born knowing only one thing – war. The Blood Moons rejoiced when we brought them in. Their bloodlust is insatiable. Look at them tremble in hatred! Did you spare them because you pitied them!? They will stab you in the back –!”

“Look closer.” The Amalgam drew her face near, her cold breath instantly silencing her.

The depth of her eyes swallowed the Arachnid like an ocean. Her shrunken pupils tremored like the hitches of her breathing. Just what was happening to her, she thought.

“Moons are a product of the world. As are you. But you contributed to it. You reveled in it. The Blood Moons wanted nothing more than to belong. You exploited them and dragged them down to the depths of where you are, because you yourself know deep down that you’re chasing something you cannot reach.”

Suddenly, the world shifted around the Red Giant as her many eyes went wide. And then, as the Amalgam fell in total silence, the woman began to speak to herself.

< *“It was born from inferiority.”* >

Her voice echoed like a haunting bell, causing the Red Giants to stare quizzically as they tried to picture just what was happening within the Arachnid’s cell.

They began calling out her name, some making joking remarks, but the woman only continued to utter a self-destructive monologue.

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Red Giants began their life as any other Star. They roamed the world searching for meaning. The Arachnid’s memories were not rewound that far back. Instead, she was taken to a moment that began her downward spiral.

“Stars are guides. Moons are the ones who deal with the threats of the Nexus.” She was told immediately upon becoming a Star by a being whose face was nothing but a twisted spiral. The gravity of their words rattled the darkness that surrounded the Arachnid.

The only source of light came from a crest she proudly wore on her chest. But it did little against the void that swallowed them both. The tone of the grey being was heavily distorted, and their grey suits were made entirely out of cold, steel feathers.

“We must not commit ourselves to a purpose that strays far from the Nexus. Never forget that it was the Nexus that gave us fleeting souls a purpose in this senseless voyage.”

Bullshit. I envied the Moons. The Iron Stars lived like this. They lived in stagnation in a place where the light can never reach. I found my purpose as a Star of the Nexus. But I wanted to become my own star.

The sound of an indescribable throbbing coursed through her body like an electric shock. The vibrations of the Nexus guided her through the dark to return from whence she came.

I despised that my lantern did not come from inside of me. I wanted to claim myself. I surrounded myself with people who aspired to become like me. Who heralded at the sight of me, a Star.

But even so, I wanted more. This inferior me lacked the gravity of a Moon. They were unwanted by the Ateliers. But people from afar worshiped them.

The Arachnid found herself standing in a shallow pool. Slowly, bodies began to appear face down all around her. Bloodied clouds wrapped around her ankles like shackles. But to her, they were not shackles. They were restraints of the people she kept close.

I climbed the ladder in search of my purpose. What was it that I wanted the most? Why did their eyes shine so brightly towards others?

More bodies piled up around her. Red threads tied their bodies to the base of her eight legs as she turned her head towards the distant skies.

That's right. Their eyes radiated to a star I had not become yet. I did not shine because I was not high enough.

A mountain of corpses elevated her. The world was a landfill of the bodies she had slain. But amongst their piles were familiar faces.

Iterations of myself pass when I joined Scarlet Logic. Through them I knew that I could become the best version of myself. A Star that shone the brightest. A Red Giant. But the Moons looked at me with pity rather than fear. Their eyes were never set to look up at us.

So...

An ocean of blood rose to catch up to her. The bodies of a Blood Moon were each impaled on her legs. She trampled on them as she continued to reach upwards to a star she believed existed at the end of the red mist. The grey fog above further obscured everything.

But no matter how far she reached, she could not find what it was that everyone's eyes sparkled with.

I lost my magic. I relied on the tools of man. I groveled to reach the top. But I was not rewarded with my struggles. The Moons I dragged down became my dogs. I realized that if I could not reach the top, then I needed to drag everyone down until I was the only source of their light in this miserable existence.

Suddenly, just as she felt like she was about to clasp at something within the veil –

“Yet you are still in the same place as you started.”

– A voice with the same resonance as the Nexus spoke to her.