

LXXIX

He saw the world through a smeared bloodstain, but still felt every moment and sense of his twisted new body, even though he could no longer control the hideous limbs of his loping and gnarled frame. As he tried to comprehend the visions he was seeing through his obfuscated vision, he felt a sense wash over him from the Entity that rode his body like a steed: it was fear.

For a long while now, his body had been fleeing from something that left destruction in its wake, though his sense of hearing was significantly reduced due to the loss of his ears, but he still felt the colossal *boom* of every explosion that nearly erased his body from existence.

Stop moving you coward! Face our pursuer! he tried to yell at his own body, but it would not obey him. It had not listened to him for a long time now.

The air shook around him, before erupting in a piercing light that even his obfuscated eyes could see and flooding his mind with an immense pain that seemed to leave an imprint on his mind, as though the sensation echoed repeatedly, like waves washing over him again-and-again.

This time his body seemed to turn toward its attacker, and Patrych finally laid eyes on the creature they had been fleeing from for the last hour.

Even through his eyes, he clearly saw the figure before him, and noticed how its eyes wept with heterochromatic glows that seemed opposed to one another, yet occupied the same horned frame.

At first he believed he was looking at a demon, but the Entity that controlled him would not fear any ordinary demon, for it itself was a creature of manifested dread and nightmares.

"I am the Sovereign!" yelled the figure, as Patrych's malformed body loped towards it. *"I will cleanse this city of your foul influence and claim it for myself! My will cannot be denied!"*

Unsurprisingly, Grandfather remained alive, even as just a head.

"Why does this human yet retain his life?" Tchinn asked, prodding the Old Corpse's forehead with one of his claws as he held the severed head aloft by the wispy hair that stubbornly clung to his scalp.

"Is this to be my punishment?" Grandfather asked jokingly. *"To become the entertainment for a Daemon... Even for you, dear Jakob, that seems extraordinarily cruel."*

"Be quiet," Jakob told him as he read through the scrolls. He had left the largest for last, as it clearly seemed the most significant, but all of the scrolls contained within them immensely-powerful rituals, such as the one that had summoned Jakob to this realm, as well as the Hymns that Grandfather had passed on to him in bits-and-pieces, jealously hiding their true versions from him.

As he unfurled the largest of the scrolls, his eyes widened in surprise, then narrowed in suspicion.

He turned to his erstwhile Mentor and demanded to know, "How did you obtain these!? Where did you find such scrolls!?"

"A loyal servant is often rewarded well for their troubles, though the one in your hands was one I discovered in the capital of Heimdale, beneath their most ancient academy. If you would believe it, that entire city was built atop the ruins of a millennia-old civilisation whose Emperor attempted the ritual you are looking at, and failed."

Jakob was unsure what was truth and what was falsehood or exaggeration, so he reached out with his right hand and absorbed the memories directly from his Mentor's mind. Surprisingly, he was telling the truth, though what he left unsaid was that he himself had worked for more than a century to fulfil the esoteric tolls of the ritual himself, but in doing so had allied himself with the Flayed Lady, who, amusingly, had ensured he could never reach his goal, thanks to locking him inside his sewer sanctum in a timeless state of not-quite-alive and not-quite-dead.

"I see," Jakob said matter-of-factly. If he had retained the ability to, he would have grinned. If he had possessed the arrogance for it, he would have gloated. Instead he did neither, and simply bade Wothram and his constructs take the scrolls with them, preparing to leave.

"Don't you want to know why I did what I did!?"

Jakob gave him a glance of pity. "I already know everything you could possibly tell me, Nharlla has gifted me such a power. While you were busy grovelling at the feet of your worthless Lady, I accomplished more than you could ever have imagined. I no longer need anything from you. But, I will give you a final mercy, for old time's sake."

Tchinn let Grandfather's head fall to the stone floor, as Jakob beckoned over one of the guardsmen constructs and ordered it, "You are to watch over this pathetic corpse's remains. If it ever dares speak again, you are to take it outside of this chamber."

Grandfather's eyes widened in the realisation of the fate Jakob had just cursed him with. But Jakob knew from the look in his eyes that the Old Spider yet valued his miserable life and so would not dare speak, lest he be taken from his sanctum and reduced to dust.

"Wothram, we're leaving."

After climbing back atop his steed, Jakob cast a final glance at the head that remained on the stone floor, while the bone construct man had its eyes locked on it, awaiting a signal that might never come.

Just before leaving Grandfather's earshot, Jakob said, "I know what you did to Hesel. This is your reward for all the injustices to heaped upon him and I. This is the reward for defying the Watcher. This is your reward for tutoring an Apprentice so well that he would never again have need of your wisdom."

Then he left the inner sanctum of the ruined grand laboratory.

As Jakob and his entourage neared the entrance to Haven district, Tchinn warned, "*A mass of hearts await us in the world above.*"

"Can you sense their intent?"

"They seem frightened, but relieved."

"I see." Then he remembered a thing that he had noticed from delving into Grandfather's mind. "Tchinn, if you would kindly wipe out all the rats in the city, that would please me greatly."

A hiss followed, before the Daemon replied, "*It has been done.*"

"Thank you." He imagined the surprise pain of dozens of mind-linked bodies all dying at once would make the Old Corpse yelp out loud, ensuring his death at the hands of the single-minded construct that watched him, but there was no way for him to find out, and in truth he did not plan to ever return to those foul depths and find out.

After emerging from the sewer entrance near the river, Jakob rode his steed to the highest point of the district, looking for signs of his progeny. In the far distance, he saw the ruins that the Helmsgarten Castle had been reduced to and knew that Iskandarr had fulfilled his task. To attest to this, he saw no

signs of the fiends when he looked out over the river to the other districts nearby, where before they had swarmed like waiting wolves.

A fork of green-tinted light lit up the horizon, followed a few seconds later by a *crack* of thunder that could be heard across the entire city, so loud and powerful that it was as though the Gods themselves had visited their wrath upon the mortal world.

Jakob knew that there was likely little he could do to aid his progeny, so he instead bade Wothram and his constructs begin preparations for the ritual engraved into the large tungsten scroll he held in his arms.

His clawed, monstrous hands could not reach the Demon of Lightning, for he moved with such suddenness that it was as though his entire body was possessed of the element that shot forth from his hands.

Patrych heard the invocation again, his mangled ears picking up on the sound and somehow understanding the alien language it was spoken in.

“*Spark of Creation,*” his powerful voice intoned, while Patrych’s body once again attempted to get in close, while firing off dozens of tiny flechettes of blood that curved through the air on ponderous hard-to-predict trajectories. But the self-proclaimed Sovereign dodged them all, zipping back-and-forth with lightning on his heels.

“*Seek the object of my scorn,*” he continued.

His twisted and over-long figure once again attempted to launch one of its hideous claws at the Lightning Sovereign, but he kept moving around with that impossible speed, as though simultaneously casting two incantations; a feat that was surely impossible.

As the power of the spell drew to a close, Patrych’s body turned and began to flee, having already been scalded once by the devastating power. Though he wished for death to take him, he likewise feared the power of their quarry, for the lightning strike they had survived already had felt like Patrych’s entire body was steamed alive, the temperature carefully managed to ensure he felt the entire thing, and the echoes of that pain filled him even now.

“*Voltaic Serpent!*”

A cataclysmic lightning strike hit the world, lighting the city with such power that it usurped the sun, and in the powerful light, Patrych could have sworn he saw a four-hundred-metre-long serpent of pure energy, with a tail stuck to the clouds above and a maw coming straight for his body, as it sailed through the air following a massive leap from the part of the wall they had been running along.

Another lightning strike hit them, and in the light, Patrych saw those fangs of energy close around his twisted body like a cage, before the energy of the entire unbelievable Voltaic Serpent surged into his body.

He felt himself falling, unsure if he had regained control of his limbs, but, with the little bit he could see, it was obvious that no much was left of his body. Then he hit the ground and felt the pain of the moment so intensely that he cried out in pain, his actual voice emerging from whatever was left of his face.

Moments later, a *crack* of static emerged next to him, before he felt the air around the remains of his body become charged with static, as energy built up for a final blow.

Patrych still had a desire to live, despite it all, but he was unable to fight back. The Sovereign was truly a calamitous force and he briefly worried for his people, but then realised that not many were left anymore, the vile Entity that had taken over him had made sure of that.

Then he heard those now-familiar words and knew the end had come.

“Spark of Creation.”