



He looked at the back of his hand, while sitting on a rock in front of some corpses that his companion was steadily devouring. With a sigh, the condensate in his mask pumped out through the vents in the sides.

“The Seeker and the Sovereign, huh?” he muttered to himself, while enjoying the faint tingle of the euphorics laced into the scent-ball of his mask.

The mask was formed from the bones of two female hands, made as a gift for him by an old acquaintance he met in Hesslik a decade prior, during a plague of tuberculosis that he was hired to deal with. Once, he was a Magister of Pathogens in the metropolis of Helmsgarten, but, grown tired of being nothing more than a glorified physician, he had set out across the continent, seeking and cataloguing diseases and illnesses, and learning how to control them.

Not many people knew the causes of these things, but Harmlig was gifted when it came to this field, understanding the nature of bacteria and viruses. Some might say he was a prodigy or ahead of his time, but few truly understood his worth. And to an unappreciated man with no moral qualms and oceans of a talent, the world was but a playground to experiment with.

He thought fondly of the brain-devouring sickness he had conjured and spread across the town of Hillfang, although it had not worked exactly as planned, since the sickness led to a form of dementia-induced rabies rather than debilitating and excruciatingly-slow death. But the entertaining part of his work was the unpredictability.

His brief stint in Hesslik during the plague had taught him most of what he now relied on, much of it thanks to his acquaintance Goddard. If not for *that* man, Harmlig would never have thought to use magical rituals alongside his creations, but now Demonological spells played a core role in the delivery of his carefully-crafted pathogens. Favourite amongst them was the Gluttonous Swarm invocation, which, after offering up a toll of blood and a feast of flesh, allowed him to demand a service from the swarm of critters that came to do his bidding. The most common type of swarm consisted of rats, but he had also seen mosquitos, bats, locust, and flies answer his beckoning spell.

“Are you quite done?” he asked his companion, who was shoving the last body into the darkness that made up its diminutive figure, the legs flopping around as they slowly disappeared.

The child-like Spawn of Nwetrou turned to face him. “**I HUNGER.**”

“You just ate four people...”

It regarded him coolly. “**STILL HUNGER.**”

Harmlig shook his head with a grin hidden beneath his mask. What a peculiar creature it was, this *child* of ‘The Great Devourer’, although it certainly lived up to its namesake progenitor.

“We’re right on the border, I’m certain we will find more bodies.”

The eyes that dotted the dark silhouette of its body seemed to dilate slightly, then locked their lidless glares on him. “**HUNGER LIVING FLESH.**”

He scratched the burn-scar tissue on the side of his face in consternation. “If you hold out for just a while more, I’m sure we can find something in the metropolis. I hear slaves are easy to come by there now.”

The creature turned away to stare off into the horizon, as though looking through the trees, hills, and stones to observe the metropolis that still lay a couple weeks of travel away.

It was peculiar. The ‘child’ had just appeared alongside the scar on the back of his hand and the voice of some great entity addressing him.

Harmlig;
Master of Pathogens;
Architect of Sickness and Disease;
I gift to you a fragment of my knowledge;
Alongside the companionship of the spawn of Absolutes;
Aid the one they call Sovereign;
As the Seeker, this is my demand.

Harmlig could not explain it, but the scar had granted him knowledge he had never possessed, such as the innate understanding of the peculiar shadow-born creature before him. He had never known much about the ancient deities, but now he could list all the ones that had their eyes locked on his world, and knew fragments of a reality-warping language that invoked their powers.

He also knew that the creature before him was but the first of several children of the Absolutes that would seek him out. There was sure to be a logic behind these entities seeking his companionship, but he had yet to gleam it.

Nwetrou was known to him, thanks to the Seeker’s gift, as The Great Devourer, though it also bore many other names, such as The Dweller in the Deep, Devourer of Suns, and Leviathan of Leviathans. Like all Absolutes, it was the paragon and primogenitor of several elements, chief

amongst which was a bottomless hunger, exemplified by his bizarre companion that wore the guise of a human child.

It was known to him that the Seven Sinners, their realms, and the Demons that resided within them all inherited the elements of these Great Ones, meaning that the Demons of Gluttony were the misbegotten descendants of Nwetrou, as they were the incarnation of bottomless hunger.

Harmlig was unsure if that made the Spawn before him something like an uncle to such Demons. He let out a cloud of vapour. “What a silly thought.”

“**I HUNGER.**”

“I hear ya,” he said and got up from the rock. He was likewise hoping to find some food for himself soon, but it was tough to get a hold of any before his ‘friend’ swallowed it all. It would perhaps change once they crossed over into Octland’s territory. Part of him was also just excited to set foot on an active battlefield, as such was a great place to ply his craft, as well as discovering new diseases for him to modify.

Hopefully the Seeker, his new Benefactor as it were, would allow him a bit of a detour.

Swarms of Gorger Flies, each the size of a thumb and covered in orange-brown bristles, flowed through the air in a giant mass resembling some strange creature, greater in numbers than what he had ever witnessed.

Crows and other carrion birds hopped between the many bodies, picking out their favourite bits, like the jellied eyes and soft cheek meat of the dead faces. It spoke volumes that even these gruesome birds avoided the swarms of flies, since the insects had no qualms eating anything that got between them and their feast.

Just by a rough estimate, there had to be over a hundred bodies in the open grave that sat like a sinkhole in the claylike ground. Nearby was the charred husk of a village, torched and pillaged.

Harmlig went over to the edge of the great hole, peering down and realising he had to revise his headcount when he saw how deep it went. His companion had already hopped down to feast among the flies and carrion birds, reaching out with jointless and spindly shadow arms to drag bodies into his awaiting maw.

Even from a few metres away, he saw the uniformity of their deaths and could speculate to which perpetrator was behind it, although it made little sense to him.

“If Helmsgarten had come upon this village, they would’ve taken these people as slaves. It seems the warriors of Octland were the ones to do *this*. Strange.”

Suddenly the mass grave stirred from below, as one of the corpses lurched out of the pile, clawing its way through the many bodies buried atop of it. When it emerged into the fresh air, Harmlig realised there was something off about it.

He stood up and waited, as it clumsily broke free of the dead embrace of the dozens of bodies around it. Slowly it gained its feet, before shambling his way, disregarding its own fatal injuries. Part of its former attire still clung to its body in tatters, such as bits of silvery armour and stained white cloth.

When it reached the lip of the grave and began scrambling up the side, Harmlig backed away a few steps, putting his palm on the pommel of the hollow tube-like rapier that he carried on his hip and within which was a flesh-eating sickness primed-and-ready.

“Hungry child, you mind helping me out here?” he called to his gluttonous companion, who had ignored the arrival of the newcomer for some reason.

In one move, the corpse pulled itself up and over the lip of the grave, before standing upright and looking at the former Magister with its lifeless eyes and wide-open mouth.

“Still. Your hostilities.” The voice emerged from the corpse, though its mouth did not move.

It took Harmlig a second, but then some realisation hit him.

“Another Spawn of the Absolutes?” he wondered aloud.

“This one. Heeds. The Seeker.”

He huffed a laugh, vapour emerging from his mask alongside it. “The Seeker has provided me with another wayward child... Pray tell which Great One sired you.”

The way it just stood there in its corpse visage, not moving a muscle, was deeply unnerving. From the look of the body, he had been a footman in the Holy Corps of Octland, though the voice that addressed him was more feminine in tone, making him wonder just what exactly he was looking at. Confusingly, the body had been slain in the same way as all the other dead civilians in the grave: a precise stab into the nape. Perhaps this footman had, in life, been opposed to the mass slaughter of innocent people.

“The Dancer. The Shapeshifter. The Disfigured. The Many Faces.”

Harmlig grinned beneath his mask. “Nharlla’s Spawn? And what is your unique nature I wonder?”

“Find. This one. A living vessel. It will reveal.”