

*We call it the Heart of Noloth.*

*Don't worry. We have it well-trained. We had the faith culture this one into being a particularly stupid god. The sacrifices are made to believe that it is more beast than person—the shaping made easier by the fact of its arrival.*

*Oh. Do you know it holds the temple? We discovered both the god and the “holy site” together. You can say they were entwined from the very beginning. Sometimes, when the air is calm and the pantheons are squabbling, we have it reach beyond the darkness of night to chart the void beyond. Hm? What's there? Oh. Chaos and ruin. That is what lies beyond our realm.*

*The Heart is fed now, though. Worry not about stepping into the dark. After tasting eight thousand slaves. It will be compliant. It will take us wherever we wish, ferry us to every corner where its shadow lies. It would have been better if she wasn't with the child. It has been known to steal those from slaves sometimes. Weep not if you suddenly find your womb emptied.*

*It would be better if she wasn't with child. I suppose nothing can be done about it now—*

*No!*

*No—no! No! Put away that ridiculous weapon. You cannot cut darkness. No! No! The light! Quench the glow! Yes! Yes, fine! I suppose you, in particular, have a way to cut at darkness! Now—*

**[Zein laughing]**

*...Do that again, and I leave you in the black and make my apologies to the High Priest.*

-Lesser Acolyte of Noloth showing Jaus Avandaer and Zein Thousandhand the Heart of Noloth

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Inheritor of Shadows

The darkness seized them all in its ravenous embrace. Though capable of twisting chronology to its whims against Avo, the rules of asymmetry were now turned against the dragon, its emanations of light enwreathing struggling desperately to hold the lashing shadows at bay.

Tongues and tendrils drained projected manifestations and recalled miracles. Undulations of shifting force shifted in the void, swatting down to hold the dragon in place, trying to grip Avo's slithering form, but lacking the dexterity to contest his speed and morphological asymmetry.

And countless leagues beyond the George Washington's still disintegrating husk shone a resplendent shell, its etheric incandescent building the dark found itself blessed with new purpose—to feed upon novel succor, to learn the flavor of dragon and Godclad both.

With everything in motion, Avo wasted no time, quenching his flames and reasserting his Delusions. Immediately, he sent two splinters through his Auto-Seance. Both would be commanded by his Subminds for separate tasks.

The first would seek to achieve what hadn't been done earlier: locating easy targets for a final harvest of deaths. In the aftermath of the Nether's destabilization, the vicious and vulnerable were in a state of disarray, gangers and Syndicates open to infiltration—seeding opportunities for future slaughter.

There was a good chance that he couldn't manage to grant Zein her final end. That he would have to operate with caution beyond caution in the coming days. Better to stack the deck as best he could and position himself to claim deaths when the opportunities arose.

That being said, just because he might not be able to kill Zein didn't mean he was out of options. His second submind interfaced with Kare, the Paladin quickly approaching Naeko's position on the DeepNav. He inched into her periphery awareness and sequenced new memories in place: knowledge connected to the George Washington's gateways, and what to anticipate.

Thousandhand really shouldn't have told him about Naeko's power. Or his importance. And with everything already past the point of no return, why not break the paths some more? Why not inconvenience her further, give her former disciple something to focus his ire?

Besides, there was more than a measure of schadenfreude involved. Especially as he ensured Kare knew all about what Zein was planning—what was fated to happen at the trial. As memory sank in, the real Kare struggled against rising nausea in her and Maru's speeding arovec.

*+Don't worry. I'll be keeping watch over you. Won't let her have you.+* With his promise cast and the essential details uploaded, Avo broke the link before she could respond.

Her template did in her stead. **[Bless you, Avo. Thank you. For everything.]**

Avo fought the urge to laugh. If righteousness could always come bundled with acts of cruel vindication, he doubted he would be the only decent ghoul in existence.

Of course, this was all just the consolation prize.

Back near the destroyed voidship, Avo's base mind was still set on a single objective: to seize any chance he could and kill Zein Thousandhand once and for all.

A thread of synaptic iridescent flicked along the plane of darkness. A sudden shove sent the remaining modules of the George Washington tumbling aside without inflicting any damage. Scarcely more than two kilometers remained of the once impressive voidship. The rest was

gone. Over fifty-five million metric tons of self-shaping matter came apart in a ballet of debris. Motes of disintegrative entropy spilled from its hollowed core, parts of the structure evaporating still. More of the ship had been wrenched apart by digits of grasping dark.

Even still, there was something tragically noble in how the George Washington clung to life.

Reactive sinews of tubular smart matter condensed into straining cords, the system clearly trying to preserve whatever it could, despite the lack of a guiding intellect.

This was a vessel designed to protect its crew to ensure their survival, whatever the cost. It had no part in the misfortune it faced. No chance to guard the fate of its crew against wretched fate. No means of denying the darkness' intrusive touch.

One of its shifting spinal rings broke as the crystalline lattices affixing it to the ship succumbed. It tumbled thereafter and struck another, layers of spinning concentricity collapsing in a calamitous cascade.

A memory called to Avo. A moment from a month ago. He recalled the George Washington's intact visage—a fibrous tower woven over melted cubes, its outer edges ovular, gravity maintained by the churning of three vast rings.

No more.

All that wonder and design broken with an exhalation of his Heaven.

Peace glared out through Avo. **[We had that temple for over three centuries. Three fucking centuries. And you just fucking lose it in a month. Break it fighting that sow, Thousandhand—who you shouldn't have—]**

Avo ignored the Famine. Still. The moment felt wrong. A travesty. Like he had broken a relic, and more personally, one of the few things he still had left of his father. But such was the fate of mundane matter. Erosion. Only memory maintained and metaphysical concepts could endure the unceasing passage that was time. At least the crew was still safe. At least the modules had been separated. There was a chance of resurrection. Of return. Such was more than most would ever get.

There was nothing for it: He would comfort himself by producing a creation that surpassed the voidship in every way.

But that was for later. Right now, he had a dragon to upset, and a Godclad to kill.

With his Fardrifter manifested, his **Nine Streams** split the dark as hurricane-sized serpents. Six tunneled fast through the dark, their two-hundred and fifty kilometers of velocity enhanced by a factor of ten thanks to his **Shadowrun** canon. Those heads circled the area around the dragon.

The beast was currently flinging warhead after warhead from its storied history. Scars of fissuring light expanded to cleave the dark. The Heart of Noloith thundered in agony as the distant shell unfurled, opening to reveal a fang-lidded eye, iris dim of ambiance.

An oppressive opalescent bloomed within the confines of this demiplane. The Heart was roused. Incensed by the wounds it endured. Little did it seem to notice the other three of Avo's streams approaching, like sharks of ill-intent emerging from the deep.

The shadows tightened. The Heart of Noloith exerted more effort to hold everything still. Another percent of Rend ticked over for his Fardrifter, causing his Metamind to shriek even louder.

**REND CAPACITY [FARDRIFTER] - 99%**  
**VENT! VENT! VENT!**

His Fardrifter shivered as the sickness of entropy approached the point of overflow. ***“We approach an edge. My endurance is at its end.”***

Avo disagreed. *+You'll do more than endure. You'll ride free. Fly high. I'm cutting your harnesses. Seek the horizons. Just get me that dragon. Get me Zein.+*

The Heaven of Air brayed as a chorus of nine in abject startlement. Their surprise was shared by the Woundmother.

***“Master,”*** the Heaven of Blood began, ***“you can't possibly–”***

But he was. A storm of red-tinged lightning lashed out from the epicenter of the nine streams. Briefly, the steeds flicked out of existence as Avo tried to **Halt** each individual bolt.

Normally, he could have emptied his Rend this way. Balanced the expense incurred by his miracles. But he intended something different this time. Needed another to fight in his stead and shred the Heart of Noloith with entropy without taxing his focus.

And he did something that no other Godclad would ever dare.

Avo deliberately unleashed his Fardrifter as a Daemon—a Heaven unchained and fueled by Rend.

**->Domain: (Air/Entropy)**

**->Canon: Halt of the Passing (IV) - The user can enchain all actors and objects moving through their area of physical influence (250 Kilometers) with stasis**

**->Daemon: An anathema of correspondence will be birthed if the total velocity drained exceeds the total Rend accrued**

**THE FARDRIFTER UNBOUND, ANATHEMA OF CORRESPONDENCE**

**WARNING: DAEMON TRIGGERED**

**->HEAVEN: [FARDRIFTER]**

**->REND CAPACITY [TWICE-WALKER]: 97%**

**SPATIAL METAPHYSICS UNRAVELING**

**REND SPILLING DETECTED**

The nine-headed steed roared back into existence, their voice louder than ever before. The Daemon's presence was a hurricane unleashed, and its ontology was as if tearing skin, the entropy expulsion now driving it forward shredding the Domains of Air, Space, Shadow, and Labyrinths.

Spatial reality churned and tore. The analogy of the surrounding dark changed as well, twisted from a black sea to little more than tearing paper, carving wounds the Heart of Noloth couldn't endure.

Soulfire erupted from the open eye, the deimplane beset by destructive tides. While the collapse outside continued, Avo felt the structure of his ontology shift as well.

The Fardrifter was inverted of Heaven and Hell, but more importantly, their position relative to the Soul had been swapped as well. Now, they occupied the epicenter of the Stillborn, the Soulfire coursing into the Fardrifter's cyclor first before leaking over to the other two Heavens.

Avo himself felt an ineffable discomfort, the situation as if a phansmic was in control of a Metamind.

Still. The situation was mostly acceptable. The Fardrifter's authority was loud in his skull, its compulsions sufficient to overwhelm a lesser mind. But he was thoughtform—cognition unchained. Even without relying on his subminds, he could arrange his awareness and reshape his own sequences to accommodate what would have been encroaching madness for anyone else.

Bitter laughter broke from Abrel. Jhred was still on her mind, his tortured, near-mad form resting in Avo's memories, a pathetic thing to behold in comparison to the ghoul's mental implacability. **[This is such fucking bullshit.]**

And it was going to be that "fucking bullshit" that gave Avo his edge.

As more beams of light tore into the darkness, gouged apart from within by Avo's Rend-soaked Anathema of Correspondence, the demiplane collapsed, and the Heart of Noloth gave a final desperate blink as it fell in full.

**SOUL DETECTED**

**"HEART OF NOLOTH" (SPHERE IV)**

**WARNING: REND CAPACITY SPIKING**

**REND CAPACITY: [ERROR%]**

**EXTERNAL RESONANCE BLEEDING OVER**

**DOMAINS DETECTED**

- [SPACE]

- [SHADOW]

The demiplane ruptured open like a torn sack, and Avo found himself squeezed out from an alleyway in the gutters, his Fardrifter blasting out as a line of hurricanes. Before he was dislodged from the collapsing space, however, he watched his Fardrifter reward his trust, slamming two snake-like heads down on the dragon while the rest of its being screamed with rising joy. ***"Free! Free! Free!"***

Nuclear detonations and eldritch phenomena splashed and vanished into twisting whirlwinds of shifting space. Unsteady buildings were torn from their foundations as Avo found himself drawn upward, rising to meet Layer One—the horizon greeting him as pockets of accretion amidst spawls of dissected blocks. A ripple of gold pulsed against his Frame. The dragon accelerated time again, but he had it now. Well, his Heaven of Air did.

In most other circumstances, unleashing a Daemon would have been a desperate act at best considering how deleterious they were to their users' minds and uncontrollable during their rampages, but Avo's Heavens were weaned from true self-awareness. Capable of forming dialogues with him—displaying character and traits he understood.

The Fardrifter might have seen him as something of a jailer before, but this offering of laxity on his part ensured at least temporary loyalty from it and also coincided with the collateral devastation of the Heart.

Zein, meanwhile, was someone they could both hate. She was a slaver, in more ways than one. A woman that had shackled time itself. And neither of them would ever get what they wanted again if they fell to her grasp.

And now, one way or another, he would see her suffer for her intentions.

He directed a splinter out to where the Heart of Noloith lay via an Oversec into a passing Exorcist patrol drone. A twelve-kilometer zone at the center of a Sang bioform processing complex became ground zero. Darkness stretched and writhed around the area, stretching and distortion everything in its vicinity.

Immediately, he began jacking into the Paladin Oversecs, hijacking golems with the appropriate Domains—and therefore Rendsinks—to drain away the Heart of Noloth’s instability and achieve equilibrium.

Concurrently, he prepared to update Kare on his exact whereabouts on the DeepNav, but held back for a beat. He didn’t want to draw Naeko’s notice yet. Not until he had no other options.

+*Fardrifter: Reel them in*, + Avo said. To his continued surprise, the Anathema obeyed, distracted as it was. It neighed through the air as spatial reality thinned around its twisting winds. The dragon tumbled upward, and so did Zein’s body, now wrenched free from the creature’s protection. All was not well, however. The Godslayer’s metaphysical scab was already beginning to break.

Avo’s focus narrowed. He reached out, **Sanguinity** manifesting as clawing claws to seize her body, to flood her with Rend.

**“No. Cease!”** The dragon’s shout was drowned out by the Fardrifter’s laughter. The metaphysical architecture of the Heart of Noloth was collapsing, miracles flattening back into mundanity as the eye collapsed, as every last bit of physical matter went whistling out through a few thousand ruptures.

He sank his ontology into Zein’s an instant before her resurrection, impaling her on branches of calcified lightning in retribution for how she struck him earlier.

**META-FAC ACTIVATING...**

**TRANSFERRING REND FROM [TECHPLAGUER] TO—**

**WARNING!**

**->RESURRECTION - 100%**

Avo growled internally as the mem-data flickered and broke. But even as Zein returned, he knew the attempt to be in vain.

**[Three,]** Peace snarled in frustration, the sight of seven interfaces belonging to seven other unused ontologies aside from her Fisher still taunting him. **[Fucking three other Heavens! The cunt was playing with you earlier!]**

Part of Avo suspected, but the truth was often a bitter thing to learn. So be it. Consolation victory it was.

“Avo!” Zein snarled, body turning as the Fisher That Wasn’t splashed into time itself.

A shame.

A pity.

A foreseen possibility.

He cast his current position over the Kare.

***“Akusande!”*** Zein called, her voice echoing loud with the spreading of the paths. The dragon transformed again, golden threads spooling back into a glaive, spearing toward Zein’s open hand, an army of her echoes already pulsing into existence, slashing at his Fardrifter.

The glaive never made it.

A palm—twice the size of a megablock—manifested just beneath Layer One’s holographic sunrise and descended, pinning Daemon and Godslayer in place.

Avo, meanwhile, left but a sliver of ghosts present in his corresponding sheath and fled the scene to secure the Heart of Noloath as a consolation prize.