

*So it comes, the daughter, the beast,
Daggers in the dark, this turmoil a feast.
Across the length of what is, near and far,
Words and acts of deception meld, their marks upon Truth a growing mar.
And in the darkest dark, within the beast's Soul,
The mother lays in wait, her blade half-drawn, anticipating the culmination of a long fated goal.
But plot cannot bear plot, and love will not be soon to last,
For while the Burning Dreamer schemes, the Agnos will be made to fray, each moment closer to
her last...*

-Stormsparrow's Chrous

28-11

Children of Broken Legacies (I)

Veylis's appearance within the gatekeeper's open wound compelled an outpouring of dread from all corners of Scale, but not from Avo. No. In his heart of hearts, he yearned for this moment, had wanted her to come and face him as she was, as she sought to present herself. The templates within him were divided. Some went still with fear. Others faced her with nervous anticipation. A few recoiled and then flared with burning hatred, and the strongest of them remained utterly indifferent.

+Well, well,+ Corner muttered, *+been a long time coming. Time to see what this cunt looks like.+*

Over the Court of Truth, Avo's Strix Upon the Empty glared down at Veylis's approaching shadow. Beneath his protective shroud, Kae's avatar took two steps back, while Draus simply folded her arms and rolled her neck, as if her former master was just another bout in a prize fight.

Across Cala's cog-feed, her views exploded. Her active viewers shot into the billion threshold for once and just kept growing from there. The same nervous, infectious energy spread all across New Vultun as well. Veylis's coming was like an ember cast upon gas. Every lobby, every district, every sovereignty, every megacity. If one was aware, they were likely hearing about this, witnessing history in motion twice over, beholding the declaration of the Anti-Guild polity known as Symmetry and the second intrusion of Veylis Avandaer into Scale.

Time spilled out from the gatekeeper like blood oozing free of a disembowelment. The radiant glow bathed Veylis, and even as she emerged from the metaphysical wound, a star-bright shine clung to her still. With her first step, a crushing pressure descended. Avo could bear it better than ever before with his new apotheosis. Sphere Seven. She was still powerful, her very existence a crushing oppressive force, but he was greater than ever before as well, and he was not alone.

The Gatekeeper, Naeko, even the Stormsparrow... Within Scale was a gathering of titans. Rather than a single dominant tsunami sweeping all lesser aside, what transpired was a clashing of tides, each pressing on different patterns of reality.

The light enshrouding Veylis dimmed a moment thereafter, and for the first time, Avo beheld her physical sheath, or at least what she presented as such.

Post-human. If there was any word to encapsulate Veylis's aesthetic, such would be it. His perception settled on her face first and foremost. It bore a strong resemblance to a younger Zein, their likeness undeniable. However, Veylis's cheeks were rounder, her jaw sharper, eyes the color of coldest blue. More than that, however, the Woundmother studied her flesh and found it natural, organic, preserved but not enhanced. This is likely a restoration of her most original biology.

"Master," the Woundmother whispered, **"the flesh is true, but the same cannot be said for her brain. There is... no tissue there... Nothingness."**

And that was when Avo's attention slid away from her face and took in the rest of her body. The bulk of her sheath was technothaumic perfection. Primary limbs were composed of an alloy that left even the Woundmother confused. Its patterns denoted something of matter, but also more – something that crossed over into force itself. Along many ports dotting her arms, heat and golden light spilled out, the emissions so severe that most golems were even put to shame.

Then there were the reaching hands sprouting free from her back, each one of them coiling, growing from each other like branches of an expanding tree. Some among them were alloyed, some were shaped from translucent gold, others were feeble like flesh. The motif of the hands did not end there, for the bulk of Veylis's torso was composed of five layers of revolving rings. Each layer sprouted their own hands as well, brushing the inner layers within, fingertips caressing in some manner of strange, inscrutable symbology. Within the very last ring, however, was an oscillating blackness. Gravitational pressure contained within a field of dancing static.

Calvino intruded into Avo's thoughts then, the EGI's words surprised and alarmed. *{That's a singularity generator,}* Calvino said. *{With what has been done to physics... That shouldn't be possible to make anymore.}*

+*Huh?*+ said Chambers, listening in.

{*She has a fucking black hole that suckles the energy out of matter and stars in her chest,*}
Calvino elaborated.

+*Black... hole?*+ Chambers muttered, thinking of the wrong kind.

To Avo fascination, he felt Veylis' paths extend beyond the threshold of the singularity. He felt threads run up along the insides of Veylis's body, connecting the machinery implanted on the back of her skull that projected a static veil instead of a typical halo. Finally, two burning wheels spun beneath her golden sabatons. They emitted a constant propulsive force and kept Veylis's entire body aloft. Her form was well over four meters tall, and of that, her face was just a small slip of a thing, barely a dot among all that mass. But still, Avo kept going back to it, for her eyes commanded attention, and her gaze was more piercing than any other he had ever known.

He wasn't the only one to think such, for a new figure descended from a podium on the Saintists' side. Chief Paladin Naeko struck the ground without any noise or strain as he strode forth, a man possessed, his path destined for Veylis.

With his sudden intrusion into the heart of the court, the Massists considered striking at Veylis herself, but Avo tore the desire out from their foolish minds and did the same for the Saintists as well. This would be a place for diplomacy. He would not see the sanctity of Scale defiled as Veylis did all over a century ago. He would stake his righteousness upon her folly. She would be the furnace he would use to cement his true legitimacy, to forge proper validity for his new polity in the eyes of all the downtrodden, the unsatisfied, and the altogether fateless.

Veylis took three more steps, the rings beneath her feet hammering hard against Scale's tessellated bricks, sending tremors passing through the entire structure. She stopped four meters away from Abrel, from D'Rongo, from Kae, from Draus. The Instrument choked, unable to respond. The regular just glared, the Arsenalist and Simulacra forming over her. The faintest hints of the Maelstormer lingered around Kae. All the while, Elder D'Rongo wilted, her back pressed against her cell, fear leaking forth from her eyes. Yet the first person that Veylis spoke to was once one of her own. She looked upon Draus as a most inquisitive expression pulled at her features.

"Guard Captain," she said, greeting Draus with a faint smile.

"Highest Avandaer," Draus replied. Her voice was dry, devoid of actual respect, but she acknowledged Veylis's title all the same. No point in doing otherwise.

"You stand against me here," Veylis said, her words an observation and not an accusation. **"Is that your final choice."**

"Yeah," Draus replied. "Reckon I do. Reckon it's been my choice for a good long while." A beep followed and the Regular thought to herself some more. "Now, come to think of it, that might always have been the case. Doubt you was ever going to leave a place for a war dog in paradise."

"Paradoxically, I think I will keep you," Veylis let out a soft breath. ***"Tell me, do you believe in his dream? Do you believe in him?"***

The High Seraph lifted a single golden arm, her fist a construct of power and brilliance both. As she gestured towards Avo, he felt the strength in her every movement. Naeko finally came to a stop just beside him.

+Now,+ Naeko said, his mind nearly blind with shivering anticipation and panic. His being hundred with barely withheld violence, and red began to creep along the corners of his eyes.

+No,+ Avo replied, ***+stick to the original plan. We strike with our strategy. We do not engage on her terms.+***

A myriad of thoughts rushed through the Chief Paladin's mind. He wanted to start the fight right now, to see this to an end, whatever end that might be. But he knew that Avo was right. That didn't make this moment any easier for him. But more than that, though Veylis was here, she didn't even seem to regard him. Not yet. Part of him would always want that longing, that yearning recognition of a servant seeking his master's approval.

"Do you think we're real?" the Draus asked, using Avo's words against Veylis.

Veylis pondered her question for a moment before answering. ***"To ourselves, perhaps, but not to each other."***

Her reply left Draus silent for a moment, and then the regular broke into a chuckle. She casually turned to Avo and shook her head. "This one don't like colors," she said, and the Regular's masked insult made Avo laugh as well. Rather than taking offense, an expression of curiosity spread across the High Seraph's face, and slowly a look of satisfaction.

"Ah, I see." She glanced between Avo and Draus. ***"You are a fortunate one, Guard-Captain. Many fail to find those they regard as kindred in heart or mind."***

"I think she just enjoys killing me," Avo said.

"I'm merely pleased that you've given my weapon some semblance of true life. Perhaps I should commend you for this alchemy. Perhaps I should commend her more for this change instead."

Draus sneered. "Fuck yourself, Highest. I am what you know me to be. Only difference is I got a better target in mind."

"Oh. You think yourself so capable?"

"Only one way to find out. I'm ready. Are you?"

A long moment passed, and Veylis simply nodded. **"Nicoma would have been proud."**

"Nicoma's fucking dead. You're spittin' wind." Draus spat at Veylis' feet.

"High Seraph," Abrel choked intruding on the dialogue. All semblance of the warrior was gone. All that remained was a shame-filled, terror-consumed girl. Back at the podium, her father fared even worse. Uthred Greatling clutched at the railings as he gripped his chest, trying not to dry-heave.

Beside him, Osjon looked on with a wry smile as Vator wept openly, tearing every sensation of the present moment into his memory. "This is... this is... this will never occur again. I am here. I am here."

Across the court, Shotin and the Massists looked on, eyes unblinking, wordless. Internally, the Seeker screamed at Avo to release him from control, to give him the opportunity to bring a planar shift down on Veylis and see just retribution delivered.

But Avo was not obliged to help the Seeker commit a meaningless suicide.

"Silence," Veylis said. Such were her first and only words to Admiral Greatling. The Instrument choked, and two tears spilled from her eyes, something inside her breaking. It was lack of approval. It was the complete coldness with which Veylis spoke those words. She was unimportant. For all the service she had dedicated to Highflame, for all that she had done to wipe away her mother's humiliation, she was still worthless. Always unworthy.

"I will see your world burn for what you have done." A third voice followed. The speaker shook with every syllable. But Veylis regarded Kae's template as the little Agnos glared hatefully at her captor.

"You will do nothing other than serve another's desired purpose and be spent afterwards," Veylis said simply. **"I pity you, Agnos, and I have preserved you the best I can. Soon, your true self will know glory unlike any other, for this city will be in your debt forevermore. And when it is done... I will see you rewarded in the coming life for this deed, unwilling or not."**

"Veylis. What have you done?" Avo's question was projected with the full weight **Hysteria** behind it. And though he probed, he glimpsed nothing within Veylis this time. Nothing at all.

Finally, she spoke to Avo, ignoring Elder D'Rongo altogether, disregarded as little more than a distraction. **"Burning Dreamer, you evolve evermore with each period we spend apart from each other. I suppose it is your fortune to be broken by me. I suspect you would have never gotten this far without my rupturing of your frame."**

"My gratitude," Avo replied sarcastically. **"I can return the favor. See if I can help you do the same. Now. Let us face the city together. Give an accounting of what all these wars have been for."**

"They know what it is for," Veylis replied. **"The power to decide. For yourself. For all others. The chance to shape all that is. To determine all that is to come. My father's fate—whatever you assume it to be—pales before the wants of man. And now you are here to claim your share of the prize—only you say that you have no interest in man's fate. Only that you place yourself above us. A superior to the Guilds, offering retribution to the weak and abandoned, but promising no paradise... How inhuman."**

"And you promise a kingdom of deliverance upon the foundations of your father's eternal suffering. What a fragile pedestal."

Veylis' eyes twinkled. **"You think this will strike my resolve? I greet you now with a simple request. Make my father's screams louder. Let the city hear the voice of its savior. Let them know what has been sacrificed by me upon the altar of our salvation. Let everyone hear and know that there is nothing! Nothing! Nothing! I will not give and no one I will not damn! Including myself! Especially myself! To ensure that humanity can keep their choices! That we will be watched over by the best of us, rather than machines that cast us into this pit of ruination."**

Madness. Madness and impossible confidence. Even right now, at this very instant, the High Seraph believed she was right. Believed everything she did was justified.

"You fucking—" Naeko croaked out.

Finally, the coldness within Veylis's eyes vanished as embers of genuine anger burned behind her gaze. She stared upon Naeko, and he glared back. Love and hate were ever close, and the intensities of one could easily cross the threshold into another. Avo studied the two and saw a wordless exchange follow. Whatever was being said, whatever was conveyed, he couldn't fully read, even with **Hysteria**. But the gist was communicated when Veylis spoke her sentence.

"Say nothing to me, coward. You would not have been enough. I would have called for you, and he would have called for you, and Zein would have called for you, and you would have chosen nothing. Dog!"

Pain. Pure pain flashed through Naeko. For a moment, a palm formed over Veylis, and Avo cast a thought to interrupt him.

+No. Naeko. Do not give her your will. Do not let her decide.+

The palm quivered. Veylis stared on in cold judgment. And then Naeko let his Heaven break. "You're wrong. You're godsdamned wrong. I would have... I would have tried."

"You would have what?" Veylis said, sounding more disappointed than angry now.

"I would have stopped all you damn fools," Naeko growled. "I would have chosen me."

And now it was Veylis' turn to be cut down. The High Seraph turned away first, the first hints of humanity passing through her expression. **"I wish I could imagine the sight."**

"Don't wish. Just wait." Avo hissed a low laugh at Veylis as she turned to face him once more.

"Paladins," Veylis said, speaking to the guardians of Scale as if they were her soldiers, **"remove the accused. They do not matter. This trial is not about them. It is about us. We children of broken legacies. The Guilds under Jaus. And the Burning Dreamer, emerged from the ashes of Noloth. Let the Gatekeeper glare upon us. Let truth hang like a promised blade. I will burn in judgement and toil before your words. Will you do the same, Dreamer?"**

A challenge easily accept. **"Let us be joined in the crucible of truth, Seraph. Stand and deliver."**