The Black Moon shone in the sky.

Tanya watched silently as dark, smoky beams descended upon the ever-illuminated town of Haviskali, consuming the Eternal Light wherever they fell. It was a blatant disrespect to the power of the Great Goddess, yet they did it so leisurely. Carelessly, even.

The sight made her envious. She wished she could be like those beams. An existence without thought, capable of simply being. Not caring, thinking, or hurting. Then maybe she too could be free.

She stood in the inner courtyard of the Banksi Estate, breathing in the aroma of jasmine flowers. Knowing what she did about nobles, she had expected to see flamboyant displays of wealth and power. However, she'd been welcomed at the gates by a middle-aged rōnin and a lone maid. For someone of Zuken Banksi's affluence, it was a painfully frugal way of living.

This was the house of someone that was comfortable living alone. She could empathize with him perfectly well. After all, when you were alone, no one could betray you.

Tanya heard shuffling a short distance away, and suppressed the urge to flood her wristbands with mana. She turned around and saw the door slide open, revealing a compact, clear-cut man in his late twenties. He had precise features, and a lot of very soft black hair. A mask of tranquility adorned his face, but there was a hint of wariness in those thoughtful, brown eyes. He stepped through the entry, adorned in a white shirt overlaid by a deep green vest with engraved gold buttons. The black suit on top was long, and his dark-brown wristbands, engraved with the Banksi insignia, signified his status as a terramancer. Light glinted off of the rings on each finger, no doubt enchanted with numerous protective spells and mana reservoirs.

Zuken Banksi. Second in line to the Banksi name, one of the Holy Eight Clans in the Asukan Empire.

Her eyes flickered white.

Mana	**2200**
Lifeforce	**1960**

Strong, but not overwhelmingly so.

"Miss Tanya," Zuken offered, a coy smile accompanying his words. "Welcome to my home. Though, I distinctly remember asking Hiroto to show you to the guest room."

The rōnin certainly tried to. In fact, he looked a hairsbreadth away from whipping out his katana and forcing her to walk there at swordpoint. It might've been preferable. She could deal with people trying to kill her. But someone inviting her in and treating her with basic courtesy? That was uncharted waters.

"I like it out here," Tanya brusquely replied. The courtyard gave her a clear view of the estate, and it was easier to escape should things… escalate.

"I see." A ghost of a frown flitted across his face. "Even so, the others are expecting you inside. Do not fret. I wouldn't dream of tarnishing my clan name by offering poor hospitality to a welcomed guest."

She supposed that was the best she could get. Nobles were all too obsessed with maintaining spotless images, to the point where swearing in the name of their clan was akin to an unbreakable vow. Of course, that didn't guarantee that Zuken Banksi wouldn't betray her.

After all, his clan's name would only be stained if she lived to tell the tale.

"Miss Tanya, I'm aware the Cobalt Army is looking for you. However, handing you over is not my intention. In fact, so long as you are here, you are immune to their reach. Should our meeting today prove fruitful, we're going to be professional peers, after all."

Tanya narrowed her eyes. *So long*, he had said. What about after that?

"Fine," she stiffly replied. "But if anyone inside attacks me—"

"Then I will consider it an attack on my person and react appropriately. That, I assure you, is a promise."

Tanya slowly nodded. "Okay. Let's go."

The door opened into a long hallway, just wide enough to let them walk through without feeling claustrophobic. The interior walls were decorated with graffiti while the air smelled like dewy wet grass. Almost every inch of the floor was elevated slightly above ground level, and knowing the Banksi Clan's reputation with earth-shaping, she wondered whether she was entering a mansion or a garrison.

It begged the question of why a man so resourceful needed her of all people.

There were two sides to the Haviskali Underground. The first was the taverns, where thieves and miscreants and government spies either sold or exchanged information. The second was people like Zuken Banksi, who owned entire organizations dedicated to under-the-table services — imposters, assassins, forgers, whores, and anyone else incredibly skilled and dedicated to their crafts.

But *her*? She was just some runaway.

Albeit, a runaway who had committed a heinous crime in the past, but a runaway nonetheless.

"Charming place," she offered as she walked alongside him. "A bit too spacious, I must say."

Zuken laughed. "I like to breathe in fresh air while I attend to my duties. Earthen philosophy is more than just layering defenses and gaining ground. It's about stability and foundations."

Tanya found his affability disconcerting. Even if it was for a job that required her skillset, he was being awfully accommodating. "Your letter mentioned a job…"

He raised a hand. "The others are waiting inside. I'd rather not repeat myself."

The end of the hallway led into a flight of stairs. She walked a step behind Zuken at all times, a wind-blade just a twitch of her fingers away. The stairs led to a wide chamber, almost as large as the Seron Market, and filled with plush chairs, couches, tables, and a massive writing board around fifty feet long.

"Welcome to my conference room. I apologize if it seems a little cluttered."

Tanya followed Zuken inside and tensed. Nothing came screaming at her from the walls or the floor. Nobody had started firing spells either.

“Oooh, paranoid, aren’t you?” someone commented. It was a thin, bubbly voice filled with amusement. Turning slightly, Tanya found herself facing a girl, tall and buxom, with dark brown tresses and an aura about her. She was dressed in a tight bodycon with her hands folded in front of her. Tanya noted her slender ears. *A ljósálfar? No, she seems less luminous. A changeling, then?*

Her eyes flickered again.

Mana	**—**
Lifeforce	**1100**

Definitely a changeling. A ljósálfar would have switched lifeforce for mana, and a dökkálfar’s lifeforce reserves would have made this look like pocket change. She looked older too, for a changeling that was. *A failure perhaps? Though Zuken doesn’t seem like the type to take in strays…*

“Play nice!” complained another girl. This one looked like an ordinary bremetan with ginger hair, brown eyes, a plum-shaped face, and a rather plump pair of lips. With a nod, she gestured towards one of the chairs.

Mana	**—**
Lifeforce	**5000**

Tanya nearly wheezed. *5000?* That was practically a walking bomb waiting to explode. The girl’s numbers really did not match her disposition. Unnerved, she took the seat farthest from the walls, allowing her to see the entrance without having to move.

“Is this it, Zuken?” asked the changeling, giving her a once-over.

“Just one more. He’s already within the premises. In fact, he’ll be with us right about… now.”

“Ahem,” came a new voice. “Apologies for the delay. I was— YOU?!”

Tanya whirled around. The man who stood before her was tall, with the build of an experienced soldier. A loose, sleeveless shirt exposed well-sculpted arms and oceanic blue bands around his wrists. He had shoulder-length hair, a fierce face, and eyes that seemed to glitter with savage laughter.

It was a face to dominate or fight, never one to patronize or pity. All his movements were large and perfectly balanced, and when he appeared in a room like this, he was like a wild animal trapped in a cage too small.

Which, in hindsight, made a lot of sense. After all, she was in the same room as him.

“May I introduce Olfric Bergott…” Banksi trailed off. “And with that, we now have everyone here.”

Olfric, heir to Clan Bergott. A well-reputed noble family, though not a part of the Holy Eight. He was an aquamancer, and an absolute pain in the ass.

Mana	**3000**
Lifeforce	**2740**

Tanya's eyes widened. *Three thousand? He must have leveled up again.*

Her fingers twitched. She glanced towards Zuken whose poker face was impeccable. The two girls looked between her and Olfric, the ginger-haired one all bright-eyed and interested while the brunette remained justifiably apprehensive.

"What's she doing here?" Olfric demanded.

"She is here on my invitation," her host replied nonchalantly.

"She's an outlaw!"

"Not if we don't tell the law."

Olfric was nearly frothing at the mouth.

"So long as she enjoys the hospitality of the Banksi estate, her presence will remain a secret," Zuken firmly said. "If you have an issue with this, I suggest you take it up with the Overseer, who I seem to recall appointed you in the first place."

"The Overseer never said anything about having to work with her."

Zuken smiled disarmingly.

"You've grown more aggressive, Olfric," the ginger-haired woman commented.

"Maude," Olfric grunted, before jerking a finger in Tanya's direction. "I thought I made it clear that the next time I saw you, it'd be your last."

"Empty words," Tanya bit out. The only reason Olfric could be so bold was because she wasn't the rising star among adventurers that she used to be. Had things played out differently…

She bit her lip, unwilling to lose control so easily. Especially with the Black Moon ascending.

"I knew this would be a problem," she told Zuken.

The man in question leveled Olfric with a look. "Whatever problem you have with her, you can settle it after we're done. As long as this job is on the table, she enjoys the same diplomatic immunity that I do. As such, I implore you to treat her as a professional peer and an ally."

Olfric sneered.

But Zuken wasn't finished. "If you fail to do so, I'll treat it as a failure on the Overseer's part to grant me appropriate support. If word of her presence here gets out, I will consider it a failure on your part to adhere to the customs of Asukan nobility, which will affect your standing in the Empire. Not to mention, I will mark it as an obstruction to this time-sensitive job."

Tanya felt her jaw drop, feeling both impressed and wary at the same time. If she didn't have an incentive to take the job before, she certainly did now.

"Does anyone else have a problem with her?"

The ginger-haired girl, Maude, resolutely shook her head. The brunette's expression was distant, and her eyes focused on nothing particular. She gave a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Fine," Olfric replied, looking like he had just bitten into a rotten egg. "But I'll say this now. That girl is a danger to us all. By the Goddess, I can't believe you're even allowing her to enter your premises."

"She's integral to my plans."

"She's a Sinner."

"Which is exactly why she is here. To sin so our hands stay clean."

Something ugly flickered far back in Olfric's eyes, but he nodded and stepped back. Zuken's smile never wavered.

"Right," interrupted the brunette who stood up, smiling brightly at her. "Hi! You don't know me, but I'm Elena. Welcome to the team."

Tanya glanced at the changeling. To her knowledge, most changelings had their shifts by the time they were thirteen. Elena, for all her sensuality and youth, looked far older than that.

"So you're the infamous Tanya," she went on. "Mana output in the low four thousands. *Very* impressive. Youngest aeromancer in the Llaisy Kingdom to hit Expert rank. They say you're actually close to a Master at Aerokinetic Combat, but you tone down your performance to stick to plain average."

She sent a glance in Olfric's direction. "Some also say I'm a demented wacko who kills babies for kicks."

"I choose which 'they' to listen to very carefully," Elena replied. Her voice went down to a whisper. "Did you know half the clans think you're actually the Baramunz princess, Taenis, in disguise?"

Tanya choked on her spit.

"Anyway," Elena chirped, "I'm a changeling. My occupation is whatever Zuken dictates. Oh, and I'm partial to peaches."

Tanya blinked again. Changelings were supposedly good at Charming. She wondered what this girl's particular talents laid in. A man like Zuken wouldn't have had her attend this meeting otherwise.

"I'm Maude," the ginger shyly introduced herself. "I'm a naturopath."

A Northern medic, Tanya translated. Someone who could draw out power from the earth and use it to pour lifeforce into others, accelerating their self-healing. She wondered if Maude had a vanir up in her lineage.

"By Eir's mercy," Maude went on, "I've never had anyone die in my presence."

And modest, too.

All four of Zuken's party were looking at her pointedly. Tanya realized they were waiting for her to introduce herself. She pushed the golden curls falling over her face behind her ear. "I'm Tanya. A nomad. I'm an aeromancer, and—"

"A nobody," Olfric interjected. "Outlaws aren't listed on the Adventurer Rankings."

Tanya narrowed her icy blue eyes. “I’m going to say this one time. Back off before you get hurt.”

The room became quiet and tense as Tanya stared down Olfric. Hard. Daring him to challenge her. To meet her on equal grounds and demonstrate how superior he really was.

“Easy,” Elena soothed. “We’re all professionals here, right? Take it easy.”

Tanya tipped her head. “I apologize.”

The changeling was right. It was obvious Zuken Banksi had called them there to discuss something important and beneficial for all of them. Getting irritated on Bergott and spoiling the mood wouldn’t help. A calmness rose within her like a gentle tide, and her heartbeat slowed. Yes, she was here on a purpose and should just focus on—

She paused, her lips slightly open. Wait, why was she—

“Elena,” Zuken chided, “no charming the crowd.”

Tanya whirled towards the changeling, who was smiling like a cherub.

Had she just charmed her? Tanya was no expert at mental shielding, but she was no slouch either. That line of thought was clearly foreign, but she hadn’t felt even the slightest breaching of her mental defenses.

Just what kind of crazy charmer was this girl?

She considered the group. A terramancer, aquamancer, and an aeromancer. A naturopath to heal wounds and apply fortifying magic, and a charmer to deal with scenarios when confrontation wouldn’t do.

“There’s something I don’t understand,” Olfric asserted, “The Overseer told me this was a State-sponsored mission. But all State-sponsored work is to be postponed until the Black Moon wanes. But instead here, we’re having this meeting, and there’s a Sinner on board. At least tell me you’ve a group of Onmyōji in the other rooms praying to the Great Goddess right now?”

Not that she’d ever admit it, but she mentally sent the aquamancer her thanks. Something similar had crossed her mind several times in the last several minutes, but she had ignored them and focused on the people around her.

Zuken laughed. It was loud and boisterous. A bit too much. “By the Great Goddess, no. If anything, I told them to take the day off.”

“But the Black Moon—”

“My good man,” Zuken replied, “I went out of my way to arrange this meeting under the Black Moon. No doubt you’re a devout bremetan. Tell me, are you aware of the effects of the Black Moon?”

“The Moon God falls to the curse of darkness,” Olfric recited, “and ascends to the Central Sky, heralding the return of the Mists. The Hour of Evil Spirits.”

Oumagatoki, Tanya didn’t say. Even public mention of the term could evoke tensions. Not to mention the word originally had a far more deleterious meaning.

The Hour Of Great Calamity. The End Of The World.

Zuken nodded slowly. “And the other effect?”

Sweat beaded on the aquamancer’s brow. Tanya didn’t need to hire a scholar to know how deeply religious Olfric was. Even thinking such things was likely sacrilege to him.

“During the Black Moon…” Olfric’s voice trembled sightly, “the All-Seeing Eye of the Goddess is blinded.”

“I figured he’d react like this,” Elena commented.

Zuken smiled. “Olfric Bergott, I arranged this meeting under such unholy conditions, because what I’m about to suggest can be construed as an act of high treason.”

Tanya gulped.

The table was quiet as the group finished their meals. Despite Olfric’s protests, the terramancer had clammed up on the subject completely, suggesting they have their meals before they could get down to business. He had claimed that it would be a long meeting and he really didn’t want them to sit through it with an empty stomach.

Finally, the maid-servant had placed several large glasses of whiskey on the table before bowing out.

“If I may,” Tanya spoke up hesitantly, “what is this really about? You said something about having to sin and—”

“You’re already a Sinner?” Olfric offered. “Trust me, you don’t have to broadcast your great accomplishment here. We all know it.”

Tanya scowled, but said nothing.

“Personally,” Maude interjected, her tone neither warm nor cold, “I don’t have any problems with her.”

“Me too,” Elena chirped.

Don’t look at me, I invited her,” Zuken replied with a laugh.

“Well I do,” Olfric added darkly.

“So,” Tanya steepled her hands in front of her, “can we get started?”

“Right!” Zuken stood up, clearing his throat. “Ladies and gentlemen, now that we’ve finally settled down and everything, we can move forward to the topic at hand. Some of you have been informed about a job offer. One with good pay, for both the job as well as your discretion.”

A dirty job, then. High stakes, high pay, high chances of getting horribly murdered. It was right up her alley.

“Not to beat around the bush,” Tanya spoke up again, “but is this an assasination mission? An enemy? Someone in the higher-ups, given the entire treason business?” She looked at Olfric and smirked. “A High Priest perhaps?”

You—” Olfric got up, growling.

Zuken chuckled lightly. “No. Enemies are a waste of time. They’re a distraction for those unwilling or incapable of dealing with such annoyances. *I*, on the other hand, prefer having friends. People I interact with

frequently. Acquaintances to speak to on occasion. Then there is bremetan society beyond that. And at the end of the spectrum, there are targets. Never enemies."

The terramancer said it without any melodrama, the way most people talked about talking out the trash.

Elena continued to sip at her whiskey.

"As for the mission, I can't speak of any details until I am convinced you're all committed to it."

"And how will you know that?" Maude questioned.

Elena pulled out a stack of folders from the drawer under the table, and slid one towards each of them.

"An Eztli contract," Zuken explained. "It's an unbreakable pact that is agreed upon, supported, and enforced by both parties in the name of the Great Goddess. Should you break the pact, it would trigger a lethal blood curse. Of course, the contract only covers an Oath of Silence. You are free to accept or reject the mission regardless."

Impossible, Tanya thought, eyeing the folder like it was about to sprout fangs. Zuken had to be bluffing. An Oath of Silence was a complete joke. Anyone with a creative enough mind would find a way to get the information out without triggering its curse. No, he probably had assassins ready just in case one of them decided to walk away from this offer.

She needed to act carefully. And soon. Or she might not make it out alive.

"Right…" she drawled, pushing the folder away. "I get it now."

"Oh?"

"I'm an outlaw, on the run from the Army, and then you summon me here, with him in tow," she sent a withering glare in Olfric's direction, "asking — no, *coercing* me into committing a Sin so that you people can enjoy the benefits."

"She's pretty spot-on so far," Elena giggled.

Everyone stared at her.

"...what?"

"You said I'm immune as long as I'm here," Tanya interjected. "So if I say no, I'll be forced out, probably right into the Army's hands. But if I accept this mission, I'll be committing yet another Sin. And I can't even talk about it because of the contract." She stood up abruptly. "So why don't you just call the Army and end this charade?"

"Can we?" Olfric eagerly asked. "Call the army?"

Zuken stared at her for a long, intense period of silence. "That's not how I operate."

Tanya leaned forward despite herself. "Then what is this about?"

"Something that will start making sense when you open the folder in front of you."

Curiosity finally winning her over, Tanya tore through the seal and opened it. The first document was, as he mentioned, a formal Oath of Silence detailing the stipulations. The second was a dictum from the office of the Shogun, the greatest authority in the entire Llaisy Kingdom of which Haviskali was a part of, stating—

“A complete pardon?” Tanya asked incredulously. She searched Zuken’s face for any shred of falsehood. Anything that would tell her that this was all a fabrication. A ploy to take advantage of her. A twisted scheme that she would come to regret.

“Hey wait a second!” Olfric yelled. “Pardon? You’re *pardoning* her? That’s it, I’m out of this—”

“Feel free,” Zuken replied sternly. “Be advised, however, that apart from the Shogun himself and the Overseer, the only people who know about this Pardon are sitting here in this room. If word of this goes out, I’m sure the Shogun himself will be deeply interested in meeting you.”

Olfric swallowed.

“The Overseer promised me he’d send me some useful help. So far, all I’m seeing are obstructions. Perhaps I should talk to him tomorrow.”

All traces of confidence faded from Olfric’s face, as he quietly sat down in his chair.

“So…. is this true?” Tanya whispered softly, tenderly holding the document in her hands as carefully as one would cradle a child.

“I assure you, it is completely legal. If you join us on this job and we succeed, that becomes your new reality. Of course, the pardon only applies to crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the Llaisy Kingdom. If you have outstanding charges in other areas, you will have to deal with them yourself.”

“How do I know you aren’t lying?” she demanded, slamming her hands on the table.

“Sign the contract, then walk to the Overseer’s office with me tomorrow. Verify it for yourself,” he replied simply, shrugging. “And yes, you will be pardoned for both Sins.”

“Just what is this damn job about?”

“Once again, nothing I can disclose without you signing that contract.”

Tanya carefully considered her options. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined something like this falling into her lap. A chance to start over? To clear her past history? She could establish herself as an adventurer and climb the Ranks, rather than taking asylum in exchange for favors.

“What if I fail the job? Then all of this is for nothing.”

“If you fail, then we all die.”

Tanya slowly retreated back into the comfort of her chair. More and more, she was realizing just how dangerous this mission was. But if everything Zuken had promised was true, then it was more than worth it.

One after another, all three of them signed it. Elena collected the folders and tucked them away.

“Now then,” Zuken said, resting his chin on his hands, “let’s discuss remuneration. Aside from the pardon granted to Tanya, you shall be paid fifty thousand mezals. Each. Twenty thousand upfront, and the remainder after completing the mission.”

Tanya’s breath stopped for a second. Fifty thousand mezals? The freedom from the pardon would go a long way, but there were always bills to be paid. For someone who made eight thousand mezals in her best year, the sum was unimaginable.

“In addition, there will be other profitable avenues. It goes without saying, everything we find will be divided equally among ourselves.”

“Just asking out of curiosity, how much would these ‘extra avenues’ be worth?” she asked.

“Enough to double your current remuneration.”

Tanya nearly choked. The amount had gone from high to surreal to downright ridiculous. A hundred thousand was so much money, it had practically no real meaning to her.

“What is it you’re after?” she asked.

“The Feelers have reported the presence of a Class-3 anomaly in the Namzuuhuu Desert,” Zuken replied.

“An anomaly?” Olfric asked.

“Class-3?” Maude arched an eyebrow.

“In *the* Desert?” Olfric finished.

Tanya stayed silent. An anomaly was good news. They were treasure-troves of resources that included metal deposits, organic extracts, gemstones, and most importantly, work for the common people. By Wind, entire *towns* were constructed around an anomaly, especially if it was a Class-3 as Zuken proclaimed.

Anomaly-exploration missions were big news. She could visualize the Haviskali Shrine hosting a large event, inviting adventurers— local and foreign, to be part of the exploration missions. Depending upon the results, they’d sent a horde of metalcrafters, terramancers and miners to get the resources out. Something so grand was supposed to be the talk of the town, not be discussed in whispers enforced by an Oath of Silence.

What was she missing?

“The Desert is out-of-bounds for all bremetans,” Olfric asserted. “And even if you did go there, you’d be caught by the Army’s Scanners. Not to mention it is an accursed place.”

“Oh it’s accursed all right,” Zuken replied. “But that does not make this any less true. The mission is to sneak past the Army, get into the Desert, and locate the Anomaly. And once we’ve gotten what we want—”

The gears in Tanya’s mind were already turning. So that was why she was brought here. This was the Sin Zuken had alluded to, the Sin he wanted her to commit.

“You want me to destroy the anomaly,” she replied in a very small voice, ignoring the looks of surprise from the others. She had eyes only for Zuken, as if willing him to disagree.

“Yes,” he said unflappably.

“WHAT?” Olfric sprang up, his legs knocking his chair backwards. The shock in his face was too real to be faked. “Are you out of your mind? I knew our mission involved Sin, but an anomaly is a grand blessing from the World. To kill one is—”

“A very grave Sin,” Tanya finished. “Something I’ve committed in the past.”

“You destroyed a freaking *anomaly?!”* Maude exclaimed.

“Along with all her comrades,” Olfric growled.

“Clearly not all of them,” Tanya shot back. “You survived, after all.”

The aquamancer went beet-red. “No thanks to you.”

“I tried my best.”

The anomaly incident during her last mission was what had gotten her life screwed up. Olfric Bergott had been her staunchest adversary from the start, and had been loudest at accusing her for the deaths of the rest of the team members. It was what led to her being shamed and removed from the Ranks.

“What I don’t get is why we’re even talking about destroying it in the first place,” Maude said, “especially when she’s being hunted for a similar offense.”

Tanya could only snort derisively. The hypocrisies of the Empire no longer were a surprise to her.

“That is not your concern,” Zuken replied airily. “The point is, the Black Moon will wane in forty-eight days. During this period, the All-Seeing Eye of the Goddess shall remain blind. We need to complete the anomaly exploration mission, figure out what’s causing the spike, collect our loot and destroy the place on our way out. All within that time limit. And… take care of any witnesses we may find there.”

Translation— Kill everyone.

“Witnesses…” Tanya trailed off. “Do you mean other adventurers?”

“It is possible that the Scanners in Cyffnar might have taken note of this and acted.”

Of course they had. Cyffnar was situated on the other side of the Desert. A city in the Eaborid Kingdom that didn’t share friendly ties with Haviskali.

Zuken looked at everyone earnestly. “Do we have any quitters?”

No one said anything. Tanya glanced at Olfric and found him looking downwards, fists clenched.

“In that case,” he cleared his throat authoritatively, “let’s retire for now. I’m sure this is a lot to take in, and I’d advise you to sleep on it. Rooms have been prepared for you to rest in the mansion. Tomorrow, we will plan and prepare for the mission. We will leave as early as possible.”

With that, he stood up from his chair and walked out with Elena in tow. Olfric followed soon after. Maude hovered around for a while before she stepped out of the room, and called for the maid-servant to show her the sleeping quarters, leaving Tanya all by herself.

Alone.

Thinking.

Forty-eight days. Even assuming they managed to get started for the mission in around a week, they'd have to sneak past the Army, travel through the Desert and suffer its curse. Finding an anomaly there would be ludicrously difficult, not to mention the problems they were gonna face. And even if they managed to get to the anomaly and get the loot, there was no saying what could happen after.

Zuken had claimed to be willing to distribute the loot equally among all five of them.

Tanya had almost stood up and called him a liar to his face. Adventurers killing adventurers after uncovering loot wasn't unheard of. Money had a tendency to bring out the worst in people, and she doubted Zuken Banksi was any sort of holier-than-thou exception. The long-term wealth an anomaly could generate was enough to support the rise of kingdoms.

But he had given her an offer she couldn't refuse. And she could trust he would keep her alive to hold the burden of the Sin.

And once the anomaly was destroyed…

She warily eyed the now-empty room.

Everything was up in the air.
