

The door to the villa was different this time. Amongst the symbols painted on it were the recent additions of a cyan coloured sheep and a pizza slice. There were papers nailed beneath the red star and the sheep.

“Ah, so they're in today?” A knock on the door.

“Ah, good morning, Claw,” was the response. “I see the secret door knock is going well for you.”

“May I come in? This is... well, this isn't really important.”

“Of course.”

The entrance to the house hadn't changed a bit. A bit messy, sure, but that would be the result of a glitch-bird going rampant in it. If this were back up in the Palace of The Gods, Amber would've yelled at him. Not because of the mess, but for not doing his (*everyone else's*) work.

“Coffee, Alice. Arabica, just a bit of milk.” Claw took a book off a nearby shelf and started flipping through it.

“So, Claw, what brings you here?” Alice pressed several buttons on the coffee machine, then took a seat.

“Simply telling the news. First off, however, how has life been so far?”

“It's been fine. Many squabbles, like your pantheon, but rather normal. For a Host. What's the news? Why are you still in the mortal plane, actually?” Alice noticed the coffee was finished, so she poured some.

“Well, I've been reaccepted into the Pantheon, actually, but I still have business to handle down here.”

“I wasn't aware you were impeached, or exiled, or any of the sort.”

“It's a long story, which you really should already know, because we wrote this book together.” Claw held up the book he was flipping through. The cover read ‘*On the Pantheon*’.

“Is that they call it nowadays?” Camila came into the room and sat on the couch. She immediately turned on the (*outdated, Claw noted*) nondescript game system and inserted a disc.

Seeking to end that train of thought, Claw replied, “I assume so. Alice, what do you think the Pantheon does now?”

"I don't know. Do they have a monthly meet-up where they tear each other's throat out, have a rap battle, or yell at each other, or what?" Alice took several sips from her coffee.

"Funny story about that rap battle part..."

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"And then Amber got angry when I vassalized him. I mean, he was asking for it. A tiny Arabia against a blobbed Ryukyu? Not a chance. Worst case, I would've fully annexed him."

"I don't understand a word you're saying."

The conversation quickly ran out of control. Now, many of the other Hosts, including AJ of all people, were starting to listen in (*while playing video games*). Of particular note was Cyan.

"Oh, it's simple, really. Amber was furious when I made his small nation of Arabia pay tribute to my large nation of Ryukyu. Besides, Oman was my first pick. He just managed to click on it quicker."

"And what happened next? It's a bit confusing."

"Well, Sail, my ally, formed Malaya and systematically destroyed Helix's navy. And everyone else's."

"What?"

Claw had forgotten the rest of the Hosts were listening. "Oh, hello, Red. How was your day?"

Before Red had a chance to speak, AJ and Camila were carrying him away.

Alice continued the conversation. "Actually, Claw, have I told you that it's actually been 2 days since the Communists started their revolution?"

"It is? I haven't noticed. They seem inactive."

"That's because *you're* inactive you fool!" Alice's outburst seemed to surprise some the Hosts.

Claw seemed to wince. He took this time to remind himself to save his snark for Amber.

"Actually, I came here to ask about Cyan. Which of the twelve... or perhaps eleven... which member of the Pantheon does she pledge allegiance to? Asking for a... no, asking for Amber."

“Why don’t you go ask her? Don’t ask me, I’m not Cyan, and I don’t pledge any allegiances.”

“Right.” Claw mentally facepalmed. What a dumb question! What was with him today?

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After a slew of questions to and from every Host, Claw saw fit join them in their ‘*video gaming endeavors*’, as Amber would say. At the moment, Alice was organizing a game of Europa Universalis IV.

Claw saw that Oman was already taken (*Aoi*), Ryukyu was already taken (*Alice, though she was ‘waiting for Dithmarschen so I can spread Communism’*), France was already taken (*Napoleon*), The Papal States were already taken (*Red*)... every interesting country was already taken. So, Claw settled for Ulm.

Nearing the end of the game, the world was split in four: Europe belonged to Ulm under Claw, Asia belonged to Ryukyu under Alice, Africa and the Middle East belonged to Arabia under Aoi, and The Americas belonged to an exiled Jerusalem under Cyan.

When the clock finally hit 1 January 1821, the game ended. The four rulers of the world handed out salt shakers to the failed countries.

Sometimes you just need a little distraction from all the hardships in your life.

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The steps to the Palace of the Gods were the same as ever. Not quite, actually; the steps were a bit dirtier. “It’s probably because I wasn’t here for a bit. Lazy ba-starts.”

Claw entered the Palace and went towards the area with the most noise, which was always the Round Table (*which was a misnomer; the table was a rounded rectangle, with the 1st and 12th seats at the heads*). There were usually two empty seats when he entered: His, and the mysterious 12th seat. He usually wasn’t noticed when he entered, so he usually went and put something in the 12th seat, such as a picture of Arabia, a cardboard cut-out of a bird (*which, for whatever reason, made Amber anxious*), a sheep, or a ballot box. This time, he sat there. At his opposite was Amber.

“Order! Order! Please, everyone! Be quiet!” Amber seemed visibly worried. Everyone else was arguing about... something. Helix and Dome were at each other’s throats, as always. Root was arguing with Jaw over trivial matters, such as toilet paper and flatbread pizza (*flatbread isn’t pizza, Claw would’ve added*). Plume and Cover were debating on the matters of life and death (*as well as pirates and ninjas*). Skull and Armor were playing chess while they talked about the Hosts. Sail sat next to Claw, yelling about overthrowing ‘The Big Three’ and about how the establishment of an anarchist commune would be a good idea. (*Claw agreed, because he and Sail were the only ones who did work in the Pantheon, because Amber*

*told them to do everyone else's work when they're gone. Which resulted in everyone else handing over their work to Claw and Sail.)*

"Claw, could please shut them all up?" Amber asked, exhausted. "I'm going back to bed. You handle this meeting."

Claw sighed. It was back to the dreary old drive.