

To destroy something beautiful, muses Umbra, is also beautiful.

“I will make your death painless.”

Umbra’s shadow stabs.

Reality shatters like fine china in a rodeo and the shadow spear dissipates into mist, blocked by a pitch black armored leg intruding from the void. The clearing chimes again as two gauntleted hands break through space above Umbra’s eye level then pull apart, ripping through space and time which crumble like thin glass. His mind reels with vertigo as a massive, armored knight steps across the threshold of the abyss.

Behind the knight, reality crackles violently as the rift quickly repairs itself.

“Mule!” he hears the [Abess]’ forlorn call.

The dark knight, Mule, turns its body and kneels before its ward.

“I heed your call.”

“Mule, can you save Quasi?” she begs.

The undead turns its head to look at the corpse next to her.

“Negative. Soul is missing. Entity Quasi is deceased.”

“NO!” she screams. “It can’t be.”

Mule, silent, stares again at his charge without movement or obvious emotion. Only its aura changes; with every sob and wail from Jessica, Mule’s ominous presence grows stronger and darker.

Umbra frowns under his mask. His attack should have penetrated the armor, if not destroyed it utterly. Instead he felt his spell weaken and vanish at the moment of contact. He raises his palm again, and a thousand spears of shadows rise up around him. With a flick of his wrist, he fires the fusillade at the black knight.

Yet to Umbra’s shock and alarm, a translucent barrier blocks every attack. Destruction reigns throughout the clearing, dirt and wood fly through the air as trees and rocks explode.

Inside the hemisphere, the grieving [Abbess] and the armored knight kneel face to face next to the corpse, serene, pastoral, untouched.

Once the attack stops and the dust settles, Jessica wipes her tear stricken eyes and looks up at Mule, and then the surrounding destruction.

"Mule," she says softly, "Can you please kill the man behind you? He needs to die."

Mule stands up and turns towards Umbra. A violet gleam disperses out of Mules helmet as it gazes at the writhing shadow.

"Activating skill [True sight]: Success. Entity designation: Umbra. System Marked: Suffocating Shadow. Class: [Sovereign Shadowmancer]. Level: 366."

"Assessing threat level of Entity Umbra. Calculating odds... Complete. Chance of destruction by entity Umbra is 0.0000021%. Threat level of entity Umbra designated as Very-Low."

"Entity Umbra designation of Very-low does not require elimination for primary objective."

Mule turns back around and kneels once again in front of Jessica.

Jessica stares at Mule for a few moments while she digests his words.

"You're not going to kill him? Not even for me?"

"Entity Umbra does not require elimination for primary objective." Mule states.

Jessica nods slowly to Mules words. She sighs as she stands up. She glances once at Quasi's body before walking around Mule to stare at Umbra. The named hasn't moved since Mule showed up, nor has much physically changed except that the shadows have grown longer upon the ground.

"Are you planning to kill me?" she asks casually.

Umbra, unmoving, stares into the woman's eyes. What he finds are the eyes of loss. Not the loss of a loved one... but the loss of something more.

He glances past her, at the giant still kneeling in the same position.

"Yes. By the orders of the [Chancellor], servants of Eir will be eradicated." he finally answers.

A bright toothy, crazed grin blooms on the [Abess'] face. She looks at the knight.

"Mule," she raises a finger and points at Umbra, "He said he plans to kill me."

The knight rises and faces Umbra.

“Statement: Entity Umbra is a threat to Entity Jessica.

“Value: True

“Recalculating threat level parameters... Complete.

“Chance of Entity Umbra causing death of Entity Jessica exceeds 0.00000001%. Threat level of Entity Umbra changed from Very-low to Extreme.

“Highest threat level reached. Entity Umbra will be terminated with extreme prejudice.

“Criterion: Planet must survive

“Criterion: Planet must remain habitable

“Criterion: Sufficient population to provide for Entity Jessica must survive

“Calculating.....

“Criteria met.

“Protocol found.

**“Locating all instances of Entity Umbra..... Expanding probability field.....
Expanding probability field..... Accounting for future instances.....**

“Located.

“Strike coordinates calculated. Target Locked.

“Releasing All Limiters.”

Umbra takes a step back as mana, so dense it's visible, explodes from the knight in all directions. Swirling, violet fog rolls across the moon-dabble clearing.

“Reading spell database..... Spells loaded.

“Commencing Activation.”

Umbra takes another step back as the ground rumbles, the wind picks up, and his [Dangersense] goes off for the second time this year. First the vixen, and now this.

“[Overclock], [Radiation Harden], [Stabilize Waveform], [Maximize Entanglement], [Still Cast], [Instant Cast], [Multi-Thread], [Multi-Cast],” Mule's vocal readout speeds up and distorts as it begins to cast spells simultaneously, words overlapping, **“[Amplify Magic], [Maximize Mana], [Maximize Mana Flow], [Greater Haste], [Emulate Mind], [Mind of**

Adamant], [Greater Discernment], [Absolute Focus], [Mental Division], [Voice of Many], [Greater Fire Resistance], [Heat Sap], [Greater Lightning Resistance], [Electric Sap], [Greater Light Resistance], [Greater Dark Resistance], [Greater Cold Resistance], [Greater Acid Resistance], [Greater Mental Resistance], [Greater Curse Resistance], [Greater Holy Resistance], [Greater Spell Absorption], [Mana Sap], [Greater Tremor Resistance], [Greater Blood Resistance], [Polymorph Resistance], [Plague Resistance], [Damage Resistance], [Armor of Adamant], [Bones of Adamant], [Steel Skin], [Necrotic Empowerment], [Necrotic Regeneration], [Spell Reflection], [Force Reflection], [Prismatic Barrier], [Secure Toupee], [Greater Elemental Ward], [Pressure-Lock], [Space-Lock], [Dimension-Lock], [Time-Lock], [Preferred Reference Frame], [True Observer], [Holy Ward], [Gravity Ward], [Suppression Ward], [Greater Air Shield], [Greater Air Wall], [Greater Shield], [Bastion], [Ongoing Renewal], [Fractal Defense Matrix], [Null barrier], [Reinforcement], [Degauss], [Broad Spectrum Absorption], [Minimize Cross-Section], [Minimize Heat Signature], [Greater Divination Ward], [False Information], [False Mind], [False Life], [Black Vision], [Heat Vision], [Magnetic Sight], [Scent Sight], [Mana Sight], [True Sight], [Detect Holy], [Detect Undead], [Detect Life], [Detect Infernal], [Detect Intent], [Eyes of Many], [Tremor Sense], [Sensory Sphere], [Maximize Sensory Sphere], [Undying Rage], [Fists of Adamant], [Arms of Durga], [Consolidate Construct], [Overlay Construct], [True Strike], [Giant Strength], [Word of Magic], [Mage's Stance], [Juggernaut's Poise], [Greater Levitation], [Air Walk], [Spider Climb], [Greater Agility],”

With every utterance, Umbra's [Dangersense] grows ever louder. He takes another step back before realizing that he's being an idiot. What is he to fear? It is night, and unless this thing can suppress shadows, then there's no way for him to die.

“[Greater Dexterity], [Second Chance], [Save State], [Immediate Return], [Improved Odds], [Greater Luck], [Knight in Shining Armor], [Damage Transfer], [Damage Absorption], [Taunting Presence],”

The knight raises a palm up into the air. Mana rises and swirls into a violet vortex in the sky.

“[Mana Vortex], [Blood Power], [Spell Swarm], [Triplicate], [Maximize], [Triplicate], [Maximize], [Triplicate], [Maximize], [Spell Fusion], [Greater Empowerment], [Overload], [Overflow], [Surge]...”

The vortex swirls faster and faster, circling the sky with numerous numbers of spell matrices that number in the tens of thousands. So many matrices that no mortal could ever possibly comprehend or create.

“[The Will and the Wyrd],”

Then, all at once, matrices all connect, and the storm of mana completely halts.

“[REWRITE]”

“Stay back!” she yells again, but Umbra continues walking. As he does, a shadow rises beside him, and forms another spear.

“I am not without kindness. I will make your death painless.”

Ubra takes one more step, but before he can put his foot down, the sound of glass shattering rings throughout the clearing.

Jessica blinks and Umbra's headless corpse falls to the ground. His head remains in the same spot, held by a black gauntlet poking through space as through shattered glass. Reality continues to shatter as first an armored leg and then the rest of Mule steps out of the abyss.

“Entity Umbra eliminated.”

“Primary objective complete.”

“Mule?” Jessica, forlorn, calls.

The dark knight, Mule, does not react to her words. The [Undead Demigod] rises several meters into the air.

“Commencing Secondary Objectives.”

Mana churns around him. Mule raises a finger and points into the air.

“[Wormhole]”

In front of Mule, reality opens, leading to a place far away. Without pausing a moment, Mule enters through and the [Wormhole] closes.

Jessica stares at the location where the [Wormhole] closed, then she glances at Umbra's headless corpse, before finally leaning towards Quasi's corpse.

Within the penthouse of a skyscraper is a large, circular table. The table purports to be made from Mahogany, but in fact it is a replica, a fancy facsimile of the color, texture, and even cellular structure of wood.

Those around the table know that the table is fake, as is the rest of the room, including the holographic replica of Camelot and the surrounding lands. Yet, the fakeries are flawless. Somewhere there is a Mahogany just like this one and on Orbis there is Camelot, represented on the table in real time.

Ra, Coyote, Hades, Anansi, Laverna, Hermes, Kumiho, and Eir stare into the hologram. They watch the chaotic maelstrom of combat as it happens, following every detail and keeping an eye out for their own people.

They watch, but they cannot act. The laws of the system restrict godly interference in large scale battles. At this moment, the gods can only watch as the fight unfolds.

"That Volpe is quite powerful," Anansi says as he watches an earthen hand rise up and grasp a titan.

Kumiho grins happily at his praise.

"Don't be so impressed," Coyote counters, "She just captured it. It's not like she's grinding its core down like Anansi's champion."

The group looks to Peter, and finds the spider slowly swallowing the pieces of the titan.

"Should he be consuming it?" Ra asks.

The group stares at Peter, then they all look at Anansi.

"I... dont know." he answers after a pause.

"Your [Hero] is about to die." Hades interrupts the group. He points to an artificial forest in front of Camelot.

All the gods stare at the corner of the table where Quasi kneels.

Before anyone can say a word, Quasi's chest explodes. Anansi, Hermes, Coyote, Volpe, and Laverna scream in pain as the marks they placed on Quasi are severed. A large part of their newly restored power vanishes when Quasi perishes, as happens when a high ranked servant dies.

Hades stands up. "It seems this little pantheon of rejects won't go nearly as far as you think."

“Sit back down.” Loki’s voice reverberates off the window in front of him. He stands straight, hands clasped behind his back, as he gazes at downtown Chicago.

Hades tisks in annoyance. “For what? If this pantheon of yours cant even keep a [Hero] alive, then what’s the point of cooperating?”

Just then, the hologram glitches. Hades stumbles and grabs the table. Hermes pukes and Volpe’s, Laverna’s, and Anansi’s faces go pale.

Loki turns his head so that a single eye stares at the table.

He grins.

“We are near the finale.”

His eye focuses on Eir.

“Isn’t that right?”

Eir raises an eyebrow.

“What do you mea-ahhhhhhhhhh.”

She screams as her mark is severed.