

By HisokaXHuntah

Prologue

The harbor bell rung with perseverance as the squall howled in defiance to its welcoming toll. We had just ported on a manmade island about 90 miles from illegal waters that bordered by the Dark Continent. My client hired me through my agent for a job assisting his crew in transporting different specimen, stratum and substances that they were to excavate far north of the Dark Continent. I was accompanied by another fellow whom caused a bit of a stir on our boat here; his name was Henri Losphult. While being debriefed by our informant, we were told this mission was to be kept off the books and hush hush. If the V5 caught wind of this, we could all face very severe punishments.

Our client was a resident of Sahelta, a very outspoken country and quick to jail their citizens for even the slightest of rule breaking. I can't even imagine what they would do if someone disobeyed one of their heavily placed sanctions. No doubt they would contact the Hunter Association and get any Hunters involved into serious trouble, meaning my neck was on the line. But that's what it meant to be a Hunter. I relished at the chance to become involved with an expedition to the Dark Continent, but it seems even the informant was caught off guard when we found out they had left a few months from the scheduled date.

After avoiding international waters patrol like the plague, we had only just managed to make it to the port. Henri was angry that they neglected to mention that they had left early, but I wasn't all that surprised. Our client obviously wanted to venture to the Dark Continent without anybody noticing and to stay idle to a deadline would increase their risk of getting caught.

I learned Henri was an Enhancer during the debriefing. We were not obligated to mention our Nen abilities since it was already mentioned during the pre-screening, but Henri insisted on letting us know of his accomplishments. They were certainly impressive; he helped discover the Dragonwhisp Lilyroot, an herb responsible for the cure of most degenerative brain diseases and wrote a paper on advanced Ko application to protect vital organs from sustaining impact. It is widely regarded in the Hunter Association. Chairman Netero himself

praised Henri for his natural affinity for Nen. Upon further research that I took upon myself, I learned he was apart of a revolution in his home country when he was younger. The military training seemed to still be gripping him by the balls, as he wore his military beret in a quiet pride. He was smug about his accomplishments, and rightfully so. However, I was not obligated to mention anything to him nor did I intend to. You never really know when a friend may become an enemy in this line of work.

“We better be getting paid, damn it.” He muttered, looking up at me. His eyes were difficult to make out through the settling fog.

The squall picked up in intensity and begun to turn into a bad storm judging by the deep rumbles in the sky. We were told to go inside on one of the decks on the man made island and await further instructions. The informant went to contact our client and left the two of us alone.

“Storm’s really picking up.” He muttered. It was obvious he was trying to get to know me, probably for the sake of social obligation.

“Indeed it is.” I responded. “The storm seemed to have came out of nowhere.”

Henri lifted his bushy eyebrow. “We are close to forbidden waters; the weather changes as fast as you blink your eye according to the reports.” I nodded my head in agreement.

I then recalled something.

“Speaking of reports, they headed North, right? Wasn’t there an expedition that was conducted there once and only 2 people survived?”

Henri pulled out a cigar and chuckled in response to the grim question I posed. “The plant weapon Brion.” He put the cigar in his mouth and lit it with a Zippo lighter. “Poor bastards didn’t know what they got themselves into.”

I watched as he took deep puffs of the potent smelling smoke and exhaled. Very few people actually inhaled cigar smoke, but it certainly didn't seem to bother him.

"Luckily our client didn't go into that death trap" Henri said in a tone of slight disappointment. Despite his previous comment, he also really wanted to go on the expedition for reasons beyond money.

I sighed, sharing his frustration, and looked out at sea. It was unlike anything I've ever seen. A clash of dark greys and blackness melting into each other with complex patterns of lightning in the distance. It was like a jumbled set of neurons firing haphazardly and it was headed straight for us.

The brunt of the storm had not hit the man made island yet, and I awaited our informant to return with news from our client. I heard Henri mutter "bastard" to himself, followed by a strange howling from outside. It was rather unsettling, as it sounded more like a wounded beast fighting off death itself than just bad wind.

"Well thankfully they went around the labyrinth city and headed to the frozen mountains there to collect samples." I said in monotone, mindlessly regurgitating what I had just heard in the debriefing. I didn't really care in that moment. I was getting entranced by the rapidly shifting shapes of the dark clouds approaching us.

"Mountains? Pah!" Henri snorted. "I thought you did your homework, kid."

I closed my eyes in annoyance to his "kid" comment.

"Those weren't mountains!" He had a good 18 years on me at least, but his smugness certainly didn't make things better. I knew in that moment that I rued the day in ever trying to make small talk with an Enhancer. Henri continued his response.

"The last expedition that was sent off to check out the labyrinth city sent two people to venture around and to head farther north." I realized Henri had access to these reports that were supposed to be classified. He didn't get this info by any conventional or legal means.

“At first they thought they were mountains. They had an unusual concentration of ice, despite it being impossible due to the temperature displacement. Upon closer inspection, they observed the mountains were, in fact, something else entirely.”

Henri’s hand suddenly appeared in front of my face holding a phone. I was no longer entranced by the clouds and was back in my current predicament of being left behind. I calmly grabbed the phone and looked at it. I did my best to understand what it was I was looking at. The first picture were mountains, but they had very pointed and sleek peaks. They almost looked



like pyramids, except they were all conjoined together to make what appeared to be a super structure. The ice was an unnaturally polished white and very cleancut; there was virtually no debris. The mountain-like structures seemed to go on for a great distance. However, what truly threw me off was the the next picture. I could hear Henri chuckling heartily at my facial expression. “Exactly what I did when I saw that.”

The second picture was actually comparing two separate images simultaneously; the first half showed a relief etched into a solid white wall. It was very impressive work that I would hesitate to believe it was ancient; it showed several large beings holding a small circular object with a detailed line going up into the being holding it. It was very simple yet highly detailed; however, I couldn’t make out the bottom of the relief as it seemed more like a random amalgamation of lines. I found it hard to believe that it was made on normal material for it to still look so polished. I suspected the ice was not quite ice but some sort of substance that preserves objects that has the properties of ice; but it was just speculation.

I heard Henri lean from his chair to which I turned my head to him. "It's very beautiful, almost hauntingly so. However, the second half completely destroys that pleasant imagery."

Henri nodded in agreement, exhaling a huge cloud of smoke from his cigar; it smelled like an expensive wood mixed with some sort of cherry. I gazed back down and analyzed the second half of the comparison photo and in mild disgust.

It was an artistic rendition of the relief, except the crisp white and simple lines were replaced with an ethereal and twisted color scheme. The now-detailed entities were something out of the disturbed mind of a mental patient and there was something else different in this second half that wasn't present in the relief in the first half; there was a human child on the floor. I thought that portion of the relief was just lines with no purpose but the disturbed artist seems to have envisioned his own warped interpretation.

"You said they sent two people to investigate beyond the labyrinth city?" I said, recollecting my thoughts.

Henri reached his hand out for his phone which I promptly gave to him. "They were the two survivors of that expedition, you know. One of them was the one who drew the second part of the relief sometime after returning home. He went missing about a year after."

Henri wasn't chuckling this time.

He too seemed to be mesmerized by the increasing pace of the wind and darkened clouds twisting in our direction. It was then that Henri's eyes widened. Something out at sea caught his attention. I turned my head out into the distance and was greeted with a faint light in the darkness. It was a large cargo ship, though it still had good distance before reaching us.



"My good Hunters" a voice projected behind us. It was the informant. "Our client has returned and will soon dock." Henri laughed heartily in relief while I observed the informant. He was very relaxed and seemed to not be bothered by our client returning with no problems.

"Were there any complications?" I asked. The informant shook his head but said something that startled me.

"No. But it does appear that they found something."

Chapter One - Proscribed Coterie

The cargo ship was much larger up close. Upon docking, we were greeted by a small group of personnel who instructed us to come aboard. Once they resupplied on the fabricated island, they would begin their journey back home. Our client, Mr. Faust Bedoz, was a resourceful man. The man made island would slowly disintegrate once he gave the word to set off a chemical compound which broke down the island that would be eventually be absorbed into the sea by becoming ions that make up the base of sea water. Henri was not impressed and begun to talk about his accomplishments as a Nen user.

Henri's Nen ability had the ability to enhance or "dehance" the temperature of an object. This meant several things; first he didn't quite have the ability to control temperature. Rather, he had the ability to control when and how fast an object's temperature can decline or rise. This gave him two options; he could retard heat or cold, or accelerate heat or cold but not control temperature itself. In order for the ability to work, the object must be in an environment where cause and effect permits a certain temperature change. In other words, he couldn't cool down something on fire but he could retard the rate at which an object would burn. He made it abundantly clear this wasn't his main hatsu in an act to conserve his pride, but he did mention how one time he killed an opponent who had a fever by accelerating the rate of the fever to the point of death.

I walked on board and was shown around the facilities. Several crew members were donned in thick jackets no doubt still feeling traces of their freezing expedition, running in a hurry to the other end of the cargo ship to report on the stratum they analyzed. The personnel took us down the starboard and down a set of steps. The ship was brimming with the smell of the ocean and gasoline. As we went down the metallic staircase, the smell dramatically shifted to cleaning chemicals and rust. There were a great deal of men and women managing the software and radio frequencies of the ship. This was how they remained undetected by satellites and radar.

I observed a tall lean woman wearing a tanktop, camo pants and boots meditating just behind the men and women working on their computers. Upon using Gyo, I saw her emitting Nen almost like radar waves. She must have played a key role in staying hidden from any surveillance through some sort of anti-radar. They were all obviously military trained.

We went through the steam room past some workers below deck and went down another flight of stairs. This was where the living quarters were. One of the women guiding us asked if we would like to settle in our rooms.

Henri and I both looked at each other and smirked. We were tired of settling.

The woman nodded her head and continued to guide us. The rest of the personnel filed in front of a large set of steel doors on each side while the woman leading us stopped.

She stopped just in front and parted ways with us. "Welcome aboard the Gyllis Prime!"

I inferred they were not given clearance to enter the room and only served to handle the minor duties aboard the Gyllis Prime. Henri, who was adamant about being the one up front, opened the door and I followed right behind him. What a sight I beheld.

It felt like I was in a space station. The walls of the room were entirely digitized screens, with an insane amount of logistics, infographics, charts, temperature readings, and other numbers were jolting around, albeit it was more akin to controlled chaos. I noticed they followed pre-linear paths that ended up on certain parts of the room. There was a small group

of 7 or 8 people observing all the data on the second floor, inputting their findings, and sending the data to another person to observe. Directly in the middle of the room was a large table with five individuals and at the head of the table, a stout but well dressed man. The other four were sitting at the table, silent and covered in residue dirt from their adventure.



The stout man turned his head and seemed to jump for joy. “Ah, yes! Welcome fellow Hunters! Yes, please make yourselves comfortable!!”

The other five individuals turned their heads and looked at us. They were ready to eat us alive. The look on their faces showed they braved impossible odds. I was in the presence of other Pro Hunters who ventured to the Dark Continent and lived to tell about it; I had so many questions.

We were then gestured to take a seat at the large table. Henri and I sat at opposite ends of the table, directly facing each other. Henri was next to a rather muscular Hunter who undoubtedly was also an Enhancer judging by his size. I found myself next to a rather plump, dark skinned fellow who seemed like he was ready to take a nap in his seat. A young woman, one of the people observing the data from the digitized walls, had approached the stout, well dressed man. She handed him a large stack of papers and folders. Upon hearing her address the man, I knew my assumption was correct; he was none other my client, Mr. Bedoz.

After the young woman finished whispering in his ear, he nodded his head. “Very good.” he muttered in confidence.

She then left the table, and all I could see were beasts looking at us curiously as to whether we would make a good meal.

“Mr. Henri Losphult! It is a pleasure to have you aboard our vessel!” Mr. Bedoz spoke aloud, breaking the growing tension.

Henri closed his eyes and smirked, putting his hands on his head in smug pride. “Pleasures all mine. Though I wish you guys didn’t ditch us like that.”

Mr. Bedoz chuckled heartily. A couple of the Hunters at the table seemed amused and laughed as well. It seemed not all of them were as vicious as previously thought.

“Well” Mr. Bedoz sighed in relief, rubbing his sweaty red face with a handkerchief. “I’ll explain to you in a moment.” He then looked at me. I braced myself for the attention that was about to be directed towards me. I detested being put on the spot, more so than I realized until I was in these very situations.

“And of course.. Mr. Marco Delanus, I’ve heard great things about you from the Hunter Association!”

I feigned a half smile, my gaze looking across the table. “Thank you for inviting me, Mr. Bedoz.” I politely replied. It was difficult to surmount if my uncomfortable feelings were obvious.

Mr. Bedoz put his handkerchief back in his pocket and his expression took on a more serious manner. “I’m sure you share Mr. Losphult’s sentiment?” I paused briefly, then nodded my head yes.

“I’ve heard your abilities are most interesting indeed, Mr. Delanus.” Mr. Bedoz clasped his hands together and placed them on the table. “So interesting in fact that I realized you were better suited for the voyage back home rather than the expedition.”

I could feel Henri's gaze upon me. I averted my eyes briefly to his. He was staring at me with a perplex determination; he probably didn't remember my name and judging the little bit I already knew from him, he wanted to know what my Nen abilities were. I slowly shifted my gaze across the table and seeing the other two Hunters on his side of the table. The large muscular man next to him was looking at me but with a rather blank expression but next to him was a short woman with bushy hair.

I couldn't really see her eyes as her hair draped over them, but her head was pointed downward; She looked like she was asleep!

"Well, Mr. Delanus" I heard Henri say mockingly. "I didn't know you were so popular! What Nen category do you fall under?" I rolled my eyes. "Conjurer!" Mr. Bedoz proclaimed. I looked and saw he was reading one of the various documents on the table. He began prying into the more detailed aspects of myself for the entire table to hear. I clenched my fist under the table in great annoyance.

"Marco Delanus, age 28, single starred Beast Hunter currently being considered for a double star after his groundbreaking discovery of a new species of Magical Beast that disguises itself as local wildlife.." Mr. Bedoz paused to clear his throat, then continued reading. "Marco has created numerous rehabilitation facilities for endangered Beasts being poached and the inventor of the Nen Wildlife Rehabilitator, a room in which Nen is used to recuperate Beasts and animals alike from trauma, biological injury, infection, and parasitic infestation. Currently awaiting human trials."

The plump dark skinned man jerked his head and looked directly at me. "Get the hell out of here!" he shouted in excitement. The room was momentarily silent. I wasn't sure how to respond to the man's sudden brash attention towards me. "You're THAT Marco Delanus?! MAN, what a treat!!" He was very jubilant; I could tell by the shimmer in his eyes that he was a kind soul.

"Fernus!" chuckled Mr. Bedoz. "I hadn't seen you this excited since our chefs made those biscuits you loved for lunch!"

Fernus ignored the old man's quips and continued talking. "My name is Fernus Nottingham. I'm also a Beast Hunter, but I'm not quite as involved in the field as you are." He said sheepishly. "You're in luck, cause we didn't really encounter any Beasts along the way aside from the flying creatures in this entire area and beyond towards the Dark Continent...but man do I have stories!!"

We had begun to discuss the many bizarre rumored creatures encountered in the Dark Continent. He went on about the Managuano Centipede, an alleged specimen that Fernus had investigated. It emerges out of the rectum of victims who breathe in the eggs which float like spores. When it exits its host, it is said to feel like a normal bowel movement until the jittering of tiny legs and long retracting antennas was were felt shortly after the pain of your rectum being ripped. Most victims don't die but their rectums are left in a state of disrepair. There was a small infestation on a fishing island not too far from here that local fisherman contracted that he had to help purge; whatever that means.

Mr. Bedoz cleared his throat. Fernus jerked forward and laughed nervously. "Oh! I'm sorry I didn't mean to get so carried away! Sorry if the conversation was inappropriate!" Henri laughed along with Fernus and I.

The other Hunters were silent; the large muscular man finally spoke. "There's no need to lie to them, Fernus." he said. "We most certainly did encounter a Beast." Fernus looked confused at the man and then realized what he had meant. "Well, I guess but we still don't know - "

Mr. Bedoz rose out of his chair. "Not another word!" he said aggressively. "We will talk about *that* in due time."

I was immediately piqued, as was Henri who crossed his arms and was not looking to be jerked around anymore. "What the hell are you going on about? What did you encounter out there?" The large muscular man next to Henri was physically bigger than him, but Henri did not seem intimidated by his size. "I think Marco and I have the right to know what it is we are being used for."

The muscular man nodded his head in agreement. However, a voice that I hadn't heard chimed in.

"Mr. Bedoz just said you were going to find out in due time. Be patient. Your job doesn't require you to know every single thing involved in the mission aside from what you were assigned to do."

I turned my head behind Fernus and saw a rather young woman, around the same age as me in fact. She had long purple hair and judging from her harsh tone, had a fiery personality.

However, Henri didn't seem to care. "Excuse me miss, but I don't give a damn what you think should be appropriate or not. I was promised a trip to the Dark Continent and was jipped out of that, so the least you people could do is fill us in."

Mr. Bedoz tried to end the feud but it was already too late. He stammered his words but the purple hair girl fired back.

"It's not my fault you two were disqualified from the expedition mission and were used for utility roles. Therefore, I'm not entitled to tell you anything. Just shut up, do your job and there won't be any problems."

Henri lifted his furry eyebrows. His eyes looked like an eagle ready to swoop in on its prey. "Problems from who, you? That's hardly much of a threat. Way I see it, there's already a problem. I have a very short temper, so I would love to avoid ripping your tongue out." The purple haired girl laughed in defiance and shot out of her chair. "Oh yeah, bushy eyed geezer? Try it!" She proceeded to stick her tongue out and make an "mmmmmm" sound.

Fernus sighed and massaged his temples. "Alistahr, just let it go. I really don't want to have a repeat of what happened to that personnel attendant..".

She stopped sticking her tongue out and looked at Fernus. "That bastard had no business telling me I had forgotten my supply bag! I told him I didn't need it so there!" She

clearly had issues, coupled with her aggressive personality made her a bit too much for my liking.

“Alistahr, can you just be quiet for once.” Said the large muscular man. He spoke very calmly. Perhaps I was wrong about him being an Enhancer?

“Yeah, bitch. Nobody wants to smell your nasty breath.” chuckled Henri. Alistahr gasped in offense and was ready to go on a tangent regarding some choice words, but we all went silent just before she spoke.

“SHUT UP!” shrieked the bushy haired girl. She must have woken up. She clearly had used Nen to amplify the shriek because it echoed unnaturally throughout the room. Everyone at the table jumped.

Mr. Bedoz cleared his throat. “Thank you, Jasper. Please, tell me what you saw.”

What she saw? What did he mean by that?

“Before I begin, may I please say something to those present at the table?” politely asked Jasper. She had a surprisingly soft voice. “Of course, my dear.” She stood up on her chair, propped herself on the table and made her way over to the center. She was petite and was wearing pajamas. She was wearing footwraps around her barefeet and scrunched her toes as she begun to speak.

“My name is Jasper Geist. I would like to propose something so we can finish this mission with as little problems as possible. I believe we should all state our names, our abilities chosen for this mission and address the concerns of the two gentlemen who came late to the party.” The table was near unanimous with only Henri and Alistahr refusing to vote. I was relieved there was at least one diplomatic person at this table.

Jasper Geist was an Emitter who utilized her ability, Astral Journey, to detach herself from her body and travel great distances. She was asleep initially so she didn't know who Henri and I were yet. Jasper was instructed to follow the travel route of the Gyllis and

investigate any international police or potential obstacles in the way. She encountered a few ships heading southeast from our destination, but after going aboard the ships she was able to confirm they had no detection of the Gyllis Primus. Her role was just that; investigation, which suited her well as she was a renowned detective who served as a Terrorist Hunter. She was the youngest person here, having just turned 20 years old. She was a genius, and I suspected she was not revealing everything about her abilities.

I was the second to talk. I stated my name and went into detail about the abilities I was using for this mission. I was a Conjurer as mentioned before, but I had a variety of practical objects I used. My hatsu was called "Liquid Metal; Malleable Construction" which has a blend of Transmutation and Conjuraton; it was quite literally a nicely sized ball of liquid metal. I could make an object and attach conditions to it, though I could never use those objects or conditions ever again once they were dispelled. For the mission I conjured a set of small needles that when implanted in a person or object I would know where it was at all times given they are within a 200 meter space. The ship itself was over 400 meters, but this was mainly to keep track of specimen and Hunters on duty. I was also able to conjure most items with simple conditions that I could create sparingly, the small needles being one of them, which gave me great versatility.

Henri was next. He stated his ability of enhancing or diminishing the rate of temperature in an object or person. However, he went on to talk about how this was but a secondary hatsu he developed to assist him and his comrades in war when he sabotaged enemy energy power plants and spoiling their food supplies by throwing off the temperature. His actual hatsu was more combat oriented and great for fighting large groups. By utilizing Shu and Ko on his weapons, he was able to pull a variety of devastating techniques.

Each bullet from a gun exploded like grenades upon hit, while each grenade thrown exploded more like a bomb. His combat knife was able to slice through opponents like butter and didn't allow blood to coagulate, meaning they would bleed out from even small wounds. He boasted his fists were enough to take on a small militia, bragging about how he once took out a group of 40 soldiers by punching each one into the wall and turning them to human mush. His Nen allowed the velocity and speed of an object thrown or punched to continue for much longer periods of time, meaning a person he punched would go great distances.

The large muscular man next to him was actually a chemist and Chemical Element Hunter named Dr. Dom Heltwood. To my surprise, he was a Manipulator turned Specialist. Despite his large physical size, he was not as combat oriented as Henri. Dom took up bodybuilding as a sport and has won several worldwide competitions. When he achieved his prime, he realized his Nen had also changed. His original hatsu had the ability to control anything with liquid, as he was able to control the water and blood flow in his muscles, but it later evolved into allowing him to control anything liquid, break down its structure into molecules, learn what the molecules are, and reassemble it into another element with the same atomic structure. Whether he could control the liquid in another person's body and break it down into chemicals was something he didn't say, which left me a bit unsettled.

Fernus Hyoko was a Beast Hunter. He functioned as an Enhancer who actually focused his Nen proficiency in Emission and Transmutation respectively. Although not a fighter, his ability was certainly useful in a fight; he is able to transmute his organs into the characteristics of any animal he can think of and use that to his advantage; he could also emit his senses around like a beast, further breaking the limits of even the sharpened senses of animals. If he so chose, he could both transmute and enhance his muscles to take on the strength of a gorilla or a tiger. His hatsu, Chimera Transcendence, allowed him to use up to three animal traits at a time, making him a human-animal hybrid with senses that exceed both animals and man. His role was to analyze any Beasts they encountered and to keep track of their surroundings.

The purple haired girl was reluctant but revealed herself. Her full name was Alistahr Houzer, who was a professional MMA fighter as well as a Martial Artist Hunter and contract bodyguard. She has founded several disciplines of martial arts based on her natural understanding of the body and flow of Nen when in combat. She was an Enhancer as well but she was pure combat oriented. Her role was essentially protecting the Hunters from any encounters with her hatsu, Fists of Glory. Depending on what stance she took, she was able to fully counter physical hits or deal devastating damage with her Nen infused martial arts. She was a one woman army and was always looking for a fight. Her role was to make sure the other Hunters were not being attacked by any creatures, but has been by Mr. Bedoz's side for most of the trip.

The girl who was utilizing the radar jamming ability was named Jane Estrella. Her sole job was to make sure the ship remained undetected. She wasn't a Hunter but rather an accomplice Jasper Geist recommended to bring aboard. I wasn't too sure about their relationship with each other. Jane, despite her Nen ability, was forbidden to be in the room with us.

Most bizarre of all, I was taken aback to find out that Mr. Faust Bedoz himself was able to use Nen. He was a Transmuter who had the ability to change his clothing at will into various sets of protective gear as well as the color of any object. He claimed it was for vanity and cosmetic purposes as he hated changing clothes and that his wife always complained about changing the color of their drapes. He had by far the most useless ability for this mission, though he didn't strike me as someone who could use Nen. He didn't reveal where he had learned Nen, though my intuition tells me it was in a manner most dubious indeed. He ended his explanation with the words that I had been dying to hear.

"Well..I suppose it is time to show you what it is we found."

Mr. Bedoz pressed a button on his phone and a large metallic door opened far behind us. Cold, chilling air poured out of the black abyss; there was no light to be seen inside from where I sat. It was more like the entrance to a haunted ruin than a cryo laboratory. The low humming emitting from the freezing entrance sounded like the distant bellows of a great sea beast lying in the depths. Mr. Bedoz was first to go inside, followed by Alistahr who protected the client at all times, then the rest. They grabbed their insulated jackets which had high padding and threw their hoods on. A small visor was attached, which closed the face piece.

"I'll have my personnel deliver your jackets at once." muffled Mr. Bedoz through his face mask. Despite being able to "change clothes", he had put on his jacket like the rest of the Hunters.

"Nonsense! I think Marco and I will manage." Henri patted my back with enough force that it bordered on assault.

"It's beyond freezing in there!" I said with reluctance.

"It's -150 C to be exact." replied Dom. I looked over at Henri, who was looking back at me with a cheeky smirk.

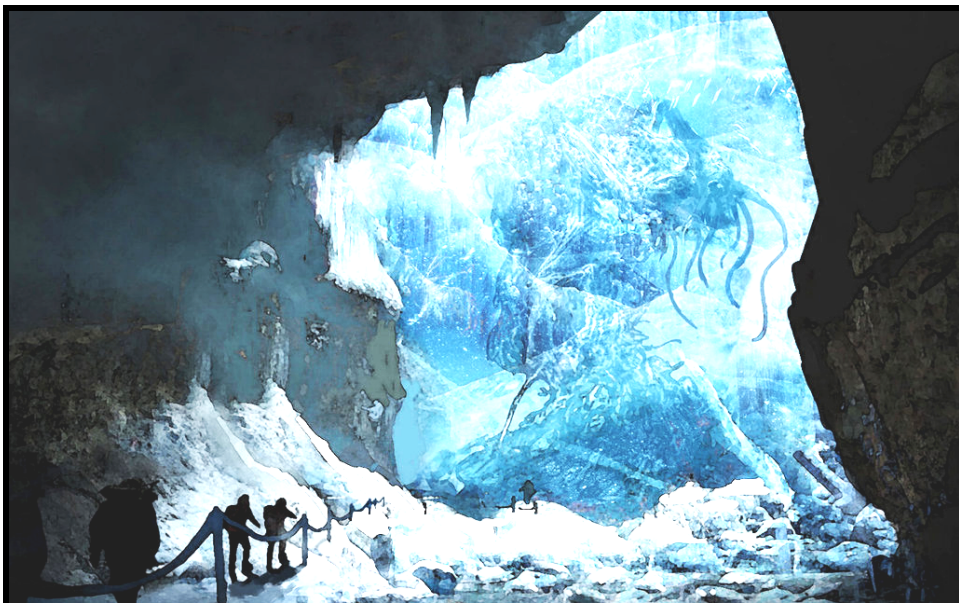
"Do you have to touch your target for your ability to activate?" I asked?

"Who knows." he said in deadpan. He was a cheeky bastard, but he slowly began to grow on me.

We walked inside and I didn't feel anything. Of course, I was very slowly being affected by the -150 Celsius but Henri kept his hand on my back. It appeared it worked on himself as well as whatever he touched. I was able to see faint blue lights on the walls with plant life, rocks, debris, and even small dead organisms. They were rodent like, with large bat wings folded in on itself, and had two large sacks on their neck that seemed to function like lungs.

We went deeper inside, and came to a halt.

Mr. Bedoz stood in front of a large mass of blackness. There was no light shining on it. "You asked what it was we found." He said through the grating sounds of his mask. I saw the light of his phone; for a moment I thought he was going to shine a flashlight on the hulking black mass that rested before us. I had briefly caught a glimpse of solid ice. As he pressed a button, several lights shone from behind and around the mass, it was revealed to be a large piece of ice; remnants of an iceberg to be exact. It must have weighed over a ton alone. But what I then saw made my heart sink.



A large red mass was observable through the ice. It was definitely humanoid, though I couldn't make out any other limbs or appendages due to the way it was frozen. It was hunched over, almost as if it

was curled up into a ball trying to protect itself. Despite being in such a position, it was gargantuan. Even while curled up, it was still much bigger than Dom who himself was easily 6'7. The ice separating us from this thing was only about 4 or 5 feet yet it felt much closer. There were tentacled masses that seemed like growths on the beast, towering 30 feet or higher. I felt something which I have never felt before; an almost fleeting feeling except my body felt like it was being carried away. I felt myself disassociating in that moment, observing this thing almost from a third person perspective as if I wasn't in my own body.

I couldn't make out more precise details about the entity that was in front of me, but I could see claws at the end of its large feet and long boney fingers. There was black hair on its chest and a large white mane draped around its neck that seemed to extend to its back; I couldn't make out its face as it was looking down. This thing was unlike anything I have ever seen. I had a quick flashback of that picture of the relief that Henri showed me just before getting on the ship, but this entity looked nothing like those creatures.

I wondered in that moment if there were things in this world that meant to remain frozen away.

Chapter Two - Isomorphism

Upon leaving the cryo laboratory, Mr. Bedoz gave us several documents. It stated our designated tasks as to par our agreement. Jasper was assigned to surveillance at designated times and was to report her findings. Dom and Henri were assigned to "Research" as written on the document; Dom was tasked with analysis, sampling his findings, and organizing the data to be observed further by the individuals studying the data in Mr. Bedoz's high-tech meeting room. Henri would simply be holding the samples while they were out of cryo. This would go on the entire day starting tomorrow.

Fernus was assigned to security with me, making sure everything was ok. Alistahr was of course assigned as Mr. Bedoz's full time bodyguard and accompanied him at all times. I gave everyone my pins so that I could keep track of them and we left the high-tech meeting room.

Henri and I decided to grab some food. I was still in a dissociated state from observing the frozen red entity; something about that thing did not sit well in my stomach. I couldn't make out if it was due to the physical superiority it had over every single one of us or if it was because of the vibe it gave off. I used Gyo to confirm if it was just my gut; I saw nothing coming from the frozen mass. I just wanted to discuss my thoughts with Henri; just what *was* that thing?

Jane Estrella and Jasper met up and walked off down the corridor while Dom and Fernus were hanging back with Mr. Bedoz, presumably discussing their roles. Alistahr was also still there, due to her assignment to protect the client. We entered the large metal doors and into a surprisingly decorated cafeteria. There were several cooks and a chef working tirelessly in the kitchen. The smell was impeccable.

"Damn. Hope the grub is ready cause I need food to calm my nerves." chuckled Henri, stretching his arms over his head. I agreed, and asked a cook if any food was available to eat. The cook told us the chef had prepared a chaufa fried rice medley of fresh fish caught just before restocking back at the man made island as well as some sushi and meticulously crafted sweets with icing painted on by none other than a world renowned artist. The cook notified us the chef was a Gourmet Hunter whose sole purpose was to provide delicious food the remainder of the trip.

Henri was given two massive bowls of the chaufa fried rice; it was decorated with various colorful vegetables as well as smoked house made chorizo and exotic seafood from these waters. I made sure to grab some of the fancy desserts, silverware and made my way to the table Henri picked. My stomach was yearning for food; I hadn't realized how famished I was. Henri was already feasting on his bowl while I had just begun.

"Man, what a day." I said in a feigned humorous tone. Henri just grunted in response as he continued to wolf down the food in front of him. It was damned good, a delicious reminder of the value of Gourmet Hunters.

Henri slowed down his eating and looked down at the table.

“Marco.” He said, with a blank tone in his voice. I continued eating but watched him for a response. “In all my years in combat and fighting vicious monsters, humans worse than monsters, and seeing things no person should ever see in this world, I felt something beyond that when I saw that... thing.”

I had yet to hear Henri sound so serious. He spoke in a very militaristic manner but his voice was much softer than before.

“Yeah, I was a bit unsettled myself.” I said, downplaying my actual feelings. My ego wanted to make myself seem much more confident than I actually felt.

“Unsettled? I have to have my *hand* on that thing and make sure the ice doesn’t thaw out! Don’t talk to me about unsettled!!”

We both laughed heartily and ate some more. We proceeded to talk about our impressions of the people on the boat; Henri gave his stamp of approval on everyone in the meeting room but when I asked about Alistahr he seemed to be more sheepish. “She’s alright, I guess.” I didn’t think much of it.

We parted ways and went to bed. Everyone was still detectable due to the pins I gave them. I had to get up at 6 am to assist Fernus in standard surveillance procedure. My room was very small and cramped, like on a Navy ship. I honestly didn’t care where I slept. It must have been almost midnight at this point. After showering in the bathroom down the hall, I came back to my room and collapsed. I didn’t really understand why I was so tired. I suppose switching time zones is the reason but I’ve done so consistently in the past and have gotten used to it. My mind drifted into my thoughts, which then drifted into the abstract realm of my subconscious.

Except, something wasn’t quite right.

I found myself in a very dark room. I tried to observe the surroundings, but it was for naught. It was not until I recognized the large black mass in front of me that I realized I was inside the cryo laboratory. My heart began to race as I anticipated to see the frozen demon

once more; yet the light did not turn on. However, despite this I felt it's presence and knew it was with me in the dark. A feeling of primal instinct rushed through me like a trapped rabbit being cornered by wolves. There was no escape.



The sound of a horn bellowed in the darkness. It's pitch was ominously deep, almost like the blaring of a ship's horn. It felt more and more like the announcement of something ancient and there was nothing that could be done. The bellowing got louder and louder, swimming forth from the depths of the darkness; was it some kind of monster?

Something else was inside with us. I braced myself to be devoured or dismembered by whatever hidden thing approached me. The sky opened up and there was devastation seeping inside the cryo lab; debris, ashes, and the smell of burnt flesh descended from the crackling magma colored

skies. A strange creature descended to me, like the Angel of Revelations came down to John, and grabbed me. I tried to use Nen but for some reason it didn't work. It spread its infernal wings and flew up into the volcanic hell-colored sky and to my sight I had realized I was truly in a nightmare.

Destruction of the known world laid barren across the familiar landscapes I once knew. I was gripped by the strange creature's talons which dug into my shoulders. I tried desperately to wake up but my body refused. We were heading to a structure in the distance; the geometric shapes were beyond anything that I had ever witnessed. Chanting had echoed from the structure. As the creature drew me closer to this demonic abomination, the chanting got louder and louder. I couldn't make out the language. We flew above a large mass of people. They were emaciated, performing blasphemous rituals as a way to appease this large structure and grant them some form of peace.

But the structure stood stoically in their suffering.

We flew high above to the top of the structure and there awaited in a throne sat an entity; no, a monster. It had mouths upon its deformed body, gnawing on small corpses. I could not help but wonder if they were dead children. It was pale, with a protruding spinal cord and a bulbous mass of flesh on its neck that seemed to act as a breathing apparatus. Upon its main head was a floating golden ball of aura which seemed to serve as a twisted version of a halo. The demonic creature dropped me there and left me with this abomination. I looked up to the horror before me; it had a mass of tentacles where its legs should be and upon its misshapen large head was a crown made of bone. I couldn't make out any signs of compassion on its face; just mouths divided in three sections. The middle mouth swallowed its meal and spoke to me.

"Thou shalt be the great messenger. Embrace thine destiny."

It extended its elongated neck and went in to consume me but I was met with the wailing sound of my alarm and woke up.

My stomach felt bloated. Perhaps it wasn't a good idea to eat so much before bed. As I rose and prepared

for my assigned duties, I felt rather drained; my aura seemed rather normal but my focus and overall alertness were dwindled.

Some coffee would do the trick. Upon washing up, I checked the pins I planted on the Hunters; everyone was where they were supposed to be. As I headed for the cafeteria, the nightmare I had was still fresh in my mind; I could still smell the burning flesh and the putrid smell of the bizarre entity that spoke to me. I was rather taken aback by the disturbing imagery, but recalling the words of a Disease Hunter, it was probably just the culmination of all my anxiety from recent events. It certainly made sense; the imagery of the dead child from



the relief, the cryo lab, and my overall anxiety with what Mr. Bedoz found.

Someone slapped my back. I turned and expected to see Henri but to my surprise it wasn't.

"Sleep well, champ?" Asked Fernus with an unnatural burst of energy. I never understood morning people.

"Not really.. I think I ate too much and didn't really get a lot of sleep." I muttered as I prepared my first cup of coffee. I added the sugar and cream while Fernus continued to talk.

"Yeah, I haven't gotten a whole lot of sleep either since coming back from the Dark Continent. I guess I'm still riled up from coming back and surviving!" Fernus laughed loudly. I tried my best to hide my annoyance.

"An impressive feat, no doubt." I said, stirring my thick paper cup. The smell of high quality coffee calmed my body down.

Fernus then said something that interested me.

"Dom and I were just talking last night about how he couldn't sleep." He said with a slightly serious tone. "His reasoning was that he was excited to begin working on their findings."

I sipped the piping hot coffee; it was damned good. Fernus was quiet for a couple seconds and continued talking.

"I did have a weird dream last night."

I turned my head. I saw his eyes widen no doubt in reaction to the expression of shock on my own face. My heart began racing. "About what?" I asked in a feigned calm tone. I tried not to rile him up; but there is no helping morning people.

"Well, I was a dog. Then I was visited by a young woman who said she was my deceased grandma. She wasn't speaking in a language I knew but I understood what she was saying." I

began to sip my coffee and calm my body down with the soothing caffeine. Fernus continued speaking. "She kept saying the phrase *'De'zi al ma'al kurta'* repeatedly.

De'zi al ma'al kurta...now that I think about it, it does sound familiar. Though, I wasn't really sure where it came from. It sounded very foreign, almost middle eastern but not quite right phonetically. It was indeed a strange language but something about it sounded eerily familiar.

Then it happened.

I had lost trace of Mr. Bedoz. I notified Fernus and we dropped the conversation. I chugged the coffee as fast as I could and bolted out the cafeteria to the meeting room from last night; that was where Dom, Henri and Alistahr were at. Alistahr hadn't left Mr. Bedoz side at all so he undoubtedly was still there. Fernus was using his Nen ability to track down Mr. Bedoz's scent by transmuting his nose to that of a wolf. "He should still be in the meeting room." said Fernus confidently. He relied on his ability for a multitude of things so I trusted his judgement.

We burst through the doors. Everyone turned their heads to us; Dom was holding a clipboard with an assortment of papers, Henri was holding onto a large sheet of ice with small creatures and rocks, while Alistahr stood relatively close to the two.

"Can I help you?" asked Alistahr snarkily.

Fernus got on all fours and began sniffing around. "We came to check up on Mr. Bedoz."

Henri chuckled and turned his head to Alistahr; "It's cause you're not doing your job, now you have these two doing it for ya'!"

She crossed her arms and made it clear in her body language she was resisting Henri's instigation. "Mr. Bedoz left to his quarters to drop off a copy of the data we acquired in his filing cabinet. He asked me to stay behind."

Dom silently jotted down on his clipboard, completely detached from everything transpiring. He only cared about acquiring as much data as possible for his own personal curiosity.

“That’s impossible.” stated Fernus. “I would have smelled him in the hallway if that were the case. His most recent scent is inside this room; unless there is another way out, you’re either lying or you made a mistake.”

I was not sure why Fernus was acting so confrontational. I didn’t realize he took himself so seriously.

Alistahr responded in a harsh manner. “Maybe your Nen abilities aren’t as good as you think they are, little pup.”

Fernus stood on his legs. I could sense his aggressive aura from here. “Answer me now; is there another way out of here?”

Henri was amused by all this. “Damn wolfie, are you going to just stand there and take that?” If there was one thing I learned about Henri is that he took pleasure in causing conflict.

“Knock it off, you three.” said Dom.

Henri scowled at him for interrupting his fun while Fernus and Alistahr were going back and forth to satiate their own egos. Fernus was very insecure about his abilities and was trying to prove himself.

I knew when it was time to diffuse a situation. Nobody at all seemed worried about what happened to our client.

“We have more pressing matters to attend to then deciding whose dick is bigger than the others.” I said in annoyance. I couldn’t believe how childish they were acting. “Alistahr, I suggest you tell us if there is another way out of this meeting room so you can make our lives

easier." Alistahr paused for a moment; she still had some choice words pent up that she wanted to get out, but withheld them. "No, only the emergency exit that takes you directly to the main deck. He went through the main door."

Fernus was not convinced. "If he isn't in his room, we are going to have a serious issue." Alistahr looked at my partner with amusement. "Oh yeah? Or else what?" I could feel the aura coming from both of them now; a fight was inevitable.

I put my arm in front of Fernus. "Mr. Bedoz removed his pin. I can no longer track him; if he isn't in his room we are holding you responsible for not escorting him to his quarters."

Alistahr rolled her eyes. Henri seemed to already lose interest in instigating.

"Let's go, Fernus." I stated.

He declined. "No, I'll check on Mr. Bedoz. You make sure she doesn't try to escape." He bolted off on all fours and left the room.

"Yeah, you better hope he's in there or you're going to have your organs plastered all over the room!!" Henri chuckled.

Alistahr turned her head toward Henri and laughed with him. How unexpected to see them get along so suddenly. They actually seem to really enjoy each other's company.

"Are you ready to proceed to the next specimen, Dr. Heltwood?" said a familiar voice. It was the young woman from yesterday who gave Mr. Bedoz those documents.

"Yes Dr. Yule, input this data and proceed to the next subject to be examined on the list." He handed his clipboard to the young woman, who ran up to the second floor to give to the others inputting the data. She came back downstairs and opened the cryo lab door. Henri walked into the dark void of the entrance as Dr. Yule threw on a suit and went in with him. Just what was she up too?

I walked over to Dom, who was completely removed from the situation. "This is astounding work, Marco." He said with excitement.

"Oh?" I said with a slight interest. I wanted to know what it was he was so excited about. Surely they haven't examined that monstrosity yet.

He took me upstairs to the second floor of the meeting room. A large digital image of the creatures he examined appeared.

"Are you familiar with the term 'isomorphism'?"

"Nope." I said truthfully. "Does it have something to do with shapes?"

Dom smiled as more data shot across the digitized walls.

"It can be; Isomorphism has multiple definitions throughout mathematics and science. Take these creatures on the wall for example; they are what biologists would call isomorphs. They biologically are near identical to the Ghuver Packrat found in most countries, yet these creatures possess wings and a strange secondary lung system within their throat."

The screen changed to some of the ice that was observed. "Isomorphism in chemistry is when two or more substances are found in a crystal form; this ice though not quite a crystal, possessed a wide variety of substances not known to science." The ice on the screen then zoomed in further, revealing beautiful geometric patterns that were clearly not natural in ice patterns. "Isomorphism is also observed in shapes, like the ones you see before you."

They were erratic and unlike anything I've ever seen.

I sensed Henri walk outside the Cryo lab. "You sure you don't need help?" I heard him say. Dom folded his hands behind his back and looked up, immersed in his thoughts. "Isomorphism is also a sociological concept that refers to how a group of people adapts to be like another group. These fall under three subcategories; the first is called normative where you adapt to norms and roles from your profession; being a Hunter you take on the social

prejudices that come with being a Hunter. Look at these clowns below, always arguing about whose strongest. It's the classic repertoire of the Hunter...to prove whose strongest."

He glanced at Alistahr, who was sitting in a chair, arms crossed. I listened to Dom with a rather unusual focus. I suppose it was no surprise he would be so insightful.

"The second is called Mimetic Isomorphism, in which a group imitates another group because it's beneficial or safer. You can say that Mr. Bedoz hiring us Hunters on board is Mimetic Isomorphism so as to have that feeling of safety; I am sure he could have done this expedition with just a couple of us, but he wanted to feel he was meeting the vision in his mind as to what it meant to be 'leading a proper expedition.' More Hunters means the security of his own vision, not necessarily a means of efficiency. I would argue it's more counterproductive to have so many Hunters in one vessel."

He turned around to view the main room, as did I. I saw Dr. Yule holding over her head a behemoth iceberg; it was the creature they found.

"The third one is called coercive isomorphism. It relies heavily on another group and will die if it doesn't meet the standard."

I was observing the fact this young girl was lifting over a ton over her head; how many men users were on board that I wasn't told about?

"Well." said Dr. Hentwood, gritting his teeth in excitement. "Time to get to work on the main course!"

Henri shouted up to us. "Marco, get a load of this thing..you can see more of it in actual light!"

My morbid curiosity made me run down the stairs. I looked forward and saw the large red humanoid mass. I didn't see anything different at first. However, as I got closer I noticed a few more things. It's claws seemed sharper than I remembered, it's high muscle tone was slightly visible and the size of its limbs were immense. The white mane around its head still

made it difficult to see its face. I actually wasn't even sure if that was a mane or some other strange creature wrapped around it's head.

Dom screamed in excitement across the room.

"We're going to make history!!" It was a bit unsettling to hear him with that amount of enthusiasm.

He seemed a little too obsessed.

As he uttered those words, Fernus erupted back into the room; and he wasn't alone. As I turned, I saw Jasper was with him.

"What's the deal?" grunted Alistahr, as she shot up from her seat.

"A vessel is approaching us at an unusually high speed." Said Jasper. "We're going to be intercepted in about 10 minutes." I could see Fernus was calmer, but his look was much more fierce. It wasn't until he spoke that I realized why.

"Mr. Bedoz is gone."

"Fernus." Shouted Alistahr. Fernus looked over at the spunky girl. "I take full responsibility for what happened. I'll let you pound my face in after we find Mr. Bedoz." Fernus smirked. "I appreciate the sentiments, but we have work to do." Before I knew it, both Fernus and Alistahr sprinted out of the room. Henri let out a loud sigh as he saw her go.

"It's the Hunter Association." Jasper said as she twirled her messy hair.

Chapter 3: Nen Aberration

I couldn't believe it. The *Hunter Association* was en route?

Adrenaline shot through my body as I did my best to devise a strategy to cover our asses. We only had ten minutes to devise a plan that ensures they don't find any confidential material. Luckily, we entered sanctioned waters a half hour ago so they can't get us on grounds of breaking anything; that is, so long as they don't discover the specimens recovered...or worst still, the beast locked away in it's tomb of ice. To make matters worse, Mr. Bedoz vanished without a trace.

We're in serious trouble.

"Dom!" shouted Jasper. "We need to hide this!"

"And how do you expect me to do that?" asked the hulking man. He was entranced by the beast in the iceberg.

"Protocols were in the documents given to us yesterday in the case we get boarded by international police."

Jasper pulled out one of those documents with a map and some scribbles.

"Directly below us is a chamber that is not shown on the ships specifications. The only way in is through a Nen activated security system."

"A what now?" I asked with great intrigue.

"Only Mr. Bedoz, Alistahr and I know the code. It was designed by a contracted Hunter that specializes entirely in Nencryptology."



I wasn't even aware such a thing existed -but the world of Nen is ever expanding. You never know what you might come across.

"So then what do you expect me to do." said Dom again with no emotion in his voice. His aloofness was proving to be a liability. He just kept staring at the block of ice.

"Isn't it obvious!?" shouted Jasper. "We need to start moving the specimens down below!!" Dom shot a look at Jasper but said nothing.

Something was definitely not right here.

Jasper ignored Dom's apathetic response. "Dr. Yule, we need your help transferring the specimens into the chamber."

"I'll call for more personnel to assist us." Said Dr. Yule as she turned to page in more people.

"Stop!!" shouted Jasper. "The less the crew know about it the better. This needs to stay with everyone present in the room now. That way we can eliminate anybody who might crack under the Hunter Associations interrogation."

"But what about Fernus and Alihstar?" I questioned. "You have been around them longer than I have. Can we trust them as well?"

Jasper twirled her hair and begun wiggling her toes and her voice calmed down. "I trust them. After our adventure in the Dark Continent and the amount of time we spent together, I can vouch for them."

I looked over at Dom, who was mesmerized by the massive demon encased in ice.

"Just what the hell are you staring at?" asked Henri. He was in accordance with me that something about him was off.

Dom then said something that made the hairs on my body stand.

“The ice.... It’s melting.”

We all looked at the massive iceberg. It was hard to notice at first glance, but the iceberg was indeed secreting a very thin layer of water. Henri’s eyes widened. He looked to be in flight or fight mode.

“I’m doing everything that I can to slow down the temperature!! What do you mean its melting?!” he barked.

We heard a deep bellowing, like that of a horn. It sounded eerily familiar.. It must have been the Hunter Associations ship!

Dom was able to see the liquid secretion from the slowly melting beast due to his ability. Was that what he was staring at with such focus? Even if that was the case, why didn’t he say anything?

“I don’t doubt it, Henri. But the ice melting at this rate can only mean that there is another heat source. And judging from the water secreting from the iceberg...”

Dom paused, entranced by the shrouded red demon.

“Well, spit it out!!!” Shouted Henri.

“Yes, get to the point. Time is of the essence.” Jasper chimed. Dr. Yule was assembling the specimen on a large cart as Dom continued speaking.

“ The water.. It has traces of aura!”

Silence. The cart full of the Dark Continent stratum and frozen creatures was wheeled back into the cryolab to be transferred to the secret chamber below.

"But...How is that possible?!" I asked Dom fervently. I couldn't retain my emotions at a time like this.

"I'm not entirely sure... but it's possible that it's coming from inside the iceberg!" said Dom gritting his teeth.

"Impossible. No aura is being exhibited by whatever is inside. We checked and continued checking." I said with asureness. Jasper was contemplating while Henri closed his eyes, ignoring the melting beast in his hand.

"Observing the isomorphism of the fluid excretion from the iceberg, it's not a stretch to presume that the aura is from somewhere else."

"What do you mean?" asked Henri. "Where else could the aura come from?!"

"Well, Mr. Losphult." said Dom. "Look around you."

I couldn't believe it. Rather, I refused to believe it.

"Do you mean to infer that this.. *thing* is feeding off our aura?" I blurted. I felt a sense of being violated at the thought of this foreign beast covertly feeding off my life energy.

"It's not improbable. However, I wouldn't quite assume such a thing until this is studied mo-"

"Shut up and let's talk below." said Henri. He picked up the massive creature and took it back into the cryolab. We threw on the suits and went inside.

The deep bellowing echoed outside. It sounded very close.. As if it was right outside the ship.

Jasper pressed her hands against the walls and a wave of aura flashed. Using gyo, I saw bits of symbols flash across the wall and into the surrounding air. I couldn't quite figure out how the nen encryption worked but it was a spectacle to behold. In a few moments, the aura vanished and a door appeared. It was very bizarre in design.

As the door creaked open, Dr. Yule didn't hesitate to roll the large cart filled with the specimens through the passageway. Lights inside the secret room slowly rose in intensity, revealing an elevator.

"This elevator is in a suspended dimension created by the person who encrypted this room" breathed Jasper's filtered voice through her mask. "I'm not at liberty to share the code to any of you as it would only increase our chances of getting caught. I hope you understand."

So there was no secret room on the ship, but rather a suspended dimension hiding behind the nen encrypted door. It would be very difficult for even the Hunter Association to access this, so long as everything was kept away from any form of documentation.

A loud horn echoed outside. The Hunter Association had arrived. We heard a loud thump, no doubt from the boarding bridge. We had to get out of here.

We descended the elevator which took us to another room. It was much simpler in design and infrastructure than the techy cryolab. Dr. Yule put the large cart to the side and Henri placed the iceberg tip on the ground.

"Will the temperature keep it solid?" asked Henri, wiping his wet hands on his pants.

"Yes; it's a remote facility located far away from the boat that Mr. Bedoz contracted out. And assuming Dr. Heltwoods hypothesis is true, there is no Nen that this... thing can feed off of here. We can access it anytime through the elevator in the suspended dimension - providing you have the "key" to access it of course." said Jasper.

"I will stay here and analyze the creature." said Dom.

"No." said Jasper. "You need to be present on the ship. They have access to whoever is on this boat. Plus, what if this thing *is* feeding off aura? Would you really be so dense in your pursuit for knowledge?"

"I'm not present on the names on the list, among the majority of the Hunters secretly contracted. Just you, Alihstar, and a few no-names. And even if that were true, the temperature in here will keep it at bay. I will be fine here."

Jasper snapped back. "Out of the question. Nobody is staying here."

"You have no rank above me." said Dom. "I will stay if I so choose." The tension was beginning to get heavy. Jasper was small, but she was not afraid to show her fangs.

"I will be forced to use physical means on you, and I'm sure the others here would be inclined to agree that you staying here is a bad idea. "

Dom laughed, as if Jasper told him a joke.

"So you would leave this thing here unsupervised? That's irresponsible and equally as foolish, wouldn't you agree?"

"I don't have time to argue with you, but I agree. Which is why I will be staying here." said Jasper.

"Let's get going." said Dr. Yule Henri was already headed towards the elevator. He wanted to be as far from the beast as possible. Dom said nothing. Nobody could make his facial expression under the cryomask.

"Dr. Yule, stay with me. I need you watching over my body. I will be investigating what is happening on the Gyllis Prime through my ability.

Dr. Yule said nothing, but nodded her head in earnest. "You can count on me."

Henri stood at the entrance of the elevator, arms crossed. "TODAY, PEOPLE."

"I'll be in contact with Marco relaying information I find." said Jasper

I was impressed. "You mean..."

"Yes. Not only can I leave my body but I can communicate with one *and only one* person each time I leave. Marco will be the one I choose due to your level headedness. It works if I touch you in my Astral form. Nobody can hear me speak to you and you can communicate back to me through your thoughts, so long as I'm still touching you."

"I'm staying here as well." Said Dom. "Dr. Yule can see me out after I discern where this isomorphic aura is coming from."

We had no time to continue arguing. I reached my hand out and conjured my hatsu; the metallic sphere churned as I imagined my newest creation.

I conjured a metallic phone with two buttons and a receiver. I handed the phone to Dr. Yule. "The restrictions are that only Dr. Yule can use this phone and what you say can only be sent to this receiver in my hand. In order to use this new creation, the pins I placed on all the Hunters have disappeared and can never be used again. Dr. Yule, all you must do is press the button on the phone and speak through it. I will receive all information but I will be able to hear it in my head. Nobody else can audibly hear it. However, In order for me to respond to you, I must speak into the receiver." The conditions were made.

"What about the second button?" asked Dr. Yule.

"The second button is for emergency. I will hear an alarm and will know something is wrong."

Our plan was solid. I had two ways of communicating with them and Jasper would be our hidden eyes.

"Contact me if you need assistance." I said, waving my hand. I boarded the elevator with Henri and the doors closed.

“Something is wrong” said Henri, speaking in a low serious voice. “Dom has been acting strange since we analyzed that frozen creature. It’s imperative you keep contact with them as often as you can spare, Marco.”

“Duly noted. Now let’s deal with the Hunter Association.” I sighed. This was proving to be more stressful than I had hoped.

The elevator door opened and we rushed out, removing our suits and hanging them up. Scientists were filling the room with different kinds of temperature sensitive material to hide the original purpose of the cryochamber. We walked out the room and to our designated positions presented to us in the contingency documents, that were now destroyed due to protocol.

“I forget what the hell we’re supposed to pretend to be doing.” sighed Henri as he lit his zippo to light another cigar. The smell was soothing.

“You idiot. You’re supposed to be a bodyguard hired by Mr. Bedoz to protect from pirate raids in the area.”

“Oh yea... what about you?” Henri said, putting his hands on his head.

“I’m supposed to be helping with communications in charting the waters to a dummy base somewhere out in the ocean.”

“That’s right. We’re charting waters to add to data that will make going to the Dark Continent possible for future *legal* explorations, which we do have.”

“Maybe it will help humanity out in reaching the Dark Continent with more ease in the future.” said Henri. His eyes were spaced out.

I nodded my head. We went upstairs to the top deck and the waft of the deep ocean air overwhelmed me. The storm was really picking up, the waves crashing mercilessly against the Gyllis Prime.

I saw Alistahr without Fernus, so he was in all likelihood secretly still looking for Mr. Bedoz. He was listed as a Hunter on board this ship but his protocol position was security, so it wasn't strange to see Fernus wasn't present at this time.

However, upon seeing who Alistahr was speaking too, I saw there with her were faces I wish I hadn't seen.

Alistahr pointed her finger at me and Henri as she talked to the three Hunters, two of which I instantly identified and knew this would prove to be very troublesome.

I walked over past the personnel walking about the dock with loads of fuel being taken to storage. They were vaguely aware of the situation but were instructed to do what they would normally do in this situation.

Henri and I approached Alistahr and the Hunters I wish weren't here. They were mid conversation.

"Yes, this is one of them; Marco Delanus. Our communications director." said Alistahr. She was acting pretty professional compared to her immature self yesterday. "Excuse me while I speak to Mr. Bedoz." She walked off.

I reached my hand out to a large framed silver haired man that I already identified. "A pleasure!"

The hulking man was looking at me, but I couldn't see where his eyes were behind those sunglasses. He was holding a large blunt weapon, concealed in some cloth over his shoulder while he kept his spare hand resting idly at his side.

"Delanus..." said the silver haired man. "What's a single star Beast Hunter doing as a communications director?"

"Well Mr. Mackernasey -"

"Please. Call me Morel." he chuckled to himself.. I wasn't surprised another single-star Hunter was able to recognize who I was by name, let alone him. Morel was someone in the Hunter community that was well connected, and quite frequently crosses over into domains such as Beast Hunting and the like.



Between the other two Hunters Morel brought, I recognized one in appearance alone and the other I was unaware of. From the one Hunters large stature - he was the same size as Dom - dreadlocks and iconic hawaiian flower shirt, he was none other than Jakari Djemorok. His smooth dark skin caught my eye. He stood there, towering over me, looking down through his cheap plastic sunglasses at me.

"They must be paying you well to be here" boomed the rasta man's voice.

"Not nearly enough." Chimed in Henri, cheekily smiling. This bastard amazed me sometimes.

"Jakari, right? So tell me, is it true you captured that Phantom Troupe member?" asked Henri with earnest. I couldn't believe how he could be so crass, but he did lighten the mood a bit.

"Well now - someone has done their homework." said Morel. "You're not as dumb as you look."

"I try to impress." said Henri in deadpan. "I read up on my fellow Hunters when I can." I rolled my eyes.

"Well, that was expunged from the Hunter Site, so there must be other blacklist sites popping up still." groaned Jakari.

I had noticed a white headphone in his ear. I knew as well that he captured the Phantom Troupe member Feitan, though sometime after turning him to the agency that hired him, he escaped. Worst still, nobody outside his close circle knew what Jakari's hatsu was... so he must be very formidable.

I watched the white headphone in his ear through my peripheral, as the third Hunter spoke.

"Grachan De Santos. Deep Sea Hunter. Not as famous as these guys, I guess." he sighed with reluctance. His hands were in his pockets. He was definitely concealing something in them.

"So you're *all* Deep Sea Hunters?" I asked, pretending not to notice Grachan's obvious hand placement.

"Indeed. We were actually in pursuit of something of interest until we saw an uncharted boat this close to Dark Continent waters." said Morel.

"Must be good if you were dragged all the way out here." said Henri smugly.

"Well" said Morel, looking at me. "I'm surprised you didn't detect it."

I was puzzled as to what he meant. "Well we did detect that loud horn of yours. Must have payed a pretty penny to blast something that loud."

The three Hunters all stared at me.

"That was no horn." said Morel.

"No. It was a monster." Said Jakari.

My heart began to race.

"Serpentine. Estimated 45-60 feet long. I'm amazed your radar didn't pick it up."

"It was...headed this direction?" I asked.

"It was. In fact, according to the coordinates we have tracking this creature, it was headed straight towards you. We even have audible recordings of it." said Grachan.

Jakari handed me his headphone. I was shocked at how willing he was to let me hold it.

I placed it in my ear. Morel looked away, examining the Gyllis and talked to Henri about his cigar and how he could keep it lit in this storm. Henri went into detail about how he can enhance and "dehance" temperature.

"It's a bit loud." warned Jakari. "Even if I turn the volume down." He pressed play.

Then I heard it.

Bellowing, deep and with intelligence, almost singing a hymn. It repeated the same notes, and then followed by a deep mono sound.

It was almost like...my dream I had. Flashes of the nightmare, I continued to listen until I couldn't handle it anymore. I took the headphone out of my ear and handed it to him. "It's definitely loud." I said, doing my best to hide my fear.

"You seem unsettled." Said Jakari. Grachan was staring me down. They already suspected we were doing illegal activity this far out, but there was nothing I could do but continue with protocol.

"Well.. that noise was certainly unsettling." I said in response

"That's not the worst of it." said Morel. I held my tongue. Henri let out a puff of smoke, which was immediately stolen by the wind. The rain began to pour.

"Let's get inside." I said. We ran into the inner chambers. Henri took the lead and went straight to the cafeteria. Already, there was hot cocoa, vegetable crudite with veggies I've never seen before, steak, fish, desserts. The colors gave me a semblance of peace..

"So then, what's the worst of it?" Asked Henri as he piled his plate. Morel joined him. Jakari stood next to me while Grachan wandered off to look at the food.

"The worst of it, is that this thing is likely from the Dark Continent" said Jakari. I saw him staring forward, lost in thought.

"How can you be certain?" I asked genuinely.

"Because we were able to detect its sound waves matching an origin point far away from here, in the uncharted waters of the Dark Continent."

I remembered the reliefs Henri showed me yesterday before we boarded the Gyllis. This was beginning to become exceptionally troublesome. That is, until I heard a familiar voice.

"Marco." It was Jasper. She was speaking to me through her ability. "The Hunters here are not visiting on the Hunter Associations behalf, but they still are obligated to report us if they discover any evidence. We can't afford to lose our Hunter licenses for this."

"They're tracking some kind of creature." I responded telepathically. "Any luck finding Mr. Bedoz?"

"I reconvened with Fernus. He said Mr. Bedoz was..."

Jakari handed me a plate. "After you" he said. I missed what Jasper said.

I smiled and begun reaching for the delicious food while I continued speaking through thought.

"What did he say?" I asked. "I didn't quite catch that."

"Mr Bedoz was... found naked in his closet, mumbling some words."

I did what I could to keep my cool, but I dropped the serving spoon. The loud clanking got everyone's attention. I calmly picked it up and wiped it off, setting the dirty spoon aside.

Alistahr entered the cafeteria with Fernus.

"What the hell is wrong with everyone on this boat?" I asked Jasper.

"I dont know. But Fernus was pretty disturbed by it. He said it was a phrase from a dream he had last night."

"Dr. Yule hasn't called me yet, so I take it things are smooth."

"Last I checked, Dom was sitting on the floor staring at the creature. I fear for the worst."

"Dr. Yule is capable." I said with assurance.

"No... it's not that." said Jasper. "Something... is truly wrong."

"What do you mean." I said, pouring myself a cup of cocoa.

"Use Gyo." She said. "Something is wrong."

As I walked to the table of Hunters, I used Gyo and saw what Jasper was referring too.

Small sparkling particles of light slowly floated in the room. It was hypnotizing. They were especially saturated around the Hunters.

"What the hell is this. Is it from one of the Deep Sea Hunters?"

"I don't know. But it seems none of them noticed, or they have and are simply keeping quiet. Be on your guard.. I will contact you again soon."

I took a seat at the table. Alistahr and Henri talked with Morel while Jakari followed me to the table. Grachan was already sitting down with a plate full of sweets. Jane Estrella walked in with a few people from her unit and seemed to be rather upset. It was strange, but tensions were unusually high. Fernus made no point to hide his disturbance, as he stared down at his food lost in thought.

"Communications must be tough with this rain." Said Jakari, grabbing a fried fish and taking a huge bite. "What do you use to keep contact with everyone?"

"Aside from our communications system, I usually use my hatsu to relay information to our base where they research the charting we did." I reached for my cup of hot cocoa.

"Is it that receiver you have hidden under your shirt?" Said Jakari.

I burned my tongue, swallowing the scalding cocoa. This was not looking good.

"Sharp eye." I said.

I saw the Gourmet Hunter peeking their head from behind the kitchen door, admiring us eating the food.

"So, will Mr. Bedoz be joining us?" Asked Morel. "Seems rather odd of him, wouldn't you agree?"

"Mr. Bedoz seems to have contracted something." said Fernus. He sounded defeated.

"He's a rather odd person regardless." Commented Alistahr, fiercely biting a piece of the fresh bread on the table. "Very strange job to say the least."

"That's for damned sure." said Henri, wolfing down a bowl of chowder.

Fernus just stared down at his plate. Morel took notice of his disposition and didn't hesitate to take advantage of the situation.

"Fernus, was it?" smirked Morel. "You wear your emotions on your sleeve."

The Hunters at the table all looked at each other, waiting to see what the other one would do.

"Now, now." said Morel. "You can't hide whatever you're hiding from me any longer."

"Yeah? You mean like Grachan over there hiding that weird trident?" chuckled Henri.

Morel looked over at Grachan. Grachan looked nervous to be put on the spot. I was too busy dealing with the situation and communicating with Jasper to notice.

"Buddy here used it to scratch his back, then dispelled it when he thought nobody could see him!" laughed Alistahr, picking pieces of bread and flicking it at him.

Morel and Jakari both sighed in great disappointment.

"Uhh.." said Grachan.

"Idiot. You're really going to get in trouble on of these days." said Morel.

"Not as much trouble as these guys." said Jakari, standing up.

Everyone went quiet.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

“To check on your friend Mr. Bedoz. It’s evident you lot are hiding something and I’m going to see what this man is muttering to himself. “

Could Jakari read minds? Or allocate sound from another location? Yes, more likely the latter... that explains how he had that recording on hand.

Morel and Grachan stood up as well to accompany their friend, but Alistahr and Henri shot up and blocked the way.

“Stop.” Said Alistahr. “Our client requested to be left alone. Entering without permission will be considered an act of hostility.”

The tension begun to weigh heavy on those in the room, as Henri and Alistahr were the first to use Ren and prepare themselves for battle. This was less than ideal, but they did have a point.

“Jakari.” I said sternly. “Stop.”

“I’ll stop if you can answer me one thing.” He said.

“We’re not obligated to answer anything.” said Fernus, who was now standing next to me.

“De’zi al ma’al kurta...” What does this message mean?” said Jakai; he glared at us from below his cheap sunglasses.

Fernus furrowed his eyes and begun to slowly transform his body.

“You boarded our vessel and you come seeking demands...” growled Fernus. His disposition was now that of a hulking bear, his face that of a dragon. He was prepared to fight to the death! I seemed to be the only one who wanted to find a way around this without fighting, but Hunters would rather fight to the death than give up their status as a Hunter. But even this was too extreme!

“A dream.” said Fernus.

Jakari raised his eyebrow. Fernus snarled at Jakari.

"It's from a dream. Not that it means much to you. Now, stay where you are."

Jakari let out a deep hearty laugh, amused by Fernus's conviction

"Marco!" exclaimed another voice. It was Dr. Yule! "Marco... it's Dr. Heltwood... he's acting strange!"

What was going on now!?

"Well, in accordance to the Hunters Association, we have every right to search this ship." said Jakari. Though, it seemed like he wasn't trying to get everyone in trouble. No.. it seemed like he was itching to see what we would do about him forcing his way into Mr. Bedoz's room. Jakari wanted to fight more than anything... but why?!

"Marco I'm sure you can't respond to me right now... but Dr. Heltwood... He's talking to himself.. Saying strange things. Laughing. He even took his cryosuit off!"

Dom would freeze to death if he had prolonged exposure to the temperature!! I reached for the receiver. There was no point in hiding it if Jakari knew of its existence. He still didn't know who was on the other side speaking.

"Ensure Jaspers does her job." I said being as vague as possible.

I was beginning to notice I was pretty drained myself.

"Jasper!" I cried out in my thoughts.

No response. She must still be surveying around.

"Dr. Heltwood, eh? Another secret Hunter aboard this ship?" asked Jakari.

He heard everything. I was unsure if he was able to hear what Jasper said to me, but it seemed that wasn't the case. He was suspicious long before.

"Taking his clothes off? What kind of ship are you running here?" said Morel.

Morel could hear it too? It must be related to Jakari's ability!! I can't communicate through the receiver.. Worst still, what if Dr. Yule contacts me again and reveals more information... about the trip to the Dark Continent!!

If I destroy communications, Jakari would have no way to listen and the secret would be assured... but I put Jasper, Dom, and Dr. Yule at risk! Worst still, I can't lose track of that frozen creature...

"Damn!!" shouted Henri. I looked back to see the commotion.

Upon looking back and I saw about twenty replicas of Morel and Grachan... and a heavy smokey haze that began concealing them. Morel had an enormous pipe out. Grachan and his clones had their tridents aimed at Alistahr and Henri. The smoke blanketed Alistahr and Henri... I lost sight of them for the moment. However, some of the copies remained outside!! They were attempting to cut us all off!

Finally, a monstrous Ren bursted out of Jakari. Fernus roared, readying his attack. Morel's smoke haze covered the back of the cafeteria. The only way out was through the way Jakari was going, which Fernus and I had covered. I really had no way to support Fernus without conjuring another item and sacrificing communication with Dr. Yule.

Fernus made the first move and chaos ensued.

Chapter 4: God or Devil

Fernus struck Jakari with a powerful blow of his transmuted claws. However, Jakari proved himself a highly formidable Nen user, using Ko to protect his vitals. Jakari's face lit up, drunk

on battle.

“IS THAT ALL YOU GOT??!” Jakari laughed. The rasta man clapped his hands together, emitting an immense sound wave that nearly deafened my ears. My ears rang, discombobulated. I tried to focus on the clones that remained in front of the smoky wall.

Jane leaped and high jump kicked one of the Morel clones, which dissipated into smoke and went into the smoky wall. I was unsure what this meant.

I used Gyo; I couldn't tell which was real. They all had similar traces of aura. Morel was very adept at crafting these Nen puppets. However, I did notice something odd. The mysterious red particles were all dispersed around the copies but more condensed around one them - the real Grachan!! I tried to compose myself from Jakari's attack initial attack and tell my comrades.

I coughed up blood... internal damage?! Jakari needed to be dealt with. Another one of his sound attacks might do serious damage if it can affect vital organs. I was ready to use Ko to protect my ears when Jakari was to ready an attack.

“Hey, pretty boy!” shouted Grachan. I watched him with Gyo conjure a surfboard along side the trident - they were both razor sharp!! He was the one with the most condense red particles around him. He was the only real one!

“Unfortunately for you, it's raining today.” smirked Grachan. Jane did her best to reach the real Grachan.

But it was for naught.

Water poured in out of nowhere!! It flooded the room. I was hit by a huge rush of water, smashing me against a wall. Tables, chairs, and soggy food smashed around the torrent of waves. I was powerless.

Unless...

No. I needed to hold out longer!! I couldn't contact Dr. Yule due to the surge of water and I still haven't heard from Jasper.

Jakari let out a great shout, but it wasn't an attack. Barely able to see, I saw Fernus bite deep into Jakari's arm. Fernus looked like a feral beast - but I was damn glad he was on our side.

Water overtook the room. I did my best to adjust my body to the violent undertoe. I was flung around the room and I smashed into the smoky wall - it was solid! Could water not go inside? I couldn't determine how to proceed as my body helplessly was thrown around the waves.

Grachan and his clones were surfing atop the conjured sea, one of them swished their board on a wave and shot towards me at great speed... he was going in for the kill.

I was dragged down below. Something had grabbed me and yanked me down below the roaring tides. I lost sight of Jane. I saw a great tentacle wrapped around my leg...

Fernus!!

His arm was that of a great tentacle. Fernus was mid transformation, biting down on Jakari who was repeatedly trying to punch him off. Jakari seemed to be trying his luck at holding his breath while Grachan deal with me.

Fernus let go of my leg, focusing on Jakari. I saw the rasta man open his mouth, about to attack again!! But Fernus's tentacle was too fast. He wrapped the tentacle around his face, covering his mouth!!

I covered my mouth. There was nothing I could do. I felt my lungs begin to burn, I wanted to cough up more blood.

I had no choice.

I conjured the metallic sphere - and destroyed the receiver.. Severing contact between Dr. Yule and myself.

I created a scuba mask and immediately placed it on my face! The condition was simple - I didn't have enough time to work out the kinks. I just needed to be able to breathe and communicate through the mask so Fernus could hear me.

I slapped it on my face, the metallic liquid forming around my head. The mask was able to convert the water into oxygen. I was safe - for now.

I saw Jane sinking. I did what I could to make my way to her while Grachan and the clones were above the surface waiting to decapitate the whoever was foolish enough to gasp for air. I inhaled a deep breath and put the mask on her mouth.

She frantically took in as much air as possible.

"You..." said Jane through the metallic mask. I gestured to her that I was to remove the mask. She took a deep breath and I swapped back to my face.

"Jane. Can you use your ability to conceal us? We need to formulate a plan."

She nodded her head and activated her ability. Grachan could no longer locate us.

"Jane. The real Morel is inside that smoke prison... Use Gyo and you can see that there are red particles condensed around the real Grachan but ignore the copies!" I removed the mask and put it back on Jane.

I glanced back at Fernus and saw he still had the tentacle wrapped around Jakari's mouth. His head changed to that of a great King Kakin shark so he could breathe underwater. Jakari was calm, doing what he could to preserve the air in his lungs. He must be able to hold his breath for a long period of time. It complemented Grachan's ability. It made sense Morel could do this as well, meaning as soon as that smoke prison was dispelled, he could hold his breath and wait out until we drowned.

They were fighting to kill and the aggression was unnatural.

"...Jasper?!" said Jane. My heart raced. I was glad to hear Jasper was fine, though the tone of Jane's voice was that of panic.

"Marco!" screamed Jasper.

"What's wrong, Jasper?" She was frantic!

"I have little time to explain but I found the source of the strange particles... they're being created by a strange creature!!"

"Where is it." I said as blunt as possible. I needed the facts and I needed them now.

"It's hot on my tail. I just lost it. But it was in Mr. Bedoz's room! It saw me and chased me out."

I switched the mask back to me and took in as much air as possible.

"I broke communication with Dr. Yule. As you can see, things got way out of hand."

"It's the particles!!!" cried Jasper. "It's doing this!! It's making you all crazy!!"

"Go back to your body and wake up! You need to see to Dom and Dr. Yule!!"

I heard a screech. I looked up and saw an unholy site.

Jasper let go of me and shot off through a wall. The creature was huge - an elongated body with putrid yellow skin. It shot its body at great speed and headed towards me!!

I braced myself, but the creature stopped. It was directly in front of my face.. Staring me down.

It's eyes were empty.

It looked into me and smiled - though we were underwater I smelled its putrid breath through the mask!! It had no teeth and its nose was pierced together as if denying it breath and yet it lived. It's red hair flowing majestically... this was a Nen Beast of some kind!

The smoke prison then dispelled!

The creature shot its head back and screeched, launching itself into the direction Jasper had flown off.



Morel tumbled out as did a few of the clones. I saw Alistahr and Henri were still alive. They were able to handle Morel's trap. Morel gambled unlucky going against two powerful Enhancers in such a confined space.

The water level begun to change!! Was Grachan dispelling his ability?

The Hunters that walked below the watery threshold stared above as they watched Grachan slowly descend with the water level. Once the water was gone, it was going to be a blood bath.

I noticed that Morel's clones had vanished completely. Only Grachan descended. Were they admitting defeat?

The water was finally gone. Everyone gasping for breathe. Fernus threw himself off Jakari and begun to morph back into his human form.

However, Jakari was enraged.

"You... YOU... YOU FUCKING BASTARD!!!! I'LL KILL YOU!!!!" Jakari widened his stance, readying to unleash all his might!!

SMASH!!!

Morel had swung his pipe and knocked Jakari out. All the Hunters were confused, and watched Morel. Grachan dispelled his trident and surfboard.

"This is senseless." Said Morel. "And I had thought that before but let instinct completely take over me. Something deep and primal."

"But we heard you." said Grachan. "Luckily Jakari's ability was still activated. We were so drunk off the feeling. But after using Gyo..."

"There is so many of these particles." Said Alistahr. Everyone was using Gyo.

"I saw them while we were eating but thought they were a result from one of you guys. Which is why I went along with the assault. I thought you were a threat."

"I thought the same thing." said Henri.

"Jasper and the others are in trouble." I said, dispelling my scuba mask. Jane clenched her fist upon me saying those words.

"Alistahr." I said. "We need to go there. To that place."

Alistahr looked at me and closed her eyes and nodded. "Let's go.

"What about Jakari?" asked Fernus. His arm was severely injured - no, it was nearly missing! Bits of bone and muscle protruded from huge empty pockets of missing flesh.

Fernus smirked. "Oh this thing? Jakari decided to give me a solid bite while covering his mouth shut. Unfortunately octopus skin is pretty soft... so forming my whole arm back wasn't possible."

"Yea well, I think Henri broke my ribs." joked Morel, though he was 100% serious. He had broken a few of his ribs. His face was pretty black and blue. Morel really took a beating.

Before I could say something, I coughed up blood. Henri rushed over. "Looks like internal damage. Seems like Jakari got you good.."

"If Jakari was trying he would have killed you easily." said Grachan. "He was having fun toying with you. He must have really went into instinct mode."

"Let's... lets go." I said. I felt a burning pain scorch my intestines.

Alistahr looked up and her jaw dropped. The other Hunters did the same.

"Mr....Bedoz?!!" screamed Alistahr.

I glanced up. There stood Mr. Bedoz, naked but unaware. He was gleefully laughing. Mr. Bedoz was completely turned. His mind was no longer there.

His eyes were a piercing red - like that of a rage filled demon!!

"Jolly me jolly me! Quite the sight for you to see!" Laughed Mr. Bedoz in sing-song.

"Amazing. He's rhyming." said Henri, sighing in annoyance.

"He's completely consumed by the particles." said Morel.

I used Gyo on Mr. Bedoz and saw they had completely overtaken him. Looking at him with Gyo, I couldn't even see his skin - it was completely distorted by the particles.

Mr. Bedoz contorted his face and asked a strange question.

“God... or Devil?”

Grachan chuckled to himself. “This guy is fucking crazy.”

It happened so fast.

Mr. Bedoz glared at Grachan. He opened his mouth and his jaw unhinged. Physically contorting his face and opening his mouth larger and larger. The cracking bones and blood streaming down his eyes while the deranged naked man spoke in with a pitch no human voice could produce.

“De’zi al ma’al kurta. There is a God you know nothing of, for he has been forgotten by man. His might is definitive, his empire everlasting. He bestows his gifts to the chosen few, His scarlet shepherds. The ones who will guide the lambs into the maws of the Sabled Sun, to drink the blood of man and open the gate to the Outer Ones. ”

Using Gyo I saw that yellow entity again. Wait... no it was a separate one! It came out of Mr. Bedoz’s destroyed and broken mouth. He was in physical agony. It seemed like he wasn’t in control of his body after all.

Mr. Bedoz was being controlled by this thing...was he still alive?

Morel in this time had created 3 puppets and infused them with some sort of core. He struggled due to his broken ribs. Alistahr prepared herself as she watched the yellow entity through gyo. It was staring at Grachan, who was frozen in fear. It’s empty white eyes beckoned to him.

“Don’t answer Its questions!!” Shouted Alistahr. “Grachan, don’t even look at it! It must be apart of some kind of ability!”

The entity wailed in hysteria, both sobbing and gleefully laughing in interval pitches of tone. It sounded juvenile, and menacingly masculine at the same time.

I wasn't waiting to see what this thing was going to do to Grachan. So I acted first.

I conjured my metallic sphere. The yellow demon snapped its head all the way around its neck like an owl about to devour me. It's eyes, devoid of all life, look upon me and spoke.

"God...or Devil?"

Just as I was about to conjure my weapon of choice, I saw Mr. Bedoz's contorting body snap. His spine was severed. Mr. Bedoz was definitely dead, but the body continued transforming.

Then, it was gone. Splattered. Intestines and bone fragments with flesh still wrapped firmly was shot across the room. Henri stood there, his fist covered in nen. He completely destroyed the body.

But the yellow entity lingered.

Morel's gripped his ribs in pain. "My smoke puppets will track this thing should it decide to escape. What's strange though is that this being does not belong to any of you..."

"There was a second one. Jasper, one of the Hunters working for us, was being chased by one!! We need to get to that hidden chamber, Alistahr!!" I shouted.

The yellow entity floated above Grachan. The particles were beginning to condense around him.

"What about Grachan." said Henri, cracking his knuckles. Grachan freaked out.

"Don't kill me!! I didn't do anything!!"

"Not yet, at least." said Henri, staring down Grachan. "The second you prove to be a problem,

I'll kill you."

Nobody said a word.

"It seems a person's natural predisposition to aggression is a huge factor." said Morel. He was very astute. "Marco was among the last of us to be affected, if at all. Jakari is pretty hot headed and loves a good fight, which in turn fueled everyone around him."

"I was pretty heated." said Alistahr. Fernus nodded in agreement. He was dealing with the pain in his arm as best as he could.

"I still am." Henri muttered, staring at his bloodied hand.

"Sabled Sun.." muttered Fernus. But nobody responded.

We ran to the cryolab as fast as we could. Most of us we injured and felt the high charge of the particles that continued to fill the entire boat. One of the smoke puppets carried Jakari while the other two followed Grachan, who stood in front of everyone.

Jasper seemed correct that these yellow entities were responsible for the hidden particles, but it didn't make sense where the entities came from. As of now, it didn't attack Grachan, it merely took notice of him and followed him after he responded. The entity did, however, ask us that question. Meaning it can jump to different people.

Could that be how it reproduced?

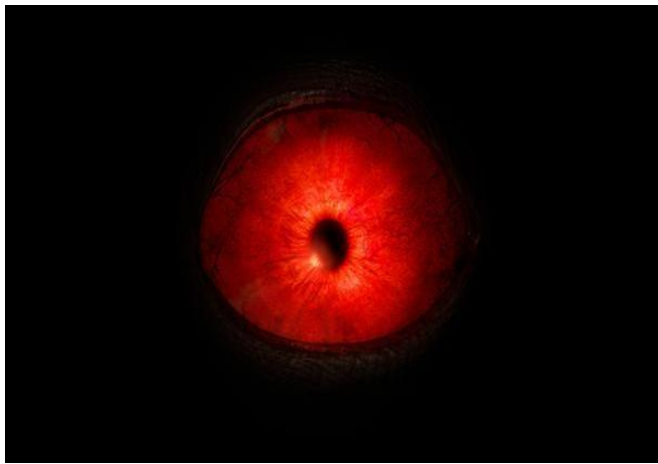
Arriving at the Cryo Chamber, we put on our suits. Henri placed his hands on Morel and Jakari. Grachan was the only one without a suit.

"I'll stay here with him." Said Morel. "I may be injured but I'm not out." We looked at each other, and entered the dark chamber. Fernus agreed to stay behind as well. Hunters were a tough lot, even when severely injured.

Alistahr unlocked the chamber. We went into the elevator, prepared for the worst.

The door opened. We ran inside and my worst fears were realized.

Dom was sprawled out, frozen to death, with no clothes. His face was completely destroyed, his throat elongated but frozen near perfectly. Upon further inspection, his eyes were a deep red color - it wasn't quite like anything I've seen. They were scarlet in color. It didn't seem to be blood coagulation.



Just a few feet away, Jaspers body - eviscerated. It was just a mass of flesh. Jane screamed in fury as she saw her compatriot was now reduced to unrecognizable lumps. I only knew it was Jasper because Dr. Yule's corpse was identifiable. Her body was like Mr. Bedoz's except much more elongated and boney. Her face was completely unrecognizable.

Her mouth stretched like a baby pushed out of a premature vessel.

There, floating above, were two of the yellow entities. Asking us the same question.

We ignored the lesser demons to the best of our ability. For the worst of it laid bare in front of our eyes - the red creature frozen away from time, the ancient beast of unknown antiquity that was undoubtedly responsible for all this - the thing that never should have been found at it's frozen tomb in the Dark Continent.

It was gone.

Chapter 5: The Sabled Sun

We ran back into the elevator. The yellow entities followed us and asked the question over and over while we spoke amongst ourselves.

"This is my fault." said Marco. "I should have kept communications with Dr. Yule."

"There was nothing that could have been done." said Henri. Alistahr nodded in agreement.

"We were overtaken by our instincts.." said Jane. She didn't seem too injured but the psychological damage was evident. I couldn't help but wonder if they were lovers.

"I think I know how those yellow beings are reproducing." said Henri. "I think with each person that agrees to talk to it and answer its question, it completely overtakes them and births another."

"Yes. The original entity that 'impregnates' the victim must leave once it succeeds."

"Wait." I said. "If that were true, how come there were two entities instead of three?" I paused.

"It's possible Jasper is still in her Astral form..." muttered Jane in desperation.

"Assuming her Nen survived after death." Henri cracked his neck and tuned out of the conversation.

Jane glared at Henri who was now tuning out the conversation. Alistahr changed the subject.

"Judging from what we know, the victims eyes turn a scarlet red. Their body changes and 'gives birth' to one of those entities through the throat and mouth. This is only possible if you speak and answer its question." Said Alistahr.

"But we don't know what happens when you pick a certain answer. If you respond "God" or "Devil", are the effects the same?"

"It's possible. Grachan didn't even answer and one of them took a keen interest.. Those weird particles are very condensed around his body as if he was 'marked'." she said.

Henri interrupted.

"If that entity isn't there, then we will have no choice but to kill Grachan."

The two entities were now getting in our face asking us the questions. It grew difficult to not tell them to shut the hell up.

The elevator door opened. None of us disagreed with Henri. Does that mean merely answering the question creates this response? Or maybe answering it without saying "God" or "Devil" forces the victim to give birth to another one of these beings?

We used Gyo - none of the particles seemed condensed on one person specifically but the number of particles spiked. Using Gyo was like staring into a static screen - it was impossible to see. This proved difficult.. There was no way to locate Jasper through Gyo, assuming she did survive.

Jakari was awake, though he was now tending to Morel, who laid on the floor in pain. Fernus was standing guard.

But Grachan...was missing!!

"What happened!" shouted Henri, clenching his bloodied fist. The particles were whittling away at his psyche. I feared that Henri would become a serious threat. I had not yet figured out how to deal with him should he go on the attack.

Alistahr put her hand on his shoulder. He released the harsh grip of his fist and put it on his side. Henri stared at the floor, regaining his composure. They really were fond of each other.

"Grachan... escaped." muttered Fernus. He sat on the floor next to Morel, who was gasping for breath. "He sucker punched Morel in the ribs and ran off..." Fernus's injury was worse than he let on. On top of his arm injury he was also suffering from internal damage from his previous fight with Jakari. The effects must have been worse given how close he was.

I could see it in Fernus's eyes. He had accepted death. He sat peacefully by Morel.

"You got me good, Jakari." said Fernus.

"Well Morel got me good." joked Jakari.

"Grachan...got me..." wheezed Morel.

The brief solidarity of Hunters admiring each others strengths was a beacon to this hopeless situation. We were not sure what was going to happen and who would survive this. But I knew in this moment, seeing the unrelenting spirit to persevere and conquer in the face of near impossible odds... that was what it meant to be a Hunter.

I heard a familiar voice.

"Marco."

"...Jasper?" I said out loud. Jane's eyes lit up. Alistahr sighed in relief.

"Jasper!!" cried out Jane. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"Marco... thank goodness." said Jasper in relief. I felt a weight lift off my shoulders. I couldn't believe it. She survived in her Astral form...

"Jasper. Your body is-"

"I know. Spare me the grievances. After escaping that yellow creature, I've been trying to navigate through this sea of particles. It's beginning to stretch outside into the sea.."

"How far do the particles stretch?" I asked.

"Marco.. You haven't been outside have you." said Jasper with great concern.

I sighed, massaging my temples.

"More good news, I take it?" asked Henri. Everyone managed to let out a laugh but me. It was what we needed, but I felt no connection to high spirits. We needed to act.

"Jasper. Hang close."

"I'm going to talk to Jane now." said Jasper.

Nen after death... she died and is in essence a disembodied spirit.. Can she now communicate with whoever she wants?!

Jane sobbed and she spoke with Jasper telepathically.

The deep bellowing of the mysterious sea beast echoed. The particles began to vibrate with the notes of the creatures song. Fernus chose to stay behind with Morel. Jakari would look after them both. Jane chose to stay as well. Alistahr went to gather medicine to do what she could. I went up with Henri to see what Jasper was referring too.

There were no personel on the ship. They were gone. Without a trace. I felt the air begin to feel heavier. It was like breathing in heavy humidity. The doors outside were wide open



The sky was scorched. And there looming in the sky was a black void - a Sabled Sun. It looked like the blackness never ended.

As we made our way to the top of the ship we saw all the ships personnel lined up, staring into the void. Using Gyo I confirmed that they were all marked. It was difficult to see outside but the particles formed tendrils that seemed to extend endlessly across the ocean in all directions.

We couldn't allow this to spread to the mainland.

However, before I ran forward Henri stopped me. I looked over and his eyes were glazed over. They were hyperfocused. He didn't dare utter a breathe.

I looked and behold, standing upon the bow of the Gyllis Prime was a scarlet Beast. It towered over the humans, at least four times their size. The Beast was humanoid in some capacities; it's upper body was that of a human - it had a torso and chest, and four arms. It's high muscle tone was abysmally sleek and pronounced. It's monstrous thighs were wider than five humans standing together. The thighs ended in boney slender appendages with four arched toes which it stood upon ever so delicately. Its claws were unlike anything I've seen. Blacker than any obsidian.

It's head was hardly that - it had a cranial structure with two large protruding ears, but where it's eyes should be were a series large protruding horns, that ran up it's scalp in innumerable sizes and went down it's spine that was as black as the sabled sun. It's great white mane covered the base of the horn protrusions from its And it's mouth - it opened and an infernal red eye splogged opened. It's iris constricting as it's gaze observed the humans staring into the maws of nothingness.

The scarlet Beast raised its four arms and formed its monstrous hands into gestures in the likeness of Baphomet - no, the Baphomet was undoubtedly inspired by the ancient infernal horror that cursed man.

The marked humans opened their mouths and let out a singular note - a blasphemous hymn.

It littered the air.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhuuuuuuugggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh”

The ship began to shake...

Behind the Scarlet One, the Sabled Sun begun to absorb the red particles. It was enacting some kind of ceremony to sustain the black hole in the sky...

Bellowing of familiar terror shook the Gyllis Prime. Without hesitation, the lifeless sea bursted forth, giving birth to a new terror! A serpentine creature with eyes that littered its body! Tentacled appendages grabbed hold of the Gyllis's, and after ensuring its grip was certain it opened an orifice from the top of its oblate head and let out a deep humming that echoed in accordance with the turned humans. I could not tell how large this creature was as I was certain that most of its body was still underwater but what I could see was that it was at least ten stories tall!! The yellow entities possessing the humans joined in the accursed rite and the Gyllis Prime begun to float off the water.

I ran with Henri downstairs to warn the others but I knew there was no escaping. Henri said nothing as did I - we both looked forward as we made our way back down.

As the ship rose above the sea, it begun to angle itself. Everything was sliding down the angle, but it held itself in that angle.

We made our way to the room. I had no words to muster.

“We're fucked.” said Henri. “We're getting sucked into some kind of black hole.”

“Fernus told us.” said Morel, still laying on his back.

"What?" I said. "How could Fernus possibly know."

Fernus stared at the ground, at peace.

"Because the yellow ghosts told me." he said. "They told me... that I was going to die. And that I can know."

"You SPOKE to them??!" I screamed. I was now beginning to really feel the effects of the particles.

"No. They spoke to me. Because I was going to die. They told me everything." He said with no emotion.

The Hunters were silent.

"We're going to his domain - the ritual opened the portal. We are going to his Church. He is called Abraxas, and he is ancient. Beyond ancient. He has come and gone from this earth so as to destroy and reshape humanity to sacrifice us to the Outer Ones... "

"Who are the Outer Ones?" said Henri calmly. He was not ashamed at showing he was shaking at the sight he saw.

"Things you cannot know. They come from the Outside - and enter to take what is theirs."

"You're gonna have to be more specific than that." said Henri shaking his hands. "What was that thing outside. It grew immensely. That was not the thing frozen in the ice."

"Abraxas feeds off the life force of man and uses it to perform rites to bring those to his cause. It wills the Outer Ones into our world at the sacrifice and enslavement of humankind. He is the Scarlet One, the Lord of the Purge, who grants the gift of scarlet sight to his shepards."

"What shepards?" I said. "The only ones with scarlet eyes are all dead and disfigured."

"Kurta... they are not true *kurta*." said Fernus. He had completely turned off all emotion and was simply speaking on behalf of the yellow demons.

"*Kurta* means shepard; at least when translating it into the common tongue of man. True kurta performed the rites of Abraxas since his reign millenia ago. They possess the gift he gave the original shepherds of man to enslave and sacrifice humanity to his unholy realm, whose life energy was used to perform his rites."

I know I heard that word somewhere. It was all too familiar.

"What are these yellow creatures?" Asked Jane. She was asking on behalf of Jasper as well as the Hunters on board.

"Those that chose their answer are reborn as Abraxas's worshippers. They spread his will, through the unseen rites that awaken man's primal instinct. Something so ingrained in man - the very thing Abraxas created to keep humanity under his servitude. The Kurta utilize this gift and it shows in their eyes. Those that answer wrong cannot stomach the true power of Abraxas and their life energy is recycled."

"Enough." I said. "Fernus, you're not going to die. Not yet."

"We're all dead." said Fernus. His mind was gone. "I chose my answer. Now what will yours be?"

Fernus's eyes rolled back and he fell. Dead.

It was instantaneous. Did he really give his soul to Abraxas? Was the pressure to live that great? His body didn't react the same way the others... what answer did he choose?

The black void blanketed the sky. We were about to enter.

I was unsure how we would make it now. I myself was unsure how. But the end of humanity was upon us and we sat there, entering the forsaken realm of the infernal high priest of the Outer Ones. Sound and light bent and distorted.

There was no escape.

Chapter 6: Abraxas

Silence. Everlasting darkness blanketed my eyes while we shot through the sabled sun. It was still - almost tranquil. The unholy hymning from outside was non-existent. Using gyo, I saw nothing. Utter blackness.

"We're still alive." said Jasper telepathically.

"I can get used to this silence." said Henri.

"Well you're ruining it." Chuckled Morel.

Feint lights danced across the silent void, perplexing in color and even more in shape. I could not help but gaze out the broken windows into the charnel nothing we sailed across.

The colorful lights were not lights, but alternate worlds. I knew this from gazing and understanding what I saw. My mind connected with the happenings of the world over, and I saw things that had not transpired, yet happened, or have happened. I saw a great king of an alien species fight with Chairman Netero, who exploded into a poisoned Rose. I observed many a great Hunter race to the top, and unfamiliar faces glistened above humanities folly as they chased infinity. I could not understand these things yet I did. We were drifting across the sea of dimensions.

None of the Hunters said a word.

The colors began to turn into scorched cracks in reality - a nightmarish sub-reality begun to take the place of the alternate worlds. Did this mean Abraxas conquered those worlds too?

Were we next? A low ambient hum vibrated the Gyllis.

It was time.

The ship delicately landed onto solid ground of an unknowable place. I slowly moved my hands - gravity was heavy. There was no light. There was nothing. Nothing but the scorch planes of alternate worlds to light our way.

We exited the boat, the heaviness was difficult. We were all accounted for. In the distance, a black pyramid that feintly glowed with aura. It floated above the surface the Gyllis was on. Alistahr threw a piece of rubble over the boat onto the surface but there was no audible sound. It looked like it fell through the surface of unknowable substance, perhaps into another world.

We were trapped. There was no way out. The yellow demons beckoned us to join, that there was no returning to our world. They asked us the same question - God or Devil? Do we submit to Abraxas or deny him? Remain with no visible sight and trapped here until we starve to death or live eternally by the Scarlet One - the Ender of Days?

We were responsible for this. This was our fault. And even though I took no direct part in its unearthing, I would have was I there. And I took part in hiding this thing from the world.

And now I aided in the destruction of humanity.

The black pyramid beckoned to us.

I conjured my metallic sphere. I felt my energy being drained. I was going to die here and if I'm lucky, become something else.

I remember where I heard "kurta". There was a blonde hair kid... a kid from a clan that was wiped out. A kid that held Abraxas's will and power deep inside him.

The yellow demons spoke of him like he was the pope - they would seek him out to aid in humanities destruction. I needed to warn him. I needed him to know what was happening.

I called to Jasper. I called until she touched me. I pleaded with her. She was our last hope. Our last hope to reach this "kurta". To warn him of the end of days, to deny Abraxas, and to seek a way to stop the apocalypse. To brave the journey back. I would conjure a metallic raven that would seek him out. And upon reaching him, I would die. That was my resolve. To reach him. And for her to follow my metallic raven.

I could feel the temptation to give myself.

I conjured the raven. I was not even sure it was going to make it through. But I had no choice.

Jasper bid everyone farewell, and flew off with my raven as my guide to the one that may save - or destroy - humanity. Everything I experienced up to this point - will be transferred to this raven. Please, whoever you are... hear my message.

There he sat. Abraxas, the true King of Men, on a throne of charred dimensional rubble. His great eye looking down on me. Awakening something deep and powerful so that I may give myself to the Outer Ones. A forgotten God among men and the high priest of things not yet known.

The end is coming.

