

The unmistakable smell of rot and the crunch of shriveled plants assaulted Azazel's senses as he journeyed along the valley of death. Ever since the world had fractured in half, the blue cccat sought only to find peace. He'd witnessed death. Far too much of it, in fact. He was weak; he could admit that. He wasn't good enough for what the people of Eeridi needed since his retirement, and now here he was.

He hated the look of Ichor. The smell required a gas mask and heft gloves to go near. The fauna of the New World, or rather what once was, was nearly as terrible as the black sludge itself. He'd proven he could not handle a fight. He posed no good advantage against the beasts that had become overbearing quickly, and Asriel could only save him so many times before their paths needed to split.

He was simply not built for that.

Instead, here he was. Booted feet dragging on rocks and dirt in search of something. Fragments from the old world, anything they could use to help rebuild their once-perfect home. At least, it used to be perfect. Before the crooks veered their ugly faces, and now this? What the hell did he do to Everything to deserve this? It seemed unfair!

"This is so stupid. None of this is sustainable!" He complained loudly, kicking over rocks into the thick black sludge with a sickening clunk. He had to start dressing head to toe when coming all this way. Remnants of Skire's who once were not quiet beasts themselves, but still just as dangerous

Long fingers clawed at the dirt when he passed by. Following his steps as if knowing he was there, like bedbugs to body heat. It was disgusting. What Gods would allow this to happen? What could any of them do?

Azazel stopped, his head learning back as he breathed. His chest was rising and falling with air that was far too thick and sickening for his liking. He wanted to be back on the real land. Safe and warm on a Sunny beach. As if that would ever happen again. All of the bodies of water were just floating swimming pools. Dangerous and deadly, and the Sun would never rise the same way it had only a year prior.

Without warning, the feeling of hands gripped at his ankles, pulled at his boots. Rising to pull at his pants when his attention turned to the malformed monster of a crook who once walked among him. Azazel didn't know what to expect, or rather how to react, as he panicked. Hopping on one foot as he shouted and kicked away at the ichor creature.

"Damn things! Get off! This is such bullshit!" He yelled, as if anyone would hear him. He was too far from the base camp to get help, so he needed to act fast. And what exactly was fast? Untying his boot quickly to release it from the ichor's grasp, sending not only it fumbling back into where it belonged, but also Azazel, who stumbled back. Losing his balance as he fell back into the hard, rocky dirt with a loud oof.

For a moment, he simply lay there. Embracing that he may have messed up, but at least he was alive. A missing boot and a stabbing pain in his back, but he was here, wasn't he? He

was sure everyone back at the base wished he wasn't, but who the hell cared? He sure as hell didn't. Or maybe he did. All he really cared about was the strange feel in his back that forced him to groan and roll onto his side. Searching behind his back to lift a broken bionic motor.

Huh. Never had he imagined he'd actually find something all the way out there, let alone something useful. Maybe scraps, but a motor? Even if his body sort of... Destroyed it. It was better than coming back with only a missing boot and a face of regret. Perhaps even, there was more around.

Forcing himself onto his stomach, he gazed out upon the open slab of dirt. Shards and shrapnel of forgotten goods once used by mechanics of Skire were scattered across the floor. Bark he'd heard was useful on their voyage, and screws he could pick up while he journeyed about the devastation of a ship that once was. Pushing himself up onto his knees, he shoved the motor fragments into his pocket, at last climbing up onto his feet.

The rocks felt foreign. This land was not his home. It was a graveyard, and the monster that grabbed at him was just like him. A lost soul, a graveyard for the fallen, and far in the distance, journeying across the ichor was the Titan itself. The whole reason he was even here. To find a way to stop it.

WORD COUNT: 816