

# FAIR.

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## **~ ACT ONE ~**

### **Chapter 1: It starts with a death.**

The rain beat down heavily on the forest, shaking the trees violently. Though on a night as dark as this they were only visible as specks of leaves, dancing at the edges of the mother's torchlight.

She looked down at her child, sheltered in her cloak. Tired from the journey she felt the mud was getting the better of her. The mother hoped this was the only hardship the child would have to face. She knew there were troubled times ahead for people like them, but just as she did now she was going to do all she could to shelter her child from the storm.

A flash of lightning turned turned the night to day for the shortest of moments, the trees were nothing but an instance of movement, a single frame in their movie-fight with the wind and rain.

But the mother was sharper than the lightning. She knew she had seen something but made sure not to show it. If she was being hunted then she didn't want her stalker to know that she was aware.

Another flash of lightning and she knew she was surrounded. This was a situation where she was outmatched, her only goal now was the survival of her child.

The mother stopped, moved her child as close as possible and then put out the torch.

—

The assassins probably didn't hear the child crying beside her mother's corpse as they approached. They likely didn't even know the mother had her child with her under the cloak. The circle of killers slowly crept towards the body, still fearful of it. If the death was just a trick a warrior this strong could be the end of their careers... and their lives.

The child, still partly covered by the cloak tried to get some kind of response from her mother. She saw the blood running down her arm, her face laying sideways in the mud, eyes wide open.

Unblinking.

The girl could feel the puddle she was in was warm, and knew well enough what it meant. Someone had taken her mother from her, and she didn't know why. More than anything she knew it was the most unfair thing in the world.

The girl stood up and attempted to wipe the tears from her eyes, but the rain pushed on her so strongly there's no way to know if she managed.

The assassins froze. It was clear to them now the child was with the mother, and it was not a part of the plan. One decided it would be best to knock out the child, but they never got the chance.

It seemed like daylight for another split-second, but it wasn't the lightning this time. When the light faded there was a circle of bodies surrounding the child, and her mother's at her feet also.

The child out cried the storm.

## **Chapter 2: Customers expect benefits.**

Aella felt herself being shaken. Drowsy, she opened her eyes to see a large, bald, bearded man's head right in front of her face.

"Wake the hell up girl! I don't pay you to sleep on the job!"

Aella thought to herself 'you barely pay me at all'.

He then shook her forcefully a second time.

"Ok... ok already! I'm up! fuck, Ssa!"

"Don't give me any of that lip, serve the customers and then take the trash."

Aella picked herself up from the sacks of potatoes she was using as a bed and straightened out her outfit, pulling her apron back into place. As she did this she noticed her mother's bracelet, the one thing she had to remember her by, was showing. She quickly covered it with her sleeve.

Who knows what the assholes who came to the bar would do if they saw something that looked that valuable. Especially if they saw that one of the 26 glass beads embedded in it... glowed. Aella didn't want to risk losing the last connection she had with her mother.

Picking up a tray and a cloth, Aella stepped out of the kitchen and into the bar to clear the tables. As usual the bar was totally full. Aella heard that ever since the white event times have been hard for everyone. She looked at all the men drowning themselves in beer

across the bar and thought them all cowards. If times are hard, all they do is drink themselves stupid so they don't have to think about it.

"Hey tits! Our table needs some attention!"

This was her life ever since her mother died, cleaning up after rude, drunken assholes who can barely make it to the toilet. And even when they did they made a god-awful mess for her to clean up. And for what? So she could earn enough to stay alive and keep doing *this?*

"My name's Aella, asshole." she took the (substantial number of) glasses from the table and wiped it down.

"No need to be rude kid, it was a friendly gesture!"

Aella looked at the man's grinning face, she could see right past it like it was invisible and his thoughts were painted out all to clear. he was being too *friendly* for her liking.

"Whatever, I don't like it. Don't talk to me like that."

Aella cleared up the rest of the tables in the bar, received many similar interactions with the other customers and by the time she was done she was ready to put someone's face inside out.

She dumped the glasses in the sink and grabbed the bags of trash.

"Make sure you put them *in* the skip at the end of the alleyway this time, don't just dump them next to it." Ssa called at her from the other side of the kitchen.

"Hey that was because the skip was full! The garbage guys are too busy drinking in there to do their jobs!"

"Times are hard girl, and they need their cheer if they are to get back to work. *And* it's their cheer that's paying for your room and food, don't forget that!"

Stepping out of the kitchen and into the alley Aella cursed Ssa, she saw how much money came into the bar and she knew how much the beer cost. He could lecture her all he wanted but she knew he was ripping her off something rotten.

"Well hello there tits, fancy seeing you here."

It was the asshole from the bar, blocking the end of the alley. Aella knew the trash wasn't worth the trouble of going past some horny customer alone, so she turned back. Only to find someone had been waiting behind the door also, to stop her getting back to the relative safety of the kitchen.

"Now now girl, don't try and leave us just yet. You said some pretty mean things back there... you have a cruel mouth."

Aella turned to face the gobby one walking toward her down the alley, the same stupid grin wrapped across his face.

“I’m sure we can find better things to do with that pretty mouth of yours, much better thi-”

“If its raping me you’re after, I’m not going down without a fight.”

Before she knew it the man behind her had Aella in his grip, he held her arms over her head and the trash bags dropped to the ground.

“Well that wasn’t much of a fight was it now girl? But you look much nicer in that pose, it shows off your figure.”

The grinning man reached towards her chest but hesitated.

“What is this now, looks like you have a very nice bracelet there,”

Aella saw red. Her sleeve must have slid down, with her arm being held by the goon behind.

“I think, pretty as you are, its a bit too good for you. Lets take that before we get started shall we...”

Aella tensed up, not in fear but in preperation, and said;

“That’s one wrong move too many, dickheads.”

She pulled her hands down in front of her at full strength, throwing the goon holding onto her over both Aella and the man in front.

The grinning man (not grinning any more) turned in shock to see his friend smash into the skip and get knocked out cold.

As he turned around to face back to Aella, her foot was already passing through where his head was and he was flew toward the wall with a bigger headache than he had ever had in his life.

“What the fuck do you think you are doing girl?”

Aella turned around to see Ssa fuming in the kitchen doorway.

“These assholes tried to rape me!”

“So what!? My customers expect certain benefits and the cost of the beer covers that! You think I pay you so much just to walk around carrying stuff back and forth!?! When these guys come to you, you will damn well do what they want!”

“Screw you Ssa! This isn’t what I signed up for, I quit!”

“Fine, there’s plenty of women who would kill for the life you are throwing away. I hope you enjoy the gutter bitch.”

At that Ssa slammed the door.

Fuming, Aella picked up the trash and threw it at the kitchen door.

“ASSHOLE!”

Aella marched out the alley towards the street, she knew a place that she could go to clear her head for now.

“You should have let them do it.”

Aella turned round to see a child with pigtails, in a dress, carrying what seemed to be an unreasonably large backpack.

“Trust me girl, when you’re a little older you’ll take my side on this.”

“Hey, I’m not a girl!”

“...you look like a girl.”

“No, I look beautiful. I’m going to be the most beautiful person in the whole land when I’m older, and I’m not going to let the fact I’m a boy hold me back!”

“Great, I’m almost mugged and raped, I lose my job and now I’m being pestered by some cross-dressing little brat.”

At that Aella turned away and started walking off along the street.

She heard the boy’s footsteps behind her.

“What now?”

“Well, its just that... they couldn’t have taken it, your bracelet I mean.”

“And you know that how?”

“Well it says right here, see...” the boy pulled a huge book out of his backpack and flicked through the pages. Aella stopped walking and looked at the book, it seemed to be almost half the size of the boy, and his still backpack seemed to be full.

‘This kid’s stronger than he looks’ Aella thought.

“Ah! Here it is see, items forged in the white event cannot be taken from their owner unless the owner dies.”

Aella looked at what the boy was pointing to and all the words seemed alien to her,

“What do you mean *forged in the white event*? this was my mother’s bracelet.”

“Your mother’s? Are you not Anemone?”

Aella hung her head.

“No... that was my mother”

“...I- I’m sorry, so you never knew anything about the bracelet? Did it not seem weird to you that it glows?”

“Hey! How did you know it did that? And more importantly, how do you know about my mother? She must have died before you were out of nappies, kid!”

“Well, can’t you tell I’m a scholar?”

“... What?”

“I’d have thought the glasses gave it away... whatever. The thing is my dad knew your mum, they used to work together studying white event phenomena. So that’s how I know about her. I actually came looking for her so I could study stuff like that in the real world, instead of just reading about it. It’s the right of all scholars to explore the world!”

“Well like I said, my mum’s dead now. Sorry you wasted your trip kid.”

At that Aella turned and carried on down the street.

“Don’t you want to know about her? About your bracelet? About why she died?”

Aella paused for a moment.

“You can follow me for a while if you want kid, it’s not safe round here for girls anyway.”

“I already told you, I’m not a girl!”

“Yeah, but you look like one and that makes it not safe for you.”

“...”

“Come on.”

“Hey, I still don’t know your name!”

“I’m Aella.”

“Nice to meetcha! I’m Claire.”

“Claire?”

“What’s wrong with that? Its more beautiful than the one my parents gave me!”

“...”

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“What is this place?” Claire asked, though Aella could only really see his head over the top of the long grass. With the sun setting soon she wouldn’t even be able to see that much of him.

“This is the town’s orchard. It’s supposed to be off-limits, but I used to help the picker out so he lets me come here as long as I keep quiet, and he looks the other way if a couple of benapples go missing.”

“It’s huge! Its like as big as ten fields!”

“Yeah, the benapples help to go into the beer, as well as most of the towns baking. Apparently they only grow round here since the white event.”

The pair sat down at the edge of some woods looking down a sloped orchard, over the town and at the sunset falling behind the mountains on the horizon.

“This is kind of my spot, we’ll be staying here tonight.”

“You don’t have any other place to go?”

“That bar was where I slept before, but to be honest I think being homeless is better. What about you, why are you sleeping outside tonight?”

“I told you, I’m a scholar on my world stud-”

“Save it kid, last scholar I saw on world study was three times your age. I know you aren’t supposed to leave the library till then.”

“...”

“Runaway huh?”

“...yes.”

“... I’ll get a fire started.”

## **Chapter 3: Doll.**

The assassin never expected to become a prisoner. The boss told him this job should be the easiest, the weakest to take from. But this guy... he had seen the assassin coming a mile off, which took some doing, the assassin was exceptionally well trained.

Arms tied to a beam in the ceiling, the assassin tried to shake himself free.

“I wouldn’t bother trying if I were you,” the assassin heard someone say from behind him, and footsteps sounded as the unknown man walked in front of the assassin.

“you are tied with pure Qi there, there’s no breaking that.”

the assassin was thinking a mile a minute, he was furious, this opponent was beyond belief, not only had he managed to trap him, but to tie someone up with nothing but Qi energy seemed impossible, either the boss set him up, or more likely, the boss had no idea the target was so advanced.

The assassin knew better than to ask what was going to happen, to speak a single word would give away something about his master. This was going to be an interrogation.

"I can see from your eyes you don't plan on talking, no doubt you'll die before saying a single word. I'd be impressed if the determination was your own, or you had a worthy cause, but clearly you don't..."

"Doll, if he isn't going to talk then what are we doing here?" another voice came from behind the assassin.

"He's not going to talk, but I am... since you have brought this world back to me its time for me to be honest with myself... and with you I guess."

at that Doll started to tense up a little, the assassin could see the shadows cast by the dim basement light started to fall across Doll in a different way, he was... shape shifting?

Doll stretched a little, working out the kinks in her new body.

"God its good to be back to myself again, well, I say myself but this isn't the body I was born with, its just the most comfortable you know?"

before the assassin, where seconds ago stood a dirty, unshaven man, now stood a beautiful woman with hair almost down to her knees.

"wha..." a word escaped the lips of the assassin, this was too unexpected.

"ah, made you talk huh? Don't worry kid, I wont hold it against you. Like I said, I'm not after information from you, I want you to tell your boss about me, tell him he should have come himself, then I would never have stepped out of hiding, all he has accomplished today is awakened another contestant, and my goal is the same as his."

at that Doll withdrew her Qi holding the assassin in place.

"also, tell him I don't think highly of getting others to do his dirty work, when I am ready I hope we become opponents and I shall take the points he cheated from the others who couldn't stop you assassins."

The assassin quickly looked around, trying to assess his situation?

"I wont kill you stupid," doll smiled "I need you to deliver the message"

at that the assassin took his opportunity and dashed out the door past Doll's friend.

"Are you sure its ok to let him go?"

"bah, I don't want to kill anyone I don't have to, especially as he isn't a match for me. If I win the contest, hopefully it will put an end to the killing."

"So you are going now?"

"Things have been set in motion, the arena is calling louder than ever, and I can feel my bracelet's energy, it will start to pull soon."

Doll looked at her bracelet, an ornate, expensive looking band with 26 glass beads embedded in it. One of them glowing.

## **Chapter 4: Encounter in the twilight.**

“What do you mean my mother was a warrior! She never hurt anyone!”

Aella was almost shocked this kid had known her five minutes and was already badmouthing her mother.

“whoa there A! I’m not saying she was a barbarian or a soldier or anything, like it or not you’re a warrior too-” Claire tried to explain himself

“I am not!”

“oh yeah, as far as I can tell you’re the only 16 year old girl who totally caned two full grown men in a fight today.”

“that was! ... that was different, I was just defending-”

“exactly! Warriors aren’t just people who get into fights for fun, you had a reason, you believed in what you were doing, and you decided to do it yourself.”

Aella looked at the boy, already used to his girlish appearance, took a deep breath and sat back down on the log by the fire. The sun had slid behind the horizon and its light only half-heartedly tried to light the surroundings, but it was clear the twilight would make way for night soon.

Aella gazed into the fire for some time,

“So, what is the deal with my mother’s bracelet then?”

from no-where some knives hit the trunk right by Aella, she quickly turned around, making sure to come between Claire and whoever was attacking.

“Who’s out there!?”

a calm voice responded;

“Well I suck at sneak attacks anyway, to be honest I was hoping they would miss anyway, I’d prefer to face you with honour. Still though, its strange you couldn’t tell I was here... didn’t you feel the pull?”

“the pull? What are you talking about?”

Claire was the one to answer Aella’s question;

“the pull on your bracelet! It pulls in the direction of the nearest warrior who also has a bracelet like it! He’s here to kill you!”

The owner of the voice dropped from the trees, he appeared to be a young man, no older than 18.

“well its true I want to kill you, but only for a short while, I have a technique to bring you back to life if I’m quick enough, then I can take your glow and be on my way.”

“what do you mean take my glow! Why do you want to fight me?”

The boy tilted his head a little

“...you’re serious aren’t you, you have no idea what’s going on.”

the boy walked over to the camp-fire, and sat down on the log, pulling his knives from it and putting them in pockets along his clothes. Aella made sure to stand between him and Claire.

“oh don’t worry, I’m not about to fight someone who is as ignorant as you, its just not honourable. I’ll wait until you have learned enough, and I promise next time I’ll give you warning first.”

Aella saw the boy was quite relaxed, and not defensive so she relaxed a little and sat down.

“who’s the girl anyway?” the boy pointed.

“HIS name is Claire.” Aella responded.

“tomboy?”

“just boy.”

“whatever.”

the three sat around the fire in silence for about an hour, Aella didn’t know what to say, Claire wasn’t sure if she should carry on explaining stuff in the presence of someone who would sooner or later be an enemy, and the boy just seemed to not care about anything but relaxing by the fire.

-

“OK what the hell is up with you asshole! You bust in trying to kill Aella and now you just think you can hang with us!?!?”

the boy looked up to see Claire standing over him.

“And what’s with you Aella?! You’re just sitting there not doing ANYTHING, the least you could do is try and learn what is going on, and take advantage and kill this idiot who’s taking you too lightly!”

Claire looked back and forth between the two.

“ANYONE WOULD THINK YOU DONT WANT TO KILL EACH OTHER!”

Claire stood gasping, waiting for their response.

“well, I don’t want to kill him”

“I’m not in any rush to kill her either, why are you stressing out on such a pleasant night?”

Claire was clearly more pissed off that this guy was back chatting and kicked him as hard as he could.

“ow! And what was that for?”

“If you’re going to hang around then at least tell us your name!”

“... do you normally ask people questions this way?”

Claire looked set to blow again, he seemed to the boy to be like a volcano that could explode as often as it wanted, each time more violent than the next, a real nuisance.

“My name’s Timon, no need to get so stressed.”

“URGH!”

Claire sat back down in a huff, crossed his legs, folded his arms and looked intently into the fire, almost as if he was willing it to jump onto Timon.

Aella waited a little while for Claire to calm down before asking;

“why would we want to kill each other?”

both Claire and Timon looked at her then back at the fire.

Timon answered first, “your bracelet, there are 26 in the world, each one belonging to a warrior, its the destiny of the warriors to kill each other to take the glow from all the bracelets and claim the white event legacy.”

“what’s the white event legacy?”

“no one knows for sure, but the rumour is it’s the power to reshape the world as the surviving warrior sees fit.”

“It’s not just a rumour,” Claire spoke for the first time since she was fuming, “The white event itself changed the world just enough to create these circumstances, it has the power to change the universe entirely. It is powered by sheer willpower, the determination of a warrior. Whichever warrior demonstrates their will is strongest by surviving, is the only one the white legacy will respect to obey.”

“but... why should we kill each other for that?” Aella asked, not happy with the idea of having to kill, let alone fight against 25 warriors.

“Take a look around,” Timon said, “does the world look like its ok right now? I for one think it could do with change, and I don’t trust any of the other warriors to not just make themselves dictators over all existence.”

Aella stared into the fire, no one else spoke that night, and the all fell asleep around the fire.

## **Chapter 5: Dawn punishment.**

As the sun rises the light passes through the dojo doors as the assassin makes his way back to his master, but the light does not reach the steps to the basement where his master is waiting.

“What is it Seventeen? Why do you not have the bracelet?”

“Master, I apologise, this opponent was much stronger than I could manage, he sensed me coming and trapped me. Then... he became a she and...”

“shape-shifter eh? That means that she must have mastered controlling her Qi flow and used it to keep her power hidden from me... continue Seventeen.”

“She... she gave me a message master, she told me that because you sent me she was coming out of hiding, and I don’t understand it, but she said something about taking part in the contest. She thinks she will face you at some point, said-”

“that’s enough Seventeen. All I need to know. However I sent you to collect the bracelet and you return empty handed, you have failed me Seventeen.”

The assassin’s master signalled to someone in the shadow.

“samurai, kill seventeen for me.”

there was a flash of steel and seventeen’s head rolled along the floor, samurai standing on the other side of it.

“I want you to deal with this ‘Doll’ personally, I know it’s not your style, but I want her to suffer before you kill her. It’s unacceptable that she should challenge me.”

“yes master.”

The assassin’s eyes clouded over as the samurai made his way out of the dojo to clean up the mess the assassin made.

His devotion to his master as a samurai would surely take him to victory over the assassin.

## Chapter 6: Lamm to the slaughter.

“You feel it too, the pull right?” The woman spoke into her cell phone and brushed her fringe out of her face, it was almost as tall as she was. “Don’t you have boy-slicey to do that kind of thing for you? ...busy? Well you know our agreement wasn’t that I’d do ust whatever you say, I want to have fun.”

The woman looked down from the tree she was stood in at the path below, her prey would be here any minute now.

“Well what does it matter to you anyway? They all have to die sooner or later, that’s within your plan right?” she saw lamplight catch the pebbles on the path below, he was coming, “Gotta go.” Hanging up the phone the woman reached to a holster at her side and pulled out a flute. She sat on her branch and started to play a soothing melody.

The traveller on the path approaching the tree kept walking, the torch tied to his staff swinging as he went. He walked up to just a little before the branch the woman sat on and stopped, listening to the tune.

“It’s an interesting way to introduce yourself to a man you intend to kill.” The man looked up at the woman. “As for introductions, my name is Lamm.”

The woman stopped playing her flute and backflipped off the branch onto the ground before Lamm.

“Well, ‘Lamm’, don’t disappoint me as we dance.” A wicked grin spread across the woman’s face, to Lamm it looked almost like madness.

The woman launched herself at Lamm and the two began a fight to the death.

-

The air was full of the shrill sounds of a flute being swung quickly, and a woman’s crazed laughter. Within a minute, the lamplight went out, and Lamm fell to the floor.

The woman, panting before the corpse sneered at it. “You really didn’t entertain me. How pathetic.”

as a glow passed from the corpse towards her she stood up straight and looked out to the horizon, “I hope there are better dance partners out there than this one.”

She kicked Lamm’s corpse as she set off down the path.

## Chapter 7: The Journey Begins.

As dawn cast its friendly glow down on the three around the ashes of the fire, Claire was the first up, he stretched, walked over to Aella and shook her shoulder gently;

“Aella, time to get up.”

Claire then walked over to Timon, and kicked him in the leg.

“GET UP LAZY!”

“What the hell kid!?! what’s the rush!?!”

“In case you didn’t know, we cant afford to let our guard down, you’re bracelets always pull towards the nearest warrior.”

“So?”

“Sooooo... they are pulling towards each other, there could be a warrior coming for you guys over the next hill and you wouldn’t notice it!”

“...this is a good point.” Timon was suddenly very awake.

Aella yawned and stretched.

“I’m too tired for people to be attacking us, it wouldn’t be fair.”

Timon turned to her;

“Sorry blondie, but not all the warriors are going to be as nice as I am, there aren’t really any rules to this thing.”

Timon held up his arm showing his bracelet, Aella suddenly felt her bracelet almost pull towards his.

“the bracelets... do they really want us to kill each other?”

“Of course not, they are just bracelets, they don’t want... anything!” Claire finished picking up his bag. “It’s the beads, they contain some of the essence of the white event... its like magnets, they pull towards each other, the essence is trying to recombine.”

Timon looked at Claire.

“He’s pretty smart, even I didn’t know that.”

“That’s why I know where we have to go, Aella needs training, and no-one knows more about her abilities than my father. And as for YOU...” Claire looked darkly at Timon, “You have to look after us until Aella is in fighting condition. If any warriors appear, you fight them off understand?”

“geez, so bossy... whatever, I was going to do that anyway.”

Aella looked around as the others got ready to set off.

‘So we are going to go see someone who knew my mother’ she thought. ‘perhaps going with these guys is for the best.’

“Um, little crossdreser kid...”

“It’s Claire asshole, I can remember your name, why cant you remember mine?”

“Well it is pretty confusing, you having a girls name, and dressing as a girl when you are a guy, besides my name isn’t ‘asshole’.”

“Fine, TIIIMOOON, and its only confusing to you because you are stupid.”

“could you guys maybe not fight so much? You’re giving me a headache.” Aella was already weary, they had been walking for hours across fields, no signposts or paths.

“so... CLAIRE, just where are we going anyway?” Timon asked, probably just as weary as Aella.

“We’re going to Koob of course, the capital of knowledge and wisdom? Where do you think a family of master scholars like mine would live?” Claire seemed to have lost no energy since this morning, even with her massive backpack. How she did it was a total mystery to both Aella and Timon.

After a few minutes Timon asked “Are you sure it’s ok to go to Koob? There’s a lot of people there right? There could be warriors nearby.”

“It’ll be fine, even if there are warriors, fighting is forbidden inside the city, we can use it as a refuge until Aella has mastered her abilities.”

“umm, about that...” Aella questioned, “exactly what abilities are you talking about? Like using swords and stuff?”

“I don’t think so, from what I heard about Anemone her abilities were more energy based.”

“energy based?” Aella was even more confused.

“she could use spiritual energy, she willed stuff to happen and it did, stuff like... telekinesis, levitation, heating stuff up from across the room... that kind of thing.”

“uhh, sure.” Aella was sceptical

“Don’t dismiss what he says,” Timon could sense Aella’s tone, “I’ve seen a battle between someone who could summon fire and one who danced in a way she changed the air around her.”

Claire stopped and turned around.

“Wait, you’ve actually seen 2 of the 26 warriors battle!! how the hell did you get away? Did you kill them?”

“no way, I was just a kid, I ran away whilst they were fighting, it was scary stuff.”

“and the winner didn’t come after you?”

“no, the bracelets have only recently started pulling.”

Claire thought about this for a second, and turned back continuing at his slightly too energetic pace.

## **Chapter 8: six years ago.**

The snake of panicked people pushed through the town, the evacuation led by guards who were just as fearful themselves. The fire lit up the night sky and it seemed every building was on fire.

“Timon, cover that bracelet.”

“Sorry Grandfather.”

The 12 year old pulled his sleeve down past his wrist, he didn't know why he had to do it, but his grandfather always said it was important to keep it hidden.

“It's ok, lets just concentrate on getting out of the town with everyone safely ok?”

The old man looked down to his grandchild with a warm smile, looking up at his grandfather Timon couldn't help but be comforted, even when he could see the buildings on fire behind him.

There was a large explosion a few blocks away, and the fireball reached so high Timon thought it might burn the clouds.

“Come Timon, we must hurry now”

the old man ushered his grandson toward the evacuating crowd, but between the buildings Timon saw a man walking in a daze, towards the explosion.

“Sorry grandfather, but I think someone needs my help!”

at that Timon ran between the buildings just before the entrance to the passage was filled with burning rubble.

“TIMON!” the old man was suddenly very scared, “TIMON- J... JUST BE CAREFUL! STAY SAFE!”

Timon could barely hear the calls of his grandfather over the roaring of the flame, the whole town was on fire and it was screaming.

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Timon followed the man through the maze of fire, just catching his silhouette as he came around a corner until it went over a hill and into a massive crater, probably formed by the huge explosion from before.

Timon climbed to the top of the mound at the edge of the crater but stopped himself when he saw into it, the man he was following, his hands were on fire, and he was throwing fire onto things as he went past, the man Timon chased after to save was the firestarter himself.

Timon decided it was best to leave, the firestarter was too big and clearly too dangerous a man to be around. But just as Timon turned away he heard a woman's voice call out to the fire starter.

"Ignis! I always said you were crazy, I'm sad to realise just how right I was."

There was a woman standing across the crater from the firestarter.

"Oh you would know wouldn't you Cadence".

"What happened Ignis, when did you become this way?"

"I wonder why you want to know, do you think all those years ago, it was me that did it?"  
Ignis grinned wickedly

"...well, did you?"

Cadence was clearly someone strong, but she was clearly close to tears.

"Well, I wish I could say I did, I always wanted to be in a battle for vengeance, but it was someone else. I'm not your sister's killer Cadence."

Cadence sighed and looked at the floor.

"It doesn't change anything you know, you have still become a monster Ignis."

"Of course I have, it was inevitable, and if you're the one to walk away from this encounter, sooner or later madness will take you too, it's our birthright Cadence! I just knew to give up resisting and enjoy it!"

"I'll never become you Ignis, power..." Cadence took a flute from it's holster.

"...doesn't..." she changed her stance, readying herself for battle.

"...have to..." she pointed her flute at Ignis.

"...CORRUPT!"

the two warriors launched at each other, Ignis was like a ball of fire, shooting massive fireworks at Cadence constantly, she just seemed to dance with them, and rocks and rubble around the crater started to dance with her, as she swung her flute it's tune seemed to command everything inside the crater.

The battle became furious, with fire and boulders flying far past the edges of the crater, Timon feared the two would kill each other and take the town with them, he fled in spite of the awe he felt at seeing their battle.

on a hill overlooking the town, an old man stood watching the display caused by the battle die out with a massive clap and burst of light.

The old man looked down the hill to see a 12 year old boy climbing up to him.

“Grandfather...”

“I know Timon, its time for me to tell you some things.”

## **Chapter 9: The samurai and Doll.**

Doll sat cross legged, leaning over the table on the hand, surveying the board.

“You cant beat me you know, I have faced warriors much stronger than you and won. You underestimated me today”

Doll moves her rook forward two squares.

“Check!”

Doll sits upright and smiles challengingly at the child across the table. The child looks down and after a minute thinking, they move their knight.

“Check...MATE!”

“NO WAY!” Doll feigned shock for the child “of all the opponents to defeat me, it was but a child, how humbling that you take my title. I shall never underestimate you again, for you are clearly a master.”

the child thanked doll for the game and went off to his mother who was calling him.

“It’s very honourable to sacrifice your game like that to a child.”

Doll turned to face the samurai who was resting against one of the chess house’s supporting poles.

“and pretty honourable of you to wait for your opponent to finish their battle before you challenge them.” Doll took a sip of her tea, it was getting cold.

“I am nothing if not a man of honour.”

“well, your own honour perhaps.”

“what other kind is there, we only have our own experience to guide us.”

“a shame, but true.” Doll agreed taking another sip of tea. “So you’re a samurai eh? I thought you guys were extinct. I especially wouldn’t expect a warrior of band to be a servant. What do you intent do do if you survive the contest, will you follow your masters will, or become a ronin?”

"I follow only my master, as such I shall not survive the contest myself."

"...your master has a bracelet too huh, and that means the assassin I bumped into... he a friend of yours?"

"he is no one's friend now."

Doll finished off her tea.

"It seems your master is less forgiving than I."

The samurai looked away in contemplation, he knew his master was not a good man, but as a samurai, his honour lay in following his master's wishes regardless. He looked at doll as she got up from the table and took her cup back to the serving hatch and wandered, it would be a shame for the world if he defeated her in battle, but it would be shame for him if he lost himself, and his own honour was the only one he had any right to consider, he would not hold back.

Doll walked back, "ok, I'm ready when you are, but I would rather we move someplace unpopulated, I believe we can trust each other enough to travel somewhere without attacking the other?"

"I believe so also."

Doll and the samurai left the chess house together and set off to a place where they would try and kill each other.

## **Chapter 10: Koob is a really long way away.**

Claire fell over on his back; "UUUuuuugh, guys, I'm tired, lets take a break."

"ITS BECAUSE YOU MADE US GO AT SUCH A FAST PACE IDIOT!"

"I'm going to kick you again when I get my energy back."

## **Chapter 11: The Samurai and Doll, part 2.**

The daylight shone through the trees that covered the path, making gentle dancing shadows as the leaves rustled in the breeze, above them the sky was very blue, below them Doll and the Samurai walked the path.

"There is a clearing further along this path," Doll pointed, "I think it is a suitable place, though it will be a shame for us to stain it with blood."

"...do you know this area?"

"I grew up a few villages away, but I travelled a lot as a teen, I saw people living different lives and tried a few on for myself."

"lives?"

“yes, not just because I was shapeshifter, I wanted to find my place, find me... well maybe it was because I was a shapeshifter. I was looking for something to ground me.”

“and did you find anything?”

“in a way... after you have seen life from so many perspectives, there isn't really any way to settle back into a single one, I think as I am now, I am sort of living as a 'best of' collection, I took the parts I thought would make me the best person I could be... so... what about you?”

“I have only ever been myself.”

“well that's debatable, but still, have you never empathised with people? Tried to see life from another angle?”

“you are curious if I will defect from my master.”

“I don't think you will, I'm more curious if you would be capable of it.”

“Well if it answers your question, I do think about what other people are going through, and why they act as they do, but it is always in the context of my own ideas and values. But wherever my mind travels, my actions remain firmly tied to my honour.”

The two walked on for a bit in silence.

Doll broke the silence, “And in the context of your own ideas and values, how do the actions of your master weigh up?”

“...you have a talent for knowing people and what questions to ask them.”

“well knowing people is kinda one of my talents after all” Doll smiled at the samurai.

“It is something I have thought of, and I imagine you know enough of my master simply from the interactions you have had with his subordinates.”

“I see... I have to say I'm impressed, you tell me he's a dangerous, possibly evil man, capable of anything, but without saying a bad word about him. Whilst I don't agree with your loyalty, I can't fault it.”

“it is a part of my honour after all.”

“I have to say samurai, I never enjoy battle, but I am genuinely sad that we must fight each other.”

“as am I, but we both must follow our roles.”

Doll looked up at the light passing through the leaves, “I wonder...”

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As the two warriors passed a bench alongside the path the Samurai stopped.

“Would you like to take a rest?”

“Oh? It will delay our fight...”

“I... I’m not in a hurry to fight today.”

The samurai looked away down the path and Doll sat down on the bench.

“I’m happy to sit with you.” The samurai turned to her and Doll allowed herself to smile at him.

The samurai sat down next to Doll and the two looked ahead into the wood, watching the bracken sway in the breeze beneath the trees.

Somehow, both were hesitant to walk further down the path, they were both fighters, but why did they hesitate? These thoughts drifted privately through both their minds.

Doll looked to the Samurai through the corner of her eye, could it be she felt something for him?

The samurai held his resolve to look ahead, at the path, anywhere but at Doll. He felt if he won it would be a shame to kill someone so beautiful, in both mind and body.

The samurai stood up first. “I’m sorry. I should not have asked to stop.”

Doll stood up “It’s ok... it was nice to sit.”

There was an awkward half-moment as the two stood silently and then both set off down the path once more.

## **Chapter 12: Zephyr.**

“I think you’ve drunk enough miste-”

the barman found a pistol quickly pointed at his forehead.

“I... I’ll decide when I’ve had enough, and its sure as hell isn’t enough until I’ve downed as many bottles as people I killed today... you, you have a lot more pouring to do.”

Zephyr holstered his gun and gave the barman his glass for a refill.

## **Chapter 13: The Samurai and Doll, part 3.**

Doll and the samurai stood facing each other in the clearing, the sun shone bright but neither felt it, this was to be a battle they would both regret, regardless of the outcome. In the short time that they had known each other they had made a connection, perhaps the

strongest connection possible. Regardless of their opinions of the other, they both respected each other more than any they had met before.

The leaves at this time of year were just starting to fall, and a couple blew between the silent warriors in the breeze as they waited.

They both savoured the breeze, the last thing that they would share together before the battle that would tear them apart.

"I think..." started Doll.

"I agree." the samurai nodded, "we should make it as quick as possible."

Doll looked at the floor, then into the samurai's eyes, he was already looking into hers.

The samurai dashed first, he was rapid, almost instantaneous, Doll was of course using her Qi to block it, she was exceptional, the only person who could have blocked such an attack, but as a Qi ability her will faltered, she didn't want to defend with all her heart.

The samurai's attack was not full strength either, Doll was cut across her torso, but it was nothing that could kill her.

They stood shoulder to shoulder, facing opposite directions.

"We have both... dishonoured ourselves... and my final dishonour, is for yours redeemed." the samurai closed his eyes.

"thank you." said Doll, tears forming.

She made it quick, and the samurai didn't defend, he fell to the floor, with a smile on his face.

The glow in the samurai's bracelet faded, and it passed to a clear bead in Doll's.

The samurai had chosen a new master. And Doll had lost a love, at least until she was bested.

## **Chapter 14: A grave overlooking the sea.**

There is a spot atop a cliff by the ocean, so high the gulls don't dare trespass, where the grass is lush and a single stone juts from the ground, written on it;

"Here lies a warrior of unparalleled honour, who waits patiently for his love, who he died for, and is marching to meet him with the honour he displayed"

## **Chapter 15: An insult he wont stand for.**

500 assassins stand before their master beneath the dojo, the master is clearly furious, that someone would kill his samurai and take the glow that was rightfully his called for a drastic response, twice now Doll had insulted him, and this time it was too far.

“I don’t care if you have to die to do it, if any of you don’t give it your all to kill her I will kill each of you in a manner such as your nightmares would fear... go.”

in a split second the assassins vanished, and were dashing away from the dojo through the forest.

## **Chapter 16: Back with the trio.**

“Are you still out of energy?” Timon asked.

“Well yeah, have you seen what I have to carry round?!” snapped Claire.

“I think we should stop here for the night, its a bad idea to travel in the dark.” Aella said, looking across the fields.

“oh yeah and how do you know?” jeered Claire.

“I... I have experience... besides from here we can see all around, the moonlight should let us know of anyone coming.”

“well that makes sense to me,” said Timon “we’ll take it in turns to be lookout. I don’t think there are any warriors in the area, but its best to be safe. I’ll take first shift, you two get some rest while you can.”

“don’t need to tell me twice.” Claire said relieved. Aella turned to see Claire had already pulled a sleeping bag out of his backpack and was climbing into it.

“just how much stuff do you carry around in that bag?”

“more than can fit, well... night!”.

Aella pushed down some grass to make do as a bed and Timon sat at the highest point of the hill they were on.

-

some time later, Aella walked up the hill to Timon.

“we don’t have to swap yet, there’s plenty of time before I need any sleep.” Timon smiled at Aella.

“it’s not that, I just cant sleep tonight.”

“oh,” Timon paused and looked towards the moon, “is it because of your past, or your present?”

“a little of both I guess.”

“What Claire said before, after you said we should stop here-”

“My mother... we... we were travelling at night and... she was...”

“Its ok, you don’t have to say, I can understand. When I was five my parents died in a flood. I kind of envy them in a way now I think about it.”

“you want to be dead?”

“not really, but if I’m going to die, I’d rather not be killed in a fight.”

“...”

“...”

“Timon, will we really try and kill each other someday?”

“I honestly don’t know, I’d rather not, you seem like an ok person, even if you are a little stupid.”

Timon smiled wickedly at Aella. Aella shoved him playfully,

“Heeey! You keep saying stuff like that and maybe I wont have any problems killing you.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it, I think Claire will kill us both long before anyone else will.”

the two laughed for a minute, then looked out at the moon.

-

some miles from Koob, A woman with a fringe almost as tall as her sat with some shady looking men in a shady looking bar.

“And why shouldn’t we just kill you and take your bracelet?”

The woman toyed with a flute she had holstered at her side and looked at the three men;

“Well I don’t mean to brag,” the woman grinned, “But I’m a pretty cold bitch, I would kill you in seconds. If you take them on you at least stand a chance, if you can best them, two of you can join the competition.”

“And what do you get out of it?”

“Oh? I enjoy making things interesting. Besides sooner or later I’ll have to fight whoever is wearing those bracelets, if it’s you guys or someone else I don’t care, but this way I find out how strong my opponent is.”

One of the men put his drink down on the table and looked at the woman.

“You’re a dangerous type of woman, to say so plainly we will die whatever.” the man leaned back in his chair alongside his companions, “So how do we know they will be where you say?”

The woman held up her arm and the men saw the bracelet with three glowing beads on it.

“The direction it pulls in, it’s certain they will be where I say, they are travelling to Koob so you can easily head them off, ambush them if you’d like.” the woman finished her drink. “I too am heading to Koob to see an old friend, if you defeat the others feel free to come after me too.”

she stood up and walked past the men, “but if you do, make sure you put up an entertaining fight. I hate it when my enemies die too fast, it makes for a boring dance.”

The woman left the bar and the three men were left to their thoughts and their drinks, she was truly an intimidating woman.

## **Chapter 17: The journey resumes.**

The next day was like the one before it, clear and sunny, and the three set off through the fields in the direction of Koob as they had done before (if at a slightly more reasonable pace).

“I’ve been thinking Claire” Aella started.

“Careful, don’t hurt yourself.” Claire responded.

“whatever, I was thinking how you are really a runaway, and we are going back to your home...”

“so?”

“so, we are going to see your father, what’s he going to say when you come back after doing one?”

“He’ll probably try and ground me, but I don’t care, I’m smart you know? I can break out of anywhere. When you are trained up we’ll leave again.”

“really? You let him worry like that?”

“frankly it’s not the running away punishment I’m afraid of...”

“why, what else did you do? Oh crap you didn’t steal that big book did you?”

“NO!... well, yes, but that’s not the problem. The problem is... is...”

“That your dad hasn’t ever seen you so pretty?” Timon joined the conversation.

“...well, yeah...” Claire hung his head a little.

“He’s not going to be the type to have a problem with that is he? Isn’t he a scholar too?” Aella asked.

“I don’t know, I never let him know anything about me like... this, so I don’t have any idea how he’ll react.”

“I’m sure you’re worrying about nothing Claire.” Timon patted Claire on the back. “hey, what’s that there on the horizon?”

Aella tensed for a second, and looked to where Timon was pointing.

“That’s Koob,” explained Claire, “The outer walls of the city are mirrors, the idea is that the contents of the libraries and wisdom in Koob were a reflection of the world itself. Its meant to be symbolic.”

the three picked up the pace (just a little) now that their goal was in sight.

## **Chapter 18: Udo.**

A long, long way from Koob, an old man sits at the centre of an almost otherworldly building, he watches the entrance which leads to a bridge so long its hard to make out the other side.

As the shadows grow longer in the arena the old man sees the bridge has been clear all day, and is thankful there are no warriors to challenge him today, the arena shan’t claim another life until at least tomorrow.

The old man begins to meditate as night draws in.

## **Chapter 19: Three Brothers.**

Aella, Timon and Claire pushed towards Koob as the evening wore on, but they weren’t focussed like before. As Claire took a step a rope grasped her ankle and pulled him up by a mast that sprang from the ground.

“Wha!”

“It’s an ambush!” Shouted Timon and he pulled knives from his clothes and scanned their surroundings.

A gunshot sounded and a bullet flew straight for Aella’s chest, it was deflected by a knife thrown right at it and instead it hit the mast a little below the hanging Claire’s head.

“Umm, Hello?” Claire was not amused.

Timon threw another knife in the direction the gunshot had come from at a bush and a mast shot up out of the ground blocking the attack.

“You idiot Appetis, you’re always too rash. Firing early gave away your position, and I had to ruin the my trap to save your hide!”

“Shut it Ratis, your traps are worthless anyway, look you only caught the one that doesn’t have a bracelet!”

“If you two don’t mind, seeing as the ambush is foiled, how about we face them like real warriors now?”

“ugh, fine!” Came Appetis’ voice

“Whatever you say Spiris” Agreed Ratis.

The three men came out of their hiding places and stood before Aella, Timon and the hanging Claire.

Aella looked over the men, Appetis with a gun, Spiris with a sword and Ratis seemed to have no weapon at all, then something about them confused her.

“You don’t have bracelets! Why are you attacking us?”

“They want bracelets of course.” Timon said, not letting his guard down.

“Your friend is right girl.” Spiris said, “We want in on the competition, to be honest I’m glad we face each other openly after all, though my brothers are rather fond of ambushes I prefer a nice clean fight.”

“There’s no such thing!” Timon yelled and started throwing knives, he caught Ratis in both legs and arms, leaving him disabled on the floor, and Appetis hid behind the mast a second time whilst Spiris dodged Timon’s attacks and hid behind a third mast as it sprouted from the ground.

“This is more like it!” Appetis yelled before jumping out from behind his mast to aim his gun at Timon, but Timon was no-where to be seen, it was just Aella and Claire looking up the mast beside Appetis, who looked up in time to see Timon atop the wooden pole and knives flying down.

Appetis was also paralysed on the floor too, and Timon looked toward’s Aella and threw two knives right in her direction, she ducked instinctively and they hit Spiris who was sneaking up behind her.

All three brothers disabled on the floor, Timon cut Aella down.

“If you guys pull out the knives now, by morning the pain from your wounds will be bearable enough for you to walk to the nearest village.” Timon called out behind him as the three continued towards Koob.

“You should have just killed them.” Claire said.

Timon smiled and patted Claire on the head. “I’m not a killer.”

Claire kicked Timon in the shin “Hey, who said you could pat me on the head!” He folded his arms and looked on ahead in a huff “And you should have been keeping an eye out for traps too.”

Timon smiled to himself this time. “Well I’m sorry about that too.”

## **Chapter 20: Waiting.**

Doll knew the samurai’s master would not be pleased she had survived, and expected his retaliation. She climbed mount Brave, where she could be certain a battle of any scale was out of reach of civilians, even out of site depending on the weather, the peak of the mountain was usually shrouded in mist. It was also much colder because of the altitude, if there were more assassins coming after her, the temperature change would put them off, any distraction she could prepare for in advance would work in her favour.

-

there was an abandoned dojo near the peak, Doll waited atop its roof. It creaked a little in the wind beneath her, this place was chosen as a place to train because it was so unforgiving, but it was too much for even the instructors. And so apart from the most determined of climbers, Doll was the first person to visit this place since shortly after it was built. But that would change soon.

She could sense their Qi, a few hundred souls, all with orders to kill her.

If it were not for her last fight this would be the hardest battle of Doll’s life, but when you kill the person you love, even if it was their wish, nothing can ever be that difficult.

Doll waited, fearless.

## **Chapter 21: Cadence.**

Aella, Timon and Claire continued their march towards Koob, night was starting to take hold but they didn’t want to stop when their goal was so close.

“And what do we have here?” A woman’s voice came from behind the three, they turned sharply to see a woman with a long fringe almost as tall as she was and a flute, she had a familiar bracelet on her right wrist.

“you’re... the town that burnt down you and Ignis!” Timon recognised her immediately.

“Oh? You saw that did you boy? You were lucky to have done that and gotten away alive.”

“Where did you come from?” Aella asked nervously.

“really dear, that is not the most important question to you right now, you should be asking yourselves ‘is this lady going to kill us?’ I’m well aware you both have bracelets, and the

short one also has something that could benefit me.” Cadence smiled at Claire, who took a step back.

“really children, I can see you don’t want to dance with me yet, and I am only in the mood to dance with willing partners. I just saw you passing by and thought I’d introduce myself.”

“you aren’t going to kill us?” Aella asked.

“I might, but not today.” Cadence smiled again, eyeing Aella. Aella looked at Cadence’s bracelet,

“you have 3 beads lit up...”

“you know what that means don’t you?” Cadence held up the bracelet so the three could see clearly. “for each of those I’ve killed a warrior, its a long way to go to get all 26, but not a bad start.”

Cadence relaxed a bit.

“Well anyway, I have places to be and people to see, and you just aren’t my priority now kids, ta-taa!”

At that cadence swung her flute quickly, it made a high pitched whistle as she vanished.

“she seemed much cooler the first time I met her” Timon said.

“I think we should hurry to Koob now” Aella didn’t want any more encounters.

The three ran the rest of the way.

## **Chapter 22. Night attack.**

Doll could feel them, they were surrounding her, she could feel the patterns of their planned attacks almost instinctively now, her attunement to the Qi of others had developed substantially in the past year.

At this moment she knew precisely how to counter their first wave, and how to cope with the assassins reaction to her counter. She had planned the battle in her head up to the point where half the assassins were subdued, but she ran out of time to plan the rest.

She could feel the assassins were about to make their move, she would just have to fight on instinct once she reached the end of her plan.

The first move, there were a hundred assassins in the air above her, Doll’s determination to get through this battle was unbreakable, her Qi was stronger than ever before. All around her the beams that made up the roof of the dojo were pulled out and into the assassins flying at her.

To an outsider it would look like a tornado pulling debris in a tight vortex, but each beam was under Doll’s control. Each perfectly, precisely aimed at a threat to her life.

Doll was holding back though, she didn't want to kill these men, they were only a proxy for the man she really wanted to get, Dolls attacks knocked the assassins back, but they were relentless, they wanted her dead and there was nothing she could do to stop them short of kill them.

Doll brought in all the dojo's debris around her at once and formed a cocoon around her, it would take a few minutes for the assassins to break through it.

Falling to her knees, Doll began to cry. She didn't want to become a killer.

"Don't cry Doll," doll looked up to see the ghost of the samurai standing before her, "I've seen you cry too much already."

"you... you're not real, just my imagination..."

"it's true I am a part of you, but you know well enough that doesn't make me unreal."

"...I ...I want to be with you."

"We both know you have things to do first, those men out there, the world that created them has to change."

"I cant take their lives!"

"their lives haven't been their own for a very long time, they are nothing but robots, doing as they were programmed."

"...I miss you already." Doll lost more tears. "...we barely got a chance to know each other."

"that's why you have to keep going. You know it mustn't happen again that way."

-

outside the cocoon the assassins worked tirelessly to break in, but suddenly the cocoon became a hundred thousand large splinters, each aimed at the heads of all the assassins.

The assassins all fell to the floor, and Doll began her sorrowful journey to the place she sensed they came from.

## **Chapter 23: Koob.**

As the trio walked up to the Koob entranceway even in the night the mirrored walls had a significant glare about them, and when they entered it was almost more than Aella could take.

"Are those... street lights?"

"yeah, electric too. Pretty cool huh?" Claire was happy too show off his home town.

The whole city was lit up, it seemed like magic too Aella, and even Timon was impressed, he hadn't seen a city as advanced as this in his travels. "Not bad." he said, trying his best to sound casual.

"we'll uhhh, hit the library tomorrow." Claire said, "There's a hostel a little way down over here, We'll be able to rest up there."

-

The three made their way down the streets on the outskirts of the city, it was all brilliantly lit, and what wasn't lit was reflecting something that was, and Claire continued her tour speech;

"-and that way we can create an isolated emulation of pre-white event space, allowing for us to use technology and sciences that have since been rendered useless. For example this is the only city in the world that has a railway system, and some of the buildings are so tall they have electric powered elevators."

"what are they?" Aella asked, still in awe of her surroundings.

"like, rooms that can move. You stand in them and they take you to the floor you want to go to, they are really cool. And you can't see it from this street, but in the center of the city is the great library, it's the biggest there has ever been, and they say the whole knowledge of humankind is in there. But because there is so much, there's no way one person can learn it all at once. Although there was a rumour that one scholar – oh, here we are. This is home for the night."

Aella proudly pointed at a building, like the others covered in mirrors and lights, the brightest of which spelt out 'Madame Quirk's House for the weary', it appeared to be pretty small compared to the buildings around it but Aella and Timon both secretly thought it was still a really cool looking place.

"Don't just stand there gawking at it, we have to go in and reserve our rooms idiots" Claire marched into the hostel and after exchanging glances Timon and Aella followed.

Inside it seemed the whole first floor was a kind of lounge and bar mixed, with sofas, pointed at some box lit up in the corner. Aella and Timon made their way across the room over to Claire who was talking to a friendly looking woman who appeared to be in her later forties.

"Ah, so these are your friends are they sweetie?" the woman smiled at them, "You can call me Que, Claire's explained your situation so it's ok for you to stay the night free, but if you are so tight for money maybe you should consider getting jobs while you are here?"

Que looked at Aella inquisitively, "Your apron... do you have experience waitressing hun?"

"umm, yes."

"well that settles it then, you can work here to pay for the room and food, how does that sound?"

“ummm...” Aella was unsure, her last job waitressing went very badly, she looked into Que’s eyes and Que just smiled back almost maternally, “...sure.”

“well there we go then, you can attend to your business in town tomorrow and start in the evening. Now, let me show you to your rooms.”

## **Chapter 24: Nineteen years ago.**

“it would seem I have nothing left to teach you Anemone.”

“Thank you master Udo.”

Anemone and Udo bowed in front of each other, the 18 year old girl’s training was complete, a master of her abilities, it was time for her to leave the dojo and live her life, but something was still on her mind.

“however...”

“what is it girl?”

“You have taught my to harness, and master my abilities, but not their origin, not their purpose.”

“this troubles you... well I think that is a good sign. The truth is I cannot tell you why people like us can do... just what we do. My knowledge on the matter is extremely limited. But I hear tell of scholars in Koob researching the white event. Before then, no one had abilities like this. That may be a suitable first destination for you.”

“thank you master.”

“ah, and no more of this ‘master’ business now, you could best me quite easily I think ‘Udo’ is fine from now on.”

“thank you... Udo.”

“good, now, not that I’m desperate to get rid of you, but I believe I have four fresh students arriving today.”

“Its ok, I’m keen to get started too.”

“Goodbye... Master Udo”

Anemone set off to the lodge to collect her things and leave, Udo meditated in the center of his dojo, waiting for the new students to arrive.

-

“Ok children sit straight in a row. Now, what are your names?” Udo asked the youngsters.

“Cadence.” said the first girl,

“I’m Ignis” announced the boy next to her.

“Mavis” the third girl said quietly.

“I’m Dolores, but you can call me Doll” said the girl with long braided hair at the end.

“Very well, children, you are here to become masters of your abilities, and the first and most important thing you need for that is discipline,” Udo Stood up and began to walk to the doorway, “As such, you must remain sat where you are until I say you can move.”

Udo walked out the dojo door. “And I’ll be able to tell if you move!” Udo called back.

-

An hour or so later, “Uuugh, this is so boring,” Cadence moaned, “hey, Sis?”

“what?” replied Doll, a little irritated her sister was pointing out how long it was taking.

“we could be here for days!”

“maybe.”

“u..um,” Mavis started, “are we really... are we allowed to talk?”

“well he didn’t say NOT to.” Cadence said “Might as well get to know each other I think, seeing as how we could be here FOREVER”.

“God, you girls are NOISY.” Ignis complained.

“so what? You just want to sit in silence?” Cadence questioned

“I do”

“Not asking you sis!”

“ugh, I could sit still forever, but sitting with girls is really the hardest thing ever.”

“yeah? Well its not that great sitting next to you either smelly.”

-

After a long silence, “So... where are you guys from? Mavis?” Cadence asked

Mavis was unsettled by the question, “I... I don’t want to talk about it...”

“Fine, what about you... Ignis was it?”

“If you must know, I’m from Norren.”

“Norren? You mean up in the mountains? Hey sis we are training with a real life barbarian here!”

“SHUT UP!”

“huh?”

“Don’t call me that, I’m nothing like those animals.”

“...I’m sorry, I guess we all have problems with our past then...” Cadence looked down for a moment “lets... lets call this our start ok? We can forget everything that happened before... and this is where we start our lives.”

Mavis looked at Cadence, “I, think... I would like that.”

there was a moment’s silence and then Doll looked at the others, “you think he’ll let us go to pee?”

Suddenly all the children tensed up, and if they didn’t need to go before, they couldn’t think of anything else now.

-

five minutes later, Udo walked in, “Ok that’s enough.”

“Thank GOD!” cadence didn’t hide her relief.

“The toilets are out there” Udo pointed and smiled as the kids dashed away, this was definitely an interesting group he thought to himself.

## **Chapter 25: An empty dojo.**

Doll stepped into the dojo, it reminded her of one she spent much time in as a child, but this had been the home to much evil, she could not find joy in a place like this. She took the steps down to the area below the basement to find that it was empty.

The master of the ninjas, and the man who the samurai lived for, had fled.

Doll hit one of the supporting beams, cracking it.

“Coward.”

## **Chapter 26: Timon in Koob.**

Timon walked through the streets of Koob as the dawn sun rose, all the lights were out as they simply weren’t needed any more, if anything the city was even more magnificent in the day, and not just the scenery. The city itself seemed to be alive, the streets were full of

bustle, people opening their shops, making deliveries, running errands, travelling to wherever they needed to be for the day.

Timon wasn't afraid to look awestruck when he was alone, and so he did.

Having left a note for Claire and Aella saying he would be doing his own thing today Timon took his time to enjoy the city, he knew it was safe and they would be fine without him, and he spent most of the day riding the trains that circulated the city, seeing as much of it as he could.

It had been a long time since he had a chance to be so carefree, and he took advantage of it whilst he could.

## **Chapter 27: Aella in Koob.**

Aella walked through Koob totally overwhelmed, she had a note with directions Claire wrote to get her to the library and who to ask for when she got there, but everything was so confusing, she couldn't tell the main roads from the alleys here, it was all so big.

Eventually, totally lost, she had to ask for directions and found she had almost left the city the way she was going. Her stay here would take some getting used to.

-

eventually Aella found her way to a place where she had a good view of the town, and she got her first sight of the library, it was clear the people of Koob held knowledge as more important than anything else, the library was the most prominent building in the city, it looked like a coil, circling up a great tower. From here at least she would be able to find her way to it.

-

Aella stepped through the huge entryway into the library, it felt almost like walking on holy ground, she looked around and saw a big sign that said 'reception' over a long desk with 20 or so people sat working at it.

"umm, excuse me," Aella said, "I'm trying to find someone, a err..." Aella looked at the piece of paper Claire had given her. "A Mister Irfan?"

"certainly, step into the elevator over there," The receptionist pointed at a door across the room, "And ask for floor ninety four."

"umm, ok..." Aella started off a little confused, and turned around before she forgot. "Thank you!"

Aella stepped through the door into a small room, the doors closed behind her.

"err, can I go to floor ninety four please?" Aella asked aloud, hoping someone would hear.

“Certainly, if you become disoriented please hold onto the bars.” said a voice that seemed to come from all around.

The room started to move, and Aella definitely needed to hold onto the bars, the elevator wound its way around the coil circling the building, she could see the whole city revolving around her. It was too overwhelming for her and she had to close her eyes until it was done, she just wasn't prepared for that.

“Floor ninety four” the voice said. Aella was afraid to open her eyes and just stayed stuck, holding the bar on the side of the elevator.

“Oh goodness who is it, I'm very busy.” Came a man's voice from behind her.

Aella tried to wet her dry mouth.

“U...Umm, I'm sorry, but I'm stuck.”

Footsteps sounded and came nearer.

“Oh dear, the elevator should really have warnings for people who don't like heights, take my hand, I'll lead you inside.”

“...ok” Aella reached one hand back and felt a man take hold.

“I've got you now, just follow me now.”

Aella followed the man inside and head the lift close behind her.

“It's safe now, you can open your eyes.” Aella slowly opened her eyes and looked around, she was relieved to see this floor had no windows. She saw the man who helped her walking back to a desk and resume his work.

Taking some deep breaths, Aella found herself again and took in the floor of the library, it seemed to be two floors in one, with lots of papers, open books and large diagrams on the first, and on the second floor shelves and shelves of books.

“I haven't seen anyone so scared of that elevator since...” Aella turned to see the man was lost for words and looking right at her. “It cant be.”

“u-um, are you Mister Irfan? I heard you knew my mother and I was hoping you could-”

“Aella? My goodness how you've grown! You look just like your mother did when I met her! I have to say this is a very pleasant surprise, how is your mother doing?”

Aella looked down at the floor, she didn't want to have to tell him what happened to someone he was clearly friends with, but her reservations said enough anyway.

“...I see, that is truly a shame, your mother was one of the lights that really brightened up the dim sky.” Mr Irfan took a moment to compose himself. “But dwelling on it wont do.” I assume you met Clark, and he told you I would be able to help you out.”

“I don't know... anyone called Clark.”

“Ahh, he probably introduced himself to you as Claire, that’s ok. The boy has a few quirks.” Mr Irfan chuckled to himself “Oh and if you don’t mind please don’t tell him I know about Claire, I’m sure he’s working up to telling me himself... and now I’m rambling, just look at me!” he smiled at Aella. “Now, where was it, if you’d just like to wait on that sofa there dear, I need to dig up a few things for you and I’ll be with you as soon as I can, feel free to help yourself to anything in the fridge.”

Aella looked over to the sofa, “Umm, what’s a-”

“The small box with a door, its like a larder but smaller.”

-

Aella lay on the sofa, it must have been half an hour now that Mr Irfan went to the second floor.

‘why am I here’ Aella thought to herself. Was it for training, so she could become a warrior and kill the others? So she could kill Timon? Was it to understand just what was happening, to understand the bracelets and what they have to do with the white event?

Aella knew it was none of that really, she just wanted to somehow be a bit closer to her mother.

## **Chapter 28: Claire in Koob.**

Que opened the door to Claire’s room, are you going to get out of bed at all today?

“No, too tired.”

“It’s because you always go at a pace beyond yourself.”

“uuuugh.”

## **Chapter 29: Nineteen years ago, Part 2.**

The four children were each balancing on poles high above the ground.

“I know martial artists are supposed to do this, but does anyone actually know why?” Ignis asked

“I don’t know if even the Master knows why. He hasn’t told us, his master probably never told him. It could have started out hundreds of years ago as a joke.” Doll was tired of these tasks, but still determined to do her best.

The four continued to balance a while.

“Why does most all of our training involve staying in the same spot for long periods of time,” Cadence was already tired of this, “first sat in the dojo, then under the waterfall, now here.”

“I... don't... think... I have... enough balance.” Mavis was struggling to stay on the pole. And as a slight breeze blew, her weight was too far forward, “aahhhh- ...huh?”

Everyone looked over to Mavis, who had one foot on the pole, and one foot, standing on thin air.

“what-” Mavis was as shocked as the others.

“I cant keep that air firm for long Mavis, put your weight on the pole again” keeping Mavis balanced was taking a lot of energy for Doll, and Mavis quickly righted herself. “thanks.”

“thank you, I wish I had a power like you.” Mavis thanked Doll.

“stupid!” all four looked down to see a little kid standing at the base of the poles, shouting up to them. “Cant you see what her power is energy girl?”

“I can see,” replied Doll, “But I’m not going to force her to use it this high up”

“and that’s why you’re stupid!” the little boy ran to the base of Mavis’ pole and started kicking it.

“Hey, if she falls, I cant help her again! I’m not strong enough!” Doll shouted at the boy.

“That’s why now is the perfect time.” The boy continued to kick the pole, and Mavis started to fall, there was no way she could have kept her balance, but once again, she stopped falling mid-air again.

“Thanks again Doll.”

“I didn’t do it this time Mavis, this is all you.” as much as doll hated the boy’s attitude, his approach had worked.

“I’m... I can fly?” Mavis had shocked herself.

“looks that way to me” Cadence said.

“ok I’m bored now, cya losers!” the boy was shouted and ran off up the hill, “By the way, my name’s Zephyr, don’t forget it!”

## **Chapter 30: Timon in Koob, part 2.**

It was getting late and the city lights were starting to come on, Timon realised he had been on the train most of the day, it was getting time for him to head back. He decided to get off four stops down, which was within walking distance of the Hostel.

But there was something odd, Timon looked at his bracelet, it was pulling... away from both the library and the hostel, shocked, he looked in the direction it pulled.

“smart kid, I only got on one stop ago and you realised.” A woman was sat across from him on the train, she had short, messy hair and a massive jacket, which failed to cover her bracelet.

“You know there’s no fighting allowed in Koob”

“yeah, as though any of the guards round here could keep 2 warriors from fighting.”

“Are you going to try and kill me?”

“Not me sugar, I’m more of a lover than a fighter... actually I’m not much of either. Normally when trouble comes I just up and fly away, it’s too much hassle for me.”

“Your bracelet, it has two beads lit.”

“ahh, well there’s no hiding I’ve killed before its true, but don’t worry, I didn’t like the taste of it.”

“why did you come to me?”

“Your pull was new to me, I thought I’d come check you out... the names Mav”

“Timon”

“I have to say I’m impressed, you and your friend got past Cadence, did you kill her?”

“no, she didn’t want to fight, neither did we.”

“...well, I’m glad, that girl has changed a lot since we met, but it cheers me she’s at least so whimsical in her decisions still.”

“you know her?”

“I used to hang out with her and her sister, it was pretty cool, in the times before we found out what these things meant.” Mav held up her bracelet, “and some other crap split us up too, I think these days I remind her of bad stuff, but it suits me, solitude is more my cup of tea anyway.”

Timon smiled a little “you don’t seem like the type.”

Mav leaned forward “And what type do I seem like?”

“solitary people don’t go looking to meet folks on a whim.”

Mav leaned back in her seat, looked out the window and smiled, “you wanna go someplace kid?”

## Chapter 31: Aella in Koob, Part 2.

“Sorry for taking so long, stuff piles up over the years, it took me a while to find this stuff.”

Mr Irfan was carrying a pile of books back to the lower floor for Aella, but didn't see her on the sofa, instead there was just a note.

‘I'm sorry Mr Irfan but I have to start my job soon so I cant wait any longer, I'll be back again tomorrow.’

“So responsible, just like her mother...”

-

Back at Madame Quirk's house for the weary, Aella was eyeing up the noisy box shaking in front of her, Koob had many wonders, but somehow a machine that washed the dishes seemed a little too good to be true. Having spent years over a sink, she waited till the dishwasher was done, she wanted to be sure it really worked well.

“Still getting used to the Koob lifestyle sweetie?” Que brought in a tray of glasses.

“Something like that...”

“By the way hun, you have a delivery waiting for you.”

“I do? But who knows I'm here?”

“It's from the library if that helps, it looks like things are quiet today, why don't you take a break and check it out?”

Aella nodded in response and headed out the kitchen

“I left it on the counter”

-

Aella sat down in her room, and undid the string around her books, on top was a note

‘Aella, I read your note, and thought this collection would be worth reading in your own time, I hope you appreciate the top book especially’

Aella looked at the top book and read the cover ‘Anemone's Diary, so keep out!’

at that moment, the lights cut out.

## Chapter 32: Claire in Koob, Part 3.

Claire was still in his room, reading through his big book and trying to figure out why the bracelets only recently started pulling, after two hours reading, Claire found out why.

“Oh crap.”

at that moment, the lights cut out.

Claire sat up and grabbed the book, Aella burst in through the door.

“Where is Timon?”

## **Chapter 33: Mavis.**

in Mav’s apartment which overlooked a huge area of the city, she lay in bed smoking, naked and only covered by sheets.

Across the room Timon pulled his pants back on, and began to look for his shirt.

“Going so soon kid?”

“It’s not that this wasn’t... good, it’s just, I have friends who will wonder where I am.”

“whatev-” Mav was cut off by a sharp whistling sound. “Cadence?”

“Hey kids, it looked like you had fun just now.” Cadence appeared in the room lit only by the lights outside.

“Hey, why are you back here?” Timon was suddenly tense... and with good reason.

“Well I figured I was bored, and I want to see if you and your friend are worth a dance, so I’m going to turn Mavis on.”

“Cadence, don’t!” Mav protested but it was too late, Cadence pointed her flute to Mav’s forehead and said very quietly; “Berk.”

Cadence quickly vanished with a sharp shrill flute noise.

Timon looked at Mav for a moment, “Mav, what’s-”

“Not Mav anymore.” At that Mavis shot a thousand black shadows, seemingly birds from her fingertips pushing Timon in nothing but his pants through her window and out into the sky above Koob.

It was a cold night and Timon felt it past the glass falling around him and the cut’s it was giving him, he had to think quickly if he was to survive being thrown from a skyscraper.

He pulled himself upright, and threw his knives so as they would fall slower than he did, doing this he stepped on the handles of successively thrown knives and made his way across the sky to the top of a building, which he still hit hard and even rolling to land he was in huge amounts of pain.

Up in the apartment Mavis floated up in the bedsheets, which stuck to her skin by the sweat of her madness, she glided out of the window held aloft by hundreds of these shadowy looking birds which she spawned beneath her, and died the moment each one had pushed her up a little, then faded like smoke.

Mavis floating beside her apartment building looked 30 stories down at Timon, for the first time in her life she had an opponent who was proving hard to kill, 'all the more fun' she thought, and flew at Timon at top speed, a cloud of thousands of shadows behind her.

Timon looked up just in time, Mavis' eyes were wide open, her hair pushed back by the great speed with which she hurtled towards him, she seemed to Timon to be totally hysterical, it was all he could do to use his attacks and block her attack, but he didn't have the footing on this mirrored roof, the force of the collision threw Timon off the roof and into the adjacent building so hard he flew out the other side.

Timon was falling again, he knew he had never been hurt this badly before, but he had made a promise, he knew if he didn't kill Mavis, she would kill both him and Aella, and there was nothing the city guards could do to stop her. It was all on him.

Timon righted himself and landed on the nearest building, he pulled out a load of knives from his pants and waited. He was starting to run short on knives.

Panting, his focus was on nothing but the hole he made from being thrown through the building...

'now!' Timon threw his knives at the fullest strength he could manage, fifty knives, twice the size of Mavis flew at her as she passed through the building coming after Timon.

The center of the building exploded in shards of light and smoking shadow, in the center was Mavis, 'how can she block an attack like that?' Timon became truly fearful of his opponent.

The top half of the building above Mavis started to fall down beside her, like a tree being felled, it slowly crashed down and crashed through several buildings and streets. The city suddenly changed, the lights went off, now lit only by moonlight reflected. The power must have been disrupted by the wreckage.

-

Aella and Claire ran through the darkened streets the city had a worried quiet about it, and the only noise that really stood out was a mad screaming laughter, and that is what Aella and Claire chased so hard.

They reached a point where the laughing was more above them than ahead.

"They are up on the rooves!" Aella shouted to Claire.

"Not a problem," Claire said, and he opened his big book and started reading from it, a glowing circular glyph appeared beneath Aella and Claire's feet, it started to rise taking them with it.

"How are you doing this Claire?"

“I have my own tricks you know!”

the two rode the glyph up and around the buildings until they saw flashes of light from beside shadows jumping across a building.

Coming in closer they could see a woman sending what seemed to be smoking black birds as Timon, who was getting cut badly, he couldn't block all of her attacks. Claire and Aella circled the battle, but Aella couldn't bear to watch, she leaped from the glyph to the building.

“Leave him alone!”

Mavis turned to face Aella, her attack still unceasing on Timon, “Well if it isn't another warrio-” Mavis caught sight of Claire riding the glyph “the book! She can read it! I'll make this quick children!”

Mavis stopped her attack on Timon and launched full speed at Aella, who didn't know how to react, she ducked for cover and felt a huge force, but it wasn't what she expected. She looked up to see Mavis was blocked by a Bright light around Aella, but before either of them could assess it A huge knife went through Mavis' chest, Aella's shield dropped and there was a moments silence.

Mavis spoke “Mav... thanks you kid.” her head fell, and the glows from her bracelet floated slowly over to Timon's.

Claire landed on the roof to find Timon starting to cry, for a long time, the three and the body stayed on the roof unspeaking.

## **Chapter 34: Nineteen years ago, part 3 (its more like eighteen years ago now).**

The four students lined up in the dojo in front of their master.

“Ok before each of you is a solid boulder, I want you to shatter your respective boulders, with some limitations,” Udo was glad his students were finally prepared for testes like this, “Cadence, you must shatter it by dancing to the same resonance as the boulder, the correct frequency will make it crumble. Mavis, I don't want you to just lift the boulder and drop it. Ignis, I don't want you to just torch the boulder until it explodes, besides I don't know how well this old dojo could take another fire. Doll, you must shatter yours by using strength alone, no external Qi in this test. Begin”

Cadence started to find a rhythm and the boulder crumbled pretty quickly, Mavis pushed at hard as she can against the block, imagining she was throwing birds at it like how she threw birds at the air to fly, but it took her a few goes before she hit with enough force to break the boulder. Ignis was just pissed off, he knew he should be able to master lava attacks and destroy the boulder that way but he could never figure out how.

Doll thought of what she could do to destroy the boulder physically, and she remembered seeing a really strong looking warrior from before she came to the dojo, so she shape-shifted into him and punched right through the boulder.

Mavis looked over at Doll's new form and was white as a sheet, she screamed and ran out of the dojo and down the steps as fast as she could.

Doll quickly changed back and ran after her, "Don't go after her!" Udo called out, "She must cope with it on her own."

'yeah right' Doll thought, she wasn't about to let her friend deal with whatever scared her that much on her own.

-

Doll ran after Mavis for about half an hour until the two were totally out of breath, standing on an empty path that cut through wide fields.

Doll, gasping for breath asked "Are you ok Mavis?"

Mavis for now seemed very calm.

"Where did you see that man. The one you transformed into?"

"Cadence and I saw him on the way here before we met you, he was helping a load of men build a city gateway... who is he?"

"...my stepfather, the man who killed my mother. Where was this city?"

Doll looked at Mavis, "why do you want to know Mavis?"

Mavis turned around, eyes red with tears, it was clear to Doll there was only one reason she would want to know where he is.

"...Mavis, I don't want to tell you if it's that."

"If you don't tell me I will leave you all and go looking for him anyway!"

Doll could see there was no turning back for her, if she was going to do this, she needed a friend close by.

"I'm coming with you."

-

Udo looked out over the setting sun, it was too late now, he had a very bad feeling.

"Ignis, Cadence... please could you go out and look for them, you can cover more ground if you split up."

"yes master" they said in unison, and dashed off in the direction Mavis and Doll went.

-

The bar was full at this time of night, men exchanged stories and cheer between swigs of beer, and two young girls walked into the bar, just a little too young to be in a bar like this alone. The first girl shouted above the noise in the bar;

“We’re looking for Berk!” the bar went quiet, “Where is he?”

there were hushed whispers among the patrons of the bar, why were the two girls looking for-

“Everyone out. Now.” came a voice from the back of the bar, and after seeing who it was the bar was empty within a minute.

“I have to say I wasn’t expecting to see you again kid, I thought you would be too afraid to ever look for me.” Berk stood up. “You should have stayed afraid girl.”

“sh-shut up! I... I came here... to...”

Berk walked up to Mavis “I see you’re still a thing of fear, what did you think you would do when you came here? Did you think you could actually kill me? I’ll teach you a lesson for disrespecting me like that.”

Berk grabbed Mavis hair and threw her through a table at a wall before Doll could even react, but before she hit the wall, Mavis righted herself in the air and flew at Berk full speed, her arms hit his chest and out the other side flew a flock of dying birds and lots of blood.

Mavis, shocked stepped back and fell over, Berk looked down at his chest. “...bitch.” he fell over.

Doll rushed over to Mavis to make sure she was ok, and then looked over at Berk’s corpse, a light moved from his bracelet into Mavis’, though Mavis didn’t notice, she was crying too much.

But what happened next doll noticed all too well, Berk’s shadow, started to move.

It pulled away from Berk and what appeared to be an exact copy of Berk climbed from the shadow, and stood looking down on the two girls. Doll could tell that it was really a shapeshifter, different to her though somehow.

“Well isn’t that an interesting turn,” said the copy, and Mavis looked up more scared than she had ever been before, “I wanted his light and waited in his shadow so I could claim two at once when he met another... but it seems I get to take three. I really am going to get an early lead. Now then... you.”

The copy jumped at Doll, forcing her through two walls into the next house, by the time he landed on her he looked exactly like her.

“This way,” Doll’s reflection said, “Your friend wont know which of us to kill!”

“Dickhead,” Doll was really pissed “You assume I need her to help me.”

A burst of Qi shot straight through the neck of her reflection and the copies head rolled along the floor, spilling blood all over doll.

“Doll!” Mavis came running, but what she saw made her fall against the wall in shock.

The blood spilling onto Doll had caused some kind of reaction and Doll looked just like Berk.

“change back! Change back DAMNIT!” Doll shouted. She looked over at Mavis, who was muttering to herself, wide eyed and pale, curled up as tight as she could be in the corner looking at the image of Doll beheaded.

“Mavis, its me...” as doll walked closer to Mavis, Mavis screamed.

“I- ...I’m sorry Mavis” Doll ran out into the night, she couldn’t help her friend from here, and it was all too much for her to take, she would hide for as long as she could.

## **Chapter 35: Cadence and Polot.**

Cadence stood atop the city wall, it was quite a fight that the kids put up, with a little more practice they may actually be entertaining to her.

With a shrill whistle, Cadence vanished from Koob.

-

200 miles away in the capital, surrounding the palace were a thousand warriors, behind them, sat on a throne illuminated by the torches around was the president, Polot.

He looked down at his bracelet, five of its beads glowing. He was making progress, but there were delays now, all because of her.

His assassins spent, his samurai dead, he awaited the return of his most dangerous servant.

With a high pitched whistle, the dancing beauty appeared before the throne.

“Did you have fun?”

“The little trio are promising me a lot, I’m going to give them some time so I’m sure they can deliver.”

“your games are tiresome, I expect you to collect the glows. Did you deal with Mavis?”

“I set her loose on the children.”

“It seems your fellow students and you have much in common.”

“oh?”

“Your all seem to have gone mad, but I think its a pre-disposition all banded warriors might have.”

“even the great president?”

“there’s no way I can be certain I’m not mad, in all likelihood I already am, I’m working with you after all.”

“hah, you let me have my fun and assume at the end of it when I’m done you’ll be able to beat me and take my points, and I assume the same of you. I think we are both just confident, madness isn’t something I think about these days.” Cadence looked around “speaking of which, where’s slicey? I thought he was your ace in the hole for dealing with me.”

“I’m afraid he is dead now.”

“oh really? I like the sound of that. Who did him in?”

“as it happens, it was one of your fellow students.”

“now I know you’re kidding, I saw Mavis die and I killed Ignis myself.”

“you are forgetting someone.”

Cadence fell was taken aback “that’s impossible, I saw-”

“are you absolutely sure it was her body? Because I have a shapeshifter calling herself doll who has relieved me of some of my finest warriors.”

“There’s no way, if she was alive she would have come to me! she would have-”

“I want you to kill her.”

“what? But she’s my-”

“sister? Who left you for years without a word to think she was dead? Went off and led a life without you? Left your friend Mavis when she was needed most?” Polot tilted his head, “...I want you to kill her. If you don’t, I suspect she will kill you first. And probably when your back is turned.”

Cadence stared at the floor in silence, this was too much.

## **Chapter 36: Leaving Koob.**

The trio sat in Timon’s room at the hostel together in silence.

“Claire...” Aella broke it.

“what?”

“Are you a warrior or something?”

“nope, I just, read the book is all.”

“so anyone could just read the book and be able to do that?”

“No, you kind of have to be in sync with the book, it has its own energy, for it to contain all the information on white event stuff, it kind of absorbed some of its essence.”

“so the book is a little like the bracelets then?”

“I guess you could say that, since the event it mostly lay dormant until someone who could read it came along and triggered it.”

“triggered what?”

“umm, just the book stuff. Nothing else. It just means I can do cool tricks now ok?”

“...ok”

silence fell on the room again.

After a while Claire decided he had had enough “I don’t think it’s a good idea for us to stay in Koob, we should leave first thing tomorrow, I know you guys will want to help with the rebuilding, but I think its best we head elsewhere.”

Claire set off for her room, leaving Aella and Timon alone.

Aella stood up and headed for the door but paused in the portal.

“I wanted to say...”

There was a pause, and Timon looked up, “I know... don’t worry about it.”

Aella nodded and went to her room.

-

the next morning the trio gathered their things early before anyone else in the hostel was up and headed for the city gate.

“So where are we going now?” Timon asked

“Beats me” said Claire

“I think I know.” Timon and Claire looked at Aella “Mr Irfan gave me my mother’s diary, in it she trained at a dojo in Cinnamon Hills, with a ‘Master Udo’ maybe if we go there I can learn more about my powers, and I can pick up some stuff from the studies Mr Irfan did with my mother.”

“Sounds as good as any other plan” Said Timon, stretching his arms “But we need to hit up some place on the way, I’m awfully short on knives.”

## **Chapter 37: Only the Pull.**

Doll lay in the inn bed, looking up at her bracelet, illuminated by the dim light and it’s three glowing beads, Doll felt it’s strong pull to the east.

Doll let her arm rest beside her and stared at the ceiling, was this the right approach? Surely the only way to get to the man she was after was by following the bracelet. It would lead her into a few other battles first, but if she was to survive the competition the other warriors would die anyway, in the end it didn’t matter who killed who, a death is a death and Doll almost tricked herself into thinking she was helping the other warriors by keeping them from killing as many as she would.

The truth was she hated it, but wasn’t going to change her mind, she just had to keep looking for a way to justify what she was going to do.

-

The pull on the bracelet was too strong now, she couldn’t let herself sleep if a warrior was this close.

Doll opened the curtains and looked out into the village with the green rooftops... there were too many people here, and she didn’t know how much collateral damage would be generated by her and her mystery opponent. Doll picked up her few things and jumped out the window.

Walking through the streets to the fields beyond the town, the other warrior was definitely following her at the same pace as the pull was constant. They both intended to battle.

## **Chapter 38: Night Reading.**

In the middle of a field with long grass, Claire slept in her tent, Timon rested looking up at the stars and Aella read her mother’s diary in the firelight.

’18th day of the walking moon, division year.

Today I finally arrived in Koob, its not much to look at yet but everyone is excited and construction seems to be very rapid. I don’t blame the people of Koob either, they built their library first and it is truly magnificent. Any city built to match such a great building will be a wonderful sight to behold.

I only got in a little before dusk, so I didn’t get long to look at everything, but the library stays open all through the night, there are even sofas where guests can read and spend time if they want. This really does feel like the center of civilisation.

Anyway, most of the researchers have left for the night so I am going to wait here till the morning, apparently there is a café round here somewhere so I'll get a hot drink and then crash on a sofa.

Good night diary!

19th day of the walking moon, division year.

Today didn't start great diary, I woke up too early and decided to kill time browsing the library, but I got really lost. This place is love a hundred story labyrinth diary! I was lost for hours, I wanted to just levitate over the shelves and spot the exit but I didn't know if it would freak people out. So I just wandered until I bumped into someone who lent me a map. And even then it took me a half hour to find the entrance again.

And the day didn't improve then, I asked at the reception who I could talk to about white event research and they told me that The Irfan team was away studying some arena on a fifteen month expedition. I almost collapsed but it turns out I was lucky, they had already completed the expedition and were expected back within the week.

So with a week to kill in Koob, I figured I'd get some exploring done, I went all over town to see them making new buildings, which was brilliant to look at, the buildings are going to be huuuge!

My favourite place so far is a little café I found a few blocks from the library, its run by a really sweet guy who has a passion for making cakes, and he's really good at it too, we got to talking and I promised each day I would try a new cake until I had tasted them all, and then I would tell him my favourite.

Anyway, for the time being I'm sleeping at the library again, its good that they don't mind that kind of thing here, such openness is really refreshing!

Speaking of refreshing though its been days since I had a shower, I became very aware of this when I was in Terry's café (oh, his name's terry by the way diary!) which smelt so nice. I wondered what I must have smelt like... ugh I'm too gross diary, no 1 on tomorrow's to-do list is find a bath house!.

Night diary!

Aella closed the diary and lay back into the grass, looking at it reach up into the stars, she wished she could live a life as carefree as her mother had done, Koob seemed to be the perfect place to make a home. But the bracelet kept her from that.

Aella turned on her side, her mother had the bracelet too she thought, she must have realised she had the same burden too and that's maybe why she left Koob.

The crackling of the fire played out as Aella's thoughts gradually turned to dreams.

## **Chapter 39: The Puppeteer.**

Doll waited on the hill, dawn was but minutes away and her opponent wouldn't be far behind.

She had gone two hills past the village, so she would spot her opponent before either had the chance to attack, doll felt this gave her an advantage as her appearance would not give away her fighting style, but her opponent may have some kind of tell.

Dawn broke into sunrise, and as light started to fall across the hill across from doll she saw a woman appear above it, what doll wasn't expecting was for her to keep rising above it. Doll's opponent seemed to be standing atop a giant animal of some kind, four times the size of Doll.

What was the tactics here, could her opponent command mysterious animals? Was it just for show? Or some kind of hypnotic distraction.

The woman and animal stopped atop the opposite hill, surveying Doll.

Closing her eyes, doll attempted to sense the Qi of whatever it was approaching her, but saw what appeared to be the Qi of some kind of spider, one ball with many many thin strands coming from it. The person above was real, and they had tied their Qi to some kind of giant puppet.

Doll could tell this was the limit to her opponents Qi manipulation, it would only become a problem if the puppet was destroyed and she was left to fight the woman with her loose Qi.

A cutting Qi type attack would sever connections to the doll and result in her opponent having uncontrolled whip like Qi where the strings were.

Doll would have to win this fight physically, which was going to be tricky, as this opponent seemed to have her Qi set up for maximum physical attacks anyway.

"Presumably you have decided your tactics now?" Doll's opponent's voice carried well without any breeze.

"And you?"

"my tactics are always the same."

"I am ready when you are then."

Doll's opponent dropped to a ready stance atop her puppet, and which after a slight pause dashed full speed towards Doll.

Doll began an arcing charge toward her opponent down the side of the hill, and leaped towards her opponent above the puppet, but the beast reared up and doll hit the base of the doll instead, it was solid and she did no damage to it.

Standing sideways on the puppet, doll realised it was about to fall forward to crush her, she leaped back and skidded through the grass facing her opponent.

"It looks like you are going to be a fun one, I heard warriors could be strong and I was looking forward to killing others like me." the puppeteer smiled down at doll.

“So I’m your first battle against a banded warrior?”

“To tell the truth yes, but I’ve killed plenty before, back in my homeland I beat armies, I was feared all over, it’s refreshing to be able to remake my reputation here also.” The woman bent over and studied Doll. “You seem disappointed.”

Doll stood upright again and brushed her fringe from her face.

“To tell the truth I am, I was hoping I could get extra points for the one battle. But it doesn’t matter, I plan on getting all the points anyway.”

“well of course, we all want to be the one left alive, but I don’t think this discussion is going to get us anywhere. Tell you what, I’ll let you make the next attack, to make this interesting.”

“Ok” came Doll’s voice from behind her opponent, Doll had long since mastered using Qi to form a clone of herself and shifting into a form to move about undiscovered. The real Doll ran up behind the puppeteer and kicked her from her perch. The puppeteer flew through the air, through Doll’s clone (which vanished) and hit the ground hard.

Doll stood atop the puppet. “I don’t think your reputation is deserved.”

The woman spat out the dirt from her mouth and stood up to face Doll, after wiping her face she said back, rather pissed; “It seems I’ve underestimated you. My name is Riopene, so just who are you?”

“My name is Doll.”

“Ha, that’s amusing, so this is a battle of one doll against another.” Riopene raised her hands (and as Doll saw it, several Qi type hands as well) “too bad my doll can’t get hurt, I don’t think we can say the same of you.”

Riopene pulled all her arms down hard and her doll leaped full speed toward a nearby tree, trying to crush Doll into it.

The trees split through the middle, the puppet landed on its feet and Doll was still standing on top unshaken, she had long since been able to kick through solid trees, her opponent was still underestimating her.

Doll knew that wouldn’t last forever though, she would have to make her move soon.

## **Chapter 40: the road again.**

The trio continued on their way towards the cinnamon hills, Aella thought about the man in the café her mother met, she had clearly taken a shine to him. Aella realised there had never been anyone she even felt remotely like that about.

Aella looked over to Timon and tried to imagine him naked. Timon saw her looking over.

“What?”

Aella didn't get anything from him, maybe things have to start out romantically, maybe not she thought, either way he wasn't for her. Aella looked forward again.

“Nothing.”

## **Chapter 41: The puppeteer, part 2.**

Doll tried to hold on to the puppet for as long as she could whilst Riopene did her best to shake her. ‘Sooner or later’ doll thought ‘she's going to pull towards herself, and I can kick the puppet full force and stun her to get my chance’

Riopene raised her arms towards doll and the puppet, ‘this is it’ Doll thought, but when Riopene pulled towards herself the puppet stayed rooted, and Riopene launched at doll herself, full speed.

Doll was unprepared and was sent flying.

Before she realised what was happening Riopene's puppet was above her and stomping its foot down, it was all doll could do to grab the foot and try to keep it from crushing her.

“I underestimated you before, Doll, but I'm going to end this before I make the same mistake again.”

Doll, worn out and becoming desperate looked for any way of breaking free and she saw a chance she would not like to take, a cutting type Qi attack was her only option, but if it didn't kill Riopene right away it would be too dangerous for her.

Doll focussed almost all her Qi into a single burst, and released it, the leg pushing down on her split in two, as did the body of the puppet, and Riopene.

Covered in blood, The image of Riopene struggled to stand up in the wreckage and held up her bracelet, one glow moved into it making four lit beads.

She tensed up, and screaming, fought to get her form to return to normal.

Doll passed out, she pushed too hard to win this time.

## **Chapter 42: Claire's Guilt.**

The trio continued on their journey, Claire thought to himself ‘should I tell them it's my fault?’

He decided against it, he just wasn't strong enough to take responsibility yet.

## Chapter 43: Polot's wheels, set in motion.

"See to it that the information is made available across the country, starting at Koob and work it out from there. There is to be a bonus if they are killed and not captured."

"Certainly President sir."

The official made his way from the palace towards his helicopter, and Polot drummed on his arm rests, he knew his subordinate would not take well to this move but time was running short, with warriors battling every other day it was only a matter of time before he was the only one left to kill, he needed his ace in the hole and this move was the only one for left him to play. It was much more uncertain than he preferred.

## Chapter 44: Madness.

Cadence floated in the darkness, stars danced wildly around her for a time, but then faded.

Drifting, Cadence felt so alone.

her mirror image appeared before her, "Ignis was right you know."

"About what?"

"for us to become a monster, it's inevitable."

"It doesn't have to be, I still believe that, I'll never turn into what he did."

"that's true..." her mirror disappeared and spoke from behind her "you became something much worse."

Cadence turned round in shock, "what do you mean?"

"Ignis went mad sure, he longed for destruction and killed many, even causing suffering. But you, you are the one who turned your own friend into that, your not only mad, you are spreading it."

Cadence didn't know how to respond, "when did I become this way..."

"you were always this way Cadence, you just used to be better at hiding it."

-

Cadence drifted alone in the void for some time, struggling to come to terms with the monster she seemed to have become.

"It's not your fault you know." her reflection said from below, as if rippling across the surface of a black sea. "you might have stood a chance if she hadn't abandoned you."

“...Doll.”

“It was bad enough for her to have died, but if she didn’t its a cut much worse. You had no choice but to hide in the madness, to wrap its blanket tighter around you to shield from the world, and now she is going to kill you.”

“She wouldn’t!”

“and you know that how? You don’t even know her anymore Cadence, are you sure you even did before? She was always so quiet. And all those times she ran away, trying on different personalities like they were clothes... did she ever take you with her?”

“She never did actually open up to me...”

“she is a stranger Cadence, deal with her as such!” the mirror faded.

“I guess I will, my heart is already too broken, and I think my mind will go the same way,” Cadence drifted higher, “after all, it’s inevitable.”

## **Chapter 45: Wanted.**

In the village with the green rooftops, Aella outside the weapon shop while Timon went in to buy more knives and Claire went to get some food.

’20th day of the walking moon, division year.

So I found the bathhouse today diary, and like everything else in Koob it was really impressive. I’m used to a stream and a rag but this was complete luxury. Heated water, steam rooms and even pools made specifically for the children to have fun in so the parents don’t have to fight to get them clean. This place may actually be paradise.

Anyway, I spent the whole day with Terry (the guy who runs the café and makes cakes) I went to his shop early today and we got to chatting the whole day, and when it came time for him to close he took me for a walk around his favourite park and we watched the sun set. I think this might be what love feels like diary!

Goodnight diary!

1st day of the sleeping sun, division year.

Well diary, this is an interesting position I find myself in, I’m not writing this at the library tonight, Terry has offered to let me stay at his house above the café. He is such a gentleman I feel totally swept off my feet, and I never thought that could be a good feeling until now.

First thing I did yesterday was check up at the reception to find out when the researchers would get back, apparently sometime tomorrow so I had another day to spend. And I spent it all with Terry. We pretty much did the exact same things we did yesterday, but I’m starting to feel that if I repeated days like this for the rest of my life I could die happy.

Night diary!

Aella put the diary away and waited for Timon. Looking around this place was a far cry from the ultra magnificence of Koob, but it had a sort of homely charm that she found very pleasant and calming.

“Ok, I’m done, lets go meet up with Claire.”

Aella looked up to see Timon, his clothes once again fully stocked with deadly weapons.

-

Aella and Timon walked down the streets towards the market when Claire came running full speed round the corner and when he spotted them said;

“We have to leave NOW!”

“what is it?” Aella asked, “Did you see a warrior?”

“not yet” Claire replied, and held up a poster she had just torn down, “but it’s only a matter of time”

Aella and Timon looked at the poster, and their faces looked back at them from it.

‘WANTED DEAD! Two banded warriors responsible for massive destruction to the peaceful city of Koob. Last sighted heading east from Koob.

Beware! Whilst they appear to be young these warriors are exceptionally deadly even compared to other banded warriors, do not try to capture alive.

Large monetary reward for the heads of both warriors.

This notice printed on behalf of President Polot’

“Oh shit.” Timon knew every banded warrior within a few hundred miles would be onto them now.

“We should make a move.” Aella said nervously looking around.

The trio made their exit from the village, trying to go the least crowded route.

“we need to stay totally clear of paths and settlements from now on. We’ll get our food from the wildlife.” Timon knew they couldn’t avoid warriors pulled by the bracelets, but they could at least avoid people seeing them and word getting out about their location.

## **Chapter 46: Infirmary.**

Doll came to in the infirmary, a nurse was sat beside her reading.

“Oh? Looks like you’re finally up.”

Doll looked around, the room was all white, and pretty clean for a village hospital. Sitting up in her bed, Doll asked “How long was I out for?”

“Oh just a day, which is lucky on your part, the farmer who’s animals graze the field you fought in, he was pretty pissed about the mess you made.”

“I’m sorry about that, I did my best to choose a place that would be the least bother.”

“Well I’m glad to hear some of you banded types are considerate, not like that couple that trashed Koob. They are like killer vandals with unlimited power.”

“Trashed Koob?”

“yeah, check this.” The nurse stood up and pulled a poster from the noticeboard, handing it to Doll. “You should consider going after them, there’s big cash for the vigilante that takes care of them.”

Doll looked over the poster, and was reminded strongly of the samurai’s master, it couldn’t be that the president and the coward were one and the same could it?

“The poster says they are heading east from Koob, they could be heading towards this village as we speak, I’d hate to think what they’d do to a place like this if they could just crumple parts of Koob.”

Doll felt her bracelet pulling east, towards the cinnamon hills.

“They have already passed through here.”

“Really? Are you going to go after them?”

Doll looked out the window, then stood up from her bed.

“yes.”

## **Chapter 47: Walking and Reading.**

As the three crossed fields, Claire and Timon keeping an eye out for anyone else, Aella continued to read her mother’s diary.

’2nd day of the sleeping sun, division year.

It started snowing last night diary, when I headed to the library this morning I had to wade through snow a foot deep!

I think it’s halted most of the construction but some teams are still building, the will of the Koob citizens is very impressive, they should be really proud of what they are doing here.

However its not all good news diary, after speaking to the receptionist again I was told I could wait on the researchers floor for them to arrive, so I took my first trip ever in an 'elevator' and its an experience I don't think I'll get used to, you stand in a glass box which shoots up all the way to near the top of the library and spins around the building as it does it. I was never so scared in my whole life.

Anyway, I didn't have to wait to long until the 'Irfan team' showed up, it was really just the three researchers, Mr Irfan and his wife and another man called Brook. Apparently their expedition had taken them to the very source of the white event itself and they had collected a load of artefacts to study. The place they went to sounded wonderful and awful at the same time. But they were very excited about it, and it was kind of infectious.

I listened to all their stories and theories about what had triggered the event, and there was some philosophical discussion on whether it had some purpose, it was a good hour or so before I remembered why I came, when I showed my bracelet the team was almost overjoyed with excitement. They had heard of banded people with extraordinary abilities and had theorised it too, but I was the first they had ever seen...

which is understandable, by their reckoning there were at most 26 of us at any given time, and it had something to do with how the bracelet itself had 26 glass beads embedded in it.

Anyway, I've offered to help out with the research in exchange for demonstrating my abilities and trying to explain them as best I can, Mr and Mrs Irfan agreed even though Brook was initially against it. He had concerns I wasn't 'properly trained' though I'm smart enough to know that's his way of calling me stupid. But anyway, I'll study as hard as I can so his criticism will be unfounded... that's what I came here to do anyway after all.

Anyway, when we finished the day at the library I came back to Terry's and we had hot drinks and talked. It was a pretty good day I think.

Anyway, night diary!

the breeze blew a couple of pages over in the diary and Aella put it away, she'd done enough reading for today.

"Are those the cinnamon hills there then?"

"Yep" Claire was pretty confident.

"How do you know, we don't actually have a map." Timon said

"Course we do idiot, I'm all the map you'll ever need, got all the cartography from the library up here." Claire pointed at his head.

Aella sighed 'it might be nice to have a map that wasn't so cocky.'

## **Chapter 48: Cadence in the desert.**

Cadence fumed across the desert bridge toward the arena.

“It’s been some time Cadence.” Udo stood up, he wasn’t expecting to have to fight Cadence so soon. “Are you here to battle?”

“Did you know!?”

“Know what dear?”

“Doll, she was alive the whole time, did you know?”

Udo looked into Cadence eyes, into her mind. She was beyond help now and it saddened him greatly.

“If I had known that I would have done something, I might have been able to keep you from becoming this.”

Cadence turned her back to Udo

“Cadence...” Udo could see an event in her, “you did that? To someone who trusted you? What did Mavis do to deserve it?”

Cadence stared out through the arena gates and down the bridge, “She did nothing, but it doesn’t matter.” Cadence faced Udo again, “I don’t care about anything anymore!”

Udo looked down, saddened, “not even finding your sister?”

“My sister...” Cadence stepped up to Udo, “I’m going to kill her. And I’ll enjoy doing it.”

and with a high pitched noise, Cadence vanished.

## **Chapter 49: You did what!?**

“You want me to repeat myself? I sent out a death warrant for your two little kiddies. You are taking too long getting rid of them, and I don’t have patience for your games, you have toyed with them too long and I’m a busy man.”

Cadence grabbed Polot by the shirt and pushed him hard into the back of the chair.

“You realise our agreement was only going to last as long as it was mutually beneficial! Its no longer in my favour, what’s to stop me killing you now!”

Polot smiled “Because my sources tell me your sister is almost on top of your kiddy pets, if you don’t go now she’ll be the one to claim the prize if you don’t hurry up.”

“ksch!” Cadence threw Polot to the floor “Asshole, you don’t think I’ll be coming back for you?”

“Honestly cadence, I don’t care if you do anymore.”

## Chapter 50: Echoes in the dojo.

Doll took in her old home, the only place she truly felt happy and safe, the dojo was empty now but for every nook and cranny there was a memory lurking, echoes of children playing and shouting only she could hear.

Doll sat on the steps leading into the dojo, she had made it here ahead of this Aella and Timon pair. Doll believed this dojo to be their destination, but why?

If these really were two savage warriors who went around destroying cities, why go to an abandoned dojo in the middle of nowhere? 'perhaps,' doll thought 'its the obvious answer... they are coming here for training?'

-

Almost out of breath the trio climbed the steps into the cinnamon hills towards the dojo, trying to get to the dojo before the sunset would.

"I thought dojos were just at the top of loads of steps in stories." Aella was getting worn out.

"It makes sense though, it keeps you fit." if Timon was physically drained, he wasn't showing it.

"I don't know what you are complaining about, this is the perfect physical difficulty for me" Claire boasted.

"Yeah, but as soon as you get to the top you are going to pass out from pushing yourself too hard." Timon responded

Claire shot him a dirty look "you're just jealous I can push myself like this, when we get to the top it wont matter how tired I am anyway. Speaking of which, I can see the top from here."

-

"It's not much to look at is it? You sure there's anyone to train you here?"

The trio stood before the dojo, and Claire clearly didn't think much of it.

"I don't know, thinking about it it's been almost 20 years since my mother came here... maybe coming here wasn't such a good idea." Aella suddenly felt very foolish having suggested they come here.

"You are a little late I'm afraid, Old Udo hasn't given anyone lessons here for a long time."

The three turned quickly to see doll sat at the top of the steps looking down across the hills.

"Who're you!?" Timon demanded.

“I’m one of Udo’s last students of course,” doll stood up and faced them, “And I presume you are Timon and Aella. I’m sorry I haven’t heard of you short one.”

“Are you here to kill us and collect your ransom?” Aella asked defiantly

“well,” doll put her hands on her hips and looked at the ground thinking, “my plan was to kill all the other warriors, and I thought I was justified to do it too, but seeing you guys I see that’s not entirely the case.”

“what are you talking about lady?” Claire was not in a mood for someone to just unload like this.

“Well, to put it simply, I don’t think it’s your fault what happened in Koob, I think Polot has some kind of agenda in wanting you dead. Plus it’s not my style to fight someone who is untrained... I tried to play the part of merciless warrior but it doesn’t fit quite right. So in short, I’m not going to fight you... assuming of course you wont fight me.”

“for real?” Timon was unsure.

“For real.” Doll nodded

all four eased up a bit, but then a fifth voice spoke

“But will you fight me Doll?”

Doll looked across the clearing to a woman standing against the side of the dojo.

“...Cadence?”

## **Chapter 51: Polot’s plan.**

The official stood across from Polot after Cadence vanished

“Are you sure that was wise sir, when she is done she will come back for you.”

“That’s if she survives, and either way it doesn’t matter, she is only a distraction, a decoy.”

“you can deal with her sir?”

“I’m about to have the key, with that my biggest problems will fade.”

## **Chapter 52: Echoes in the dojo (of a different kind).**

“... Cadence?”

“Don’t act so surprised ‘sister’, it’s not like I let you think I was dead for years on end or anything.” Cadence was clearly filled with rage, it was all she could do to hold back and appear calm.

“I know cadence... I did something stupid. I had gotten to thinking whatever I did I could only harm the people around me so I ran, and I stayed hidden until recently. I found out even in hiding I was doomed to harm again.”

“Save it Doll, I don’t want to hear how you justified it. What you did I can’t forgive.” Cadence stood upright and faced Doll. “Fight me.”

Doll looked at cadence and sighed.

“I wont.”

“LIER! You knew I was on the list when you decided to clean up the banded warriors.”

“I kept myself from thinking that far ahead-”

“FIGHT. ME!”

“I wont, even if I meant to before, standing here now I’ve already done too much harm to you Cadence.”

Cadence pulled out her flute and swung it sharply, the shrill sound cut the air, and Timon fell to the floor, his throat cut.

“TIMON!” Aella screamed and rushed over to him, but he had already passed away.

“Doll, fight. me. Now!” Cadence walked slowly towards doll.

“What have you become Cadence? You gave him no warning!”

“I’ll do it again if you don’t fight me Doll!”

“Cadence, don’t make me-” Doll was in tears now, but there was something that took the attention of both Doll and Cadence, beside Timon’s body Aella stood up, her whole body appeared to have a strong blue halo whilst she herself turned darker, eyes glowing and spark flying from her like lightning, Aella was more charged than she had ever been.

Cadence swung her flute but it had no effect. “Ha! Finally the bitch is ready to fight!”

Aella spoke almost in a whisper, but it was deafening to those that heard what she said, “I’m not going to fight cadence, you don’t deserve it.” Aella rose up and started to hover towards Cadence. “I’m just going to kill you. There wont be chance for you to fight.”

Cadence was really pissed now and turned away from doll to Aella, “don’t underestimate me bitc-”

The air was on fire, the dusk became a bright blue fire. It was impossible to see a thing from the glare, and when it faded, what was left of Cadence’s drifted away in the breeze.

Aella fell to her knees exhausted and still in shock, but a loud roar behind her got both her and Doll's attention, a helicopter flew away to the north west. Aella quickly looked around and then got to her feet to chase after the helicopter.

"Claire!" but Aella was too weary, she fell again, and this time everything went dark.

**(intermission)**







Now using this technique, we can type three times as fast!



but...  
we only have  
one keyboard.  
this idea was stupid



It's true.  
we're a total moron.



- TED!  
WHY DID YOU  
SUGGEST- ?

I was just going  
to say you should  
use write-or-die or  
something (thats all...)



Besides, wouldn't you be done  
sooner if you didn't waste  
you time making dumb comics?

I  
D  
I  
O  
T

## ~ ACT TWO ~

### Chapter 53: Nineteen years ago, Part 2, Camera B.

Mr Zee, his wife and son made it to the top of the steps and faced the dojo.

“Goodness, that’s a tiring climb” Mrs Zee was clearly worn out.

Mr Zee looked brushed down his suit a little and looked at his watch, “We wont be staying for long, going downhill will be easier, gravity will do the work for you.” Mr Zee looked to his son “Zephyr, go play someplace, your mother and I have matters to attend to in the dojo.”

“Yes father.” Zephyr walked off to see if there was anything interesting, he hated being dragged around on his father’s trips but he did his best to find something entertaining. Mr and Mrs Zee stepped into the dojo, looking for it’s master.

-

inside the dojo it was cooler than outside, the shadows providing Mr and Mrs Zee refuge from the strong summer sun.

“Welcome to my dojo, my name is Udo how can I help you.” Udo walked over to the couple and shook their hands.

Mr Zee saw shaking Udo’s hand he had a bracelet similar to his son’s.

“Well Mr Udo... my son has a bracelet just like that. His grandfather left it to him when he passed on.” Mr Zee’s expression was unchanging, and Udo knew this was a man only of business.

“I see, and you heard I train people who have bracelets like that from a rumour.”

“That is correct.”

“well the rumour is true, If your son is willing I can help him master his abilities,” Mr Zee gave the slightest of changes to his facial expression at the word ‘abilities’ Udo saw it but didn’t let on, “The training usually takes one to two years, so it’s a big commitment on his part, and no doubt you would miss your son.”

“Not at all.” Mr Zee said blankly “But our son already has commitments and we have expectations of him, the time you need to train him is too much, is there nothing to be done to shorten it?”

“I’m afraid not, to be truthful he would have to be prepared to train indefinitely if that is what he needed to master his abilities.”

“Unacceptable.” Mr Zee turned and headed for the exit of the dojo, his wife following close behind. “I apologise for wasting your time Mr Udo.”

“There’s no need to apologise to me Mr Zee.” Udo knew the person who was losing out in this situation. And Mr Zee was clearly oblivious or ignorant of anything that didn’t suit him, he didn’t even consider it odd Udo knew his name without having introduced himself.

“Call our son dear, we’re leaving.” Mr Zee headed to the top of the steps that led down the hill, he hated wasted trips like this.

## **Chapter 54: Rain.**

Grey, dreary and heavy, the sky let go of everything it had been holding for days, visibility was low and it seemed to Doll that only the small area around the dojo was left in existence, beyond was just a constant void of grey and rain.

Doll dug deeper, she could have used her Qi to dig faster, cleaner, but Doll realised that for all the people she had killed, she had never dug a single grave, so she dug for herself, fighting desperately to keep the mud from falling back in, and struggling against the weight the sky was giving it.

She did not complain, she deserved this punishment hundreds of times over, Doll savoured the sweat and stinging across her body, it helped cleanse her... if only a little.

-

Doll finished filling in the grave and the rain started to thin and stopped roaring, seemingly in respect to Timon.

Doll looked across the grave and down the cinnamon hills into the grey, how she longed to just fall into the grey, as though her sister was waiting for her there, a place where neither had any memory of this world and they could just be together.

Doll took some time to think, but nothing came to mind. Eventually she went back to the dojo’s old lodge to check up on Aella.

-

what light fell on Aella’s bed was grey, and the shadows were pale. Doll pulled a seat beside Aella and watched her breathing.

“Poor girl.” Doll brushed Aella’s hair from her face and sat down beside her, watching her slowly breathe as she fell asleep in the chair.

-

Aella was in the center of the storm, thunder and lightning danced in the cloud around her, but wouldn’t dare come near. The storm didn’t dare rain, Aella cried enough for a thousand storms.

## **Chapter 55: A man, a child and a cell.**

Claire sat, hands tied behind him to a chain set in the wall. His cell was dark, the only light came in through a small window high up in the ceiling, and cast a sharp rectangle in the floor before him.

Claire heard the turning of a lock and some footsteps, a shadow stepped into the light before him, a tall man of sturdy build, wearing what appeared to be an almost military uniform. His face carried thin spectacles, but his eyes were piercing, as though he didn't need the glasses at all.

"You wont believe the trouble I had to go through to get a hold of you Clark... or would you prefer Claire?"

"Eat shit!"

"I suppose it doesn't matter anyway, what's in a name after all?" The man shrugged and pushed his glasses up his nose. "If you care my name's Polot, but you probably recognise me from all my posters anyway, perhaps even from the television, you're an enlightened child of Koob after all."

Claire spat at Polot and turned to face the wall away from him.

"Now that attitude just wont do, not when I was going to give you your book back."

Claire turned sharply to see Polot holding his white event book.

"Why would you give me that?" if Polot had kidnapped him, he must have known how dangerous Claire could be with that book.

"Well I know you could easily misbehave with it, so I got some insurance against that." Polot clicked his fingers and a monitor came on across the wall beside Claire showing a prisoner in another room.

"MOTHER!"

## **Chapter 56: Tommy Guns and Fencing.**

"Back off Mickey! You take so much as one step nearer with those pretty shoes a'yours and the dame gets it!" The tommy gun was pressed hard into the young woman's side.

"You always were a coward Fingers, hiding behind others even to the end. But no more."

Mickey hawk eye raised his gun and fired, Fingers McGee was blown backwards through the window and down ten stories, landing on a cab. His Trilby floated down to the floor, a bullet hole in the front, but none at the back.

“Mickey! You could have hit me!” Deborah was in shock.

“Relax doll, this gun is justice, and its bullet’s never miss their target.” Mickey holstered his gun, put his jacket and trilby on over his bloodstained shirt and turned for the door.

“I don’t want to have to rescue you again miss, if you gotta do your journalism game, play with folks who play by the rules, this part of town’s just too dirty for a flower like you.”

Mickey closed the door behind him, leaving Deborah alone in the room with nothing but Finger’s McGee’s unconscious goons.

“But... this is the only way I can get closer to you mickey...”

The movie stopped and the screen went black.

“Zephyr, what have I told you about watching these movies!?”

“But Dad Mickey Hawk eye is so cool, he’s like a warrior hero!”

“Real warriors don’t use gun’s these days Zephyr, business deals and transactions are applicable to all conflicts. And if you must settle something physically, fencing is the honourable way to do it.”

“But dad I don’t like-”

“I don’t care if you don’t like it, it will teach you discipline and your lesson is in 5 minutes, go and get ready before you are late again.”

-

Zephyr hit the ground hard. He hated how these lessons ended this way, if he was allowed to use a gun like Mickey Hawk eye he could easily beat his cousin in these sparring sessions.

“Zephyr, you haven’t been practising. Your Cousin Polot beat you in two moves that time. If you continue to lack discipline I will be leaving the company to him.”

Mr Zee stood up and walked to the gym door. “Such a disappointment for a son.”

## **Chapter 57: Return to the storm.**

The storm raged on, but Aella had run short of tears.

Cadence floated before her in the cloud “You know Aella, we have something in common.”

Aella raised her head.

“We’re both killers dear, just as I killed that boy of yours you killed me, no mercy, no chance.”

Aella dropped her head. "We're different"

"oh? Do tell."

"I have people I care about."

"and you don't think I did before you vaporised me?"

"I don't"

"well you're probably right, but like it or not you go out of control, and you kill. You might as well accept that part of you, who knows... you might even enjoy it."

The storm continued, and Aella found more tears.

## **Chapter 58: 17 years ago.**

Brook walked home from the library, he was relieved The Irfans, his and Anemone's work was almost complete, or at least approaching publishable, but it was a significant drain on his energies, starting early and finishing late had become his routine.

Stepping into his home brook was greeted by his daughter,

"Daddy! I missed you, I haven't seen you in days! Can we play for a bit?"

"Not now Yami, Daddy needs some rest."

At that Brook walked past his daughter and on into his bedroom.

Yami couldn't stand it, for months her father had been pulling away from her, she didn't have a mother to turn to and her advanced intelligence at school made the other children keep their distance. 'That's it' Yami thought, and stormed out of the house and made her way through the night towards the library. 'I'll finish his work so he wont have any excuse not to be with me!'

Yami had tolerated loneliness for too long, it was the worst feeling possible, she was sure of it.

-

Yami stepped off the elevator and into floor ninety four, the security wasn't a problem for her to bypass, as a ten year old doing school assignments 20 year olds found challenging, she was an intelligent girl.

She walked up to her fathers desk to go over his research notes and learn what she had to to complete his work on her own, but something caught her eye, a slight glow at the back of the room, Yami couldn't help being curious, it was her curious nature that had pushed her to be so smart, to know more. She stepped towards it.

It was coming from inside what appeared to be a lead safe, left slightly ajar. For about 5 meters around it a circle was marked on the floor, with chalk written by it 'please don't cross Anemone'

Yami was not Anemone, and stepped towards the safe, she had to see what was inside it.

Standing before the safe, Yami pulled the door open to see a bracelet, with 26 beads embedded in it, one of them glowing brighter the closer Yami got to it. Almost in a trance, Yami knew she was going to wear it, it was for her. Then for Yami, everything went dark.

-

Yami woke up an hour later, she climbed to her feet and saw the bracelet on her wrist, though she didn't want to take it off, but she knew she'd be in trouble if she didn't. But no matter how hard Yami pulled the bracelet wouldn't go any further than her wrist.

"Damn"

Yami was angry, angry at herself for putting it on, angry at her dad for ignoring her and making her come here, angry at her mother for dying, angry at the kids at school for picking on her. She was so furious at her loneliness. If she wasn't alone she would never be in this situation, if only she could be hugged by someone, if only somebody was there who looked out for her.

Yami suddenly felt a headache and fell forward, it faded quickly and Yami had the odd sensation of seeing both the floor she was looking at, and also her own body looking at the floor. She stood up and turned around, now she could see herself in both images, she had two bodies now.

"This is definitely weird" both Yami bodies said completely at the same time, it took Yami all night experimenting, moving and interacting, but she realised, she was now a girl with one mind and two bodies.

"floor ninety four" both of Yami's bodies heard the elevator, thinking at double speed (as she now had two brains to use) she hid one of herself and stepped towards the elevator, whatever the punishment was for trying on the bracelet, she had no idea what would happen if she was found out for what she had become.

Anemone stepped off the elevator.

"Oh hello there Yami, have you come again to check-" Anemone almost immediately noticed the bracelet on Yami's wrist. "Yami..."

The bracelet was different, with only 13 beads, and one only half glowing, Anemone knew something had happened, she closed her eyes and used her abilities to try and sense the bracelet, she felt it both before her and across the room behind a pile of books.

"Yami, if there are two of you, I need to see both, you might need help."

Yami looked at anemone, how could she know already? But her face wasn't one of anger like she had expected, it was one of concern.

“Ok” she said, and walked her other body to beside her. Anemone was definitely shocked to see Yami’s twin.

“I’ll admit I wasn’t expecting this sweetie.”

“What does it mean Anemone?” Yami asked, both her bodies talking simultaneously.

“I’m not a hundred percent sure yet hun, we’ll have to talk it out a little to figure it out.” Anemone wrote a short note and left it on Brook’s desk “We’ll go to the private boothes on another floor so we can be sure no one walks in, how does that sound?”

Both of Yami nodded, she was glad Anemone was considerate, if her father walked in now he’d flip out, and this way she could at least prepare for it.

Anemone and Yami entered the elevator, each of her holding one of anemone’s hands.

-

“Floor ninety four” Anemone returned to the floor to find Brook and Mr and Mrs Irfan waiting.

“Anemone! I know your note said not to worry, but Yami is missing, and the bracelet too! What’s going on?”

“We need you to be calm please Brook, I know its going to be hard but please try.” Anemone didn’t want to make this any harder for Yami than it already was, and she had lost a little sympathy for brook he left his child so lonely when her abilities awakened the only thing she wanted was another body that could hold her. Anemone knew Brook’s dedication to his research was his way of avenging his wife’s death, but she couldn’t imagine putting work before a child.

“Yami, you can come out now.”

Both of Yami stepped off the elevator, and Brook fell back into his chair. Speechless.

-

That night Brook tucked his daughter into bed, it was a little small for the both of her now but she didn’t seem to mind, she was clearly glad he hadn’t shouted at her, but how could he have done, Brook knew he was the one who should be punished.

“Are you really quitting dad? I know the research is really important to you.”

“Nothing is more important to me than you Yami, I’m sorry I forgot that.” Brook walked over to the door and turned out the light.

What pained Brook most of all though, was he was one of the few people who knew what the bracelets meant for those who wore them, sooner or later someone would try to kill his daughter, and she would either die or have to become a killer to survive.

Brook didn’t sleep that night, it was all he could do to keep his crying quiet so neither of his daughter heard him.

## **Chapter 59: Return to the storm, part 2.**

The clouds rumbled around Aella, she was starting to hate this place, she knew it was her own mind, but she wanted out of even that.

Anemone floated before Aella this time.

“You can cry for as long as you like hun, get it out of your system, but as soon as its not helping any more you have to stop ok?”

“You always used to say that when I was sad...”

“I would always be there to hold you when you tripped and fell, or if another child started to pick on you.”

“I wish you could hold me now.”

“You could pretend I am if you want, but would it really help?”

“I’d know it wasn’t real.”

“Well you have to find what will help, you need to find out how to live a life that doesn’t make you sad. You know I wouldn’t like you this sad.”

“I know mum.”

## **Chapter 60: four years after Tommy Guns and Fencing.**

“Polot, thanks for coming” Zephyr welcomed his cousin into his apartment.

“It’s no problem, frankly I’m glad to have a chance to speak with you. You know I have 30 percent ownership but I cant make all the decisions, the have the majority vote and you mustn’t avoid your duties, your father wouldn’t have wanted that.”

The image of Zephyr’s father mutilated and distributed across the room with his mothers flashed into his mind.

“I know, he wanted the business to be run with discipline, that’s why I asked for you...”

“What is it Zephyr?”

“I’m going to sign over my share of the business to you, you’ll have 100 percent ownership-”

“are you sure? Have you thought this through? It’s only been a few weeks since...”

The bloody image flashed before Zephyr again

“I’m sure.”

“I’m not going to say I didn’t always want this zephyr, but I wanted to win the company from you myself, are you sure you are coping?”

Zephyr nodded and opened the door for Polot, once he left the door was closed and Zephyr said; ‘I’m going to hunt down whoever did it and tear him apart.’”

## **Chapter 61: Return to the storm, part 3.**

The storm showed no signs of letting up, Aella was pretty sure it would go on forever.

Timon appeared, floating before her.

Aella looked at him but he wouldn’t speak.

“Timon... I know I didn’t know you long, but you were a friend...”

Timon remained silent.

“Timon... why wont you talk to me?”

Aella and Timon started to descend, slowly falling out of the storm.

“Aella, you have listened to the dead too much, don’t do it anymore.”

Aella looked at her hands, “But, its like they are calling for-”

“The dead don’t want to be avenged Aella, they have more than enough company as it is.”

Coming out the bottom of the storm, sunlight shone into Aella’s face. She blinked and found herself in a bed, with the woman from earlier sleeping in a chair beside her.

Aella looked at her resting face, ‘How beautiful’ she thought.

## **Chapter 62: Last entry.**

2nd day of the Pine’s Drift, squaring year.

I’m sorry its been a while since my last entry diary, but I’ve been very busy of late travelling and running various errands, the mess with Polot and Yami has caused various problems and issues that need setting right, I didn’t want to have to take Aella on the road with me either, but she has gone far too quiet ever since her father died, and I cant leave her with the Irfans, they would be good to her but they have their own child to care for now.

But I think she is starting to recover, a little bit at a time, we've certainly been having a few adventures together, and whilst I wished Terry could still be with us, I see my daughter and now life still has plenty in store yet.

I know not everyone is so lucky, on our way to Udo's dojo to inform him of what was happening, we came across a river that had burst its banks in the heavy rain we've been having lately. It had spilled into a valley and towards a village. We went to see if we could help out but there was only one survivor left, a very young boy, perhaps only a couple of years older than Aella.

The boy was banded too diary, it seems the instances of the bracelets crossing paths is increasing. We took the boy with us to Udo, I knew Udo would be able to care for the boy, he even said the boy could call him grandfather. I guess Udo wasn't in the spirits to be considered a master ever since he lost a pupil...

anyway, we are currently staying at an inn in a village where they have a huge abundance of benapples, they taste wonderful, and Aella seems to have taken a liking to them too. I'm glad she's starting to become a little passionate about something again.

Anyway, with our errands almost run we'll be heading through the woods to the dojo nearby to leave a message before heading back to Koob, I'd rather get back sooner than later, the world is becoming increasingly unsafe for a banded warrior like me, and I don't want to risk Aella.

## **Chapter 63: one bed, two souls, three bodies.**

Yami straddled her lover with one body and kissed him with the other, with the curtains drawn the light from outside traced just one thin line across Yami's bodies and her man's chest, all glistening with sweat.

Between kisses Yami spoke, maintaining her thrusts with the other body.

"Aren't you afraid your cousin sent me to kill you Zee?" Yami traced three hands along Zephyr's chest.

"He doesn't see me as a threat, he'll wait till later to kill me in case I can bring down the number of the warriors more. Besides," Zephyr raised his hand to Yami's nearest face, "If he asked you to, would you really kill me?"

Yami lay across his chest, and looked up into his eyes, "I might, I hear you have been thinking about joining the contest seriously... would you kill me?"

Yami became more forceful, the intensity of the conversation made for an increase in the intensity of the sex. This was why she came to him. And she had just made him come to her too.

"I might, but I'd rather someone else do it."

"Aww, that's pretty cruel that you want me to die at all." Yami pouted as she held Zephyr, she also climbed off him to get a drink off the side.

“...I want everyone to die.”

Yami downed what was left in the glass and climbed into the bed to be on both sides of Zephyr.

“Is this because of what happened to your family all those years ago?”

“I don’t have a reason.”

The two lay in their sweat stained sheets and looked up at the ceiling for a time.

“why did you come to me Yami?”

“I’m just passing through, I heard you were in the area... and I miss our sessions like this.”

“really?”

“well, I am escorting someone for your cousin.”

“And do they know you are kidnapping them this time?”

“No... well not yet anyway.”

Yami moved closer to Zephyr’s ears and spoke softly.

“I can smell the booze on you Zee, I know what that means, how many people did you kill this time?”

Zephyr sighed and sat up.

“It’s time for you to leave.”

“Already? I don’t get another romp?”

“Please go.”

## **Chapter 64: discovery in the recovery**

Doll came to just as Aella finished reading her mother’s diary and closed it.

“Finally awake I see.”

Aella stared quietly at the ceiling, “I could say the same for you...”

Doll looked at the young girl in bed. “It’s true, I think we both needed a rest”

“I’ve rested enough, I need to go help Claire.”

“Not so fast hun” Aella turned to doll, “You might not see it now but you’re in no position to rescue anyone, with my ability I can sense your energies, your body’s fine but you pushed yourself too hard before, it will take some more time to recover fully.”

Aella stared back at the ceiling, “It doesn’t matter anyway, I have no way of knowing where she was taken.”

“I know exactly where.”

Aella sat up quickly, “Where!?” Felling faint Aella fell sideways off the bed and Doll had to catch her.

“See what I mean? You need more rest.” Doll lay Aella back in bed.

“Where?”

“President Polot has taken her to the capital, he’s a banded warrior too.”

“Polot... my mother mentioned him in her diary...”

“I know.”

Aella turned to doll inquisitively.

“Well you were out for a long time, and I couldn’t resist reading the diary of Udo’s favourite student, he always talked about her so much and I wanted to know her too I guess... plus there’s nothing else to read round here.” Doll smiled at Aella “I’m sorry if I upset you by it.”

“It’s ok” Aella couldn’t stop looking into Doll’s eyes. They seemed to be magical to Aella, she struggled on to her hands and crawled to the edge of the bed, leaning over to Doll.

“Hey, I said you need rest, what are you doi-”

Aella’s lips met Doll’s, their softness and smoothness felt so pleasant to Aella, she savoured the second or so that the kiss lasted before passing out and landing in dolls lap.

Doll stroked Aella’s hair before putting her back in bed.

Could she really fight her when she got her strength back? Doll knew she had to win the competition and she thought it was worth any cost, but could she really win and stay human, what would it say about her if she fought this girl who cared for her, who didn’t want to fight. Wouldn’t that make her the same as Cadence?

## **Chapter 65: What do you want with me and my mother?**

“You’re going to kill two birds with one stone for me Claire, almost literally.” Polot walked over to the monitor showing Mrs Irfan tied up just as Claire was. “I want the Key Claire, I know I need it to complete the competition, and you know you cant keep the key from being made.”

Polot turned to Claire “It’s inevitable, you know this.”

Claire looked down at the floor, it would be a great sacrifice of his to make the key.

“What else I want, well...” Polot turned from the monitor and walked up to Claire “The spell to forge the key, I know it’s the most powerful and dangerous spell you are capable of, I want you to use it to kill Aella and her new friend Doll. You will wait for them to come for you, you will kill them and at the same time, give me the key.”

Claire looked up at Polot, the man’s confidence almost stung Claire to look, “And if I don’t, you will kill my mother?”

“Not just that, I can make every moment up until her death painful, Polot turned to someone in the shadows behind him and said, “do it.”

on the monitor, another woman walked into view.

“Yami?” Claire recognised her, Yami walked up to Mrs Irfan and slapped her full force across the face, Mrs Irfan was knocked across the floor and started bleeding a little.

Claire looked at Polot in rage, tears welling up in his eyes.

“You behave, or worse will happen. Watch both of them for me Yami, and make sure this one behaves.” Polot left Claire’s book in the center of the room and as he left, Yami’s other body stepped into the light.

“You’d best do as he says Claire.”

## **Chapter 66: 5 weeks ago.**

“So you’re our first opponent then, its an honour to face you, I am Xethoran, and this is my wife Vashti” The man with the massive hammer announced to zephyr across the clearing, he was pleased their first battleground was such a magnificent spot.

“it will be a pleasure to face you in a spot such as this where the trees rise so tall the tops are out of sight. I hope that you-”

“You’re boring me.” Zephyr took out his cigarette and put it out on the floor in front of him, “This ‘honour’ and ‘pleasure’ of yours, I don’t give a shit about any of that!”

The wind started to pick up, even in a forest such as this, the tall trees were bare and nothing impeded the wind, it traced patterns on the brown pine’s scattered across the ground.

“Besides? Don’t you two get it? Only one person can win the competition, are you going to kill one another then?”

“Of course,” Vashti smiled back “Our wish to change the world is the same, and we wont be apart for long after we win.”

Zephyr spat to the ground and said, “Geez, you two piss me off, let’s go already!”

“Yeah, go Zee, kick their ass!” Zephyr’s party of followers cheered from behind him. “They aren’t a match for you Zee!”

Zephyr never wanted anyone to following him around, but he never told them to stop either, sooner or later they might be useful for something he figured.

“Are you in that much of a hurry to fight?” Xethoran quizzed, “you truly are a man of no honour, we shall put you in your place!”

at that Xethoran ran at Zephyr full speed with his hammer.

Zephyr flicked a fresh cigarette into the air and caught it in his mouth, in one movement he pulled a gun from one of his back holsters and aimed it right at Xethoran running towards him, he fired his gun perfectly past the end of his cigarette, lighting it and the bullet continued on right at Xethoran, who blocked with his hammer. Zephyr jumped to get distance before his bullet hit.

It was no ordinary bullet of course, it exploded on impact and caused a massive fireball to shoot up and the smoke from the explosion engulfed Xethoran, it wasn’t enough to harm him but it had definitely knocked him off balance, he stood in the clearing smoke waiting for Zephyr’s follow up attack but it didn’t come, his wife had taken care of that.

“What the hell” Zephyr struggled, tied up in ropes to the branch he jumped to above Xethoran.

“You should be more careful with your strategies gun man, my wife is a master of ropes.”

Vashti moved her hand just a little and a rope moved from beneath the pine needles at Xethoran’s feet, he stood on the end of the rope and readied himself, his wife threw him full speed towards zephyr, his hammer drawn back ready to swing.

“Don’t take me so lightly fatass.” Zephyr was pissed he had to abandon his cigarette already but he didn’t have a choice, he flicked it up into the air from his moth and it landed on his boot just before Xethoran hit. The gunpowder Zephyr had across his body ignited freeing him from the ropes, and he used the force of the dynamite he kept strapped to his feet to jump higher into the trees, and to knock Xethoran back towards the ground.

Almost a hundred meters up, and his suit significantly more singed than it was before, Zephyr waited for the pair to make the next move.

Zephyr felt the tree he was on shaking and heard thumping footsteps come from beneath him, the fatass was running up the tree to hit him again. ‘must’ve realised my last escape was a one time only thing’ Zephyr thought, he started to ready himself for the attack but was pulled off balance, looking at where his branch joined the tree, a rope had pulled it out.

Zephyr fell down beside the tree and saw Xethoran running up along it towards him.

Zephyr smiled, “You guys need to vary your attacks more” Zephyr pressed the trigger and the tree a short way below him exploded, sending Xethoran flying. ‘those charges were a

good idea' Zephyr thought to himself as he grabbed a branch of the falling part of the tree and started to ride it down to the ground.

Turning though, he saw Xethoran had been caught in a web of rope quickly cast out for him, and the huge tree trunk half that was falling suddenly stopped mid-air, that too had been caught by rope sprang from somewhere. The sudden stop almost sent Zephyr misfooted and falling, but he righted himself to see Vashti standing further along the trunk from him.

"Are explosions your only trick?"

"Are ropes yours?"

A rope came up from behind Vashti and pulled her out of sight, Zephyr quickly looked to where Xethoran had been caught and saw his safety net was empty, Zephyr jumped from the hanging trunk quickly just before a hammer shattered it in two. Zephyr pulled out a machine gun and fired it behind him as he flew through the air, using it to get a little extra thrust and reach a higher branch.

Xethoran used his hammer to block again but it cost him is upwards momentum and so he fell somewhere below zephyr.

Zephyr Pulled himself up onto the branch and started to jump between trees quickly whilst looking around.

It seemed staying put in one place was a shitty strategy against these two, if he was moving he would be both harder to trap and to hit. He kept his eye open for any sign of Vashti, if he could get her then Xethoran shouldn't pose him any difficulty.

Suddenly a hundred ropes strung up in the trees around and Zephyr froze in his tracks. He tried to see if there was someone coming, or if the ropes made any noticeable pattern, a discernible motive, it was clear enough when he saw it, even in the thinning light, the ropes had a slight purple shine, they were poisoned. An arena had been layed out that they didn't want him escaping. He couldn't climb the ropes either, his shoes were blown off before and he had no gloves.

He saw one of the ropes twitch a little and saw Xethoran running up the rope to look for him. Xethoran clearly had shoes, and Zephyr hid as close to the trunk of his tree as he could.

'Now would be a great time to think of a strategy' was what should of passed through his head, what he really thought he shouted loud and clear.

"Screw you ya bastard!" he leaped out from his perch and opened fire on Xethoran, his leap took him straight towards one of the poisoned ropes, so he threw his gun at the rope and landed on that instead, riding the rope down the funnel that it made towards Xethoran.

Zephyr pulled out a shotgun and aimed ready, around the next trunk his opponent should be waiting. But after sliding around the corner Xethoran was absent, Zephyr looked around for him only to see the large hammer wielding warrior come from above, once again Zephyr jumped aside to dodge the attack but it was a little too late this time and he had to block using his shotgun.

Zephyr was blasted full force right through one tree trunk and almost embedded into the next, he was lucky not to have hit a poison rope.

Now Zephyr really was aggravated, he pulled himself out of the crater his body left in the tree trunk and stood on a branch, he looked at his shotgun, it was severely bent out of shape.

“Don’t think you’ll be using that again any time soon Gunman.”

Zephyr looked across to Xethoran, standing on another branch not far off, he threw his shotgun at him, Xethoran found this act of desperation quite amusing, until the bent shotgun exploded in a massive fireball sending him flying right into some poisoned ropes where he became tangled.

“Noooooo!” Zephyr heard Vashti scream and he made himself scarce as she rode a rope up to her husband.

“Don’t worry honey, I have the antido-” Vashti was cut short, a rope passed right through her hears and then through her husbands.

“You’re not the only one who can use ropes bitch!” Zephyr whispered into her ear as the life left her. He held his weapon so she could see, “Harpoon gun darlin’, oh and I’ll be taking that, it’ll make it easier for me to get to the ground.” Zephyr grabbed the bottle with the poison’s antidote from her hand and waited until both glows had passed from their bracelets to his.

-

Zephyr walked past his followers, “Alright Zee you did it, two more glows means two deaths right?”

“Where to now Zee?”

Zephyr paused and sighed

“I need a drink.”

## **Chapter 67: Time to go.**

Aella found herself strong enough to stand and read the note Doll had left.

‘Gone to get some food and supplies from nearby village, back soon’

Aella didn’t waste any time, she grabbed her things and left immediately, as much as she found she cared for Doll, she remembered that Cadence had mentioned doll was planning to kill all the other warriors, and Aella had to at least rescue Claire before she was killed, so she set off to the north east in the direction of the capital, cutting across the fields of the Cinnamon hills so as to avoid Doll when she returned. She knew Doll would realise she

was gone soon enough, but she just hoped for enough of a head start that she could get to Claire first.

-

The grass was wet from the recent rainfall and the day was about to wear itself out, Aella predicted that she had an hour or so of light left, and then she planned to push on a little further, she had rested enough lately and anything she could do to put herself further from an approaching warrior was a good move she thought.

-

as Doll nears the top of the steps up the hill to the dojo she thought back to the night her sister died, did Aella really know she only used but a fraction of her strength?

Doll decided she should tell Aella about her full potential ability, and that she wont fight her until she has mastered it.

“Hey Aella, I got food. And there’s something I want to talk to you about-”

Aella was gone, and doll saw she had left a note.

‘I imagine you cared for me so we could have a fair fight, I’m sorry but I’d rather not fight you, and I have to help my friend first. So if its something we must do, please can it wait.’

“Silly girl.” Doll became very concerned, she knew she wouldn’t be the only warrior who had seen the wanted posters.

-

The sunset gave the hills a last wave of colour whilst preparing to go for the night, the breeze blew the grass around Aella pretty strongly, if only Aella had rested more, she might have perhaps noticed that her bracelet wasn’t pulling in Doll’s direction anymore.

“So you’re Aella huh? I have to say you seem to have a lot of glows, whilst I’ve only got mine.”

Aella looked to her right, another girl, maybe three or four years older than her stood a few meters away in the grass.

“Are you here to fight me?”

“That’s the idea, though I might not have killed... what’s that, six people? I do have plenty of training, and you... you look pretty weary. I like my chances. Best follow the rules though, I’m Jasu, it wouldn’t be right to fight you without telling you my name first.”

“I’m not going to fight you, I don’t like killing.” Aella started to continue walking, away from Jasu.

“Hey what’s that about? You cant just walk away from a banded warrior like that, who they hell do you think you are!?” Jasu wasn’t happy, “That’s it bitch, if you wont fight then that just makes it easy for me!”

Aella saw her shadow cast across the ground in front of her, a bright flashing was coming from Jasu, Aella turned just in time and put up a shield, there was intense crackling as Jasu's lightning hit Aella's defence. Jasu stopped herself.

"Another lightning type eh? I must admit I wasn't expecting that, this will be fun I think!"

Jasu shot another two beams of lightning this time and maintained their blast.

"Let's see who's tougher, you seem a little untrained and I can go much more powerful, can you feel it yet?"

"STOP IT! I don't want to fight you! Why do we have to fight!?"

"Stupid bitch, isn't there something you want to change about the world, something worth killing for? I sure as hell think there is, and I'm going to rise to the top in style, I'm going to be a hero for killing one of the people who attacked Koob!"

The Lightning continued and Aella started to cry.

"Please... stop, if you push much harder, I won't be able to control it."

"Oh, you have more? In that case I want to see it!"

-

Doll followed the pull on her bracelet, she knew Aella couldn't have gotten too far.

There was a huge blue flash a mile or so before her, one doll recognised immediately, she knew Aella was in trouble so she set off towards it as quickly as she could, but before she even covered 100 meters the light changed, it quickly became a massive pillar, reaching off into the sky and out into space, it became a deafening roar all around it and even from the distance doll was she could feel the heat, it must have been a mile wide at least.

The pillar burned for about a minute before dissipating, and Doll rushed as fast as she could towards the source of it.

## **Chapter 68: Reaction to the pillar.**

The arena shook all around Udo, he could see right down the bridge and the pillar seemed to be an extension of it perfectly aligned, climbing up into the night sky.

The arena almost gave off a groan, a desire.

"You want that don't you?" Udo spoke aloud to the arena.

'What have I done' Udo thought to himself, and continued meditating.

-

in the capital Polot looked out across the city towards the pillar, it seemed to turn half the sky to day whilst the other half was night, he faced it for it's full duration, determined not to let such power in his opponents scare him.

Though he realised shortly after that his determination was proof he was indeed afraid. A fact he would keep to himself.

## **Chapter 69: center of the crater.**

Ten minute later, doll arrived at the edge of a mile wide crater, she saw a body in the center unconscious, she rushed to it as fast as she could.

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Doll was relieved to see it was Aella, and infinitely more relieved to see she was still alive.

“Aella hun, are you ok?”

Doll shook Aella just a little

“uu- I... I'm ok... I think.” Aella sat up, “That's a lie, I'm not ok... I didn't want to, but because her power was similar to my electric charge it pretty much broke the seal on my real ability.”

“so you knew your real ability wasn't-”

“I didn't know until it happened, after that everything just clicked... I suppose you want to fight me now?”

“Don't be silly, we have to rescue your friend first.”

“You'll help?”

“of course, its my fault as much as yours they were able to take her, besides I don't think you'll get there like this.”

“huh?”

“You've been going the wrong way, plus your friend left this.” Doll pulled out a piece of paper from her pocket, Aella recognised it as a page from Claire's book, it had a glowing glyph on it with an arrow in the center.

“A compass?”

“I think so, it's pointed right at the capital now.”

Doll gave Aella a hand up.

“Come on, we have to make some distance, I think your show might have gotten a few people's attention.”

“you think?” Aella questioned sarcastically.

The two set off (in the right direction) out of the crater.

## **Chapter 70: 80 years ago.**

The private jet cruised along high above the ocean, the sun shining off it like a mirror.

“So Doctor Udo, can you tell me yet what it is?”

“Honestly Verity I have no idea.”

“Really? I thought you were the top scientist on the site?”

well I am the lead researcher, but so far I’ve only been able to send the rest of the team there, my first flight was delayed so I got stuck here with you... not that it isn’t a pleasure of course,” Udo gave the young reporter a smile, which she definitely appreciated, he was a very charming young man, and brilliant too. “So I don’t have a clue what is at the site itself”

“and your team hasn’t sent you any data or correspondence? It’s been a few days since they arrived hasn’t it?”

“Well it’s to be expected, the electro-magnetic interference there is very great, and we’ve detected high levels of radiation too.. nothing harmful to us,” Udo reassured Verity “but it seems to enjoy breaking out equipment. We’ll likely be recording most our data the old fashioned way.” Udo smiled pleasantly again, before sipping from his tea.

“and what way is that?” Verity looked up from her notepad.

“Same way you’re doing it.” Udo nodded at her pen and paper.

“This is the pilot speaking, just wanted to inform you it should be about two hours before we touchdown, I’m sure you understand it would be dangerous to get the plane too close to the X zone. Pilot out.”

The plane continued over the ocean, carrying one of the worlds most brilliant scientists and one of it’s most determined reporters to a place unlike any other on the planet.

## **Chapter 71: Love at first sight (eleven years ago).**

6 years years since Yami doubled, she found herself helping Mr Irfan with his white event research, Mrs Irfan would be helping too, but she had a new child to care for, and Anemone too was on the team, but it seems her child took up most of her time.

When Mr Irfan left for lunch Yami felt the emptiness start to set in again, her father had died from a heart attack just one year before and it still got to her, and now everyone she knew was starting families of their own.

“Floor Ninety four” the elevator announced.

“You’re back early.” Yami said expecting Mr Irfan to respond, but it was not him.

“Actually I think I’m way overdue a visit.”

Yami turned round and let her other body continue reading. Standing off the lift was a young man wearing a suit and thin spectacles. He had the Zee Industries logo on a button he had pinned to his suit.

“And you are?”

“I’m Polot, CEO of Zee Industries, it’s nice to meet you miss...”

“Yami.”

“It’s nice to meet you Yami and...”

“oh, that’s also me.”

“Oh? Ah I see... no, I apologise, I don’t see.”

The reading Yami body put down her book and stepped up beside it’s double and both announced in an almost patronising way.

“We are both the same person in control of two bodies.” Yami curtsied for Polot and whilst he realised she was toying with him, he played along as a gentleman.

“It’s a pleasure to meet both of you, good lady” He took two of Yami’s hands, bowed and kissed them both.

Yami was caught a little off guard, she had never met anyone who treated her nicely even after she teased them before.

“I must say it’s a fascinating ability you have there.” Polot complimented her.

“Ah, thank you.” Yami blushed twice, “But what about you, a young man of but 18, running the largest business in the world, you’re something yourself.”

“Well thankyou for your kindness, but I was brought up with training for it, I’m afraid it doesn’t leave me much time for pleasantries such as this.”

“Ah of course, well Mr Irfan is the head researcher here but he is out to lunch at the moment. No doubt it’s him you want to speak to, I think he has a few technological innovations he wanted to put forward. Though I didn’t think he usually spoke with the CEO”

“Well in truth he normally doesn’t, however I have taken a personal interest in white event phenomena myself, I find it very fascinating, much like yourself Miss Yami.”

“Oh, because of my ability?”

“Well that is fascinating, but I think even if you only had the one body it alone would be more beauty than this poor planet deserves, and certainly more than my eyes can take before falling in love.”

Yami found herself blushing enough for four people.

“Floor Ninety Four”

“Ah, I think your boss is here,” Polot turned to the elevator but hesitated, before telling Yami “I know a nice restaurant in the 2nd quarter, would you care to join me for dinner tonight?”

## **Chapter 72: 4 weeks ago (AKA Zephyr vs n).**

“whoa, do you have to actually fight an army this time Zee?”

“Isn’t this a bit much? Who the heck gets an army to fight for them.”

The snow had been falling heavy for some time on these plains but had started to thin out in the last hour, zephyr stood atop a small mound, his followers behind him, and an army of warriors ahead of him, at the back of the army lay his target.

The moonlight and the snow made for good visibility, and bonfires lit across the battlefield sent smoke high into the air, Zephyr knew that meant archers, if they were using flaming arrows at least they would be easier to see and dodge at night.

Zephyr took his cigarette out and flicked it into the snow.

“you really gonna do this Zephyr?”

Zephyr Smiled and ran full speed towards the center of the army, the soldiers immediately responded, a hail of flaming arrows flew up and arced towards him.

Zephyr pulled the bazooka from his back and aimed it forward, the arrows started to fall, if he kept going as he was they would certainly land on him, Zephyr jumped and aimed his bazooka at the ground beneath him, Zephyr was catapulted by the explosion, front-flipping over the arrows, narrowly missing them, one even catching the tail of his jacket.

Zephyr grinned as he flew over the first line of soldiers, upgrading to steel soled boots since last time was a good move.

Zephyr fired again at the spot he was falling towards, the explosion cleared the area of soldiers and slowed his landing as he hit the top of it. He landed on hard ground, the snow having evaporated in the explosion.

The bazooka empty, he threw it as hard as he could at the advancing soldiers, it knocked them back for about 50 meters and then like the shotgun the week before it exploded, but much more violently this time, the explosion cleared a massive area and Zephyr pushed

his advantage for all it was worth, he rushed into the smoke and fire to get closer to his target.

The soldiers on the other side expected him but wouldn't step into the smoke, instead they pulled back and waited for him to come out before making their move.

Something dropped at the feet of the soldiers a few lines back, they looked down to see an explosive charge, looking up they saw Zephyr falling towards them his machine gun drawn.

Zephyr allowed himself a wicked smile as he opened fire at the area beneath him, the explosion again launched him up and over more waves of soldiers.

He landed into a pile of bodies left from his last spray of bullets and was about to press forwards when all the soldiers around him suddenly exploded in a shower of their own blood, as they fell Zephyr saw he was surrounded by men with large lances (blood stained) and all had extra armoured bracers covering their wrists.

Zephyr started firing his machine gun and spun it around over his head shooting at each Lancer, but all his bullets were blocked by what appeared to be a shifting, floating pool of water that hardened before the bullets passed through.

Zephyr eyed all the lancers, "So one of you dicks is my real target eh? But which one?"

The lancers simultaneously braced themselves and Zephyr found 20 blades pointed at him

Zephyr relaxed and shrugged a little. "Dumb strategy when my bracelet tells me already." He raised his hands over his head and dropped his gun to his feet. Zephyr looked over to the lancer his bracelet pulled towards. "By the way, how did you convince all these guys to fight for you."

Zephyr didn't expect an answer, his machine gun exploded launching him above the lancers spears but what happened next he did not expect.

All the snow across the battlefield pulled in towards it's center, carrying soldiers with it, zephyr found himself stood on a floating island of soldier's bodies 70 meters or so in the air, supported by a swirling vortex of water beneath, with powerful water spouts furiously spinning around this human platform. Across stood with him atop the bodies was his opponent.

"I didn't convince them of anything."

Zephyr was definitely puzzled by this one, and he knew a challenge when it presented itself. "oh?"

"I am the great Quan, I control water as you can see, and humans... well they are mostly water aren't they."

"Heh, you're a pretty big asshole."

"And you claim to be better?"

“I’m so much worse! I’ll prove it!”

Zephyr pulled a rifle from his back and charged at Quan across the soft platform, Quan did the same with his lancer.

Zephyr jumped at the last second avoiding Quan’s lance attack, but wasn’t counting on his other abilities, one by one Quan pulled bodies screaming from the edge of the platform and threw them at Zephyr who used his high powered rifle to blast them away.

His gun jammed and one of the flying soldiers was on a collision course for zephyr, he took advantage and grabbed the man, rode him down towards Quan with his rifle pointed at the man’s chest. The man screaming all the way.

Zephyr fired his rifle through the man at Quan, the force of the blast tearing the soldier apart but Quan blocked the shot with the hilt of his lance.

Zephyr kicked off the lance and jumped back across the platform facing Quan.

Quan smiled at Zephyr, “Are you really such a dark warrior?”

Zephyr grinned and pointed down. As Quan looked to his feet the rifle Zephyr left there exploded, blasting Quan up over Zephyr, who pulled a knife from his pocket and threw it right through Quan’s throat as he flew overhead.

“asshole,” Zephyr lit his cigarette at Quan’s body was caught up in a water spout and sent a mile high, “Making me use a blade.”

Zephyr took a drag as the platform started to collapse, none of its construction materials were left alive when they hit the floor.

-

Zephyr walked on over to his followers a little damp and lighter for weapons but otherwise not as torn up as last time.

“Did’ya get em Zee? You don’t have another glow.”

Zephyr grabbed his follower by the shirt and pulled him over, “huh, what did I sa-”

Quan’s body landed just where the follower had been stood, and the glow from the bracelet floated over to Zephyr’s.

“whoa.”

## **Chapter 73: Safe for now.**

“We’ll stop here for the night I think Aella.”

“huh? We cant be more than a couple of miles from the crater though.”

“Yeah, I think they will expect us to travel further, if someone comes looking for us they wont send heavy search parties in this area, plus the thicket gives us good cover.”

“I guess that makes sense.” Aella stretched and allowed her self a yawn, she definitely needed the rest, her energies were in sync again but she took a big hit of adrenaline when she fired up the pillar and she was starting to come down from it’s support.

“besides,” doll looked over in the direction of the crater, “I don’t think anyone is going to be heading towards this place and expecting to actually win in a fight.”

Aella sat down in a seat formed by the curving roots of a tree. “I wouldn’t kill anyone again, I have control of it now.”

Doll turned to Aella and saw she was down, she must have killed again before and it was getting to her. Doll walked over and smiled. “I believe you.”

“Well it will make it easier for you at least, once we’ve helped Claire I wont fight back.”

Doll stood up again. “Do I really seem like that type of person?”

“Aren’t you?”

“I thought I was... well, I had my reasons, but you seem to have a different approach.” Doll turned and lay back in the roots near Aella, “I’m curious to see how it works out.”

-

Aella and doll lay beneath the tree, the moonlight shining down onto them, each between large roots almost forming beds.

“Doll, about that time...”

“hmm?”

“The kiss... I’m sorr-”

“don’t be sorry.” Doll smiled whilst looking up at the stars.

“It’s just that... I never felt that way before and I-”

“had to see what it was like?”

“mmh- yeah..”

“Don’t worry, I understand, I spent years looking for what was right for me, in many ways... I guess I still am. You should never apologise for trying to find out who you are hun.”

Aella looked over to where Doll was, she could only see her knees past all the roots.

“Thank you Doll...”

“Hey, I’m here to look out for you ok? But...” Doll looked down, “I know it sucks to hear it, but you aren’t my type, The one I loved, recently he-”

“Don’t you be sorry either,” Doll looked over to see Aella looking over to her, leaning over the roots. “You have to be yourself also, I didn’t expect you to like me back so I’m already ok with it.”

Doll smiled “Sooner or later you’ll find the right person.”

Aella lay back down in in the roots of the tree. “That’s if I’m not killed before it happens.”

the two paused, both looking at the moonlight shimmering across the grass before their tree.

“Well I’m going to do my best to make sure nothing happens to you.”

“Thanks Doll.”

## **Chapter 74: 80 years ago, part 2.**

Udo and Verity waved off the jet as it took off from the flats.

Verity looked around, apart from the truck left for them by the first group, she couldn’t see anything in any direction.

“This really is a barren spot.”

“Yeah, but at least its a solid desert, we should be able to drive it pretty easily.”

“Is it like this because of what’s at the site you think?”

“It’s not likely, we can tell from satellite images the site itself has plant life there.” Udo Climbed into the truck.

“But doesn’t this desert surround the site?” Verity got in with him.

“That, or maybe the site causes things to bloom even in the desert.” Udo smiled at Verity before turning the ignition. She could tell he wasn’t really all too sure himself, and she could tell that excited him.

“This is perhaps the most interesting thing you have ever studied isn’t it Mr Udo?”

Udo set the Truck off along the flats. “I’d be lying if I said no, I’m a mystery man personally, and lately I’d been running out of mysteries, thinking all the scientists of the past had it best when everything was new and unexplored.” Udo looked over to Verity, “I’m sure you can relate, you know doubt have it different to the cutting edge reporters bringing people the kind of news they never thought could happen.”

“I suppose, but I never felt there is a shortage of things people should know” Verity smiled back at Udo.

“On that I can definitely agree with you.”

-

After half an hour driving, and still no sight of anything but the flats, Verity had to ask;

“How do you know where we are going?”

“I don’t, there’s no way to tell.”

“What!?”

“Compasses are no good because of the interference, and other equipment would be even more useless, its entirely possible the other team is still driving around the flats looking for the site.”

“Really? Couldn’t you like... use the stars or something when it turns to night?”

“We would, but the site creates a certain aurora, like the northern lights, but it’s too strong to make out the stars beyond it.”

“Well wont that give away the site’s position if its giving off light?”

“well its not the sight itself that generates the lights, its wild magnetic behaviour, and because we don’t understand that yet-”

“you cant follow it right?”

“Precisely.” Udo smiled, he was pleased the reporter was smart as well as Attractive.

The two continued to drive in what Udo believed to be the correct direction.

## **Chapter 75: Why are you working for someone like him Yami?**

Yami sat across from Claire in his cell, eating a Benapple.

“Well, for one thing, he’s my husband. He’s one of the few people in the world who never abandoned me, not like your family did when you came along.”

“So you’re blaming me for something?”

Yami took another bite out of her apple, “Not at all, it was my fault for depending on people like your parents, on Aella’s family too. Polot’s type is never changing, I like that. Besides,” Yami stood up and threw away the core of her apple. Walking over to Claire she said “Up until not long after you were born, it was Polot’s company who funded your fathers work.”

“That’s a lie!”

“Really? You don’t think the owner of a huge company who has a bracelet himself wouldn’t fund white event research? That wasn’t all there was to it either, we helped make inventions for Zee Industries too, the helicopter that took you away for example, the energy weapons used by the elite guards outside? All Irfan et al innovations Claire.”

Claire looked down at the floor, there was still so much he didn’t know.

“Claire...” Yami leant over Claire close, “You need to get on with preparing the key spell now, you’re taking to long. You know what that means.”

There was a sharp slapping noise and crying coming from the monitor wall beside Claire, he couldn’t bear to look.

Tears running down his eyes Claire pleaded, “please... stop. I’ll do it.”

Claire opened the book and started reading, if it was any other book his tears would be smudging the ink.

“thatta’ boy.” Yami went back to her seat and slouched, keeping a constant eye on Claire.

## **Chapter 76: Poison.**

“wow, he really does drink a bottle for every guy he kills.”

“In that case he shouldn’t kill so many folks at once, he’s going to poison himself to death at this rate. Come on, you carry that end and lets get him to a room.”

Zephyr had been on a month long binge, and had eventually been barred from every pub and inn in Norren City. A couple of his followers carried him to a place to rest up whilst he was too drunk to kill either of them.

-

Zephyr sat in the darkness.

“Hey there Zee dear, you look a mess.” Deborah from the old Mickey hawk eye movies appeared before him.

“I don’t remember you dressing like such a slut before.”

“Well you never needed a slut before, and now she’s busy,” The image of a million Yami bodies naked and glistening appeared around Zephyr and Deborah but faded back to black as Deborah spoke, “But now... you’ve only got me.”

“I don’t want either of you.”

“Oh, well why are you here then? Could it be you came back to see it, to fuel your battle spirit once more?”

“No. don’t show me-”

The image of Zephyr's parent's bodies distributed across his home was inescapable, it made zephyr feel ill.

"There see? Doesn't that feel better?"

"How could that possibly make me feel better?" Zephyr looked down

"Oh, normally when you get pissed off about having killed people you come to look at that to feel better about it, the world did horrible things to you after all, so its ok, fun even, to do horrible things back, the world owes you a debt it can never repay. Isn't that what you think?"

"I don't know..."

"well look at that! Might the Mad Devil Zee be having a change of heart!"

"What do you know?"

"Everything you do, of course."

Deborah pouted after the pause, "You're no fun like this, where is Zephyr the warrior, Zephyr the great gale blowing unstoppable? You just sit all mopey like, its not like you are even thinking of anything, just getting miserable because you think that's what people are supposed to feel after killing other people. But I know the truth," She leant down and held his chin, bringing their faces close "I know you don't feel anything, this act of yours is a joke, and a waste of time."

"so what if it is?" Zephyr pulled away. "Piss of already, you're me aren't you? Well I want to do just what I'm doing. And I'm going to keep doing it until I don't want to. Ok?"

Deborah stepped back in a huff, "Suit yourself, its no fun though." she slowly faded and then there was nothing but the black.

## **Chapter 77: Antidote.**

Doll sat atop the lilies, drifting slowly along the lake, moonlight glistening off the surface and fireflies danced around between her and the samurai, sat opposite her.

"Are you upset at me I wonder?"

"Why would I be upset?"

Doll looked down, "My resolve, it's not firm."

"There is nothing wrong with your resolve," Doll looked at the samurai "you are questioning what is really right, It was doing that that I came to transcend myself, and its right to question."

the samurai stood and turned, walking away across the surface of the lake he said; "If you cant keep questioning if you are right, and be able to answer honestly, then perhaps..."

"... I don't really know what is right."

## **Chapter 78: A week before the wedding (ten years ago).**

Yami looked out over Koob from the Polot's private suite in the hotel, looking just a little lost.

Polot had learned to see it from miles away.

"What's the matter, are you still bothered that you cant be totally at the altar with me when we get married? You know what it would look like if you did right?"

"It's not that..."

"Then what, talk to me Yami, you know we'll be married soon after all, you can tell me anything."

Yami turned and gave a half smile, the idea that there was someone who would always be there for her, that's all she ever wanted, but she couldn't just keep something like this from him. She looked back out from the balcony.

"There's something I've been keeping from you."

"Oh? Whatever it is its ok, I wont mind."

"Well... it concerns you... concerns everyone who has these." Yami held up her bracelet arm."

Yami looked away again "The primary white event report, significant portions of it were ommited from the final paper."

"A cover-up?" Polot was taken aback, he had trusted Irfan's team completely, they had been a great asset to his company. And he knew Irfan's type perfectly well to use him to keep him, "Irfan's a good man though, for him to keep a secret..."

Yami looked over at Polot, "come meet me at the library tonight, I'll show you the full report."

-

Polot looked up after an hours reading and sighed heavily, "so that's what the bracelets mean."

"You see why I had to tell you..." both of Yami sat across the room, pretty nervous too.

"I appreciate you sharing this with my Yami, but this... it's too important to be kept hidden."

"What do you mean!?"

Polot stood up and started to pace, thinking.

“If this fighting is inevitable, and if I’ve learnt anything its that fighting is always inevitable, its better people know about it, the purpose of this... ‘contest’ is to find the right person to remake the universe. If one warrior finds out ahead of the others, the contest becomes unfair, they can go from one to the next, and the chances are unbalanced.”

“but it means people will come for us too.”

“well no one knows we are banded, and they don’t start pulling towards each other until the key is ready, we can spread the news, but remain hidden ourselves, and other warriors will have the same advantage, its not at all unfair.”

“Is this really what you think is right Polot?”

“I do.”

Yami stood up and walked over to her fiancé, “then so do I.”

## **Chapter 79: 80 years ago part 3.**

The truck choked and spat before the engine cut out and it rolled to a stop on the flats, illuminated by the shimmering green sky above.

“The truck’s broken?” Verity asked?

“yep” Udo climbed out and started to look around.

“That means we’re close right?”

Udo smiled, she really caught on fast, it was almost a waste she was a reporter and not a scientist he thought to himself.

“Over there!” Verity got Udo’s attention and pointed a small treeline on the horizon.

“That’s it!” Udo climbed around to the back of the truck and pulled out their packs, “Let’s get going then.”

the two set off on foot towards the site, beneath a sky that looked like a green ocean.

-

“Is there anything I should know before going in there?” Verity asked as they approached the trees, it seemed to her to be just a small wood, perhaps some kind of oasis.

“Watch your step, the satellite shots suggested tha-aaaAAH!” As the two stepped on the grass between the trees it gave way, sending them down a dry nook where a steam had flowed at one point, but now it was just a dusty slide, sending them winding down into a huge dip in the flats.

Fortunately the stream had never become a waterfall and they made it to the bottom of the dip relatively unharmed, with just a few scratches.

Dusting themselves off the pair looked around, it was almost like a crater, lined with trees and the bright green ocean above.

“Oh my god.” Udo turned to see what Verity was looking at, he saw the other members of his team, as if caught in the freeze frame. They appeared to be walking towards a mound in the center of the dip, but they weren’t moving.

Udo walked over to them and examined them further.

“Are they dead?”

“It doesn’t look like it, by my guess their time streams and our are not in sync.”

“What does that mean?”

“well, they are moving, but so slowly we cant see it, and to them, we are moving very very fast, too fast to see also. To experience a temporal disturbance like this first hand is amazing, and at this scale too.”

“so why are we out of sync?”

“My guess is they arrived during the day when there wasn’t the aurora, the entry point must determine the rate of temporal flow.” Udo turned to the mound “Come on, I’m sure they wont object to us going on ahead of them.”

“Are they going to be ok?”

“they are ok now, its us who are passing through time too quickly.”

“what?”

“well I’m just saying, there is every possibility you could spend the rest of your life in this very hour.”

“What, I’d die of old age tonight?”

“Maybe.” Udo climbed to the top of the mound where there appeared to be a hatch. “Anyway if time is a problem for you then you shouldn’t waste it so, come on.”

opening the hatch Udo saw rungs to climb down with. “Now that’s weird.”

“You can just plainly say your team is in a temporal mess and so are we, if you say something is weird we must be totally screwed, what is it?”

“it looks like this site, this... artefact, is man made.”

“How could something man made do all this?”

“Well that’s why we are here, but I’m starting to suspect, perhaps it was more... made for man, then by man.”

Udo shook his head, now wasn’t the time to be thinking about stuff like that. He climbed down through the hatch into whatever lied below.

## **Chapter 80: Midday.**

Aella woke up to find the sun shining high overhead, and Doll laid back in the grass before the tree looking up at the clouds pass by.

“You didn’t wake me at dawn?”

“I figured you needed the extra rest. Besides,” Doll got to her feet and faced Aella. “If you didn’t you would have woken up sooner wouldn’t you?”

Aella smiled

“That’s what I like to see, anyway, now you’re up we can set off whenever you’d like.”

-

The two walked through the fields of long grass, checking Claire’s page once in a while to make sure they were headed in the right direction. The warm breeze and sun did their best to raise Aella’s spirits just like Doll, and Aella definitely appreciated it.

It hadn’t escaped Aella’s mind at all that one of her friends had been killed and another had been kidnapped, but the world seemed to her to be reassuring her that there is something worthwhile to life, even the hard and sad parts. A breeze like this, travelling with good company, these are things she could appreciate no matter what state her heart finds itself in.

## **Chapter 81: The order.**

Polot walked into the cell, “how is the spell coming?”

Claire looked up from his book, various glyphs and glows charging in the air around him.

“It will take a while, days maybe.”

“You aren’t holding out on me are you?” Polot looked over to his wife. “Yami, do i-”

“NO DONT!” Claire started to cry again “I’m going as fast as I can please believe me, but this spell takes a long time to charge before I can use it, otherwise it just wont do anything.”

Polot could see the honesty in Claire's face, he was used to pushing people to their limit to get what he wanted and knew Claire could not be pushed any harder. He needed to buy more time.

"Yami... I want you to go and kill Aella and Doll."

Yami stood up, she knew what was really expected of her. "Yes dear."

Yami walked over to Polot and embraced him, even though he didn't react, she convinced herself this moment meant something to him too. Both of Yami's bodies then left their respective cells and headed for the palace exit.

She would go on to delay the two warriors from getting to the capital, her suicide mission for the man who kept her from the grasp of loneliness.

-

"Aella is with that Doll woman right? How do you know she can beat her?"

"I don't, I think she is at best an even match for doll, but she doesn't stand a chance against Aella"

Claire looked up at Polot, "So you just sent your wife to her death to buy yourself more time."

"I am a man of ambition Claire," Polot turned to the door as a new guard came into the cell, "I won't be beaten by any warrior, not even the one I love." at that Polot left.

Claire looked from his new guard to his counterpart on the monitor showing his mother's cell. Polot's ambition truly was fearsome.

## **Chapter 82: Temperature drop.**

Doll sat down after getting the fire going for the night, this far north it was starting to get colder.

Aella however had already managed to get to sleep.

Doll looked at her, she refused to fight, yet was determined to save her friend, how did she hope to win? 'does she even think she has a chance?' Doll thought.

The bushes nearby started to rustle in the cool breeze.

'Regardless,' doll thought to herself, 'I can do what she won't, perhaps if I fight she won't have to... I might be able to keep her from becoming like me... like the others.'

-

The storm raged on over Aella, red and ferocious, but sitting in the grass beneath it Aella didn't let it worry her, she could get by outside that part of herself, she could cope beyond the storm.

Claire appeared before Aella.

“Aella, there is someone coming for you.”

“I think its a little much my dreams are trying to be prophetic.”

“This isn’t a prophecy, I’m actually Claire, I can get through to you like this using a spell from the book.”

“Wait, so you are really Claire?”

“That’s what I said.”

“...prove it.”

“You’re a dumb blonde and I’m better looking than you.”

“Ok... so you can jump into people’s dreams... cool.”

Aella looked down.

“I’m sorry I didn’t stop them taking you.”

“...We both had other things on our mind at that time Aella.”

The two were quiet for a while.

“So I hear you are travelling with that Doll woman...”

“Yeah, she’s pretty cool. I think she’s strong too.”

“And she isn’t trying to fight you?”

“No, its like she said when we met, she doesn’t want to fight at all. I’m not sure why she was even fighting in the first place... I wonder if even she knows.”

“So we can trust her?”

“I think so, she’s at least promised to help me come get you.”

Claire turned away.

“Don’t come for me Aella.”

“What!? Why, is it because Polot is sending people for us?”

“no... its not that...” Claire sighed and faced Aella. “If you come, I will be forced to kill you.”

Aella looked at Claire and could see he was really torn up. “Claire... why?”

“He has my mother, and I’ve been made to do stuff... stuff there is no coming back from.”  
Claire looked down. “Don’t try to save me Aella, I’m past saving.”

Aella stood up quickly, the storm became more rowdy.

“Don’t say that! We will save you! Nothing in the world will stop us!”

“Please Aella... don’t...” Claire slowly faded, leaving Aella alone in her dream again.

## Chapter 83: Leader.

“Geez Zee, you have literally been banned from every bar in Norren.”

“That’s some feat.”

Zephyr walked north along the path from Norren, he didn’t know of any towns nearby, but this is where his bracelet pulled. Unfortunately though, by his count he was still due a couple of bottles of booze. He crossed his fingers in the hopes of getting some before he faced the next warrior.

“He never speaks does he?”

“Not really, he’s the silent type, I guess its because of his burden”

Zephyr’s followers chatted amongst themselves a few seconds walk behind him. Zephyr liked his room. It was cold and getting dark, he lit up a fresh cigarette and took a drag.

“You know who you remind me of Zeph?” Deborah asked, walking alongside him.

Zephyr exhaled, “Aren’t you cold dressed like that?”

Deborah gave him a look, “Of course, you’re a part of me, your only as cold as me?”

“Actually I’m only as cold as you think I am, but you are dodging the question.”

“What question.”

“Who it is you remind me of.”

“...and who is that then?”

“All those bandit leaders you massacred.”

“Massacred is a strong word. Besides, how am I like them?”

“first of all massacred is exactly the word, you never gave any of them a chance to survive, on the off chance that one of them was the one who killed your parents you wanted them to suffer equally.” Deborah put her arm over Zephyr’s shoulder “Don’t go playing down how strong, how wild you were, you are like a force of nature, I don’t want you to turn into a pussy like some of these fighters do.”

Zephyr shrugged off her arm “So how exactly am I like them?”

“The big crowd of adoring followers behind you, adoring you and your strength at every opportunity.”

"I never asked them to follow me like that."

"Oh its not a bad thing Zephie dear, I think its pretty cool, you are a natural leader."

Zephyr focussed on the path ahead.

"When you have killed this warrior, you should head back the other way, go take back Zee industries from your cousin."

"I don't want it."

"but you want all the warriors dead, and if you took his position, we wouldn't have to go on these long walks would we? A helicopter would make a nice change."

Zephyr looked at her "And just who would fly this helicopter."

Deborah was thrown off, and zephyr saw it "You're clearly not from a particularly smart part of my head, why should I listen to you?"

Deborah looked at Zephyr almost in pity. "Because I'm the only one who ever helped you silly." She ruffled his hair "I got you out of that funk after your house was painted with dear mom and dad and gave you a purpose. You might not see it yet but even now I'm trying to help you here."

Zephyr threw his cigarette into the snow piled alongside the path, he saw a light further down. It looked like he might get those two bottles after all.

## **Chapter 84: 80 years ago, The White event.**

Udo and Verity sprinted with all their might from the mound at the center of the crater in the flats.

"What about your team? Cant we help them?"

The ground shook violently beneath them, Verity stalled, she knew they had to evacuate but the other scientists caught in a different time stream concerned her just as much.

"There's nothing we can do for them now, it would take us relative years to move them to a safe distance, we don't have the time and they have even less! Hurry up!"

Udo and Verity continued their dash to escape the crater but didn't get far, from the center a bright white light beamed up into the sky and turned the green aurora white too, the brightness of it all intensified a thousandfold, and the light was pushed out in all directions, though Udo and verity couldn't see from where they were in the crater (and even then it would be too bright to see anyway) but the light spread across the sky across the whole planet. For a few minutes, the entire globe bathed in nothing but white light.

As the light started to fade Udo and Verity were brought back to their senses by the ground shaking beneath them. They rushed as fast as they could out of the crater, but all along it's sides the trees and rocks were crashing down against them.

"I'm not going to let it end here!" Verity shouted, and before they realised it they suddenly found themselves almost 200 meters from the crater.

"how-" Udo's question was cut short, and Verity was as stunned anyway. But what really demanded their awe happened before them at the site, a tall structure rose high up out of the ground, and the flats around them fell away, leaving them on what appeared to be a bridge that led to this new structure from miles away across the flats. The alien building emitted a bright light which seemed to become a vortex spinning and joining with the first pillar of light, it split off into 26 glowing lights which orbited the tower like structure and then quickly jumped away from it to all corners of the horizon, though two glows went straight to Udo and Verity, they fixed above each of their right wrists and seemed to crystallise, becoming just a glowing glass bead hovering over the skin.

From now where particles seemed to spin around their wrists and formed into solid chunks of some kind of metal and more glass beads, it all expanded and suddenly contracted, to become some kind of bracelet.

"wha-" Udo was cut short, the structure emitted a huge and deafening boom, and suddenly the sky looked like a regular night sky, the structure emitted no more light save for some fires burning at the top of it's spires, and Udo and Verity were left stood on what used to be the ground of the flats, but what was now a bridge very high up.

"I don't know if this story is one I wanted." Verity examined the bracelet, finding she couldn't take it off.

"I know how you feel." Udo looked at the structure before him and got a very dark feeling.

## **Chapter 85: Wiynd.**

Wiynd sat at the bar eating her crisps

"Look lady, if you aren't going to drink anything could you at least move over, that massive yo-yo of yours is taking up space a paying customer could have."

"hey, I am paying! See this?" Wiynd waved her packet of crisps in front of the barman and half of the bag's contents flew out over the bar and the barman.

"Are you going to clean that up lady?" the barman was not amused.

"Hey you clean it up, and get me more crisps, you should treat beautiful ladies like me better, if I decide I like this place men will come from miles around to buy me drinks, then you will be rich!"

"Beautiful?" The barman let loose "You're as big as ten cows!"

"Hey, are you trying to say something? I'm the perfect weight!"

“What are you talking about, you already broke one of my stools and you’re making my floor creak!”

“How dare you say something like that, I’ll have you know I spend my life making sure I have a graceful style, you clearly just cant appreciate it!”

Zephyr who was sat further down the bar was getting a headache. He had had the one beer and was waiting for the second before he revealed to this Wiynd girl he was going to kill her. But she was hogging all the service.

“Graceful? You must weigh the same as a hundred elephan-”

“Shut up!” Zephyr had had enough. “Barman, give me a beer, or I’ll kill both of you.” Zephyr had a gun pointed at both.

“Geez, what a scary guy.” Wiynd said out loud.

The barman gave Zephyr a fresh bottle and he put his gun down before drinking it down as fast as gravity would allow. He then wiped his mouth, picked up his gun again and pointed it at Wiynd.

“HEY! I thought you said you wouldn’t kill us if you got your beer!”

Zephyr smiled “I said I wouldn’t kill ‘both’ of you, I’m afraid you tubby, are on my death list.” He pulled down his shirt sleeve and revealed his bracelet.”

Wiynd saw how many beads were lit up on it. “Holy SHI-”

Zephyr fired his gun and it was all Wiynd could do to pull her yo-yo to her and block the blast, but it still sent her flying back and crashing out the wall of the inn into the cold Norren night outside.

As zephyr got up and walked towards the huge hole in the wall the barman started to ask “Hey, I know she’s annoying, but who’s going to pay for th-” the barman didn’t finish his sentence, a bullet from zephyr’s gun separated most of the barman’s brain and his mouth quite effectively.

“By the way,” zephyr said to the barman’s falling corpse, “I’m a liar, I will kill you both.” at that he stepped out into the snow after Wiynd.

-

The snow fell lightly around zephyr as he stepped away from the inn, looking for where Wiynd had got to, when he heard her loudly proclaim. “Ladies and Gentlemen, young and old, welcome to the first ever show starring the great, the magnificent, Wiynd!” at that bright floodlights turned on all around zephyr revealing Wiynd stood before him atop her huge yo-yo. She must have set up the lights when he was dealing with the barman.

“you’re a weird one.”

“well it’s true there isn’t really an audience, but I like the spectacle you know? Plus its good practice for fights when there are spectators, I’ll be the greatest entertainer ever!”

“you know I am going to kill you right?”

“You’re going to try, but as you might have heard,” Wiynd jumped off her yo-yo and picked it up over her shoulder. “I spent a long time working on my style, when I beat you I’ll tell stories of how I slayed the most scary gunman in the snow, people will buy me more benapple sweetcake than I can eat.”

“Even if it were possible to beat me.” Zephyr pulled out his new shotgun, “its impossible for there to be a limit to how much food you could eat fatty.”

“Hey!” Wiynd launched her yo-yo at Zephyr and he readied himself for the real battle.

## **Chapter 86: He Really came to you in a dream?**

Aella and Doll walked on alongside the lakes, on the horizon ahead of them were snow topped hills.

“I know its hard to believe but it was definitely him.”

“And he said there is someone coming to stop us? Well that’s not much of a surprise. Did he say anything else?”

Aella thought about Claire’s warning, she wasn’t going to lie.

“Claire... doesn’t want us to rescue him, his mother is a hostage too, and if we turn up Claire will be made to kill us...”

The two walked on in silence for a short while.

“And we are still going?”

“Nothing is going to stop me.”

Doll looked over at Aella, her determination was admirable, but had she really thought this through, had she thought any of it through?

“Do you think I’m selfish Doll?”

“Not really,” Doll looked ahead, “To be honest I wish I could be like that, all that determination but not have to hurt people.”

Aella looked over at Doll.

“And what’s stopping you? The only way to live an ideal life is to live it regardless, if you want to be something then be it.”

Doll didn't respond, she knew Aella was right, but naive, the world wouldn't let warriors just fade away like that, it needed them.

## Chapter 87: Wiynd, part 2.

the yo-yo span at Zephyr full speed as he ran towards it, he jumped up onto it and aimed his shotgun at Wiynd but did not expect the yo-yo to explode. He was thrown pretty high and landed face first in the snow.

Wiynd allowed her yo-yo to run circles around Zephyr a few times before pulling it back to her.

As zephyr climbed back to his feet, Wiynd taunted "You aren't that scary after all."

Zephyr wiped the snow off his clothes. "I just wasn't expecting you to use that kind of trick."

"Oh I have plenty of tricks" Wiynd smiled, her yo-yo before her, which suddenly jumped as around it about 60 knives jutted out, each shining and apparently razor sharp.

Zephyr smiled, he pulled his newest toy from his collection out.

"What the hell is that?"

Zephyr grinned, this would be fun. "Chainsaw machinegun."

he opened fire, hundreds of fast spinning motorised bladed filled the air and flew right at Wiynd. She immediately went on the defensive, spinning her yo-yo in an arc around Zephyr, riding it and using it as a shield as it span along.

Zephyr pulled his gun trying to keep up but she moved too fast and then appeared to vanish completely.

'she is pretty agile after all' Zephyr thought to himself 'but predictable'. He aimed his chainsaw machinegun over his head and fired without even having to look to see Wiynd in the air falling towards him. Her yo-yo fell to the ground behind him and she hit the ground to his front.

She looked up at him him in shock.

"How could you see that move!?" she asked as zephyr lit up a fresh cigarette.

"Well I didn't see it, didn't have to." he pointed his gun at her "if I cant see you in the lights you set up it means you are above them stupid."

"No, wai-"

A spinning blade cut through her neck and half her face, her blood spilled and stained the brightly it and freshly fallen snow, the glow from her bracelet floated over to zephyr. Who turned back to the bar, his followers were watching from the hole in the wall.

"Now there's the monster I like." Deborah smiled.

Zephyr turned back to look at her “I don’t want to be a monster.”

“It’s a little late for that don’t you think Zephie?”

## **Chapter 88: Yami.**

Yami walked southward towards the fox pass, the only place she calculated Aella and Doll would make their move through the hills on toward the capital, two swords per body she held tightly onto the handles, the cold making her fingers go a little numb.

“I’ll be entirely numb soon.” Yami said aloud, “but I don’t mind.”

the breeze blew and her hair started to swing to her sides. “at least I’m with someone, at least I am not alone when I go.”

She kept walking, even though she was expected to die, she would still give it her all, she would do her best for the man that stopped her feeling so lonely.

## **Chapter 89: 78 years ago.**

Udo stood before the bonfire, the flames reaching high, he had hoped it would feel better doing this but it didn’t help. He still felt numb.

“What the hell are you doing!?” Verity rushed over to find Udo throwing more books on the fire.

“I have to get away from it, all this need to understand the world, the universe... it’s what led to the white event. All those people who died across the world during those few minutes, if I wasn’t into all of this...” he threw a bundle of notes into the fire.

“You aren’t still blaming yourself for that are you? It was two years ago!”

“And millions of lives...” he picked up another book but verity grabbed his hand.

“I know you don’t believe in this, what happened to you Udo, I remember you were a handsome and brilliant man once.”

Udo looked down at the floor, constantly shifting colour because of the flickering flame light. “It was my brilliance that did this.”

“That’s a lie!” Verity tried to get him to look at her “You know as well as I do someone would have gone to the site sooner or later, and it was inevitable what would happen when they did.” Verity paused and let go of Udo. “look, don’t burn the books, I’ll take them with me, I heard there were plans to archive as much information as possible west of the cinnamon hills, they would appreciate all this.”

Udo looked over to Verity “You’re leaving?”

“Udo... you need to find something to live for, if not science, find some other way to help people. That’s what your real talent is I think... you waste it like this.”

The fire burnt out that night, but claimed no more writing.

## **Chapter 90: Fox pass.**

Aella and Doll walked through the valley, the snow starting to fall lightly. It was rare for snow to come this far south of the capital, even this time of year.

Looking up the cliffsides and past the top of the hills Aella could see the sky turn orange, sunset was coming in, and the rock face on the opposite cliff across the ravine glowed a strong orange.

“You really think they will attack here Doll?”

“I think it’s likely, its our best route through the hills to get to the capital, it shouldn’t be hard to figure out we’ll go this way.”

“Well why don’t we take a different route?”

A voice from above called out to them, “because then you wont be in time to rescue your friend right?”

A girl slid down the cliffside and stood on the ledge before them. “I’m Yami.”

Aella looked immediately at Yami’s bracelet.

“Doll!”

“I see it too...” Doll readied herself. “You’re only half of our opponents!”

“How troublesome.” Yami pulled out her swords. “I was hoping you wouldn’t realise until further in the fight, regardless...”

Doll felt something behind her and jumped to avoid Yami’s other body’s attack, Yami gave chase with that body and as she was jumping across the cliff face trying to kill Doll she also made a move for Aella, not expecting to survive, but Aella simply dodged the attack. There was no high energy blast like Yami expected.

Doll pulled back and ran full speed towards the Yami who swung at Aella and made a Qi punch as powerful as she could, be even though her back was turned Yami dodged it and used the force of Doll’s punch to throw her down to a ledge lower in the ravine. Doll righted herself in the air and skidded to a halt on the rock.

Yami could see Aella was giving up chances to attack and decided the best approach was to go all out at Doll before Aella. This was to her advantage. She jumped both bodies down and landed before Doll.

“How did you dodge my attack without seeing it?”

"I did see it," Yami grinned, "four eyes see?"

Doll readied herself, if that was how it was then it wasn't the four swords that were most dangerous. She tried to use a cutting Qi type attack to get past the swords but Yami perfectly spaced the swords and when the Qi attack hit them the specific placement cancelled the attack out.

"What!?" Doll was amazed it was even possible to nullify an attack like that.

Yami smiled "turns out reading all those Qi resonance theories payed off after all."

Doll jumped from the ledge and ran away from Yami along the cliffside, a different strategy would be needed if she was to come out of this alive. Yami followed, running along both sides of the ravine in pursuit of doll.

Aella tried to keep up on foot running along the side of the path, she could easily have used her abilities to move fast, or to even have killed Yami almost just by willing it, but she didn't have the will to fight. It was down to doll.

Doll jumped to a spire type rock in the middle of the ravine and turned to face Yami, who still ran along the cliffs towards her, at least she had the advantage in speed doll thought, but that wouldn't get past Yami's tight defences. She placed her Qi all along the cliffside about one meter in and pulled it into the ravine as fast and hard as she could. The walls practically exploded, rocks flew everywhere and giant slabs of cliff started to fall in. as the biggest chunk fell before Doll like a wall, she hoped all the debris would carry both Yami down and over power them, but the huge stone wall before her split in two and then two again, both Yami launching through what was left of it and at doll full speed.

"Harmonic swords?" Doll knew a weapon of Polot's could afford high tech equipment, but this was something she had only heard rumours about, Yami could cut through diamonds with swords like that. She jumped back and only just dodged Yami's attack, the three bodies fell further into the ravine together and landed on a ledge, doll facing the two of Yami once again.

The left Yami had a massive scar down the side of her face and blood spilling down her cheek. 'that's one eye down' doll thought to herself.

Doll and Yami stood facing each other for a time, catching their breath.

"Why do you do this for someone else?" Doll asked.

"None of your business." Yami spat.

They both breathed hard before doll threw all the rocks she could up at them from inside the ledge beneath, Yami fought back the dangerous rocks but was forced to ride their flow upwards, and Doll disappeared below the rocks. She set off to find a decent hiding place, she knew she couldn't attack directly until Yami only had one person's sight.

The rocks lost momentum and as they started to fall Yami jumped to the cliffside and looked all around below looking for where Doll had hidden herself.

A little further along the ravine Doll hid in a cranny hoping for a chance to launch more rocks at Yami's eyes but she didn't get her chance, Yami used the pull on both her bracelets to triangulate Doll's exact position, and Doll had to launch herself from the crevice to avoid being crushed by the rocks cut away above her by Yami's harmonic swords, looking up she saw it was the damaged eye Yami there, but the other Yami was elsewhere, probably in the very direction she found herself falling now, she had to think quickly or she would be dead in seconds.

Something white caught Doll's eye as she fell past, one of the rocks falling beside her was lit by the sunset slightly differently, it was chalk, Doll knew this was her only chance.

Doll threw the chalk up at one-eye Yami who cut it with her sword, but the harmonics caused the chalk to just become a dusty cloud. The Yami's vision was now compromised, Doll kicked off some of the falling rock sensing (and only just dodging) Yami's swing. Knowing she couldn't see from behind her now Doll pulled a large rock from behind Yami and through her chest. Yami let go of her sword.

Doll found her footing on a ledge and Yami and all the falling debris fell past her down into the ravine.

She heard screaming coming from above where one eye'd Yami was.

Doll walked up to Yami, on the floor bent over clutching her chest she wouldn't stop screaming, her mind and soul, constantly feeling the death of her other body. Her screams intensified as her other body hit the bottom of the ravine.

Fighting the pain Yami looked up to Doll, tears in her eyes "Kill me!"

Doll did it as quickly as possible, and Yami felt nothing anymore.

## **Chapter 91: Some time passes.**

Uneventfully.

## **Chapter 92: Capital empty.**

"where is everyone?" Aella asked, walking down the empty streets with Doll they both found it strange, A capital city without any people, like a ghost town.

"They were evacuated" A very young girl walked around the corner and faced the two, "There's an elite level banded warrior headed this way to assassinate the president apparently, so the government decided it was too dangerous to be around here." the young girl walked up to Doll and Aella, "Perhaps one of you is this so called 'elite' you seem to have a lot of glows between you."

Aella looked down, even her sleeve didn't hide her bracelet anymore, with eight glows the light shone right through. Thinking about it, Aella realised that between her and Doll they

had almost half of all the glows. The number of warriors must be getting very low since the bracelets started to pull.

“And why is there a young girl staying behind I wonder?” Doll was suspicious of the child.

“Oh, I thought it would be fun to watch an elite fight, it might be like an action story.” The girl walked to the side of the path and pointed down it, “The palace is that way... of course, the guards did not evacuate with the others, they are expecting you.”

“Come on Aella” Doll set off down the path and Aella followed.

The young girl watched the pair walk away. A voice from the shadows spoke to her “princess, what is your move?”

“I will wait to see just how elite they are before fighting, to get that many glows at once would be a bonus.” the young girl turned to face the ninja’s hiding place “It’s a pain so many fights have already happened, I feel like I missed out on all the fun.”

## **Chapter 93: A thousand soldiers.**

Doll and Aella stood in the gateway to the palace, before them a thousand soldiers waited for them to cross through the portal. The atmosphere was tense, the men had all seen the pillar of fire that was fearsome even from miles away. Many of the guard hoped the warriors would just turn back, some hoped to become heroes by taking them on, all however were nervous.

“It’s a pain you wont kill them all at once huh?” Doll smiled over to Aella, who was a little shocked she would say something like that.

“Eh, I’m just kidding, don’t worry.” she patted Aella’s head “its just troublesome because I’ll have to kill them all anyway to get past.”

“Why?”

“huh?”

“If you don’t want to kill them and do want to get past... why are the two mutually exclusive?”

“So you would just walk through without attacking anyone?”

“yes.” Aella started walking into the palace grounds and towards the main building. A lot of the guards ran at her right away.

Doll smiled a little, this girl really was special. Time seemed to slow for doll a little, and the samurai spoke to her; “did you find it?”

“the right way to live? I think she has shown me.”

“so what next?”

“Well I don’t want to make her a hypocrite killer like me, and I also want her to live to make her world after winning the contest. But to make sure she survives to the end, I guess I don’t mind being the killer for her.”

The heads of all the soldiers running at Aella rolled off backwards and their bodies fell forward from the run, spilling blood across the cobbles.

“If any of you run away, you wont die!” Doll called out.

A loud hiss and a beeping noise echoed above the soldiers.

“This is Polot, I will personally kill any deserting soldier, hold your ground.” the sound system hissed again as it shut off, and as Aella continued walking towards the next wave of guards they were very torn and very fearful.

“Ignore that guy, he wont outlive the day anyway, there’s no reason for you guys to die for him.”

at that the soldiers parted for Aella and Doll and from their edges they began to run for the gate.

“Did you have to kill them?”

“I had to protect you.”

“If I cant live by my ideals, then it’s best I don’t live.”

Doll looked to Aella, even though she had just been shunned for helping her she didn’t mind, it was for her beliefs and determination that she would protect her for as long as she could.

The two walked across the cobbled palace grounds towards the palace building in silence.

## **Chapter 94: The Palace Elite Guard.**

The palace elite guard lined up 200 strong, energy weapons primed and ready. They faced off their target in the snow.

Zephyr walked towards them. “So Polot finally decided my number was up hey?”

“Zee, why are the president’s personal guard coming for you?”

Zephyr pulled out a fresh cigarette “Isn’t it obvious?” he lit it up, “He wants me dead.”

“Zephyr Zee, you are hereby under arrest by order of the presidency, surrender now or we will use lethal force.” The megaphone voice echoed across the field.

“You were right to not trust your family back then zephyr.” Deborah smiled

“Shut your face bitch, I’m busy right now.”

Deborah walked before Zephyr and placed her hand on his cheek “Rage for me my beast, kill them all.”

She faded and zephyr stepped forward, pulling out twin machine guns.

“This is your final warning Zephyr, drop your weapons!”

“LIKE HELL I WILL ASSHOLES!”

Zephyr ran full speed towards the soldiers and opened fire. The air around him was alight with lasers, all threading each other trying to hit him but he was too agile, he jumped, slid and flipped through the obstacle course and sometimes even used the reflective side of his ammo clips to deflect a laser and clear a path.

He was a blur of black weaving through bright flashes and leaving a cloud of snow kicked up behind him, rapid and wild he was amongst the guard in a matter of seconds, emptying his guns into their heads and chests at point blank range and picking them up throwing them at each other just for variety. A wild smile across his face the whole time.

When all the powder settled again he was stood amongst the bodies of 200 men, a cigarette in his smile-stretched mouth.

## **Chapter 95: Face off.**

Aella and Doll faced him from across the roof, Polot himself held Claire by the hair illuminated by all the hovering glyphs surrounding Claire.

“Cast it now, kill them!”

“I... I don’t want to!” Claire was in tears.

Polot held his wrist up and spoke into it “Shoot her in the knee”

A gunshot sounded out over the sound system followed by a scream and hysterical crying.

“Kill them, or she dies!”

Claire started to scream, it was all too much for him and his spell started to activate, the glyphs bit by bit slowly lined up and Claire started to glow green.

“Claire,” Claire looked over at Aella, “We’re here to rescue you guys.” Aella smiled.

Doll raised her hand and Polot’s head rolled. “If you don’t do it quickly he’ll shoot your mother.” Doll called out to Claire.

He wiped away his tears and with great difficulty pulled the glyphs so they pointed through the floor of the building. A second later, a bright light 5 meters in diameter blew through the palace, narrowly missing Claire’s mother but decimating the guard who was moving his gun to her head.

The light remained for seconds, then violently pulled back towards Claire, he shone brightly, too brightly. This time it was Claire who spawned the pillar of light, the key was being forged, and the energy involved was immense, the clouds parted for the huge beam and the sky turned green. It made a noise like an electric buzz, except it was deafeningly loud. Aella fought her way into the center of the beam against its force.

"I'm sorry Aella, I really can't go with you again, I am becoming the key. There's... there's no coming back from that."

"I'm the sorry one... I thought I could save you on willpower alone."

"but you did save me Aella."

Claire raised his hand and touched Aella on the forehead, her mind flashed.

Seconds later, the light pulled inwards and became a single glowing light hovering in front of Aella, which slowly lowered itself into a jar before her.

Aella fell over crying beside the jar, engulfed in her own storm again, fighting to control her emotions at losing yet another friend.

-

"it looks like the elite one won't even fight princess"

"That's okay, it's the one who killed Riopene I want."

"Princess, it was Riopene who killed your father, how will going after that one satisfy your vengeance?"

"If I can beat her, it's the same as beating Riopene, plus I specifically want her glow above the others."

"Will you make your move now Princess?"

"Not yet, a new player has appeared, I don't like crowds."

-

Zephyr climbed the steps to the roof and saw the scene before him, two banded warriors and Polot's body on the floor.

"You got to my cousin first?"

Doll looked over to zephyr.

Deborah whispered in his ear "what a shame, weren't you looking forward to killing him too?"

"Are you here to fight?" Doll asked.

“Well, I plan to kill everyone,” Deborah responded through Zephyr’s lips, “And you guys would be a good start. But...”

Zephyr pulled out his rifle and aimed it behind him. “I don’t like spectators who plan to jump in after.” Zephyr fired and a half mile away the young girl jumped from her perch just before the bullet passed where her heart was.

“Time to fall back princess?”

“for now, yes.”

Back on the roof Zephyr lit up a cigarette.

“Those things will kill you y’know.” Doll said to Zephyr, readying herself for a fight.”

“Didn’t I say before, I want to kill everyone.” He smiled and aimed his rifle forward.

## **Chapter 96: Claire raised his hand and touched Aella on the forehead.**

Her mind flashed.

-

Aella and Claire stood within the bright green light, stars fell around them like snow in the wind.

“Aella, this is my last chance to tell you this, so you have to listen good ok?”

Claire walked up to Aella and held her hands.

“It’s all my fault Aella, I’m sorry. When I cast the first spell looking for Anemone’s bracelet, I set everything in motion, before then... the bracelets didn’t pull, you could have lived out your life without anyone trying to kill you, without having to become a killer yourself...”

Claire looked away and let go of Aella, “because I was stupid, because I didn’t understand the book before I used it...”

“Claire, I don’t blame-”

“I know, I’m sorry Claire but we don’t have the time, I am stretching this moment for as long as I can but I can’t hold out much longer, I have to tell you, the Key that I will become, it is needed to activate a parallel white event, its in joining with that that the last warrior can change anything... change everything.”

Claire looked back to Aella “Aella, I used to think fighting was the best way to find the top warrior, but I know now I was wrong, trust in yourself Aella. You are the strongest.”

-

Seconds later, the light pulled inwards and became a single glowing light hovering in front of Aella, which slowly lowered itself into a jar before her.

## **Chapter 97: Visit from an old colleague.**

Mrs Irfan walked up the steps of her home and across the landing she saw her son's door slightly ajar. Normally he didn't close it at all unless he was dressing up. Slightly ajar was new for him, but Mrs Irfan wasn't worried until as she walked past she saw a green light coming from inside the room.

Concerned she pushed the door open slightly to check up on her child and saw him sat on his bed, engrossed in a book she recognised immediately.

She knew right away what it meant that he could understand what was written and was somewhat saddened, but at least there was no chance he would do something like become the key until he was at least an old man. Mrs Irfan tried to comfort herself with this as she walked away from the room but was interrupted by a call from her Husband downstairs.

"Honey, we... have a visitor."

-

"Yami?"

"Sorry to drop in on you like this Mrs Irfan, but I need your help with some of the research I'm doing at the Zee Industries tower in the capital, I had requested Mr Irfan too but Polot said his work was too important here."

"I don't suppose I have much choice do I?" Mrs Irfan was not happy about this, since Yami had revealed their original research paper Polot had been a much harsher employer. "Let me get my things."

"Really, I am sorry." Yami bowed in apology but didn't appear to be entirely sincere.

"Just let me say goodbye to my husband."

Mrs Irfan went into the back of the house where her husband was in the kitchen and Yami waited outside the door for her return.

"Are you leaving?"

"Yes..."

"Well no worries, I'm sure you'll be back in no time."

"...listen... it's Clark, I saw him reading it."

"it?"

“THE book, you know the one.”

Mr Irfan just smiled and hugged his wife.

“Don’t worry about it, we’ll all talk it out when you get back, and Clark is a smart kid, he’ll be ok.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course.” Mr Irfan smiled, “Now get going, we don’t want to keep Polot’s research waiting do we?” Mr Irfan rolled his eyes.

“Ok, I’ll be back as soon as I can.” The couple hugged and Mrs Irfan left with Yami.

## **Chapter 98: Face Off, part 2.**

“Didn’t I say before, I want to kill everyone.” Zephyr smiled and aimed his rifle forward.

He fired and the bullet went straight through Doll’s head, passing through it as if she were made of smoke.

“Figured you looked trickier than that.”

“You figured right.” Doll was behind Zephyr and swung her arm for a cutting Qi type attack, but zephyr had already vaulted over her head and fired right down. The bullet hit this time, in through Doll’s back and out the other side, taking some of her right lung with it as it went.

Doll stumbled forward, struggling to stay on her feet, she tripped and rolled onto her side.

Zephyr walked up to her, she focussed all the energy she could to cut him, but all she managed was a scratch. Normally to focus her Qi she would think only on her breathing and use that as her center, now every breath was nothing but pain to her, her ability was entirely compromised. And tearful, Doll knew it.

Aella, horrified, watched on, clutching the Key in the jar as close to her chest as she could. She wanted to help, but she knew it wasn’t right neither Doll nor this man deserved to live more than the other, it would betray what Claire said too.

Zephyr took a drag on his cigarette as the cold wind blew on the three on the rooftop, Doll coughed up blood.

“I thought you’d give more of a fight, maybe this one will be more entertaining...”

“Wait...” Doll grabbed zephyr by the boot.

“No matter what you do... that one wont hurt anyone... its why she isn’t helping even me right now.” Doll coughed again, getting blood on Zephyr’s boot. Deborah Sneered and Zephyr was frozen at the sight.

“Kill me, but don’t kill her, why kill someone who will never do anything to you?”

Deborah aimed at the head this time and Doll’s skull simply exploded.

Aella let out a whimper.

Zephyr walked over to Aella, Doll’s glows following him. Looking down on her he spoke.

“Is it true? You wont ever fight me?”

Aella shook her head slowly “...never.”

“What about your friend, her blood is spattered across me... don’t you want revenge?”

“I do. But I wont take it. If she killed you one of your gang over there would only try and take revenge themselves... it has to stop somewhere, and its stopping with me.”

Aella stood up and faced Zephyr “Are you going to kill me, or shall I bury my friend?”

“Do it, blow her brains out Zephie, its easy points! The stupid bitch.”

“I wont kill you.” Zephyr said, “Not now anyway.” Zephyr turned and walked away. Leaving the roof with his followers.

Aella looked at Doll’s corpse, her clothes and hair rustling in the wind. “I’ll miss you too.”

## **Chapter 99: Zee industries basement.**

Polot walked down the dimly lit corridor past the first three cells and into scanned his card by the fourth door marked ‘Niga’. The scanner beeped and the door clicked as it was unlocked.

“So much security for someone who’s abilities aren’t even physical.”

Polot pushed the door and walked in.

“Not physical, but still dangerous” The girl wearing the blindfold said to him from across the room.

“You heard me? I thought these places were soundproofed.”

“They are.”

Polot smiled “So you have already seen this happen before?”

The woman nodded.

“So then, what do I say next?”

“You start talking, but you are interrupted.”

“By wh-”

“By me of course.” The woman smiled and Polot laughed. He enjoyed these games, even if she was a prisoner she was entertaining.

Polot walked up to the recording equipment, to check the videos of the room since he had last been in.

“Have you had any more holographic premonitions Niga?” Polot asked as he booted up the observation screen.

“Just the one...” Niga looked down. “...It may have been the worst yet.”

“Anything useful to me?” Polot asked as he waited for the machine to skip to the appropriate part of the recording.

“Even if it was, I’ve already told you, time is elastic, anything you do to change it wont last, it will spring back into place.”

“And is that something you know or something you believe.”

“If I could change stuff, I would be running out the door now, whilst it’s unlocked.”

The screen lit up red, sounds of screaming echoed around the cell. Zephyr recognised what this premonition was, it was rare for Niga to have visions of the past, but sadly this would have to be her last vision at all.

“...You knew I would have to kill you after seeing this didn’t you?”

“yes.”

“You wont try and stop me?”

“I don’t have to.” Niga looked up and smiled. “I’ve seen you stopped, besides my end is here, I’ve honestly been looking forward to it.”

Niga stood up and walked over to Polot, she pointed at her forehead. “You shoot me here now.”

-

Niga’s body fell to the floor and the glow from her bracelet slowly glided up into Polot’s.

“The first glow... If I am to keep her from stopping me I’ll need more.”

Polot pulled out his phone “Yes, it’s me. Its time for you to mobilise, there are people I need dead.”

## **Chapter 100: Zee Industries Basement, present day.**

“Well this is quite an interesting turn of events.”

“What is it Europa?”

“Idiot, I thought I told you not to call me that. If another warrior found out we are so close they would use it against us.”

“It’s not like I called you sister- OW!”

“What did I just say retard!”

The ninja rubbed his head whilst the Europa replayed the recording on portable holo display. Red light lit up her face and the torn up bodies of the old Zee industries boss and his wife were spread across the room she saw.

“I saw this man on the roof of the palace.”

“Well it’s not really a surprise is it princess? We knew he was a killer anyway”

“But this is different...”

## **Chapter 101: Imposter below the storm.**

The storm raged on over Aella, but she stayed fixed on the ground beneath, not getting caught up in it even though the lightning occasionally struck the earth nearby.

“Aella!”

Aella turned round to see Claire before her in her dream.

“I found a way we can talk, even after becoming the key I-”

“You aren’t Claire.” Aella stood up and walked over to Claire’s image. “And you aren’t my creation either. Who are you?”

Claire’s image smiled. “You truly are powerful, how is it you are like this, it’s different to all the other humans I’ve seen.”

Aella blinked

“Yes, I’m not human,” Claire’s image started to walk away from Aella. “I am the arena, you’ve felt my pull right? you’ll have to come sooner or later right?”

the image faded and Aella was left alone.

-

Aella sat up quickly, and felt very cold, she shouldn't have fallen asleep outside, especially not this far north. Looking forward she saw the graves she had dug, she must have passed out after filling them in.

Aella stood up, holding onto the key and said goodbye. Aella knew the image wasn't to be trusted, but she had a new-found strength and would survive whatever the arena had in store for her.

## **Chapter 102: Why so soft?**

"I mean... you just let her live!" Deborah was clearly frustrated, and wanted zephyr to know it as he walked on in the direction he saw the child warrior escape in.

"Its no big deal, if she isn't coming after me I don't have to worry about her for now."

"And how do you know she wont fight you? You cant trust anyone Zee, you mustn't!"

Zephyr looked over at her "you're afraid of her?"

"Of course not!"

"Then there's no rush." Zephyr lit his cigarette and carried on.

Deborah didn't like this attitude, an image flashed before zephyr's eyes, the image of his dead parents, and he dropped to his knees.

"Don't forget Zephyr, this is what happens when you trust people beyond yourself, it will only ever end like this!"

"Hey Zee, you alright?" his followers became concerned.

Zephyr climbed to his feet and carried on. "I'm fine, I just tripped up little, that's all."

## **Chapter 103: Helicopter.**

Aella made her way down the road away from the capital, following the pull to the Arena when she heard a loud noise come above her. Looking up and shielding her eyes from the setting sun she saw it was a helicopter.

It landed a short way down the road and out of it climbed someone Aella would have sworn looked like Claire for a second, but taller.

The woman walked towards Aella and as the noise of the machine behind her died down she spoke;

"You look a lot like your mother Aella."

"Mrs Irfan?"

She nodded, her hands in her pockets looking off into the horizon.

“I’m sorry, Claire-”

“It’s not your fault sweetie.” Mrs Irfan looked over to Aella and smiled, even though she was clearly saddened. “You were a good friend and you did your best.”

Mrs Irfan walked up to Aella and put her hand on her shoulder as Aella looked down at her feet. “If you need to go somewhere, I’d be happy to give you a lift.”

Aella looked up into Mrs Irfan’s eyes, then looked away again, she couldn’t just ask something of a woman who lost her child.

“Don’t be like that,” Mrs Irfan turned around and took a couple of steps towards the helicopter, “As I see it, I’d be giving my son a ride too.”

Aella looked at the glowing jar she had been holding tight the whole time.

“If you don’t mind Mrs Irfan, please-”

“The Arena?” Mrs Irfan looked back, a pleasant look on her face.

Aella nodded.

“All Aboard then.” Mrs Irfan started walking towards the helicopter and Aella followed.

## **Chapter 104: Europa.**

Princess Europa punched through the door into the last basement cell, finally finding her target.

“Asleep?”

Lying in the bed before her was the banded warrior she was following the pull of. Unmoving, save the slow rising and falling of his chest as he breathed.

Europa pulled off the chart on the end of his bed and read it.

“What does it say princess?”

“Coma.”

Europa walked around to the side of the bed and punched right through the man’s chest and most of the bed beneath.

“Well first glow... seems a little too easy.”

Europa turned and left, heading for the stairs up and out of the Zee Industries building, the ninja following close behind.

## **Chapter 105: helicopter ride.**

Aella sat curled up in the seat beside Mrs Irfan in the helicopter cockpit, somehow it was very quiet, the engine and rotor blades outside were but a slight humming noise.

Aella looked out of the window to see they were passing over some rough hills, further down she saw fox pass illuminated in the dusk once more. And on the horizon she could just make out the cinnamon hills. It was probably a trick of the light, but she thought she could see the crater she had carved out of them the night her powers fully awoke, the last time she killed.

Aella looked back into the cockpit. A place that was new, something different to all the sorrows before. But not free of them, in the corner of her eye Mrs. Irfan's leg invaded her vision. It was almost unbearable to Aella to have to face Claire's mother like this after what happened. Then Aella realised however bad she felt Mrs. Irfan having lost a child could only feel worse, and so Aella's sorrows increased.

-

As dusk turned to night Aella saw lights on the horizon.

"..is that Koob?"

"Yes dear." Mrs Irfan looked over and tried to comfort Aella, but it was difficult for her. "We need to refuel to get to the Arena."

As the lights on the horizon grew Aella started to fall asleep, she was so very tired.

## **Chapter 106: Fire vs Lightning.**

Zephyr stood before the Zee industries tower in the commercial district of the Capital, and aimed his RPG right at the front doors and when he saw some movement inside he fired it right away.

He turned to shield himself from the blast, but in the light of the blast cast by the explosion he saw a blur and one of his followers head explode violently sideways spilling blood across his friends and the ground beneath them. As the corpse fell towards the ground zephyr realised his opponent was insanely fast and strong to boot. He pulled out both his rifle and a grin as he twisted to the side to face the direction the head blew off in.

"Shouldn't run in a straight line, I can see you," Zephyr fired as the dot rushing towards him down the road.

Europa jumped off on her left foot, and using her right she stepped on the bullet and pushed off it to get even more height.

“Shi-” Zephyr grunted just before Europa hit him full force from her jump and knocked him to the ground, Europa rode him about 50 meters down the road, carving up the concrete as they ground along it.

Zephyr reached for a pull string beneath his jacket and pulled it just before the tow came to a stop, half zephyr’s weapons exploded immediately, and launched him and the child warrior high into the air.

“Without the ground it’s hard to run eh?” Zephyr grinned as he grabbed his revolver from its holster and aimed it at Europa as they rose through the air. He fired but almost immediately found out it was a bad idea, Europa moved so fast she caught the bullet and span, releasing it sending it right back at zephyr. It only cut zephyr along the side of his leg but it was enough to knock him back some.

As they reached the top of their flight and started the hang before the fall, Zephyr grimaced and Europa smiled, arms folded and confident.

Then a thought occurred to zephyr.

“Did you really think killing my follower would affect me?”

Europa raised an eyebrow and Zephyr had the smile now, he aimed his RPG down at the sunroof of one of the buildings beneath and fired.

It rocketed down, smashed through the glass and the whole side of the building exploded, sending the ninja who was hiding in it out through the window, flying across the street beneath zephyr and Europa and into the Lamp-post on the opposite side. He collapsed to the floor just as Europa and Zephyr landed hard, making craters and causing two shockwaves that danced with each other where they crossed.

“Bro!” Europa rushed over to the ninja distraught.

Zephyr fired his gun into the back of her head at point blank range, she never even realised he was there before the point where she never realised anything again. Her blood hit her brother’s body first and then her corpse landed on his, something spilling from her pocket onto the street as she fell.

“That’s the beast I like.” Deborah smiled.

As two glows passed over to zephyr’s bracelet he lit up a cigarette, he saw his followers running to catch him up and so he set off down the street in the opposite direction of both the pull of other bracelets and the arena, and instead in the direction of a pub he saw, his foot knocked something and looking down he saw a Zee industries portable holographic projector.

“Hmm, why did she have this?”

## **Chapter 107: Sin.**

Udo felt the pull of the arena even though he was already there, he knew this meant the competition was nearing its end, there could only be one or two other warriors beside himself.

He sighed, lost in thoughts of his sins. Even though it was so long ago, he still blamed himself for everything that had happened since.

“You torture me arena.”

## **Chapter 108: Venom.**

Zephyr was totally drunk, not only did he drink to compensate for killing all the palace elite guards, but even when he reached the count he kept drinking, his mind filled with images of a girl who would never fight back.

-

Zephyr sat alone in the darkness.

“If you would just kill her already, she’d only cost the one bottle.”

“what’s the rush?”

“you counted her glows right? Besides you and her there is only one other warrior, you cant put off killing her much longer.”

Zephyr looked down, lost in thought.

“We both know the world beyond you is cruel, and not to be trusted, the best thing is for it to be destroyed and she is just a part of it, even now causing you pain. And that’s all the world is good for, or did you forget?”

“No, not agai-”

The bloody image was inescapable for zephyr, and Deborah made sure he saw every bit of it.

“you have to become the boogie man, become the apocalypse Zephyr, the world has to end, there is too much pain in it.”

## **Chapter 109: Below the storm again.**

The lightning struck yet closer to Aella than before. She looked up at the storm and saw it had grown stronger, more violent. If she didn’t find a way to control it soon it would envelop her again. She couldn’t hide from it forever.

“It may surprise you to know you are my favourite to win” Aella turned to see Claire’s image, the Arena was visiting her mind once again.

“Favourite, but still a disappointment.” The image shook its head, “All that power but not the will to use it.”

“I have a stronger will.”

“Oh?” The Arena looked at her quizzingly “I’m not so sure, it looks like that thing is set to blow.” it pointed up and the red clouds above.

“Why do you want me to use my abilities, it’s hardly impartial.”

“Well lets just say I have my own ideas about the contest, that’s why I’m here, I want you to win, but I can’t help you, the best I can do is tell you if you don’t fight you will lose. That zephyr character, the one who blew your friend, your first crush to bits... do you have any idea how many people he alone has killed? It’s well into quadruple figures Aella. What makes you think he wont kill you?”

“I don’t think he wont kill me.”

“You plan to die?”

“I plan to face him and not fight, if he kills me he kills me, if he doesn’t he doesn’t.”

“perhaps I should back another contestant.”

The image faded from the dream and lighting stuck where it stood.

## **Chapter 110: Café.**

The sign outside read ‘Terry’s place’ and doll sat in at the back, stirring her tea that had long since gone cold and staring into the glowing jar on the table before her.

She had hoped finding this café would somehow bring back memories of her childhood, of her mother and father, but nothing came back but a slight sense of familiarity with her surroundings.

The sound of a plate being placed on the table before her made her jump, it was a cake.

“Just like your Dad used to make.”

Aella looked up and saw a kind looking lady in an apron standing beside the table.

“Sorry, but you are the spitting image of your mother.” The woman smiled.

“But I cant affor-”

“Oh don’t you be silly now of course it’s on the house dear. Besides you were looking so down I knew this would cheer you up.”

Aella looked at the cake again, three layers, all with different fillings, a bright coloured cream on top supporting a cherry.

“well take a bite already.”

Aella looked up at the woman and did her best to smile. “Thank you.” She took a bite and was taken by surprise, “It’s really very good!”

“Didn’t I tell you? Now you finish that off and if you want another one, or anything else for that matter you come see me.” The woman smiled and walked back to the counter.  
“Anything at all dear.”

Aella finished off the cake in small bits, making sure to enjoy each and every bite. By the time she was done she really did feel better.

-

Aella left as it started to get dark, as she walked off towards the helipad she replayed the stories of her as a child with her parents the woman at the shop had told, she was her father’s understudy apparently, and had gotten to know her family quite well it seemed. Even if her stories were not Aella’s own memories but some proxy, she held on to them.

Somehow now the weight of the jar Aella kept so close was a little lighter, and her mind flowed a little more carefree. Just a little, but it was more than Aella had hoped for.

## **Chapter 111: Killer.**

As zephyr slowly climbed out of his drunken state he felt something digging into his side, pulling it out he found it was the holographic projector Europa dropped.

“This thing?”

He turned it on.

-

After seeing the video of his parent’s murdered he was disgusted, but more than that he was filled with rage, he finally knew who killed his parents, and it wasn’t some random bandit like the gangs he was going around laying to waste.

“I KILLED THEM!”

“Well it took you long enough to figure it out.” Deborah sat on a crate, relaxed and checking her nails.

“YOU, YOU MADE ME FORGET!”

“Oh for fucks sake zephyr, you do know I’m you right? You forgot because it was such a horrible thing you did, haven’t I told you how much of a monster you are?”

“All this pain, everything I’ve gone through... I caused it!”

“That’s what you think? Killing your parents was just something you had to do to cope.”

“what?”

“Oh you can’t have forgotten how they treated you, your mother didn’t care for anyone but herself, your father only cared about you becoming his successor, if you did anything but fit the form he expected you were punished. Did you forget that life so easily?”

Zephyr looked down.

“They had it coming zephyr, the world is still the same as before you knew this, and you still deal with it in the same way, even then.”

Zephyr stood up and walked for the door.

“Are you going to the arena?”

“yes.”

“That’s my boy.”

## **Chapter 112: Bridge.**

The helicopter winding down behind them and the great bridge across the desert stretching ahead, Aella asked; “So the arena is this way?”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get you closer.”

“I’m very grateful you took me this far.”

“Well good luck Aella, I’m sorry but you will have to be on your own from here, I am going to go back and be with my husband before the next event.”

Mrs Irfan turned back to the helicopter, but before she climbed in she felt Aella wrap her arms around her waist.

“I’m sorry.”

A tear rolled down Mrs Irfan’s cheek.

“Don’t be.” She wiped away her tear. “Aella... are you going to fight?”

“No.”

it was no use, Mrs Irfan had too many tears to wipe away, she turned and Aella and Mrs Irfan hugged completely.

-

Mrs Irfan fired up the helicopter as Aella set off down the bridge. She allowed herself more tears before setting off, it was painful to lose Claire, and now to lose another child so close to her, who she babysat for, who played with her baby, who was Claire's friend. Mrs Irfan felt the world was losing all of its good children.

Eventually she lifted off, she didn't expect a pacifist to win the tournament, and she wanted to be with her husband in the time before the world changed.

## **Chapter 113: Hello.**

"Who's there?"

## **Chapter 114: Bridge, part 2.**

Aella spent the day crossing the bridge, slowly, step by step walking towards the thin trail of smoke rising from the horizon. The end of the desert getting smaller and eventually invisible behind her.

The sky was mostly clear, the occasional cloud crossed the desert towards Aella and after its shadow glanced off the bridge it carried on slowly towards the other end of the sky.

The day was like a long uneventful dream to Aella, and at the same time it seemed to only last a short moment, the length of a single thought. Perhaps because that was all she felt she had as she crossed the bridge.

-

As Dusk closed in, Aella found herself at the end of the bridge, before the steps that led up into the arena, she saw an old man stood in the center waiting for her. She approached.

## **Chapter 115: Memories...**

"...what is their importance?"

"..."

## **Chapter 116: Two warriors in the arena.**

"Aella is it?"

"...yes."

"It's nice to see you again, and all grown up too. You probably don't remember me... we only met once after all. My name is Udo."

“Udo... you’re the man that taught my mother!”

Udo smiled, “That’s right.”

Aella looked down at the floor. And neither Aella nor Udo spoke for some time.

“Are you going to attack any time soon?”

“No, are you?”

“I refuse to make the first attack.”

“I refuse to attack at all.”

Udo looked over to Aella, she had a very curious stance for a warrior who made it this far. “I don’t mean to upset you Aella, but you appear to have collected quite a few glows...”

“I am a better person than I was when I started... at least I think so.”

Udo looked Aella over. And thought for a minute “Well it seems we won’t fight, if you don’t mind I shall leave the arena to you.”

At that Udo set off towards the steps and down onto the bridge.

Aella didn’t really know what to say, but not fighting was a very good outcome as far as she was concerned.

## **Chapter 117: All your memories...**

“...things that have happened in the past, they are things not happening now, they don’t really exist anymore. There’s no real way to know they existed in the first place. Perhaps you just imagined them all? Why let that be a part of who you are, surely it’s pretend.”

“I don’t think it is, but even then, pretending... maybe all of this is that anyway.”

## **Chapter 118: Bridge, part 3.**

Zephyr walked ahead of his followers down the bridge. The sun baking them and a small dot some distance ahead waiting for them on the bridge.

Udo saw the group up ahead and sensed their motivations as they slowly approached, they were definitely mixed.

He searched his own motivations too, what would the outcome to all this be? He knew he couldn’t be there at the final decision, he mustn’t be there, he had done too much damage already.

He allowed himself a decision to meddle just once more.

-

As Zephyr came close enough to the figure to see it was a very old man, and a Warrior too, him and his men fell to the ground having suddenly lost all sense of orientation.

The men struggled to climb up again but they simply couldn't tell which way was up anymore.

Zephyr though, fought his instinct and moved on what he could see alone and managed (with great difficulty) to stand up ignoring his sense of balance.

He aimed a gun roughly at the old man Udo. "You're the cause of this."

"Shoot me and the effects will remain."

Zephyr thought about it for a moment and believed the old man. "Ok." he lowered his gun.

"I want it to be just you t go to her, it isn't fair if its all these men plus you against the one girl."

"Fair? The only outcome to a fair fight is both sides lose, and die."

"I am hoping for another outcome."

Zephyr slowly made his way past Udo and further down the bridge, he gradually got back his sense of balance the further he went.

"I just hope this is ok." Udo closed his eyes before zephyr's bullet passed between them.

The glow passed from the corpse before zephyr's squirming followers and along the bridge to zephyr, who continued towards the arena, leaving his followers behind.

## **Chapter 119: What is 'Fair'?**

"I think... Something important."

## **Chapter 120: .**

Zephyr and Aella faced each other across the arena.

Aella just held on to the jar. Waiting.

"You really wont try kill me?" Zephyr asked across the space.

"I wont."

"This is your chance Zephyr, you can really do it, you can really destroy everything!"

Zephyr turned to Deborah. "I'm not going to kill her."

"What!?"

"I was wrong, this whole time I was wrong. I wanted to destroy the world, a world that could only create pain. But by taking on the world I only created infinitely more pain." Zephyr turned to face Aella and smiled calmly "If I didn't fight and kill, imagine just how much better my life could have been, how much I've destroyed that could have been left to bloom."

"If you let her go she'll kill you!"

"She won't. If one person is a pacifist, there is no reason for the other person to kill." Zephyr looked up at the sky. "I finally see now, if you want to live a happy peaceful life, you just have to live peacefully, and then you have a chance for happiness too."

Aella and Zephyr smiled at each other.

"I owe you so much girl. So I'm going to give you the world, I think in your hands, it will be ok."

Zephyr shot himself in the head and his body fell lifeless to the floor.

The glows from his bracelet floated out and started to spiral slowly around Aella.

The arena started to shake, and Claire's image appeared before Aella.

"You didn't use your power!"

"The only winning move, the real power... an arena cannot understand, an arena cannot withstand."

"THIS DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING, THIS DOESN'T-" The image faded as the glows spiraled tighter and faster around Aella, one by one taking a place around her bracelet. The pillars around the arena started to crumble, and the whole structure caved in on top of Aella.

## **Chapter 121: The After.**

Aella found herself in a strange place, the universe, her body, the minds around her, all was different, shifting and at the same time constant and familiar.

"Hello."

"Who's there?" Aella questioned.

"Are you asking again?"

"Did I ask before? What did you answer?"

“we said there isn’t a there, nor is there a here. Not in this.”

“Well... what is this?”

“this is everything.”

“Everything?”

“Everything. Do you know why you are here?”

“The Arena... the warriors, and the bracelets, I was the last one...”

“There was only really the Arena and you, everything else was... a phantom of the arena.”

“What?”

“It doesn’t matter really, it was a test of some sort, and that you are among us, that you experience this with us, you have, for lack of a better term; ‘passed’ the test.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Yes you do, at least on some level.”

“what do I do from here?”

“What do you want to do?”

Everything flashed.

## **Chapter 122: ???.**

The storm was everywhere around Aella, the lighting passed through her with every other strike and the red clouds swirled and rumbled.

Aella Smiled

“My past has much pain, but...” Aella looked up into the clouds. “My past is only one part of me, the most important parts are my present and my future.”

The storm seemed to lose a little strength.

“I found out recently, I can remember all the bad things, and still be happy where I am.” Aella pushed the clouds aside and let the sunlight hit her face.

## **Chapter 123: Out of the rubble.**

Aella used her ability to pull aside the rubble from the fallen arena until she came to what she was looking for, she saw a hand reaching out from beneath.

After moving more rubble she grabbed onto the hand and pulled Claire from the wreckage.

“Thanks.”

“No worries, you ok?”

“I’m fine. So did you win?”

“I don’t know about win... but I think... I found a way forward.”

“oh?”

“There’s still a chance for happiness, I’m going to go looking for it.”

“Can I come with you?”

Aella turned to Claire and smiled.

“I always like to travel with friends, that might even be happiness right there.”

“So,” Claire looked out across the desert at the collapsed bridge, “Where do we go looking first?”

“First off,” Aella pushed Claire off the rubble he was stood on and towards a part of the bridge that made a path down to the desert. “We are taking you to Koob, you left your parents pretty worried you know.”

“I guess I should see them, its not fair to let them worry.”

Aella and Claire set off as the sun started to drop off behind the horizon, both smiled.

– End –

## **Author’s Notes**

And that's it for Fair! Thank you very much for reading it, hopefully it was enjoyable, it was certainly great fun to write!

But here I am having written the end of the story but there's still so much about the world of Fair I want to tell you, a lot of it didn't quite fit in well or would break the flow, so I'm going to personally cover the ins and outs of bits that were left out, and also explain some stuff I found interesting, mostly because I have the textual equivalent of liking the sound of my own voice! ;)

First of all I'll get the white event stuff out of the way first, in the story I had a young Udo and Verity drop into a hatch and when they climb back out again they have done 'something' and then the white event happens, changing the properties of physics and creating these 26 bracelets.

First of all I have already been asked 'why 26' so I'll cover that first. The reason isn't all that impressive, I'd like to say 'oh, its because the ancient Egyptonorseman culture had 26 gods who fought for rulership' but in truth the real reason is I was going to have one warrior for each letter of the alphabet, and I followed that part through, Each of the warriors names start out with a different letter of the alphabet, starting with Aella and ending at Zephyr (I was going for an 'alpha vs omega' thing there of course). It did get iffy when I started to realise the bracelets would have to belong to other people before the present ones, so in all the flashbacks bracelet owners beyond the 'main' 26 have irrelevant names, though if you want to believe a bracelet's owners all share the same starting letter of their name that's entirely possible, after all Aella and Anemone share a bracelet, and that leaves Verity and Vashti, and it's not impossible the bracelet is the same for them too.

Other white event stuff not covered very much in the story are 'abilities'. They come across pretty much like 'magic' (at least that was the intention) but in reality they are all possible because the 'physics' of the world change after the white event. For example Cadence's ability is that she can find the right harmonics to cause certain chain reactions, such as getting rocks thrown about, making air move at high pressure (like how she killed Timon) or even bending space (yes she really teleports when she swings her flute!). All of the warriors abilities are controlled by their attunement to the universe, which changed, well, 'frequency' to one much closer to a human brain during the white event.

So how is it only the banded warriors can use these cool abilities? Well some other people can use them too, and not all of the banded warriors have these abilities themselves. For example, Aella used her ability after her mother died, \*before\* she took her mothers bracelet, and at no point does Polot use any ability in the story (though I did toy with giving him various ones, but I'll get to that later). The idea of the bracelets themselves was they tend to end up in the hands of people with the strongest willpower and determination. Whilst there is certainly more banded warriors with abilities than without, you don't need one to have the other. (which is why some non-banded, non-ability folks try to kill warriors for their bracelets like the three brothers do).

Ok, that's the bracelets and abilities taken care of, I think Claire explained the nature of them pulling wellnough in the story so onto the main white event issue! The place where the white event was caused had an entrance that had ladder rungs leading down into it, something Udo commented 'like it was made for man' so it would seem, the white event, the bracelets, the arena, the competition, all of it was planned by someone, or something. Because I left anything more than that you are welcome to think what you like about it, I have a few theories myself (and I promise if you have your own mine are no more valid ;).

theory number one: a god left it there.

This is actually my least favourite theory, the idea is that god was tired and wanted to retire from existence, to find out if humanity had the will to survive on its own (or possibly as a way to destroy it) a god left a machine that would trigger the white event in a desert.

Theory number two: Aliens did it.

I quite like this theory, and it's close to my third and favourite theory. In this theory, aliens had evolved so far past what we know as 'life' they forgot what it was like to actually live so they leave some technology on earth that will determine the human with the strongest will and the second white event would elevate a human to their level and they could ask 'what is it like to be alive'

Theory number three: It's all in the mind

My ultimate favourite theory, and in keeping with my tendency for my stories to turn out 'it was all part of my delusion!' or 'it turned out the world was a computer program!' (don't blame me for these cheesy clichés it's the matrix's fault for making it cool). In this theory, there are a couple of ways of looking at the story and the motivations behind the white event (and secondary white event.) in the first, Everything before Aella helping Claire out of the Arena's rubble never actually happened, it's all just the wandering thoughts and consciousness of Aella, drifting alone through empty existence building an imaginary life for herself, one she turns into reality in the end, having decided a life with others even if filled with pain is worthwhile. In this respect she is god and creates the world, starting at the point where the arena fell.

Another idea along similar lines would be the reverse of that, everything was 'real' up until the second white event, and after the arena falls Aella instead of pushing her problems aside, pushes away the world, destroying it. And all that remains after is her imagination, pretending she has a happy life ahead of her (this is the saddest interpretation of the ending I could think of, if you can make me more depressed, let me know!)

So why the tournament? What's going on there? Again, when I talk about this it's more my interpretations than intention necessarily (hey I know I wrote this but I can't be expected to know everything about the world, in most respects I'm as much of an observer as any other reader is). My main thoughts behind it are that god, aliens or whoever determined they wanted to find humans with strong willpower would look at humanity objectively and decide an appropriate means to determine the most suitable human, as humans have a history of settling things with violence, I think it makes sense a tournament of death-matches would make sense to a non-human (and probably a few humans too sadly) I would personally like to think the tournament is there as something to overcome, that a human's real opponent is not who they were fighting but the fight itself. It was my intention from the start to write a story about overcoming conflict with pacifism. In this respect the real enemy is the tournament itself (which I personified as the Arena). In this interpretation, the only way to 'win' the tournament is not take part, and Aella eventually does this.

Lets see, I think that's pretty much all the white event stuff covered, so what else is there? Why characters of course! They weren't always going to be how they turned out in the book.

First of All I'll cover Polot as he is someone who changed the most, especially as I was writing him. As I mentioned originally he was going to have abilities, and it was going to be mind control or hypnosis, that then became a general 'ability to get people to do what he wants' (which got passed over to Quan before it changed again) and later on in the story my plan was for him to have a 'swords' ability where he could spawn swords from nowhere and fight with ten at once, this was kind of fitting with his character in how he followed the teachings of Zephyr's father, preferring non-combat approaches to problems but being just as ruthless in trying to get your own way, and also explained how he could beat zephyr so hard at fencing. In the end though, Polot was always there as my 'boogie man wearing a suit' he was supposed to represent corrupt leadership and government that didn't care for it's subjects over itself and how dangerous it could be when people give such people power. In this respect Polot didn't really need any powers, I think he is much more frightening and dangerous when people just give him power.

Next up on most changed characters was Polot's cousin. Zephyr was in fact the first character in this story to exist, I wrote about his confrontation with Udo in the desert months ago but had no story to tie him to, it wasn't until I started to think about what to

write for NaNoWriMo that I decided I would use him in this story. So how was he when he started out? Well he has always been a total badass, he's more or less always been a psychopath, but he also used to be something else; a cowboy. A really cheesy cowboy with a really cheesy cowboy accent, cowboy boots and a big cowboy hat. Looking back at what I wrote months ago it actually makes me cringe, I'm glad I toned that side of him down, it's still in there a bit I think, but just enough to get a nice dusty flavour, not enough to put you off the meal.

Another character who did unexpected things in the story was Doll, and to be honest she shouldn't have done anything unexpected as I wrote her to be my avatar. My plan was to have this world that was full of all these warriors, one destination at the end and see what they did, and I could possess my Doll (see why I named her that) and steer characters in the right direction for the plot if needed. I had to sort of roleplay it a bit with her, so that she wasn't acting as I would in her situation, but acting in a suitable way for the story. When I started writing her I honestly expected her to be a minor character (I didn't want to take the spotlight in my own novel lol) but the more I wrote the more she developed and stuff like her love of the samurai (which came out of nowhere, and I actually cried as I wrote his death omg I'm an emotional wreck) and her almost rivalry with Polot seemed to pull her to be as important a character as Aella, Timon or Claire (who were supposed to be the main characters, the novel following their story). I don't know what it says about me that the 'me' character fell in love, and ended up going on a vengeance trip, at points justifying killing hundreds of assassins, but I think the way Doll acted throughout the story made it a bit more than just my planned 'Aella finds out killing is bad and decides not to do it' that was planned in the first place.

Next character to be addressed? Timon, in case I didn't make it clear in the plot, he was the flood victim who Anemone hands over to Udo, so the 'grandfather' in his flashback is of course Udo. As far as characters go Timon behaved pretty well and didn't deviate from what I expected of him, until he got himself killed waaaaaay ahead of when I wanted him to die. But how it happens in the story was how he died as a character, as I was writing Cadence confronting Doll, I was getting pretty caught up in her desperation and Cadence had just gone off the deep end psychologically, I should have seen it coming but I was honestly surprised when she killed him so suddenly, I wrote it and was like 'omg... can she do that?' of course cadence had long since stopped listening to me as an author by then and after thinking about it I thought Timon's death was a suitable way to end the first act of the story. It was definitely hard to write stuff for a little while after it happened though, I had to get everything back in order and find a path for the story again.

And why not cover Cadence next, she also changed quite a bit, I wrote her fight with Ignis first of all, intending for her to gradually get corrupted with power over the course of the story, but she seemed to have decided to do that in the time before the story started and when we first encounter her she is already pretty crazed, just looking for thrill in her 'dances' and disregarding everything else. Her 'alliance' with Polot is just a way for her to be sure of bumping into as many warriors to fight as possible. Her relationship with her sister was not planned AT ALL, it wasn't until I wrote the flashback of her training at Udo's that I thought 'who should her sister be' and I figured 'hey, doll's been in hiding for a while, lets make it her' and I added Mavis as a way to make the reader think 'oh that must be Cadence's dead sister' but in the end Mavis turned out to be a much more interesting character than her initial role of 'sister decoy', especially when it came to write how Cadence thought Doll was dead (which was a nightmare to come up with those circumstances by the way). In the end even though Cadence had gone crazy already,

finding out her sister was alive after all this time was her 'rage' button in the end, and made her carelesshen she tried to anger Doll into fighting by killing Timon, but she disregarded her prior intuition that Aella was hiding great power and it cost her her life.

And it's about time I talked about Aella huh? She was supposed to be the 'main' character after all, but a lot of other people took the limelight in the end I think, and with good reason. to be honest I think she has the weakest development throughout the book. Mostly she's all loss, she loses her mother, her friends, and everything that seems like it might not be total shit. In my head she went from this emotionally crippled girl, on the same path to becoming another Zephyr, Cadence or Mavis. but as she is going over everything she sees the option of *not* fighting back being the one nobody else took, that it's the clear solution to break the cycle of violence. but I don't really think I expressed this well, even when I myself am reading she seems to be a girl who is massively traumatized and has given up but is just using pacifism as an excuse. fortunately other characters don't quite see her in this light otherwise the story would have had a very different ending. I think mostly when Zephyr or Doll thought about her they say someone they wished that they were.

Well that's pretty much all I can think of to say about *Fair* for now. thanks for reading my little story!

- *Sophie*