

Chapter II

YESTERDAY afternoon set in misty and cold within my room, beneath the twin suns which rotated in lunatic ballet within my room's sky. I had half a mind to spend it by my study fire, instead of wading through the heath and mud to my door, and from there take six trains, two airplanes, a zeppelin, and finally a transdimensional molecular transporter to get to the penthouse of Tromp Tower, known to those in the know as "Tromp Heights." On coming up from dinner, however, (N.B. - I dine between 3735 and 3835LTST (Local Standard Thrushcross Suite Time); my housekeeper, a buxom serving-lass of good Redhead stock, knows her place and serves me promptly) - on mounting the stairs with this lazy intention, and stepping into the room, I saw a servant-girl, also of good Redhead stock, on her knees surrounded by brushes and coal-scuttles, and raising an infernal dust as she extinguished her flames with heaps of cinders. This uncouth spectacle drove me back immediately; I took my helmet, and, after several hours of continuous transport, made much easier by my newfound TSA Preclear status (a by-product of the Emperor's Favor), I arrived at the God-Emperor's garden-gate just in time to escape the first feathery puffs of smoke from the flyers of the Matriarchy's monthly orbital protest-bombardment.

On the bleak hill-top upon which Tromp Heights stood the earth was comprised of carbon nanotubes, and covered with a black frost of fresh blood and biomatter imported from the killing fields every day. The air was nonexistent, for not only did Tromp Heights stand spatially within the peak of Tromp Tower, well out past the farthest extremities of Terra's atmosphere, it stood outside of time, within a single five-dimensional slice of being. The events which took place here all took place at a single point in the cosmic gestalt, and are best described as "having had been swoovlery," but for the sake of the mere Millenials reading this, I shall make the effort to render them unto you in a sequential, consecutive order. That also explains why there was no air there. Being unable to disarm the whirling death axes covered in radioactive ebola which barred by entry, I moved several miles to the left and hopped the fence, and, running up the skull-paved causeway, bordered with acres of ritually disfigured corpses impaled on spikes, eventually got to the door, upon which I knocked vainly for admittance, til my knuckles tingled, and, for some reason, a few dog-person/things began to howl within.

"Wretched inmates!" I ejaculated mentally, much to the dismay of a passing aethyr-wisp, "you deserve perpetual isolation from your species for your churlish inhospitality. At least, I would not keep my doors barred in the day-time. I don't care - I will get in!" So resolved, I grasped the latch and shook it vehemently. Failing to achieve any meaningful result, I unholstered my assault weapon and reduced the door to a fine red mist.

"?!En un lugar de la Mancha?!" shouted a nearby cluster of Jose, projecting it/their head/s from behind a nearby ten-mile-tall statue of the God-Emperor, currently under construction. In my surprise, I swung my assault weapon around and murdered untold millions of sub-Joses, most

of them old women and children. I blanched momentarily before remembering that this was all part of Jose's miraculous self-regeneration system.

"Is there nobody inside to open the door?" I screamed over the sound of myself reloading my assault weapon in panic at my impending cultural enrichment, without the Emperor to protect me.

"!De cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor!" shouted Jose in unison.

"Oh God, give me strength!" I cried, slamming another magazine home and working the bolt on my assault weapon in order to continue my assault on the inclement, immortal horde that was Jose.

"Una olla de algo más vaca que carnero, salpicón las más noches, duelos y quebrantos los sábados, lantejas los viernes, algún palomino de añadidura los domingos, consumían las tres partes de su hacienda!" intoned what appeared to be a quaint Southwestern marketplace, replete with street stalls, kachina dolls, and food vendors. "El resto della concluían sayo de velarte, calzas de velludo para las fiestas, con sus pantuflos de lo mismo, y los días de entresemana se honraba con su vellorí de lo más fino," muttered the quaint Southwestern marketplace, before becoming absorbed within Jose once more. Jose then retreated back behind the giant statue it had been working on, and troubled me no more.

The ash from the Matriarchy's orbital bombardment of ironic faxes of blog posts began to drive thickly. I seized another magazine to express my anger at the lowered visibility by firing indiscriminately at the sky while yelling patriotic slogans, but before I could do so in a satisfactory manner, I caught sight of a strapping young man in the nude, holding a laser-pitchfork, doing squat-thrusts in the football stadium behind the house. He hailed me to follow him, and, after marching through marching-band practice, and a paved area containing a factory for processing the ashes of vanquished enemies into diamonds, and past several giant black obelisks of impressive size and girth, we at length arrived in a huge, warm, cheerful apartment, of impressive size and girth. I had not seen this apartment before, but its size and girth were so impressive that it could only belong to a God, and knew only one God. Ronald Tromp, God-Emperor of Mankind.

The apartment glowed delightfully in the radiance of banks of active crematoriums, busily converting the bodies of the vanquished into carbon for use in the diamond-processing machines. Near the table, which was laid with all manner of exotic meats from cloned extinct animals bred at extravagant cost solely to be tortured, murdered, and consumed, I was pleased to observe an individual of such stunning grace and beauty that it could only be overshadowed by the beauty and vitality of the God-Emperor Himself in the flesh. It was the High Empress Ivanka Tromp. I bowed and waited, thinking she would bid me take a seat. She looked at me, leaning back in her chair made from human skulls and remained motionless and mute.

"Rough weather!" I remarked. "I'm afraid, Empress Tromp, that I blew the ever-loving fuck out of your door just now. Your servant startled me and I was afraid for my life." She never opened her mouth. I stared - she stared back, her exceedingly special eyes piercing my mind with all the welcoming warmth of an industrial nuclear demolition charge. I looked away in vain, for she kept her eyes on me in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable.

"Have a seat, sailor," said the beautiful young nude man, gruffly. "The Emperor will be in soon."

I obeyed and hemmed, and called to the villainous bitch-woman whom I have now learned to call "Juno," who deigned, at this second interview, to move the extreme tip of her tail, in token of owning my acquaintance.

"A beautiful animal!" I commenced again. "Do you intend parting with the...other ones, madam?" I gulped, then, as the lunatic anthropocanines who had comprised the body of my welcoming committee on the prior night began once again to sway into vision with each gentle flick of Juno's luxuriously-appointed tail.

"They are not mine," said the amiable hostess, in a far more repellant manner than the Emperor's simultaneously gentle and firmly paternal demeanor.

"Ah," I murmured nervously, "Your favorites are among these, then?" I continued, turning to a glass cube full of cat-persons.

"A strange choice of favorites, to be sure!" she observed scornfully.

Unluckily, it was in point of fact not a glass cube full of cat-persons, but rather a glass cube containing a heap of dead rabbit-persons. I hemmed once more, and drew closer to the hearth, repeating my comment on the wildness of the evening.

"You should not have come up," she said, rising and reaching from the chimney-piece two of the painted canisters which contained the apartment's store of K-cups.

Her position before was sheltered from the light; now, I had a distinct view of her whole figure and countenance. She was slender, and apparently scarcely past girlhood, despite being thousands of years old. She had the most exquisite face I have ever had the pleasure of beholding; small, feminine features, very fair- unquestionably of True American descent; flaxen ringlets, or rather golden (for they were, in truth, made of spun gold), hanging loose on her delicate, feminine, porcelain neck; and eyes, had they been agreeable in expression, that would have been irresistible: fortunately for my susceptible heart, the only sentiment they evinced hovered between scorn and a kind of lustful desperation, singularly unnatural to be detected there. The canisters upon the hearth of the crematorium nearest us were almost out of her reach; I made a motion to aid her; she turned on her leg-extensions, retrieved the canisters, and

returned to her normal height, then she turned upon me as a Merchant might turn if anyone attempted to assist him in counting his credits.

"I don't want your help," she snapped; "I can get them for myself."

"I beg your pardon, your Highness!" I hastened to reply.

"Were you asked to coffee?" she demanded, tying a skimpy negligee about her bikini-clad form, and standing with a Keurig packet poised over the Keurig machine.

"I should be glad to have a cup, for after all, the best part about waking up is..."

"Were. You. Asked?" she spat through a sweet girlish smile before giggling girlishly as well.

"No," I said, half smiling. "You are the proper person to ask me."

She flung the Keurig machine through the wall, and resumed her chair in a girlish pout; her forehead corrugated, and her red underlip pushed out, like a child's ready to cry.

Meanwhile, the young man had slung on to his person a decidedly shabby upper garment, and erecting himself before the blaze, looked down on me from the corner of his eyes, for all the world as if there were some mortal feud unavenged between us. I began to doubt whether he were a servant or not: his lack of pantaloons and his speech were both quite rude, entirely devoid of the True American superiority observable in the Emperor and Empress Tromp; his thick brown curls were rough and uncultivated, his whiskers encroached bearishly over his cheeks, and his hands were embrowned like those of a common laborer: still his bearing was free, almost haughty, and he showed none of a domestic's assiduity in attending on the lady of the house. In the absence of clear proofs of his condition, I deemed it best to abstain from noticing his curious conduct and partial nudity; and, five minutes afterwards, the entrance of the God-Emperor relieved me, in some measure, from my uncomfortable state.

"You see, your Godliness, I am come, according to promise!" I exclaimed, assuming the cheerful; "and I fear I shall be weather-bound for half an hour at least, if you can afford me shelter during that space."

"Half an hour?" he said, shaking the white flakes of combusted #killallmen tweets from his clothes; "I wonder you should select the thick of an orbital bombardment to ramble about in. Do you know that you run a risk of being struck by a bioweapon out there? Even people familiar with the timecube tesseract within which Tromp Heights resides often miss their road on such evenings; and I can tell you there is no chance of a change at present. When we signed the peace treaty with the Feminazi party in 2050, we unfortunately had to agree to their terms that they could continue attacking us until we lost. Thankfully, we were able to infect their networks with vintage psy-op programs, developed as part of PROJECT TUMBLR in the 2010s. They've

dismantled all their weapons, outlawed psychology, and spend all of their time maintaining a precise ecological balance of insanity and overzealous support for the insanities of other. When it became clear that such a society would never be able to defeat the American Empire, backchannels were opened, and we agreed to provide them with a decommissioned battlestation and the means to launch paper projectiles at Tromp Heights once a month as a symbolic gesture of America's submission to the Matriarchy. Honestly, it sucks, but it was way easier than trying to deal with those psychos living among us in the early days. Very few people outside of Tromp Tower are aware of the existence of these orbital bombardments at all."

"Perhaps I can get a guide among Jose, and he might stay at the Grange Suite till morning- could you spare me one?"

"Certainly, although there is no need for such a thing, I can simply teleport you to your bed whenever I wish."

"Are you gonna make the coffee yet?!" demanded he of the shabby coat and conspicuously absent drawers, shifting his ferocious gaze from me to the young lady.

"Is HE to have any?" she asked, appealing to the God-Emperor.

"Get it ready, will you?" was the answer, uttered so savagely that I started. The tone in which the words were said revealed the existence of a darker side, steeped in blackest ritual murder and the corrupting influence of the energies of raw Privilege. So much so that I no longer felt inclined to call the God-Emperor a capital fellow. When the preparations were finished (which is to say that Empress Ivanka had been thoroughly flogged for breaking the Keurig, and the Emperor and I had decided to drink radium-whiskey instead), he invited me with - "Now, sir, bring forward your chair." And we all, including the rustic, partially-nude youth, drew round the table: an austere silence prevailing while we began to consume quantities of calories far higher than our personal daily requirements.

I thought, if I had caused the pall which had been cast upon this potentially convivial gathering, it was my duty to make an effort to dispel it. They could not every day sit so grim and taciturn, the God-Emperor, the Empress Ivanka, and this inexplicable inexplicably semi-naked youth; and it was impossible, however ill-tempered they might be, that the universal scowl they wore was their every-day countenance.

"It is strange," I began, in the interval of swallowing one pint-glass of radium-whiskey and receiving another - "it is strange how custom can mold our tastes and ideas: many could not imagine the existence of happiness in a life of such complete exile from the world as you spend, Emperor Tromp; yet, I'll venture to say, that, surrounded by your family, and with your amiable lady as the presiding genius over your kitchen and heart - "

"My amiable lady!" he interrupted, with an almost diabolical sneer on his face. "You mean Ivanka?"

"Most Excellent and Holy God, your wife, the Pinnacle of Womanhood Her Holy Eminence the Empress Tromp, I mean."

"Well, yes - oh, you would intimate that her spirit might take the post of a ministering angel, and guard the fortunes of Tromp Heights, even when her body is gone. Is that it? That actually sounds pretty fuckin' cool- let's do it!"

In a confused haze, I watched as the God-Emperor beheaded the Empress with his chainblade, then picked her up by the legs with one begauntleted hand and began to draw a madcap symbol of sorts on the vaulted ceiling above us, using the spurting, gory stump of her neck as some kind of hellish pen-tip. As I looked on in abject horror, I saw the blood begin to flow across the planes of the timecube tesseract and imbue it with a phantom luminescence.

Then in a flash, the clown at my elbow, who had, until the present instant under scrutiny, been guzzling radium-whiskey from a basin and eating his bread with unwashed hands, looked up from his uncouth repast in response to a knock at the door. A knock which I had entirely missed in my awe-struck transfixion at the Empress' execution and, much to my onlooking horror, subsequent transdimensional crucifixion. Before my feverish eyes the scene swam like a mirage from the fabled oases of the early Terrorists. I saw the lad leap to attention at once and fly to the double doors- flinging them open with a great clatter. This explosive feat of athleticism performed, he slunk back to his seat in exhaustion, sat down with an audible thud, and resumed his animal grazing.

It was with the sole occupant of that space between the threshold and the world, revealed, in stark contrast to the snowy ash which drifted down behind - at that very moment; illuminated she was, picked out by the crack and spark of a nearby Tesla coil, stretching miles above in ghastly industrial splendor. "Allow me to present my daughter-in-law," boomed the God-Emperor over a fresh flagon of radium-whiskey, with which he gestured, as if with a lecture-pointer. I noted, as he boomed, a peculiar look in her direction: a look of hatred; unless he has a most perverse set of facial muscles that will not, like those of other people, interpret the language of his soul- a distinct possibility in this twisted nightmare world in which we live.

"Ah, certainly - I see now: you are the favored possessor of the beneficent fairy," gesturing to the room's latest occupant, a radiant gossamer-winged beauty, with the distinctive pointed ear-tips that mark the subjects of the Fey kingdoms. When I turned back to face my neighbour I marked that I had made yet another blunder: the youth grew crimson, and clenched his powerfist, my cybernetic threat-assessment implants began to blare "MEDITATED ASSAULT IMMINENT" over and over within my mind. My adrenal gland output-limiters slotted open, and I felt the berserker rage of my ancestors begin to come over me. My cyberlenses engaged, casting a crimson filter over the scene. I centered the uncouth youth in my vision, and thumbed

the power stud on my Privilege field emitter. He seemed to recollect himself presently at this, and smothered the storm with a brutal curse upon a particular caste of sub-Joses; from that day on, those poor individuals were born with voices that uttered only the dying screams of the damned, and eyes that saw only the Blood God's mouth.

"Unhappy in your conjectures, sir," observed my host; "we neither of us have the privilege of owning the good fairy; her mate is dead. I said she was my daughter-in-law: therefore, she must have married my son."

"And this young man is -"

"...Not my son, I assure you. Only the clones of the National Rifle Association can claim me as father." The Emperor smiled again, as if it were rather too bold a jest to attribute the paternity of that bear to him.

"My name's Rafa McGee," and you'd better respect it!"

"I've shown no disrespect," was my reply, laughing internally at the dignity with which he announced himself, considering his visible condition.

He fixed his eye on me for longer than I cared to return the stare, for fear I might be tempted either to box his ears or render my hilarity audible. I began to feel unmistakably out of place in that unpleasant family circle. The dismal psychic atmosphere overcame, and more than neutralized, the glowing physical and parapsychical comforts round me; and I resolved to be cautious how I ventured onwards and upwards to this, the crown jewel of the Empire, a second (...or was it third?) time.

The business of eating being concluded rapidly following this juncture, and no one of us assembled three uttering a word of sociable conversation, I approached a window to examine the weather. A sorrowful sight I saw: dark night come prematurely, and sky and hills mangled in one bitter whorl of wind and suffocating pamphlet-ash.

"I don't think it possible for me to get home now without a guide," I could not help exclaiming. "The roads will be buried already; and, if they were bare, I could scarcely distinguish a foot in advance, and that's without mentioning the potential biohazard risk!"

"Rafa, drive those dozen tanks into the bunker. They'll be covered in ash if we leave them on the parade ground all night: and wax them all," said the God-Emperor nonchalantly.

"What must I do?" I continued, with rising irritation.

There was no reply to my question; and on looking round I saw only Jose bringing in the day's supply of food for the animal-persons in the fighting and breeding pits beneath Tromp Heights,

and the good fairy, a creature whose name I have since learned to be "Tinkerbelle," diverting herself with burning a bundle of soul-diamonds which had fallen from the mantle over one of the crematoria as she restored the canisters of K-cups to their place there, from where they had fallen from the late Ivanka's hands. The former, when he had deposited his burden, took a critical survey of the room, and in computerized tones cracked out a perfect rendition of "Bittersweet Samba," off Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass's album "Whipped Cream & Other Delights."

I imagined, for a moment, that this piece of music was addressed to me, and, sufficiently enraged, I unlimbered my assault weapon and began firing high-caliber armor-piercing assault bullets from my extended assault magazine-clip into Jose. Tinkerbelle, however, checked me in my spree by extending a sequined wing to protect Jose; to my infinite surprise, my rounds pinged off her wing as if it was covered in some kind of protective force-field. She surprised me again when, once the din of my would-be rampage had echoed away into nothingness, she began to rail against Jose quite viciously in her own right.

"You scandalous old hypocrite!" she screamed in a sultry bellow, impressive for one of her size and frame, "Are you not afraid of being carried away bodily, whenever you mention the devil's name? I warn you to refrain from provoking me, or I'll ask your deportation as a special favor! Stop! Look here, Jose," she continued, taking a long, black book from somewhere behind a decidedly non-Euclidean corner of the timecube tesseract; "I'll show you how far I've progressed in the Black Art: I shall soon be competent to make a clear house of it. The red planet didn't explode by chance; and your laziness can hardly be reckoned among providential visitations!"

"Tenía en su casa una ama que pasaba de los cuarenta, y una sobrina que no llegaba a los veinte, y un mozo de campo y plaza, que así ensillaba el rocín como tomaba la podadera," gasped Jose in a voice like the dying screams of the damned; "¡Frisaba la edad de nuestro hidalgo con los cincuenta años; era de complexión recia, seco de carnes, enjuto de rostro, gran madrugador y amigo de la caza!"

"No, reprobate! You are a castaway - be off, or I'll hurt you. Seriously. I'll have you all modeled in wax and clay! And the first who passes the limits I fix shall - I'll not say what he shall be done with - but, you'll see! Go, I'm looking at you!"

The little witch put a mock malignity into her beautiful, special eyes, and Jose, trembling with sincere horror, hurried out, praying, and ejaculating wickedly as it/they went. I thought her conduct must be prompted by a species of dreary fun; and, now that we were alone, I endeavored to interest her in my distress.

"Tinkerbelle," I said earnestly, "you must excuse me for troubling you, I presume, because, with that face, I'm sure you cannot help being good-hearted. Do point out some landmarks by which I may know my way home: I have no more idea how to get there than you would have how to get to Neptune!"

"Take the road you came in on," she answered, ensconcing herself on a loveseat, with a candle-the long book seated upon her lap. "It is brief advice, but as sound as I can give."

"Then, if you hear of me being discovered dead in the knife dimension or a pit full of ash, your conscience won't whisper that it is partly your fault?"

"How so? I cannot escort you. They wouldn't let me go to the end of the garden wall."

"YOU! I should be sorry to ask you to cross the threshold again for my convenience, on such a night," I cried. "I want you to tell me my way, not to SHOW it: or else to persuade the God-Emperor to give me a guide."

"Who? There is himself, McGee, Janice, Jose, and I. Which would you have?"

"Are there no Space Marines at Tromp Heights?"

"No; those are all."

"Then, it follows that I am compelled to stay."

"That you may settle with your host. I have nothing to do with it."

"I hope it will be a lesson to you to make no more rash journeys on these hills," boomed the Emperor's voice from the pleasure-dens below. "As to staying here, I don't keep accommodations for visitors: you must share a bed with McGee or Jose, if you do."

"I can sleep on a chair in this room," I replied in a blind panic.

"No, no! A stranger is a stranger, be he rich or poor: it will not suit me to permit anyone the range of the place while I am in cryosleep!" said the Emperor, in an altogether more churlish fashion than that which I had observed upon first meeting him.

With this insult my patience was at an end. I uttered an expression of disgust, and pushed past the God-Emperor into the yard, running against McGee in my haste. It was so dark that I could not see the means of exit; and, as I wandered round, I heard another specimen of their "civil" behaviour amongst each other. At first the young brithless man appeared about to befriend me.

"I'll go with him as far as the park," he said.

"You'll go with him to Hell!" exclaimed his and my master, the God-Emperor of Mankind. "And who is to look after the tanks, eh?"

"A man's life is of more consequence than one evening's neglect of a tiny spring in the vast machine of the military-industrial complex: somebody must go," murmured Tinkerbelle, more kindly than I expected.

"Not at your command!" retorted McGee. "If you set store on him, you'd better be quiet."

"Then I hope his ghost will haunt you; and I hope the God-Emperor will never get another tenant til the Grange Suite is a ruin," she growled, sharply.

"Quieren decir que tenía el sobrenombre de Quijada, o Quesada, que en esto hay alguna diferencia en los autores que deste caso escriben; aunque, por conjeturas verosímiles, se deja entender que se llamaba Quejana," muttered Jose, towards whom I had been steering.

A tiny village sat within earshot, where a group of sub-Joses sat milking the cows by the light of a lantern, which I seized unceremoniously, and, calling out that I would send it back on the morrow, rushed to the nearest postern.

"!Pero esto importa poco a nuestro cuento; basta que en la narración dél no se salga un punto de la verdad!" shouted an ancient sub-Jose, pursuing my retreat. "¡Es, pues, de saber que este sobredicho hidalgo, los ratos que estaba ocioso, que eran los más del año, se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto el ejercicio de la caza, y aun la administración de su hacienda!" screamed Jose in unison.

At this incomprehensible outcry, an unholy stampede of animal-persons came galloping and sprinting from out the pits below, flying at my throat, bearing me down, bearing down on me, and extinguishing the light; while a mingled guffaw from the God-Emperor and McGee put the copestone on my rage and humiliation. Fortunately, the beasts seemed more bent on stretching their paws, and working their jaws, and flourishing their tails about, than devouring me alive; but they would not be denied their romp, and I was forced to lie till their malignant masters pleased to deliver me: then, helmetless and trembling with wrath, I ordered the miscreants to let me out - on their peril to keep me one minute longer - with several incoherent threats of retaliation that, in their indefinite depth of futility, smacked of a child trying to take out a battlestar with a kiss.

The vehemence of my agitation brought on another berserk rage, and still the God-Emperor laughed, and still I scolded, which is to say that I wrought thermonuclear holocaust upon the timecube tesseract. I don't know what would have concluded the scene, had there not been one person at hand rather more rational than myself, and more benevolent than the God I refer to here as my entertainer (although I suspect that our broader roles are quite reversed, in point of truth). This was Janice, the aged, spindly housewife; who at length issued forth from her cupboard to inquire into the nature of the uproar. She thought that some of them had been laying violent hands on me; and, not daring to attack the God-Emperor, she turned her vocal artillery against the younger scoundrel.

"Well WELL, 'MISTER' McGee," she cried, tongue sharp as a vibro-knife, "Let's just MURDER people on the PERSIAN RUG I JUST CLEANED, why don't we?" I can't live like this another MINUTE - look at the poor sweet boy, he's CHOKING! SHAME, SHAME on YOU, McGee. Come in here, darling, and I'll fix ya right up: there now, hold STILL."

With these words she suddenly vented a canister of liquid nitrogen into my cooling system, and pulled me into the kitchen. The God-Emperor followed, his accidental merriment expiring quickly in what I now know to be his habitual moroseness.

I was sick exceedingly, and dizzy, and faint; and thus compelled perforce to accept lodgings under the God-Emperor's roof. He told Janice to give me a glass of brandy, and then passed on to the inner room; while she consoled with me on my sorry predicament, and having obeyed the Emperor's orders, whereby I was somewhat revived, ushered me to my cryosleep chamber.