The Accursed Discovery

Tariq Ali

To Isawa Hifumi, Phoenix Clan's Expedition Head, Protector of Tomorrow

I refute the malicious rumors spread against me. These rumors are based on idle curiosity and simplistic appearances. They do not take into account the nuances of spiritual research.

My frequent visits to the Barren Swamps are not a sign of addiction. I am not entranced by the feelings of blissful contentment that wash over me whenever I enter the area. I do not suffer from any withdrawal symptoms when I return back to the Empty City. I am solely focused on my spiritual research, and do not deviate from my purpose.

My spiritual research, however, is hindered by the presence of Mantis pirates. Their patrols have grown more frequent over the last few weeks. I have taken steps to keep my distance from these pirates, thereby avoiding possible exposure. The fewer people who know about our activities throughout Sanctuary, the better.

Now, though, I believe that a subtle touch would not work any longer. It is time for us to make more bold spiritual expeditions across territories claimed by each of the clans. I have made a discovery that threatens to upend much of what we have previously understood to be true. While we personally have the spiritual training to understand such revelations, less-educated individuals might let these revelations throw them into doubt.

In my expeditions within the Barren Swamps, I stumbled upon the trail of a Tanuki. The Tanuki led me to a small, well-tended shrine. At first, I could not determine what sort of spirit the shrine paid homage to. I implored the Tanuki to tell me the story of the shrine. He refused.

It was only when I told him I was willing to play a game with him that he offered to tell me the nature of this shrine.

At the time, I was pleased at my victory. Now though, I write this letter, my hands trembling in fear. It is quite clear to me that the Tanuki rigged the game. This mischievous Tanuki wanted me to win, as part of a much more cruel prank. I claimed my prize.

The shrine, he claimed, was created by a woman who stood between the heavens and the earth, with the voice of music. I take this to mean it was made by Dōji herself, during the creation of the Empire. The shrine was to the one called Inahou Okami. The name seemed familiar to me, like a reference to a story I was told so long ago that even earliest childhood memories would be more recent. But for all my scholarship, I did not know the term.

The Tanuki laughed at me, and challenged me to lay my offering at the shrine of the one I did not know, and find out. I tried to restrain my curiosity, and succeeded for four days. By the fifth, my curiosity could stand it no longer.

I prepared a libation of my finest sake and took it to the shrine. When I got to the shrine though, I saw some Mantis pirates praying to it, making offerings to the deity there. I hid quietly, not wanting to disturb the pirates (and also not wanting them to see me). Eventually the pirates departed, and I brought my own libation to the shrine. I could feel the Tanuki laughing at me for my weakness, but I had to know. I had to!

You can imagine my gratitude when my offering was accepted, not by some dark, unfamiliar force, but in the growing and spilling out of rice grains, overflowing out of the empty bowl of sake I had poured out. Rice grains! In that moment of peace, I felt the blessings of the Fortune of Rice, a fortune I feared we had left behind in the lands of our Ancestors when we walked this path. She waited patiently for us to come to her, to speak to her the name that she had once been called in the days before the foundation of the Emerald Empire.

I am certain that there are other shrines to other Fortunes, here in Sanctuary, built by Dōji herself and maintained by Tanuki. They merely wait to pour out their blessings to those who bring tribute.

I carried the bowl of rice grain with me to the sterile halls of the Empty City, to report my findings and provide proof of my blessing. When I passed through the city gates, however, the peaceful feeling disappeared, and all that remained was dread.

On the mainland, we did not call the Fortune of Rice by that ancient name "Inahou Okami". We instead called her by a different name, and she responded in the same manner.

Why did the Fortune of Rice once choose the name of "Inahou Okami"?

Why did the Fortune of Rice decide on a new name?

Why did the Fortune of Rice decide to revert back to the old name?

Why did our history change so drastically?

Why is history so mutable?

Why?

Can I answer these questions satisfactorily? Maybe. I do possess the spiritual training necessary to handle startling revelations. It will take time. And even if I never discover the answers, if it takes generations, I can be content knowing such answers exist even if they are beyond my ken. But other people lack the training that I have. People without the proper education may start to question everything. Such questioning, if left unanswered, will eventually lead to unrest, perhaps even rebellion, not only against man but against the gods themselves. This is the heresy I fear.

And then, a new question arose. One that caused me to throw the rice bowl to the ground in anger, cursing the Tanuki's game.

Why did I see Mantis samurai at the well-tended shrine of Inahou Okami?

That Tanuki has carelessly informed others.

To avoid losing control over the situation, I suggest that we openly fund expeditions all across Sanctuary, to find these ancestral shrines. We would urge the other clans to help us in this wonderful endeavor. And of course our generosity will allow us to monitor their progress and help them understand properly whatever knowledge they blunder into. If our agents find all these ancestral shrines and make sincere offerings, then we may win the kinship with the Tanuki shrine-keepers who served these shrines for so long.

The Empire will be saved.

I await only your orders.

Kaito Yoshiaki, Shrinekeeper