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Creative Project Final

### "When the Shadows Come"

A "Game of Rat and Dragon" and *Black Panther* crossover fanfiction story

**\*\*This story is set in a universe where *Avengers: Infinity War* was the last stand\*\***

#### **Shuri**

The world went to shit after the snap. The Avengers, our guardians, our protectors, had failed us. The Earth had lost half of all life, our population dwindling down to a staggering 3.75 billion people. But humans weren't the only species that fell in numbers. The Animal Kingdom was hit hard. And for some reason, the cats were hit the hardest. I don't understand how, or why, but the entire feline gene went extinct. You'd think that if the snap killed half of all life, why would it kill an entire species on this planet? My best bet, maybe there was some sort of feline species that existed among the stars, and Earth just drew the short straw.

At the time, no one thought much of losing the cats. If anything, the gazelles that roamed the savannahs were the happiest. The humans were too busy mourning, our loved ones, lost. One of them being my brother, T'Challa. I was the sole heir to the throne of Wakanda. Immediately, I was crowned as Queen, being the youngest one the country has ever seen at 16 years old. No tribe opposed to the decision.

My people looked at me for guidance, me, a little girl who hadn't even experienced her first love yet. So, in lough of that, I grew up pretty fast. During my ascension to Queen, I couldn't see my brother in the ancestral plane. The Black Panther was dead, Killmonger made sure of that. I was just me, not super, not anything. Okoye and my mother were there with me through every step of the process. With their help and guidance, I grew into the person I am today. And as I grew, so did Wakanda.

The world was thrust into another Great Depression not long after that. Billions of dollars were just floating around in bank accounts that governments didn't have access to. And they couldn't print more money because they would risk inflammation, not like it mattered anyway. It was complete anarchy, every man for themselves. But not Wakanda. I wouldn't let it come to that; I didn't let it come to that.

That was 6 years ago. I am 22 now, still the youngest Queen Wakanda had seen. It took 3 long years of blood, sweat, and tears to get my country out of its stupor, but I accomplished it. The world still isn't the same as it once was, but it is doing much better. New governments started to re-emerge after the first year or two post-snap. Our population started to increase. People were coming to terms with their loss and finally moving on with life. Once I knew that Wakanda would be okay, I began to open trade again to our neighboring countries and bringing their people aid. Everything was falling back into place. Or at least it was until 6 months ago.

That's when *they* attacked. No one knew what they were or where they came from. A black hole, a dark abyss of nothing, somewhere in the infinite cosmos? The Germans call them *drachen*, the Thai call them *mangkon*, but to us, they are dragons. They move fast, too fast for the human mind to comprehend. Their first attack was on Hong Kong, then New York, then London, then Dubai, and just last week, Cairo. As far as I can calculate, they attack populated cities, leaving them in ruins afterwards in the blink of an eye, and their people, missing. No bodies ever found. The attacks seemed coordinated too, happening on the first of every month since the beginning. And the unsettling part is, they're getting closer, wrapping their way around to this side of the globe. Soon, there won't be anyone left to fight back. I have this dull ache in my chest, Wakanda will be next. We don't have much time. The 1<sup>st</sup> of April was fast approaching, on that date, we will take our last stand.

Ever since they made their existence known, I've been tracking their movements, trying to find the patterns, through the satellites we have in orbit. It's quite clear that they are a hostile unidentified alien species that intend to harm this world. So, with that knowledge, I've been studying the data like one would study the Bible or Torah. Out of the many hypotheses I've tested, one of them came out to be conclusive.

Because the dragons move too fast for any one person to see, a mere human is powerless against them. The dragon's movements are too unpredictable, untraceable, unprecedented, like rodents. And that's when the lightbulb clicked. The only other species on this planet that has any correlation to the way these creatures move is in fact rodents, more specifically rats. But I have to be sure, so I replayed the Cairo attack in slow motion from the satellite footage and ran a simulation with the dragons' movement patterns compared to a common rat. Just as I thought, they are an exact match. I am on the brink of something here. This whole time, we had been the hunted and them, the hunters. Let's turn that around.

I have to treat this like a proportion, which shouldn't be a problem because I use proportions in many of my algorithms daily. On one side of this complex equation, you have us, the humans now turned predators; equaling the other side of the equation, the dragons now turned prey. And we can't forget our variable, X. That's what needs to be determined. So, if a dragon is the equivalent to a rat, and a human is equivalent to a human, then what is the variable factor in all of this? What on this Earth, preys on rodents? Then it hit me, cats!

They're the rodents' natural predator. How could I have not seen this before? Humanity may have a chance in this never-ending war. But there is just one slight problem I have to face next, all species of feline on this planet went extinct during the snap. I mean, I can easily make an entire legion of robot cats, but that's all they'd be, robots. They'd be predictable, and I need unpredictable, I need DNA. With that, I can rewire the functions of these cats. They wouldn't be dull, lifeless, cold beings. They would be something more, they'd be alive, with an actual conscious allowing them to act with free will. Now I just need to get it. Well, all the alive DNA turned to dust long ago. That just leaves what was already dead. Surely there had to be some poor house cat that got buried away years ago around here. Where's a dead cat when you need one?

On that last thought, I leave my lab work desk, the one I've been at for 3 days straight. I need to make an announcement to the officials about my discoveries. I'll ask them to question their tribes about the cat situation. Today's date is March 5<sup>th</sup>, giving me about 3-and-a-half weeks to create a cyborg cat army along with formulating a plan on how to stop these dragons. Shouldn't be too hard, right?

I turn to my head lab assistant and call out his name before retiring to my bedchambers for a short while.

“Arka.”

“Yes, my Queen.” He yawns out with tired and glassy eyes.

“Take a well-deserved break before gathering some other assistants to go over the attack footage from the past 6 months. Slow it down and check for anything that seems to stand out, no matter how small. I’m going to call a meeting with the leaders of the tribes in the mean-time. Send for me if you come across anything, okay.” I tell him with my hand on his shoulder.

“Yes, my Queen.” He nods.

After a quick shower and nap, I call for the council members. They will be here within the hour. As I slip through my sandals, frantic knocking is heard at my door. Begrudgingly, I answer it with a tired yawn only to see Arka sweating and panting profusely. He is bent over his knee, trying to catch his breath. I stare in confusion.

“My Queen!” he chokes out while trying sit back up.

“Yes, Arka? Are you okay? You look like you’ve just run a marathon.” I question him quizzically with a small smirk.

“I am fine, my Queen. The research team, we found something that you need to see. We think it might be the key to defeating these monsters.” He said with renewed energy.

On that note, we quickly jog downstairs back to my lab. Each person on the team has clips of each attack pulled up on their computers. Arka strides to his work desk and sits down where he has one instance of the Cairo attack pulled up on the screen. He projects it onto the main monitor, where everyone turns to see. Quickly he presses play. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing.

Amongst the chaos, in the corner of the screen, a dragon is swooping down to a couple who has headlights strapped around their heads. It seems like they were going out for a peaceful jog before the attack started. It’s clear they couldn’t outrun the dragon, so the male turns around to shield his partner. But as he turns, his headlight flashes the dragon. The dragon itself seems to be harmed by it and recoils back in pain. Arka stops the video. Kianga, another lab assistant, broadcasts the Dubai attack next. Where something similar happens. A group of construction workers are huddled together in the middle of a worksite, looking at the monsters that surround them frantically. Many dragons are swirling around the site, crashing into each other in anger. It seems that the dragons could not touch the men because the entire worksite is lit up with bright construction lights. Every time they try to get close, the dragons hiss in pain because a chunk of their darkness goes missing as it touches the light.

The remaining lab assistants pull up their footage to the main screen where we all watch in silence. In each video something similar would happen. Once light connected to a dragon, they would recoil away. Once the final video was shown, they all turned to me, awaiting their next orders. I notice that these dragons always attack in the night. Most likely to easily conceal themselves. With hard and calculating eyes

I sprint to my work desk, opening the bottom drawer and shuffling through my old design papers for some inventions I never got around to.

"Where is it? Where is it?" I repeat like a mantra.

When I find what I'm looking for I release a breath I didn't know I was holding in. Jogging to the main lab table, I push all the equipment off it, making loud clattering sounds as they hit the floor. In my hands is a template plan for a light cannon. I never got around to most of my inventions because I was too busy leading Wakanda out of its depression, and this was one of them. I lay the template out on the table while my assistants gather around me. My brain, working a million miles a minute, trying to fit all these puzzle pieces together. Just as I am about to explain what I'd been thinking; Okoye came through the lab doors.

"The council has gathered, my Queen." She says, with her usual stony expression.

"Arka, gather every lab worker we have. Show them what we have witnessed today in these videos. When I return, we will get straight to work and I will explain my plans, okay." I told him with a gleam in my eyes.

"Yes, my Queen." He states with the same mirrored sparkle in his eyes.

I turn and walk out of my lab with Okoye by my flank. A guard stationed in the hallway hands me the royal Robe of the Panther Tribe as I walk into the throne room. With a smile on my face I address the officials, to which they all bow and then sit down in their prospected chairs. Once I sit at the head throne, I put my plan into motion. Explaining everything to them took a little longer than expected. I only get confused stares when I mention that I need a cat carcass. Other than that, the rest of the explanation went smoothly. Okoye seems very impressed with my reasoning behind my plan. As well as my mother, bless her heart. Once everyone is satisfied and thoroughly walked through my plan, I adjourn the meeting. Walking out of the council room I exchange the Royal Robe for my lab coat and make my way back to my lab where I will explain my plan to my assistants, who are left in the dark up until now unfortunately.

Entering the doors, about 40 pairs of eyes stare back at me, awaiting what to do next. Strolling slowly to the main lab table as the sea of people part for me, I look over the light cannon plans again. Turning to them all, I explain my plans.

"Okay everybody, listen up because we don't have a lot of time. The dragons are coming. I feel it and I know you can too, but we will not bow down. We will fight. And here's how. On this table are my plans for a light cannon I thought of a few years back. Now I'm assuming you all are caught up on what you've seen in this footage today, yes? Okay good, very good." I take a deep breath processing what I'm about to say before continuing.

"It's clear to see that these creatures have a weakness to light. It seems a small sliver of it is detrimental to them, that's where the light cannon comes into play. Not only are we going to build this cannon, but it will be on a massive scale. At least one for every War Dog in Wakanda. But this won't just be any regular weapon. It will be more. Now, everyone needs to stay with me here because this is where I might lose some of you." I eye them all with wavering eyes.

“Earlier, I stumbled upon what will be our saving grace, what will defeat these monsters. It’s cats! I know, I may sound a little crazy right now, but just stay with me. I ran some simulations with the dragons’ movement patterns compared to a common rat and they were an exact match. The natural predator to a rat is, in fact a cat. I know they went extinct years ago, that’s why I called the council. To ask their tribal members if any of them may have buried away a cat that they had owned before the snap. It’s disgusting, but it’s our only option. With that in play, I can re-create the feline gene. A cat can predict the movement of a rat and move much faster than any human can. We are going to make an entire legion of these cyborg cats, again, one for each member of the War Dog tribe. But the War Dogs won’t be fighting alongside these robotic felines, no, they’ll be working as one, with one mind.” I finish with crazed eyes. I can see the confusion in their stares, like I lost my mind. So, I begin to clarify.

“These cats won’t be able to fight the dragons without the help of humans keeping their minds on track. When their DNA is spliced with robotic functions, they will still think like a cat, wanting to pounce on anything that moves, and chase around little toys. That’s where a human comes in. With a neurotransmitter-helmet we can connect the two minds of the feline and the Homo Sapiens. That way the human will have some control over the cat, to be able to keep them focused with the task at hand. Which is fighting the dragons in front of them. Now for the next part, the cruisers we have on deck in Wakanda are too slow, so they’ll have to be modified for speed. We also have to face the problem of attaching the light cannons to these cruisers and somehow making a platform within the cruisers for the cats, so that they can connect to the vehicle itself. In a sense, it will move like the cat, with agility and nimbleness.” I explain. Many eyes seem to understand so I do a run-through one last time.

“Okay, just to make sure everyone understands I’m going to make a checklist. 1) Find cat DNA. 2) Splice that DNA with robotic functions to make a legion of mechanized cats. 3) Modify the Wakandan cruisers to be faster and accommodate these cats. 4) Create neurotransmitter-helmets for the War Dogs and their prospected cat companions. And finally, 5) Attach the light cannons to the cruisers. We have about three-and-a-half weeks to accomplish this. I know it’s not ideal in the amount of time we have, but the entire country and the world is at stake here. We cannot fail. Is everyone understood on what we are to accomplish here?” I state with authority. A series of “Yes, my Queen’s” is heard.

On that note we go straight into production. I split my scientists into groups for each assignment. Because we didn’t have the DNA yet, we start on the cruisers first. Wakandan technology is decades ahead of the worlds, so I predict that this would not take too long. Within the next day, a little girl from the Jabari tribe comes forward with a small box that contains her pet cat that passed away when she was a child. I thank her for her sacrifice and get to work on splicing its DNA still contained in its rotting bones, luckily for us the poor animal still has some decaying bones left to be analyzed. In the span of a week, every cruiser is modified and ready for battle with the light cannons attached. In another week the legion of robotic cats is ready and prepped for battle along with the neurotransmitter-helmets.

Everything is completed a week before predicted. I have an army of 1000 cats and their corresponding War Dogs awaiting their orders on what to do next. That left just enough time to practice, so practice we do. With the looming threat of the dragons impending arrival, many people were on edge, including me. I am really going out on a limb here with placing the fate of humanity in a robotic cats’ paws. This is the only plan we have, so it has to work. If I change any aspect of it now, who knows what will happen. I’m trying not to second guess myself, but this pressure is really getting to me at this point. I feel

like I've never had a chance to breath ever since I was crowned Queen, and the breaths I did take were a false hope of security.

Today's date is March 31<sup>st</sup>. They arrive tomorrow at the brink of dusk. We are ready, as ready as we'll ever be. Okoye and I will be front and center on the battlefield, along with the royal guards and the War Dog tribe with the cats. I've instructed every citizen who is not fighting to the underground bunkers that we have for emergency evacuation purposes. Hopefully the dragons won't be able to get through. I've added extra light beam cannons all around the bunkers. Tomorrow I wake early and mobilize the troops.

"Panthers, watch over us." I whisper towards the sky before walking from the bedroom balcony towards my bed.

The next morning, and possibly my last, comes all too early. I can feel it, the thickness in the air, the tenseness running in everyone's shoulders, and the quiet hum of anticipation. I dress in a warrior's attire with war paint, as does everyone else. I leisurely walk towards the podium to address the people of my country who also awake early this day.

"Today is the day. Today we stand. Today we fight. We will not back down. Everything has led up to this moment in time, right here, right now. Everyone knows what is at stake. To those who are not fighting today, you may head to the bunkers now. To those who are fighting, man your stations, you know where they are. May the Panthers be with us all." I state in a sad tone.

On that note, everyone disperses. I grasp my mother's hand and kiss it. She, in turn, gives me a hug. I will see her again. She turns toward the bunkers. I take my time walking to the mines, where we have the fleet lined up and prepared for war. I am the last to arrive. Climbing into my cruiser, I look to my left to see Okoye and the elite guard sitting in chilled anticipation. Jua, my cat begins to purr and rub against my leg on my seat. Seeing her brings me some happiness. If only we could all be as blissfully ignorant as cats. With that final thought I pick her up onto her platform. She connects instantly and the vehicle roars to life with newfound energy. I attach my neurotransmitter-helmet and turn on the intercom that connects all of the cruisers. We sit idle for a few hours before I make the announcement to pounce.

"Everyone! Move into their positions, just like we practiced. A through F Squads take the northern territory. G through L take the southern territory. M through R take the east. And S through X take the west. Y and Z are center field." I yell through the mic.

The whirs of engines are all that can be heard. Okoye, the rest of the Y/Z Squad, and myself are stationed on centerfield. I don't understand why, but it just felt like I should take my stand here. As the sun gave up its shift for the moon, I knew they were already fast approaching. Everything was still, so quiet, too quiet. And then it wasn't.

"This will be the end of Wakanda, again." Okoye whispers into the mic, staring at the raging storm above us. I smile, remembering the irony that entailed during our fight with Thanos. It wasn't the end then and it won't be the end now.

"Let's go!" I charge forward.

From right above us, a dark portal opens. They are here in a flash, ironically, swirling like a violent sea storm in the night. This battle will probably take all of 10 minutes, but the fate of humanity hangs onto

these 10 minutes. The Y/Z squad began charging and fighting the dragons violently. Okoye chases one through the forest canopy. I can hear yelling and shouting through our mic. I just hope that my men are alright, but I have to worry about what is in front of me. And that is a massive dragon with red beady eyes. I felt as if it's staring straight through me. Like it traveled all this way specifically for me. The feeling sends a chill down my spine.

"Jua, now!" I yell staring straight back at the beast.

Jua responds instantly with a 'meow'. As we lurch forward the cannon fires, aiming for the dragon's head. As if it knew our move, it dodges swiftly and advanced forward. In the last second, I maneuver around it and fly backwards. Obviously, I can't take it head on because it will just avoid me, so I decide a chase will be better. It follows closely behind, just like I thought it would. Luckily the light cannon has 360-degree range. Swiveling around and flying to nowhere in particular, Jua fires at the dragon strikingly fast. At least 10 light beam shots per second are fired, and to finish it off, one spread beam, which takes up 100 feet in diameter. I slow and turn around with caution. Who knows what these dragons have up their sleeves?

"Did we get him?" I ask Jua. She looks just as apprehensive as I am right now, with her robotic hackles raised and claws extended.

The intercom goes quiet. That's odd... up until this point there was a constant stream of shouts and orders being yelled through the squadrons not even 10 seconds ago. The dragon is nowhere in sight, so I suppose we have eliminated him. Just then, static begins to interfere with the intercom. I can barely make out my name being yelled. It sounds so distant.

"-uri! Shu..." It crackles and buzzes continuously, only to cut in and out repeatedly.

I turn the cruiser around to see if I can get a better field of range view. Out of nowhere, the dragon that I presume I had eliminated reappears out of thin air and is heading straight for me about 200 yards to my right line of vision. In my state of shock Jua takes the reins and fired another spread beam. I saw it before I can comprehend it, but the dragon disappears into the air again before the beam even comes out. They are much faster in person than the videos, or maybe it's just this specific dragon? It does seem bigger than the rest, maybe some sort of leader? It must be teleporting, that's the only reason for the amount of speed it possesses. I never caught this in any of my research of these creatures. These damn dragons will have us flying around in circles if that's the case.

"Shuri, behind you!" Okoye's voice came through the mic.

Her cruiser rounded the forest canopy coming straight for me on my left flank. She flew fast above me firing several beam shots. I don't have time to see what she is heading towards before darkness consumes her entire vehicle. Just like that, she's gone. It's as if she entered a black hole, never to come back out. Those beady eyes stare deep into my soul and don't even seem fazed. In fact, it cackles right in front of me. My teacher, my mentor, another family member is gone and the dragon that took her found humor in my disarray. I was speechless. I was shocked. I was hurt. I am vengeful. She sacrificed herself, for me. I've lost another person who is close to me, in the blink of an eye, without reason. Why? What was the point of all this? If we were born to just die, why are we even here? It makes no sense. I hate this. Jua agrees because she lets out a long 'hiss'.

“Brother. Mother. Please forgive me for what will ensue.” I let out in a hushed tone with red-rimmed eyes. The tears burned down my cheeks, but I welcome the pain. I have nothing to lose now.

We are at a standoff. The intercom is deadly silent, I am most likely the last person to take a stand against these demons. We have failed. The same dragon stares at me, as I do to it, with rage fueling my actions. Jua feels my loss. My pain is hers and vice versa. She’s in full agreeance with my plan. We are going to charge the dragon and detonate the light bomb I implanted in this ship for this exact instance. I press the red button, initiating the countdown. This ship will explode in 5 seconds with me in it.

“Wakanda Forever!” Staring death in the face, I wail and charge forward. The dragon screeches and its eyes go frantic, like it’s actually fearful for once since it arrived. Good! It should be. We both pull forward simultaneously, crashing into each other.

“3, 2, 1, 0...” The ship counts down...

## Shuri

My body is numb. My eyes are closed and yet I feel everything around me. There is a faint buzzing in the background. What happened to me? Where am I? Who am I? Thousands of questions are reeling through my head at once. I can hear voices, but they sound so distant. Where are they coming from?

“Shuri. Shuri.” Everything crashes into me at once. That is my name. I am Shuri. And that voice is my brothers. His name is T’Challa. There was a fight, no not fight, a war. There was a war and we lost the war, twice? The faint buzzing turns into a snapping sound, it’s so repetitive. Snap. Snap. Snap. It just goes on and on. Forever.

“Shuri. Shuri!” There it is again, his voice. It sounds more frantic now, wheezing in and out. But somehow, it’s changing, from female and back to male, sounding like every voice I’ve ever come into contact with. Snap. Snap. Snap.

“This was all just a game, a game of rat and dragon.”

“You listen to lies believing them as truths.”

“The battle was only 5 minutes.”

“Snap. Snap. Snap.”

“You’ve been here a while little sister, better wake up before you forget how to.” T’Challa’s voice floods through the sea of others, coming to the forefront and my eyes fly open.

It’s beautiful, where I am. I’m standing on an endless plane, completely flat. The ground reflects the sky above, so it fuels the illusion of walking on sunshine. There’s an orange hue to the sky. It looks like a sunset, but I see no sun, or moon for that matter. The clouds dance around slowly to a wind that is not there. I turn around only to see the plane continue on for miles and miles. I’m not in my warriors attire anymore, instead I’m barefoot and wearing a silky fine black dress that ends at my mid-thigh. What is this place? I must be dead, right?



"Finally, I've awoken. I was starting to get worried about us. Others usually do not take as long as we have. And no, we're not dead." A voice speaks.

I turn on my heels to see a woman, no not a woman, me. She's me, an exact carbon copy. The only difference in our appearance is that her dress is white, and her skin is as black as charcoal, but everything else is exactly the same. Down to the last detail, even the barely-there small dark freckles that spread across my cheeks and nose. How is this possible? There can't be more than one me because I am me, I think?

She skips towards me and takes my hands in hers. Instantly I feel a spark between us, and I know she feels it too by the expression on her face. A feeling of overwhelming peace consumes me, but the feeling is so foreign, so I pull away. A frown overtakes her face and she takes a step back. I pull my hands to my chest. She looks so sad. I want to ease the crease in her forehead and tell her how sorry I am. Wait, what? I don't even know this person. For all I know, this could be another one of *their* tricks.

"This isn't a trick, I assure us. I understand our confusion, our pain, but let us help each other. We can explain. We promise, this is a safe place, where you belong, where we belong. Together." She steps forward and caresses my cheek. That same feeling from before overcomes me again and I lean into her touch. I don't know what has come over me, but I feel she speaks the truth. So, I continue to let her touch me. She brings her other hand forward to my other cheek and presses her forehead to mine. That feeling only grows more, from deep within me. When I look up, she is crying, but so am I. My hands move on their own accord and wipe her tears away while she does the same to me.

We stay like that for I don't know how long, but eventually we slide down to the floor, holding each other's hands again, sitting across from one another. I have no idea what is happening, but I don't want this to stop, ever.

"We agree, we have missed us so much, too much. Many cannot survive to be apart for as long as we have. It has been too long." She takes my left hand and intertwines our fingers. I'm confused on who she is referring to as 'we' and 'us', so I ask.

"Who is this 'we' you speak of? I don't understand. I have so many questions, like why do you look like me and why do I feel so comfortable around you? What is this place? And what happened to the dragons? What about Earth? You say I'm not dead, so then what am I? Because if this is Hell, I imagined it looking much different?" I let out a shaky breath and turn my head. Everything seems so calm, feels so calm, unlike me. She lets out a small giggle.

"Firstly, when I say 'we' I mean us, as in you and me. We are us. We are one." She states with glee. Her words register in my mind, somehow, we are the same person.

"Well...for the sake of this very confusing conversation, can you refer to 'us' as different people? At least for now? This is all still brand new to me." I say gesturing between me and her.

"Of course, I will do whatever I can to make this as comfortable as possible, to make this transition as comfortable as possible for you." She gives my hands a small squeeze and I sigh. She continues on.

"Now, where to begin. It has been a very long time. I suppose I'll start from the beginning. A long time ago, before the realms existed, there were the Horned Gods. They were the celestial beings who

controlled the very aspects of the universe. The very beings who created all life that exists today. They understood life and death, but they believed there could be more. So, when the universe continuously expanded, their new purpose was to guide the beings they created. Guide them to become what the Horned Gods were, while still giving each being the power of free will. But a miscalculation was made.”

“Because each being had the power of free will, that means they could make their own decisions, whether that be good or bad. Malice and corruption spread through the realm like wildfire, hot and scary. The Horned Gods saw this and a decision was made to remove all evils from the realm. But they could not destroy a piece of their creations because in turn, they would be weakening themselves. We came from them. Where the Horned Gods thrived, there was only good. Evil did not exist there. So, they divided us, they divided the realm into many realms. Some parallel to others, some exact opposites, some filled with absolutely nothing in them. That way there was an infinite amount of good just as there was an infinite amount of bad, perfectly balanced.”

“But the Horned Gods could not live on like that, it was a temporary fix. Their creations reflected themselves, meaning that if we were both infinitely good and bad, so were they. But this could not be. In the Horned Gods realm, evil did not exist, so they were stuck in a continuous state of equilibrium. Their bodies deteriorated just as much as it regenerated. Yes, their creations were the epitome of good and evil, but the Horned Gods could only be good. Only good. Those stones that the one you call Thanos collected were made by the Horned Gods. In fact, it was them who put Thanos on the task to collect them all. They realized that their constant state of equilibrium would eventually destroy where they thrived, essentially destroying us, beings like you, beings like me. And they loved you too much for that, loved us too much for that.”

“So, when Thanos succeeded in his quest to kill half of all life, the Horned Gods became whole again. Only for a short while though. I know it seems unjust, but it was the only way. Killing half of all life meant that he equally killed half of all evils that existed. That gave the Horned Gods enough time to stabilize. Enough time to create me, and the others like me. We are pure, unlike the beings who reside in your realm. I was made with the Horned Gods original intent, goodness. Then they sent us off to find our other halves. So that when we would connect, all the evils of your lifetime and past lives would be purged instantly. We scattered from realm to realm, cleansing each one in our wake from the virus of evil that had implanted itself there.”

“You do not realize, but this has been a continuous cycle, a paradox if you will. The saying that “history repeats itself” is very true. We have been in this situation many times over because the universe has been born and died many times over. But no matter what, I have always found you. I will always find you, that will not change. Nothing can live on forever, not even the Horned Gods, being so powerful that they are. Thanos has purged the universe quite a number of times by now. The Horned Gods realized their mistake early on. By creating beings like you, they threw themselves into this infinite loop, so that is why they allow themselves to die. They bear the burden, so that you have a chance at life, no matter how miniscule. It has taken eons. You have lived your life in darkness, being born and reborn into it.”

“I waited for you. When I was created you were not exactly existing yet. I had to wait many star deaths until your rebirth, and even then, I traveled halfway across this realm to feel your connection. In the end, none of this really matters because we will go through all of it again. I will always find you. But at least

we have this eternity together. You were never meant to live on this plane of being, at least not without me. I know you can feel it, this thread that has tethered us together. Now that I've finally found you, we can merge and become one. We can go home, to the Horned Gods. Where we belong. There, we are eternal."

I understood everything now. This was so much bigger than me, bigger than anything. I had a feeling that there had to be more to this life, like I was destined for more. I constantly felt empty, hollow, like a piece of me was missing. Nothing else mattered to me except this moment.

We are eternal.

**THE END**

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