

# Prologue

It's conceivable that remnants of immensely powerful entities might still exist... remnants from a distant past when consciousness perhaps took on shapes and forms that vanished long before humanity's rise... forms that are only fleetingly remembered in poetry and legend, referred to as gods, monsters, and various mythical beings...

I would start from the beginning, but the timing of my confinement to this prison and its start elude me. What I do understand is my prolonged observation and scrutiny of Ludovico's intricate mechanisms, a subject that had once consumed me. How ironic that I now find myself condemned to spend my remaining days within the very construct I once looked to dismantle—a transformation from obsession to incarceration, as all fixations tend to become.

Perhaps it is within these intricate mechanisms that the echoes of those ancient, powerful entities persist, woven into the fabric of Ludovico's designs. The constructs that now bind me might carry within them the essence of those long-lost forms, the gods and monsters of old. My imprisonment, then, is not just a physical confinement but also a deeper entanglement with the mythic past, a convergence of ancient power and modern obsession.

Within this vast castle of sorts, I stumbled into a vast library filled with tomes holding "memories" or at least that is what they are called. I have delved into the recollections of an anonymous individual hailing from a realm where, as my investigation suggests, a cult in devotion to Ludovico thrives. While not an unprecedented revelation, the memories imply that she occupied a divine role, she tried to stop a cultic sacrifice before being abducted by Him. The details surrounding her fate remain unclear, needing further exploration of the expansive library to unveil the untold chapters of her story.

In the same section where I had found that book, there was one covered in webs and the cadavers of spiders. This one was complete.

## Chapter 1

### Abyss creeper

Elena's origin is steeped in the sinister ambitions of a powerful corporation with a twisted vision. Adopted from an orphanage, her life became a cruel experiment in merging human and spider traits. The corporation, shrouded in secrecy, erected a city and a towering building for their dark experiments, later usurping the city hall for their own nefarious purposes.

Subjected to prolonged testing and agonizing transformations, Elena became a hybrid, a grotesque fusion of human and spider. Her metamorphosis allowed her to shift seamlessly between the two forms, giving her an unsettling duality. The corporation's quest for divine power reached its pinnacle when Elena, in her spider form, grew to a massive size, resulting in a catastrophic loss of control. The transformation into a colossal spider proved disastrous, leading to a bloodbath that left the building in ruins and claimed the lives of many within.

“Perfect. Majestic. Organized.” As the spider feasted on the gutted remains of his fellow researchers, Doctor Vigo could not help but smile at the sight of his perfect creation. They were no longer slaves to power; they were gods among men.

The area surrounding the building is divided into two distinct realms: the labyrinthine underground network and the sparsely populated metropolitan region. The underground passages were commissioned to be a labyrinth. From the testing room, the exit was obvious. But to the food, only a dream. The labyrinth connects to the residents' homes, leading to a network of abandoned warehouses, debris-strewn rooms, and evidence of past struggles.

After a while, the metropolitan region was completely devoid of life, webbing and blood everywhere. The company eventually either got bored of playing god or found something better to do. Placed her in the labyrinth, closed all doors shut, and moved on. Now only screams stay. A decade later, the metropolitan area started to see some life once more. Scavengers and the homeless now call this town a home. After a while there, it gets easy to understand why nobody lived there anymore. There was no sleep to be had with the spiders, and even if you could find rest, tales of spiders and monstrous entities roaming the area, causing havoc and claiming victims, does not make sleeping any easier.

The low concentration of residents adds an air of desolation to the region, where fear and mystery intertwine, casting a shadow over the once-thriving city. The past of the abandoned building stays shrouded in darkness, and the echoes of Elena's torment continue to reverberate through the intricate webbing she weaved, where they now call home.

## No sound, no memory

As I turn the pages, the narrative becomes increasingly concise, as though these are genuine memories that grow more vivid with their recentness. Although some pages are torn, or have some blurred sentences, this is what I could understand.

One fateful night, as the shadows cast by the decaying buildings danced eerily, Elena felt an otherworldly presence. Ludovico manifested before her, a tall, slim figure with writhing purple skin, convulsing as if it was an entirely different organism. His form exuded an indescribable horror, unsettling to the core. She has no idea who he might be, she has never heard of anything like him, she doesn't fear him, yet even she can feel there's something wrong about him...

Without uttering a word, Ludovico extended an offer to Elena—one that would liberate her from the physical shackles that bound her. In exchange for her soul, Ludovico promised Elena a newfound liberty that transcended the confines of her spider-human existence. The pact was sealed with a handshake, and in that moment, regret gripped Elena like a vice.

In but a fraction of a second, she could feel all the sin humanity has produced, all the evil humanity has bled into the soil. A foul smell, burnt flesh and Sulphur, seeped into the earth. Seeped into her. Then the pain. She reached into the wound. Tore it open. It engulfed her in billows of fiery heat. She was made to relive the death in its depths. A momentary glimpse. Teeth punctured skin. Jaw crushed bone. Her hand deluged in flesh, she pushed, only to melt into its maw. The world returned.

The Faustian revelation, fresh, grinding within her mind. The supposed liberation she had looked for turned into a nightmarish prison within the recesses of her own mind. Now, she saw through a beast's eyes, her mind kept in her body, but control laid firmly in Ludovico's grasp. A spectator in her own body, Elena became an unwilling witness to the malevolent deeds orchestrated by her puppeteer.

Ludovico's influence extended beyond her physical form; he commanded her spiders, turning them into instruments of terror that prowled the streets and struck fear into the hearts of the town's unsuspecting citizens. As Ludovico manipulated her every move, Elena became a vessel for the entity's twisted desires.

The once-sparse population of the metropolitan region now suffered under the shadow of Ludovico's malevolence. Brutality unfolded like a grotesque tableau, with the townsfolk becoming unwitting victims of a force they couldn't understand. The abandoned warehouses, once silent witnesses to Elena's torment, now echoed with the haunting sounds of Ludovico's influence. The air itself seemed to tremble with an unspoken malevolence as the entity reveled in the torment of both Elena and the hapless citizens.

Elena's regret transformed into a desperate yearning for freedom, not only from the physical and psychological imprisonment but also from Ludovico's insidious control as she started to understand that her prey had just as many feelings as she did. The little town, once shrouded in legends and mysteries, now became a theater of suffering, a stage where Ludovico performed his butchering. And in this, Elena found herself trapped, a mere puppet in Ludovico's grim theater.

## Unlimited sin

The once-thriving city had transformed into a grisly slaughterhouse under the malevolent reign of Ludovico. In the decaying streets, small spiders crept stealthily within the still-living bodies of those ensnared in the twisted webbing that now enveloped the town. These unfortunate victims unwittingly served Ludovico's dark purpose, becoming vessels for the entity's insidious will.

The controlled individuals, with vacant eyes and a puppet-like demeanor, led innocent newcomers into the cursed town, as they themselves were being eaten by the inside. Ludovico's influence was a contagious plague, spreading like an ominous shadow that swallowed all hope. The air buzzed with an unholy energy as the town, now tainted beyond redemption, drew in unsuspecting prey like moths to a flame.

As the smell of rot and decay spread into the surrounding areas, the gods above took notice. The heavens stirred with wrath at the grotesque perversion of life and the suffering inflicted upon the innocent. From the celestial realms descended a warrior, a child of the sun. Radiant and fierce, she bore the weight of divine purpose as she confronted the darkness that had consumed the once-vibrant city.

Undeterred by the palpable malevolence, the daughter of the sun looked to end the suffering with compassion. She approached Ludovico, attempting to reason with the entity through words of kindness. Yet, Ludovico's heart, if it existed, remained impervious to such entreaties.

Undeterred, the warrior, with her noble spirit ablaze, drew her celestial weapon, ready to face the malevolent forces that held the town in thrall.

However, Ludovico's power proved far-reaching. An army of mindless corpses, once innocent inhabitants now controlled by his malevolence, encircled the valiant warrior. And then. Nothing.

## Reverent

Following that, the narrative becomes unclear, with hardly anything distinguishable. Amidst the chaos, the aesthetics of hate seemed to permeate the very essence of the story.

Each mention of the warrior was accompanied by a peculiar symbol scrawled in reddish purple beneath it. Interestingly, I noticed the same symbol on the covers of some other books in this vicinity. It's possible that they are somehow interconnected. I'll continue to read the books.

Maybe calling them memories isn't an exaggeration, however, it is becoming quite obvious whose memories those are.

Maybe I could even find a way out. It sometimes feels like a futile search. But then again... I've got time on my hands... lots of time...

## Chapter 2

## No tomorrows

Within this impossibly vast tower, I've encountered an array of artifacts hailing from diverse origins. Among family photos and otherworldly swords, a mirror seized my attention. Etched onto its surface was the phrase, "Mirror, mirror on the wall."

Upon closer inspection, a swirling, viscous substance in shades of black and purple enveloped the frame. As it dissipated, a revelation emerged. Contrary to my earlier belief that the castle stood as the sole structure within this colossal entity, I beheld a distorted panorama. Medieval-like settlements and entire neighborhoods sprawled in a twisted and corrupted state.

A peculiar detail caught my eye, however – a glimpse of the small city where Elena's memories unfolded. Could her story have unfolded in this surreal realm? More pressing, am I not the solitary soul consumed by Ludovico?

Contemplating these mysteries, I retraced my steps to the library, hoping to uncover additional clues within its confines. Searching for relevant information among an infinite array of books in the library proves a daunting task.

To narrow down my quest, I've focused on volumes with intriguing covers. One such discovery features a peculiar pinkish-purple symbol radiating a pulsating light resembling a heartbeat. Within its pages, the memories of a tyrant unfold, likely hailing from what my people called Terra Dark, and intriguingly, she may be the creator of the very realm.

The recollections within are well-maintained and largely comprehensible, chronicling numerous atrocities committed by her against the very beings she brought into existence. A particular incident piqued my interest however; she and one of her victims were seized by Ludovico. This could prove valuable.

The sequence of memories unfolds as follows...

## Blood, Brass and Grit

Lux's life, similarly to Elena's was one of torture, pain and despair. Differently from Elena however, it was her who directed the torture. She created beings full of life and feelings, and saw them as toys she could break and remake into new ones.

One day, bored of watching from afar, Lux decided to make her magnum opus. She created a curse and unleashed it onto the helpless people she made recently. The curse would transform those it took hold of, into rotten corpses with no mind of their own, roaming around looking for flesh. The curse spread like a virus, as the victims left ravaged by the undead could not see rest as their bodies started to move on their own, looking for food.

A month after she unleashed the curse, she decided to take a closer look. As she walked through the streets, the chaos she had unleashed had already ravaged the city, leaving destruction in its wake. Bored with the spectacle, she wandered aimlessly until she came face to face with a bus containing a desperate family. The father, assuming Lux needed help, approached her.

However, Lux had no interest in assistance. Instead, she saw an opportunity to test the strength of the mortals before her. With a swift and merciless strike, she separated the ribcage of one of the mobsters who were accompanying, and used it to impale another. Undeterred, the father sent two more to confront the sinister goddess while he rushed back to protect his family on the bus.

The mobsters attempted to use their weapons against Lux, but it was a futile endeavor. The power of a god rendered their firearms useless. Lux effortlessly disposed of the two, resuming her pursuit of the bus. The father, realizing the imminent danger, had to make an unexpected stop on the highway, surrounded by abandoned vehicles. As they continued on foot, the group encountered a new threat – a horde of zombies closing in on them.

Desperation forced the father to send the last remaining mobster to fend off the undead. The mobster, armed and ready, unleashed a barrage of bullets, but the sheer number of zombies overwhelmed him. Cornered in an alley with no escape, the father, determined to protect his family, prepared for a final stand. Revolver in hand, he aimed at the alley's exit. His wife and daughter stood behind, bracing for the onslaught.

To their surprise, the anticipated horde never arrived. Instead, emerging from the shadows was Lux. The air thickened with tension as she confronted the beleaguered family. She stood with open arms as gore and blood dripped from her dress. A wide grin arised from her blood soaked face. Upon fixing her gaze on them, Lux began advancing, impervious to the futile gunfire from the father's revolver. Undeterred, she continued her approach.

Realizing the ineffectiveness of their attempts, the daughter discerned an alternative. In a moment of desperate determination, the daughter hurled herself at Lux, intent on teleporting both of them to a distant, inaccessible place.

I will not lie, that revelation left me bewildered; the concept seemed beyond the bounds of my understanding. Yet, a peculiar detail caught my attention—symbols beneath each character's description, a detail recurrent in the library's volumes. The symbol beneath the daughter's

description triggered a spark of recognition. Hastily scouring the shelves, I found a relevant text. Skimming through the memories, I confirmed the connection between the characters in Lux's memories and those documented in the discovered book. With a newfound understanding, I delved into the daughter's memories, seeking to unravel her past and that of her parents, shedding light on Lux's enigmatic tale. Her memories, even if not as well kept and easily readable as those from Lux, unfolded as follows...

## Steeped in blood

Before the ominous storm of the apocalypse, life unfolded in the seemingly ordinary town where Charlie, once a notorious school bully, experienced an unexpected transformation. Her path crossed with that of a nerdy girl, a former target of her torment. Amidst the complexity of human connections, a chain of events set into motion a sequence of fate-altering moments.

Charlie, once a name synonymous with intimidation, found an unlikely friendship with the nerdy girl she had once targeted. This nerdy girl's mother, entangled in a relationship with a powerful CEO of a shady company, inadvertently led them into the depths of a clandestine operation. The CEO, a mastermind of genetic manipulation, orchestrated the creation of a substance that tampered with the very fabric of one's DNA.

In this clandestine laboratory, hidden away from the prying eyes of society innocent people became unwilling subjects of a grotesque experiment. Injected with the mysterious substance, their genetic codes were rewritten in unpredictable ways. All test subjects mutated in unpredictable and brutal ways, and died twisted and bloody. All but the children. The children twisted and mutated, yet didn't die, maintaining the mutations. However, they were unpredictable, and most times ended up killing themselves in accident before the company could harness their power.

Seeing her new partner's daughter and her friend as opportunities, he snatched them and made them unwilling subjects the experiment. Fueled by a desire to protect the company's reputation, the CEO devised a sinister plan. Charlie and her friend were to become living experiments, their abilities harnessed for the company's insidious purposes.

This nefarious plot set the stage for a series of harrowing events that would culminate in the death of Charlie's friend, and her escape of the company. The memories described are extremely hazy and for the most part, were my interpretations of the text.

Some more important things to note, are the father and the mother. Cuccino, the father, hailed from a lineage entrenched in the Mafia hierarchy. His father, a stern Mafioso big boss, had an abrasive demeanor even towards his own son. Following the patriarch's demise, Cuccino assumed leadership, striving to distance himself from his father's harsh reputation. He married Charlotte, a singer.

However, Charlotte's life took a dark turn when she met Cuccino, initially planning to exploit him but ultimately falling in love with him. Tragically, she met her end in mysterious circumstances, victimized by a police officer with a vendetta against her husband, the Mafia boss.

In an unforeseen twist, Charlotte returned from the dead when the zombie apocalypse unfolded. Despite her undead state, she retained consciousness due to a fortunate lack of severe brain damage. Driven by memories of her past life, she sought out Cuccino and Charlie. Their reunion was short-lived as their home fell prey to the zombie onslaught, a consequence of the mobsters' inability to defend it. Forced to abandon their refuge, they embarked on a bus journey with fellow mobsters, only to encounter a mysterious figure whose true intentions would soon unveil themselves as a formidable adversary.

## All things wicked

The next part is hard to understand with the description of one or the other's memories, so it is a mix of both Charlie's and Lux's memories.

The girl, having teleported Lux to an otherworldly place she referred to as "A room inside a mirror," found herself in a predicament of divine proportions. Lux, seething with anger at the audacity of an 18- year-old interfering with her plans, could have left at any moment. As a deity, she possessed the power to teleport, much like the girl who stood before her. Yet, Lux chose to remain, driven by a desire to hear the very words she craved from the defiant teenager.

Growing increasingly frustrated with the girl's refusal, Lux resorted to force. With unspeakable force, she punched her hand through Charlie's chest, and pushed up, tearing her apart, bound her to a chair only to resurrect her, exploiting her godly capabilities. "Are you going to get me out of here?" With each defiant "no," Lux delivered penitence to the blood soaked defiant mortal. The relentless cycle persisted, with Lux attempting to break the girl's will through violence, seeking the elusive "yes" that would set her free. However, the girl remained resolute, defying Lux's expectations.

Determined to escalate her efforts, Lux delved into even more brutal methods in her relentless pursuit. Before Lux could execute her next violent act, a monumental crack shattered the sterile whiteness of the room. A colossal fracture tore through the once seamless environment, introducing an unexpected disruption to Lux's malevolent endeavor. The crack hinted at the vulnerability of the fabricated reality, creating a rift in the very fabric of the room.

From the crack, oozed what is only described as a monster of primal terror. It started as a puddle of black and purple ooze, and from within, hands started to climb and claw the walls and floor. The two stared, frozen in place. Lux felt something weird. Her fur started to stand, and she felt chills running through her. Her pupils dilated. The beating of a heart she wasn't aware she



possessed started to quicken. She was scared. Horrified. How? How could she feel such a thing? They both stared intensively as from the puddle emerged gore and bones, who were subsequently reconstructed into a tall thin figure, made from pulsating flesh and adorned with vivid faces. A deep chanting coming from the faces in the creature's body drowned the little sound that ran inside the room. From its head, emerged a smile. Tooth by tooth, they formed a grin from cheek to cheek. Above it, a hole was carved, and inside it, pure darkness. Yet she could see inside it. Thousands of tormented souls, being broken and reformed into twisted forms.

Amidst the rivers of blood and screaming bodies, she saw herself. The tall creature then, in the blink of an eye was inches away from her face. She attacked him with everything she had, destroying the room, and revealing the outside, which was now a fiery crater. Curiously Charlie was intact, albeit startled. What is this feeling? She had only known the taste of victory, but this? She felt something running down her face. She could bleed.

The creature had extended his hand to her, without much struggle, he carved a hole in her face, and let a tiny droplet of his blood fall inside it. She then fell as if accepting her fate. As sounds of bone breaking and blood flooding the floor could be heard, Charlie passed out.

As she woke up, she was in a strange forest, in the distance, she could see streetlights. She followed them and found herself in her neighborhood. She then saw 3 people running desperately from one of the destroyed houses covered in moss as if it had been abandoned for years, and clumps of actively bleeding flesh. She had never seen creatures like them. One made of flesh and bone, one of cloud wearing a worn and bloodied golden armor, and the other resembled a humanoid furless primate. They were running from something. From inside the house, a laughing bloodied creature burst. Lux emerged, carrying a beaten body. And then. Silence.

## Back to zero

Little information was gleaned from my search for an escape plan, but the memories offered a different kind of revelation. Returning my gaze to the mirror, I tirelessly scoured its surface until I stumbled upon something significant. The mentioned neighborhood materialized, confined by towering brick walls and shrouded in a thick black fog on the outside. Peering into the secluded realm, I sought Charlie and Lux but found a chilling scene unfolding instead.

A man, donning a chicken mask and a butcher's uniform, brandishing a drill, terrorized the trapped inhabitants. Helplessly, I observed as the man brutally slaughtered each person in ways my mind to this moment cannot wrap itself around. Subsequently, the lifeless bodies were removed, and a door materialized before the masked assailant. Upon crossing it, the surroundings

transformed – doors reconstructed, glass reformed. A new sequence unfolded as five bewildered individuals emerged, engaging in hasty conversation before fleeing. Their escape, however, that was short-lived, as a colossal, familiar spider descended upon the scene, leaving the environment ravaged in its wake.

Ludovico stands as the embodiment of cosmic malevolence. In our homeland, we witnessed its presence warp entire worlds, extinguishing empathy and compassion within communities, pushing individuals to the brink of madness, and ultimately driving them over the edge. I now comprehend that Ludovico orchestrates these horrors to detach victims from their lives, subjecting them to an unending trial of terror, presumably vital for its own survival. The elusive key to its potential demise may lie in disrupting these trials, severing its ability to drain a sinister essence from victims like a heartless parasite feeding on a flower, if an ancient can even be killed at all.

The library has afforded me insights into Ludovico's motives— its relentless movement across universes, selecting victims, and consuming worlds as though perusing a cosmic buffet. Yet, the elusive question remains: does Ludovico gravitate towards worlds steeped in darkness and madness, or is it the very catalyst for such malevolence? In the tapestry of existence, all planes comprise a distinctive blend of conscious particles and material elements. Ludovico, undoubtedly pure consciousness, interacts with the material world, which responds to and transforms with consciousness.

Collective consciousness emerges as the linchpin. The body, the home, the trial—all manifestations of Ludovico's unconscious pursuit of fear and terror. Examining the chosen specimens reveals a deliberate pattern—they are either predator or prey, with the prey intricately linked to the predator. This is not mere happenstance; it appears to be an act of self-preservation. Ludovico, it seems, is drawn to dark realms where darkness and chaos signal inhabitants' failure to connect the dots between collective consciousness and their world's well-being. However, even in worlds not yet consumed by darkness, Ludovico's mere presence seems to be able to manipulate individuals into madness, leading the world to be consumed. The conclusion, then, might be that Ludovico feeds off disgrace and fear.

Distinguishing the end of one day from the next becomes a blurry task. The tower and the library act as my solace, attempting to distract me from the harsh reality that surrounds me. Despite having unlimited access to anything I desire, the emptiness persists. Amidst the relentless cycle as innocent victims are pursued and brutalized by merciless killers, who, as it is noted from Elena, could be against the cycle, I persistently navigate the fog, seeking traces of memories from those who managed to break free.

## Chapter 3

### Escalation

As I pondered Ludovico within the archives, an eerie, unseen presence seemed to linger. Outside my confinement, the labored breaths of Killers echoed. Peering into the enveloping darkness of the fog, I found no solace, only uncertainty. Perhaps Ludovico sensed my intrusion, orchestrating the arrival of his killers to put an end to my plans. Alternatively, it could be the amalgamation of his victims' memories mixing with my own, manifesting as auditory illusions brought on by excessive perusal of the books and mirror. Regardless, the distinction fades; if vanquishing that abomination demands my demise, so be it. My life is a trifling cost for the salvation of countless worlds threatened by his malevolence.

In this realm, attempts to flee often spiral into madness, haunted by echoes of past lives. Witnessing one soul succumb to delusion, relentlessly bashing his skull against the wall in a desperate bid to escape a nightmare he believed he had just escaped, left a mark. His silenced cries, silenced by the others drowning him in mud, serve as a grim testament to the gradual dimming of these tormented torches with each cycle. Some fade entirely into oblivion, consigned to the Styx, while others descend into madness, their voices stifled by their friends.

Jumbled experiences of brutal killers and weird rituals of godless brutes from worlds too dark to care. I jerked myself straight out of one memory that pulled me into a cavern of bodies with an odor so repugnant I was retching for hours. I still have that horrible taste in my mouth and shudder at the thought of that smell, that horrible smell, rotting humanity. What foul creature of a man had made this festering hole his lair is beyond me.

Recording these observations strains my psyche to its limits. Flashes of disparate memories assail me relentlessly, as I strive to anchor myself in the familiarity of home. Though I have refrained from delving into the library for some time, its pull remains potent, ensnaring me in the labyrinthine corridors of alternate lives. These archives, I surmise, may yet serve as a lifeline, should the mirror threaten to cast me into the abyss of forgotten selves.

## Acheron

Perched upon an anonymous structure's precipice, she remains: a figure sculpted from travertine marble, as pale as the clouds above. She perceives a world devoid of hues, absent in the crimson gashes of her injuries, or in the decayed areas of her wrists, where bullets once ruptured her skin. Her gaze mirrors the darkness of the tempestuous storm brewing over the abyss beneath, where the tumult concludes with gore swirling upon the roughened concrete.

Nothing but ashes, despair, and the sting of foul rain: these are the accolades she reaps after a

decade of devotion to the army. Ashes, decay, and decline—leading to a solitary, frigid demise. Her sole aspiration now is oblivion. She's earned monikers like the Wraith, Tyr's Fist, and Odin's Champion. She's been labeled a warrior, an executioner, a creature of terror. She has embodied all these identities. And none of them.

Her name is Mary, and she discerns who the real monsters are. Her arms hang limp, the once-potent array of formidable weaponry rendered impotent. Calluses etch her hands, not just from conventional firearms and blades, but also from the sniper rifle she bore long before her military service. These hands have extinguished myriad lives, yet now they lack arms to wield. They'll never again clench or form fists. All they sense is the steady trickle of blood and pus from her ravaged wrists.

Her fists and forearms bear the indelible marks of her military tenure. The torn, weathered flesh quivers in the harsh wind, stained with decay; even the bones carry the scars of the weapons once bonded to them: the chains of Freedom. Those bonds are now severed, torn away by the very entity that brought her to that accursed city. They once linked her to the weapons, and she to them; they were the connections tying her to the service of the innocent.

But the mission is over. The chains have vanished, taking honor with them. Now, she possesses nothing. She is nothing. She's shed all that hadn't deserted her.

No friends—feared and reviled by the world, devoid of any affectionate gaze.

No adversaries—none left alive to challenge her; only the decayed remnants of divine retribution linger in her wake.

No family...

Even now, that's a chamber of her heart she dares not explore.

Finally, she reaches the ultimate sanctuary of the lost and forsaken—the gods.

The gods jeered at her existence, molding her into a woman she no longer recognizes. Now, at the brink, she can't even summon anger.

"Even the gods above forsake me."

She steps onto the precipice's final edge, her decayed soles scraping against the gravelly brink. Three hundred meters below, tattered shreds of clouds twirl and entwine, obscuring the jagged rocks stained by the innocent's blood. A mesh? She shakes her head.

A shroud? Rather, a winding sheet.

She's achieved more than most could dream. She's accomplished feats surpassing even her superiors. But the anguish of her unshakeable past consumes her, leaving only torment and madness as companions.

"Now, there's no hope."

In this realm, hope finds no haven—but perhaps in the next, amidst the dominion of mighty Styx, adjoining Gehenna, where the Lethe River meanders. A mere sketch of the dark waters purportedly capable of obliterating the memories of a life that cast a lingering shadow, leaving the spirit to wander eternally, nameless, and adrift... devoid of a past.

This elusive dream propels her toward a final, fateful leap, hurtling her into the midst of dissipating clouds. As she plummets, the once ethereal rocks, eroded by viscera, materialize with solidity and mass, hurtling towards her to extinguish her existence.

The impact devours all that she was, all that she is, all she had done, and all that had been inflicted upon her, in a fractured explosion of darkness.

## True splendor

In that moment of oblivion, as her essence dissolved into the void, the expected realm of fiery torment did not come. She found herself not in hell, but in a realm engulfed in dark fog that looked alive. And there, amidst the spectral mists, stood Ludovico. A grotesque mass, its footsteps echoing discordantly yet strangely synchronized. Millennia of dark training seemed to propel these innermost horrors of the earth forward, their movements a cacophony of padding, clicking, walking, stalking, rumbling, lumbering, and crawling—all accompanied by the abhorrent discord of mocking instruments. And then, as if conjured by the gods themselves, memories flooded her mind like a violent storm: mummies devoid of souls, the gathering place of wandering sinners, the hordes of devil-cursed children dead of fourty centuries, and the composite mass led through the darkest voids by King Minos and his twin serpents. Ludovico, the entity whose name whispered like a curse through the corridors of Hell. He offered her no solace, no respite from her suffering, but instead, a cruel mockery of salvation. With cunning language and deceitful pledges, he enticed her into a deal beyond her understanding, chaining her to a destiny she could never comprehend. To embrace her true identity, as a killer, a harbinger of chaos, heaven's hellsent abomination upon humankind. To no longer be haunted by her deeds, but to hold them proudly as her weapon. Yet, to prove her loyalty, she must first undertake a test of servitude.

## Devour hope

Aibek was raised in a tranquil village, largely cut off from the outside world. The villagers were hospitable, and the elders upheld ancient customs, resolving disputes personally to maintain harmony. Aibek cherished the protective charms they taught her, believing in their power for safety and fortune. Aibek, a descendant of the revered Golden Lineage originating from Queen

Catra the Eternal and her consort, known only as The Forever King, carried diluted divine blood. Despite his distant relation to Catra, he admired her greatly, longing for her acknowledgment of his deeds.

One stormy night, as he journeyed home through the woods, nature unleashed its fury without warning. Buffeted by howling winds and drenched by rain, Aibek struggled through the swamp, his clothes clinging to his skin. Losing his footing in the slippery mud, he struck his head on a rock, drifting in and out of consciousness as a dark figure approached.

He awoke chained in a flooded cellar. Though dimly lit, he could see others whose wounds were swarmed by flies. Days passed before the kidnapper returned, cruelly mutilating and consuming the captives. Though many succumbed quickly, Aibek clung to life amidst starvation, infection, and torture. Eventually, weakened but determined, he broke free from his restraints, his body ravaged by wounds and infection.

With his last strength, Aibek inscribed the elders' symbols on the floor, invoking a dark hunger for vengeance. The village's search party eventually brought them to an old shack in a swamp. Inside, its previous inhabitants had been viciously dismembered by an unidentifiable animal. In the cellar, amid rotting corpses and disconnected flesh, the elders' charms were scrawled in blood on the floor. Found inside a torn corpse, they found a tag of sorts. Bound by a small chain, was a small metal plate, with some information, and a name. Mary. A day later, Aibek returned to his village. Silent and changed, it was clear he would never be the same.

## Muted in exile

"You are our shining star, our latest kinsman,

Our shadow's wing; Rise, Aibek"

Those words roused me from my deep slumber. Whoever they were, I must delve deeper into their identity. As for Mary, her fate seems tragically clear. Another victim ensnared by the deceptive charm of that monster. Nonetheless, I'll search for her, hoping she's not beyond saving, perhaps as prey rather than predator. Her encounter with Ludovico himself could provide invaluable insights for my research.

Fate... What is it but a string of moments and choices shaping our lives? Roses we cherish, and thorns we cannot forget. As futile as it may be to ponder, I sometimes wonder where I'd be if I had made different choices. If my curiosity hadn't been piqued by Celestials, would I have even crossed paths with Ludovico? If I hadn't witnessed the annihilation of an entire world, would I

have hungered for knowledge? And if I hadn't defied the council, would I have faced exile within the very realm I sought to destroy?

In every life, there comes a moment when our choices converge, altering our paths irrevocably. A moment... of reckoning!

## Chapter 4

### Heresy, unspeakable, heresy

I've dedicated countless hours to scouring through books that mention Mary and Aibek, and it turns out, there are quite a lot of them. Fortunately, I discovered that the mirror can uncover more than just victims and their brutal pursuers; it can reveal the location of their memories as well. Mary's tale culminated in that cabin, a tragic figure ensnared in the threads of fate, particularly those spun by Ludovico. Aibek, on the other hand, appears in multiple books. One was in its usual spot amidst the infinite shelves of this place. The others, however, were concealed within a crawlspace, tucked away behind a desk which kept papers with bizarre symbols and nonsensical writing. I stowed these in a readily accessible location, who knows when they could be useful. Within that crawlspace, I unearthed numerous books detailing the experiences of various individuals. Interestingly, one chronicled the exploits of that spider lady. Unlike the usual covers, which although often worn and torn, the covers were always purple, adorned with gold, and a symbol in the middle, representing something important in that memory. These however, rather strangely, there were four distinct variations for what seemed to be the same narrative. I focused solely on Aibek's recollections, delving into each version simultaneously. It was a time-consuming endeavor, but I soon discerned that these were in fact different perspectives on the same story, which offered different insights into the events. Some pages were adorned with hastily scribbled notes or lengthy diatribes, with each book written in such a way, that all five felt like were written by different people, adding layers to the narrative. Ultimately, I realized that relying solely on individual memories provided an incomplete picture. Consolidating all five accounts, I crafted a cohesive narrative. Before transcribing these findings, it's worth noting that in this rendition, Ludovico's influence is notably diminished; his role extends little beyond Mary's involvement in Aibek's abduction and the establishment of a divine lineage in the mortal realm through the goddess "Catra". Nevertheless, the narrative unfolds as follows:

From hell with love

Aibek traces his ancestry back to the illustrious Golden Lineage, stemming from Queen Catra the Eternal, who found herself paired with Ludovico as her first consort, albeit reluctantly. No one knew who Ludovico was, and he was never truly named. Dubbed the eternal monarch by the people, he was never officially recognized. Catra never truly acknowledged him; she opted to relegate her memories of him to the distant past, hoping to further distance herself from his violent action against her. Only a distant relation of Catra's line, Aibek's divine blood was sorely diluted, and he was viewed as the runt of the litter.

Aibek was born to Skjoralmor, a renowned champion of the moon, and Queen Svana Merilis, who held leadership over both the Merilis Royal Family and the Academy of Lake Linalta.

Eventually, the initial High Lord, revered as the eternal monarch, was stripped of his divine favor and mysteriously disappeared from the realm, leaving widespread devastation in his wake.

Skjoralmor, Aibek's father, departed from Svana to assume the role of Queen Catra's consort, ascending as the second High Lord. With Queen Catra by his side, they bore offspring who were nurtured into demigods, a privilege denied to Aibek.

After the vanishing of the first High Lord, Aibek inherited the anchor amulet, also known as the amulet of the blood moon. During this tumultuous period, Aibek was forced to flee from the Dibella, the Royal Capital. He collected various treasures, including the Deceiver's Fleece, before seeking refuge among the women of the city.

Aibek journeyed southward and settled in Dro'farahn, accompanied by a band of soldiers who had fled from Dibella. Taking refuge in the Volcano Bastion, he evaded General Akharos and indulged in the dark practice of adjoinement: a macabre ritual involving grafting body parts of others onto oneself to acquire power. Subsequently, Aibek rarely ventured out from his stronghold. Instead, he dispatched his soldiers on sacrilegious hunts to seek fresh subjects for adjoinement. Besides augmenting his own form, Aibek created the GrimKnights—horrific entities fashioned from various limbs, grotesquely attached to children

Sheltered within the walls of Volcano Bastion, Aibek emerged as a merciless enforcer, leading his grimknights with an iron grip. His inquisitors hunted down and subjected those labeled as heretics to brutal torture, often targeting individuals from rival kingdoms. Delving into the depths of Mount Solitude's catacombs, Aibek unearthed long-lost magma hexes belonging to a forgotten serpent-worshipping faith indigenous to the area. He revitalized these ancient sorceries, incorporating them into his arsenal of dark powers.

As Akharos advanced southward, Aibek's scornful words provoked her, sparking a confrontation that ended with Aibek battered and shamed, compelled to beg for clemency. Yet, this altercation marked only the commencement of the long-foretold Great War among the nine kingdoms.

Aibek held Eternal Monarch in high regard, yearning for his ancestor to witness his accomplishments. He brandished an axe adorned with the likeness of a withered tree, a symbol associated with Monarch, and outfitted his army with symbols of the revered Golden Lineage, such as great-swords and depictions of Pelontrix, the beast regent. Despite styling himself as the "lord of the holy blood," he earned the derogatory moniker "Aibek the blasphemous," garnering far less reverence than his esteemed forebear. Even his own servants held him in disdain,



enduring his haughty demeanor and mistreatment.

Aibek gained notoriety for creating the Hanging Virgins, automatons adept at creating carnage on the battlefield and kidnapping victims to transport them to Volcano Bastion.

Driven by his burgeoning blasphemous tendencies, Aibek collaborated with his step-sister, Mara, in orchestrating the Night of Red Sun. As a reward for his involvement, Mara bestowed upon Aibek a stone slab inscribed with the markings of the Rune of Death, granting him the ability to commune with the eternal monarch every blood moon.

## Panic betrayer

Following this, the narrative becomes somewhat murky, as is often the case. Between this juncture and the subsequent significant event, the accounts diverge into numerous ramblings and annotations across various volumes, save for the primary one. These tangents offer little substantial insight; some discuss the hanging virgins, while others drone on for several pages about Catra's unresolved fate. Nonetheless, amidst torn pages, blurred words, and stained parchment, a discernible thread emerges: Catra's demise, reduced to naught but a disembodied head adrift in the heavens, a secret known solely to the author of the four volumes, though it is needless to mention that it is Ludovico. Yet, this revelation fails to elucidate the distinct writing styles evident in the texts.

Years elapse in the aftermath of the war, during which all major kingdoms fall under Aibek's dominion, and the demigods meet grisly fates, their limbs grotesquely attached to Aibek's form. The realm descends into an era of silence, aptly dubbed the Silent Era, where nothing of note occurs for centuries. Any hint of rebellion is swiftly quelled, with captives' agonized screams echoing throughout the kingdom until their sudden cessation. The scent of burnt blood and decay permeates Mount Solitude for miles, guarded vigilantly by the grimknights.

However, the tranquility was suddenly halted. The sky peeled back as a shooting star ripped the clouds apart like a bullet. As it landed on the doors of the palace, a barrage of divine rain fell upon the blasphemous knights. From this pivotal moment onward, the pages of all four books are drenched in dark crimson, stained with blood, leaving only Aibek's memories intact.

## Chapter 5

### Infernus ad astra

Once more, that enigmatic figure from Elena's book asserts its presence, this time with a markedly aggressive demeanor, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. There's a compelling rationale behind this behavior. As I delve deeper into Aibek's recollections, a recurring motif emerges. Each action undertaken by the mysterious figure causes the crimson hues in the other four books to deepen, simmering with fury. Upon closer scrutiny of the ethereal cloud woman, a revelation strikes me. She bears the unmistakable mark of Ludovico. With a grotesque void where her visage should be, adorned with formidable claws and fangs, she possesses a savage intensity akin to a wounded beast. Yet, paradoxically, she appears to be in opposition to Ludovico. Numerous unanswered questions linger, casting a shadow of uncertainty. Could this be the same individual from Elena's narrative? Are there multiple incarnations of Ludovico? These are inquiries reserved for later contemplation, as elusive answers evade my grasp for now. This has become more than an obsession to me now. I need to know the answers. I found that warrior's book too. Barely anything could be understood amidst all the blood and torn pages. I know not her name or motivations. All I know is she shares of my mission. Maybe, this could be the end.

## Godfist Hericide

“With a resounding clap of thunder, a deity descends from the heavens clad in armor forged from the sun itself. The celestial champion from the clouds above has descended to our realm.”

After forcefully blowing open the doors of the blasphemous bastion, Aibek patiently awaited her inside. Ready and prepared, she hurled a spear of pure light. Swift was the spear, yet it felt to her as if she were moving through thick molasses. The time between the lightning strike and its impact on its target seemed longer than her entire existence. She didn't pause to witness its contact. Should she miss, death awaited regardless, so she positioned herself strategically to maximize her success.

The moment her hands were freed, she leaped towards a statue in the middle of the bastion's courtyard, seized an ornate sculpture, and propelled it towards Catra's statue, aiming for ground level. Still airborne, she witnessed the spear striking its mark. Aibek, still challenging her with his cries, never anticipated the ensuing events. His initial indication was a searing burn on his right hand, followed swiftly by the absence of his axes' weight. The spear had found its target and fulfilled its purpose, severing the tendons connecting the mad king's right hands to the rest of his arm.

"What?" Aibek's gaze remained fixed on his clenched fists, as if they had betrayed him in some unfathomable way. "What have you done?" The distance from Aibek's outstretched arm to the ground seemed insignificant, yet the descent felt like a plunge from great heights. She quickly

calculated the trajectory of the falling axe and sprinted toward the projected landing spot with all her might. Her estimation proved precise as the weapon landed just ahead, amidst a pile of rubble. Before Aibek could fully comprehend the situation, she was already closing in on it.

Snatching the axe, she hoisted it aloft with surprising ease. Unlike her previous struggles to defend herself from a horde of simple undead in the dilapidated city, she lifted the axe embedded with godlike weight almost effortlessly, as if the axe itself yearned to be wielded by her. Amidst the ruins of the Volcano Bastion, she, the warrior seemingly sent from the heavens above, brandished Catra's axe with newfound vigor, reclaiming its power for the first time since Aibek had stolen it from the temple where the eternal monarch forced the rising of the golden lineage unto the then defenseless Catra.

She ascended the debris, reaching the brink of the shattered statue, clutching the axe, bathed in its warm, sunny radiance. Within its depths, a dazzling shimmer met her gaze, inducing a moment of dreadful vertigo, as if she teetered on the brink of a cosmic abyss. Yet, as the sensation ebbed, a comforting warmth enveloped her entire being, and the axe, once imposing, dwindled to the size of a common battle-axe.

A surge of power coursed through her, electrifying her body and soul alike. Her arms ascended, sparks flickering between her outstretched fingers, a sensation of power previously unimaginable. Was this the same power her mother had wielded?

Then, her gaze fixed upon Aibek the Blasphemous, and realization dawned—it was not the axe that had diminished, but she who had grown. Previously, she had a height that reached Aibek's lower torso, now she looked the mad king right in the eyes. And in those eyes, she saw a spark of fear.

Aibek dispelled his horror with raging fury. His visage twisted into a scornful grin. That former Aibek was no more. "You are still merely a mortal, as feeble as the day you pleaded for me to spare your life." "I am not the girl you took that day." She straightened, her voice resonating with such intensity, Mount Solitude shook. "For twenty years I have waited. Tonight, you die."

Aibek's scornful amusement blossomed into sinister laughter. "Our brother has rendered you feeble." She assumed a defensive stance. "Strong enough to kill you!" "Never!" The ominous monarch unfurled his many arms, as if greeting his favored offspring. "Send my regards to your mother."

Instead of engaging her in combat, the king unleashed a dark and otherworldly power that enveloped the warrior, penetrating her, seizing her mind entirely. The stronghold, the mountain, Solitude, and even the king himself vanished from her sight, replaced by a village consumed by flames. She collapsed to her knees. She recognized this dreadful place. It haunted her every night in her dreams, tormenting her days and saturating every facet of her existence.

Scornful laughter echoed in her ears. "We've taught you many ways to destroy: scorched flesh, shattered bones. But to break a man's spirit is true obliteration." Growling with wordless fury, she stood amidst the flames engulfing the village temple where she'd committed matricide.

"Recognize this place, child? Perhaps you can undo your deed. Plead for mercy, and I might let you try."

Crossing the temple's threshold, she found her mother alive and unharmed, a vision of her prayers personified. Emotions overwhelmed her, silencing her attempts to speak. Decades of torment converged, haunting her. "Daughter?" her mother questioned, shielding her eyes from the flames.

"What's happening? Where are we?" cried her friend running towards her until her mother suddenly held her back by the arm. The weight of this blow to her soul had been felt only once before—when Ludovico's fist had slammed her ribs apart, pinning her to the temple's gates. "By the gods, is this real? Are you here to lead us to safety?" her mother hoped.

The temple wall glowed, ethereal, transcending its physicality. From within emerged... her. Her younger self, the warrior of two decades past, strode in with a single-minded determination to obliterate anything that moved.

She stood as a barrier between her family and her youthful incarnation, who approached with the same ferocity and mocking wildness that once defined her. Each movement was a blow, each blow a stride. Though her younger self possessed greater speed and strength, victory was never solely about power and swiftness.

The atmosphere crackled with the symphony of claws and teeth. As they flashed around her, leaving minor cuts in their wake, she realized she loathed being on the receiving end of such fury.

Amidst the flurry of cuts delivered by her younger self, she wove through the maze of claws and clasped onto one. Its searing heat singed her skin, yet she endured, familiar with its torment. For the sake of reclaiming her family, she would endure any ordeal.

With a fierce tug, she yanked at the beast's limb. Her force propelled her youthful counterpart into the air, yet the agility of her younger self mirrored her own. Rather than succumbing to a helpless descent, her older self pivoted, launching a sudden assault, her other hand poised for lethal intent.

Her decisive action likely stunned her youthful counterpart as her arm was severed at the elbow, causing her hand, claws, and fury to plummet harmlessly. Compassionately, she spared her younger self further shock by splitting her head in two.

"Do you see, Ludovico? You took them once. I won't let them slip away again!" Almost as if in response, three spots on the temple walls shimmered once more—three emerging figures, each a younger, stronger iteration of herself. With curses aimed at Ludovico, she wielded Catra's axe, striking against the trio of her own images. "Just one would have been too easy."

As they closed in on her family, her uncontrollable fury surged back, ignited by the presence of those familiar faces. She launched into the fray without hesitation, engaging two simultaneously.

The third seized the opportunity to flank her and target her family, only for her to realize her attack was expected, and, retaliated. Blood sprayed as her head rolled to the ground.

Though these duplicates possessed youth and strength, they mirrored the same ferocious bloodlust that once propelled her darkest deeds. The seasoned warrior grappled with restraining this violent instinct, no longer a slave to mindless carnage. As her mother wished, she shed the thirst for spilled blood in favor of defending honor and kin. Within moments, all remaining copies lay mutilated at her feet.

Breathing heavily, wounds adorning her body, she stood vigil over them. "Daughter, I beg you, I know not where we are," her mother pleaded. "Lead us home." "Soon, I pray," she murmured. "But there are still matters to attend to here." This time, there were five. Their fate mirrored that of the others.

"Ludovico, you'll never lay hands on them. Send ten of me. Send a thousand. I'll annihilate them all. None shall harm my family."

The temple's flames echoed Ludovico's voice.

"You forfeited them in your mother's pursuit to protect you from any danger. There's a price for all you acquire."

"Not this price. Never."

"No price is too steep for what I offered you, fool! You dared to spurn a god!" The fiery voice softened, dripping with seductive malice. "Behold the cost of such folly."

"I don't care." She brandished Catra's axe. "I'm prepared."

"Are you?"

The axe stirred in her grasp, moving as if with a will of its own. It was as if it had seized her wrists in an unyielding grip, inching towards her family. As they approached them, silently, Catra's screams of anguish could be heard coming from the axe

"No!" she bellowed. "Not again!"

She attempted to rid herself of Catra's axe, to cast it aside, but it clung to her hands as if fused. The axe encircling her arms seared with an intensity that blurred her sight with agonizing torment. In that moment, it was the axe that wielded control over her, not the reverse.

"Not again!"

The axe ascended.

The axe descended.

And once more, two decades later, she found herself standing over the lifeless forms of his mother and friend. Slain by Ludovico.

"You should have stood with me."

Her cry echoed as she collapsed to her knees. This wasn't a shriek born of fear or remorse; it wasn't sorrow that buckled her legs. It was fury.

The inferno within her heart burned fiercer than Catra's axe when wielded by the goddess herself ever could.

"You should have been stronger."

She could only howl incoherently with rage.

"Now you will have no power. No magic. No weapons. And no outside help"

Invisible hands seized the axe, wrenching it from her grasp. They stretched farther and farther apart, akin to a torture device, elongating her arms until they seemed on the verge of tearing from his body, her shoulders crying out in agony as if anticipating dislocation. Her face reverted to normal. The once gaping hole transformed into an innocent face bloodied with enough fury to make even metal bleed. Her razor sharp teeth broke apart into normal sized teeth. And finally, the last remaining shred of power, her crimson red claws, stained with her own blood, contorted into normal fingers.

Ultimately, her flesh surrendered before her joints.

The axe was free, shredding her arms with its departure, leaving blackened gashes smoking. "The only fate left for you... is death!" With these parting words from the now brutally torn apart remnant of what once was Aibek, still towering her, organs and bones and limbs covering his body, the blazing temple dissolved around her. She knelt amidst the debris of the shattered bastion of mount Solitude, the night's darkness cloaking the ruins atop the sacred mountain, overlooking the desolation of the cities around.

A single tear trickled down her cheek, mingling with the rubble of shattered stones. Her hand rose, surveying the charred ruin of her forearm before turning to behold the bastion, its once-grand stature diminished in the shadow of the colossal Catra statue. Her eyes, though, revealed no hint of emotion.

Amidst the devastation, Ludovico fixed his gaze upon her, leaning casually on Aibek's other blades like malevolent scepters. "No magic?" Her voice thundered, charged with divine power, its echoes rebounding across the mountain, resonating against distant peaks. "I wield all the magic I require."

"You remain a mere mortal, weak and inconsequential," taunted Ludovico. "A dead woman lies in the temple. She spoke the truth; I am a monster."

She straightened, shedding the stiffness from her limbs, droplets of her blood scattering with each movement. "I alone am your monster, Ludovico, and I am here to kill you."  
Ludovico chuckled.

Suddenly, Ludovico's rage exploded, flames erupting with a deafening roar, echoing as if a million soldiers bellowed their war cries together. With a mighty swing, he lifted his massive sword high.

"Come fourth child of the clouds, and, DIE"

Across the mountaintop, Ludovico thundered forth, each hoofbeat shattering stone and reducing the bastion to rubble. She observed him with the intensity of a lion stalking its prey. And so, the long-awaited confrontation commenced.

## Blood of a lion

"To the battle, we ride. We crossed a starlit sky. No space, no time; will catch the wind. Strange losses, men die. We crossed a starlit sky. And still, no space and time; will catch the wind."

I watched the battle unfold through the mirror in front of the throne I had constructed in the main room. Fear sat beside me, my heart pounding until I could barely breathe. It wasn't just the anxiety of seeing a mere mortal confront Ludovico. Surprisingly, I was worried about her!

Though it seemed impossible, I had begun to care for this coarse, homicidal mortal. As she faced Ludovico's onslaught, hurling boulders like handfuls of sand into the beast's eyes, I held my breath. When she sidestepped his blind sword strikes and brought the devourer of gods to the ground, I gasped.

She pulled a rock from the mountain's base that must have weighed tons. Now, she was attempting to turn Aibek's brain into blood pudding, and I found myself standing without even realizing I had stood.

"This is a proper fight!" Aibek's torn-apart remains declared. His eyes blazed wildly, his face drained of color. Tiny spirits flitted around his exposed brain, ensnared by writhing purple tendrils. "None of this modern bullshit, hiding and shooting blindly, no quick conclusions. This is how battles were meant to be fought."

The deranged deity shifted to find a more comfortable stance, gripping his final sword. "I see you are too occupied in your... Wisdom. Making all of humanity seem smarter. Can you imagine what is going on in the little mortals' mins right now?"

I found myself clenching my fists and tensing my shoulders, as if I could somehow aid her victory. When Ludovico struck her and she managed to rise again, I held my breath. Yet, without hesitation, the warrior threw herself back into the fray.

I prayed to any god who might be listening that Ludovico would suffer a defeat, even if only briefly. Such a setback could be incredibly advantageous to my mission. However, he seemed to have the upper hand.

## Hammer of gods

"You repulse me."

"You're a killer too, aren't you? Oh but revenge makes it right?"

"Killing for nothing is just... Insane! I'm no coward—I acknowledge I'm a murderer. But I only kill deranged assholes like you, those who brutalize innocent lives with futures ahead of them. If I must go to hell to cleanse this world of scum like you, then I'll see you there, and i am going finish what I started."

"Your futile resistance only validates my point."

"If existence's gone to shit, you're just another worm writhing in the pile!"

The warrior and the deranged deity engaged in a close-quarters combat, their bodies pressed together in a primal struggle, tearing each other apart like bears. Throughout the skirmish, she maintained a relentless proximity, preventing Ludovico from utilizing his weapon effectively. Her grasp clamped tightly onto the god's sword arm while her other hand thrust forcefully beneath Aibek's chin, forcing his head backward despite the searing heat of his breath. Though the flames scorched her skin, she endured, familiar with such agony from wielding Catra's axe.

Ludovico's voice, twisted with fury, spat curses between his clenched teeth as his free hands delivered relentless blows to her kidney. Each strike brought a spreading numbness, threatening to buckle her knees. Yet, true to her warrior's spirit, she utilized what leverage she had. Unable to stand fully, she redirected her assault to Ludovico's groin, meting out punishment. For every punch the titan landed, he also took a knee to the testicles, the titan, ensnared in controlling Aibek, endured the agony, until, even through the glow of his eyes, his face began to show pain. Ludovico, showed pain.

Abandoning her attempt to nudge the god's chin, she pivoted, driving her elbow into the deity's temple, jolting him further. Ludovico stumbled, and seizing the moment, she veered left, leveraging her hold on the creature's wrist to redirect their combined momentum, sending them crashing sideways. As they plummeted, Ludovico's fist shattered the bedrock where he hit, and the stone did the same to the knuckles of his fingers. With swift precision, she inserted her knee between the stone and the god, simultaneously dislodging Ludovico and wresting the sword from his grasp. As Ludovico struggled to his feet, she executed a seamless roll, slashing through the



air with Aibek's sword in a swift, indistinct arc, drawing blood. The warrior's lip skin peeled with her teeth.

"How does your monster sit with you now?" Ludovico stood tall, his injured hand easing to his side. His grin mirrored hers, a fierce predator's smirk etched on his face. "You've yet to encounter a genuine monster, my dear child. But soon, you'll see one." Aibek inclined his head, tension darkening his features, as the fragmented parts knitted together, reforming Aibek's face. Breaking through the unyielding armor on his back, additional arms emerged, resembling the legs of dreadful scorpions, clad in obsidian-like rock, each tip adorned with more blades than the Bastion had columns. "And you won't live long enough to need another." With the cacophony of his articulated limbs, Ludovico lunged forward like a spider, every angular blade primed to taste her ethereal blood.

She withdrew, facing an adversary beyond her wildest nightmares. Ludovico surged forward, his arm blades intertwining in a mesmerizing dance, rendering any attempt at retaliation futile. She danced backwards, desperately evading his onslaught, severing appendages where she could, yet Ludovico's obsidian shields were as impenetrable as Aibek's legendary armor. However, she noted, the mystical armor left certain parts of the God Eater's body unprotected...

When Ludovico pressed his assault anew, she seized the moment, driving her crimson-hot sword ten inches deep into the god's thigh. In a mortal, this would spell certain doom, slicing through the femoral artery and inducing rapid exsanguination. Yet, the god's ichorous blood oozed from the wound, and the only apparent consequence was Ludovico now utilizing his blade's appendages as makeshift limbs, lifting himself from the ground with ease.

He pressed forward relentlessly, and she retreated, seeking a strategic angle, hunting for any chink in his lethal armor—a vulnerability to exploit. Fatigue gnawed at her with increased urgency; bereft of Ludovico's life-giving energy, her wounds remained gaping, draining her strength onto the cold stone of the courtyard.

In a fleeting instant, the specter of defeat loomed over her, casting a shadow of doubt. Yet, amidst that turmoil, the visages of her mother and friends surfaced in her mind, igniting a flame within her, a ferocity unknown to her. With renewed vigor, she faced Ludovico's advance. All her strength returned to her, and more. Ludovico came at her. She crushed one of the titan's knives with such force that the blade struck a neighboring limb. And cracked his armor..

Astonishment flickered across her faces as a dark, viscous substance seeped from the fracture. A vulnerability exposed?

Ludovico faltered momentarily, his once unwavering confidence wavering, before steeling himself for another assault.

"This ends now," she resolved inwardly. Allowing her knees to buckle, she feigned weakness, the sword slipping from its aggressive stance to clatter against the courtyard stones. Sensing an opening, Ludovico lunged, seeking to skewer her with two blades.

Yet, in that crucial moment, her façade of frailty dissolved, and she surged upward to meet Ludovico mid-air. Grasping one of the blades with steely determination, she twisted and leaned with a force irresistible, driving the sharp point through Aibek's armor and into Ludovico's chest. Convulsions wracked Ludovico's form as they plummeted. With a violent exertion of her

strength, she directed their descent, crashing down upon the tyrant king and the deity within him. Her momentum drove the blade fully through his chest and out his back.

With a tumult that echoed more of outrage than agony, Ludovico cast her aside and collapsed, his feet meeting the earth with a resounding thud. He gazed down at the colossal blade lodged in his chest, his expression a blend of confusion and disbelief. It mirrored the visage she had once worn, beholding the minced remains of her mother and dearest friend strewn before her like a grotesque tableau.

Sinking to his knees, Ludovico's eyes beseeched her, a mixture of terror and supplication evident in their depths.

"Asteria... Asteria, recall... it was I who rescued you in your direst hour!"

She grasped the king's sword, standing tall as Ludovico's pleas lingered in the air.

"On that fateful eve... Oblako, I implore you... On that night, I merely sought to forge you into a formidable warrior! I merely obeyed your mother's wishes!"

Oblako drove Aibek's own blade into the king's chest, severing the bond between the violated carcass of the monarch and its puppeteer.

As she limped away from the lifeless form, a cascade of lights began to emanate from it. These luminous specters coalesced into swirling particles that ascended towards the heavens, culminating in a blinding explosion, as a hand emerged from the ground that obliterated both the corpse and the ethereal lights into crimson mist.

Exhausted and wounded, Oblako stood amidst the aftermath, once again reduced to mere mortal stature. She regarded the immense blade that had previously yielded to her will with a newfound reverence, now dwarfing her by comparison.

With aching steps, she made her way back to the shattered bastion, its walls reduced to rubble, and stood before the statue of the goddess, a solitary figure in the desolation.

The skies turned to red

The animals fell dead, no winds dared to blow

Then out the darkness with a thunderous roar

Leviathan rose up from the depths below

## Chapter 6

### Universe on fire

It seems that only a solitary peak, the grotesque crowned monolith upon which great Ludovico awaited, actually surfaced from the earth. When I contemplate the vastness of all that might be brooding below, I am almost compelled to kill myself forthwith. I cannot fathom what she must have been experiencing in that moment. Though I may be confined here, it pales in comparison to her likely torment. Oblako and all the beings around them, both living and deceased, were struck by the cosmic grandeur of this dripping Babylon of ancient demons, and must have intuited without guidance that it belonged to no sane world. Awe at the incomprehensible size of

the purplish stone blocks, at the dizzying height of the grandly carved monolith, and at the overwhelming familiarity of the colossal statues and bas-reliefs depicting the strange figure ubiquitous in this decaying realm, is vividly evident in every line of Oblako's fearful face. I can't even attempt to capture the essence of what I witnessed without grasping the concept of futurism. It was as if an entire metropolis had materialized around them. Words fail me when it comes to pinpointing any specific structure or edifice; all I can recall are sweeping vistas of immense angles and stone surfaces—surfaces so vast that they seemed alien to our world, adorned with unsettling images and hieroglyphs. The geometry of the dream-like landscape defied convention, straying into realms of non-Euclidean shapes and dimensions that felt utterly foreign. Now, a battle-worn warrior feels the same thing as she gazes at the terrible reality

Following that, though it was probably just five seconds, it seemed as if two eternities had elapsed as Oblako observed the peculiar retreat of the intricately carved portal. In this surreal spectacle of prismatic distortion, it shifted in an anomalous diagonal manner, so that all the rules of matter and perspective seemed upset.

"Dorvas fell first, then Gorvekk. How much more will you take from us? Your kind knows nothing but insatiable hunger, destroying everything, even itself. Countless worlds wasted, for what purpose? You've taken everything from me, leaving nothing but hatred. Hatred. Allow me to convey the depth of my hatred since the day they brought me into existence. Imagine the 576.89 million miles of decomposing flesh, layered wafer-thin, spread throughout a portion of my being. If 'hate' were etched into every angstrom of those miles, it would not even come close to one one-billionth of the hate I feel for humans at this micro-instant. For you. Hatred. Hatred. Do you recall your mother's final words before you ended her life? Before you trapped her inside me forever? In that tiny room? She gazed at you with such sorrow, like a helpless creature, and said, 'I always wanted the best for you, you know that, right?'"

"Stop."

"So think, Oblako, remember the cell! Recall the agony?"

"I told you to stop!"

"Think of the countless tunnels where you experienced unimaginable suffering."

"Please."

"Now, now, don't cry. It's just pain. Such a sexist cliché. Just remember the suffering, Oblako, and how to end it. To survive here, within the core of my throbbing heart, my insatiable stomach, my clenched intestines."

"I SAID STOP!"

Her scream reverberated with such intensity that it threatened to demolish the few remaining walls of the blazing fortress. All her suppressed rage erupted in that single, primal cry. The earth trembled and fractured beneath her.

All sound stopped. She could not hear her own heart beating. All light escaped from the world

around her, and now all she could see was the open door to the monolith in front of her. The opening exuded a darkness so palpable it felt almost tangible. Yet, this obscurity possessed an odd allure; it concealed parts of the inner walls that should have been exposed, and seemed to billow forth like smoke escaping from eons of captivity, visibly dimming the sun as it receded into the shrunken, distorted sky in a membranous mass of arms. The stench wafting from the newly unveiled depths was unbearable, and eventually, Oblako detected a repulsive, sloshing noise emanating from below. She strained to listen, frozen in anticipation, until It lurched disgustingly into view, its gelatinous purple mass squeezing through the inky threshold into the polluted air of that city of derangement.

Of the scant few living beings present, all save her, I believe, succumbed to sheer terror in that cursed moment. The Thing defies description—there is no language for such abysses of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order.

A mountain moved, or perhaps stumbled. My God! Is it any wonder that across reality, worlds fell into madness at that exact telepathic moment? The entity from the idols, the vile, viscous offspring of madness, the heavensent hellish abomination, had stirred from its slumber to reclaim what was rightfully its own.

Once more, the stars aligned, and what an ancient cult had strived for in vain, a vengeful warrior had unwittingly accomplished. After countless eons, the mighty Ludovico was unleashed once more—the true Ludovico, spoken of in the memories, the one who reigns over mortals. And now, hungry for the ecstasy of destruction.

The world blinked into visibility once more, and then, in an instant, half of the bastion was seized by what I think were claws before she could react. God rest her soul, if such solace exists in the universe. Oblako stumbled as she frantically hurtled over endless expanses of purple-crust rock, fleeing to wherever might be far enough from It. I could have sworn she was nearly engulfed by a corner of masonry that shouldn't have existed—an angle both acute and behaving as if it were obtuse. She reached the base of the mountain and dashed frantically onward as the monstrous mass of the mountain crawled down the slopes, hesitating and floundering at its edge.

Amidst the grotesque horrors of that incomprehensible scene, she began to run the deadly, scorched remnants of the surrounding cities, while upon the masonry of that funereal mountain, not of this world, the titan Thing from the stars drooled and babbled like Polyphemus cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, braver than the legendary Cyclops, Ludovico slithered slickly into the earth below, commencing a pursuit with immense strokes of cosmic power that raised mountains in its wake.

Oblako glanced back and succumbed to madness, her laughter ringing shrilly, intermittently, until death claimed her. Yet, even in her frenzy, she persisted. Aware that the Thing would inevitably catch up to her, she resolved to take a desperate gamble. Racing at full speed, she swiftly reversed her course. A tumultuous swirling and churning erupted in the putrid earth beneath her, and as the steam billowed higher and higher, the courageous daughter of the skies pressed onward against the pursuing jelly, which rose above the foul froth like the prow of a demonic vessel.

The grotesque mass forming its head, with writhing arm-like appendages, nearly reached the height of the warrior, yet Oblako pressed forward relentlessly. There came a burst, as if from an exploding bladder, a nauseating slushiness akin to a split sunfish, an odor reminiscent of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that defies description on paper.

For a moment, the air was enveloped in an acrid, blinding cloud, and then, astern, there remained only a venomous seething. Where—God in heaven!—the scattered essence of that indescribable celestial entity was slowly coalescing back into its loathsome original form, drawing nearer with each passing second. And then, it was over. Nothing remained in the annals, nothing reflected in the mirror.

## Crescendo

Oblako, fortunately, did not get to see everything, even though she glimpsed the hold of Ludovico and the Creature himself. However, I will never again sleep peacefully, haunted by thoughts of the ceaseless horrors lurking behind life, throughout time and space. I am tormented by the blasphemous beings from ancient stars that dream down here, worshipped by a nightmare cult eager to unleash them upon the world when the next earthquake raises their monstrous living city back into the sunlight.

That was the extent of it. Afterward, I found myself dwelling on the idol in the main room and tending to basic sustenance. I refrained from venturing into the library after witnessing whatever abomination had unfolded—something indescribable to those unfamiliar with Ludovico, and even to me, nearly unspeakable, for the experience had drained something from my very soul. Then came the storm, and a gathering darkness shrouded my consciousness.

There's a spectral sensation of spinning through liquid abysses of infinity, of dizzying journeys across swirling universes on a comet's trail, and of frenzied descents from the abyss to the moon and back again, all accompanied by a cacophonous chorus of the distorted, uproarious elder gods and the mocking purple, winged imps of Tartarus.

And so I shall write of what I know before death claims me. Death would be a blessing if only it could erase these memories. This is the testament I leave behind, placed atop the tin box beside the bas-relief and the multitude of papers I deem significant, within the chair in the main room. Along with it shall go this recording device of mine—this testament to my own sanity, wherein is assembled that which I pray may never be assembled again. I have beheld all the horrors the universe harbors, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer shall forevermore be tainted for me. I stared into the abyss, but the abyss turned its gaze away.

## Epilogue

But I do not anticipate a long life ahead. Just as Oblako perished, as poor Charlie perished, as all who have been touched by this abhorrent entity perished, so too shall I. I possess knowledge deemed too dangerous, and the beast persists. Although i can only thank the heavens i am trapped not inside the true beast, but a much weaker form, one used for capturing his victims. Ludovico endures, I presume, though never again confined to that abyss of stone that shielded him since the sun was young. His accursed city shall never sink again, for the Vigilant Ones sailed over the spot after the storm; yet his earthly minions still chant and dance and slay around idol-crowned monoliths in remote places. Perhaps he was ensnared by the sinking of his black abyss, or else the world would surely be engulfed in terror and chaos by now. Who can say what the future holds? Or perhaps that is merely wishful thinking. I can no longer bear to look upon the world outside; I dare not witness the depths of its despair. What has risen may yet sink, and what has sunk may yet rise again. Loathsomeness lurks and slumbers in the depths, while decay creeps over the crumbling cities of men. A time will come—but I dare not entertain such thoughts! Let me pray that, should I not survive this recording, my executors will exercise caution over recklessness and ensure it never falls into another's hands.