All Noc Stories thus far for Claude to organize

There are nights I dream of laying it all down. The weapons. The war. The weight of being needed.

In the dark, I imagine a world where I’m just a man—no scars, no claws, no one calling my name like I’m the last wall between them and annihilation. Just silence. Just peace. Just breath.

Then the sun rises. And peace dies with it.

I lead a Caern that shouldn’t exist—a bastion of unity in a world addicted to division. Not because I believe in peace. Because I’m tired of digging graves for the same damn war.

They call me Nocturnal. A name that clings like blood to bone. It wasn’t the one I was born with. That name belonged to someone else—a boy with sharp eyes and too many books, who thought he could save his brother with gene therapy and dreams.

Miguel Rhaegis died in the jungle. Nocturnal crawled out of it.

There’s a kind of alchemy in trauma. You don’t just survive it. You transform.

Once, I hesitated before I killed. Now? My hands know the weight of necks and the silence that follows. Once, I avoided conflict. Now I train children how to win them. Once, I dreamed of curing disease. Now I wage war against it—with steel, and spirit, and fury.

Don’t mistake this for strength. It’s just adaptation. A scar is only skin learning how not to bleed.

Red Knight tells me I’m still human underneath it all. That I haven’t lost the boy I was. But he didn’t see what Dragomir made of me. What Maryska unleashed. He doesn’t hear the teeth behind my silence. Doesn’t feel the beast in my prayers.

But he stays. He stays, and that’s enough to keep me trying.

Maybe that’s all we are now—monsters who refuse to stop hoping. Maybe hope’s the bravest thing left.

### \_The Whisper and the Spark\_

The night smelled of myrrh and scorched ink.

Maryska stood alone in her sanctum, surrounded by half-finished corpses and prayers. Candles guttered against the weight of silence, the kind that pressed down like a blanket soaked in water. The air was \_too still\_, and for once, she wasn't talking to herself.

She was listening.

And then—he was there.

Or something like him.

A shape, more void than form, peeled away from the corner shadows like oil lifting from old stone. No sound. No heartbeat. Not even the breath of intention. Just a presence that \_coiled\_ in her thoughts like cold wire.

It didn’t introduce itself.

It didn’t have to.

The figure held out a small, black case. Old. Sealed in wax and sigils burned in languages no one spoke aloud anymore.

When she reached for it, its hand didn’t move—just hovered, waiting.

She took the case.

And then a voice, low and slow, like gravity whispering through the bones of the earth:

\*\*“You were never meant to raise the god. You were meant to test the vessel.”\*\*

Then it was gone.

The room exhaled again. Candles flared back to life. The corpses resumed their slow decomposition.

Maryska stood alone with the case. And for the first time in centuries, she hesitated.

But only for a moment.

She broke the seal with her teeth.

Inside: blood samples. Tissues. Fully sequenced genome strands. Names.

\*\*Miguel Rhaegis.\*\*

\*\*Red Knight.\*\*

She remembered Rhaegis from an old thesis that circulated the underground bioethics circles—\*\*a ridiculous little thing\*\*, all theory and messianic idealism. Something about werewolves as evolutionary protectors, spiritual stewards, ecological keystones. He had called them “custodians of entropy.” He’d been \*\*mocked\*\*, of course. Called naïve.

But \_she\_ hadn’t laughed.

Because she’d recognized something in him that none of his peers had.

\*\*Conviction.\*\*

The kind that either died young—or burned its way into legend.

And Red?

The pup that walked like a man and made war look like ballet.

They were beautiful, both of them. \_Tragic and inevitable.\_

And now their code was hers.

Maryska laughed then—a sharp, joyous sound.

Oh, how delicious the irony. The savior and the soldier. The boy who wanted to heal the world and the wild child.

\*\*And she would break them with science.\*\*

Not Lilith. Not yet.

Lilith could wait.

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\*\*Months Later\*\*

She stood on the edge of the Amazon, watching the fireflies gather like souls around the perimeter of her camp. Maldaldo beside her, silent as always, blade at his back, blood in his teeth.

Miguel Rhaegis was out there.

So small.

So wounded.

So \*\*perfectly alone.\*\*

Maryska smiled.

Time to collect.

Los Alamos, New Mexico – Age 14

The sound of the plate hitting the floor was Miguel’s cue. Ceramic shattered against tile like a gunshot. Forks skittered. His father’s chair scraped back.

Miguel was already on his feet. "Nice job, genius," he snapped, stepping between his little brother and the coming storm. “You need instructions now to hold a plate?”

It was enough. The attention shifted. The monster turned.

He didn’t remember what he said next. He rarely did. The goal wasn’t clarity—it was volume. It was friction. Anything to derail the train before it crushed Xavier.

The first hit always knocked the words out of him. The rest blurred together.

Miguel Rhaegis grew up in a house where silence was survival. Where the air was thick with resentment and sweat, and God watched from a cross nailed to yellowing wallpaper, silent as ever.

His father was a machinist—angry, exhausted, always one beer short of violent. His mother was less than a ghost. She floated from room to room, eyes unfocused, fingers stained with cigarette smoke and detachment. She never stopped him. She never stopped anything.

But Miguel? Miguel stopped what he could.

He stopped his father from turning Xavier into a corpse. Stopped himself from screaming until his lungs collapsed. Stopped time, when he could, by burying himself in things that made sense—molecular biology, theoretical math, obscure physics forums full of strangers who didn’t ask about bruises.

He was an honor roll student before he could explain why mitochondria mattered. Chess club captain, AV club nerd, three grades ahead in math. Because the longer he stayed after school, the less time he spent at home.

Friends were liabilities. He didn’t bring anyone over. Ever. How do you explain to someone that the yelling isn’t the worst part? That it’s the long, echoing silence after that breaks you?

So Miguel kept his head down and his mind sharp. Rage became focus. Hopelessness became obsession. And every time he watched Xavier struggle to breathe, every time his brother’s hands trembled trying to hold a spoon, Miguel made himself another promise.

I will save him. I will fix this. I don’t care what I have to become.

That was the first vow. The clean one. The one made in science labs and sleepless nights. The one made before fangs and fury, before chains and slave pits. Before gods whispered back.

Back when he was still just a boy with too much brain and nowhere to put it, except in service of the only person who had ever mattered.

\_(Age 12 – The Moment That Changes Everything)\_

The front door slammed so hard the frame shook.

Miguel barely noticed.

The newspaper bag hit the floor, forgotten, as his eyes locked onto Xavier— \*\*blue\*\*. Lips pale and cracked, pupils blown wide, hands clawing at nothing. \*\*Dying.\*\*

Miguel’s breath lodged somewhere high in his throat. He lurched forward, skidding to his knees, fumbling for the inhaler, the meds—his fingers numb, clumsy, useless—

\*\*“No, no, no, stay with me—\*\*”

Xavier convulsed, his small body arching. Miguel forced the inhaler against his lips, pressed the pump, counting seconds he didn’t have—

A ragged, gasping breath.

Not enough. \*\*Not enough.\*\*

The phone. The \*\*ambulance.\*\* He scrambled for it, hands shaking so badly he nearly dropped the receiver.

\*\*"Twelve-year-old reporting, my brother can't breathe—he's turning blue, he—just hurry—\*\*"

His heart hammered against his ribs. The dispatcher's voice blurred—something about protocol, questions, his parents—

His \*\*parents\*\*.

Miguel snapped his head toward the kitchen.

His father sat, half-sunk into the couch, beer resting against his knee. He barely \*\*turned his head\*\*.

His mother sat by the open window, cigarette perched between her fingers, staring at nothing.

Nothing.

Miguel's voice was \*\*hoarse\*\*.

\*\*"He's—Xavier's dying!"\*\*

A slow blink from his mother.

His father exhaled, lips twisting in something close to irritation.

\*\*"Well, then. Handle it."\*\*

Just that.

Nothing more.

Miguel felt something \*\*fracture\*\* inside his chest.

The sound of sirens barely registered. He scooped Xavier into his arms, bolted for the door, barely hearing his mother’s sharp inhale as she \*\*never moved\*\* to follow.

The EMTs met him outside, taking Xavier from his arms, strapping the oxygen mask into place—but \*\*they didn't take Miguel.\*\* Not really. Not in the way he needed.

They took Xavier.

They left Miguel \*\*alone\*\* in the waiting room.

The fluorescent lights hummed above him, sterile and white and \*\*empty\*\*.

\*\*"We can't give you medical details,"\*\* the nurse said.

\*\*"You're not a guardian."\*\*

Miguel stared at her.

Not a guardian.

Not an adult.

Not someone who mattered.

He swallowed. His throat burned.

Something inside him \*\*snapped\*\*.

And the \*\*oath\*\*—though unspoken—etched itself into the marrow of his bones.

\*\*If no one else will protect him, then I will.\*\*

\*\*The Oath to No One\*\*

\_(Age 12 – After Saving Xavier, After Being Forgotten)\_

The waiting room smelled like antiseptic and old coffee. The air hummed beneath fluorescent lights too white, too cold—unforgiving in their brightness.

Miguel sat, stiff-backed in the plastic chair, hands clasped between his knees like he could hold himself together by sheer force of will. The nurses passed. The doctors murmured. No one stopped. No one looked.

Three hours.

The clock ticked \*\*slow\*\*, dragging time out like it wanted him to feel every second of his own helplessness.

Xavier was behind those double doors, somewhere deep in the hospital, strapped to oxygen, drowning in silence Miguel wasn’t allowed to breach. He had \*\*saved him\*\*, he had done \*\*everything right\*\*, and yet—

\*\*"We can’t give you medical details. You’re not a guardian."\*\*

He was \*\*not enough\*\*.

The words pressed into his ribs, sharp and relentless. His fingers curled into fists against his thighs. He stared down at them, at the boyish, calloused hands that held onto newspapers in the morning and his brother’s life at night.

A child’s hands.

Not a man’s.

His father hadn’t come. His mother hadn’t called. Neither had bothered to check if their son was dead or alive. It wasn’t \*\*neglect\*\*, not in a way the world would call criminal. It was something \*\*quieter\*\*. Something \*\*worse\*\*.

Miguel’s throat tightened.

He glanced up, toward the ceiling, at nothing—at everything. \*\*A god he hadn’t spoken to in years, not since hope had felt like something real.\*\*

\*\*He spoke anyway.\*\*

\*\*"You listenin’, bastard?"\*\*

The words felt too loud in the empty space of the waiting room.

Miguel exhaled, slow, measured, like he could \*\*hold the rage down long enough to speak it properly\*\*.

\*\*"Fine. Listen close. You don’t care? That’s alright. That’s fair. Neither does anyone else."\*\*

He clenched his jaw, shoulders stiff, voice steady in its quiet breaking.

\*\*"But one day, I’m gonna matter."\*\*

His pulse thrummed in his throat.

\*\*"One day, people are gonna answer to me when they hurt others. They’re gonna hesitate. They’re gonna feel fear."\*\*

His breath shuddered, but his words did not.

\*\*"I’ll be the one they beg. The one they fear."\*\*

He let his head fall back against the chair, eyes closing briefly.

\*\*"I’ll be the one who stops them. And nothing—\*\*" his voice dipped, low, final, \*\*"—nothing will stop me."\*\*

The promise settled deep into his bones, something heavier than the words alone.

The door swung open.

Miguel blinked once, slow, as a familiar voice cut through the sterile air.

\*\*"Miguel—hell, kid, I didn’t know—\*\*"

He looked up. Mrs. Daley. The neighbor. \*\*Concern in her eyes where his parents had none.\*\*

She was already kneeling in front of him, hands on his arms, eyes flicking over him as if checking for wounds that weren’t there.

\*\*"You’ve been here alone this whole time?"\*\*

He swallowed. Didn’t nod. Didn’t move.

She squeezed his arm. \*\*"Come on. I’ll take you boys home."\*\*

Miguel stood, shaking off the moment like it was something small, something meaningless.

But it wasn’t.

It wasn’t.

The moment Miguel Rhaegis walked into his office, Professor Riegel Orks felt a subtle shift in the air, a change that signaled the next piece of his grand design had fallen into place. He did not stand to greet Miguel—there was no need. Orks had already mapped out this encounter from start to finish. He did not need to engage with the young man emotionally or physically, not when his influence was woven so deep into the fabric of Miguel's mind and his path forward.

\*\*Orks\*\*, at his core, was a \*\*probability engine\*\*, a manipulator of time’s threads, a man who could see the many layers of possibility in a given situation and move through them like a master chess player. The moves he made were deliberate, every step calculated across multiple timelines that existed concurrently, some seen, some hidden. The chaos that surrounded him, the unpredictable variables in the human equation—he thrived in it, his mind ever-multiplying the chances, creating outcomes he could control.

Tonight, though, it was more than simply manipulating Miguel Rhaegis. No, tonight the pieces were moving for a far more insidious reason.

Miguel had no idea the weight of the moment. He didn’t know that the very air in the office had been crafted, subtly altered by Orks' will, to guide him into the correct frame of mind. The way the light caught the corner of the dossier, the subtle adjustment in the way the chair creaked as Miguel sat—these were all details part of the invisible thread Orks had been weaving for years.

\*\*Miguel’s trust in him\*\* was a well-worn path, a finely crafted illusion of mentorship. Orks had been shaping him long before this meeting, pulling strings behind the scenes to make sure his influence was felt even when Miguel wasn’t consciously aware of it. A series of small, quiet nudges that led Miguel to his conclusions, that had guided him through a web of academic success and personal trauma, all without ever touching the core of Miguel’s free will. Orks had \*\*been the invisible hand\*\*, the one who manipulated the research projects that led to this moment in the Amazon—this pivotal moment where the threads of genetics, prophecy, and godhood would converge.

\_But this isn’t just about Miguel,\_ Orks thought as he quietly watched the young man fumble through the dossier. \_It’s about something greater. The pieces are falling into place. The Toreador are desperate, and I—\_

Orks paused internally, allowing a brief flicker of emotion to register. \*\*Desperate\*\* was the right word. The Toreador vampire, obsessed with the creation of gods and immortality, had become increasingly fixated on manipulating the fabric of life itself. She had taken an interest in Miguel’s bloodline, in his latent potential.

Her obsession with creating a new breed of immortal plaything—something \*\*better\*\* than the dying, flawed race of mortals—had led her to make \_certain deals\_ that were, perhaps, not quite above board.

Orks had been there from the beginning, making the right contacts in the darker corners of academia and the occult world, constructing a network of influence that would eventually bring the Toreador’s vision into reality. It was never as simple as the genetic manipulation they so craved; no, the true objective was something much grander, something that would allow them to reshape the world through their progeny.

\*\*The Toreador needed a vessel.\*\*

A perfect human, someone who carried within them the potential for something greater, something divine. Something with a touch of teh Wyld in him, an air of desperation-turned-ambition-turned-obsession. And Miguel? Well, he had the right blood—whether he realized it or not.

Riegel Orks had made sure of that.

In the multi-layered web Orks wove, his involvement with the Toreador had been essential. He had acted as the bridge to Miguel, guiding him through his early research, offering him the perfect opportunities. But beyond that, Orks had carefully inserted himself into her mind. \*\*He had suggested the idea\*\* of blending the genetic codes of two powerful bloodlines, one already tangled with his own design, the other... Miguel’s.

Of course, he hadn’t told Miguel that. He wouldn’t. Miguel had no idea how deep the game truly ran, how the Toreador’s interest in him had twisted through layers of manipulation and chance. Orks’ delicate orchestration had started with a small dossier—innocuous at first, but it would eventually lead to the discovery of the hidden tribe and the genetic anomalies within it. It would lead them to the child.

While Miguel obsessively examined the file, oblivious to the whispers of chaos in the genetic data, Orks allowed his mind to drift, to feel the \*\*multiple timelines running in parallel\*\*. He could already see the outcomes of this encounter—the path Miguel would take into the jungle, the inevitable discovery of Seras, the violent collision of past mistakes with future desires. Each step was calculated, measured, and now… set in motion.

\_I am not just playing with probabilities,\_ Orks thought, the satisfaction of his control washing over him. \_I am the architect of them. The timelines bend to my will, folding one into the other, shaping the future as if it were clay. Miguel’s choices will be my design. The Toreador’s creation will be my crowning achievement.\_

In the corner of his mind, Orks allowed a small fragment of doubt to flicker—\*\*Had he miscalculated? Was there a thread he hadn’t seen?\*\*

But that doubt, too, was calculated. Even in failure, there was an opportunity. And Orks had spent years working with shadows, learning to play with them until they revealed their secrets.

"Miguel," Orks said aloud, breaking his own musings, "Remember this. What you're about to uncover in the Amazon isn't just academic research. It’s... destiny."

Miguel nodded, completely unaware of the weight of the words, of the fate Orks had spun into his life.

The young man had no idea that \*\*this\*\* was just the beginning, and that \*\*Riegel Orks\*\*—the father figure he trusted so blindly—was the true puppet master, pulling the strings that would guide him into darkness and godhood.

### Scene: Riegel’s Hidden Hand in the Grand Design

Riegel Orks had never been one to play \*\*directly\*\* in the chaos. He wasn’t interested in the loud, obvious moves that people like Maryska Nightfire reveled in. No, Orks was a different kind of orchestrator, the kind who saw patterns in the most chaotic of moments, who wove \*\*the threads of fate\*\* before the world even noticed the loom had moved.

And right now, Riegel was content to watch the chaos unfold as \*\*Miguel\*\*—young, idealistic, and naïve—chased a dream that was never his own. He wasn’t truly aware of the \*\*predetermined path\*\* that had already been laid before him, but Riegel knew that this was how the game was played. His game.

Riegel watched from the shadows as \*\*Miguel\*\* threw himself into his work, the Amazonian tribe, the stolen genetic research, unaware of the \*\*puppet strings\*\* that connected his every move to a grander, more dangerous scheme.

Maryska, the Toreador, had \*\*obsessed\*\* over the resurrection of \*\*Lilith\*\*. But the path she had chosen—sacrificing lives, manipulating genetics, and ultimately creating Seras—was one Riegel had subtly guided her toward. He hadn’t done it for the resurrection of Lilith. That had never been his end goal.

\*\*Maryska\*\* believed she was crafting the perfect god, the ultimate being, something divine, but \*\*Riegel\*\* saw the larger picture. She was simply a tool, another force to be \*\*redirected\*\*. The child she had \*\*created\*\* wasn’t the key—\*\*Seras\*\* was simply a means to an end.

Riegel knew the truth: \*\*Noc\*\* and \*\*Red’s\*\* bloodline—tainted with ancient Garou influence—was something of interest, but not for the reasons Maryska thought. It wasn’t about creating an army of vampire gods. It wasn’t about transcending vampirism or becoming immortal in the classic sense. It was about something far deeper, something that even Maryska couldn’t comprehend.

\*\*Riegel\*\*, in his quiet brilliance, saw the \*\*pathways of the future\*\* and manipulated them. He didn’t push anyone directly. He simply \*\*placed the right people in the right positions\*\*. He had nudged Maryska into her \*\*mad quest for resurrection\*\* because it would pull everything into a position where he could control the \*\*final outcome\*\*. He had manipulated Miguel’s place in her life because \*\*he knew\*\* that Miguel’s involvement would bring about something much greater than the resurrection of a mythical figure.

In a sense, Riegel had \*\*redirected\*\* their fates, pulled the strings of their destinies, weaving them into a design of his own. He wasn’t after the \*\*god-like beings\*\* that Maryska sought. He wasn’t after \*\*Seras\*\* as the perfect being of power. He was after the \*\*disruption\*\* of the system—\*\*control over the inevitable chaos\*\*.

The truth was that Seras and Miguel, along with their fates intertwined, were \*\*insignificant\*\* in the grand scheme of his plan. But they were also \*\*crucial\*\* in making sure things moved in the direction he desired.

### Riegel’s Influence on the Timeline

From the moment \*\*Miguel\*\* began his studies under Orks’ tutelage at Cambridge, Riegel saw the potential. He placed \*\*subtle thoughts\*\*, quiet suggestions, and \*\*controlled distractions\*\* to draw Miguel deeper into \*\*the Amazonian expedition\*\*. Orks had always known the trajectory of his young protege’s life—\*\*and from the moment they met, Riegel had begun influencing his decisions\*\*.

Orks understood timelines better than most understood time itself. He was an expert in probability, seeing the intricate webs of potential futures and \*\*pulling the strings of fate\*\* to create the desired outcome. It wasn’t a \*\*one-step process\*\*—it was \*\*layered\*\*, \*\*complicated\*\*, and convoluted. He knew, somewhere in the deep recesses of his mind, that if he just nudged \*\*Miguel\*\*, just slightly, then everything would unfold according to his plan.

But that didn’t mean he was \*\*untouched\*\* by the situation. Every action he took—every \*\*whisper of suggestion\*\* to Maryska, every \*\*moment of manipulation\*\* of Miguel—was a calculated risk. He watched as events unfolded, played out like a chessboard. Every move mattered. He couldn’t afford to make mistakes. And he wasn’t making them. He had seen all the possibilities.

Miguel was important, but not for the reasons the young man believed. He was a \*\*key\*\*, a necessary component in \*\*Maryska's madness\*\*, but more importantly, he was the vehicle that would carry \*\*Seras\*\* into the world. Seras, the abomination that was half-wolf, half-human, had the potential to disrupt everything in \*\*ways Maryska couldn’t predict\*\*. Her failure would be Orks’ success.

The \*\*multiple timelines\*\* were already in motion. \*\*Riegel's subtle manipulation\*\* had already set things into motion. Maryska had taken the bait, and now her obsession was following \*\*Miguel\*\* to the Amazon, where he would encounter her twisted creation.

\*\*Riegel\*\* didn’t need to be there, didn’t need to \*\*reveal himself\*\*. He was already present in every decision that \*\*Miguel\*\* made, in every \*\*twist of Maryska’s path\*\*. He had planted seeds years ago, and now the fruit was beginning to ripen. And when it did, he would take the harvest.

In his mind, \*\*Seras\*\* was nothing more than a \*\*catalyst\*\*. Miguel? A \*\*distraction\*\*. And \*\*Maryska’s goal\*\*? Irrelevant. What mattered was what \*\*Riegel\*\* would do next—how \*\*he would manipulate everything\*\* for the ultimate endgame.

Los Alamos to Cambridge – Age 22

Miguel never really believed in miracles. But Xavier's sudden recovery felt close enough.

It began slow—fewer hospital visits, steadier hands, more color in his skin. By sixteen, Xavier was taller than Miguel and running on a treadmill without collapsing. The doctors had no real explanation. Genes that once doomed him to a short life had… stabilized. Shifted. Adapted.

Miguel wanted answers. Not for Xavier’s sake anymore—he was thriving. But for himself. Because if suffering could reverse, if broken blueprints could rewrite themselves, then maybe every theory he chased in the dark had a spark of truth.

By twenty-two, Miguel was the youngest in his Master’s program—accepted on a full scholarship to a competitive genetic sciences initiative in Cambridge. He worked twice as hard as everyone else, slept half as much, and still outperformed most of his peers. Not because he needed to prove something—because he couldn’t stop.

The lab was his sanctuary. A sterile heaven of microscopes and soft glows, where blood didn’t stain walls and voices never rose above casual inquiry.

And at the center of that sanctuary was Professor Riegel Orks.

Dr. Orks was a geneticist with the soul of a poet and the hands of a pianist—quick, meticulous, and precise. He had the gentle bearing of a man who had seen brutality and survived it by refusing to become it.

From the start, he saw something in Miguel that other instructors missed: a rage so tightly folded into ambition it was practically indistinguishable.

Most professors challenged Miguel. Orks channeled him.

Genetics 301 was where it started. A deep dive into gene expression, mutation patterns, and epigenetic drift. Miguel’s favorite part was the CRISPR lab, where they edited bacteria strains by hand, stitching new instructions into life itself like digital gods. Miguel excelled, naturally, but Orks didn’t praise him for speed or brilliance.

“You treat every sequence like it owes you an apology,” Orks once said. “Like if you just crack the code, the past will undo itself.”

Miguel didn’t respond. But he came to office hours the next day.

Again. And again.

Soon, they weren’t just talking about methyl groups and telomere decay. Orks asked about New Mexico. About Xavier. He never pushed, but he listened. And Miguel, who had spent his entire life surviving silence, began to speak.

It was Orks who first suggested the Amazon.

“There’s a tribe,” he explained one evening, passing Miguel a thin dossier sealed in a dull manila folder. “Remote. Unmapped. Their genetic markers don’t follow any known phylogenetic pattern. There’s a hypothesis that their genome may have latent or novel epigenetic regulation we’ve never seen.”

Miguel opened the folder and stared. He didn’t speak for a full minute.

“You want me to chase godblood.”

“I want you to chase truth. Whatever shape it takes.”

That was the moment Miguel stopped seeing Riegel as a professor and started seeing him as something more. A mentor, yes. But also a compass. Someone who believed in who Miguel might become—outside the trauma, outside the teeth.

Miguel agreed to lead the field expedition.

It would be his thesis. His magnum opus.

His last step as a man of science.

Before the jungle swallowed him. Before the bite.

\*\*Cambridge, Office of Professor Riegel Orks—The Turning Point\*\*

Miguel Rhaegis sat across from Professor Riegel Orks, his eyes flickering between the cluttered desk and the quiet, imposing figure of the older man. The office was exactly as it had been every time Miguel had come here—disorganized yet somehow always brimming with purpose. Books on genetics and ancient cultures lined the walls, papers were strewn across the desk, and the faint hum of a heater in the corner kept the room just warm enough to make the musty scent of old papers feel comfortable, familiar.

Orks, his professor and academic advisor, was an imposing figure—calm, composed, and always so sure of himself. Miguel looked up to him in a way he never could with his own father, who had never given him the time of day beyond criticism and blame. Orks was different—encouraging, insightful, and always ready to push Miguel just a little bit further. In many ways, he was the father figure Miguel had never had.

“Miguel,” Orks said, voice smooth but with that edge of quiet authority. “I believe it’s time you move forward with your research. The tribe you’ve been studying in the Amazon—the one whose genetic patterns piqued your interest—there’s something there. Something you need to explore further.”

Miguel leaned forward, his eyes bright with excitement. The Amazon was exactly what he needed to prove himself in the field of genetics—his big chance, his moment to make a name for himself. He had spent years at Cambridge, struggling to gain recognition, but now, it felt like his breakthrough was within reach.

“I’m ready,” Miguel said eagerly. “I’ve been working on the tribal genetics, and I think I’ve found something. This could be the key to the next stage of my research. But I don’t know if I can do it alone.”

Orks leaned back in his chair, an inscrutable expression on his face, though his lips curled upward in a small, approving smile. “You won’t be alone, Miguel. I’ve arranged everything. The resources, the materials, the knowledge. It’s all here.”

He slid a thick dossier across the desk to Miguel. It was neat, organized, with pages upon pages of data, photographs, and field notes. Everything about the tribe, their rituals, their genetics—but there was something more. Something that made Miguel’s fingers hesitate as he reached for the file. The paper was smooth, almost too perfect, and there was a faint smell of something unfamiliar on the edges. A smell that reminded him of… something sterile. Clean.

“This is everything you need,” Orks said, his voice calm, almost soothing. “You’ve been on the right track all along. Now you have the information to take your work to the next level.”

Miguel opened the file, scanning the first few pages quickly. He saw the familiar notes on the tribe’s bloodlines, rituals, and ceremonies. But what made his breath catch was the mention of genetics—the specifics of the tribe’s DNA, and then, strangely, the mention of some kind of foreign influence.

“What’s this?” Miguel asked, pointing to a section where there were references to genetic materials from outside the tribe, carefully cross-referenced with strange symbols and notes.

Orks smiled knowingly, his eyes glinting with something unreadable. “I’ve done some additional research. There’s more to the story than just the tribe’s genetics. A certain… lineage has been followed, and there are connections to other, more elusive elements. I’m certain you’ll uncover them on your trip. It’s an opportunity to further your research into the unknown.”

Miguel didn’t see the hidden layers beneath Orks’ words, nor the meaning behind the way the professor’s eyes lingered on the file. For him, this was all part of the natural progression—he had been guided to this point, to this discovery, and it felt like his hard work was finally paying off.

“Thank you,” Miguel said, his voice filled with gratitude. “I don’t know what I’d do without you, Professor. You’ve given me so much already.”

Orks didn’t say anything at first. Instead, he watched Miguel, his expression unreadable. After a moment, he leaned forward slightly, his voice dropping lower, almost as if he were letting Miguel in on a secret.

“This is just the beginning, Miguel,” Orks said, his words filled with quiet, measured weight. “You’re about to step into a much larger world than you’ve ever known. The work you’ll do there, with the tribe… it will change everything.”

Miguel nodded, completely unaware of the deeper meaning behind Orks’ cryptic statement. He felt an overwhelming sense of trust and awe for the professor, who had helped him so much already. Orks had always been there for him, like a father, always one step ahead, guiding him with gentle hands.

As Miguel gathered the dossier, preparing to leave for the Amazon, Orks’ voice followed him.

“Remember, Miguel,” he said softly. “You’re not just uncovering the past. You’re shaping the future. And you are exactly the right person for it.”

Miguel, heart swelling with pride and anticipation, didn’t question the oddity of the statement. He didn’t think to ask how Orks could be so sure, or why he’d gone to such lengths to ensure Miguel’s success.

In his mind, Professor Orks was simply a brilliant mentor, guiding him to greatness.

He had no idea that Orks—no, \*\*Riegel Orks\*\*—was already pulling strings, already setting events into motion that would affect the course of his life in ways he couldn’t even imagine. All Miguel knew was that for the first time, he was on the edge of something \_big\_. And Professor Orks was right there, leading him into it.

\*\*Cambridge, 2003 – Trinity College\*\*

The frost was thin on the windows, a delicate lace etched by unseen fingers. Professor Orks sat at his ancient mahogany desk, cluttered in deliberate chaos: yellowing field notes, fossilized artifacts, a chipped teacup stained with lapses in time. Everything in his office smelled faintly of pipe tobacco and ozone—\*\*like the world might storm if he blinked wrong\*\*.

Above the hearth, a map of South America was pinned. Every inch annotated in Orks' slanted hand. Somewhere in the heart of the Amazon, something pulsed. Something that had waited for this exact moment.

He didn’t need to turn to know the dossier was there.

It hadn’t been there yesterday.

\*\*It never was.\*\*

That’s how Riegel worked.

You didn’t catch Riegel \_arriving\_. You caught the echo of his intent. A distortion. A shadow that never quite moved right.

The dossier sat in the exact center of his desk, weighted by a small obsidian stone.

\*\*Not a paperweight. A warning.\*\*

Orks smiled, thin and knowing.

He had run the permutations again that morning. Seventy-six thousand variations of Miguel Rhaegis’s life. And only \_four\_—only four—ended in anything resembling hope. All four began \*\*here.\*\* With this moment. This dossier. And this boy.

A knock.

Three beats.

The hesitation between the second and third knock told him it was Miguel before the door opened.

“Professor Orks?” the young man asked, leaning in with a polite but distracted smile. His curls were a little windblown, his coat damp from the river mist, and his hands still ink-stained from morning notes.

“Come in, Rhaegis,” Orks said, his voice smoother than his appearance suggested. He gestured toward the leather chair opposite him with a silver-handled fountain pen.

Miguel took the seat but didn’t relax. He rarely did. Not here. Not anywhere. Not since the night he saw that thing in the alley and told himself it was just the dark playing tricks.

“This just arrived,” Orks said, pushing the dossier forward.

Miguel eyed the seal.

Not Cambridge. Not academic. Not military.

This was something \*\*older\*\*.

A tribal motif. Not \_of\_ any modern tribe—an amalgam of styles. Amazonian, yes. But laced with something older than culture. Something \_ritualistic\_.

“What is it?” Miguel asked, hesitating.

Orks shrugged, the motion deliberate.

“A contact. Remote tribe. Completely undocumented. Hidden for centuries in the Vale do Javari. They sent a message. One name attached.”

Miguel looked up.

“Mine?”

Orks inclined his head slightly, as if conceding a chess move he already accounted for twelve plays ago.

“They want to meet the one who dreams in glyphs.”

Silence hung heavy between them.

Miguel reached out, broke the seal, and opened the dossier. A photo slid free: a stone altar in the deep jungle, covered in symbols he’d drawn in the margins of his notebook three years ago.

Symbols he’d never seen before.

Not until they started showing up in his \*\*sleep\*\*.

“You’ve seen this before,” Miguel whispered.

“No,” Orks said. “But \_you\_ have.”

Another silence. This one deeper.

“Why me?” Miguel asked.

“Because you’ve already been there,” Orks replied. “You just don’t remember the way back yet.”

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Outside the arched windows of Trinity, the river sighed under the weight of winter. Inside, destiny changed its clothes and stepped into the light.

\_(Age 18 – Packing for Cambridge, Leaving the Box Behind)\_

The suitcase lay open on the bed, half-full. Miguel folded his shirts with slow, methodical care. The scholarship letter sat \*\*perfectly centered\*\* on the desk, untouched since the day it arrived.

Behind him, his father cracked open another beer. The sound of it—the snap-hiss of metal breaking its seal—was so \*\*normal\*\* Miguel barely noticed.

Nothing new.

Nothing surprising.

Just background noise.

Miguel reached for his books—genetics volumes, research papers, notes scrawled in worn notebooks. His hands were steady as he stacked them into place.

His father snorted.

\*\*"You really think you’re somethin’, huh."\*\*

Miguel kept packing.

\*\*"Gonna be a big shot? Actin’ like you’re better than everyone just ‘cause you got some scholarship?"\*\*

The words rolled off his back, just like \*\*always\*\*. Just \*\*noise\*\*, slurred through alcohol, wrapped in years of contempt.

His father took a swig. The bottle hit the table with \*\*too much force\*\*.

\*\*"You failed him."\*\*

Miguel’s hands \*\*paused\*\*.

Not clenched. Not shaking. Just \*\*still\*\*.

\*\*"Xavier needed you. And where were you?"\*\* His father gestured, vaguely, eyes glazed. \*\*"Out playin’ smart boy, wastin’ time on school. Shoulda stayed. Shoulda kept your head down. College ain’t gonna save some dumb Mexican kid from the ghetto."\*\*

Silence stretched long.

Miguel exhaled—slow, controlled. \*\*Measured.\*\*

Then, finally, he turned.

His father sat \*\*slouched\*\*, beer bottle dangling, eyes \*\*yellowed with exhaustion\*\*. Not anger. Not even hatred. \*\*Just smallness\*\*.

And for the first time—Miguel saw it. \*\*Really saw it.\*\*

This wasn’t about \*\*him\*\*.

It was about \*\*his father\*\*, and the way \*\*he’d always felt lesser\*\*. How Miguel’s mind—his sharpness, his curiosity, his refusal to fold into mediocrity—had always \*\*terrified\*\* the man who raised him.

Miguel didn’t feel anger.

Not really.

What he felt was \*\*pity\*\*.

And that—more than anything—was the moment things \*\*shifted forever\*\*.

His father wanted him to fight. To snap, to yell, to crack under the weight of words meant to shrink him down.

Miguel didn’t.

Instead, he picked up the suitcase.

\*\*"Take care of yourself."\*\*

That was all. No fury. No argument.

Just \*\*departure\*\*.

His father stared, \*\*like he didn’t recognize him\*\*.

Like he realized—\*\*too late\*\*—that Miguel was no longer afraid.

Miguel walked out.

And for the first time in his life—he \*\*didn’t look back\*\*

\_(Age 18 – Walking Away for the Last Time)\_

Miguel stepped out onto the front porch, suitcase gripped tight, the weight of his textbooks pressing down like \*\*anchors to another world\*\*. The air sat \*\*heavy\*\*, thick with humidity, clinging to his skin like something trying to pull him back.

He should’ve \*\*just walked\*\*. Should’ve never \*\*looked\*\*.

But he did.

The front door was still open behind him, swinging lazily in the evening breeze. Through it, the house sat \*\*exposed\*\*, stripped of shadows.

For the first time, Miguel \*\*saw it\*\*.

The peeling wallpaper, yellowed and curling at the edges. The \*\*water stains\*\* on the ceiling, mapping out old damage no one had ever fixed. The carpets, worn thin in places that told stories of \*\*too many years spent pacing, sitting, waiting\*\*.

His father sat slouched on the couch, beer can slick with condensation, resting against his knee like it belonged there. His shirt was stained, his posture slack, but his \*\*eyes followed Miguel\*\*, tracking him like a man watching something he can’t stop.

His mother sat at the kitchen table, cigarette between her fingers, gaze \*\*far away, somewhere deep in the past\*\*.

Not here.

Not \*\*ever\*\* here.

The air tasted \*\*stale\*\*—cigarettes, sweat, beer, rot. The scent of a place \*\*stuck in time\*\*, refusing to shift, refusing to change.

And then Miguel understood. \*\*Finally.\*\*

This was \*\*not home\*\*.

It had never been home.

It was \*\*just a house\*\*, just a decaying structure where people happened to exist inside.

A \*\*prison built from perception\*\*, from memories warped by desperation, from years spent telling himself there was something here worth holding onto.

But there wasn’t.

And there never had been.

The realization settled deep—\*\*too deep to unravel\*\*, too final to argue.

Miguel didn’t say anything.

He didn’t step back inside.

He simply \*\*turned\*\*—stepping off the porch, down the cracked concrete sidewalk, into the humid night, suitcase in hand.

And \*\*he did not stop walking\*\*.

\*\*The Jungle Watches—And So Does She\*\*

\_(The locals left. She stayed. And now, he is hers to unravel.)\_

The jungle \*\*never stopped watching\*\*.

Neither did she.

Miguel Rhaegis had spent \*\*eight days alone\*\*, surviving on little more than stale coffee and the relentless demands of his research.

There had been \*\*warnings\*\*, hushed words from the locals, hands gripping his forearm \*\*too tightly\*\* as they urged him to \*\*leave before the moon grew full\*\*.

He had ignored them.

\_"Folklore. Superstition."\_

That’s what he told himself as he cataloged blood samples, recorded environmental shifts, tracked the dietary habits of a haplogroup long forgotten by modern anthropology.

He was meticulous.

Precise.

\*\*Blind.\*\*

He never felt the moment the jungle \*\*stopped breathing around him\*\*.

Never noticed when the \*\*whisper of insects died off\*\*, when the scent of damp earth became \*\*overpowered by something else\*\*.

Not until the last of the locals \*\*packed their things and vanished\*\*.

They did not say goodbye.

Just a glance—one final look of \*\*pity, of quiet resignation\*\*, before the trees swallowed them.

And then he was \*\*alone\*\*.

That night, as he crouched near the firepit, washing sweat from his face with water so stale it reeked of tin, \*\*she stood on an outcropping above him\*\*, watching.

She had been watching for days.

At first, it was \*\*idle interest\*\*.

Then, \*\*curiosity\*\*.

Now, something else.

She crouched, resting one elbow on her knee, chin tilted downward, her eyes \*\*glinting softly under the haze of smoke drifting upward from his fire\*\*.

\*\*"This one is different."\*\*

Maldaldo shifted at her side, silent. Waiting. \*\*The predator was patient.\*\*

She wasn’t speaking to him.

She was speaking to herself.

She hadn’t expected Rhaegis to last this long. \*\*She hadn’t expected him to keep pushing forward when everything around him had started screaming warnings.\*\*

And yet, \*\*he did\*\*.

Fascinating.

Her fingers curled tighter around the stone beneath her.

She could \*\*see it now\*\*, the tension lining his body, the exhaustion leaking into his movements, the dark smudges under his eyes \*\*from too many nights spent ignoring the whisper of danger\*\*.

It was \*\*delicious\*\*.

There was nothing special about humans who wandered too deep. Nothing remarkable about the ones who didn’t heed the warnings.

They died.

Always.

But this one...

This one had survived \*\*longer than expected\*\*.

And that made her wonder.

\*\*Could he survive the bite?\*\*

No one did.

Not fully. Not without \*\*breaking into something lesser, something shattered, something easy to control.\*\*

But still, she watched.

Still, she lingered.

And when the night finally came—when Maldaldo finally moved, when claws finally raked through flesh and tendon—she would be waiting.

Just to see.

Just to watch.

Because now, she needed to \*\*know\*\*.

\_(The jungle never forgets. Neither does she.)\_

Miguel had been alone for \*\*eight days\*\*, surviving on stale coffee and sheer \*\*obsession\*\*.

The research site was little more than a patch of clearing tucked beneath the jungle’s suffocating canopy—mosquito-infested, drenched in humidity, with the scent of damp earth clinging to everything.

He had no team. \*\*Teams cost money.\*\*

So he worked alone.

Every blood test, every note scribbled into the battered leather journal by the dim light of his lantern.

The locals \*\*had warned him\*\*, shaking their heads when he refused to leave with them, their voices thick with unease.

\_"Dark things walk when the moon is full."\_

He had dismissed it. Superstition. Folklore.

Then \*\*they left\*\*, abandoning the research station, taking their supplies, their laughter, their presence—\*\*everything except the warning.\*\*

And that night, as he stood beneath the dripping jungle canopy, washing sweat from his face near the firepit, \*\*she arrived.\*\*

A shadow.

Nothing more than \*\*a specter watching from the rock outcropping\*\*, silent, patient, \*\*waiting\*\*.

Not for him.

For \*\*the bloodshed.\*\*

It came quickly.

Maldaldo \*\*wasn’t sloppy\*\*.

The Glasswalker struck \*\*precisely\*\*, claws raking through flesh, tearing muscle, severing tendon \*\*like a surgeon of brutality\*\*.

Miguel never saw him coming—just the \*\*sudden force\*\*, the crackle of bone, the wet heat of his own blood spilling onto jungle soil.

He hit the ground. Hard.

Vision blackened at the edges, the stars obliterated by thick canopy.

The pain came next.

Blinding. Unrelenting.

MIguel tried to breathe.

But \*\*something inside him was breaking. Something was changing.\*\*

She watched.

She did not intervene.

She did not speak.

She simply \*\*waited.\*\*

Because no one survived the bite.

No one.

### \*\*The Silver Collar — A Promise of Suffering\*\*

\_Survival was a mistake. She intends to correct it.\_

The jungle was still now.

No more screams.

No more howling.

Just \_him\_—a collapsed miracle sprawled in the blood-wet moss, breath hitching in uneven fragments, fur matted and steaming from the agony of rebirth.

She crouched beside him, long coat brushing the dirt, predator made queen. A silhouette against the moon-stitched canopy.

His body had burned itself out. Every tendon, every nerve ending, every thread of his soul had been ripped apart and re-woven by forces older than reason. It should’ve killed him.

It always did.

And yet.

She tilted her head, gaze flicking over his trembling limbs with a fascination that bordered on reverence. "Miguel," she murmured, voice rich with the lullaby cadence of someone admiring the bloom of a rare, poisonous flower.

He didn’t answer.

He \_couldn’t\_.

The transformation had stolen his voice, his strength—his humanity.

She reached out, brushing a gloved fingertip across the sharp edge of his jaw, where wolf and man still warred beneath the surface.

Blood steamed beneath her hand. His blood.

Still hot.

Still alive.

"Do you know what you’ve done?" she whispered, voice wrapped in velvet and threat. Not cruel. Not gentle. Just \_curious\_—the same way a surgeon might admire the twitch of muscle beneath a blade.

"You survived."

A pause, a breath.

"No one survives."

A faint smile touched her lips, carved from something far older than joy. She slid a hand into her coat and drew it out again, holding something small, something wicked.

A silver collar.

Gleaming. Perfect. Made for \_him\_.

"So now I need to know..." she said.

The \_snick\_ of the clasp was quiet. But it rang like a gunshot in the hollow of his mind.

He flinched as it closed around his throat. His body jerked instinctively, the silver burning into new flesh. Smoke curled up like incense from where it bit down.

She smiled wider. "…what will break you?"

Her fingers ghosted along the curve of the metal, tracing it like a lover’s promise. The jungle whispered around them—wind rustling through leaves, insects chirping like distant clockwork—but no answers came.

"You’ll fight them, you know. My best. My darlings. My monsters," she said, crouching lower, her voice a seductive razor. “You’ll win… or you won’t.”

Her eyes glittered, inhuman and hungry.

"And I’ll be watching. Every. Time."

Another soft tug on the collar. Not to restrain—just to \_remind\_.

"And when that last part of you finally splinters, when the fire in your eyes gutters out like the last breath of a dying star…" she leaned close, her lips brushing fur, “…then I’ll know. I’ll know I’ve found the limit of something extraordinary.”

His eyelids fluttered. Consciousness slipped like water through a cracked vessel. His breath slowed. His limbs sagged. The darkness came, and with it, silence.

She didn't stop it.

She just watched, patiently.

Like an artist savoring the final brushstroke.

The jungle exhaled. The moment held.

And somewhere beneath that canopy of gods and ghosts, a miracle of fury and flesh fell asleep in chains—while the monster who made him plotted how to tear him apart.

\_March 30th, 2014 — Somewhere deep in the Peruvian Amazon\_

The jungle was a living, breathing symphony. Days before it all fell apart, Nocturnal Miguel Rhaegis had learned to move with its rhythm — the chatter of capuchins, the humid sighs of wind through thick leaves, the low drone of insects filling the thick air like static. He kept meticulous notes even in the heat and haze, his journals heavy with data and observations: blood panels from local tribespeople, environmental readings, dietary logs, fungal spores scraped from bark, parasites fished from water sources.

It had been exhausting work — unforgiving, relentless, and lonely. But Noc had always worked best alone. He hadn’t taken a team because that required grants, and grants required funding, and he was already burning the last of his savings just to be there. So he slept in a hammock slung between trees, bathed in riverwater, and catalogued his microbiological findings by solar lamp after dusk. Even his microscope was secondhand, propped up on crates and an old field desk. But he made it work. He always had.

The locals had helped him, at first — a few men and women from a nearby village who understood the land and respected his strange, quiet dedication. But when the warnings started, they came less often. Whispers of a \_bruja\_ — a sorceress, a ghost-woman of the jungle. They begged him to leave. Told him the air had turned wrong. That things were moving in the trees at night that should not be.

He didn’t believe them — not truly. Not until the camp went quiet.

They were just gone. Their shelters dismantled, trails scrubbed clean, fires left to burn out. A final warning scrawled hastily in Spanish on the side of his supply tent: \_“Se acerca la sombra. No le mires a los ojos.”\_

\*\*The shadow approaches. Do not meet her eyes.\*\*

Still, Noc stayed. Of course he did. The jungle had always held danger — jaguars, pythons, venomous insects. He chalked the warnings up to superstition and stubbornly pressed on. He had research to complete, dammit. Blood samples to test. Hypotheses to confirm.

He didn’t know she was watching.

For two days, the forest pressed inward. Quieter. Heavier. The sounds of life became muffled, distant — like they were afraid. Even the birdsong disappeared.

The attack came during the most human of moments: while relieving himself behind a broad ficus tree just after dusk. No gear. No defenses. His pants around his thighs when the growl came — low, bone-deep, like gravel soaked in hatred. And then the flash of movement: white teeth, shining eyes, the blur of fur and claws.

Maldaldo Galacia was no ordinary wolf. He had been a man once, a predator in a tailored suit, all smooth speech and quiet menace. At night, though, he was something else — something primal. His jaws clamped around Noc’s side, tearing through flesh like wet paper. Muscle peeled away. Tendons snapped. The pain was unimaginable, a white-hot shriek of agony that sent Noc’s vision blurring.

He tried to scream, but the wolf crushed the air from his lungs with another bite, this one rending across his back. He couldn’t move. Could barely breathe. Blood pooled beneath him, soaking the jungle floor, the scent of iron mingling with the damp earth and the bitter musk of the wolf’s coat.

Above them, on a high outcropping of black stone, she stood.

Maryska Dragomir. Pale as moonlight. Dressed in silver and shadow. Her eyes were pits — bottomless wells that watched, waiting, curious.

The wolf backed away eventually, panting, its mouth painted in Noc’s blood. It sat beside her like a loyal hound as she knelt and looked down upon the broken boy bleeding in the mud.

They never survive, she thought.

Humans weren’t meant to endure the bite. Their bodies broke under the strain of transformation. The virus ripped through bone and mind, crushing them in a merciless rebirth. Those who didn’t die screaming, went mad.

But Noc didn’t die.

He \_screamed\_, oh yes — long and hoarse until his throat was raw. He \_bled\_, shaking violently as the infection tore through him like wildfire. He clawed at the dirt, lungs gasping for air that wouldn’t come. Stars blinked above the canopy, indifferent, and still he didn’t die.

And that… that was \_interesting.\_

Maryska tilted her head, a slow smile curving her lips. Her eyes glittered. She saw potential now — not just another corpse, not a shattered thing to be discarded.

She saw a toy.

A test subject.

A soul to \_break.\_

And as Noc lay there, barely conscious, body torn and twisted, the first shudders of his transformation rippling through ruined nerves… something changed. In him. A fire sparked. The kind that doesn’t come from anger or vengeance, but from refusal. From the decision — primal and pure — \_not to die.\_

And in that defiant heartbeat, the boy became the monster. And the monster would one day become more than even Maryska could have imagined.

\_Maryska's Watch — March 30th, 2014\_

He smelled like sun-warmed copper and sweet ambition.

From the moment she first caught his scent, drifting faintly through the jungle canopy like incense smoke, Maryska was intrigued. Not afraid. Not threatened. Just… curious. Humans were usually so easy to read — base creatures driven by sex, hunger, pride, fear. But this one?

He worked alone. Bled into his research. Starved himself for progress. He was \_driven\_, to the point of self-erasure. \_That\_ was rare.

And he was so very tired. She could taste it on the air — like worn leather and burnt sugar. The kind of exhaustion that only came from someone who believed the world owed him \_answers\_. Someone who chased knowledge like it would save him.

How quaint.

He was beautiful in that quiet way that humans sometimes were: all sharp cheekbones, furrowed brow, and calloused hands that trembled slightly when he thought no one was looking. His notes were meticulous, his lab setup crude but functional. She read them one night, standing in the dark just beyond the firelight, watching him sleep in his hammock while her fingers traced the neat rows of data in his journals.

Bloodwork. Parasites. Spore behavior. Bacterial interactions with ancient gut flora.

\_Obsessive.\_ Brilliant, even. But also fragile.

So fragile.

The locals warned him. She had made sure of it. She liked to watch them run. She liked how humans whispered about her — \_bruja, demonio, la Dama de la Muerte\_. Let them flee into the bush. She only needed \_him\_.

Maryska had been waiting for a moment of vulnerability. She’d considered dragging him from sleep, but there was something crude about that. No artistry. No \_message\_.

So when he stepped away to relieve himself, vulnerable and unaware, she smiled.

A flick of her wrist.

\_Maldaldo, go.\_

The wolf moved like oil through water — silent, smooth, lethal. He was always eager to please. So devoted. So vicious. The perfect tool. Maryska glided after him, barefoot on stone, rising to an outcropping that gave her a perfect view of the unfolding scene below.

The boy didn’t even have time to scream at first. Not really. Maldaldo tore into him with a predator’s glee — one bite to the ribs, another to the back. Blood sprayed across the undergrowth in a beautiful arc. Red on green. Life unspooled in ribbons at her feet.

She watched dispassionately as the boy collapsed. He convulsed. Cried out. Clawed at the dirt like it might save him. His eyes bulged, his body breaking down beneath the viral storm now raging in his cells.

The bite never took. Not properly. Not unless the human had some spark buried deep — something \_foul\_ and \_furious\_ enough to grab hold of the beast and \_live\_. And even then, it burned them out. Almost always.

Almost.

But this one \_screamed\_ and \_suffered\_ and \_bled\_…

And \_lived.\_

Maryska tilted her head. The smirk faded from her lips. Her eyes narrowed, golden and cold. She leaned forward, scenting the air — not just blood and piss and agony now, but \_change\_. Something old awakening. Something sharp.

He was turning.

\_Turning.\_

She felt it ripple through the Gauntlet like a blade dragged over silk. The boy howled — high and raw and terrible — and the forest \_shuddered\_. Flocks scattered. The insects stopped singing. And in that sudden silence, Maryska knew:

She had found something exceptional.

Something broken, yes. Something trembling. But inside that soft academic shell was \_fire\_. \_Spite\_. \_Defiance.\_

A survivor.

And she \_loathed\_ him for it.

She should have ended it there. Snapped his neck. Burned his notes. Fed him to Maldaldo and moved on.

But instead… she turned to the wolf beside her and whispered,

“Bring him in.”

And just like that, the boy was no longer prey.

He was a \_project.\_

### \*\*The Long Game of Maryska Dragomir\*\*

\_Before the collar, there was curiosity. Before obsession, there was a name: Miguel Rhaegis.\_

She first heard his name in a research abstract.

A forgettable paper. Dry. Unremarkable.

Something about epigenetic anomalies in remote populations and ancient mythologies as expressions of blood memory. Too ambitious. Too unpolished.

But there was a flicker of something beneath the jargon. A hum.

A hunger that mirrored her own.

So she read it again.

And again.

Then she found the boy behind the paper.

He was young—\_too\_ young for what he was doing. Gaunt. Spectacled. The kind of creature who spent more time with the dead than the living. Not quite beautiful, but there was something raw in him. Uncut potential.

A blade waiting to be forged.

He didn’t even know he was asking the right questions. He just… \_felt\_ his way through the world, like a child crawling toward fire.

She watched him for months. First through data. Then through windows.

Los Alamos was a tomb of bureaucrats and dreamers. He fit in with neither. Always alone. Always awake. Always digging.

They called him obsessive.

She called him \_promising\_.

She never needed to glamour anyone to read his notes. He left them everywhere. On desks. In lab notebooks. On walls. Diagrams with red thread. Theories half-insane but laced with \_truth\_.

He believed there were monsters in the blood.

He believed he could save them.

\_Oh, darling,\_ she thought, \_how quaint.\_

By the time he secured fieldwork funding—barely enough for a one-way flight and a tent—Maryska had already cleared her calendar. No one else would interfere. She made certain of it.

She followed him to the jungle like a ghost.

Always watching. Always one step behind.

At night, she crept through his makeshift camp and read the journals he hid beneath his hammock. Sometimes she left them open to different pages, just to see if he’d notice.

He didn’t.

Not at first.

She left marks in the trees where the natives would see them. Charcoal symbols from their grandmother’s nightmares. The old kind, the kind that whispered \_leave now or die screaming.\_

One by one, they left him.

First for short trips. Then overnight.

Then entirely.

He thought it was his fault. That he’d offended them. That they feared the work.

But no.

They feared \_her\_.

And now he was alone.

Perfect.

He still spoke aloud sometimes, narrating his findings to the trees like someone trying to outrun loneliness. She learned the cadence of his voice. The rhythm of his thoughts. She even felt a flicker of something...almost like guilt when she saw how thin he was getting.

\_Almost.\_

She waited for the right night.

The rain had made the earth soft. The moon was high. He’d just finished cataloging a new sample—muddy boots tossed beside his cot, hair slicked to his brow with sweat.

He looked like a drowned cat.

She watched him trudge into the trees to relieve himself, muttering in that dry voice.

And then she unleashed Maldaldo.

Her oldest. Her favorite. A creature of elegance and brutality.

It didn’t take long.

The fight was over in minutes. Flesh torn. Bones split. Blood everywhere.

But he didn’t die.

He \_transformed.\_

And Maryska Dragomir—Toreador, predator, connoisseur of pain and beauty—felt something she hadn’t felt in decades:

\*\*Wonder.\*\*

\*\*Maryska Dragomir — The Artist and the Animal\*\*

They never survive the bite.

It was the first truth she learned when she discovered her ability to call wolves. The second was that they never \_remain\_ themselves afterward. The soul, if it stays, twists. Collapses under the weight of pain, of transformation. It becomes a thing to be shaped. Beautifully, horrifically malleable.

And yet, \_he\_ lived.

Maryska had watched him through the dense jungle brush like a patient sculptor hovering over untouched marble. He was all sharp edges and quiet drive, methodical in a way that offended her Toreador sensibilities. Not a drop of chaos in him. No art. No madness. Just data, discipline, and exhausting decency. He could have been boring, like the rest. But there was something—\_something\_—feral glinting just beneath that lab coat, behind the dark eyes that never quite softened.

So she sent Maldaldo. A test. A beginning. Not to kill, just to \_crack the shell.\_

She didn’t expect him to \_survive.\_

Maryska stood on the cliff’s edge above his writhing body, silent as moonlight, watching. Listening to the way he screamed. The music of agony. The tearing of flesh and ego, the violent undoing of a man who believed in structure, logic, and control. And even as he bled and whimpered and cursed the stars... he \_refused\_ to die.

It was the most beautiful thing she’d ever seen.

So she took him.

Not as a prisoner—\_as a project.\_

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\*\*What Maryska Wanted\*\*

Maryska Dragomir had long grown tired of mortal playthings. They shattered too easily. What she wanted—what she \_needed\_—was something rare. A creature of duality. Savage but sentient. Loyal but lethal. She didn’t crave a lover, or a servant. She wanted a \_blade with a heartbeat.\_

Noc had all the right ingredients: strength, trauma, intelligence, and that stubborn little ember of defiance that refused to go out no matter how she smothered it. That ember drove her mad. She told herself she hated it.

But really, she was afraid of it.

She broke his body, again and again. Pit fights that pushed him past exhaustion. Humiliations designed to erode his identity. Isolation. Degradation. Moments of twisted tenderness, confusing rewards after brutality, keeping him off balance.

She studied him like a living sculpture, chiseling away hope. Polishing his rage. Teaching him to compartmentalize pain, then weaponize it.

But Noc never \_broke.\_ Not completely.

He gave her obedience—but never loyalty.

He gave her silence—but never submission.

He gave her fear—but never \_love.\_

And that—that—was her undoing.

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\*\*Why She Failed\*\*

Maryska didn’t understand that true wolves don’t \_break.\_ They \_bleed,\_ they \_bend,\_ but their soul has a rhythm older than anything vampiric elegance can comprehend. She mistook pain for leverage. Mistook control for connection. She wanted to own him, but he was never hers.

Even when he fought in her arenas with bloodlust in his eyes, it wasn’t her name on his lips. Even when he trained like a machine, it wasn’t her will he served.

He was hiding himself in plain sight, keeping the last shard of who he was buried where her claws couldn’t reach. That final sliver of self was beyond her grasp, and she hated it.

So she pushed harder.

Made mistakes.

Grew desperate.

In the end, she lost him—not in the arena, but in that quiet, defiant place she could never reach.

And that, more than his escape, \_infuriated her.\_

### \*\*The First Kill\*\*

\_He was seventeen. Noc never forgot that. Not once. Not in forty years.\_

He’d been starved for three days.

No blood. No light. No voice except hers, murmuring through the stone walls like a lullaby made of rusted knives.

When he tried to shift back to human, the collar scorched his spine.

When he refused to eat, she laughed and whispered, \_“Soon.”\_

And when the cell door finally opened—

\*\*he ran.\*\*

Instinct. Terror. Something primal surging through ruined nerves.

But it wasn’t freedom.

It was the arena.

Stone floor. Salt-soaked walls. A viewing balcony with her silhouette leaned forward like a theatre patron breathless at opening night.

And in the center of the chamber—

a boy.

\*\*Seventeen.\*\*

He was shaking so hard the sword in his hand rattled.

Miguel—\_Nocturnal\_—froze. His claws scraped stone. His breath steamed the air. The wolf inside him snarled, but it wasn’t rage. It was hunger.

The boy looked up. Pale eyes. Freckled cheeks. Tears.

\*\*“Please,”\*\* he whispered. “\_I don’t want to—\_”

And then the doors slammed shut behind them.

It wasn’t a choice. It was a \_sentence.\_

Maryska’s voice slithered down from the shadows.

> “One of you walks out. You decide which.”

He could feel her eyes on him. Not with hatred.

With \*\*expectation.\*\*

Like this was the moment she’d been waiting for.

And deep, \_deep\_ in Noc’s gut—something responded.

Not \_will\_.

Not \_consent\_.

Just the simple animal truth:

\*\*Eat. Or die.\*\*

The boy swung first. Screamed as he did. It wasn’t skill. It wasn’t rage. It was desperation.

The blade grazed fur, nicked his shoulder.

That’s all it took.

The wolf didn’t think. It \_moved.\_

Faster than it should’ve.

Teeth found flesh. Claws tore.

There was blood—\_so much blood\_—and it was warm and it was screaming and it was \*\*his\*\* and he couldn’t stop—

He didn’t remember the moment Alexander stopped fighting.

Only the \_after.\_

The sound of dripping.

The copper taste.

The quiet.

And her voice.

> “Beautiful.”

He dropped to the floor, mouth slick with guilt and gore, eyes wide and human again.

\*\*Seventeen.\*\*

He was seventeen.

Noc reached out with trembling fingers, touched the boy’s cheek.

Still warm.

Still \_real.\_

And that was the moment something \_broke.\_

He’d believed he was cursed. That something in him was always waiting to erupt. That \_this\_ was why the world punished him. That he’d been born wrong, and now Maryska had \_proof\_.

He’d taken a life.

He’d torn a child apart.

And the worst part—

The very worst part—

Was that some part of him

\*\*felt alive.\*\*

---

He would spend the next four decades trying to bleed that feeling out of himself.

Through discipline. Through battle. Through every act of service that might atone.

But no matter what he did,

no matter who he saved,

no matter how much blood he spilled to protect others—

Alexander’s name was always the first he whispered when the nightmares came.

\_(September 19, 2015 – Kozilek Watches, Knowing He’s Part of Something Bigger)\_

The fortress was \*\*too quiet\*\*, but Kozilek had learned long ago—quiet meant movement. Quiet meant decisions being made in the dark. \*\*Quiet meant someone was about to bleed.\*\*

And tonight?

Tonight, someone \*\*was walking out of here alive\*\* when they weren’t supposed to.

He lingered in the corridor, posture loose, hands in his pockets, every inch of him projecting \*\*calculated disinterest\*\*. But beneath the surface, he was watching. \*\*Dissecting. Memorizing.\*\*

Kozilek had spent weeks \*\*tracking Nocturnal Rhaegis\*\*, learning his movements, studying Maryshka’s twisted fascination with the boy.

Not because he cared.

Because it was \*\*too neat.\*\*

Something was \*\*off\*\*, something beneath the surface.

This wasn’t just \*\*another pet project of Maryshka’s\*\*, wasn’t just another \*\*prisoner she delighted in breaking.\*\*

Nocturnal wasn’t breaking. \*\*Not fully. Not the way he should have.\*\*

And that was \*\*why Kozilek was here\*\*.

Not because Fisk sent him.

Because someone else had.

Someone \*\*Fisk listened to\*\*.

Someone \*\*who had orchestrated this from a distance, long before Kozilek had stepped foot in this place\*\*.

But Kozilek still didn’t have a name.

That was what unsettled him most.

Because he had \*\*never worked in shadows he didn’t recognize.\*\*

Until now.

The \*\*gate groaned open\*\*, the stolen key scraping metal, the sound \*\*far too loud\*\* in the brittle silence.

\*\*And then—the howl.\*\*

Werewolves.

Kozilek stepped forward.

Just \*\*slightly\*\*.

Just \*\*enough\*\*.

The vampires hesitated.

It wasn’t noticeable. \*\*It wasn’t supposed to be.\*\*

Just a flicker in the rhythm of pursuit, a half-second delay \*\*where there shouldn’t have been one\*\*.

Enough for them to get away.

Enough for Maryshka to realize, just a \*\*fraction of a second too late\*\*, that \*\*her favorite had slipped through her fingers\*\*.

The fortress exploded with sound.

Alarms, footsteps, orders being barked—chaos \*\*rolling through the walls like a sickness.\*\*

Kozilek leaned against the stone, exhaling slow.

Maryshka was \*\*furious\*\*.

Good.

He had done \*\*exactly what was expected\*\*.

Even if he still didn’t know \*\*who expected it.\*\*

And Rhaegis?

He had no idea Kozilek had \*\*been there at all\*\*.

Not \*\*yet\*\*.

But \*\*one day\*\*, he would.

And when he did?

It was going to be \*\*a hell of a reckoning\*\*.

\_(Maryshka’s POV – After Noc’s Escape)\_

The halls of her Romanian fortress stood \*\*silent\*\*, but the moment Maryshka stepped into the cold corridor where \*\*his\*\* cell had been, she \*\*felt it\*\*—an absence, a void where her favorite plaything should have remained.

She paused, tracing the stone wall with the edge of her nail, as if she could still catch the heat of him lingering there.

Nocturnal Rhaegis. \*\*Her obsession. Her pet.\*\*

The boy she had \*\*plucked from his promising life\*\*, that scrawny, studious thing with eyes full of fire and \*\*just enough defiance\*\* to make the breaking \_satisfying.\_

She had seen \*\*potential\*\* in him, more than he ever imagined. His mind fascinated her—so sharp, so disciplined, but it was that underlying \*\*resistance\*\*, that refusal to bend, that \*\*captivated her most\*\*.

How many nights had she pushed him to the edge? How many times had she \*\*bruised that pale skin\*\*, left him \*\*gasping\*\*, \*\*crying\*\*, thinking that maybe this time—this time—\*\*he would finally break\*\*?

But he never had.

Oh, he had screamed. He had wept. He had obeyed. But there was always \*\*something missing\*\*. A piece of him that refused to bend, a defiance woven \*\*deep into his bones\*\*.

It \*\*infuriated her.\*\* It \*\*excited her.\*\* It \*\*made her want him even more.\*\*

Maryshka clenched her fists, nails pressing into skin, drawing thin lines of blood.

She had given him \*\*everything\*\*, hadn’t she? A place by her side. Power, control, even the chance to \*\*rise above what he had been\*\*. All he had to do was submit. To be \*\*hers.\*\* Completely.

\*\*And he had the gall to escape.\*\*

Her cloak billowed behind her as she stormed through the corridor, boots striking the stone floor \*\*like a war drum\*\*.

How long had he been gone? \*\*A few hours? Less?\*\*

It didn’t matter. She would \*\*find\*\* him. She would \*\*drag\*\* him back. And this time, oh this time, she would \*\*break\*\* him.

She would find that piece of him that still clung to hope, that foolish \*\*belief in freedom\*\*, and she would \*\*crush it beneath her heel\*\*.

Maryshka’s lips curled into a \*\*twisted smile\*\*.

She had been \*\*kind\*\*, in her way. Hadn’t she?

She had \*\*offered\*\* him power. Even affection. If he had just \*\*given in\*\*, she would have treated him like a king.

But no. He had to keep fighting. He had to keep that streak of \*\*rebellion burning inside him\*\*.

She could almost hear his voice in her head, \*\*low and steady\*\*, that same voice that had once cried out \*\*her\*\* name in pain but had never truly \_begged\_.

Never truly \_submitted\_.

It enraged her. \*\*It thrilled her.\*\*

It made her \*\*starve\*\* for the day he would finally crumble.

She entered her chamber, where her lieutenants stood waiting, faces pale, wary, bracing for the storm.

Her voice was calm. \*\*Terrifyingly calm.\*\*

\*\*"Find him."\*\*

Her eyes gleamed with something dark, something \*\*cold\*\*, something \*\*unchanged by time or distance\*\*.

He belonged to her.

He was \*\*hers to control, to manipulate, to break\*\*.

And if she had to chase him to the ends of the earth, she would remind him of that.

She stood alone in her chamber, the shadows flickering across her face. A small, cruel smile played on her lips.

\*\*“Run, little wolf.”\*\*

Her voice was \*\*barely a whisper\*\*.

\*\*“But you’ll never be free.”\*\*

He could run. He could hide.

But she had left a \*\*mark\*\* on him—one that \*\*would never fade\*\*.

No matter how far he fled, he would \*\*always\*\* remember who had shaped him.

Who had \*\*made\*\* him.

Who had made him \*\*hers\*\*.

\_(Noc & Red—An Underground Fight That Was Never Just a Fight)\_

The abandoned garage \*\*hummed with tension\*\*, the walls slick with shadow, as if the darkness itself had a heartbeat. Dust drifted in the shafts of moonlight \*\*like waiting ghosts\*\*, slicing through the grime-covered windows in fractured streaks.

Below, the \*\*pit\*\* pulsed with something \*\*raw\*\*, \*\*animal\*\*, \*\*unspoken\*\*—a place where desperation met violence, where men fought for survival, for coin, for proof that they still \*\*existed\*\*.

And in the center of it, \*\*Nocturnal Rhaegis stood alone\*\*.

His presence was a storm contained, a quiet menace \*\*etched into the cut of his posture\*\*, the \*\*steady scan of his obsidian-dark gaze\*\*. He did not need to speak to \*\*command the silence\*\*—he was threat enough \*\*simply by standing there\*\*.

Across from him, \*\*Red\*\*.

Younger. Leaner. But dangerous in the way survivors always were.

Scars \*\*etched across his skin\*\*, tattoos whispering stories he never told. His stance was sharp, coiled, \*\*ready\*\*—but beneath it, beneath the tension \*\*that always existed before the first strike\*\*, something \*\*shifted\*\*.

Recognition.

Not familiarity.

Not even understanding.

Just \*\*a pull—something unshaken, something inevitable.\*\*

And then—Noc \*\*caught the scent\*\*.

It \*\*hit him\*\* like ice in the lungs.

Not sweat. Not blood. Not the reek of human bodies packed together like predators waiting for the kill.

This was different. \*\*Sharp. Unmistakable.\*\*

\*\*Another werewolf.\*\*

His pulse \*\*stuttered\*\*.

Red’s \*\*stiffened\*\*.

That instinct, that knowing—\*\*two wolves recognizing their own\*\*.

Red spoke first. \*\*“You’re wasting yourself in here.”\*\*

Noc didn’t blink. \*\*“And you aren’t?”\*\*

The crowd blurred—nothing but \*\*a distant haze\*\*, just noise in the backdrop of a moment \*\*that had already changed them\*\*.

Then the fight began.

Flesh met flesh, not just \*\*for dominance\*\*, not just \*\*for survival\*\*, but for \*\*something unspoken\*\*.

Neither of them held back.

Neither of them \*\*needed to\*\*.

This wasn’t about \*\*winning\*\*—it was about \*\*knowing\*\*.

About \*\*testing the weight of each other’s existence\*\*.

The fight lasted too long. \*\*Neither broke. Neither yielded.\*\* But in the end, it was Noc \*\*who stood last\*\*.

Breath heaving. Blood on his knuckles.

And Red—watching him like he’d found something \*\*worth knowing\*\*.

Something \*\*worth following\*\*.

The silence stretched long \*\*before it cracked\*\*.

Red let out a slow, quiet exhale. \*\*"You fight like a man who doesn’t know how to lose."\*\*

Noc tilted his head, gaze still sharp, still assessing. \*\*"You fight like a man who doesn’t care if he does."\*\*

A beat.

And then—\*\*everything settled.\*\*

What began in fists \*\*ended in knowing\*\*.

Not friendship. Not camaraderie.

Something \*\*deeper\*\*.

Something \*\*more dangerous\*\*.

Something Noc never \*\*expected\*\*, never \*\*wanted\*\*, but now \*\*couldn’t stop from shifting the course of his world.\*\*

And \*\*Red\*\*?

Red \*\*had already decided\*\*.

Not just tonight.

Not just this fight.

But for \*\*everything that would come after.\*\*

\_(Noc & Red – The Overpass, The Decision That Wasn’t His to Make)\_

The city was a \*\*cacophony of noise, a symphony of despair\*\*.

Noc walked the abandoned streets like a ghost wearing a borrowed body, steps slow, measured—not tentative, not careful, just... \*\*waiting\*\*.

The industrial district wasn’t part of the city, not really. It was its \*\*rotting appendix\*\*, its forgotten limb, the place where \*\*machines died and men came to disappear\*\*.

The air was thick with the scent of \*\*decay\*\*, burning rubber, the metallic tang of rust. A stray newspaper skidded across the asphalt, caught in the breath of wind that carried \*\*nothing but dust and old promises.\*\*

Noc inhaled deep—\*\*too deep\*\*. He committed the scent to memory.

Before \*\*dawn erased him\*\*.

The freeway overpass loomed ahead, stretching into the city’s skyline like a scar across the horizon.

Noc stepped onto the ledge, the metal \*\*humming beneath his weight\*\*. Below, traffic roared, engines spitting fury into the cold morning air.

The city was alive. It would always be alive. \*\*With or without him.\*\*

He reached for his headphones.

\*\*"If I leave here tomorrow... would you still remember me?"\*\*

The lyrics curled against his ears, soft and aching. He let the wind drown out the \*\*rest\*\*.

Noc shifted his stance, leaning forward just enough to \*\*feel the void beneath him\*\*—a silent, endless thing, waiting without judgment.

He could go now.

He could—

\*\*"You done?"\*\*

The voice was low, calm, cutting through the moment like a \*\*knife through fog\*\*.

Noc \*\*froze\*\*.

A beat.

Another.

Then he turned his head—slow, deliberate.

\*\*Red.\*\*

Standing in the shadow of the overpass, hands in his pockets, head tilted just enough to make it clear: \*\*he’d been there the whole time.\*\*

\*\*Watching. Waiting. Knowing.\*\*

Noc blinked. \*\*"...How long you been standing there?"\*\*

Red exhaled through his nose, glancing at the city below before looking back.

\*\*"Long enough."\*\*

Noc swallowed. His pulse \*\*wasn’t steady anymore\*\*.

Silence stretched between them, thin and fragile as glass.

Red let it settle. Then, after a long pause:

\*\*"Get down. We’re going home."\*\*

Noc could’ve argued. Should’ve argued. But he just—\*\*stepped back\*\*.

Like it had never been a choice.

Like Red had already made it for him.

Noc felt the familiar weight of Red’s hand settle against the nape of his neck—\*\*not gripping, not forcing, just anchoring\*\*.

The wind was colder now. The city was waking up, turning gold beneath the sunrise, and for the first time, Noc \*\*watched it instead of trying to leave it behind\*\*.

Red squeezed gently.

\*\*"You're welcome, man. We’re a team, remember?"\*\*

Noc let out a breath.

\*\*"Yeah."\*\*

And for once, that was enough.

The air was thick with heat and tension, machetes slicing paths through the green as Noc led the team with quiet warnings. He knew these lands. He remembered them—the trees held screams he hadn't yet told Red about. The mercs, all bark and bravado, mocked the reverence in his tone, eager to push forward.

Then, the village appeared: woven huts nestled in a clearing, watched over by the golden-eyed Balam. There was no violence, only wary calm.

An elder shaman stepped forward, his every move a ritual, his voice rising in ancient cadence. Noc felt it—something sacred blooming.

And then—

CRACK.

The shaman’s skull shattered mid-chant. Bone. Blood. Silence.

Then screams. Spears. Chaos.

“SNIPER!” Red roared, already dragging Noc down.

But it was too late.

The shooter—one of their own—had stayed behind. Hidden. Patient. He vanished into the jungle like a cowardly ghost, leaving ruin in his wake.

What followed was worse than violence. Quetzalcoatl descended.

Wind died. Color bled from the world as divine force coiled through the trees. Light shimmered into the form of a feathered serpent-god, radiating judgment.

Noc fell to his knees. Red followed.

“You bring death and dishonor. You trespass on blood-soaked land and murder its heart.”

The voice wasn’t sound. It was inside them.

The god searched their spirits. Judged. Weighed.

“The one who killed flees, and his fate will come. But you... you may choose.”

The mercenaries were struck dumb. Most fled in terror.

But Noc and Red stayed.

They remained behind for days, maybe weeks. They did not eat first. They did not sleep first. They worked—tending the wounded, digging graves for the shaman and the fallen, helping prepare the village for the mourning rites. Noc carried bodies he once would have fought. Red bound wounds in silence.

When night fell, they huddled together under the canopy, watching for the vengeful ghost of justice, but only the jungle answered.

On the seventh night, Noc sat beside a low fire, fingers caked in dirt and ash, his body sagging under the weight of what might have been.

Red nudged him. “We still breathing.”

Noc looked up. “Do you think that’s mercy? Or punishment?”

Red met his gaze, unwavering. “Maybe both. But we’re earning it.”

A beat passed.

Then Noc smiled, small and raw. “I think I’m glad you came.”

Red’s mouth twitched. “I think you’re stuck with me now.”

They didn’t need an oath. That night—the shame, the service, the blood—they bonded not in survival, but in shared atonement.

And from that point forward, there was no Noc or Red without the other.

It was raining when I found him.

Face down on an Oregon sidewalk, the wet concrete dark with blood that shouldn't be there—his blood. The smell hit first. Metallic, wrong. Like burnt copper and panic. Then the sight—Red’s body twisted, too still, too quiet. A predator shouldn’t ever lie like that.

I don’t remember screaming, but I know I did.

I dropped to my knees so hard I think I cracked bone, hands fumbling until I found the source—the artery pulsing out his life in thick, desperate gulps. I jammed two fingers into the wound, pinched it shut like I was clamping down on Death itself. It squirmed. It didn’t want to go quietly.

“Stay with me,” I whispered, or begged. “Don’t you fucking do this to me.”

His eyes fluttered—just a twitch—but it was enough to make my throat close. Blood soaked my wrists. My arms. My soul.

And that’s when it hit me.

If he died, I’d follow. Not out of some grand romantic tragedy bullshit. No, something colder. Truer. The kind of bond that doesn’t care if it’s healthy or right—it just is.

“I can’t lose you,” I said, voice breaking, forehead pressed to his. “If you're gone, I’ll walk into the ocean and let it take me. I’ll die with my teeth bared, Red, but I’ll die. Because I love you. Gods help me, I fucking love you.”

And then—I broke.

Tears poured out, unrelenting. I cried like I was eight years old and couldn’t stop the fists from falling. I cried for Xavier’s paper-thin skin and hollow bones. For a home that had no warmth. For the monster I’d been turned into. For all the years I wasted thinking I wasn’t worth saving.

I wept over his broken body like it was an altar.

When help finally arrived, I didn’t move. I rode in the ambulance with one hand still clamped on the wound until they sedated him, stabilized him, and finally told me they’d try the shift-stim. “Try,” like the gods hadn’t already made up their minds.

The adrenaline worked. The shift took.

But I still didn’t leave.

I climbed onto that hospital bed like I belonged there—because I did. I curled around his half-shifted frame and stayed until he woke, looking like hell and already pissed.

"You look like shit,” he rasped, voice hoarse and cracked.

“You died, asshole,” I growled, hand brushing back his hair. “And you took me with you.”

Red coughed a laugh, wincing. “That why you finally grew a pair and told me?”

I winced harder. “I was trying to protect you. From me.”

He blinked slowly, then gave me that dry, devastating smirk. “You don’t get to decide that for both of us, jackass.”

“I was a monster,” I whispered.

“You still are,” he said gently. “But you’re my monster. And I’ve always known.”

Silence hung between us then. Not awkward. Not broken. Just... honest.

\*\*Red Knight – When the Light Went Out\*\*

It started with a box.

Heavy. Plain. Delivered in the rain like something casual, like something normal.

He didn’t open it right away. He knew. The moment his hands touched the cardboard, slick with water and something else, he knew.

Libra.

Gods, Libra.

Her scent was gone. That soft steadiness she always carried, the subtle grace of her presence in the caern, was just—gone. And when the box was opened—when that sight met his eyes—he didn’t scream. Not at first.

He turned toward the main hall, carrying the box like it was made of fire, and told them not to let Noc see it.

They failed.

And the light went out.

---

\*\*The Madness\*\*

Red had seen Noc angry before. Had seen him bloodied, battered, enraged, even feral. But he’d never seen him \_empty.\_

This was different.

This wasn’t rage. This was absence.

Noc didn’t speak. Didn’t sleep. Didn’t eat. He stood for hours at the cliff's edge, his hands trembling, not from fear—but from something deeper. Something unraveling. When Red touched his shoulder, Noc flinched like a wounded animal, and his eyes—

They weren’t Noc’s.

Not the man Red had fought beside in underground rings.

Not the boy who refused to die in the jungle.

Not the guardian who’d taken in every lost soul who wandered too far from Gaia’s light.

He was \_gone.\_

The worst part? Red could feel the wrongness. The supernatural twist of it. Something—\_someone\_—had found a way inside Noc’s mind, cracked it open, and let all the old horrors pour back in. Not just Libra’s death. All of it. Romania. The cages. The nights when the only sound was a crowd screaming for blood.

It broke him.

So they caged him—silver bars, reinforced cell, warded from within and without. And still, every night, Red would hear the scraping of claws. The howl muffled by stone. The whimpering.

They said it was the only way to keep him safe.

Red didn’t sleep for thirteen days.

---

\*\*The Waiting\*\*

Red buried Libra with his own hands. Said the rites himself. There wasn’t time to grieve—not properly. The rest of the pack needed leadership. The caern needed protection. And Noc—\_Noc needed saving.\_

But gods... the silence of that room.

He visited every day. Sat just outside the bars and talked like Noc could still hear him.

He told him stories. Some funny. Some dark. He recounted the first fight they ever won together, when Noc punched a Get of Fenris so hard his tooth left a dent in the concrete. He told him about the time he nearly kissed him during a blackout, and how grateful he was that Noc had been too dazed to notice.

He begged him to come back.

Red wasn’t afraid of dying. Not really. He was afraid of watching Noc forget how to \_live.\_

---

\*\*The Return\*\*

It wasn’t a miracle. It was work.

Charlotte. Sam. Cleo. They put their heads together, followed the threads of Vecna’s dark web, and untangled the metaphysical roots of the curse. It wasn’t just grief. It was \_sabotage.\_ An engineered, surgical strike at the mind of one of Gaia’s deadliest warriors.

They found a way to undo it.

There was a ritual. A risk. But they took it.

And when Noc finally looked up—\_really\_ looked up—and Red saw his eyes again... the relief nearly killed him.

He didn’t cry until later. Quietly. Alone. Back to a wall and fists clenched in his jacket. Because you don’t weep in front of a recovering wolf. You stand. You smile. You wait.

And when it’s safe—\_then\_ you fall apart.

---

\*\*He Didn’t Say It Then\*\*

He didn’t say \_I love you\_ in the cell.

He didn’t say it after Libra came back.

He didn’t say it when Noc stumbled out of the cage with bruises beneath his skin and a thousand-yard stare.

But he \_did\_ say:

“I knew you’d find your way back.”

And later, much later, Noc would whisper that it was those words—just those—that had anchored him to himself.

George’s dining room was warm. Safe. A golden sanctuary stitched from old wood, red velvet, and candlelight. London whispered outside the frosted windows, all rain and heartbeat, while the silverware chimed softly between friends.

Laughter came easy.

Until the box appeared.

Small. Black. Velvet.

Karma slid it across the table with a shy grin, nudging Seras in the side. “It’s not a ring,” she said. “I know you, baby. You don’t wear diamonds.”

Seras blinked, then opened the lid.

Inside: satin, silver, and a shining buckle.

A collar.

Elegant. Handmade. Beautiful.

But Noc didn’t see craftsmanship.

He saw fire.

He saw chains.

He saw blood in his teeth and steel around his throat and her voice saying \_“What will break you?”\_ over and over like a lullaby with no ending.

He stood so fast his chair slammed backward.

The table went still.

Red flinched. Riegel sat up straight. Karma’s eyes widened.

But Seras—Seras looked confused. Then hurt. Then angry.

“Seriously?” she snapped, standing to face him. “What the fuck, Dad? You’re not even going to \_pretend\_ to be happy for me?”

Noc didn’t answer.

He was staring at the collar.

Not at her.

Not at anyone.

Just that thin, innocent loop of silver.

Seras reached for it protectively. “This isn’t about you. This is \_ours\_. We’re not you and Red. We don’t \_have\_ to be.”

Still nothing.

Red rose halfway, like he might reach for him—but didn’t.

And then Noc spoke.

Flat. Hollow. A dead thing dragging itself from a pit.

> “When I was eight, my brother started coughing blood. My parents sold our furniture to keep him alive. Then they sold everything else. Then they started selling themselves.”

Seras faltered.

The whole table froze.

Noc didn’t notice.

> “When I was ten, I broke my arm defending him from a man who thought my mother’s son came with the price. She never thanked me. She said I scared him off.”

A pause.

His hands were shaking, but not from rage.

> “When I was fifteen, I got a scholarship. Los Alamos. Physics and myth. Thought maybe I could save someone. Thought maybe if I could find something powerful enough, I could fix it.”

His eyes were far away now.

> “So I wrote a thesis. About shapeshifters. South American legends. Got it approved. Packed my things. And flew into the jungle with notebooks, dreams, and a death wish.”

Seras was sinking back into her seat. Karma’s hand found hers beneath the table.

> “She was already there. Watching. Reading my notes. Whispering to the people who fed me. Leaving blood signs on trees to scare them off.”

> “I woke up alone one morning. Everyone gone. Nothing but silence and rot. And her.”

> “She bit me three nights later.”

Riegel inhaled sharply. Red went still.

> “It took me sixteen hours to change. Most of it I don’t remember. Bones breaking. Skin screaming. But I remember her face. Watching. Like it was Christmas morning.”

> “And when it was over…”

He looked up.

> “She collared me.”

The silence wasn’t quiet anymore. It was \_suffocating.\_

> “Silver. Around my throat. Burned so deep it fused into the muscle.”

> “She kept me in a cell. For months. No light. No food unless I killed. She’d throw people in. Her enemies. Her pets. Teenagers.”

A beat.

> “My first kill was a seventeen-year-old named Alexander. He cried the whole time. So did I.”

Seras made a sound. Small. Broken.

> “I never told anyone. Not even Red.”

Noc’s voice didn’t change. Still flat. Still unflinching.

> “She made me a monster. And I let her. I stopped counting the bodies after forty.”

He exhaled.

> “You can love whoever you want, Seras. You can kneel. You can dominate. You can build something beautiful out of power. But don’t ever ask me to smile at a collar.”

> “Not on you.”

The silence held.

No one moved.

Then Red stood and walked to his side, gently placing a hand on Noc’s shoulder.

He didn’t speak. He didn’t need to.

Riegel looked away.

Karma stared at her lap.

And Seras—Seras just wept.

Quiet, angry tears sliding down her cheeks as she clutched Karma’s hand like it was the only thing keeping her anchored.

She didn’t reach for the collar again.

And Noc didn’t sit back down.

Red had questions the moment they hit the threshold of the Legendary Realm—mostly starting with "Why does this place smell like jasmine and divine expectation?"—but Noc waved them off with a vague grunt and something about “spiritual calibration.”

He'd been quieter than usual on the trip, taut as a bowstring, like he was walking into a battlefield instead of whatever cryptic nonsense he’d arranged. Red clocked it, but didn’t press. Noc's weird was just part of the package. That, and the secret gleam behind his war-weary eyes—the one that only showed up when he had a plan he wasn’t ready to share yet.

And then they turned the corner.

The clearing was glowing. Not metaphorically—actually glowing. Petals made of stardust fell from above. Dozens of people stood in reverent silence, a who’s-who of their broken, beautiful family. Libra was crying already. Kozilek looked like he was ready to punch someone just to balance out the emotions. Spirits shimmered on the edge of vision, too sacred to name.

And at the center of it all, standing proud and uncertain in ceremonial leathers polished to a dull shine, was her. Red’s mother. Or rather, the soul of the woman he’d never known, standing in the Legendary Realm to bear witness to her son’s happiness.

Red froze.

Noc didn’t. He turned to him, jaw set like he was ready to be hit or kissed—or both.

“I know you,” Noc said, voice low and raw. “You’d never leave me. Not really. But I’ve always been afraid I’d find a reason to leave you. That I’d convince myself it was nobler to walk away, to protect you from what I am. So I didn’t give myself the chance.”

He stepped closer, and the crowd faded into the background. “This is the only way I could do it. Trick myself into something good. Because I love you, Red. I have always loved you. And if I gave myself time to think, I’d drown in my own doubt. So here we are. You don’t have to say yes, but... this is me. Asking you. To marry me.”

Red’s eyes had gone glassy. His voice, when it came, was hoarse with unshed storms.

“You dumb, gorgeous bastard,” he breathed, grabbing Noc by the collar. “You think I would’ve let you back out of this? You’re mine, and you’ve been mine since the first time you stitched up my ribs and told me not to get used to the kindness.”

He kissed him hard, and somewhere in the distance, the universe exhaled.

Red's POV – The Wedding in the Legendary Realm

He knew something was up the moment they stepped through the Moon Bridge.

It wasn’t the air—it always smelled like ozone and possibility in the Legendary Realm. No, it was the silence that did it. The kind that feels loaded, like a held breath right before thunder cracks.

The second they crested the hill and the vista opened up before them, Red froze mid-step.

There was a clearing laid out in soft golden light. Rows of hand-carved benches made from driftwood and petrified bone, woven through with silverleaf vines. A small altar sat under a canopy of aurora silk, rippling like spiritlight in the wind. And standing before it, flanked by a pack of familiar faces—including Kozilek in ceremonial armor and Takoda looking suspiciously smug—was a grinning old priest-spirit who Red swore he’d seen once in a fever dream after too much chiminage wine.

Then the music hit. Low, old, and aching with meaning. And that’s when the son of a bitch realized what was happening.

“This is a wedding,” he said out loud, voice catching in his throat like it didn’t know how to be words anymore. He turned, slowly, to look at Noc.

Noc, who was already in a sharp, ink-dark suit trimmed with soulmetal thread. His long coat moved like smoke. His hands, for once, weren’t fidgeting. His face... gods. His face. It was terrified. Hopeful. Bare.

“It’s your wedding,” Noc said quietly, stepping forward. “You just didn’t know you were invited.”

Red stared at him, mouth open, brain short-circuiting like a fried Nexus Crawler.

“You tricked me.”

“Yep.”

“Into marrying you.”

“Technically it’s a wedding, not a hostage situation.”

“You didn’t ask.”

“If I had, I’d have talked myself out of it. Framed it as protecting you from my bullshit. You know I would’ve.”

Red swallowed. Hard. Gods, he would’ve. And gods help him, Red would’ve let him.

Because Noc had always seen himself as broken glass—sharp, dangerous, impossible to hold without bleeding. But Red… Red had always seen the light coming through him.

Red stepped closer. Looked him in the eye.

“You are the most reckless, infuriating, noble bastard I’ve ever met.”

Noc gave a half-grin. “Still yes?”

Red grabbed his shirt, pulled him forward, and kissed him like it was a promise.

“Yeah, asshole. It’s always been yes.”

The clearing in the Legendary Realm was silver-lit and humming with presence—Gaian spirits rustling through the otherworldly trees, old gods watching from the periphery, and ancestors who had long since shed their names standing vigil in quiet honor.

Red stood at the heart of it all, his hands still warm from Noc’s, his heartbeat thundering in his ears for reasons he was only just beginning to understand.

But just beyond the ring of lanterns and braided garlands, someone watched.

A woman—tall, with hair the same impossible shade as Red’s when the sun hit it right, with a posture caught between battle-readiness and heartbreak. Her eyes didn’t move, not even when the crowd cheered or Noc’s voice trembled during his speech. She only watched him.

At first, Red thought she was a trick of the Realm—some spirit conjured by sentiment, maybe. But then she smiled, and he felt it like a sunbeam down his spine.

He took a few steps toward her before he even realized he was moving.

Noc, still mid-conversation with a spirit-dragon-thing (probably), turned, saw where Red was looking—and for once, said nothing. Just nodded.

So Red kept walking.

“Do I know you?” he asked, low and careful, because there was a sacredness about her, and he didn’t want to shatter it.

“You know of me,” she answered, voice softer than mist, but strong. “And I’ve known you since the first time you cried in a bassinet. You kicked like a fury, even then.”

The way she looked at him made his throat tighten. Like she was memorizing the way his soul moved beneath his skin.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there,” she added, and it nearly undid him.

He blinked fast. “Are you—?”

“I’m your mother, love.” She reached out, but stopped short. “If you’ll let me be.”

Red’s breath hitched like a snapped wire. All those years wondering. The hollow spaces in his history. The aching not-knowing.

And now, here she stood, not as myth or ghost or tragic past. Just… a woman who had once made an impossible choice, and never stopped loving him for a second after.

“I think,” Red said, the corners of his eyes wet now, “that you already are.”

She smiled like the moon breaking through stormclouds.

“I only asked for one thing, when he came to me,” she whispered, tilting her head toward where Noc stood, trying to act like he wasn’t definitely watching the whole thing from the corner of his eye. “To see you happy. He made that happen. That man loves you so much it echoes through time.”

Red gave a broken laugh. “Yeah. He’s a lunatic.”

“Lunatic,” she repeated, smiling wider. “And yours.”

Then she leaned in, kissed his temple, and disappeared like a sigh on the wind.

Red stepped back into the clearing where Noc stood, the world softening and quieting around them, though it still hummed with the ancient power of this place. He caught Noc’s eye and, without speaking, Noc knew.

Red had met her.

Her.

The one who wasn’t just a ghost, or a memory, or a story.

Red had a thousand words for what he was feeling—shock, awe, confusion, relief, grief—but none of them made sense. None of them could. He was still trying to untangle all of it in his mind.

But Noc didn’t need words. He knew, too. The way Red stood—open, vulnerable, and a little broken—and the way his eyes didn’t quite focus. It was a perfect match for the unspeakable weight that Red had carried all these years. The absence of her. The hole in his heart.

And now, she was real. Realer than he'd ever dreamed.

“You okay?” Noc asked quietly, his voice a soft anchor in the dizzying storm Red felt himself caught in.

Red smiled—tired, weary—but undeniably real. “I think so.”

Noc stepped forward, pulled Red into his arms without hesitation, without the usual teasing or bravado. Just an understanding. The kind of hug that said, I get it. I see you.

For a long moment, they stood there, breathing each other in. No words necessary. No need for explanations. Just the steady presence of each other—something neither of them had ever really known before, but now they couldn’t imagine living without.

Red's voice broke the silence, soft and raw, but steady. “She told me… that you love me. That you always have.”

Noc's throat tightened. “I do.”

“I didn’t know,” Red said, so quiet, so vulnerable. “I didn’t know what it meant, what it really felt like, until today.”

“Yeah,” Noc whispered. “Me neither.”

Red took a breath, then pulled away slightly to look at Noc, his fingers brushing against his jaw. “So… what now?”

Noc let out a low laugh. “Now? We make sure we don’t screw this up.”

Red smirked, his thumb tracing Noc’s lip before they leaned in. No more hesitations. No more playing games. Just the two of them, finally letting go of the ghosts that had haunted them for so long.

Because they were home now. Together. And nothing, nothing, could tear them apart.

\*\*Red Knight – After the Vows\*\*

The music had faded.

The guests—what few could tread where they stood—had gone quiet, fading into the edges of the Realm like mist at sunrise. The Legendary Realm had never felt so still. So real.

And Noc, his Noc, was standing beside him.

Hair braided back with Rissa’s hands. Suit half-starched, half-wrung with nerves. That strange, beautiful tension of a man who never believed he deserved love… being loved \_anyway.\_

Red’s hands still trembled a little from the vows. Not from fear. Just from the sheer \_magnitude\_ of what had happened.

They were married.

They were \*\*here.\*\*

But the cell still lingered in the back of Red’s mind.

---

\*\*The Cage\*\*

It was never supposed to get that far.

Red had promised himself, \_sworn\_ to Gaia, that he’d never let Noc suffer like that again—not after Romania, not after Maryska, not after those fucking silver scars they’d both tried so hard to ignore.

But you can’t always stop it.

You can only stand guard.

And Red had.

He'd held vigil while the man he loved howled into a void only he could see. He'd taken bloodstained cloth and cleaned it again and again, as if somehow, caring for the wounds on the outside might reach the ones on the inside. He'd buried Libra with mud in his teeth and grief in his bones, and still, still, he came back to sit by the bars.

\_“I knew you’d find your way back.”\_

He hadn't known. Not really.

He’d \_hoped.\_

---

\*\*The Altar\*\*

Now here they were—no silver, no bars.

Only starlight and the faint echo of the Pretenders still drifting through the trees.

Red had waited at so many gates with Noc: underground cages, pack moot fires, hospital thresholds... and now this.

An altar in the heart of myth.

It hadn’t surprised him that Noc waited \_for him\_ at the end of the aisle. That was who he was. Brave. Fearless. Terrified of being loved but doing it anyway, because he couldn’t let the opportunity pass.

He didn’t cry during the vows.

Red didn’t let himself.

But now, standing with fingers still twined in Noc’s and the weight of the moment settling like dawn through the trees, the tears came quietly. Not many. Just enough.

Just enough to wash away the ghost of that silver cage.

---

\*\*Aftermath\*\*

Noc leaned into him. Still uncertain, sometimes. Still waiting for the catch. Red knew that look. It would take years to unteach the lie that love was conditional.

But he’d be there.

For every startled smile. Every night when Noc forgot how to sleep. Every time he woke up thinking claws were at the door. He’d be there, still.

Red wasn’t good with words, not the way Cahaliths were. But as he looked at his husband—\_husband,\_ fuck—he knew one thing in his marrow:

Noc had survived death.

But more than that—he’d chosen to live.

And Red? He’d never stop choosing him in return.

\*\*Nocturnal Miguel Rhaegis – After the Wedding\*\*

He didn’t sleep that night.

Couldn’t.

The fire was low. The Realm didn’t need flames for warmth—it pulsed with some mythic heartbeat, ancient and watchful—but Noc still fed the embers, just to keep his hands busy.

Red was curled up nearby, breathing deep for once, one hand still reaching toward the empty space in the blankets where Noc should’ve been. That alone nearly broke him.

Because it meant \_Red expected him to stay.\_

And Noc… Noc still didn’t know how to live like that.

---

\*\*The Ghosts\*\*

He had looked her in the eyes once. Maryska.

When she slit open another child for sport and dared him to feel.

When she ordered Maldaldo to tear apart a Garou cub while Noc stood chained to a pillar, screaming until his throat bled.

She’d said something to him then.

> “Even your grief is exquisite, little wolf.”

He’d carried that phrase like a curse.

Through his exile. Through the fights. Through the rain-slick blood of a hundred victories that never meant anything when he couldn’t save \_anyone\_ who actually mattered.

And then Libra died.

No. Was \_taken.\_ Torn from this world and mailed to him like a joke.

And whatever cracks were left in him from Romania—shattered.

He remembered none of it. Only Red’s face on the other side of silver bars, eyes rimmed in sleeplessness. Voice raw. No judgment. Just \_stay with me.\_ Stay.

He almost hadn’t.

---

\*\*The Vows\*\*

And now he was married.

No chains. No cage. No test.

Just \_Red,\_ and the words he could barely say without choking on them.

> “I’ll stand by you.”

He hadn’t believed it until that moment, really. Not deep down.

But he did now.

Because Red \_had.\_ Through the madness. Through the blood. Through the silences where Noc didn’t speak for days because the fear still strangled his throat.

Red never made him explain.

Never made him feel wrong for surviving.

He just loved him. Fiercely. Quietly. Unconditionally.

Noc didn’t think he was loveable.

But Red had loved him anyway.

---

\*\*Now\*\*

He stood up from the fire. Slipped back under the blanket. Let Red's arm fall across his chest like a warding charm.

He wasn’t fixed.

Wasn’t healed.

Probably never would be.

But tonight?

He was \_loved.\_

And for the first time in his brutal, blood-drenched life…

That was enough.

Timeframe: Post-wedding, shortly after Maryska’s final defeat. Location: Caern, Noc’s private quarters.

The night was quiet, deceptively so. The kind of stillness that’s too deep, too settled. Red had taken the younger pups for a late run, giving Noc a rare hour to brood in peace. He sat in his den, floor scattered with old pit-fight trophies, cracked relics of a past he still wasn’t sure how to forgive.

The door creaked.

Karma stepped inside—usually bold, fiery-eyed, unbothered by rank or ritual. But not tonight. Tonight she moved like someone carrying a relic soaked in god-blood. She held a small digital drive in one hand, wrapped in a handkerchief as though it might bite.

Noc looked up, brow furrowed. “Someone die?”

“No,” she said quietly, “but someone’s about to be reborn.”

He straightened, tension bleeding into his shoulders. “You’re being cryptic. That’s my job.”

Karma crossed the floor and knelt in front of him. That alone was enough to gut him—Apis rarely bowed to anyone.

She offered the drive.

“I cracked the Blacksite files. The ones from Maryska’s final lab. There was a genome folder... on Seras.”

Noc flinched. He’d seen enough horrors coded into helixes to know what that meant. “What did she do to her?”

Karma shook her head. “It’s not what she did. It’s what you and Red did.”

Noc blinked. “The hell does that mean?”

Karma exhaled. “Maryska used your DNA. Both of yours. Spliced them. Ran growth trials on manipulated zygotes. Most failed. One didn’t.”

Noc stared.

Karma’s voice broke, softer now. “Seras isn’t just your daughter because you found her. She’s your daughter because you made her. You and Red. She is flesh of your flesh.”

Silence thundered through the room.

Noc didn’t move. Didn’t breathe. He just stared at the drive in her palm like it was the beating heart of some ancient god, torn from its chest and offered to him still warm.

Thirty years. Thirty years he’d lived with the quiet grief that he would never hold a child of his blood. Thirty years of telling himself he didn’t deserve to. That the Wyrm had clawed that future out of his hands the moment his bones first cracked in a rage-shift under a full moon.

And now…

A soft sound escaped him. A laugh, broken and ragged, twisted around the edges with disbelief and something dangerously close to joy.

“She’s mine?” he whispered. “Not just by oath, but by birth?”

Karma nodded, eyes shimmering.

Noc stood slowly. His hands trembled as he took the drive, holding it like a relic, like it might vanish if he looked away. Then his knees buckled, and he sank to the ground.

He didn’t cry like a man. He cried like a storm breaking over the mountains.

Red returned minutes later, sensing the rupture in their bond like a tether gone taut. He found Noc on the floor, Karma at his side, the two of them cradling a truth neither expected.

“What happened?” Red asked, rushing forward.

Noc looked up, face streaked with tears and wonder. “She’s ours,” he choked. “Seras… she’s ours.”

Red’s breath caught. And then he was on his knees too, pulling Noc into his arms, their foreheads pressed together like a prayer.

And somewhere deep in the Caern, beneath root and soil, Gaia exhaled.

Her son had come home.

Red’s POV: The Revelation

The moment Karma said “you should sit down,” Red knew something was about to tear his world open.

But he didn’t sit. He never does. Not when it counts.

The air in the room felt too still, like the world had stopped breathing. Karma laid the datapad on the table like it was a holy relic—or a live grenade. She looked at him with reverence and apology mixed like oil and blood.

“She’s yours,” Karma said. “Yours and Noc’s. She’s… she’s your daughter.”

Red didn’t flinch. Not at first. His hands didn’t tremble. His jaw didn’t drop. He just stood there, staring down at the screen like it might bite him.

DNA overlays. Ident markers. Cellular drift. Signatures of both him and Noc in every double helix of the child they’d raised, loved, protected for decades.

Seras.

Their Seras.

The world tilted.

He remembered her first words. Her first punch. The first time she called Noc “Dad” in that begrudging, I'm-not-crying-you’re-crying way. The way she used to fall asleep in Red’s lap while he sharpened his blades, the little snores that meant she felt safe, even back then.

She was already his. Already Noc’s. But this…

This made it blood. This made it soul.

Red backed away from the table like it was on fire. Not because he didn’t want it. But because the weight of it might shatter him if he let it all in at once.

He ran a hand over his face, dragging emotion out through his skin. And then—then he laughed. A short, incredulous thing. The kind of laugh you make when you find light in a cave you were sure was endless.

All this time, he thought Noc had given up the dream of being a father.

But the Wyrm lost.

The Wyrm lost.

They had a daughter. A miracle in the wreckage. A phoenix from ash and horror and all the things Maryska tried to destroy.

Red turned away from the screen, from Karma, from the data.

He needed to find Noc.

Because tonight, for the first time in years, Red Knight was going to cry. And not from pain.

But from joy.

The walls didn’t change. Same lightless stone. Same rot-slick corners. Same rhythmic drip of distant water that might once have been a heartbeat. Days and nights bled into each other until even time itself lost the will to count. Noc lay on the floor, shackled at wrist and ankle, body wrecked and mind worse.

The silver in the chains didn’t just burn—it took. It drank his strength, sapped his rage, hollowed him out like a fruit picked too late. Beside him, Red lay curled into himself, bones showing beneath skin, eyes sunken but still watching. Always watching.

For a while, they endured together.

Then the council separated them. One thought they’d outwit the bond between two warriors—two wolves—with doors and distance. Noc heard Red’s screams the first night, and something in him died.

Then something else rose.

He didn't shift. He transcended. Through searing silver, through every nerve on fire, he became fury incarnate. Guards died. Rooms were painted in gore. The council learned quickly: the monsters they feared couldn’t be broken apart. Not without paying in blood.

They kept them together after that.

But months passed. The cruelty never did.

Noc started to slip.

He didn’t know when it began. The dreams maybe, of the Pit, of Maryska’s voice dripping down the stone like poison honey. The taste of ash in his mouth. The scent of fear he knew too well—his own.

One night, Red spoke.

“I know where you’re going,” he whispered, voice rasped to the point of cracking. “I know that look, Noc.”

Silence. Just that steady, blank stare at the wall.

“You’re leaving me,” Red said.

Still nothing.

Red took a ragged breath. “I’m tired, Noc. I don’t want to fight anymore. If you give up, I do too.”

A muscle in Noc’s jaw twitched.

“Let me go.”

It was so soft. So final.

And it hit like a silver bullet straight through the soul.

Red, the boy who’d bled for him, walked beside him through fire and worse, Red who never folded, never wavered—was breaking.

That did what months of torment couldn’t. It cut through the fog like a howl through silence.

Noc blinked.

Turned his head.

Met Red’s eyes.

“I see you,” he said. Voice hoarse. Barely audible. “You’re trying to leave me. You can’t. You promised.”

And there it was.

Red’s breath hitched. The faintest curl of his lip—just enough of a smile to be a spark.

“I did,” he murmured. “So don’t make a liar out of me, wolf.”

They didn’t break them.

No, they just reminded them why they fight.

The world outside was bright. Too bright. It stabbed at their eyes like truth after too many lies. Noc and Red staggered out the rusted metal door, breath ragged, blood-soaked, silver-burned—but free.

For now.

Then came the sound. Boots. Thirty pairs. Crunching gravel. Chainmail clinking. The air thickened with the weight of drawn blades and cocked rifles. The kind of men who didn’t hesitate. Monster-killers, every one of them. Sent to bring legends to heel.

They formed a circle, weapons raised, eyes cold.

Noc and Red stood back-to-back, both swaying on their feet, their bodies so battered they could barely raise their fists—but gods, did they try. It wasn’t bravery. It wasn’t stubbornness. It was love, and it was fury, and it was the unspoken agreement that they would not go quietly.

Red’s voice was low, and calm. “Got one more dance in you?”

Noc grinned, lip split and bleeding. “If I fall, fall with me.”

“I always do.”

Then the circle began to close.

That’s when the world... shifted.

The ground hummed beneath their feet. The wind stilled, as if holding its breath. And then—light. Not golden, not bright—alive. Green and ancient and vast. It poured through the cracks of the world like something waking up from a long sleep, angry at what had been done in its absence.

The men froze.

A sound rose in the air, not a roar, not a whisper—something older. Like roots groaning beneath stone. Like thunder shaking in bone marrow.

And then—they were gone.

Vanished.

Snatched from death’s edge like wolves from the jaws of a trap.

They landed hard in soft earth, surrounded by startled gasps. Campfires. Tents. Family.

Oula dropped her blade mid-motion. Cobalt’s arms spread wide in disbelief. Delphine’s eyes filled like storm-pools. Their warriors had been moments from mounting a suicidal rescue mission—and now the wolves had returned.

Noc groaned, blinked up at the sun through the leaves, and whispered, “Did we die?”

Red rolled onto his side, coughing blood and laughter. “Guess Gaia said no.”

Oula was the first to reach them, kneeling between their broken bodies.

“You look like hell,” she said, trying to sound casual, but her voice cracked.

“We lived in worse,” Noc croaked, gripping her forearm. “But I’ll take the upgrade.”

Behind them, the wind stirred again, and the scent of wildflowers bloomed out of nowhere.

Gaia’s mark.

Not just survivors.

Chosen.

\_(Noc & His Father – Los Alamos, The Final Stand-Off)\_

The air in Los Alamos hasn’t changed.

Still that sterile, sun-bleached sharpness of a town built to contain \*\*secrets\*\*. Only now, it’s his secrets the air seems to whisper. The scent of pine and scorched rock is wrapped around the smell of ghosts.

Noc stands at the curb, Red at his side, the translator’s contact info flickering on the phone in Red’s hand like it knows this isn’t just a \*\*pit stop\*\*.

Across the street stands the house.

\*\*That house.\*\*

Its siding is sun-bleached, the windows hazy with the grime of years, and yet the door is freshly painted. The porch is intact. A \*\*tire swing still hangs, deflated and forgotten\*\*, like some dead thing left to rot in daylight.

Red leans close. \*\*“He’s here, isn’t he?”\*\*

Noc doesn’t answer. Doesn’t blink. The house holds him like a snare.

Then the door opens.

\*\*And time collapses.\*\*

The man who steps outside is \*\*older\*\*, \*\*grayer\*\*, shoulders bowed with the slow corrosion of \*\*regretless years\*\*—but his eyes are \*\*the same\*\*. That same judgmental sharpness. That same \*\*chill\*\*.

At first, \*\*confusion\*\*. Then…

\*\*Recognition.\*\*

And with it, \*\*revulsion\*\*. As if Noc were a stray dog pissing on the welcome mat.

Red breathes in slow through his nose. \*\*“I’ll go find the translator.”\*\*

Noc nods without looking away. \*\*“Don’t let him see you.”\*\*

\*\*“You sure?”\*\*

\*\*“Positive.”\*\*

Red goes, his steps crisp, controlled. Like a man \*\*walking out of a storm and leaving the thunder behind\*\*.

Noc walks across the street.

They \*\*stare\*\* at each other. No words at first.

Then:

\*\*“You’re still alive,” his father says flatly.\*\*

Noc lets out a bitter laugh. \*\*“Surprise.”\*\*

\*\*“What do you want?”\*\*

Noc exhales, slow. His voice is \*\*measured\*\*, but his pulse \*\*is not\*\*. \*\*“I want to know if you ever regretted it.”\*\*

The corners of his father’s mouth pull \*\*downward\*\*, unimpressed. \*\*“Regretted what? Throwing out trash?”\*\*

Noc \*\*doesn’t flinch\*\*. He just \*\*watches\*\*. Weighs it. Feels the choice \*\*press against his ribs\*\*—does he keep trying? Does he let silence win?

He shifts his stance. \*\*“You could’ve had a son. A real one. Someone who cared about you. Hell, someone who still could.”\*\*

His father sneers, sharp as broken glass. \*\*"You’re no son of mine."\*\*

\*\*Pause. A breath held too long.\*\*

Noc inhales, slow. Doesn’t answer. The choice lingers—\*\*bite back or let it die\*\*.

Then—

\*\*Crack!\*\*

The sound \*\*splits the sky\*\*.

A flash. A shot \*\*meant for monsters\*\*.

His father \*\*screams\*\*. Clutches his arm. Blood \*\*spills\*\*. And he \*\*runs\*\*.

Noc doesn’t chase. He just \*\*watches\*\* the stain his father leaves behind.

The moment \*\*hangs\*\*, tension hollowed out into silence.

Then—he makes the call.

Hours later, the \*\*lot is stripped bare\*\*. Bulldozers. Dump trucks. Magic-infused muscle and favors owed.

The house is \*\*gone\*\*. Just \*\*gone\*\*.

Where it stood, soft grass rolls in the moonlight. A single red flower \*\*grows\*\*, fast and impossibly wild, from the scorched patch of earth where the porch once stood.

Red returns as dawn starts to stretch its fingers across the sky. He says \*\*nothing\*\*. Just slides his arm around Noc’s waist.

Noc breathes in deep. Lets it out.

\*\*“Guess I’m homeless again,”\*\* he mutters, the edge of a smile tugging at his mouth.

Red kisses his temple. \*\*“Nah. You brought your home with you.”\*\*

Notes:

Nocturnal Miguel Rhaegis

\_Early Life\_

Nocturnal Miguel Rhaegis, known as Noc to those who came to know him, was born on a chilly Halloween morning in Los Alamos, New Mexico. The world first met him at 3:21 am on October 31, 1982, under the watchful eyes of his parents, Roberto and Carlita Rhaegis. From a young age, it was evident that Noc was not an ordinary child. His insatiable curiosity and relentless drive set him apart from his peers. By the time he was sixteen, Noc had graduated from high school, a testament to his overachieving nature and remarkable intellect. However, the relationship between Noc and his parents was always strained. His relentless pursuit of knowledge and success created a distance between him and his family, who struggled to understand his ambitions.

\_Academic Excellence\_

Noc's journey continued as he pursued higher education. By September 12, 2012, he had earned a Bachelor of Science degree in microbiology. His passion for science and discovery pushed him to immediately embark on a Master’s program. It seemed that Noc was destined for a life of academic accolades and scientific breakthroughs.

\_The South American Nightmare\_

In March 2014, Noc left for South America, eager to conduct research for his thesis. What was supposed to be a two-month trip turned into a nightmare. On March 30, 2014, he was brutally attacked and captured by Maryska Dragomir, a name that would forever haunt his dreams. During the attack, Noc was turned into a werewolf, a transformation that added a new layer of torment to his already dire situation. For nearly a year and a half, from April 1, 2014, to September 18, 2015, Noc endured unimaginable horrors. Held captive in Romania, he was forced into pit fighting, subjected to physical abuse, and made to serve against his will. The constant cycle of violence and degradation tested the limits of his spirit.

\_The Great Escape\_

Despite the torment, Noc's indomitable will to survive never waned. On September 19, 2015, he managed to escape, saving several other slaves in the process. His return to New Mexico on October 2, 2015, was bittersweet. When he revealed his affliction to his parents, their reaction was one of fear and rejection. Disowned and heartbroken, Noc found himself alone and struggling to survive.

\_The Underground Fighter\_

Starvation drove Noc to his first underground fight on November 14, 2015. It was in this brutal world that he met Red Knight, a figure who would become a pivotal part of his life. Over the next few years, Noc earned a fearsome reputation as a brutal fighter. By February 15, 2017, his renown had grown to the point where he began adopting ronin and unclaimed shifters, offering them the guidance and protection he had once needed.

\_The Campaigns\_

Noc’s life was marked by a series of campaigns, each more challenging than the last. On March 12, 2017, during the first campaign, he witnessed a shaman being killed in front of him. Though the shaman was a stranger, the event triggered a profound change in Noc. The senseless murder pushed him to set aside his life of fighting and embrace the path of a Cahalith—a werewolf shaman. This decision marked a significant turning point in his life.

The second campaign, beginning on June 1, 2017, saw him confront a terrifying creature known as the face hugger. Then, on July 2, 2017, during the third campaign, Noc faced Maryska once more. This time, he emerged victorious, putting an end to the nightmare that had begun years earlier.

\_The Undocumented Years\_

The years that followed were undocumented, known as Sobek’s Campaigns. Noc’s actions during this time remain shrouded in mystery, but they were undoubtedly filled with the same intensity and determination that had characterized his earlier years.

\_The Stranger Things Era\_

In early 2024, Noc found himself embroiled in a series of events tied to the Stranger Things universe. From March 1 to June 22, 2024, he faced unimaginable challenges. In a final act of self-sacrifice, Noc died, only to be resurrected. This period was marked by profound loss, including the death of his entire pack of ronin. In a symbolic gesture indicative of his Native heritage, when loss struck and the younglings he was caring for were killed, he cut his hair, only for Rissa to give it back, signifying a rebirth of sorts. However, there were also moments of joy and love. Noc married Red on Aug 15, 2024, and despite the heartache, found a semblance of peace.

Time line:

| | |

|---|---|

|DATE|NOTES|

|10/31/92|Born in Los Alamos, NM to Roberto and Carlita Rhaegis, 03:21 am|

|06/06/08|Graduates HS at age 16 (always been an overachiever)|

|09/12/12|Graduates with his BS in microbiology, begins his MS|

|03/15/14|Leaves for South America to do research for his thesis (planned 2 month trip)|

|03/30/14|Brutally attacked, captured by Maryska Dragomir|

|04/1 to 09/18/15|Held captive in Romania, used as pit fighter, physically abused, sexually abused, forced into slavery|

|09/19/15|Escaped, saved several other slaves in the process|

|10/02/15|Arrived at home in NM, after revealing his ‘affliction’ to his parents, was disowned|

|11/14/15|Starving, Noc enters his first underground fight, meets Red Knight|

|02/15/17|Has earned renown as a brutal fighter, begins adopting ronin/unclaimed shifters|

|03/12/17|Events of 1st campaign (Shaman killed)|

|06/01/17|Events of 2nd Campaign (face hugger)|

|07/02/17|Events of 3rd Campaign (Maryska Dies)|

|\*\*\*|Undocumented years (Sobek’s Campaigns)|

|03/01 to 08/22/24|Events of Stranger Things (Noc dies, self sacrifice, resurrected, marries Red, lost entire pack of ronin, cut his hair, Rissa gave it back)|

|||

Updated Gifts:

\_Smell of Man\_

Rank 1 Homid Gift

Creatures of the wild have learned well that where man goes, death follows. With this Gift the werewolf enhances the human scent around him greatly, causing wild animals to feel uneasy and nervous. However, the scent also causes domestic animals to recognize the werewolf as their master. An ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

All wild animals (not including supernatural creatures in animal form) lose one die from their dice pools when within 20 feet of the Garou (save when defending themselves or running away), and they are likely to flee. All domesticated animals recognize the werewolf as a friend and refuse to harm him. For example, an attack-trained dog ordered to take down the werewolf would run up to the character and wag its tail. If the domesticated animal is harmed, then it will revert to acting naturally. The Garou may use this Gift at will. He simply states when she is activating it or turning it off.

Source: Core book revised.

\_Sense Weaver\_

Rank 1 Theurge Gift

The Garou may sense Weaver energies or spirits in the nearby area. This Gift is taught by any Gaian spirit.

\*\*System\*\*:

The Garou rolls Perception + Science against a difficulty determined by the Storyteller, based on the strength of the presence. Source: Umbra

\_Network Terminal\_

Rank 1 Glass Walker Gift

Camp: Random Interrupts

Computers have grown more and more connected in recent years, most prominently via the Internet. Meanwhile, no matter how good your computer is, there’s probably someone with a better computer and you’re likely connected to it. This Gift connects the Random Interrupt to the theoretical better computer, making all work much easier. A Pattern Spider teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7. Every success adds one die to any roll involving the Computer Knowledge. The Gift doesn’t provide you with a computer; you actually need to be seated at a computer that has some form of network connection.

Source: Glass Walker Tribebook (revised)

\_Control Simple Machine\_

Rank 1 Glass Walker Gift

The Garou may command the spirits of the simplest machines, causing levers to flip, doors to unbolt, pulleys to roll and so on. Any technological spirit can teach this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Crafts (difficulty 7). The Garou’s control lasts until the end of the scene.

Source: Core book revised.

\_Persuasion\_

This Gift allows a Garou to become more persuasive when dealing with others, in such a way that his statements and arguments are imbued with added meaning or credibility. An ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Gift:\_Persuasion?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")\*\*:\*\*

The player rolls Charisma + Subterfuge. If successful, the Storyteller reduces the difficulties of all Social rolls by one for the remainder of the scene. In addition, any successful Social rolls may have significantly more impact than they would without the Gift. A werewolf could win arguments with hard line opponents, or cause a cold-hearted psychopath to relent (at least for a little while).

Sources: 2nd & 3rd ed WWtA Corebook, Gurahl Breedbook

\_Falling Touch\_

This Gift allows the Garou to send her foe sprawling with but a touch. Any aerial spirit can teach this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Gift:\_Falling\_Touch?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")\*\*:\*\*

The Garou's player rolls Dexterity + Medicine (difficulty of the opponent's Stamina + Athletics). Even one success sends the victim to the ground. Doing so counts as an action; activating this Gift and striking a foe with intent to harm are two separate things.

Source: 3rd ed WWtA Corebook

\_Cybersenses\_

Rank 2 Glasswalker Gift[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Gift:\_Cybersenses?veaction=edit&section=1 "Edit section: Cybersenses (Rank 2)")

By studying both his natural senses and the sensory capabilities of machines, the Garou may exchange the former for the latter. He may choose to exchange normal hearing for radar, or ordinary sight for infrared or UV sight. Any technological spirit can teach this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Gift:\_Cybersenses?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")\*\*:\*\*

The player spends one Gnosis point per sense affected, and he rolls Perception + Science thereafter to activate the Garou's new senses. This Gift lasts for one scene.

Source: 3rd ed WWtA Corebook

RANK 2

\_Jam Technology\_

Rank 2 Homid Gift / Rank 2 Glass Walker Gift

The werewolf can cause technological devices to cease functioning, albeit temporarily. Even the simplest of shaped objects will refuse to perform its function. A Gremlin — a type of Wyld-spirit that enjoys breaking things — teaches this Gift

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Manipulation + Crafts. The werewolf may choose the level of complexity she intends to “jam.” All technological devices (i.e., any devices shaped from fabricated materials like metal or plastic) of that complexity within 50 feet cease functioning for one turn per success. The devices remain unchanged but inert. Knives won’t cut, gunpowder won’t ignite, gears won’t turn and so on. The difficulty of the roll is based on the following chart:

Source: Core book revised / 20th Anniversary Edition

| | |

|---|---|

|\_Device\_|\_Difficulty\_|

|Computer|4|

|Phone|6|

|Automobile|8|

|Gun|9|

|Knife|10|

\_Mind Partition\_

Rank 2 Glass Walker Gift

Camp: Random Interrupts

A favorite among Random Interrupts who discover they can’t multitask nearly as well as their computers, this Gift allows the Garou to break their own mind into segments, quickly switching their concentration to a new task while never losing their place on the old task. One Cruncher described the Gift by saying, “It’s not true multitasking, but it fakes it well.” A Pattern Spider teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends one Willpower point and rolls Gnosis (difficulty 6). For every success gained, the player can add work on one extra extended action every turn, one added per turn. No penalties are incurred on any of the extended actions, but if just one botch is rolled, all uncompleted tasks fail.

Source: Glass Walker Tribebook (revised)

RANK 3

\_Cowing the Bullet\_

Rank 3 Homid Gift

The spirits of tools recognize man as their master; as a result, they become reluctant to harm the homid. A Weaver-spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends a Gnosis point. For the rest of the scene, the Garou gains two additional soak dice against all crafted weapons not made of silver.

Source: 20th Anniversary Edition

\_Exorcism\_

Rank 3 Theurge Gift

This is the Gift of ejecting spirits from places or objects, whether they are there voluntarily or are bound there. Any Incarna avatar can teach this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The Garou must concentrate uninterrupted for three turns. If a spirit does not wish to leave, the player must make a Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty of the spirit’s Willpower). If the spirit has been bound to its lodging place (or into a fetish), then the exorcist must make a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 8) and gain more successes than the binder did when tying the spirit to its location. This Gift can be used to “cure” fomori, although the host will surely die as the Bane is ejected unless a powerful healer manages to preserve her live during the exorcism.

Source: Core book revised.

\_Evocation of the Ceremony\_

Rank 3 Theurge Gift

Rituals are not used only to evoke supernatural effects; they also have an inherent value to Theurges in and of themselves. Using this Gift, the Garou evokes a sense of awe, reverence and holy mystery through ritualistic behavior — anything from a Garou rite to a Catholic sacrament. Along with any normal mystical effect, the ceremony produces a sense of reaffirmation and cosmological belonging in everybody who participates. While Theurges usually use this effect to strengthen sincere spiritual devotions or build community among Garou, it’s just as easily abused to keep participants in a rite in ignorant, dogmatic fear of the supernatural world — the Theurge’s intent, not the nature of the Gift, determines which is the case. An enigmatic spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

Any being can attempt to inspire, unify or cow an audience through ritualism with a Cha + Rit, Occ, Perf or Subt roll as appropriate to the exact situation. Possession of this Gift increases the Charisma of the Theurge by four dots, only for the purposes of such attempts (to a maximum of nine).

Source: Book of Auspices

\_Data Flow\_

Rank 3 Glass Walker Gift

The Glass Walkers originally developed this Gift as a “remote control” for new electronic devices. As the computer gained importance, this Gift gained a whole new utility. Glass Walkers now use this ability to take control of the data resources that are so important to the world’s economy and to society in general. By focusing her attention on a single computer, a Glass Walker can take control of that machine from across the room. She can order it to erase its memory, alter security clearances, transmit false data or simply print a document. An electrical spirit or the even more complex computer spirits can teach this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

A successful Wits + Computer roll (difficulty 7) plus the expenditure of one Gnosis point establishes contact with the computer. As long as the Garou keeps her target in her line of sight, she can maintain contact with the machine. While this Gift allows remote access, the Garou must still make all the appropriate roll to manipulate the computer.

Source: Player’s Guide Second Edition.

\_Control Complex Machine\_

Rank 3 Glass Walker Gift

Similar to [Control Simple Machine](http://www.wyrmfoe.com/382/control-simple-machine/), the Garou may now converse with and command the spirits of electronic devices such as computers, video games, and cars. One learns (or steals) this Gift from a Net-Spider.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends one Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Science (or Computer). The Storyteller sets the difficulty based on how complex the machine actually is (usually 8). The Garou’s control lasts for one scene.

Source: Core book revised.

RANK 4

\_Body Shift\_

Rank 4 Homid Gift / Rank 4 Ahroun Gift / Rank 4 Get of Fenris Gift

Garou raised in the shifting maze of human society are well-prepared for the endless adaptations Gaia demands of her protectors. An ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The Garou can use her shapeshifting to alter her physical Attributes: a dot of Dexterity can be shifted to Strength or Stamina, and so forth. The player rolls Stamina + Primal-Urge (difficulty 9). For each two successes, one physical Attribute dot can be shifted for the rest of the scene.

Source: 20th Anniversary

\_Blurring the Mirror\_

Rank 4 Theurge Gift

This Gift allows the Theurge to cloud the minds of other beings, making it impossible for them to find the Umbra or step sideways into it. Once used as a form of punishment for arrogant pups, this Gift is more often deployed as a weapon against Black Spiral Dancers in the days of the coming Apocalypse. A Weaver-spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends one Gnosis point for every individual she wishes to affect. The Gauntlet increases by five for those targets for the rest of the scene. Up to five individuals can be affected at once. While normally used against other Garou, this Gift is effective against any being capable of entering the Umbra sideways, including other Fera and some mages.

Source: 20th Anniversary Edition

RANK 5

\_Beyond Human\_

Rank 5 Homid Gift

The Garou is human plus. Human plus strength, agility and health. Human plus devoted, assured spirituality and meaning. Human plus animal instinct and lightning reflexes. He is as man, but greater and more whole. Every Garou radiates this to some extent, causing humans to fear and avoid them instinctively. This Gift warps this perception, turning the Garou from a figure to be avoided into a figure to be admired or adored. An ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

Once learned, this Gift is always active. Humans dealing with the character will immediately pick her out as more desirable, attractive, smarter or more charismatic compared to throw around them, regardless of their actual capacity in such matters. The Curse still applies, but rather than being instinctively feared as a predator, the werewolf is dreaded as an intimidating figure of great presence. Also, the character may boost his Social Attributes by spending Rage or Gnosis, each dot of either spent raises one Social Attribute by one point for a single scene.

Source: Players’ Guide to Garou (revised)

\_Healing the Soul\_

Rank 5 Theurge Gift

Through a week-long ordeal of fasting, trance states and spirit communication, the Theurge is able to set the elements of the Triat into perfect balance within one individual’s soul. Obviously, the subject to be healed must be willing, and the two individuals must remain in solitude (save for contact with spirits) for the duration. This Gift can cure insanity, ease emotional wounds, heal the effects of trauma and remove desensitization. If the spiritual injury was caused by ill conduct on the subject’s part, however, this Gift can only benefit them once: even the greatest empath has little sympathy for those who willingly slide back into self-degradation after being helped out the first time. An avatar of Unicorn teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The effects are largely character and story-based. This Gift alone cannot cure full-blown Harano, but it can certainly ameliorate the causes, preventing it before it takes hold completely.

If the Storyteller has already embraced the complications of mechanical crossover in her Werewolf chronicle, she may elect to allow this Gift to restore one or two levels of Humanity, or subtract one or two levels of permanent Angst, once in a given vampire or wraith’s life. Of course, very few Garou elders would ever consider wasting Gaia’s blessings on a Leech, even a penitent one.

Source: Book of Auspices

\_Summon Net-Spider\_

Rank 5 Glass Walker Gift

The Garou can summon a Net-Spider, a Weaver spirit that gives its summoner near-absolute control over any computer system. The Spider can disrupt, erase or destroy whatever system it is sent into (the exact effects are left to the Storyteller, but are typically destructive). An avatar of Cockroach teaches this Gift.

\*\*System\*\*:

The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Charisma + Computer (difficulty 8). If successful, the Net-Spider appears and heeds the Garou’s commands. This Gift allows the Garou to halve all computer-related difficulties along with the aforementioned destructive capacity of the spirit.

Source: Core book revised.

\*\*Custom Gifts\*\*

Tempus Fugit

Garou may alter and manipulate the time stream in a localized area, depending on the number of successful rolls.

![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps2.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps3.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps4.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps5.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps6.jpg): Slow time for 15 minutes (+15 minutes with a max time slowed of one scene per success)

![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps7.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps8.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps9.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps10.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps11.jpg):Accelerate time for 15 minutes (+15 minutes with a max time slowed of one scene per success)

![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps12.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps13.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps14.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps15.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps16.jpg) Stop time for 15 minutes (+15 minutes with a max time slowed of one scene per success)

![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps17.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps18.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps19.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps20.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps21.jpg) : Reverse time for 15 minutes (+15 minutes with a max time slowed of one scene per success)

![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps22.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps23.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps24.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps25.jpg)![](file:///C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local\Temp\ksohtml1116\wps26.jpg) : Slip out of the time stream entirely for 1 day (+1 day with a max time of 2 days per success)

\*\*System\*\*:

Spend 10 gnosis (expanded rules) per dot of desired effect, roll Man+Sta, difficulty 7.

This gift requires at least 2 successes to activate. Each additional success equals an increase in time manipulated/area of effect. Garou is invisible/invulnerable while under the out-of-the-time-stream effect, but will suffer physical damage when they re-enter their proper time. (Amount of damage is up to Storyteller discretion)

RITES

\_Rite of Cleansing\_

This rite purifies a person, place or object, allowing it to be used without fear of Wyrm-taint. The most common form of this rite involves the ritemaster inscribing a circle on the earth, walking counterclockwise around the afflicted person(s) or object(s) while holding a smoldering branch or torch. She must use a branch (preferably willow or birch) dipped in pure water or snow to sprinkle the object or person cleansed. As the ritemaster does so, all Garou present release an eerie, otherworldly howl in an attempt to frighten away the corrupting influence. Ideally, this rite is performed at dawn, but may function at any time.

\*\*System\*\*:[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Rite:\_Cleansing?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")

This rite can be cast upon more than one person or object, but the ritemaster must spend one Gnosis point on each extra thing in need of cleansing. Only one success is required. The difficulty level depends on the level of taint. For instance, taint caused by a spirit might carry a difficulty of the spirit’s Gnosis. If the rite is performed at dawn, the difficulty decreases by one. This rite cannot heal wounds or damage caused by Wyrm-taint — it only removes the spiritual contamination itself. This rite cannot cleanse taint of the most innate sort, either, instead inflicting agony when performed upon a fomori, vampire, unrepentant Black Spiral Dancer or other similarly corrupt being.

Source: Werewolf the Apocalypse 20th

\_Baptism of Fire\_

Most tribes attempt to track down all children born to their Kinfolk within one month of the children's birth to see if they "share the blood". Those who are Garou are "baptized" in the light of their auspice moon, beside a rite fire. Such a baptism most commonly involves mingling ashes with a few drops of Garou blood; the mixture is then touched to the child's ears, nose, eyelids, and tongue.

In the presence of one the lesser tribal spirits, known as a Kin-Fetch, the babe is then held up to the moonlight while the baptizing Garou howls Gaia's greeting to the newborn. The ritemaster then has the Kin-Fetch kiss the infant. The spirit's fiery kiss inscribes a spiritual brand upon the babe in the form of the newborn's tribal pictograph. This mark is not visible on the newborn's body; the only mark left is spiritual. It is impossible to remove this spiritual brand. Such a mark can be traced and recognized by all Garou (including Black Spiral Dancers, who all too often track down cubs of other tribes and capture them in order to create more of the foul number).

The participating Kin-Fetch spirit is assigned to watch over the young Garou as she grows to maturity, so that the tribe may always know the child's location and whether she is endangered. When the child is about to undergo the First Change and is ready for the Rite of Passage, the spirit alerts the tribe. Unfortunately, such minor spirits are notoriously weak-willed and easily distracted. All too often a Kin-Fetch loses track of its charge or becomes lost itself, leaving the young cub on her own. Such "lost cubs," unless they are miraculously picked up by a tribe upon their First Change, often become Lunatics or recluses, terrified of themselves and unable to understand their powerful primal urges.

\*\*System\*\*:[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Rite:\_Baptism\_of\_Fire?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")

The ritemaster makes a Charisma + Rituals roll (difficulty 6). Only one success is required, but additional successes improve the chance that the Kin-Fetch will keep track of the child. This rite must be performed at night under the moon in which the child was born. Although this rite is normally performed within a month of birth, the brand can be inscribed at any time before the cub reaches adolescence and undergoes her First Change.

Source: Werewolf the Apocalypse

\_Rite of Talisman Dedication\_

This rite allows a Garou to bind objects to her body, allowing these objects to fit the Garou's various forms (jeans will grow to accommodate the size increase of the Crinos form, etc.) and accompany the Garou into the Umbra. Such talismans are most commonly mundane items, for spiritual items such as fetishes and talens automatically remain with the Garou in all forms. A Garou most often performs this rite during the phase of the moon under which he was born. Each auspice has its own peculiar ritual.

\*\*System\*\*[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Rite:\_Talisman\_Dedication?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")\*\*:\*\*

The cost is one Gnosis point per object dedicated, and a Garou may never have more objects bound to himself than his Gnosis score. Certain particularly large objects (Storyteller's discretion) are considered more than one of the purpose of "cost". For the purposes of Dedication, an entire set of clothing is considered one item.

The Storyteller and the player should decide what happens to the object when the character assumes certain forms. For example, when the character assumes Crinos form, her backpack's straps may simply grow to fit around her shoulders (although the pack still cannot hold more items than normal). When the character is in Hispo form, her knife may meld with her body. In such cases, the object will appear as a tattoo; others must spend a Willpower point to remove the object from the character.

Note on Dedicated Items: A full set of clothing (top, bottom, undergarments, shoes, socks, coats, and so on) counts as one item. The idea here is that if you don't intend to use it in another form (glabro being the exception, since it can use most human items normally), the item counts as part of a character's 'full set'.

Additional accessories count as additional items. A weapon is one item (including a loaded gun). An additional clip of bullets is one item. A holstered weapon can be dedicated as part of the note full set of clothing, but if this is the case, it can not be recovered when a character shifts, and is only available in non-wolf forms. Items in pockets are likewise unavailable in any other form, but do not take extra dots of Gnosis.

Source: Werewolf the Apocalypse

\_Moot Rite\_

This rite is required to open any sort of moot. At such moots, the caerns of the Garou are recharged with Gnosis. The rite always includes a prolonged howl led by a Garou known as the Master of the Howl. The howl varies by tribe and sept, but always expresses the unique nature of the sept. All Garou involved must form a circle within the caern itself before they commence howling.

\*\*System\*\*:

The rite must be performed at least once per month to keep a caern consecrated. During the course of a moot, the participants must empower the caern with five Gnosis points per caern level in order to replenish it fully.

Source: Werewolf the Apocalypse

\_Last Blessing\_

The mere existence of metis threatens the Veil, as they are born and die in Crinos form. This blessing is given to a dying or just-deceased metis by the ritemaster. It ensures that the corpse will assume the natural form which the metis most preferred — human or wolf — arousing no suspicion. Many metis have received this rite with joy, seeing it as a sign of Gaia’s forgiveness.

\*\*System\*\*:

Standard roll. The ritemaster lays hands on the metis and chants the Song of the True Form, then spends one Gnosis point. The metis’s body changes to Homid or Lupus form, and the change is permanent. This rite must be performed within an hour of death, and has no effect on a live metis.

\_Right of Becoming\_

Werewolves must perform this rite at an Anchorhead Domain. Once completed, it enables them to travel into the Deep Umbra. The most common version of this rite requires the Garou to make a braid from three of her hairs, three pieces of fine copper wire, and three tendrils of ivy or other vine. Lengths of silk thread are sometimes substituted for the hair or wire. When the braid has been constructed, the Garou ties it around his own wrist and howls three words of power.

\*\*System\*\*:

If the braid is destroyed while the Garou is in the Deep Umbra, the werewolf takes one level of aggravated damage and risks becoming lost forever if she doesn’t return quickly to the Near Umbra.

\_Rite of the Loyal Pack\_

A leader needs respect from those that follow him if he (and they) wish to succeed. Usually, only packs that have been working together for some time and who trust each other enough to further cement those bonds perform this rite.

The rite makes the whole pack's focus and commitment dependent on the pack alpha. In effect, they submit completely to him, in the hope of gaining an advantage from his commitment to working for the benefit of all. Each member of the pack must take a small item of personal significance and a length of his or her own hair and give it to the ritemaster. She then binds together all the objects using the hairs and buries the bundle within the pack's home caern.

\*\*System\*\*:

The ritemaster’s player rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 9 minus the pack alpha's Leadership). If the roll succeeds, the entire pack gains two extra points of Willpower at the beginning of each session as long as the pack alpha is acting in the best interests of the whole pack. (Note that this cannot put a character over their maximum Willpower.) However, if the alpha has not been acting in the pack’s interests, the entire pack loses two points of Willpower at the beginning of each session. The gain or loss is entirely at the Storyteller's discretion. Should the pack alpha change, the rite's effects immediately end.

\_Rite of the Totem\_

This rite binds a totem to a group of Garou. It is most often performed during the formation of a pack. During this rite, all Garou who wish to bind their destinies to a particular totem spirit must coat their eyes with an infusion of saliva and mugwort (or another substance holy to Gaia) and step sideways into the Umbra. In the spirit Realms, the ritemaster leads the Garou in a hunt for the spiritual spoor left by a totem spirit. Such evidence varies with the spirit, but is always found by Garou worthy of the totem's attention. Even tracking down the spirit does not guarantee success, for the totem must decide whether the Garou are worthy to become its fosterlings. An undecided totem may require a quest of the supplicants, though this is almost never required if the pack has just successfully completed a Rite of Passage.

\*\*System\*\*[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Rite:\_Totem?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")\*\*:\*\*

Characters must purchase the Totem Background to benefit from this rite. Otherwise, the rite is simply not performed. However, as each pack member gets 1 Totem point per rank they hold, it is possible to undergo the Rite of the Totem without purchasing the Totem Background.

Source: Werewolf the Apocalypse

\_Rite of the Opened Sky\_

By sacrificing something of personal value and dancing a complex rain dance, the ritemaster can beckon great, purifying showers of rain to fall from the skies. This rain cleanses all Wyrm impurities, and can even heal wounds.

\*\*System\*\*:[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Rite:\_Opened\_Sky?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")

This rite works in much the same way as the Rite of Cleansing, but can encompass an entire caern and those within it. The ritemaster expends only one point of Gnosis to cleanse an area, but for every two additional points he spends, every character within the caern heals one level of damage — even aggravated damage. The difficulty of this rite depends on the level of taint, such as a tainted spirit’s Gnosis rating. Like the Rite of Cleansing, the difficulty of this rite can also be lowered by one if performed at dawn. Beings of the Wyrm and vampires suffer excruciating pain if exposed to this rite, though they are not cleansed or genuinely damaged. To use this rite outside a caern, the ritemaster must spend ten points of Gnosis — a feat only the most potent ritemasters of the Garou are capable of.

Source: Werewolf 20th

\_Rite of Caern Building\_

This powerful rite creates a caern, a permanent area where the spirit world and the physical world touch. Simply reciting the rite draws the attention of the Wyrm's servitors, and actually performing the rite has been known to prove fatal. Only the most powerful and wise mystics dare lead such an undertaking.

A power Theurge is almost always selected to perform this most sacred of rites. Many Garou must channel their energy through a powerful leader to have even a hope of success. Whole packs have been known to die in agony should the attempt fail.

Once the physical focus for the heart of the caern is chosen, the area must be cleansed of all taint in preparation for its transformation. All Garou participating in the rite must undergo a Rite of Cleansing.

The ritemaster performs a series of minor rituals, meditation, and other physical preliminaries to prepare for her awesome tasks.

Sentries must by posted (very often the players' characters), for servants of the Wyrm almost invariably attempt to disrupt such a great rite. Only the mightiest warriors are chosen for such an assignment, and their protection is critical to the success of the rite. The leader of the rite is helpless while he chants a long litany of verses designed to draw a great spirit into the prepared caern. Although it is possible to create a specific type of caern, most leaders leave this to Gaia and accept whatever caern she grants the sept.

Because an enormous amount of Gnosis is needed to create a new caern, a minimum of 13 Garou, one for each moon of the year, must participate in this rite. Regardless of the number of Garou aiding her, the ritemaster can only channel such a power stream of Gnosis through her system once per hour. The rite must performed at night. This means that in most places and at most times of the year, the ritemaster has only eight rolls (one per hour) to accomplish her task. This makes success fairly unlikely.

If, indeed, the rite does fail, all involved suffer five wounds. These are not aggravated, but are very painful and always leave small teardrop-shaped scars scattered across the Garou's body. Such scars are considered marks of bravery , and these "Tears of Gaia" are often highlighted by tattoos or paint and worn with pride by the Garou. The Garou say the scars are the result of Gaia crying out for her children's pain.

Time: The rite must be performed between the hours of sunset and sunrise during the waxing of the moon. Only the Black Spiral Dancers create caerns during the moon's waning.

\*\*System\*\*[](https://darkforcesmush.fandom.com/wiki/Rite:\_Caern\_Building?veaction=edit&section=2 "Edit section: System")

The rite requires an extended roll of Wits + Rituals, though the leader may only use as many dice as she Gnosis. The difficulty is always 8, and 40 successes are needed. Only one roll can be attempted per hour of the ritual.

Once the leader scores the required number of successes, all those involved in the rite must contribute Gnosis points - 100 are needed. If the total Gnosis available is not 100, all those participating in the rite begin to suffer aggravated wounds. Each wound counts as three more Gnosis points toward the total.

Botches during this rite are particularly deadly. All characters involved suffer seven Health Levels of damage, which means that even a Garou previously at full health becomes Incapacitated. Those Garou reduced to below Incapacitated must roll on the Battle Scars table, adding one die to the roll.

If the minimum number of success is rolled (40), the caern is ranked Level One. The Gauntlet of such an area is 4, and the spirits bound into the caern will grant powers approximately equal to Level One Gifts. Every five additional successes raises the level of the caern by one, correspondingly raising the magnitude of the powers the caern grants. At Level Three the Gauntlet of the area is 3, while at Level Five it is but 2. Immediately upon the rite's successful completion, the ritemaster must sacrifice a number of permanent Gnosis points equal to the level of the caern.

If a player's character should somehow assume the role of ritemaster and succeed, she receives three points of Glory, five points of Honor and seven points of Wisdom. Anyone else participating in the rite receives five points of Glory and three points of Honor. This is a legendary task and should be suitably rewarded.

Source: Werewolf the Apocalypse

\*\*Merits and Flaws\*\*

(these differ from the sheet, storyteller may insist an any they choose, but if they have no preference, I’ll be using the notes)

\_Animal Magnetism\_\_: 1 point Merit\_

You are especially attractive to others. You receive a - 2 to your difficulty on Seduction or Subterfuge rolls.

\_Metamorph:\_ \_6 Point Merit\_

You find it extremely easy to change forms and can do it even in your sleep. You do not need to roll to shift forms (you are considered to have an automatic five successes); nor do you need to spend a Rage point to instantly assume a desired form. In addition, if you are ever knocked unconscious (due to wounds, etc.), you can make a roll of Wits + Primal-Urge, difficulty 8, to assume whatever form you wish instead of reverting to your breed form.

\_Mixed Morph:\_ \_1 Point Merit\_

It is easy for you to transform certain body parts only, such as a hand to a claw while you remain in Homid form or changing your Lupus vocal cords into a human voice box. Your difficulty for such changes is only a 6.

\_Immune to Wyrm Emanations:\_ \_6 Point Merit\_

You have a special boon from Gaia: You are immune to the toxins of the Wyrm. You receive no penalty from supernatural radiation, balefire, Wyrm elementals and the like (although you still suffer damage from such attacks). Likewise, you are immune to Bane possession. Your sept recognizes this invulnerability and thrusts you into many dangerous perils with the expectation that you will use your immunity for the good of others.

\_Daredevil:\_ \_3 point Merit\_

You are good at taking risks, and are even better at surviving them. All difficulties are - 1 whenever you try something particularly dangerous, and you can ignore one botch result when you roll "ones" on such actions (you can cancel a single "one" that is rolled, as if you have an extra success).

\_Nemesis: 5 point flaw\_

You have an enemy, or perhaps a group of enemies. Someone wants to harm you. The value of the Flaw determines how powerful these enemies are. The most powerful enemies (kings or elder vampires) would be five-point Flaws, while someone nearer to your own power would be worth only one point. You must decide who your enemy is and how you earned such enmity in the first place.

\_Nightmares:\_ \_1 point Flaw\_

You experience horrendous nightmares every time you sleep, and memories of them haunt you during your waking hours. Sometimes the nightmares are so bad they cause you to lose one die on all your actions for the next night (Storyteller's discretion). Some of the nightmares may be so intense that you mistake them for reality. A crafty Storyteller will be quick to take advantage of this.

\_Lifesaver:\_ \_3 point Flaw\_

You believe that human life is a sacred gift, and will not take a person's life except in the most extreme of circumstances. You may not ever willingly endanger the lives of innocents or in any way participate in a killing. You have no problems with killing animals (for the right reasons), and will kill evil and inhuman creatures to protect others if necessary. (Be very careful, however, with your definition of "evil"....) Senseless death in all forms repulses you, and you feel that those who commit murder should be punished.

\_Hunted\_: 3 point Flaw\_

You are pursued by a fanatical werewolf hunter who believes you are a dangerous, slavering beast inimical to humanity (whether you are or not). All your companions may be hunted by the same individual as well. Although this hunter seeks the destruction of all Garou, there is something about you that impassions this killer. The hunter is, for some reason, immune to the Delirium.

\_Urban Bound: 2 point Flaw (reverse of Nature Bound)\_

Legends are full of incidents concerning the connection to nature and strength; this Flaw represents the negative side of that link. Characters with this Flaw take their strength from contact with urban environments, and weaken when removed from it. In game terms, characters are at no penalty when in urban surroundings, yet subtract one die from all actions when in natural settings. For purposes of this Flaw, cities, wastelands and the like are considered urban.

\_Notoriety\_\_: 3 point Flaw\_

You have a bad reputation among your peers; perhaps you violated the protocols once too often, or belong to an unpopular freehold, pack, etc. There is a two dice penalty to all dice rolls for social dealings with associated peers (specifically Elder Garou).

\*\*Allies\*\*

Billy-Jo McAllister, Acme Guns Corp, CA, NM, NV

Marcus, escapee (Las Vegas, NV)

Libra, escapee (Reno, Nevada)

Kobiyashi Maru, Arms Dealer (global)

Sobek (Mokole), Southern Louisiana

Astrid Brightflame (Get of Fenris), Southern Louisiana

Mistress Ion Ching (Ananasi), Southern Louisiana

\*\*Contacts\*\*

Jake From State Farm (Fight Promoter), Phoenix AZ Area

Selena,(counterfitter), West Coast Ninkyō Dantai (Yakuza)

Emilio (Underboss),Phoenix AZ Area Latin Kings

Damien Black (Underworld Boss), Tokyo, Japan

Carmilla Carmine (Black Furies leader, Augusta, Georgia