

Author's (unedited) Note (mostly for judges)

Dear Summer Leagues Community,

While I got off to an extremely strong start on my audition and overall storyline for the Summer Leagues 2024 OCT, things took a rough turn around a month ago. My inability to deal with personal issues caused my writing pace to tank, and those issues have not been totally cleared up yet. This has left me with only a rough draft of an audition ready for submission. Instead of attempting to just fit in more time to edit something that will ultimately feel unfinished days before the deadline, I am “ripping off the band-aid” and turning the draft in to get this weight off of my shoulders and focus on the next round. As a result this work will read in an unfinished manner and is not an example of my best work. This is not a request to go easy on this paper, this is simply an explanation as to why its quality is subpar.

Nevertheless, I still want to compete and to try again. Even if the chances of success are diminished, I still want to try. For years, I have attempted to participate in OCTs only to be cut back due to a sloppy work ethic, but those issues are behind me now. This is an opportunity to compete in the first OCT that brought me into this community, to create good art, and to be a better person that I was yesterday.

In addition, thanks goes out to DJ Napstablook92, Swanpy/Fena Ford, Cap, and Kat Purseteeth for working as beta readers and of course, Vashle and Minty for organizing the Summer Leagues

It is a high honor to be working among you, after wishing to compete for years.

And remember, finished, not perfect!

Kind Thanks and Regards for Excellence,

Oki!

At the moment there is only darkness, accented by the softest violet glow. To the soldiers who wait in it, darkness is a tool, for they know it only to be the absence of light. Nothing more. Seemingly formless things can be manipulated to perform any task. That rings true for everything in this era after all.

Outside the darkness, Crossguards move to their positions with particular haste. This is the product of a dearly urgent situation. Shouts, murmurs, and footsteps become the synthesis of each's life intertwined with unfaltering obedience to their caretaker, the God Eater. When these wardens meet their end, it will hopefully be with satisfaction.

From the darkness it begins. The telltale sounds of violence descend upon a room outside of the fireteam's refuge. By definition, a cacophony thanks to its thunderous volume and erratic nature, but the noise was never supposed to be music. This is not an artful massacre nor a display of wrathful superiority. This is necessary.

A voice of command from beyond calls. The soldiers leap out of the darkness into a steel room where generators loom over grated pathways. Nearby, a group of Crossguards and three distinct figures engage with five allies whose black armor is highlighted with runes blazing violet. In they come to aid the fight.

A wave of bullets and ordnance scatter the opposition. A rat-like humanoid, the Rat King, attempts to seize an opening, but a ball of fire from a small humanoid soldier singes his fur. He retreats from the fight, prioritizing his survival. The soldier has no such weakness. A fragment of a second passes. The soldier finds her next target. Saki, the bartender. Creating two successive bursts of air, she launches herself toward Saki's flank. Whilst Saki is locked in combat with a behemoth soldier, her halberd's white edge rips through Saki's heel, corroding the surrounding

muscle. The soldier's ally sends the undefended Saki unconscious with a single body blow. A gust of wind nearly knocks her off her feet. She knows who it is and she knows what to do. As Rakurai begins to shift her form, a flurry of monochrome lotuses and bullets maims her clothing, her flesh, and her capabilities. The wind dies down, taking Rakurai's posture with it. A different soldier with dagger and buckler blinks on top of her unconscious body just a moment too late as she is dragged out of the fight via a portal in the floor. The fight is finished. The soldier will proceed.

She relocates to the building's peak, a tower set over the windmills of the Dragon's Post. Dusk rolls over the Crossroads, moments before nightfall. Buildings of red and white mortar decorate the earth. Each is filled with warm lights. They burn amber amongst the deep blue landscape. A haven amongst a cold void. A benevolent offering by its patron. Whilst the sun shifts beneath the horizon, darkness settles around the Crossroads, then within the city as its windmills shut down. Only the lanterns retain their flame.

A different kind of light takes hold. Its priority governs higher causes. For eternity it shall influence souls infinite in number and of every color. Thus, it uses its authority where necessary to accomplish its goals. As do its soldiers. As does she.

The soldier will accomplish her goal by any means necessary.

Tonight, a violet blaze incinerates the darkness.

Beneath her mask, the flames reflect in the soldier's black sclera.

Tonight, God-Eater has been struck down.

The fire is beautiful. The fire is pure. She must be the fire.

Tonight, the Crossroads burn.

There are no gods anymore,
only fools.

Blood Lotus

Entry to the 2024 Summer Leagues OCT

By: Oki!

Prologue : Audition

Part 1 – The Heretic

Tonight, the sky is bright white. A woman finds herself in a familiar, yet perpetually alien landscape, where the light of a white sun glistens upon a concrete plane whose expanse is incomprehensible. Where there should be trees, jagged rectangular poles of concrete pierce the ground. Where there should be mountains, the ground rises not gradually but erratically at completely vertical angles. Even the water looks dead compared to its natural appearance, being a brackish substance with a charcoal color. Neither sickening to drink nor nourishing. Its thick appearance and how it stains reminds her of blood. The woman stands up, her eye catching the closest thing to flora in this void, being lotuses floating down the streams. Their razor-sharp petals alternate between colors of black and white. Only the water manages to stain them, nothing else. This lotus's stream leads to the doors of a building, a masterwork of crude architecture, composed of the same concrete blocks that compose the landscape in a slightly different shade of gray. Walking forward, the woman hears a distinct sound, a choir of angels. Outside the doors, she wipes her feet stained with bloody water. The woman enters the church, ready to meet Maduabuchi.

Her mentor is confessing.

“My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good...”

The other, praying woman kneels at a pew in the front. If it were not for her voice, Maduabuchi would be impossible to locate. Her cloak engulfs her entire body and is the same color as everything here, causing her to blend into the environment like some sort of ghost.

“I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things...”

She is surrounded by typical imagery of the old faith. It still follows the aesthetic of the landscape. Faces and bodies are simplified into dozens of rectangular prisms, and their gaze...

“I firmly intend with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.”

Despite their eyes being depicted as mere slits, they seem to follow her as she walks down the aisle toward the altar, toward a pillar of warm light radiating from a hole in the ceiling. One where individual strands of energy unite with one another to form a cohesive, beautiful image.

“Our savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.”

She almost pauses, as if to accept the light as a gift, but there are higher priorities at the moment. The woman turns right and checks the seat for any dust. It is immaculate. She moves over and sits down, waiting for Maduabuchi to finish.

“In his name, my God, have mercy on us fools.”

Maduabuchi stops, sits up, and turns around.

“Heyyy Maduabuchi!” she jumps into Maduabuchi’s arms to hug her, “I’m going to ask a question. You okay with that?”

She warmly agrees and reciprocates the embrace, “I don’t see why not Banafsaj.”

“Why are you still Catholic?”

“Why haven’t you asked sooner?” Maduabuchi chuckles, and leans back, crossing one of her legs over the other, “after years spent with me, why is it now you ask why I’m one of the two-hundred-thousand remaining worshippers of a dead faith?”

Banafsaj pauses to contemplate, “curiosity?” She seems uncomfortable with her answer.

“You, the Banafsaj Safi, acting on her dirty, filthy, oh-so detestable human instincts rather than the virtue she values so dearly?”

“Yeah, I know,” she draws back, “I know already. Banafsaj Safi indulges in her emotional impulses for the first time in the century, a monumental historical event!” She speaks with clarity, “purity means keeping indulgences to an absolute minimum. Denying them dooms the soul to insanity. This. This is the path to excellence.” Banafsaj leans in again, her tone lightening, “Now spill, out of all the things you could be doing with your infinite time in this brutalist mindscape, why waste it participating in a dead faith?”

“A few reasons Banafsaj.”

“Yes?” she smiles.

“First, I was forced into it.”

“Cruel.”

“A mercy. A fair and effective punishment for my hubris. Instead of being trapped in a flaming tomb, submerged in boiling blood, or forced to wander a white labyrinth for all eternity, they simply sought that I learn to submit to a moral authority. Many have suffered worse for less.”

“The second?”

“I’m happier.”

“How did you do it?”

“Not by myself. It was ultimately the personal connection between me and God that gave me such power. Regardless of if they are real, loving connections are forces of impeccable magnitude. When I hit rock bottom it provided the strength and emotional fulfillment necessary to save myself, strength and fulfillment I never had after the fall of the tower and ultimately myself.”

“That is...” her white irises break their gaze with Maduabuchi, “too much for a woman like me.” Banafsaj sulks.

“Dear Banafsaj,” a short sigh emanates from the shade Maduabuchi’s hood casts, “your dedication to your work need not interfere with exploring other aspects of living.”

She refocuses her gaze, “but you constantly remark how my dedication is a source of strength!”

“It’s a weakness too, and a deadly one let me tell you. Most psychological traits are,” Maduabuchi explains to Banafsaj. “I’m sure you’ve heard the saying before, that the world is neither black nor white but merely shades of gray.”

“I have relied upon this trait for my entire life, must I abandon it now?”

“No, no, please Banafsaj-“

Banafsaj strikes the pew with her fist, “then how must I circumvent this issue! Kindly, Maduabuchi, if you have the wisdom, provide it so I do not fall to corruption and become another source of suffering!”

“Banafsaj, please don’t overreact. You’ve been living with the consequences of your best traits for four decades, and you turned out beautiful.”

She pouts, “I just got real lucky...”

“I did too Banafsaj. Everyone does.”

She shoves the topic aside, “so... you have advice?”

“No. You’ll have to look to others for that,” Banafsaj knows Maduabuchi has some sort of a smile underneath that hood, “simple as.”

“But you-”

“Look to others. Need I say more?”

“No Maduabuchi.”

“Excellent,” she stands, revealing her full form. A simple gray hooded cloak that forms well around her body bound in black belts, partially accentuating the muscular physique of Maduabuchi. Her hands are covered with gloves of a lighter shade, and her face is obscured by a perpetual shadow cast through the cloak. Only one item is on her person. A brick inscribed with the silhouette of a beheaded lion, bound to her hip with some cord.

She asks Banafsaj, “ready to wake up?” handing her a sword and motioning toward a small pool recently formed in the center aisle.

Banafsaj responds, “yes.” If there was by some means any hesitation left in her tone, it has all burned away. Her hand embraces the weapon. Once the pew is abandoned by Banafsaj, she strides over to the main aisle. Murky waters fade to reveal a clear, reflective surface where her reflection becomes visible. Both step in from opposite ends of the pool. The Church’s floor falls wayside to an endless abyss of the same colorless liquid composing the pool. With impious focus, Banafsaj looks at her adversary in her two-hued eyes. They brace for the coming clash.

After an extended stalemate, Banafsaj spots an opening and drives the tip of her blade through the reflection’s head. The same wound opens in Banafsaj. After both collapse to the ground, they begin to be consumed by the “sea”. Expeditiously, blood pours out from the head of Banafsaj. The water becomes a different shade due to its presence, a familiar shade. Brackish gray. The wound only worsens, as the slit spiderwebs out to Banafsaj’s head, breast, torso, and her limbs. More and more blood is spilt until her vision fills with a night thicker than pitch and darker than a winter’s solstice. She can see, just barely, razor lotuses untainted by the water coming into bloom, whose immaculate petals glean black and white amidst a sea of placid gray. Whether they bloom in spite of or because of the waters, she cannot determine.

Part 2 – The Goddess

Tonight, the city outside is filled to the brim with warmth and people as preparations are underway for the Cross Tournament. At the peak of the Fox Den, two women meet for a second time. The soldier is not dressed in her usual attire, revealing her civilian appearance. She sits up, independent of the seat's backboard, maintaining crossed arms. A smile is paired with a stern glare. The goddess sits opposite her, leaning back with a smirk on her face and the slightest tremble in her foot. The soldier has skin the color of burnt honey, while the Goddess' resembles fresh peaches. One has ashy black hair with alabaster highlights in a long ponytail, the other a pale porcelain updo parted into nine segments. Both carry flowers in their hair, a crimson lotus and a magenta pseudocodon respectively. Their eyes differ too. A pair with inverted colors of a black sclera and white iris, and a "normal" pair with irises resembling the sunset. The soldier no longer has her armor to conceal her, so instead she chooses an ivory-hued suit and tie with an ebony oxford, slacks, and dress shoes to pair. The goddesses' is more complex. A scarf and cloth beneath her breast reach past her loins coated in a gradient extending from fuchsia to flame. The rest of her torso and a single leg are covered with fine black silk. As for her shoes, pink platform heels. The most glaring feature about her though are the nine tails that dance behind her, marked with a red circle surrounding a single golden dot. The mark of the God-Eater.

They get to talking.

"So... who's this one?"

"Oh, introductions! I am Banafsaj Safi, madam God-Eater!" she grins, extending her hand. The God-Eater pauses for a short while before accepting it, and gingerly remarks, "you

already know my name? That's an interesting detail~" she pulls back into her seat, "but I probably should have expected such a thing. Considering what you did, you know about my secret, yes Safi?"

"Yes Chiifu. Sorry if that makes you uncomfortable, but that's just how I am!"

She breathes a sigh of relief, and speaks with newfound levity, as if a weight has been lifted from her shoulders, "Interesting~ Then could I provide you with the pleasure of a drink before we begin?" She retrieves a bottle of liquor from a nearby cabinet and two shot glasses.

"Nope."

"Come on~ you mortals only get so many years," the God-Eater turns to Banafsaj as she reclaims her seat, finding irritability painted over the human's face, "experience the joys of life. Live a little!" She empties some of the dark fluid into one glass.

Her tone shifts, "I am living, as you requested, by not poisoning my body."

"Ohohoho! Harsh for a seemingly jovial woman like you~"

"It's a distraction from what's important."

"And what would that be?"

"Doing my duty."

"Oh, speaking of your duty and whatnot," she recalls and takes a sip of her drink whilst Banafsaj scoffs, "the purpose of our meeting. My agenda. I danced around that topic, yes?"

Banafsaj nods. “If you explain, I will work with your requests to the absolute best of my ability. You can be assured of that!” her tone reverts and she sits in a cross-legged position upon the chair. “But only if you fulfill my request.”

“And that is?”

“The freedom of the soldiers captured during the Crossroads incursion. Twenty-two of my allies remain under your hold. A deal can be negotiated if need be.”

“I’ll think about it, Banafsaj~” she takes another sip.

“Think about it? This is important. Give me a definitive answer.”

“Nope~ Give me what I want first traveler, and maybe then I’ll grant your request.”

“If you insist. Shoot.”

“So, around a year ago I caught wind from my divine eyes and loyal Crossguards. There are infiltrators planning to attack the Fox Den VIP room for unknown reasons 11 months from now. The force is formidable, but not enough to threaten the sanctity of the Crossroads. It would do better as a test of its residents’ capabilities. Something to keep them on their toes, y’know! I don’t investigate, wanting to see a good show, a good fight! But then it happened.”

The God-Eater’s eyes widen, and she sighs

“Everything seems to be in place. The Crossguards have finished their investigation without my assistance and are ready for the attack. They bring along combat-capable residents, travelers, and even previous competitors, and are winning a fight with one of the three identified opposing squads. It lasts five minutes. The substitute bartender hands me a drink, and I

immediately fall to the floor, finding my conscious half-dead as unexpected teams of enemy soldiers swarm the Fox Den. Before I can summon the power to wipe away the problem, the ground beneath me opens up as any remaining awareness drains from my body. Four hours later I wake up to find the Crossroads in unpredicted chaos, yet the only damage done to the VIP room is but a single odd crystal I that refuses to exist in the rest of my dimensions. The power has gone out, half of my Crossguard forces are either injured or dead along with most of the volunteer force, and my body aches for the first time in centuries,” she finishes her sentence, still shaking as she looks Banafsaj in her eyes. Whether there is contempt or remorse in her black eyes is impossible to tell. The Goddess downs the rest of her drink and continues speaking, “fixing the problem is fortunately simple. Not perfect, but it works. I wipe the memories away, reconstruct the buildings, mend wounds, and within a minute all is well again, excluding a few missteps just for the fun of it. At least, all is well in the Crossroads.”

“You want answers?”

“Yes, so the sanctity of this domain and others cannot face a threat like that ever again. So that my role as a servant and ruler of the Crossroads cannot be burned away.”

“Absolutely! So...” she asks, practically bouncing in her seat, “What is it specifically you want to know? I am an open book for you tonight.”

The God-Eater remarks with relief, “Great... Let’s start with the boring crap first. Where do you come from? It is certainly not a domain I have any jurisdiction over.”

“A dimension outside of this multiverse.”

“There’s more?”

“Yup. This multiverse is ultimately a single dimension part of a larger multiverse. A major dimension, that’s the official term.”

“Bullshit.”

“Yeah, a bunch of bullshit, but that’s how it is. Only a small group of major dimensions have managed to breach these barriers whose interaction resulted in massive societal developments on all levels. Eventually they discovered the existence of unusual non-replicable fragments scattered the multiverse that-“

“Grant infinite power?”

“No.”

“Now that’s something new. Tell me more~”

“Absolute clarity of mind.”

“And that means?”

“It allows sentient beings to achieve a higher state of consciousness where they receive significantly increased intelligence and self-control.”

“And how powerful does that make them?”

“Exceptionally. Above our gods even. Their mental aptitude reaches unseen levels. Those who become integrated with fragments display all the best possible traits with none of the downsides. They become exceptionally charismatic, strategic, kind,” she speaks whilst counting on her fingers, “and attain every other desirable psychological aspect. Integration into the

government usually results in substantial improvements to those they lead on every level achieved only once in a blue moon. Socioeconomic equality sees a high increase, the arts see more attention, people tend to be more friendly, the economy sees substantial growth, productivity increases... Incredible. A miracle beyond divinity. And more fragments collected means more people to lead.”

“Hmmm...” the God-Eater has to halt before thinking of a response, a cold void filling the space in between her words, “a strong character motive!” She giggles and places her right hand to partially obscure her mouth, “but I’ve seen better.”

“You have seen nothing.”

“Next question~” Banafsaj sighs. The God-Eater has herself a chuckle. “Is everyone just on board with raiding other dimensions for fragments?”

“No. Many dimensions did not want to use the fragments for fear of power turning into corruption, or did not trust anyone but a specific group to put them to proper use. They splintered into factions and have been at war for the past few centuries.”

A scoff, “you could’ve just asked! I’d happily give it to you so long as you won a tournament!”

“That’s the problem.”

“A problem for soldiers of your caliber?”

“We’re ambush fighters, not gladiators. In fair, individual engagements we struggle greatly. Raiding the Crossroads was more resource-intensive, but safer and necessary to get ahead in the war. Every fragment means more leaders and a greater advantage.”

“So, what makes you unique enough to be the ones conducting this incursion? In other words,” the God-Eater’s tail taps Banafsaj’s torso, “why are you a soldier?”

“I am an anomaly.”

“Ah, you're special! I bet you have a tragic backstory to pair with your superpowers~”

“Yeah... but that is sensitive information.”

“Why not? It’s one of the things I like to avoid snooping in someone’s mind for! People are always the most entertaining when you have to unravel that mystery, piece by piece, dream by dream.”

“Sensitive information. Now I’ll continue.”

“Yeah but-”

“Do I make myself clear? I will continue as requested. You will listen.”

“Honey, you don’t have to be so abrasive,” the God-Eater teases as Banafsaj’s face flares up with embarrassment, “but maybe I like that. Carry on~”

“Fine,” she centers herself, “A multi-dimensional operative belonging to one of my faction’s military organizations, PARMA chose me for my unusual talents. Anomalous nature is a rare condition given at random to sentient beings, often ‘normal’ people, that allows them to

freely traverse through major dimensions and their subdimensions alike, along with granting other abilities to assist in their travels such as physical agelessness, multilingualism, and an ‘encyclopedia.’ There are only a few downsides, mainly being an exactly 200 years lifespan, an inability to receive wishes, plus other things. Portals are a well-understood technology, but are costly and time-intensive projects impractical for the distances that need to be traveled to reach these fragments.”

“So just to ensure all this is in order, this multiverse I hold domain over is just a single dimension part of a multiverse inaccessible to all but a few dimensions. Those dimensions are in a race against to obtain fragments to use them to appoint great leaders or destroy them and send anomalies to do the dirty work by shanking each other and the occasional unaware dimension?”

“Precisely!” Banafsaj beams.

“Another thing,” the God-Eater adjusts her position. “I have complete omnipresence in the Crossroads, and have successfully fended off multiple attacks. How was this successful? Why was I not aware of the full plan upon catching wind of it?”

“This wasn’t Michiko’s little stunt back when Rakurai and Taleus faced off, nor was it that one incident when every single competitor used their collective one-and-a-half braincells to attack you and demand a second wish. The ordeal was planned years in advance, and these sorts of operations are familiar to us. We have relations with multiple dimensions whose mortals actively fight and win against the gods that rule there. Fusing their resources and knowledge with that of other dimensions allows us to partially avoid the gaze of an omnipresent deity. The process is extremely complex, never truly foolproof, expensive, risky, and, outside of my field of expertise, but it allows us to do pull off these seemingly impossible missions.”

“But when it came time to lock swords, what pushed your team over the edge to win?”

“The element of surprise, a massive numbers advantage, bringing along tank-adjacent heavy weaponry, infiltrating the ranks of the Crossguards in advance, cutting the power, fighting at uncontestable ranges using firearms, being the superior trained team, possessing superior equipment... we had virtually every advantage.”

“Damn.”

“Can I make a deal now?”

“One last question traveler~”

“Fineeeee...”

“This is important!”

“Okay, okay. Hit me.”

The God-Eater’s leg is still trembling in spite of her cheery voice, “is the Crossroads in any further danger by these organizations?”

“Unless you piss off the wrong guy or another faction gets greedy and raids for resources, this dimension is completely safe. Infiltrations like ours only work if the deities present don’t try to investigate further. Be vigilant, and everyone will be safe. Our faction has a code of ethics, so we can guarantee there will be no attacks in the future. It does not matter what equipment an anomaly brings when they go up against an omnipotent being like yourself.”

“Good. Good,” she wipes a single bead of sweat off her brow, “then my proposal is ready.”

Banafsaj pumps her fist in the air, “yes! Boring exposition: over! Tell me then, tell me about your proposal!”

The God Eater speaks. “I have a remaining spot open for the Cross Tournament. Or one of them, that is. You may not be able to enjoy the reward of a wish, but emancipating prisoners requires none of my supernatural powers. Just a simple command. Win, and you are all free to go. Lose, and you need to wait until the next one. Until then the Crossroads is your home.”

Banafsaj’s grin decomposes into a softer smile. She stumbles over her words, twice, before asking, “but why? We pose no threat, and winning the war is paramount to securing a better future for everyone. I need to know if there are any other options so my soldiers can guarantee they can get back to fighting.”

“Mmmmm...” the God-Eater does not seem to have any thoughts despite what her body language might suggest, “yeah, no. Sorry but I’m afraid that’s my only option.”

“Nothing?”

“Yeah... no.”

“Then explain.”

“Making direct commands to a God? Fufufu~ You’re playing with fire here madame!”

“Do I stutter?” she inquires.

“Nope.”

“Then explain, Foxy~”

“Haha!” she slams her fist down on the table, “you’re not making it easier to get out of this situation. Now I just want to see more of you in the arena. Speaking of which, my reason for entering you into the tournament should be obvious to you who I am. Entertainment.”

Banafsaj counters, “there is no reason why I should have to explain how the war above you is a thousandfold more significant than your desire for entertainment.”

“But it’s a war!”

“So?”

“You have how many soldiers fighting in your faction, at least a few million?”

Banafsaj nods.

“There are twenty-two other soldiers currently in captivity, only a single drop in the lake of boiling blood that is your war.” A pale-skinned hand grasps the bottle of alcohol and refills a glass. “You should be satisfied with what you have, but you’re obsessing over the smallest things, looking so far ahead! I know types like you, many like you, people you know! Taleus, Vilivian, Senko. Men and women of cold steel. The workaholics.”

“Is there a problem with wanting to create something of value for posterity?”

“Undoubtedly. When that becomes your entire life and personality, issues arise from the depths of a dark soul~ Those ones struggle to appreciate the present, and are all the more miserable for it.”

“I am different.”

The Goddess breaks out into laughter once more, “different? No, you’re the same as they are! No friends. No fun. Only work, because you think that it will somehow make you worthy of someone’s love,” she drinks a bit more liquor, “but that’s not life honey. In fact, I bet you don’t even want love in a platonic, healthy sense. You just want the fame and the money, don’tcha? The awards, the feeling of superiority, your face eventually memorialized on paintings across schools as an adept leader.”

“Your assumptions are baseless and stupid, especially coming from a trickster deity and former kitsune, the most social of the bunch,” Banafsaj adjusts her posture, and locks her eyes with the God-Eater’s, black contrasting white, white contrasting orange. “What do you really know about me?”

“Not much, but I can make assumptions, and they are often correct. On a related note, what do you know about yourself?”

“I know what I fight for.”

“And that’s...”

“An end to the misery sentient are bound to,” she declares, “an end to the despots, an end to poverty, an end to injustice, an end to war, an end to exploitation, and an end to worldly

ignorance,” her voice only grows in power. “No more shall the innocents starve in the streets while the mighty up above get high and drunk. No further shall they slave away to produce useless luxuries. No longer shall we have to throw bodies into the fire to fuel the flames of war. The things sentients desperately attempt to escape, only to be dragged down by the limitations a soul brings, are purged through these fragments. This is a chance to do something of meaning rather than fade into the background as an ordinary, stale individual. It is a chance to do something pure and good, and a chance to return the favors fate gave to me.”

The God Eater pauses to process. “To the point where cities have to burn?”

“If it means putting an end to this suffering, so be it.”

She talks, firmly, “and what do you know of suffering?”

“More than you ever will. And what would you know of it either way?” she points at the God-Eater, her voice laced with razors. “It has been an eternity since your last meal, since you knew what struggle was like. It has been years since you have come into conflict with any physical, emotional, or ideologically challenges because no longer are there any more beings more powerful than you and no longer can any revolution become successful without your permission. Here you slouch,” Banafsaj scoffs, “content to drown yourself in entertainment, booze, and colosseum blood. Because-”

“But-“ the God-Eater regains hold of her voice, “are you sure this will work out over the long term?”

“The worst part. We cannot.”

“So, can you afford to wage this war? I mean-”

Bang.

A white-gloved fist smashes into the table. The shot glass trembles for a moment before the sound clears. The God-Eater looks at Banafsaj and she says, “CAN WE AFFORD NOT TO?” Burning is her gaze. “You have heard what I have said, and how all of those atrocities are cyclical. The fragments are liberation from the cycle. They are the catalyst for a new, prosperous era. If we are people who strive for good, then we cannot pass this opportunity, and will not let anyone, ANYONE stop us, much less you. We will let blood spill and bleed ourselves to allow a pure society to bloom,” she speaks, eyes flickering. “Are my words heard?”

“They certainly are...” her head tilts scantily downward, dragging a hand through her hair, before correcting her posture change, “Still, do not expect me to repeal my offer. I possess strength and knowledge beyond a simple human’s understanding.”

“You? Strong?” her laughter reverberates throughout the room as she remarks that the God Eater, “may be powerful, but not strong. We were born weak, but while you stole power, I bled for it.” Banafsaj snatches the envelope from the familiar’s maw and continues to explain, “when we were presented the opportunity to have everything anyone could ever desire, we made our respective choices and bound ourselves to two fates.” She pierces the seal as a white, ethereal tail with the God-Eater’s icon floats into the white-gloved hand. “This is where we differ. You chose to stop the suffering and simply “enjoy” life. I chose to fight for something greater.” Banafsaj pinches the tip of the tail, and drags it to the rear end of her head. “No one lives forever, even the gods. You are no different.” It snaps to the back, as if it were an extension of her hair. “Eventually your body will fade into the void, and so will your works.” The God-Eater looks

upon Banafsaj as she stands up, the lights behind her casting a shadow over the God-Eater. “The former of mine will, but the latter shall influence a virtually infinite number of dimensions for all eternity.” She gets out, pushes the chair back to its original position, and begins to walk toward the exit. “Our dimensions will spread and crush the snakes wherever they walk. That is the difference between you and I. You tease and boast of your power, forgetting in the end, only one of our lives is going to matter,” she opens the door, dwarfing the pair of Crossguards that stand at its opposite ends outside the room. Banafsaj steps outside, but not before turning around to say a final word. The God-Eater is helpless to do all but watch. “And you are none the wiser; in other words, a fool.” And the door closes.