

The Vision

Still reeling from what I had just heard I took a step back from the crystal, then promptly sat down. I could feel my legs about to give out from the sheer magnitude of what I had learned. Masks were magic, a spell ruled this reality, there was some big threat out there, aliens, and a vision. None of it explained how I got here though, but it offered clues.

“Saia, you heard all that right?”

“Feedback: Affirmative.”

“Any input?” I asked her.

“Feedback: The reasons for why some of this Unit’s engrams were no longer functioning are apparent now. The nature of Source Weave was altered. This explanation fits all the known parameters. If this was an effect that spread across all of reality, as the recorded being indicated, then it is possible that it also affected the Ke Erzi world. Though, my calculations suggest that to be unlikely.”

“Really? Why?”

“Feedback: You located this Unit on an isolated piece of Ke Erzi world. It is possible that only that section had somehow been obtained by this *Last Intent*. Additionally, the Host has implied that there was no Source Weave on your homeworld at all. Whatever event affected this world, it happened a long time in the past. The timeline does not match up with that of Ke Erzi, the Creators had access to Source Weave in a different form many cycles after the change happened in this place, if my estimate of the age of this ruin is correct.”

I frowned, then nodded slowly. “You know, that does pose a few good questions. If I was grabbed from my world by this spell, how was it accomplished? What if I wasn’t just picked up from another world, but a whole different reality?”

“Feedback: Recalculating. Probability high that both the Host’s and this Unit’s points of origin are different realities,” Saia reported.

“Not that it helps us much,” I sighed, then glanced up at the table and then the body next to it. It was large, taller than I was, and the wing bones large enough that it would probably have a big wingspan, a few meters across at least.

I climbed back to my feet and approached the crystal on the table. “What do you think?” I glanced at my wrist.

“Feedback: Memory recording engrams existed on Erzi. Some of which posed significant threat on use.”

“Yeah, but...” I glanced at the body on the ground. “Kolan Shukl, this message was left so long ago for someone to find. I know that I don’t owe it to anyone, it just feels wrong to ignore it.”

Saia didn’t respond. I was aware of the danger

“Are there ways for spells, engrams I guess, to take over someone’s mind? Could I get possessed here?” I asked.

“Feedback: Ke Erzi had never devised a way to achieve such a result. Damage to the mental capacity, introduction of memories, but no outright mind control. I must caution you that if what the message spoke is true, the people who had the ability to rewrite the rules of an entire reality might know something that not even the Ke Erzi had.”

Choices and risks, that was what seemed to be my life now. Ever since I came to this place I had been faces with danger and risks. Thrown into situations where I had to fight to survive another day. Finally I had some answers, and it felt wrong to ignore getting more of them. Besides, somehow I felt moved by the plea in the message. The tone it was spoken in was from someone who had been defeated, and had yet found a way to try and do something for someone who he never would have the chance to meet. A stranger, a friend from across time.

Here I stood, I didn't believe in fate, but perhaps I was brought here for a reason. I took a deep breath and put my hand on the crystal.

A shock ran through my arm and struck my mind, making everything go white.

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It started with the vision of space. I flew across the gulf in between the stars, tiny points of light flashing by my side. Until I came upon a world without oceans. I saw a gentle light surrounding the world, yellow and white it pulsed in rhythm. And then I was on the ground, a group of seven people around me. All of them were alien, winged people wearing elaborate suits that reminded me of what astronauts wore in works of science fiction, only married with fantasy. There were gemstones nestled in their suits that gave a soft glow that surrounded them.

I was looking from the point of view of one of them. I saw them walking through ruins of a grand city surrounded in a red haze. Everything was the same on this world. Even the sky was red, filled with storms so far up that it looked like an ocean churning above them. Far in the distance they could see a maelstrom of clouds, turning with lightning flashing, rising above the ruins of the city to touch the ruinous sky. Images speed through my mind quickly as they explored the destroyed city, almost like going through a dream. I could feel that something was wrong, I could see the people around me arguing, pointing at their weapons and gear. The magic wasn't working right. They moved through the ruins, seeing evidence of battle, long since dried blood painting the walls and ground. There were no bodies, until there were.

They came to a large building, an arch in a center of a massive square, and I felt ill. Thousands of spikes were lined around the building, and each held the dead, killed long ago. Their faces twisted into grimaces of agony, their bodies flayed of all skin, bones ripped out to resemble maws

reaching for the sky. It was torture, it was agony, it was death in the most brutal form there was. There were pens filled with prisoners, their bodies nothing but skin and bone. They cried out for release, they wished for death, but found only torture in it as their jailers, twisted shapes of grotesque beings, demons of putrid and rotting flesh, cast magic that visibly tore their souls out, captured them and twisted into grotesque forms that they then used to feed themselves. I heard the laughter of monsters and knew the expressions of ecstasy in their actions.

And there, near that building in the center, they saw more. Towering beings of twisted forms waited on by tiny scrambling demons that played with the bones of the dead. They were dressed in clothes made out of skin with faces still on them, symbols carved into it that leaked blood. They were terrible just to look at, I could feel it impact me in a visceral way, as if just by being in their presence I could feel them. They were monsters in all the pure meanings of the world. I saw death, and I heard cries of millions. I felt their pain and their suffering, the agony of a world. It disgusted me, and for the first time in my life, I felt a real visceral hate for something. For the first time I knew that Khalil was right, that good and evil did exist, and for the first time I prayed for the help of a righteous, wrathful, and vengeful God.

The monsters near the arch were doing something, casting some magic at the center of the arch. It was pulsing with red light, the space itself felt like it was tearing apart. The people around me started to argue, and the vision flashed. Now I was in the middle of fighting, I and the people around me were wielding terrible magic and making our way to the center. The arch pulsed and a gateway opened. Behind us drums echoed and an army spilled from the maelstrom of clouds in the distance, another marched into the square. We ran before them, going through.

We turned to light and again I flew across the stars, only to stop when I came upon a white-blue moon orbiting a jewel blue and green world. Then we were on the ground again, and fought the demons, the monsters. The people around me died as more joined us. We were in another city,

this one on the surface of the moon. I saw buildings razed and children crushed. Rising in the sky was the world filled with clouds, and oceans, and land. I saw hooks stabbed into the elderly and then skin pulled out. Magic, terrible magic filled everything around me.

The people around me argued again, until only two were left. We came to a decision, and I ran while a woman stayed. I reached another arch, this one defended by my own. I argued with them before moving through. I stumbled through the arch, the portal and hit the ground somewhere else. I turned my eyes to the sky and searched for the moon. Then the arch behind me shut off and the moon exploded high in the sky above the world.

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I fell on the ground, staring at the ceiling but not really seeing anything. I knew a voice was talking but I didn't really hear. I was frozen in time, the vision flashing before my eyes, carved into my brain as if in stone. It was not what had frozen me, but the feeling deep inside, what I knew was in my soul. When I saw those monsters, what I felt in the air around them—no, what the person whose memory I saw felt—it was the most horrible sensation I had ever felt. What I saw was a war against monsters, but it was not what I had seen that bothered me, it what I had experienced. The unapologetic sadism, the feelings of joy at the pain of others, the laughter in my head and the agony of the souls harvested.

I couldn't believe how such evil even could exist.

But most of all, it was what I had seen in the sky above that world that terrified me. The red churning ocean and the maelstrom. It was familiar to me, it looked like the storm of clouds I had seen in the distance above the jungle.

“...Marianna?”

The sound of my name spoken finally broke the spell. I stirred, then felt my body unlock as if it has been paralyzed. I groaned, still feeling my soul being pressed. My heart was beating faster so fast and so powerfully that I feared it would punch through and out of my chest.

“I’m here,” I managed to whisper.

“Query: Status of Host?”

“I, I’m fine Saia,” I answered slowly, even though I wasn’t really. I closed my eyes, but all I could see was red. I decided to rest, it would take time for me to digest all that I had seen.