

IT IS TIME.

-Akusande

28-12

Lover's Quarrel (I)

Through countless bodies, across a myriad of perspectives, Avo beheld the skies over the Tiers as growing ruptures began to spread. 15,622 demiplanes were used to seal the fallen Heaven of Love away from the rest of reality. Of all these demiplanes, **[58%]** of them were within High Flame territory. For the better part of a decade, they remained one of the few things that all Guilds would cooperate on. Their stability ensured by the Agnosi themselves.

Today, however, these planes collapsed. They did not rupture themselves; rather, they were disabled. It was like removing the stitches from an unhealed wound. Clamps of spatial reality loosened and melded with baseline reality. This went unnoticed by most, but the Fallen Heaven of Love was spilling down over the megacity, tainting existence with its twisted miracles.

Upon the tapestry, Love was a tyrant that reigned over countless patterns, yet it remained a subtle master. Its broken canons affected Domains of Biology, Emotion, Culture, Information, Action, Art, and more—so many more. Even when glancing down from the void above, the downpour of Love left Avo staggered.

He experienced all this as another strand of his consciousness faced the perpetrator of this building atrocity.

Even drawing on all the templates that were nested within his consciousness, Avo couldn't comprehend why Veylis would commit to such an action. Doing this was certain to turn the other Guilds against her—without a doubt, this would be the opening shot of the Fifth Guild War. More, it might be even be enough to cause internal fractures within Highflame. Or have her Voidwatch benefactors to disavow her entirely.

For a few passing moments, neither the Massists nor the Saintists said anything. Ultimately, it wasn't a member from either faction that broke the silence.

"Veylis," Naeko breathed, "what the *hells* did you just do?"

As the Court of Truth was a demiplane within a demiplane, it remained insulated from the most direct effects of Fallen Love. But even so, Love reigned over countless other aspects. The pull exerted upon reality's structure could not be denied. All that Naeko felt towards Veylis, the totality of his hate, the repressed love, began coalescing together once more, the beginnings of a force absolute and powerful, reigning over his being in emotion, biology, and behavior.

"I freed the Heaven of Love," Veylis repeated, without a hint of shame or fear. ***"And now, I put it on the path toward restoration or obliteration."***

A dam broke thereafter. An apocalyptic deluge of thoughtcasts flooded into the guilders, reports coming in from various districts, horrified accounts detailing the breach of Love.

"Regardless, let us discuss more theatrical matters further," Veylis said, brushing aside her great transgression as if it was no big deal. **"Kant, how shall we coordinate this Godhunt? I think it would be best for us to embark on this so that the Dreamer might amuse himself. How many cadres should we sacrifice? Hm? How many—"**

"No!" Naeko cut her off, his voice infused with power and violence. The force behind his spoken word caused the insides of the scale to crack, and as the sound traveled over Veylis, and she ground back several feet, her Chief Paladin's Heaven more than even she could bear.

All at once, the Saintists began to rise, but Avo mentally quelled their desire to defend the High Seraph. Immediately thereafter, he had to suppress the Massists as well. He didn't want this place to collapse into a fight, not like this. There were too many assets here, and if chaos reigned and Veylis managed to retreat, his chance of striking her down before the war could begin would be lost.

"The fuck... you... what were you even thinking." Naeko said. Every word spoken was a deeper growl.

Veylis regarded her former lover with a dismissive stare. **"I already told you. Your listening has worsened these days. A pity. But you are not the one who matters here."** Then the conversation switched from the material to the mental. A thoughtcast extended from the High Seraph, and she spoke to Avo directly. **+Or, perhaps I should say, we are saving this city. You can hear her, can't you? Your Agnos. She is calling for you. Calling for all of us. Your choice to Ensoul her made things simpler for me. Her genius only incentivized me further. I attached her to the Fallen Heaven. And now she observes the nature of its collapse. Her ego grinds and breaks, but there is still something of her left. You can still save her. But only if you stabilize the Heaven of Love."**

"You half-strand, motherfucker!" Chambers snarled. The Fucktopia launched a wave of cocks forward, Avo held Chambers and his manifested gods back via his phantasmal tendrils.

+Soon,+ Avo said. **+Not now. Soon. The opening is coming. We will have her.+**

Shifting his consciousness, he learned that Alysium was out of Axtraxis now. He had used one of the Instructors to create a pathway back to the Elysium of Lasthrone. Now, the Chronicler headed for the targeted techno-thaumic reactors while Avo compromised critical ephemerals across Highflame territory.

But as things developed, he felt another disturbance press down on the tapestry.

Across the Sunderwolds, near the shores of Noloth, an explosion grander and greater than anything Avo had ever witnessed blossomed over the Shattered Sea. At the same time, spatial tunnels extended rapidly as the slowly encroaching Omnitech Knots began their siege.

They were coming for his Heaven of Winter and enclave simultaneously. The attacking Knots came from all directions. Avo had to assign an additional submind to defense, increasing his total operational consciousnesses in the Sunderwolds to two.

He counted over 22,000 vectors of attack. But as the massive explosion upon the Shattered Sea swept in close, Avo **Conception of Ontology** noticed something else as well. He felt another presence carried by the blast wave, a subtle signal hidden within a wall of projected radiation. Patches of Fallen Heavens drank away the cascading force and heat from the blast, but the radiation still traveled a bit further. Before they hit a section of the Sunderwolds where space would fold upwards, about 560 more knots manifested in the real before their forms narrowed into needle thin threads, diving into the raid as well.

[Quite the show of force,] one submind said.

The other submind grunted. **[Wasteful.]**

Along with them was Draus, her mind further bolstered by the Gestalt and her many copies. *+Alright then,+* Draus said. *+Time to open up some kill boxes. You ready, Avo?+*

[Yes,] both subminds hissed. They let a sliver of the beast within infest their personalities as feral delight mingled with martial focus.

Across the Sunderwolds, 108 memetically constructed towers flared with Soulfire. Avo triggered his Pattern-Nullification.

PATTERN-NULLIFICATION

APPLYING DOMAIN OF (SPACE)

These watchtowers, originally used as observational outposts or in the case of the enclave, a way to circumvent the sea of darkness from enshrouding the City of Light, were now bestowed with Avo's thaumic mass. More than just that, their forms also turned reflective, and tendrils of anomalous matter and cancerous biology spread around them in growing patches, like sores infesting the face of existence. Instantly, they went from watchtowers to metaphysical launch sites, and as Avo targeted the Domain of Space using his **Pattern-Nullification**, he struck out using trauma and entropy.

Across New Vultun, expendable minds were nulled as pockets of spatial reality averaging four hundred kilometers in area collapsed utterly, flattening three-dimensional space into two.

Wavelengths of perception spread out from Avo's Skimmers as he beheld a new portrait of calamity unfolding before him. Across the vastness of the Sunderwolds, aspects of reality

fractured and frayed. Golems overloaded into blasts of Soulfire and patterns across certain corners of reality ceased to function outright.

Avo estimated 482 knots were lost. 482 and countless thousands more still coming. Some Omnitech golems emerged in material reality, bringing with them millions of drones. They lobbed enough missiles to choke up the skies as they closed, and the shots began navigating the Scar Charts between Fallen Heavens. They barely traveled an inch through space before a flood of intercepting gunfire poured free from each of the watchtowers.

The Simulacrae manifested over Avo's defensive fortifications, and within reflections, the Arsenalist worked ceaselessly, firing endlessly, destroying constantly. Ferromagnetic projectiles zipped out and then changed vectors several times, leaping bolts of lightning jumped from round to round, directing the teardrop-shaped projectiles through oncoming missiles.

About a hundred and one more Knots were utterly shredded, and Draus, along with all her copies, couldn't hide the grins on their faces as they set about defying the ordinance falling from the sky.

Another disturbance upon the tapestry drew Avo's attention. A piercing sound came from somewhere in the east. This miracle was shaped from the Domains of Vibrations and Space, and Cas volunteered himself, responding to the cacophony with the strum of his own.

+That's just noise pollution. Fuckers don't know how to jam. Let's show these bastards what it means to make some proper sound+

The Overheaven didn't need to be told twice. Once more, he triggered his **Pattern-Nullification** and picked his targets.

"A bit hasty, aren't we?" Avo spoke to the Infacer, sending over packets of mem-data detailing all the Knots they just lost.

But the mastermind of Omnitech merely sighed. **{Those are just probing assets, asshole. Gloat to me after I finish glassing your little village.}**

"Of course," Avo said, agreeing without any hesitation.

The Infacer laughed despite themselves. **{Arrogant prick. Yeah. You are one of us.}**

"The path ahead is clear," Veylis said, speaking to Avo. With each passing second, the effects of the Heaven of Love grew greater and greater. **"You know what I want from you."**

"You want me to reach into the rupture," Avo said, deducing Veylis' intentions. **"You wish for me to use the Stillborn and repair the Heaven of Love."**

"That is one path," Veylis replied. "You can also choose the wiser option: ignore my bait, accept your Agnos for dead. If that is your decision, then you will get what you want. You will be recognized as the tenth power on Idheim. People will flock to you. We will fight a war. But it will come at the cost of Kae Kusanade and the deaths of untold trillions."

Avo adapted his mind, removing any possibility of emotional compromise, but a flood of anger still swelled within him. It came from every member of his Gestalt, and it came from Kae herself. The template outraged by the High Seraph's actions.

"Fucking sow!" Kae roared with a piercing shriek that silenced the entire court. "You! You!" She pointed to Veylis, hyperventilating, but then her eyes went wide, an epiphany passed through her.

She looked upon all the Guilders present, and then she spat. "All of you, this is all your fault. We build the world. We Agnosi.... We give our lives. We give our every effort to shape society. We butcher. We kill. We murder thousands, millions, billions, trillions to make your heavens, to shape your cities, to build your futures. And you dream of what? You use us for what? You honor what?"

Kae wheezed, and Veylis just shook her head at the display. Avo sensed something almost like disgust emanating from her. Disgust for this outburst.

"All my life, I just wanted to practice my craft and to make the world better. Bring our lives right now a little closer to imagined paradise. But everything I build, you use to break. Now, now that I'm trapped inside something that's broken. Now, now, now that even love itself has been enslaved and turned into a weapon by you, by all of you!"

And then, for a moment, Kae said nothing more. Instead, she stared hatefully at Veylis before continuing. "Before this is over, I'm going to kill you. I'm going to break your Frame. I'm going to make you suffer."

"No," the High Seraph replied, rejecting Kae's words outright. "You will not. Rage is empty. Action is everything. And action will determine all that follows next. So, Dreamer, what will you choose? For this is your choice. Yours above all your companions. Yours, because you are the one that stands before me. Because you—"

Alysim stepped out from the time stream as he watched fast-moving pylons churn around the techno-thaumic reactor. It looked like vast metallic arms sweeping over the burning heart of a Soul. A sequence reached out from his being and burrowed into the reactor, draining the thaums while dumping Rend into the sinks hidden deep within the surrounding architecture.

+Are you sure she will come for me?+ Alysim asked.

+Yes,+ Avo replied, the thaums flooding into him. **+No way she can ignore this. Not after what I'm about to do.+**

And then a few thousand locations across Highflame ruptured, Rend and ruin swallowing whole portions of districts while the rest of the Overheaven continued to feed.

+Keep going,+ Avo told Alysım. **+We take everything we can. Until we lose. Until she comes for us.+**

Suddenly, Veylis trailed off, a peculiar expression spreading across her face. A golden stream brushed out from the High Seraph, extending through the Gatekeeper, spearing fast across Highflame's territories.

Across from her, Avo expected a few moments of searching—some desperate attempt to stop him from draining her reactors. Instead, her Heaven cleaved out across existence and immediately sifted through the building havoc. A tendril of lashing gold cut across all her territories, and within five seconds, she managed to find Alysım even as he made another leap across the paths.

Her interception of the Chronicler was staggering. It was like catching a single grain using one's bare hands in a thunderstorm. The feat was absurd, but for the blood of Zein and Jaus Avandaer? Veylis acted like this was routine.

[Fuck me,] Benhata breathed. **[I thought we were going to have more time... some time, at least. She just... How the fuck are we going to kill her.]**

[Soon,] Corner answered, a growing anticipation accompanying him. **[Bitch is about to get a special surprise.]**

Within the prison plane, Avo turned to Zein and Naeko.

Before he could say anything, the Godslayer's glaive trembled.

IT IS TIME.

As Alysım felt a greater power sweep over his path, he felt nothing but a sense of relief. Finally. The moment was approaching. Finally, his death would have—

Reality shifted around him. A bridge of gold carried him across time and space, slamming him down within a perfect replica of the Court of Truth. Groaning, Alysım tried to rise as he took in

his surroundings. Most of the individuals present radiated with a sheen of gold around them. They were puppets—constructs to aid in Veylis' simulation.

And then, standing over him, with countless streams from the paths flowing out from her, was the High Seraph herself, crowned by a veil of static.

"How?" Veylis murmured, trying to process who she just caught. The ghoul simply laughed at her.

"You planned. So did I. Planned within plans. Schemes within schemes. You want me to reach into your trap, to stop the Heaven of Love from falling. All to service a desired future of your making. But you haven't even resolved matters from your past."

And for the first time, Veylis directed a genuine glare at Avo.

For a few moments, Veylis just stared, watching as the Chronicler slowly staggered back to his feet. Brushing his ragged outfit off, he turned and smiled. "Hello, girl." His lip twitched as his smile collapsed. "Lore lost, what have you done to yourself? You look like some kind of ridiculous statue."

Veylis continued her silence, but the Infacer was far less reserved. **{What the fuck?}** the EGI muttered. **{How the hell are you here? Isn't he dead? Mind me, Veylis. Are my databases getting corrupted? We saw your mother—}**

"He died." Veylis was certain. **"He died. We saw his body. We saw mother sever him from his tether to time."**

The Chronicler simply shrugged. "Time is a funny thing. And death is a matter of philosophical—"

Veylis seized Alysium by his throat.

"How?" Veylis almost snarled, eyes burning holes into Avo. **"How did you find him? How is he alive?"**

To this, the Overheaven but laughed. **"I did not find him. He was fated to find me. You should... ask your mother about this."**

"Truth," the Gatekeeper said. The weight of the Heaven of Truth's approval swept through the court. The High Seraph was at a loss as she turned to face the Gatekeeper.

“What is he—” Veylis began

Then, within her Heaven, all hell broke loose.

Veylis' hand closed tighter. Several of Alysims' vertebrae parted immediately. ***"I don't know how you're back, you disgusting creature. I don't know how you survived my mother. She's many things, but a liar, unskilled. No, she killed you, of that I'm certain. Your signature is undeniable. It is you. You are bound to history, same as you were before, until my mother severed you. Severed you and bled you dry. So how are you here?"***

Alysims grinned at her as she asked the very same question to the Overheaven back in stable reality. She clenched tighter, and more of his neck broke. But a second later, time mended his wounds, impossibly. Alysims managed to laugh. Finally, the Chronicler met her gaze again and sighed. "It is the past, don't you see? I still—I am not dead. A path is extending forth from me still. I still have a future, am still yet to die."

Valeys paused and tried to follow the pathway of his ontology. Her paths reached forth, pressing down on him. "Yet to—"

One of his pockets burst open. A plane of space promptly expanded, but in the same instant, Veylis altered the paths within herself, shifting away.

To no avail. A glaive split through her paths, and a dragon across Veylis' being, guiding a glaive to split the Heaven asunder. Veylis manifested a full canon avatar and intercepted the blow. In a fraction of an instant, Zein Thousandhand, Godslayer, operative of Ninth Column, and prisoner to the Paladins no more, stood upon a bridge of gold across from her daughter, her glaive an inch away from Veylis' skull.

They regarded each other during their statement as Zein spoke first. "Hello, my girl. I've come to kill you for good."

"Mother," Veylis replied. "I see your pride has grown cheap over the years. Tell me, how did you do this? Is he just a manifestation from your past?"

"No. All too annoying real, I'm afraid. But don't worry. His end is approaching. And has already happened. But right now, I think it's time we see this done."

And then, before Veylis could question her mother any further, a massive palm swept into existence just behind Zein while a Strix flapped its wings within its mists. Both the Burning Dreamer and Force-Breaker struck together, joining their weight to hammer hard against the butt of Zein's glaive, sending its tip clean through Veylis' skull.