

I can't draw and I'm not British.

Hey all, sorry it's been so long since this was updated despite having won last month. RL issues killed most of that month and I went on vacation with the family (who, though I love them, do not leave me time for my fics) for a week this month. And then it took my beta-readers weeks to get it back to me, just as the editors for Horse for the Force got that back to me. Mind you, since the totality was 70,000 words that's fair enough.

But I have seen some people complain about my overlarge chapters, and 70,000 words is a bit much even for me. So once my editors got it back to me I cut the chapter in two. Not evenly, but where I thought a break worked.

A few people also commented on my Original Character villains once more. First, why: I have looked at the villains in DxD. Now, I won't deny many are evil, powerful, and all that. But honestly, I found them lacking in various ways. I could get into it here but doing so would add more words to the word count than I am comfortable with in an author's note. In summary I found them all lacking either in their goals (Ophis) or in their beliefs (Cao Cao) or in how they were treated in canon (Vali) or just in their general character (Rivezem – one of many issues I have with him). the only one I liked was Hades and even he was... too simple a character I guess? too one dimensional. I also think that it's been proven in a lot of other fandoms that villains who fight from the shadows, who use duplicity and guile, are better as long-term antagonists. So I made two of my own villains.

Second, as to their having it all their own way, I would say they have made mistakes – Nefertiti attack on Kuroka was necessary and something she wanted but wasn't well-planned. It nearly resulted in her husband's death, another mistake on both their parts – his going back at all. And again, it must be stated: they have had **thousands** of years to plan this out. Like they are literally older than the Jewish religion. That is a whole lot of time to plan alternatives and gather resources, as well as time to make and recover from mistakes.

This has been edited by me via Grammarly, [Nad Destroyer](#), and [Morde24](#). Hopefully that means there aren't a lot of mistakes. I'm sure you lot will let me know if that isn't the case LOL.

## Chapter 25: Egypt Tours: Harrowing

On the morning of the fifth day of their stay in Egypt, Yubelluna woke up in her room off of the main suite, smiling as dawn light played over her bed, having left the shades open the night before. She had been on duty early last night, which meant she had gotten a full six hours of sleep, and really, Yubelluna much preferred to get up early rather than stay out late.

*Mind you, that wasn't always the case*, she thought ruefully as she dressed. Yubelluna had normally enjoyed sleeping before becoming a bandrui, but since then, when the dawn rose,

so did she. *Heh, always makes me think I might be part plant instead of just having some power over them.*

Outside, Yubelluna found Kalawarner, also already dressed, ready to head out to buy some ingredients for breakfast, a bible sitting on the dining table where she had just put it after praying, as she would at home with Asia. "I'm surprised you're up, didn't you spend last night with Harry?" Yubelluna teased. When either Akeno or Kalawarner had the night off along with Harry, you didn't need a mind reader to know what they would be spending their time doing.

Kalawarner shrugged, a wry, yet somehow tender twist to her light-blue painted lips. "Honestly, neither of us was in the mood last night, so we just cuddled. And can I just say that for a Fallen Angel who Fell through the Sin of Lust, cuddling is a rather odd experience, and yet at the same time a veritable gift from God?"

"Ironic," Yubelluna replied, linking arms with the other woman as they left the suite.

"Exactly. But, what about you? Are you ready to start getting your daily dose of Potter?" Kalawarner questioned as they stepped to the elevator.

"Not with everything else going around. I am most definitely not." While her tone was tart, Yubelluna's smirk at the other woman's joking tone, as well as her acceptance of Yubelluna, came through from the smile she gave Kalawarner. "But I still want our first time to be special, and unlike the rest of you, I haven't even gone on all that many dates with Harry yet."

"Understandable." The two women fell into a companionable silence as they exited the elevator, heading outside and into the bright light of dawn. Even as early as it was, the street of Alexandria were bustling, and here in the tourist section, that meant that there was already street folk around: performers, picture takers, would be tourist guides and so forth.

The two gorgeous women were greeted by smiles and warm welcome as they walked down the street, and a few people came up to them, shaking their hands and asking what their plans were for the day. Not all of this was because they were quite obviously tourists or indeed two beautiful women. Yubelluna had, on Harry's suggestion, played her violin several times a day, calling upon their joined connection, and she didn't always use the suite's patio. Instead, Yubelluna had taken to choosing a different café within walking distance of the hotel and practicing her violin there after eating outside.

This had made Yubelluna something of a street performer herself and attracted her quite a bit of attention. This effect was multiplied when Akeno would join her occasionally. While her voice was a bit too deep for most of the songs Yubelluna preferred to play, Akeno's singing still garnered a lot of interest even when singing in English.

Especially when it became clear that neither woman was interested in taking baksheesh. They were just having small jam sessions. More than once, other street performers had appeared to take advantage of this or began to play with Yubelluna, occasionally trying to teach her local songs, which she then attempted to transpose to violin, an enjoyable challenge.

This notoriety wasn't just useful on the bandrui side of things either. That local celebrity status had spread to Harry and the others when they occasionally joined her, cheering Yubelluna on or just smiling as they watched her play. This, in turn, had helped when they were recognized during undead or monster attacks throughout the city. Muggle or magical, Gossip and local rumor always moved faster than could ever be tracked, and people calmed down faster when they had heard of the person with the calm voice, regardless of circumstances.

At one point it had even helped do so while a fight was going on. In that fight conjured beasts rather than undead had dominated the attacking force. That had meant the battle had gone on for much longer as the spells they had created to banish the undead weren't useful against the monsters.

Shopping took the two women about an hour, by which point, others were starting to wake up back in the main suite. When they entered, Yubelluna could see Harry, Hermione, Padma, and Tiamat out on the patio, while in the kitchen Akeno was preparing coffee for herself and Tonks.

While Tonks was obviously clad in the clothing she would wear for the rest of the day, tight jeans and a T-shirt, Akeno was still clad in lingerie. Today this was a pink and black number, that left very, **very** little to the imagination. The bra was tiny, composed of connecting lines of pink and black roses that showcased Akeno's breasts, while below, her crotch was covered by a heart-shaped piece of silk with the string tied to either side. Really, Akeno's hair, which was down at present, covered more of her body than the lingerie.

Staring at the black-haired Yamato Nadeshiko, Yubelluna could only shake her head. *A body built for sin, but a voice that could take her listeners to heaven, what a strange juxtaposition.* Kalawarner, however, disdained speaking, entering the kitchen and moving between the other women, idly smacking Akeno on the rear, muttering, "You are going to change before joining us at the table, yes?"

"Ara, why ever would I do that? It's not as if I am ashamed of what I have to offer, after all," Akeno retorted, thrusting out her prodigious chest.

"You might not, but I don't think Harry wants you to show off the goods," Yubelluna retorted, even as she directed the still sleepy Tonks down to one of the chairs in the sitting area. "Besides, you know that if you go out like that, Hermione is going to give you a lecture on appropriate clothing."

Akeno pouted at that, sipping at her own coffee while pulling out another mug for Tonks. But she did indeed change before she joined the others out on the patio.

Most of the so-called command group were there that morning, barring master Husukai, who was overseeing the Alexandrian-based quick reaction teams this morning. Loup and Shen were on patrol, while Issei and Kiba were still asleep, having been on patrol for most of last night.

Having a few of Harry's group on patrol 24-7 had proved to not just be a good idea, but a necessity. Even as Kala and the other cooks sat down, Harry's eyes glanced through the glass to the magically updating map of Egypt. There, he could see there had been ten more attacks since he'd gone to bed, one of which had been in Alexandria.

But after five days, not only had, what Hermione had tried to call Potter's Extraordinary Trouble Shooters, or PETS (a name that caused Akeno and the other ladies to giggle every time it was brought up), created a system to react to any such attack, they and their Auror allies had grown strong enough that the planners and leaders could take a step back and start talking once more about the overall conflict. This morning was about that, and as the meal slowly wound down, Harry nodded over to Tonks. "I think we've all been fed and watered well enough for the morning, so why don't you start us off Tonks? And after that, Hermione I know you had a bit of excitement last night."

Everyone else looked at Hermione, who smiled complacently, before gesturing to Tonks. "Tonks first, as Harry said. That will give me time to finish this delicious Danish. You simply must give me the recipe Yubelluna."

"Well, first, the last shipment of broomsticks arrived late last night. Woke up this morning to an owl in the face carrying a message about it," the Metamorph grumbled.

This won Tonks some laughter since she and Akeno had the most trouble getting up in the mornings. Even so, the former Witch-turned-Devil Bishop was in charge of liaising with the Aurors, who, along with the Shinsengumi, were the first responders to any magical outbreak throughout most of Egypt. A further eighty Shinsengumi had arrived through official channels to help their fellows here in Egypt. With, Husukai reported, orders to follow him and Harry if there was any question of command.

But after a second, she went on. "This means that the entire Auror and Shinsengumi force are airmobile now. Proudfoot and Husukai have also spread out quick reaction teams throughout Egypt, separating them into what the locals call Nome reaction squads."

"It's an ancient name for a territory or district," Padma interrupted. "The locals use the ancient term for some reason, but they link it to the modern governorates, what we would call counties."

"Right. The size of the team assigned to each Nome is determined by the area they have to cover, the smallest being two Shinsengumi and eight Aurors, the largest being the one assigned to the New Valley Nome. That team is under a Senior Auror and is composed of twenty-eight Aurors and eight Shinsengumi." Tonks elaborated before gesturing out around to the city around them. "The only exception is here in Alexandria. Oh, and Cairo, where the Church and the locals have taken over protecting the people, using their own memory modifying spells to keep what's going on from getting out."

She smiled then, waving her hands back and forth. "Because we've had forces on hand, we're getting a handle on the attacks, responding faster and harder, which means we are saving more lives. In fact, over the past two days, there have only been five deaths due to these attacks. And while Proudfoot might've been a little dubious about the talismans and the leprechauns, we're spreading them out among the force as best as possible. Between them and the spells that Hermione and Padma have come up with, protecting the nonmagicals from undead attacks is becoming easier every time."

A group of leprechauns from modern-day Ireland had contacted Harry the day before, wishing for introductions to their long-separated kin. In return, Harry had demanded they send a few representatives to join the leprechauns already working with them to provide communications assistance. That had somehow resulted in an argy-bargy between the leprechaun groups which neither had told Harry about the reasons for. But eventually, they had agreed, and now Harry had enough people to be able to create a leprechaun-controlled communication grid.

*Although, it really makes me wish I'd been able to examine those mirrors Sirius and Remus had,* Harry reflected. The magical items, which the Marauders had created to use while pranking, could have created a whole new realm of magical communication if Harry had thought of it before they had been broken in the war. One by Fiendfyre, the other by a Reducto. *Ugh, if only I realized at the time how amazing those things were, but no, by the time I did those 'prank items' were gone.*

Tonks shivered a little, shaking her head, bringing Harry back to the here and now. "I was part of an attack team last night while you were resting, Harry."

Concentrating on Tonks once more, Harry nodded, indicating he understood. Last night, Harry had thought he had almost broken through the enchantment blocking him from fully understanding the magics on the Nile. But the attempt had exhausted him mentally, and he had retreated to his bedroom early that night, a cold compress on his head, his brain throbbing from the effort.

"It was kind of horrifying. It didn't consist of just undead like we've seen before. No, this attack was made of undead animals. Rats, crocodiles, with a lot of living beetles mixed in. It was just freaking creepy! But the anti-undead talismans worked just as well." Tonks then frowned, remembering something else. "Shen also reported that he and his team, who were backing up a

team of Aurors in Sohag, ran into an attack composed mainly of conjured beasts similar to the one Yubelluna schooled the other day, and took some losses when they had to go into the houses after them.”

“Thankfully, that doesn't seem to be happening often. They’re a lot smarter and more prone to enter houses, which makes with digging them out harder, and increases the death count no matter what we do.”

Everyone winced at that, but Tonks went on, gesturing over to Yubelluna. “Unfortunately, my attempts to work with Yubelluna on figuring out any kind of pattern to the attacks failed miserably. The only pattern is that the attacks all occur in Egypt. And that they target population centers.”

“And are mostly near the Nile,” Hermione added, looking at Harry.

“I’ll speak at the end, after you’ve shared your own adventures with the class” Harry teased gently before looking back at Tonks. “Anything else?”

“There haven't been any further magical attacks among the nonmagicals or accompanying the undead and Monster assaults. Proudfoot has reported a few incidents in the various smaller magical communities, but only one was here in Alexandria.” She too looked at Hermione now, wagging her eyebrows. “Someone attempted to set the bookstore on fire, with our little bookworm inside it.”

Hermione huffed. “I was doing some late night research. Padma’s notes pointed out something I wanted to follow up on, and yes, someone did attack me.”

“Why were you there alone?” Yubelluna asked, looking around for one of the leprechauns to question on that score. “I thought Harry had basically ordered that none of us be allowed to go about on our own.”

“I am a big girl, Nymphadora Tonks, and I thought I handled myself very well,” Hermione huffed. “They attacked me mainly with Avada Kedavra and other Dark curses, but most of those can be absorbed by items and we were in a bookstore. Do the math.”

“It was apparently quite the sight,” Tonks teased. “Bookworm Hermione standing in the middle of the bookstore having dueled four men, all these books and pieces of books flying around her like an ever moving shield, while she shot out subtle spells tying their shoes together, making their clothing attack them, or just making their legs act like jelly before using Stupefy. Not a single lethal spell or even a difficult one, but taken by complete surprise and outnumbered, Hermione still schooled them all.”

“Heh, nice to know you haven’t lost a step, Mione,” Harry said approvingly raising an invisible glass to her in salute. “Although, nonlethal?”

Hermione chuckled while Yubelluna and the others who hadn't fought beside her reevaluated the messy-haired researcher. "Well, yes, I did try to take them alive. Unfortunately they all died before they could be questioned, despite my searching for poison pills and hollow teeth. Regardless, I did discover some interesting things about Egyptian magic, so I felt it was well worth it."

Shaking her head, Akeno moved past the shock of Hermione proving to be a decent combatant to what so few magical-type attacks meant. "I don't think we can afford to assume that whoever is behind this is running out of willing, living followers. They could be husbanding them for some other purpose."

"Husbanding their strength to push forward with their own agenda, whatever it is, or to attack us," Harry mused, squeezing her thigh in agreement under the table, causing Akeno to flush happily.

From her position at the table, Tiamat, who had taken her human form because that way she could actually eat her fill rather than simply have a tiny nibble of the food, spoke up now. "What about the cover-up? Is it still holding among the nonmagicals?"

Akeno nodded, as did Tonks. She occasionally continued to follow up tabloid stories and other things of that nature that could have been connected to the various ways in which the magicals cover up the assaults. "It is, although given the number of attacks, it might not have in a more organized and technologically advanced country. Here they have technology, don't get me wrong, but it certainly isn't as universal as it is in Britain. And the fact that the Aurors are so reluctant to work with the police has made them far better at following up on the electronic side of things themselves than the Aurors in Britain or Ireland. Even so, the sheer number of deaths might have been an issue in most countries, but not here in Egypt."

"Changing gas main explosions to car accidents and alcohol or drug overdose as the cause of death has proven to be enough," Akeno added. "The government barely pays attention to car accidents, let alone deaths due to building accidents, among other things."

"How goes the distribution of the tags?" Hermione questioned. Busy with her own research, she and Padma hadn't followed that aspect of what was going on as well as they should have.

"While my Aunt should really be here to speak about that as she has taken over the mass production of those, I can say that it is going very well," Akeno began. "Most of Alexandria is now warded against the undead, and we have begun to mass-produce them for the use of the Aurors and Shinsengumi during combat and afterward. Warding against conjured creatures is harder, as the wards blocking them need to be specific, much like anti-teleportation wards, and few of the conjured beasts we've seen here have any representation in Japanese kanji. We're being forced to use hieroglyphs, and it isn't working as well. I fear that on that front, we will never be able to fully block out much of the beasts that have been reported."

She shot Tonks a smirk. "Beetles, however, can be dealt with."

Giving Akeno's thigh another squeeze of approval, Harry turned to Tiamat. "What about your research into those columns?"

"They were definitely blessed, something to do with the Sun, I believe, judging by the image on them. Something that can undo or block, perhaps?" Tiamat shook her multicolored hair from side to side, a small snarl on her lips. "That is all I can see within, and the seeing is not quite the same as understanding, and that is all I have been able to get even after taking them apart."

Something about Tiamat's line of 'seeing within' made Harry start for a moment, but before he could bring the idea to mind, Tiamat continued. "But I still agree with you that they are extremely suspicious, Harry. There are also too many of them around for my liking. I have started to head out to other cities of late and found them there as well. Do you want me to continue destroying what columns I can?"

Harry looked around the table at that, getting a nonverbal assessment of where everyone stood on that point, before nodding. "Do it. There's just something off about those. I can't tell if they are directly connected to everything else that is going on, but I still want them removed wherever you find them."

"Good." Tiamat munched on a sausage so savagely that every male there winced, before going on, seemingly unaware of their reactions as she chewed enthusiastically. "Beyond that, I have empowered the Blessing on the great pyramid in Giza with some difficulty. It tired me out quite tremendously, although I do want to ask, whatever happened to the nose on the Sphinx statue there? Sandra would be most displeased at the removing of what she always called her most patrician feature, and I feel I should look into it for friendship's sake if nothing else."

"It was destroyed by British nationalists, I believe," Hermione began before sliding to a halt in some confusion. "Wait, you knew the Sphinx that the statue was built to resemble?"

"Oh yes. I was good friends with several different sphinxes in my time. They could drink like fish and wrestle like champions. It's a pity that their own biology screwed them over so hard," Tiamat said with a sigh. "It was almost inevitable that they would go extinct."

Harry blinked at that, exchanging a confused glance with the other wizards. "Er, Tiamat, you do know that I've actually met a Sphinx, right? One was involved in the Tri-Wizard tournament in my fourth year at Hogwarts. In a kind of minor role, admittedly, but I still met one."

"Wait, what? How the heck did they survive?" Tiamat squawked, her eyes wide. "And I'm not talking about just hiding under your Wizarding World wards. The Sphinx have a lot of physical and social issues which stop them from..."



Interrupting her, Hermione coughed delicately into one fist. "There aren't many of them, but the Sphinx do survive and propagate through um... marital aid from wizards. Specifically wizards if you understand my meaning."

At first, Tiamat just stared at her, and then she laughed, bellowing in laughter, so loudly that the sound would have better fit her dragon body. She was soon joined by Akeno and Kalawarner and even Yubelluna, all of whom could see the humor in what Hermione had said, as well as how hard she was blushing at the moment, causing Padma to tease her wife in turn.

Harry let the laughter around the table continue for a bit before looking over at Hermione and Padma. With the others busy both in fighting and in other projects, it was the two of them, and occasionally Kalawarner, for her expertise on the mystical side of things, which had continued the research aspect of what they were up to. "Do you two have anything to report?"

Hermione and Padma stopped her teasing, becoming serious as they spoke with glances and little facial gestures for a moment before Padma began. "Well, we think we've identified another deific item that could be behind the fast teleportation of whoever is using the items we already identified to conjure up beasts and undead. We found some hints of the fact that wizards in service to the Pharaohs would be involved in tax collection. They had pectorals of office..."

The Indian woman paused at the looks of confusion and shook her head. "Large pieces of jewelry that went over their pecs. Anyway, these royal tax collectors could come and go from different Nomes to return the money owed 'faster than light would travel'. The muggles believed this was superstition and the fact people at the time didn't understand how fast someone could travel the Nile either way, but we found an example in a curio shop in Lighthouse Lane, and it still had some of the Egyptian runes on it. We can't quite figure out how it was supposed to work but connecting them to the tale was easy enough. The question is, how someone could discover a working copy."

"We've also put together a very limited idea of what, beyond power over the dead, the ancient Egyptian wizards could do. Much of their power seems to be closely entwined with the power of the cults they were a part of, I.E. which deity they followed. Perhaps in that manner They were actually closer to what I understand magicians to be like today, with their binding to devils. But the Pharaohs and the more learned were different. Their powers came from knowledge of words and names of power, as well as imagination," Hermione enthused. "We are still missing an idea of its limits, but we think that the Pharaonic enchantments and spells were slow, but powerful in their direction."

She became serious then. "But one thing that has long been known is the ability with Undead that the ancient Pharaohs had, and last night, I discovered a hint as to how that was so. It has to do with how the soul is seen in Egyptian magic and mythology. That was the key, you see. Things known in mythology were not connected to a few hints left in the magical side."

Everyone bar Tonks and Padma sat up and looked at her worriedly. The soul was sacred in every magical society bar the European wizards. Even Harry, who hadn't been born into that kind of thinking, had come to believe that.

Hermione explained the five parts of a person's soul, the Ib, the Ka, the Ba, the Ren, and the Sheut. "If you knew the Ren, the name of a Soul, you could control the person. Only the strongest willed could even fight against that kind of manipulation. And if you connect it to the Ba, or the spiritual side of an individual, you could even call upon them from beyond the grave."

"Crikey, so, wait, does that mean someone could try and control one of us like that? I mean, we don't have secret names, do we?" Tonks asked.

"Doubtful," Tiamat answered. "Yes, your name would have power if linked into an enchantment. But because we don't have 'real', or secret names our names lack the kind of power to compel us like that."

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief at that, while Padma was scowling. "But the big question is still a mystery: how could someone rediscover such things?"

"Exactly. Because as interesting as all that is, it sounds as if you're no closer to figuring out who is behind all this," Akeno stated, somewhat plaintively. Being on the defensive did not suit her at all, no matter how often that had proven to be the case.

Hermione and Padma both shook their heads. "Sorry, no. Frankly, divining who or where this is coming from is beyond us," the more timid of the twosome answered. "I've shifted to working on anti-apparition ward stones to pass around like the Onmyodo tags."

"On that score, I've finally begun to decipher that bit of ancient graffiti. So far, I've only gotten a few lines in, but it actually wasn't graffiti. Instead, it was a memoir written by a wizard in ancient times. He called himself a historian, who was here as part of a band of wizards hunting down one of their own. It is set in the same timeframe as the blank era Padma found within the Ottoman rule of Egypt, where nothing was recorded history-wise on the magical side of things. Translating it is slow going, it's all written in Farsi, and the grammar is **weird**, but I am getting there. I'd like to bring in some nonmagical help for it, but the tale is so obviously magical I'm uncertain how to do so."

"Lie," Tiamat, Harry and several others said as one, with Harry rolling his eyes at the look of affront on Hermione's face. "You're letting your scientist side control your realist side, Hermione. Tell them you found a book somewhere, can't tell if it's historical or not, and want it translated. That will be enough."

Hermione pouted at that, while Padma looked a little chagrined. Neither of them had thought of such a simple solution before this.

Understanding that, Kala decided to move the discussion on. "And what about you, Harry? How go your battles with the magic of the Nile?" she asked, taking his hand and pulling it into her lap, much to the annoyance of Akeno.

Smiling somewhat tiredly, Harry's hand stroked along the blue-haired woman's inner thigh for a moment before he became serious. "It's going. That's about all I can say about it unfortunately. Invading an enchantment like this which was designed by another god from an entirely different school of magic is, needless to say, something I've never had to do before. Beyond occurring on the... call it the magical plane, it isn't at all like my battling the Unseelie Queen for control of the undertaking in Tir Na Nog."

Seeing Hermione's look of interest, Harry tried to expand on his explanation. "Because I don't fully understand the spellwork and the fact it's an example of an entirely different deific system, I'm having a lot of trouble bringing my power to bear. It is something like a mix between wrestling an invisible person. The need for holds, stance and leverage, all of which boils down to knowledge in this case. That, and trying to push a tsunami through a keyhole. Every time I connect to the enchantments within the river, I find out more. I figure out how to use my full power, widening that keyhole."

He then chuckled wanly. "This is all made worse by the fact that I do not want to destroy the Blessing on the Nile. Continuing the former wrestling match analogy, it's like having a wrestling match while holding one hand behind one's back as the match is occurring on a magnificent, and above all, expensive, glass table. But I am getting there. Another day, maybe two, and I'll have it figured out and be able to interact with the rest of Egypt's underlying magical field and use that to track whoever is behind all this."

"Which means we're coming up on the most dangerous moment," Yubelluna murmured, causing the others to look at her in confusion. The experienced former Queen shrugged her shoulders. "It is when your enemy's plan is fraying at the seams that said enemy becomes his most unpredictable, and therefore most dangerous."

The breakfast broke up soon after that, each of them returning to their own duties. For Harry, this meant heading out to talk to Proudfoot and get his impression on the progress they had been making. Given that his Aurors were still providing the bulk of their manpower, keeping him buttered up was a good idea.

As he was leaving that meeting and intending to go towards the Nile to do battle with the spirits within, Harry received a magical missive in the form of an owl. Bill's contacts on the nonmagical underworld side of things, which Harry had asked to look for members of the Khaos Brigade, had come through with some information. Cao Cao had been spotted in the city of Suez.

**OOOOOOO**

In the main ritual room of the inverted pyramid that had been their home for thousands of years, Nefertiti and her husband paused by the entryway as they always did to look around at this, their greatest working. A working that rivaled any in existence for complexity, subtlety and power.

The room was huge, ten stories tall, it's walls inverted, leading down to the floor, which was in turn below where the two ancient immortals had entered, alighting onto a black basalt walkway, leading to a central dais. Those walls were lined with alcoves, out of which statues loomed. Each statue was different, magnificent and lifelike, the work of master craftsmen, each of which depicted different creatures.

Or rather, different Egyptian gods. Some of those statues were colorful, almost looking like they were alive, complete with chains binding their necks, arms and legs. The statue of Sobek, the crocodile god, was one such. Others were smaller, faded almost, shadowy within the darkness of their alcoves, like they barely existed. An example of this was the statue of Neter-Hau, but it was not alone.

Staring at those shadowy statues, Aten sneered, his teeth flashing in the light of the artificial sun above. *That British poet said it best: 'I am Ozymandias, look upon me ye mighty, and despair'. He used the terms, but I wonder if even the great Gilgamesh himself understood how the passage of time could crumble empires and tear down gods.*

*And yet, here we still stand. On the eve of a great triumph. Not the final triumph certainly, but the road to becoming the only God King of Earth is a long one. This will at least make me a god, regardless of where I will sit on the power scale. Beyond that, I have long learned patience. The rest will come.*

Shaking his head of such thoughts, Akhenaten moved forward. The dais was placed within two giant statues, made of black onyx and diamond, one a cat, and one a cobra. As he moved between the two statues, all around them the monstrous runic array that he and his wife had written into every single stone of this pyramid began to throb, coruscating with power. Those runes were half symbology based on the ancient power of the priests of Egypt and half powerful runic array, with several hundred symbols the non-magicals would recognize mixed in with others lost to time and combined in a way that even those in Kuoh would have been impressed by.

Or appalled. It was a tossup really.

At the very top of each of the statues were a few specific symbols. The symbol for protection on one, the symbol of control on the other. And on both, was another image that had been misinterpreted a time or two in history, and whose true magical power had long since been forgotten: the Hieroglyph of the Pharaoh's foot, pressing down on the head of an undefined foe.

And from the bottom of those radiated a few dozen strange squiggles and shapes. No one alive today outside the two standing there knew what these meant. For they were the true names, the Ren of some of the ancient gods of Egypt. And only by writing them down, binding them to stone, could you give those names real power. Or rather, gain real power over the owners of those names.

Power that the man who would be God King of all the Earth called upon now, placing his hands on one of two lapis lazuli spheres rising out of a central bronze plinth. Once there, the magic in the room seemed to come together, linking him to the plinth and then two a few other statues nearby. "Amathaunta, rise and obey!"

Nearby, one of the shadow statues moved, and the shadowy remnants of the ancient Egyptian goddess of the Aegean Sea shifted, coming forward. This was a woman on a large pearl-encrusted oyster shell. The woman in question was without features, the shadow the whole thing was made of making expressions or anything else impossible to pick out. And unlike with one of the living gods that Aten and Nefertiti had caged in literal ages past, there was no need to use a longer ritual to control them.

The shadowy thing moved to hover in front of Aten, and he ordered, "Join your will to that of Neter-Hau in the Nile. Protect where the Curse within interacts with Egypt's overall magi-sphere."

The word 'Curse' caused even this shadow-thing to flinch, as it had Neter-Hau. But it obeyed, disappearing into the enchantment all around them.

The ancient Pharaoh and his wife watched the water deity leave, vanishing into Egypt's underlying magic to reappear among the massive enchantment spread throughout the Nile. "Will that be enough to overcome Potter?"

"I wish I knew more about where Potter has received his deific powers. If he has somehow become the heir or siphoned off the power of a major water deity, such as Manannán Mac Lir, who he has at least some connection to, the raw power of even two dead deities may not be enough. It is only knowledge that will give them an edge, the home-field advantage, so to speak." Aten answered Nefertiti's question.

Only the upper echelons of the Khaos Brigade knew where Fragarach had come from, and why it was tied so intrinsically to Harry. And while in his Maagh persona Akhenaten had been able to influence some things, he had never been taken into his targets' trust to that extent.

"When will you release our greater servants, then?" Nefertiti asked, nodding as she understood his point.

"Once you return." Aten nodded, stepping away from the central dais and turning to look at his wife directly. "I fear that you are coming up on the time when you are due at the ICW."

Nefertiti cast a Tempus spell, staring at the number revealed for a moment, then nodded but also looked back at her husband in question. After several days of worrying about she was unwilling it to set aside her concerns about Potter's interference just yet.

"I think we may actually have to release **all** of our greater servants, darling," Aten said at last. "Potter is not alone, there is one with him who is powerful, especially in direct combat, and dragons have proven capable of slaying gods before. However, given the simplicity of the campaign in the rest of Egypt, the Harrowing phase will be able to see to the rest of the battlefronts on its own. Even the churchgoers are limited in scope and ability to project power, if not strength."

Here in the center of their power, the two could sense some of what was going on everywhere in the country through the background magic of Egypt. Tiamat sat in that network of magic like a gleaming stone on a spider web, while Harry was harder to get a read on. It was as if he held himself back somehow, perhaps through the use of Occlumency or magical items. *Or perhaps he simply has yet to truly grasp how strong he is,* Aten thought worriedly.

"Agreed, but I think we need to do something about those talismans that they are using throughout Alexandria now," Nefertiti added worriedly, having told him about those things, which had been reported by their wizard servants. "Their ability to block our undead from spawning is not something I foresaw."

"True. But it's not as if we are devoted to our wizard followers, now is it?" Nefertiti snorted at that, and Aten went on. "From now on until the Harrowing truly commences, we will use creature assaults around Alexandria to cover the subtle destruction of those talismans. I will make certain our followers understand they must be clever on this. We will see what they can do then," Aten answered, frowning.

Nothing since Potter had arrived in Egypt had gone entirely their way, and he was proving a most dangerous thorn in their side. But the basic underlying principle of their plans was still in place, and it would still continue.

Aten smiled at her, leaning forward to give his wife a kiss, delighting in the feel of her new curves, feeling somewhat eager for when they could take some time to test drive her new form. They'd had quite a lot of fun over the centuries when one or the other transforming into actors, actresses, or famous individuals. But this would be something new altogether: Nefertiti's body, but with far **more** to offer, and a tail to boot, which he played with lightly for a moment before pushing her away. "Now go on, and I will see you back here tonight."

"For a short amount of time," Nefertiti warned but nodded as she stepped back, her Nekomata tail twitching behind her. "See that everything you'll need me for is prepared appropriately."

When her husband nodded, Nefertiti turned, exited the ritual room, and headed up to their living quarters. There, she entered the teleportation, shuddering slightly as she remembered how Aten had looked when he teleported in, how close they had come to complete disaster. *It seems as if the closer we get to our goals, the more obstacles appear in our way. Yet, they will not stop us. We have worked for this for thousands of years, longer than most modern religions have been around, and we will have our prize!*

Moments later, Nefertiti appeared in a small, extremely well-warded apartment in magical Norway's equivalent of Lighthouse Lane, Slyngesti, or the Winding Way. There, she moved over to a nearby dressing area, pulling off her traditional clothing as she stared at herself in the mirror. Concentrating, Nefertiti began to change from her normal body into the form of another.

It was hard, much harder than it should've been, and Nefertiti reflected that was probably her original Metamorph powers fighting her new Nekomata body. But eventually, the change occurred, although getting rid of the tail was even harder than the rest. But eventually, instead of her new, busty Nekomata body, Nefertiti stood as a thin, somewhat tall, almost androgynous Valkyrie, with blonde hair, broad shoulders, and muscles that many a man would've been envious of and no bust to speak of.

Soon she was dressed as a senior Auror and strode out of her apartment, heading to the nearby international port key station. There she was bowed in quickly and given a portkey to the White Tower, the seat of the ICW.

"Auror General Miltani!" A security officer on duty greeted her politely, but not saluting or lowering his wand. "I heard that the Scandinavians caught the man who tried to assassinate you."

"They did indeed, although the fact that he came so close made it quite obvious that I had neglected my own security for. And honestly, I needed some downtime as well." Just like Tonks or her husband, Nefertiti's voice was also very different in this former deeper, a baritone rumble yet a voice that was still decidedly feminine. "He was another of those wannabe Death Eaters, a young brat who decided that because I was a woman, I was obviously unfit for my post. And then the fool fought to the death when the local Aurors came for him. It's sad really, a young life wasted."

The man nodded somberly but, despite their bit of banter, watched diligently as Nefertiti wrote out her name on a specially prepared paper with a Blood Quill. A second later, the parchment turned green, indicating the magical signature on it matched the one on record for the woman named Amanda Miltani. This was another trick that only the best Metamorphs

could do: changing their very magical signatures along with their physical body, just like Tonks had when she and Harry had investigated MACUSA.

Seeing this, the man saluted formally and opened the security door into the tower. "I'll call ahead and have the daily reports ready for you when you arrive in your office, General."

Several hours later, Nefertiti had read up on all the things that happened in the past few days since she had been on 'enforced sabbatical', smiling internally at the fact that everything on this end at least was going as well as could be expected. She reported this or at least a version of that to her so-called superior within the ICW later that day, Chief Mugwump Roberto Lyle.

"...So the issue in Spain is almost entirely dealt with, thanks to the redistribution of our forces I ordered before that assassination attempt. The Americans have been a major help there, and we've also started to get a handle on what's going on in Romania. Although, I'm still concerned that the Dragon Reserves in Romania and Sweden were bought out by some mysterious group. How that was allowed to occur in the first place is still a black mark on the local ministries, sir, one we really need to follow up on."

"I understand that General Miltani and I've sent several Hit Wizard teams in to see if they could find out going on. The locals are being very helpful," the old man said, stumbling a bit over Miltani's title. Roberto preferred to be a little informal with his direct subordinates, but general Miltani was not a woman you were informal with.

"They damn well should be for dropped the ball so badly," Miltani grumbled, leaning back. "In any event, I want us to keep a reserve force just in case for that issue. Beyond that, I've already started moving teams from Spain into Greece."

"Not Egypt? Normally I would not question your distribution of our forces, especially at a time like this when we have so many different issues cropping up at once. But I felt that Proudfoot's last report and the disappearance of so many Unspeakables means we should be really doubling down there."

"The loss of the Unspeakables is concerning," Miltani admitted. "But since the Aurors themselves haven't lost nearly as many men, I am inclined to put their losses down to **incompetence** rather than anything else." she ground the word out as if it personally offended her, then shook herself and went on. "But recall that Proudfoot's report said he is working closely with the Japanese forces that showed up at the Man-Who-Conquered's behest. And Potter apparently is doing his normal excellent job of mucking up the works for whatever dark wizard is working down there. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for Greece, which is just as much in danger of spilling over into the nonmagical world."

She waited until Roberto nodded, then went on. "At the moment, it sounds more as if what Proudfoot and the others need is knowledge rather than more people. And the only way



we could give them more knowledge of what could possibly be going on down, there is forcing it out of the Unspeakables. The remaining Unspeakables, I should say."

Nefertiti allowed a sneer to cross her alter ego's expression, showing disdain for them, which was quite in character for her personality at the moment. Amanda Miltani was a hard-driving, hard-nosed senior Auror of Spanish descent from Scandinavia who had been elected Auror General. It was Miltani's plans and the number of American Aurors who Roberto had convinced MACUSA to loan to the ICW (thanks to Harry passing on a certain secret) that had enabled them to start bringing an end to much of the turmoil plaguing the Wizarding World. That, and Potter's help in Ireland, and now Egypt, of course.

Not that 'Miltani' had any idea about Harry's role in the American Aurors becoming involved. Indeed that additional manpower had forced Nefertiti to scramble, even as she used it to make her cover seem even more competent than before.

Roberto winced at that but nodded. "I suppose giving Proudfoot's glowing reports on his officers and the Shinsengumi's ability to work together, I will agree with your distribution plan now that Spain's desire to split down into various smaller bits is no longer threatening to boil over into the nonmagical world. And I will put pressure on the various Unspeakable groups, as much as I can."

"You should push to disband them. At some point in the past, that group might've served some purpose, but the sheer number of Magical Oaths that they operate under has hamstrung them entirely too much," Nefertiti advised. And in this, she was honestly telling the truth. While somewhat competent combatants, the elimination of the Unspeakables sent into Egypt had been astonishingly simple, and without their notes, no one had even the slightest inkling of the number of secrets that had been excised from history, which made hiding her and her husband's manipulations far easier.

Unfortunately, I agree. I think I will have to force a vote of no-confidence on the entire program in the Senate. It will be up to the various countries to enforce the ruling after that. For now, however, tell me about what you intend to do with the added forces in Greece?"

Nefertiti nodded and began to explain the antiterrorist warfare currently occurring in Greece and how the added troops would help in various theaters there. Soon after, her 'superior' laughed, and Nefertiti leaned back in her chair before she started to draft a series of orders, smiling internally as she did. *This part of the plan is going off without a hitch!*

The fact other parts of their plan were not doing so threatened to ruin her good mood, a snarl threatening to appear on her face. *My husband and I have had several thousand years to plan, scrounge, discover, and create the enchantments necessary to take that final step. Numerous times we've had to redo the plan, to pull back, to hide. And even now, there are powers in the world which we must fear. But no wizard who simply stumbled into deific power is going to stop us! Magic returns to the world thanks to Ophis, and with the magic will come the*

*Pharaohs, the true King and Queen of humanity, ruling through divine might! You will see Potter, you and all who stand with you. You cannot fight destiny!*

OOOOOOO

Cao Cao frowned, tapping at a newspaper in front of him as if he and his table companion were talking about an article within, while his mind was entirely elsewhere as he gazed at the man sitting to one side of him. "And you're saying you couldn't detect even a single hint of Kuroka's scent in Cairo? You said you and your pack were the best."

"We are," The man he was addressing growled, a sound that caused many of the people in the café to look up and around in some concern before going back to their own musings, although several glanced in their direction in some confusion. No doubt Cao Cao, dressed in the height of local fashion, and his companion were a very strange pair. The fellow actually was a source of concern already, though. He was big, as big as Cao Cao himself, shaggy looking, with hair falling past his shoulders, with hairy arms showing in a muscle-T, long jeans, and a pair of biker sunglasses.

The man, a Belarusian named Andre, was leader of a werewolf pack that the Khaos Brigade had convinced to join them. They had both benefited greatly from that allegiance thus far, but it appeared as if in this task, they would be found lacking.

Cao Cao stared at the man, bringing all the power of his considerable personality to bare, and the man glared back for a few moments before sighing. "Not a hint. Trust me, my pack went over the entire city, and that was no picnic either. Cairo's not as bad as some cities in terms of trash, but the sheer number of people made it worse. But we're werewolves, and if Kuroka had ever been there, we should have smelled a hint of it."

The Belarusian werewolf looked as if he wanted to spit. "There wasn't a hint of her scent anywhere! And I would know that damn Nekomata's scent even if it had been hidden under the smell of a cattle herd. Nekomata, for all they look like cat girls, have a distinct scent all their own that and has nothing to do with either. But whatever happened to the curly-tailed bitch left nothing behind we could detect. That could be because of the amount of time that's gone by, but I doubt it."

To say that most werewolves did not get along with Nekomata was to put it mildly. Although most of their animosity had little to do with the supposed conflict between cats and dogs. Instead, it had a lot more to do with how they were seen, and indeed saw themselves.

Nekomata were seen as powerful fighters, tricksters, and above all, sensual and erudite in the mystical communities that knew about them and even in popular nonmagical culture. Most werewolves, while rightly respected for their regeneration and combat power, were also seen as beasts, diseased creatures who were best kept at arm's length. Only those who lived within the auspices of the Youkai Association were treated at all fairly, regardless of how the

individual werewolves acted, although that was slowly changing thanks to Harry Potter being known as a werewolf and his own actions.

Regardless, there was no better tracker in the world than a werewolf, whose sense of smell put any dog breed to shame and was coupled with a human intelligence. The Belarusian werewolves had also been trained in tracking with magic, a holdover from ancient times when werewolves were often hired as thief catchers and enforcers for local lords before the Statute of Secrecy 'separated magical society from muggle'.

Knowing this, Cao Cao scowled angrily, leaning back in his chair, thinking about what his next step should be. *At least I know that even if he had been given this task, Vali would not be having any easier time of it than I am.*

Of the two real policy makers of the Khaos Brigade, Cao Cao had been given this task by Ophis because it was felt that he was a more subtle individual than Vali and got along better with the werewolf wizards. Instead, Vali had been put in charge of a job that might or might not break Bikou out of jail, using some of their agents in the Old Devil Faction as pawns. Bikou had yet to give his captors any real information, or at the very least, they had not yet acted upon any they had wrung out of him, and Ophis wanted him freed before that could change if there was even a chance of it occurring.

But as pleased to be given this job as he had been at the time, two days later Cao Cao had nothing to show for it beyond a growing sense of futility. *Perhaps I should've brought in Le Fay, but Vali was insistent about needing her magical abilities to cover their escape once Bikou was broken out of the Fallen's jail.* "And on the magical side of things?"

As the two talked, five men had entered the caravanserai, taking over a table in the corner, followed by another group of two couples, moving to another table. They sat between the corner where the three Sacred Gear users Cao Cao had brought along as part of his team sat, discretely watching the rest of the cafe. And outside, Cao Cao could see the two tables the werewolf wizards had taken over sitting under a large awning.

A flash of light caught Cao Cao's eye, but then the wizard werewolf grunted, and told him what anyone in the public side of the Wizarding World would know: that Potter was in Egypt, that he had brought in Japanese Aurors, and that their expertise in fighting spirits had seemingly carried over into fighting undead.

"The troubles there are a lot more widespread than expected, but the Wizarding World is keeping a handle on it for now," the other man finished. "More power to them, I say."

"Indeed. The last thing we want is for the existence of magic to come out without our preparation for said being finished."

The wizard looked up, growling as the spell around the table keeping their conversation from being overheard shattered without any warning. "Wh..."

Before either man could move, or indeed their backups nearby could react, Harry Potter entered the café, moving swiftly to his table as if he had already known where Cao Cao was sitting. *SHITT!!!*

Harry's hands came up as he said aloud, "Cao Cao, I thought that was you I spotted on the streets. How have you been doing."

Thinking quickly, Cao Cao looked around, realizing that Harry wasn't going to just attack him with so many civilians around, and decided to play this out, pushing down his first thought of simply attacking himself or, honestly running away. Potter was not someone Cao Cao wanted to take on without planning it out as much as possible. "I'm well enough, although it is good to see you, old boy. Come and take a seat."

As Harry crossed the intervening distance, Andre whimpered, his whole body language changing from confident if frustrated to submissive. He actually flinched as Harry sat down across from Cao Cao, Harry barely giving him a glance. "That's a good little beta, keep your hands where I can see them, and you won't have to see your guts studded in silver."

Again, the werewolf whimpered and made no move to rise or seem threatening. Indeed, if Cao Cao was reading his body language right, it was all the werewolf could do to stop himself from dropping to all fours and rolling onto his tummy in complete submission, regardless of being in his human body at present.

Not that Cao Cao couldn't understand that. Harry's presence was like a thunderstorm, a directed one that was about to shit all over your day. Yet Cao Cao spent most of his days in the presence of Ophis and was not going to be intimidated that easily. "To what dubious pleasure do we owe your sudden appearance, Harry Potter?" Cao Cao asked as he watched Harry's fingers flick upwards, probably re-creating the noticed me not spells his approach had broken a moment ago.

"I should be asking you the same question. What the fuck are you people up to here in Egypt? And why shouldn't I just decide to try to cut off the head of the snake here and now." Harry's tone was conversational, but his emerald eyes gleamed with danger as he didn't quite glare at Cao Cao.

Cao Cao stiffened at that, but Harry's smile made him pause. That smile was as thin and as dangerous as a dagger, as was the look in Harry's eyes. One hand tapped gently on the table, bringing Cao Cao's awareness to it, where he saw a small finger dagger already in Harry's hand. "Now, I know what you're asking, can you pull out your True Longinus before Fragarach can change shape and stab you through the heart? To this question I reply, are you feeling lucky?"

Nearby, the three Sacred Gear users Cao Cao had brought along with him had also started to respond. Unlike Cao Cao, they hadn't met Harry before yet they could tell he wasn't wanted here and the trio had just enough magical sense to feel the first spell Harry had thrown up.

Before they could move, the couples who had come in were turning, wands hidden up sleeves or held lightly in their hands, their tips pointing towards the Sacred Gear users. "Now, let's not do something we'll all regret," the leader of the team of Aurors murmured.

Harry had briefed them on this operation, although he hadn't told them why this group was dangerous. But when it was discovered that they were working with a werewolf pack, a pack which consisted of several criminals in the Wizarding World, they hadn't bothered questioning further.

At the same time, leprechauns appeared under Cao Cao's table and those of the Sacred Gear users, while outside, Akeno and another team of Shinsengumi were sitting close to the werewolves, ready to act. One of the leprechauns hiding underneath the table smirked, tapping his hammer down on one of the human's feet. "Heh, now ye just be good and still, me boyo. That way this won't be going violent."

"Checkmate, bitch," another Auror, this one an American, whispered, amused at how well they had gotten the drop on these folk thanks to all the attention they had instinctively paid to Harry.

Cao Cao took all of this in with a single glance and knowing that at the very least he would not be able to get out of this without injury and decided to play it straight even as he kicked out lightly at the leprechaun under the table, faster than the leprechaun could dodge, smacking him to one side. The next second, he was holding the small gem that was his version of the emergency teleport enchantment that Bikou had once used to escape the team of Kiba, Harry, Loup and Sairaorg.

Yet for all of that, Cao Cao spoke calmly, his voice rising slightly over the cursing from under the table. "In answer to your question, the Khaos Brigade is currently not running any operation within Egypt. We had wished to discover what was going on here, and sent in Kuroka, who I believe you met after the battle with Kokabiel, along with several dozen of our own wizards, and magicians. At first, they were simply doing research, trying to follow what was going on as your wizards continued to try and keep the nonmagical world from discovering the same. However, after only a few days, they went silent. I am here to discover if Kuroka or anyone with her is still alive after this seeming betrayal."

"More detail please. When was this, how strong was the force you sent, and what do you think happened?" Harry asked slowly.

"And will you answer questions on our side?" Cao Cao questioned tartly, but then was surprised when Harry nodded.

Seeing that response, Harry laughed. "I'm pointing the **Answerer** at you, Cao Cao. That means you couldn't lie even if you wanted to. Now that I know that the Khaos Brigade isn't behind what's going on here and can see what resources you are able to bring to bear at the moment, I don't see any issue telling you what you want to know in turn so long as it isn't about me and mine. But you first."

Now Potter glanced at Andre and once more the werewolf tried to make himself seem smaller, shrinking almost in place, a somewhat comedic thing to see in someone so large and normally self-confident. "And I think before that this should be a conversation just between us."

Before Cao Cao could say anything, Andre stood up, moving to the caravanserai's entrance.

As he left, Cao Cao looked across at Potter, frowning thoughtfully, annoyed and angered by the older man's use of a magical device to force him to tell the truth. And yet, he couldn't not help but acknowledge that in Harry's place, if he had access to such a weapon, he would be using it too. *And to be perfectly fair, with how we are making no headway whatsoever in finding Kuroka, isn't like telling Potter is going to hurt anything.*

With that in mind, he gestured lightly with one hand towards his backup, all of whom relaxed, thankful that a fight wasn't going to break out just then, knowing just how out-matched they currently were. "I will willingly answer your questions, so long as you tell me anything you know or have learned that could pertain to Kuroka's disappearance. Above the others we lost here in Egypt, Kuroka is an important member of the Khaos Brigade."

"Agreed." Harry's answer again came instantly. He'd known going into this that he would be needing to give out some information to get some in turn, and that didn't cost him anything.

With that out of the way, Cao Cao explained about how they had learned that there was a plot to betray the Khaos Brigade among the wizards they had recruited. How Ophis had ordered them to respond, and how one of them, the same one who had been subtly manipulating Vali and Cao Cao, had been ousted as a Metamorph before possibly escaping. "We are uncertain if he escaped or not, but Ophis told us she felt something moving underneath the wards."

"That sounds like someone did indeed use some kind of teleportation spell," Harry mused. *Perhaps some equivalent of my water transportation but through Earth instead of water?* "And he gave his name as Simon Maagh?"

"Yes. We assume he and the woman who we sent into Egypt with Kalawarner are connected, but the how is unknown."

Harry frowned, thinking, *A Metamorph, that complicates things, even as it explains how someone could frame Cao Cao with attempting to bribe the museum curators to not answer our questions.* Over the past few days Hermione and Padma had visited several of the nation's better museums, and all of them had told the same story under Imperious-assisted questioning. Worse, Metamorphs were a security nightmare. As much as Harry loathed how they went about it, MACUSA had a point on that score.

*Still, there are ways to discover them, if you know how to look for the first place. And we have Tonks and can use her as a guinea pig.* "Okay, that's irritating. But you believe that this conspiracy began in the Wizarding World?"

"Yes. As far as we have been able to tell, Maagh didn't have any other allies within the Khaos Brigade, not even among the werewolf wizards like my former table companion here." Cao Cao drolly nodded his head towards the doorway where his ally had disappeared. "Further, beyond the way he might have teleported out, Maagh showed no non-wizard type spells or abilities."

"That tracks with some of what we've seen, although their overall goal is something none of us have really able to get a handle on. Do you have any idea?"

"At first we believed that they were simply intending to influence or otherwise guide the actions of the Khaos Brigade, setting myself and Vali at one another's throats in order to take over advising Ophis. Since Kuroka's disappearance, that idea has gone up window. At this point, we have no idea."

"Join the club," Harry grumbled. he was still pointing Answerer at the younger man, so he knew that everything that Cao Cao had said was true. The only area he had attempted to prevaricate around was what the Khaos Brigade had done to the remaining wizards. But Harry figured that whatever they had done was probably quite lethal, yet also exempted Le Fay given her role in pointing out the abilities of a Metamorph. But unfortunately, Cao Cao didn't have enough information to let them take the offense still.

"We're doing well enough on the defense, but we're still giving up initiative to the enemy," he said aloud, knowing Cao Cao would understand.

"So you lack enough information to go on the offensive as well? Perhaps a team up is in order," Cao Cao probed.

The youngster had balls, Harry reflected, especially considering the only other time they had met one another they were looking at one another from different sides of a battlefield. But he shook his head. "No. While I am willing to acknowledge that you aren't behind the troubles

in Egypt, that doesn't mean that you wouldn't wish to turn them to your own advantage rather than simply end them as I wish to. In fact, I aim debating whether or not to have one of my devil comrades throw up a bounded field or in the area and then capture or kill all of you," Harry said bluntly.

"We have emergency teleportation devices given to us by Ophis, one of which I have already in hand and can activate with a single squeeze of my fingers. Any such attempt would fail, and I rather doubt you would be able to throw up a bounded field fast enough before I have the True Longinus in my hands," Cao Cao answered equally bluntly. "Besides, you haven't given me the information you promised to, and while I believe you capable of many things, Potter, going back on an agreement is not one of them."

"Fair enough." Harry chuckled before going on seriously. ". What happened to the rest of the team you say you sent here we haven't discovered, but we were able to find the area which had been covered by a bounded field where Kuroka apparently fought a running battle against whoever had thrown the bounded field up. Kuroka was able to escape the bounded field but was captured near the edge of it. Undead, conjured beasts, and in particular a crocodile man of some kind was involved in the attack, as was a woman, who apparently got in the last knockout blow on Kuroka before she could make good her escape. From what we were able to tell, Kuroka wasn't killed, she was captured, but for what purpose or where they were taken, I have no idea. Surely you have a way to track..."

Cao Cao shook his head. "We do not. We did, previously, all our special agents have teleportation spells that can double as trackers. But somehow, whoever is behind this either blocked it or removed the item in question from Kuroka's person after the ambush and destroyed it."

Harry frowned at that, then leaned back, tapping his free hand thoughtfully on his armrest his other hand still on the table, and still pointing the tip of Answerer in its current form at Cao Cao. "Is your investigation getting anywhere?"

"Not at present. Without the wizards who were nominally sent in here with Kuroka, we lack any contacts on the Wizarding side of things in Egypt. The only wizards we still have among the Khaos Brigade are werewolves or wizards-turned-vampires, and the locals know them for what they are too much for them to blend in. As for the nonmagical side of things, the local Aurors have done their normal excellent job of keeping the secret of magic from coming out. Thus, it's been quite frustrating."

That wasn't all that was frustrating Cao Cao of course. Rather, it was simply an addition it to a monument of frustration. Ever since he had run away from home when his parents attempted to sell him to human traffickers, Cao Cao been training with his Sacred Gear, refining his spear techniques and strength, training himself in strategy and tactics as he traveled the world. In that time he had come to master the True Longinus, and himself to a tremendous degree, developing his philosophy that earth was for humans in that same time frame.



But as of late, subterfuge had been the name of the game while knowledge had shaped it. And versatility had allowed Cao Cao's enemies to bring more power or abilities to bear than he could match. Cao Cao would hardly call himself ignorant, and he was good at subterfuge, or else Ophis would know his true feelings about her and the other nonhumans. But the wizards played the game very well and in sheer versatility, a simple Sacred Gear like his own just wasn't enough against such. If he could but find them, Cao Cao was confident that he could destroy any wizard, perhaps even the one across from him, in a fair fight. But wizards never fought fair and with wizards, it was always what you didn't know could kill you.

Harry sneered at that but didn't say anything, completely understanding where the young man in front of him was coming from. After all, he'd been routinely frustrated since coming to Egypt. *The difference is, I'm making progress, however slowly. He isn't.*

Deciding that this meeting had gone about as well as could be expected, Harry stood up. "A word of advice, I would leave Egypt if I were you. Beyond brute force I don't think you can contribute to what's going on here, and, frankly, it is taking all of my willpower and the knowledge that there are innocents around to not try to capture or kill you."

*Blasted magical resistance, and I don't doubt he's got enchanted items on him. Any spell I tried on him would no doubt have to be hugely overpowered, and I've seen Cao Cao's speed before. Even from this distance he might be able to dodge it. And, drat it, I did give him my word. And he did give me a lot of information too.*

Knowing this was a bluff, there were indeed too many innocents around that would be killed in any such attempt, Cao Cao decided to change the subject, wanting to address something he had long been curious of. "What is the cause you fight for, Harry Potter? Why do you fight alongside the Devils, Youkai and others? Is it just because you are driven by lust for their bodies? Is your mind so weak as to forget they are not human?"

Harry gritted his teeth, at how this little pissant was taking a shot at his various relationships. "I have never fought for any cause other than to protect myself and those I care about. As for why I fight alongside them, I take people as they come, I judge anyone I meet by their actions, not by race as you seem to imply I should."

"Doing so can only take you so far and can blind you to the reality of what the Devils, Fallen and the rest truly are: parasites on humanity. Do you know what I fight for?" Cao Cao didn't wait for Harry to respond, instead continuing on, his voice rising into the cadence of a true believer proselytizing to the heathen.

"The Earth should belong to humanity alone. What have the gods done but demanded worship, forcing humans to go to war to spread their religions, to build temples to their glory while denigrating our fellow man? What have the Devils or Fallen or Angels created or given to Earth, to humanity? Nothing that we could not have created ourselves. Any glory we see, any

song, or art we devote to them, comes from ourselves, merely a reflection of our own abilities, our own imagination.”

“No Devils or Fallen aping humanity. No gods to place themselves above us, no magic but that of humanity. Earth for humans, and humans only! That is why I wish magic to come out into the open eventually, so that humanity, led by Sacred Gear users such as myself, will unite against these parasites and throw them out.”

Harry was appalled, no, he was honestly horrified. It wasn't the fact that Sacred Gears were actually gifts from the Abrahamic God, and thus Cao Cao Was being grossly hypocritical. No, it was Cao Cao's ignorance that appalled him.

"But what kind of humanity would it be? What kind of future? If you think that Fallen and Devils are so horrible, I urge you to study your history more. Humanity is very, very good at hating one another, regardless of outside influence. And you really think that the nonmagicals would thank you for letting the secret out? Would welcome you Sacred Gear users with open arms as they turn on the Fallen and Devils? Or on wizard-kind? That is an impossibly naïve thought.”

This was the same problem that he had talked about with the leaders of magical Ireland and Britain after repairing the Undertaking. There was just no way Harry could see magic coming out into the open playing out, without causing wars at the very least, and perhaps something like a jihad against the various magical societies. And with Gods and Devils with powers like Sirzechs added into the mix, Harry didn't think that humanity would win that fight.

Further, such a war would place his family and their friends right in the middle. The very idea made Harry want to snarl. *And this young idiot thinks that if he controls how magic comes out, he will control that outcome?! Again Harry fought the urge to end this fucker right here, and he would have if not for the fact there were still the innocents around them to consider.*

No, better to continue the work the various magical societies had begun by hiding themselves, if in an entirely new direction. Pull magic away from the world and onto Danan where it could be out in the open from the start. *It isn't as if Earth is actually able to deal with the amount of magic around now, anyway,* Harry thought, remembering the news a few days ago about another earthquake near Cuba, adding to the other natural disasters going on.

"You're living in a pipe dream Cao Cao, and I would urge you to wake up!"

With that, Harry turned around, but Cao Cao called him back right before Harry was about to cancel the spell that had concealed their conversation from being overheard. "Harry Potter, when it comes time, when the magic comes out into the open, and it becomes humans against the rest of the mystical community, I hope you choose the right side."

Whirling, Harry glared at the younger man, Fragarach singing in his hand to be used, his deific power battering at his shields. "The truce is over, Cao Cao. Get out of Egypt, or I'll kill you. And if you ever threaten my family or friends again, you won't live to regret it."

Staring at Harry, Cao-Cai slowly nodded, understanding at last that he had pushed Potter too far. "We will be gone within the hour."

"And we'll be watching," Harry retorted, exiting the caravanserai, gathering up his allies as he went.

Later that day, Harry returned to Alexandria, where he met with his family and friends, explaining his conversation with Cao-Cao. When Harry explained how Vali and Cao-Cao had both been manipulated by a Metamorph, everyone turned to Tonks, who shrugged her shoulders, her features shifting into that of a clown complete with a massive red wig. "What, you think that just because I mostly use my talent for shits and giggles that there isn't a serious danger to it?"

"I'm still surprised you could still use your Metamorph skills when you became a Devil," Hermione mumbled, frowning. Of all the things she had learned since once more reuniting with Harry, the fact that Tonks had dived into becoming a Devil without really much in the way of forethought had both not surprised her - Hermione knew Tonks' personality after all - and worried her at the same time. "I would've postulated that kind of ability would only be possible with a wizard's magical core."

"Witch's core, please. But nah, I never even thought I would lose it. And I didn't." Indeed, if anything, Tonks had gotten better with her ability to use her Metamorph powers. Certainly, in her discussions with the others, she had realized that she had not been using her Metamorph powers to its greatest potential, simply becoming someone else or changing her features slightly instead of the alternative: changing into something else entirely at need.

"The powers of a Metamorph in the hands of our enemies really disturbs me. Is there any way we can combat them? What about your magical signature, surely..." Yubelluna's voice trailed off as Tonks shook her head. "Really?"

"Changing your magical signature is a lot harder than changing your body type, but it can be done with enough practice and training. That isn't something that most people beyond Metamorphs know about, and it's **really** hard the first time you do it." She paused, then smirked. "Though, that should make sense, right? You are changing the nature of the connection between your magic and your body. So it's about as painful as a whole lifetime's worth of menstrual cramps going through your body the first few times you do it... second by second. But it can be done."

*Something I both curse me Mum and love her for*, Tonks thought, giving the now dead woman a mocking, if loving, salute in her mind. Thanks to Metamorphs having cropped up in

the Black family several times before Tonks came along, Andromeda had been able to give her daughter a book that taught her a lot about her odd magical ability. And then Andromeda had stood above Tonks every time Tonks trained with a large beater bat and forced Tonks to practice changing her magical signature until she could do it without feeling any pain.

“So, what you’re saying is, there’s no way to find a Metamorph?” Yubelluna questioned in some distress, and not just because of the implications. Indeed, most of the people around Tonks were wincing right now from her description. Even Harry, who, prior to Tonks coming to Japan, was the only one who knew about that ability, shook his head.

“Not at all. For one thing, the Metamorph in question would have to know the magical signature of the person they’re trying to change to, which isn’t the same as seeing someone’s magical signature displayed on a contract or anything like that. That’d be like seeing the notes of a song printed out on paper and thinking you know what it will sound like. Instead, you must see a person’s magic in action and then use Legilimency to get a feel for the other person like I do. So, if you have something locked down with only a few people who have access to it, that’s not something a Metamorph could get by without access to one of those people.”

Tonks let that thought settle for a second, then went on. “But if you’re trying to spot someone’s magical signature through a crowd, a Metamorph who can change their signature knowing you’re trying to track him or her down? Then no, that would be impossible. And if they have assumed an identity for long enough, then that’s a whole different kettle of fish.”

While the others thought about how many different people one, possibly two Metamorphs could become, false identities spread across a world, Harry thought about it, then chuckled, shaking his head as he repeated the line that a certain Indian god had once used. “The colors, man, the colors.”

Everyone looked at him in confusion, and Harry explained. “I’d wager the wards back in Kuoh could stop a Metamorph cold. Because even if you change your magical signature, those wards are smart enough to be able to tell the difference, especially if the original is somewhere else, already read into them.”

Tonks nodded at that. “I used my Metamorph powers a few times in Kuoh, and even when I changed my magical signature, the wards still recognized me. But that doesn’t help us now.”

“No, but we can get the word out to Proudfoot and the rest of the locals. We can have the Aurors search for people whose personalities have seemed to change or are missing, unrelated to the attacks. Maybe we’ll find this Maagh character is hiding somewhere in plain sight among the magical communities.”

“We might have a bigger problem than just the fact that he is a Metamorph who somehow was able to convince a group like the Khaos Brigade of not only his own bonafides

but to actually listen to his words,” Padma mumbled, biting her lip and looking down at the table. Indeed, she looked almost shocked.

Everyone, including Hermione, looked at her, and she chuckled wanly. “For all that you’re better at research, love, I’ve always been better at remembering specific names than you have. Maagh is a name that participated in the creation of the International Confederacy of Wizardry. And I recall what Hermione has told me about your adventures in our first year at Hogwarts Harry, specifically about Nicholas Flamel.”

Having heard about this adventure before, Kala and the others didn’t react initially to the mention of the man who had created the Philosopher’s Stone, but it was clear this disturbed the wizards. And on reflection, it began to bother Kala as well. The fact was because they knew they were immortal unless killed, few Devils, Angels or Fallen had the same drive to learn or grow as quickly as humans did. So the idea that someone could keep that essential human drive to learn, grow and gain strength for long enough? They could become as dangerous as a Longinus-level Sacred Gear user.

But in this case, there was a very different skill set to consider, and once more, Yubelluna reflected that despite the factions, ability to create bounded fields and hide their mystical features it was humans who were adept at subtlety and misdirection in terms of scheming and warfare. When it came to war and combat, the Factions were all about raw power over anything else beyond. *And only the most strategically minded of us would think about gathering allies or long-term planning like this.*

“That would actually make sense. Remember, there’s that blank portion of history during the period when the Ottomans ruled in Egypt. Just...” Hermione paused, frowning. “Just like the hidden log that I found in Giza.”

“Or even older,” Padma said, shaking her head and wanting to get the full horror of her sudden leap of logic out into the open. “What if we are dealing with an actual Pharaoh here? One who has had that significant length of time to plan whatever he’s doing here?”

“Someone even older than the oldest Fallen?” Kala frowned at that, finally understanding why this idea was worrying Padma so much. “And that’s another thing humans have over us supernatural types. If you choose to do so, you can stay on task a heck of a lot longer. I can’t think of a single Fallen who stayed on any single project for more than a few centuries, even those projects that touched on the Sins that caused their Fall.”

“Regardless of our suppositions, we still don’t know enough about the enemy. As Sun Tzu stated, one must know oneself and one’s enemy if one expects to win a war. We know ourselves, but we still have no idea about our enemy. Unless the two of you can find out who this person is?” Kiba mused, having been silent up to this point. He was there instead of Akeno, who was on duty with the reaction teams.

When the two researchers just shook their heads since they still didn't have anything else to go on, Kala spoke up once more. "What about their personalities? Is there anything that all of the Pharaohs had common?"

"Arrogance," Hermione and Padma said as one before laughing, with Hermione taking over. "All of the pharaohs were arrogant. Extremely so, egotistical in the extreme. Just look at the great works. Yes, they were amazing in terms of cultural significance, but almost all of them were built by Pharaohs who wanted to see to their comfort in the afterlife... which I would not have thought was real, right up until I discovered gods truly existed."

Hermione shook her head with a wan little chuckle, wondering what the demarcation line between Gods and Pharaohs had been, especially in terms of the whole afterlife concept, but refused to dwell on it right now. "They thought big, and they disdained even other wizards, and their magic concentrated on manipulating the five elements of the human soul as posited by Egyptian magic. They were also tyrants, as much as modern Egyptology might choose not to interpret things in that manner. There is a reason why the concept of Kings, of someone being ordained by the gods to rule, originates as an Egyptian concept. And since we know the gods existed, that becomes even more prominent."

"So, could we be looking at some kind of hostile takeover of Egypt? I don't see how small attacks like this can do that," Yubelluna protested.

"On their own, maybe not. But combined with some other kind of attack, maybe. We need to contact Rias and the others. If what we've seen so far is indeed a prelude to something bigger, we might need more boots on the ground. Specifically, I want Asia on standby. We've gotten lucky since we started to really stop these attacks in that we've been able to keep the dead and injured to a limit. But going forward, we might more help on the magical healing side of things."

At that point, the meeting broke up, with Tonks heading over to consult with Proudfoot. Because of their concerns and the idea of an immortal pharaoh still being around somewhere, two hundred more Aurors arrived throughout the day, pulled from teams of various nations around the Middle East at the ICW's behest rather than the ICW's current reserves. They were joined by a further twenty more from the United Kingdom, which meant over a third of its ready Auror force was deployed to Egypt.

With them, they brought additional mediwitches and medical supplies, putting them closer than even the fastest portkey, and in a position to go out and find wounded rather than wait for the wounded to be brought to them. While Harry had been correct, in that they had stopped people from dying in the attacks since they had arrived, there were still many people getting injured in what the wizards considered a problem they had. And only an international Portkey could get injured to St. Mungos or one of the other existing hospitals from Egypt, which did not have its own version of that venerable institution.

However, despite Harry's protests, Proudfoot and his sub-commanders decided to break these reinforcements up to enlarge the existing Nome reaction teams. And equally, unfortunately, Japan had no additional troops to send without completely stripping themselves of their own magical police force. Even so, that was an exceptionally large force of magic users: six hundred and twenty Aurors and ninety-four Shinsengumi. This was a major help, to be sure, and the leaders of the Nome reaction teams that covered a lot more territory, such as the New Valley or Asyut teams, were extremely grateful. Where before they'd both had only twenty Aurors and two Shinsengumi, they now had a hundred and thirty Aurors each and more Shinsengumi besides.

Against any normal wizard-type opponent, Harry would've been perfectly happy with that strategy. But, as it was, he wasn't. Indeed, Harry was concerned they were still underestimating the amount of force the enemy could bring to bear at any one point and how quickly. Suppose the enemy had a single target in, say, the Fayum and simply flooded the area with undead and conjured beasts? In that case, the defenders on the spot couldn't stop them from doing a lot of damage and thus covering whatever the enemy was really after.

If, that is, they were after anything specific in the first place. Unlike Proudfoot and the others, Harry was certain that their enemy was after something much larger than that. The whole country perhaps, or more? He didn't know, but he knew it would be something huge.

He passed that on to Rias, who agreed with the idea of putting Asia on standby, transferring her to Danan. Luckily, Lily could use the Undertaking to transfer between worlds, so Harry didn't have to come back to do the transportation.

This came out when Lily had the thought to try to escape to Danan to avoid schoolwork. As his daughter, Lily had a connection to the Undertaking that she could manipulate with a good bit of effort. She had come out at the same point in Tir Na Nog that Harry routinely used to travel there, and been found by the fairies, who quickly summoned Luna who, in turn, had quickly forced Lily to return and take her lumps.

Needless to say, the littlest Potter was now somewhat in the doghouse, although not literally. "But if she tries that stunt again and Luna doesn't make her immediately come back, I might just take that step," Rias had said, her tone both loving and exasperated.

Harry could have talked with her and the rest of his family for hours, delighting in the simple things in life. Instead, with Kiba protecting him, Harry once more delved into the river, grappling with the magic within. However, the resistance within had strengthened, and despite the understanding he had built the past few days of the Egyptian-style magic within, Harry found himself barely making any headway once more. But he kept at it, trying to force a tsunami through a tiny hole under a glass ceiling without damaging the ceiling. And slowly, the mental pressure faded under his assault. It wasn't quick, but Harry knew he could win this even with the renewed defenses.

OOOOOOO

“...So if we wish to become involved in whatever is happening in Egypt, or even just retrieve Kuroka, I am afraid we will have to devote more of our forces to the effort. Harry Potter was very clear in his antagonism,” Cao-Cao grumbled as he sat across from Ophis, not enjoying the feeling of once more failing in a task. “While I know finding Potter if he hides behind the Wizarding World’s wards would be an issue, I think dealing with him while he is away from his base of operations is worth it. And I certainly didn’t see any sign he could survive a strike from my Longinus if I can hit him with a full-powered strike.”

He paused then, looking at Ophis questioningly. “Although I’ve always wondered why it is that gods or more powerful beings like you cannot get past those wards?”

“Blocking the sight of one such as I is not all that difficult, or else I would already know everything I wish to know from this world,” Ophis answered, her tone so dry that Cao Cao couldn’t understand if she was making a joke or being serious. “Magic is about knowledge and intent, not just power. Even the most powerful can be fooled by illusions and trickery, especially at range. I could sense a ward directly in front of me but pinpointing them from outside my own sight is not possible.”

“But surely, if we could pinpoint an area where those wards must be, you could then break through them?”

Ophis looked uncertain for a moment. “I... Do not know. The Wizarding World wards that cover the majority of their civilization are... strange. They are not only powerful but very much almost anti-godly in a way. The closer I think about them, the more I don’t want to. They can turn even my mind away. Even thinking about them now is difficult.”

She set that aside for the moment, thinking deeply. “No. I do not believe that coming into direct conflict with Potter would do anything except weaken us both and not accomplish our goal of determining what is going on in Egypt. Rather, we will cut our losses and shift our attention. This was a tactical loss, nothing more.”

Cao-Cao blinked at that, not having anticipated that, and Ophis continued. “You will remain here in command. Vali is in the Underworld with Katerea. They have perfected the plan to break Bikou out of prison and will be doing so shortly. I will be leaving momentarily for my own mission.”

“Wait, what are you doing?” Cao Cao exclaimed in shock, before quickly bowing his head as Ophis looked at him coolly. “It is just, it is somewhat rare for you to act on your own.” the last time Ophis had even left the Khaos Brigade’s main base was to meet with Potter and attempt to discern what Hades was up to.



“True. But this is a task that I am uniquely suited for. I will be retrieving the possibly draconic artifacts that were reported previously in various museums in South and North America.”

For a moment, Cao Cao looked worried. The last thing he wanted was for Ophis to awaken more dragons who would then follow her lead. But at the look in her eyes, Cao Cao just nodded his head. There didn't seem to be anything he could do to convince her not to do this, and he wasn't yet in a position to strike at her. So, it was best not to try. Instead, he bowed his head and watched as Ophis exited the meeting room, stewing in his annoyance.

OOOOOOO

The rising and the setting of the sun were always important when it came to rituals. This was the case even if the place where the ritual was happening did not have access to the sky, such as a deep cave, or in this case, an upside-down pyramid buried under the grounds of an ancient, abandoned city.

Akhenaten moved into the central ritual chamber once more, but instead of being clad in simple homespun as he normally was at home, he was clad in his full Pharaonic regalia. Everything about his accouterments was built upon the same thing that Pharaoh regalia had been built on for eons, 'He of the Reed and Bee'. The fact that the Pharaoh was supposed to embody a series of dichotomous forces. The living and the dead, secular and social, order and chaos.

On his head, Akhenaten wore a Pharaoh's mask made of gold. This was an almost humanlike mask from the nose down, following his features like a second skin. Above that, the mask shifted into a disk above his head, with sunbeams radiating out, the areas between the gold beams filled in with different colors of pearls, diamonds, and other precious jewels.

This was a symbol of his power, the power of Aten-on-Earth. Nowhere on this mask was there a symbol of another God, only the one Akhenaten had attempted to create in ancient time, to remake himself into, rather than simply being the son of or the speaker of a God as most Pharaohs had been. To become an eternal god on Earth in truth, rather than simply reign over his tiny part of the world. *A thought my loving wife put in my head at one point, he now reflected, but which I most certainly ran with.*

*We failed then, Akhenaten's thoughts wound on, recalling the time when he had been a true Pharaoh. I failed because we underestimated the power of the gods and of the cults who followed them, beheaded though they had been when I began my quest. And yet, in failing, I succeeded just enough to give Nefertiti and I immortality. The time needed to hide and try again.*

How those early centuries rankled, even now! *Using our Skin-changing powers to fake our deaths, lest the gods discover our attempt had partially succeeded. Exiting our tombs in the*

*Royal Wadi in Amarna to discover that my religion had been torn down, our sons and daughters slain, with distant relatives sitting on the throne of the Pharaoh.*

*And the gods had watched! Thoth perhaps might have had a hint of what we had done, or Osiris might have realized those we sacrificed to the Underworld were not ourselves. Regardless, they had turned every hand against us, with every eye searching for anyone with our abilities or features until we were able to retreat here into our Fortress of Vengeance. How long it took us to decide to try again, to gather the knowledge needed.*

*But now, all those years in the desert, pay off,* he reflected, as he walked forward, the artificial light above them reflected off not only his mask but the other items on Akhenaten's body.

Had they been there to witness this, it might have made Hermione and Padma somewhat happy to know that they had correctly identified many of the items Nefertiti and Akhenaten were currently using. In his hand, the Staff of Set, which they had recently discovered pictures of, reclaimed from another Pharaoh in ancient times. Hanging from his neck, the Ankh of Royalty. And in Nefertiti's hand was the Heqa-staff called the Army Breaker.

*Blessed by the gods and taken from their owners in times of great turmoil. So much turmoil that the gods themselves did not notice.*

Nefertiti also wore special clothing, although she lacked a face mask. Her clothing consisted of white strips of silk and linen wrapping around her in such a way as to put her body on display. On her fingers, Nefertiti wore rings made of solid gold, inlaid with gemstones enchanted for mental fortitude and power, enchantments taken from several dead schools of magic. Beyond that, the white color was supposed to give her an untouched look. The jewelry Nefertiti wore added a regal air, as did her headdress: a massive thing made of Lapis Lazuli, pearls and gold, radiating outwards from her head into the same sun image as the mask Akhenaten wore. This was what a queen had to look like, and in this ceremony, symbology mattered just as much as willpower. She had to seem almost virginal, yet sexual and regal all at once.

The flicking tail behind her somewhat ruined the image. And yet, it and the sight of her chest underneath that white clothing once more sent a rush of desire through Akhenaten. *Oh yes, I am very much looking forward to taking that for a spin, as the saying goes.*

But now was not the time for such thoughts. So instead, Akhenaten led the way across the walkway to the center of the ritual chamber once more. There, the married couple moved as one, moving to stand on either side of the central control panel monitoring the hundreds of arrays around them. There, they reached forward with their free hands as one, their touch on the lapis lazuli spheres activating the enchantments all around them. The glow of the artificial sun above them dimmed, its energies slowly sucked into the surrounding enchantments as the married couple closed their eyes, ready to begin the Harrowing.

“Thousands of years we have planned this. Thousands of years. And now it comes to fruition. Now we chance our gathered strength for the greatest prize of all,” Akhenaten murmured, causing his wife to nod.

The two of them reached forward with their free hands to touch one of the control stones of the ritual, the lapis lazuli glowing under their hands. And as it grew, the light above them seemed to dim slightly as the power in the room was redirected. “I, Akhenaten, last Pharaoh of Egypt, do call upon the powers of Heka and Ra. The Blessings of the items we, the blood of Kings and Gods hold, shall be wound throughout all of Egypt.”

At those words, the magic on the staff in Akhenaten's hand wound into the enchantment worked throughout the background magic of Egypt, the power of the Ankh around his neck doing likewise. The same occurred to the Heqa-staff in Nefertiti's hand. That wasn't unusual. It was how they had been using them all along. But now, as he intoned, “Their power taken, their physical form shed like the skin of Apep, the power within becoming ours to command!” something else happened.

All three items slowly began to emit a hum, vibrate, and then slowly come apart, turning into dust. The staff's dust formed into long rivulets around Akhenaten's body to his other hand before being sucked into the lapis lazuli under his palm. The ring had, likewise, already disappeared, and now his free hand moved to the fourth lapis lazuli sphere as his wife's had.

Moments later, a fog began to spread from nowhere throughout Egypt. It started in drips and dribbles, but it would grow.

At her husband's nod, Nefertiti began to concentrate on another runic array around them. “By the power of Isis, we release the bonds of power upon our servants so they may act in our stead, my hands around their Ib, their Ren on our lips.” This spell began the process of releasing the gods held in stasis under their control. **Real** gods these, not the shadows released to combat Harry Potter on the magical plane within the Nile.

A series of runes lit up like a sun, stretching from the central day is to the surrounding statues, which shifted and slowly started to come alive. And at the same time, a feeling of almost oppressive weight began to thrum through the enchanted room.

Each of those runic arrays was composed of several different parts. One was a set of runes that almost looked foreign despite being written in hieroglyphs. Certainly, they had been created by foreign hands.

The gods' own hands, in point of fact, agreements transferred into the runic array that the gods had entered willingly.

On either side of this was the Pharaoh's foot. The image was completed by a hieroglyph that showed the head of the god in question, grinding each of the gods down, in the same

manner that this hieroglyph would have been used to note victory in battle or absolute control over his people.

And then the true name of each of the gods Akhenaten and Nefertiti had suborned was worked into the runes.

In ancient Egypt, people had a public name and a secret name, known only to their families, known as Ren. Ironically, this was to avoid being magically controlled. The gods in particular, were always extremely protective about their personal names, although for some reason, only one of them, Ra, was said to have been known for keeping his name a complete secret in modern Egyptology.

This was a falsehood. Every Egyptian God had **always** protected their secret name as much as possible. But via careful manipulation and the use of their advanced Metamorph powers, Akhenaten and Nefertiti had discovered each of their names.

Of course, even with all of that, getting the gods to write out their own agreement, to hide here, and to obey the commands of Akhenaten and Nefertiti for as long as they had, should've been impossible. But the reason behind that was easy. Even gods fear. Indeed, in a way, gods feared death more than humans. Because for gods, there was no great wheel of life, where their souls would be cleansed and reborn anew. For a God, dying was forever. So even if there would still be power in their names, held like bugs in the amber of Earth's magical structure, the gods themselves would be long gone.

In ancient times, the ancient Egyptian gods lost their power in intervals, here and there rather than all at once as was the case with the Greek gods. Several Egyptian deities died over time, slain by their brethren. Others lost power as their worshippers started to follow other cults or when their spheres of influence overlapped with other deities.

Yet the main Egyptian gods, Isis, Osiris, Horus, Ra, and a few others, spread their religion throughout the Roman era, until the arrival of the monotheistic Yahweh started to supplant the old cults. This movement, though slower than it was in Rome, killed off the pantheon in its entirety. While worshipers converted, Yahweh defeated the Egyptian gods with his legions of light in open deific combat.

When that final dissolution began, many of the gods became desperate for ways to hide away and survive even as their followers converted, limiting their powers. And some gods were simply not wise enough to read the fine print...

"Come Forth, god of the reptilian terrors, come forth, he of the powerful bite and scale. Come forth and wield the spear given you as our champion of tools, never to be released of your chains, Sobek!"

First to be released was Sobek, the most powerful of the gods Akhenaten and Nefertiti captured and the most independent. Released from his kennel, the Alligator God fought

Akhenaten's willpower, viciously attempting to break free. But Akhenaten knew his real name, had etched it in the great array around them, and the image of the Pharaoh's foot on his neck matched the reality.

Eventually, the battle of wills ended and Sobek knelt, laying the weapon that Akhenaten had given him at the immortal Pharaoh's feet. This was a weapon Akhenaten had found in Ireland when he first investigated that place during Yahweh's conquest of that land, stealing it away from a church before it could be turned into a Sacred Gear. The ancient spear of the warrior woman Scáthach, Gae Bolg.

The Spear of Mortal Pain and Death looked like it was made of bone, the bone coming from an ancient sea monster. Stronger than steel, the grey bone was marked here and there with the blood of its victims. The tip was marked with what looked like fur around the base of a slightly curved spear tip. But upon closer examination, the fur was made of hundreds of thousands of small feelers, and if someone touched them, they would start to peel and shave away at the skin. The spear's tip looked like metal, yet was a matte black, almost sucking in the light.

And when Sobek picked it up, there was a slight flare of magical energy around the spear and his hand, dark blue and green clashing for a second until green won out. The magic on the spear, although coming from an entirely different school of magic, would obey whoever wielded it but only for a given value. Some of its secrets still eluded Akhenaten even after several hundred years, and thus Sobek's understanding as well. Yet even without all of the enchantments upon it not responding to their commands, Gae Bolg was still deadly.

Next, Nefertiti released a second god. "He of Set's kin, jackal-headed and Jackal-minded, unwise warrior, devourer of hope and women's virtue. Never to touch that which you thought promised you, never to be free, come at thy mistress's bidding to sit at her feet, Wepwawet!"

Although Wepwawet was primarily a War God who was later connected to opening the ways to the Underworld for spirits and generally removing obstacles but was actually weaker than Sobek had been when he was sealed away. War was never as important to Egyptians as defending themselves from the creatures of the Nile, nor as real to the peasants as the crocodiles they could see swimming through the Holy River.

Like Sobek, Wepwawet had the body of a man, but his head was that of a jackal, similar to the far more famous Set, although his fur was grey whereas Set had black fur, and Wepwawet looked younger, his face smaller. He had the muscled body of a warrior, stripped to the waist to show his perfect musculature to best effect, a series of weapons on his back and at his sides.

As the war god appeared, looking for all the world like the very picture of warlike virility, Akhenaten could barely keep himself from chortling. That would disrupt the ritual, after all. But it never failed to amuse him to see the weak-willed warrior god sitting at Nefertiti's feet as he

quickly did now. Because, unlike the other gods, Wepwawet had told Nefertiti his secret name without any coercion or deal necessary. He had simply been seduced by promises the woman had made, given her his true name in hopes of receiving the same and thus, been ensnared.

Even now, Akhenaten was proud of his wife when thinking about that deception. *She is like a cobra in truth, beautiful in body and movement, but cold and cunning, with a deadly bite. And now for a serpent by another name...*

“Come forth, ancient protector, called upon to do your duty, bound to the throne of the one true Pharaoh! Come forth, Wadjet!”

Wadjet was the protector of kings from lower Egypt, a serpent goddess who could change her shape to a certain degree to become more human or to fly and who had long been the bodyguard of the Pharaohs. When the last of the true pharaohs, Cleopatra, killed herself, ending any chance of Egypt ever being free of foreign control, Wadjet’s very nature had both allowed her to find Akhenaten, even as he had been hiding in Rhodes at the time, and bind herself to him.

Gods, for all their power, were limited like that. Their portfolios at times forced them to act in certain ways. Sometimes to their cost.

But Wadjet had a will of her own, nor was she as weakened as the other two thanks to events leading up to her imprisonment, having still been worshipped and powerful at the time of her binding. Yet even now its very nature, the guardian of kings, allowed Akhenaten to dominate the battle.

Whereas the two warrior gods waited for further orders, kneeling or sitting at the married couple’s feet, Akhenaten issued Wadjet orders instantly. “You will merge yourself into the underlying magic of Egypt within the Nile in Alexandria and fight the foreign God-creature that is attempting to discover the nature of the magic within. You will not reveal yourself until the time has come to strike, which you will know when the lights above the Nile go out.”

Next came another snake, Meretsegar, the cobra goddess. Nefertiti was the one who had bound this creature and now released it, slowly, the snake goddess too still retaining a will of her own. “Meretsegar, no longer needed to guard the honored dead, your Ren is on my lips and written in my hand, your Ka sealed within the magics I possess. You cannot disobey your mistress, now do her bidding!”

This fight was protracted and exhausting, and by the end of it, Nefertiti was barely hanging on to the lapis lazuli spheres that connected her to the enchantments around them. But she had prevailed as Akhenaten knew she would, and the cobra goddess appeared, sliding into place where Wadjet had been a moment ago while Nefertiti gave her orders.

“You will empower the staff of Set for my husband, directing the undead creatures as he wills.” With her previous connection to the Theban Necropolis, Meretsegar was connected to

necromantic energies such as this and would add a level of responsiveness while also acting as a battery for the spell, thus freeing more of the magic of the enchantment to be used in conjuring monsters into being.

Instantly, the numbers of undead grew in number, spreading throughout Egypt. They were still spread out too much to raise alarm given the past week, but that would soon change.

And last, but not least at all, the last God they had thus convinced to walk into their cages was released. This one both Akhenaten and Nefertiti called upon, for its nature fought for freedom as that of Wadjet forced the serpent god to obey. "Red is your magic, blood drips from your mouth, yet your Ib is in our hands, your Ren written out and chained to this place. Evil you are, but evil at our command, lest your Ka be destroyed! Know this as truth, and submit anew to your master and mistress, Metni!"

The ancient Hippo God of Evil fought them for control, even as the spell released him from his cage. But against the combined mental might of the immortal married couple, it eventually subsided and, snorting with anger, sat between Sobek and Wepwawet pushing them aside with his vast bulk.

Now that the first push for freedom had been broken, the gods were bound by the spells, regardless of who had initially leashed them. This meant that Nefertiti's role in the Harrowing was finished. Slowly, and with a good deal of exhaustion, she removed herself from the runic array, slowly pulling her mind back into her mortal shell, lifting her hands off the lapis lazuli orbs in front of her.

As Akhenaten turned his attention to the rest of the spellwork going on, Nefertiti watched as her husband's body stiffened, almost spasming as he took a full load of those spells on his still merely human mind. But soon, he nodded at her, his eyes opening to lock with her own through his mask. "Go. I can handle this. It will become easier, ironically, when I can release our tools here to directly combat Potter and his fellows. But that needs to wait for the appropriate time. Which means you must still play your role."

Nefertiti nodded, then leaned across the central pedestal, kissing her husband's mask on the lips, then moving up to his eyes, kissing them as well through the openings in the mask. "Good luck, my husband. Show the world the true power of the one true Pharaoh. I will return when I can."

He nodded once more at her, and Nefertiti stepped away, racing away now, lithe on her feet, her tail swishing behind her, her earlier exhaustion having disappeared incredibly quickly thanks to her new Nekoshuu powers. Half an hour later, she was once more in the apartment owned by her Auror General cover identity. There, Nefertiti entered a small room to one side, where three owls sat on perches. Each owl was given a specific message and then ensorcelled to become invisible, above and beyond the normal enchantments laid on delivery owls. It

wouldn't last long once after they took flight, unlike the normal enchantments, but they would last long enough to get them into the air.

Nefertiti reflected that was something that most Aurors and other combat-trained wizards neglected to think about: being invisible for even a few seconds was often enough to give you an advantage. Once these owls were in the air and away from her apartment, few people would be able to figure out where they had come from. They would just be three more owls winging their way through the night with messages. In this case, very specific messages to followers of the cult of Aten elsewhere in the Wizarding World.

Moments later, the officer of the watch at the Ivory Tower was surprised when the Auror general appeared in the portkey zone. "General Miltani, we weren't expecting you tonight. Is everything all right?"

"I wasn't expecting to be here either. But something... Something is bothering me. It's as if I know there is going to be some kind of trouble. Call it an old Auror's instincts if you must. But I feel as if I need to be here tonight," Miltani confessed, writing out her name quickly on the duty book.

"And if that wasn't ominous, I don't know what is," the younger man quipped back, even as he watched the signature appear once more. Once it had, he saluted crisply. "Do you want the guards to be put on alert?"

"Yes, I think I do," Miltani answered thoughtfully, Nefertiti having fallen into her role with the ease of several thousand years of practice. "Yellow alert for now. But be ready to bump that up if needed."

About an hour later, alarms began to clamor in the Ivory Tower as Norway, Finland, Sweden, England and even Germany opened communications with them via the Floo network, screaming for help. Under her current guise, Nefertiti raced out of her room, going to her knees in front of the various fires in the communications room, shouting out so loud that all of them could be heard. "Enough! Give me a proper report."

"Dragons! Dragons have been spotted moving through the air!" Shouted one of them, indistinguishable from all the others as they continued to clamor for a moment until Nefertiti shouted them down again.

When she did, the German Minister was the only one to continue to speak. "The dragons are in Berlin! Norwegian Ridgebacks! More than a dozen of the beasts! My Aurors are being overwhelmed."

'Miltani' scowled angrily, looking over at the captain of the guard, who she had only beaten into the room by virtue of the communication center being closer to her office than the guard post at the bottom of the tower. "How many Aurors are on station here?"



“We have the remaining reserve forces you wanted to keep in reserve, eighty Aurors plus the guard detail,” the man answered crisply.

“All right, considering the Ridgebacks are the only ones that have already reached a city, we will head there first. First, corral or kill them, then bring in the Obliviator squads.”

The other Ministers protested, but in her assumed identity, Nefertiti shouted them down again. “Your own Auror forces still have distance and time to play with, gentlemen. Germany does not. Get them up here.” She ordered the duty officer. “I’ll be going in with them.”

OOOOOOO

Several days after her defilement at Nefertiti’s hands, Kuroka had mainly recovered her scattered wits, and could feel her Nekomata powers slowly returning as well. They wouldn’t be anywhere near where she had trained them to be. But Kuroka knew that was only a matter of time. *Nekoshuu might not live as long as Devils or Angels, but I’ve got time. I can train myself back to that level eventually.*

Even better for her, Nefertiti had ordered one of her Ushabti to feed her daily meals. These were more advanced undead servants who were not as decayed as Mummies habitually were under their wrappings. Thus they could be trusted to cook or do other things.

The food kept Kuroka’s strength up, and her cell was large enough for her to at least do some exercises. Heck, she even had furniture, a nice bed and a chair in the corner.

That was where she sat as a feeling of... wrongness and magical power washed over her. It seemed to thrum in the stones around her, shaking Kuroka from her long tail to the top of her ears. *Whatever the hell that bitch and her cunt of a husband are up to, it’s huge. And is probably taking up all of her attention.*

Resolutely Kuroka hopped to her feet. The problem with undead servants was they couldn’t report on things like live ones could. So, if Nefertiti didn’t have attention to pay Kuroka personally, that made for an opportunity to escape.

With a serious look on her face that looked utterly alien on the normally whimsical Kuroka, the Nekoshuu moved over to the entranceway. This wasn’t a simple barred door, rather it was a blank piece of stone seemingly like any other. It was only that this one could become an opening via magic, able to let the Ushabti assigned to her through to give Kuroka her meals.

Kuroka had attempted to overcome the thing a few times but horribly weakened as she was, Kuroka was about as strong as a normal human woman of her size would be, and thus the Ushabti had overcome her easily. “Bastard even had time to set the freaking tray, nyaa,” She grumbled now as she remembered being handled like a kitten.

But Kuroka wasn't looking to attack the Ushabti here. Instead, she lined up on the outer edge of the area of part of the wall that opened up, figuring that if there was any kind of weakness in the design, it would be there. "Well, here goes nothing, nyaa."

With that Kuroka began to punch and kick at the wall, hoping that something would give, ignoring the pain from her hands and feet. *Time to see if my healing ability has come back, and if the old saw about what doesn't kill you making you stronger is really true.*

OOOOOOO

In Alexandria, the number of possible magical sightings were noticed, but none of those still awake took much notice. There were always a few small-scale things of that type, and after a hard day of dealing with the magic in the river, Harry had retired to bed with Kala. Yubelluna was on duty that night, but while she noticed the number of dots, no call came in for aid from the various Nome reaction teams, so Yubelluna made a note of it, but didn't think it important enough to wake up anyone else. The others were already asleep or doing other things, bar Issei and Kiba, and Issei had plans of his own which he was trying to convince Kiba to go along with.

"Come on Kiba," Issei begged Kiba, grabbing at one of the Knight's arms, clinging like a limpet. "You're the only one here who is free to come with me."

"The leprechauns are interested," Kiba protested, trying to shake Issei's grip ineffectually as he pointed to the ten male leprechauns, who were standing on the bar of the suite's main area. They were passing a shot glass between them, taking large gulps from it, which to them, was about the same size as half of their body weight. They were doing a pretty good job of emptying the glass despite that. "Why don't you go with them?"

"Yeah, but that's not the same thing as having a full-sized wingman, man! They're supposed to keep invisible remember."

Kiba frowned. On the one hand belly dancers. As Issei had learned since they started hanging out, despite his normal chivalric attitude, Kiba was as perverted as the next man. And unlike Harry, his girlfriend wasn't a hop skip and a jump away, or in point of fact, already sharing his bed. And of course, Loup had Suzaku. That left Kiba. "What about a few of the Shinsengumi?" he suggested weakly.

"Most are on patrol or are dating one another," Issei said repressively. "The remaining single guys among 'em turned in early too, just like every night before this. They're treating this entire trip almost like a boot camp. But we've been here for nearly a week man, and we've seen signs for belly-dancing halls every damn time we've been out. I'm only asking for one night! I feel like I'm going to go insane if I don't get to stare at some bouncing oppai soon!!"

"W, well, I do still have a girlfriend myself, Issei, just because she isn't here doesn't mean I will try and cheat on her," Kiba reproved, but his voice was even weaker than it had been. Not although because he was losing this argument, but because the idea really did have

some appeal. Kiba had always enjoyed watching athletic girls move, and what better way to do that than watching belly dancers?

“Looking isn’t the same as touching,” Issei bore in, sensing weakness in the Knight. “Tsubaki won’t care so long as you only look.”

Kiba sighed, but frankly, after the past few days, Kiba felt they did deserve a bit of a break. “All right. But we’ll only be there for an hour, understood? While Alexandria seems safe enough, it’s still a foreign city, and there’s a limit to how late I want us to be out, and we both need our sleep for when we’re on duty tomorrow.”

Issei nodded, pumping an arm in the air with the leprechauns following suit. “Aw yeah! Now, let’s get going!”

Soon, the leprechauns had perched in various places on the two young men, two to each shoulder, and another to their feet. thankfully the leprechauns didn’t weigh much at all, and the two of them left the suite, and the hotel quickly thereafter.

The belly dance bar was closer than Kiba had thought, within a few blocks of the hotel, and somewhat within the tourist area of the city. The interior was also not at all like what Kiba had feared. It was well-lit, and it seemed very clean too, composed of many small booths separated by low walls and curtains to allow the people within some privacy as they watched the belly dancers.

Further, there was no stage or anything of that nature. The belly dancers instead moved around the place. Some danced wherever they were standing, moving from one table to another, while others acted almost like they were waiters. There also didn’t seem to be any stuffing bills into their clothing, as Kiba had heard was the case if you went to a strip club back in Japan.

The women too, Kiba had to admit, were extremely good looking. Not nearly as good-looking as Tsubaki, but still good looking. They were all uniformly exotic, with black hair either up in intricate buns or flowing down their backs, wearing baggy pants, and a tight top that came down to the bottom of their breasts, leaving ample cleavage up top, and even some side boob, yet didn’t detract from their stomachs, all of which were taut and toned, fully on display as they danced. Their belts and tops were lined with chime-like bits of metal. Kiba didn’t know what they were called but their sound was interesting. It should have been jarring, but it worked with the background music.

And the dancing was really something else too. *My word, who knew stomachs could be so sexy? Especially moving like that. Good grief, I wonder what Tsubaki would look like in something like that?*

Sitting down, Kiba ordered two drinks, one for himself, a hard lemonade, and a whiskey sour for the leprechauns to share. Issei too ordered his own drink, a local beer for some reason,

while his head twitched from side to side seemingly unable to decide which dancer to watch at one time. Kiba and the leprechauns also enjoyed it greatly, placing bills in a small metal bowl at the end of the table that was apparently for Baksheesh. And then he, like Issei, leaned back and enjoyed the show.

And so it went as the midnight hour passed, with no one the wiser as to what was building throughout Egypt.

**OOOOOOO**

Now. More than two hours since Nefertiti had left, Akhenaten could feel it, could feel Meretsegar's magic permeating the entirety of Egypt's background magic. The fog was nearly as well spread out, and it was no doubt starting to make the nonmagicals who were still awake wonder. Now was the time to release the full might of the Harrowing.

"Release the undead. Release the monsters to cause fear and death. Humanity will learn to fear magic once again," Akhenaten whispered, his voice still like a shout in the heretofore silent ritual room, so powerful was the magic he was directing at present.

Bound by spells of obedience and domination, Meretsegar could not disobey, and within moments, hell came to Egypt...

**End Chapter**

Tsk. Now I wish I had time today to write up that Hermione fight scene. Can't have everything, I suppose. Also, I was indeed making fun of Cao Cao's canon beliefs. They are nonsensical in the extreme. Still, as you can see this was the setup for the action to come so what are you waiting for? Click on the next chapter button!!