

"This is my son, Mius."

The Musician looked down at the kid.

He was small for his age. 'African American...' if that even applies in Lower Town. He did have an oddity about him that was hard to place. The Musician squinted at him until he finally found the source. His death-black hair. Instead of curly it was straight, and fell behind his ears in a silky cascade. It seemed so black... so dark... The Musician had seen nothing like it before in his life... and that was a long time. At certain intervals, his hair was shot through with a crimson-red color. It didn't look half bad.

However, one lock of hair — the one that hung over his right eye — glowed with a silvery luminescence.

The Musician sighed.

The kid had grown up pampered by Lower Town standards, that much was apparent. He had his arms folded, giving The Musician a disgusted look, as if it were his fault he was here.

"How old is this kid?" The Musician questioned, turning towards the man.

The "kid" stepped forward. "Don't call me kid! It's not like you're getting' any younger, anyways! I'm almost 13!" Mius caught the look on The Musician's face. "Is that a problem or summin? Huh?!" He had an arrogant air to him, a smart mouth. The Musician raised an eye brow.

"Sorry about him." The man popped the boy with his fist.

"OW! What was that for?!"

"For disrespecting one of the oldest living beings in this world. One of the Originals."

The kid turned to his father, tears in the corners of his eyes. He held the tender spot on his head like a mortal wound with one hand while pointing indicatively towards The Musician with the other. "You mean that snooty freak in the wimpy dress suit is—"

The man grabbed the boy roughly by the shoulders and whirled him around to face The Musician. Mius glared.

The Musician nodded. "And this boy is—"

"Yes. Unfortunately. My heir. Mine... and his mother's."

"Two Major Players... two Airmasters combined into one, 'eh." The Musician walked up to the boy and roughly grabbed his chin, forcing his head in several different directions, examining him. Mius didn't like it one bit, and put up as much resistance as he could. The Musician didn't even notice. "Interesting. It's never been done before." He looked up at the man. "And what about his older sister?"

"Let goa me you musical freak." The air swirled up in a ferocious hurricane, and then died just as suddenly. The man gasped in utter horror. The Musician's wrist had been lacerated in multiple places.

Drops of blood appeared. Mius smirked, staring at the Musician in unreserved triumph before getting slapped upside the head again.

The Musician took a step back. The man sighed. "I'm terribly sorry about his rude and outright vulgar behavior..." But the Musician, after a few seconds of silence, burst out laughing.

The man shook his head slowly, still firmly gripping his son's shoulders.

The Musician stopped laughing just as fast, giving the boy a cold stare. "Used to getting your own way by using your power `eh, brat? Heh. I'm sure a year or two in the true depths of Lower Town will mellow you out quite nicely."

...

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Too tight! Too tight!" He wheezed. "You're... choking... me..." Lucia was holding onto Eli for dear life. She wasn't aware that they had landed at the tournament entrance.

"You know we're here, right, Musician?" Alex cooed.

Lucia slowly opened her eyes, slowly relaxing her grip. *Dream...*

"I'm... dying..." Eli whispered dramatically, causing Lucia to jump backwards in surprise.

"And you're rubbing the dye out of his hair, dear." Harah scoffed. They dyed his hair a pure white color, to deter rumors and prevent detection. So far, it seemed to be working.

Lucia looked down at her arms. There were spots of white goo on her skin, like blots of paint. Parts of Eli's hair took on a faded shade. *"Oh shit! My bad! You ok, Eli?"*

Eli fell to his knees theatrically, gasping for breath. Lucia snickered.

Harah laughed softly to herself. "Were you that afraid of something going wrong, Musician?" She laughed in three short bursts, earning her a scowl from Lucia.

"I'm a being of pure *sound*. Sound and Magic don't like each other. *At all*. And I've been around magic far longer than both of you put together... I've seen it go..." She gulped. *"Horribly wrong*. Then you just jumped me, a being of sound, through a magical tube. How would I not be afraid? I mean r—

... What's so funny?!"

Harah and Alex were smirking. Lucia stopped mid sentence, attempting to look down at her face. "My face is red, isn't it?"

They laughed maniacally.

"Damn this body!" Lucia cried out, overdramatically. Eli giggled.

They moved away from the node at a brisk walk. Once they got a few feet from it, another group of travelers appeared, and then another, and another. *This was a huge tournament!* Elijah looked around excitedly. *This whole place is so huge!* He was right. Lower Town is a huge place.

After a few hours of waiting in line, it was finally their turn to get registered. The woman was portly, with a mean expression and attitude to match. It seemed like everything she did was slow and annoying *on purpose*. Alex forked over the money in the same manner, just to annoy her. It worked.

She produced four stickers with numbers on them.

“You,” she said, pointing to Alex, “Are number 401. The skinny broad next to you is number 403. Who should I give these other two tickets to, ‘eh?’” Her voice was scratchy and deep.

Lucia made a face. “That’d be us.” She said, waving snappily.

With a look of utter contempt on her face, the woman leaned on her desk, looking over the counter at both Elijah and Lucia. The desk creaked in utter protest of her awesome weight.

“And who the heck are you pipsqueaks? This is a tournament for *fighting*. It’s not some game. Go play with your dollies or something.” She put the stickers down. “NEXT!” she shouted.

Alex and Harah exchanged looks.

But before the woman could sit back down, Lucia’s arm flashed, grabbing her by the neck and clamping down.

For a fat woman, she had amazing speed. She fastened her hands on Lucia’s little arm not a second later, attempting to break it in half, but to no avail. Her eyes bulged and lips parsed. She looked kinda like a fish, stuck on land. She pulled and pulled on the hand that was suffocating her, making choked pleas. The cold, calculated violence continued in this way, with Lucia staring into the woman’s eyes with open unadulterated evil.

“Lucia...” Eli’s concerned whisper barely reached her ears.

She was too used to being a Major Player. And people didn’t *deny* a Major Player. Lucia brought the woman’s head close to her mouth, so she could hear her whisper. “What. Did. You. Just. Call. Me?”

She increased her hold on the woman’s neck. The agitated flailing of her arms was getting weaker and weaker. No one had noticed the incident... *yet*.

“Lucia!” Eli shouted, drawing attention.

Like a rubber band, something inside Lucia snapped.

ENOUGH!

She immediately let go of the woman, who fell back sloppily into her booth, sprawled on the floor.

"I was handling it, Eli. Don't worry, okay?" She turned her head towards him and gave her best smile, but, by the look on his face, it probably looked damn frightening. She meant that to her bothersome Landlord, too.

Security, drawn to the commotion, was now in route to their location, shoving people aside.

"I think you've made your point here," Alex was surveying the damage. "If you're quite done, I believe it'd be best to disappear right about now. I've made some plans, and I've got us a place to hang."

Lucia smirked. "Whatever."

She calmly took the remaining stickers from the counter and followed Alex and Harah into the mosh-pit of people, disappearing entirely into the crowd. Security didn't follow, and people didn't care.

Violence isn't something foreign in Lower Town, something people gawk at or call the cops on. Quite the opposite. If there *isn't* violence, that's when you know something's *wrong*. So when they merged with the crowd, most people paid them no mind.

But there were three who gave them especially odd looks.

They were leaning against the wall in various poses, watching the group of four move for the western exit.

The first one coughed suggestively. "Lucia huh. What's that baka-ranger doing here?"

The second one was sitting on the ground. She looked up at the first one. "And she's with that kid, too. Why the hell are they here, in New York's Lower Town... of all places?"

The third was leaning coolly against the wall. He used his elbows to right himself. "Well, we might as get outta here before those *Maja Playas* arrive. If not them, then the PKers'll. Either way, this place is about to get a whole lot more annoying."

"But what about them?" The second one pointed towards Lucia and friends, who were nearing the exit.

The third one made a rude noise. "Forget them for now. If they're participants in the tournament, and they survive the PKers, and avoid the Major Players, we'll just have to crush them in the ring. Got it?"

The first one sighed. "We should at least warn them... maybe of the PKers or something..."

"No," the third one snapped. "Enough of this senseless debating. Now let's get moving."

"Right." The other two sounded off.

“So... the hell is this place? Better yet... *where* the hell is this place?” Harah asked Alex as they walked up a seemingly-abandoned side-street.

“One of the many Guild-owned hotels I like to crash at. Pretty nice place, actually. Well kempt, nice people, yata yata.” He responded, looking around. “Well... as nice as you can get around *here*. It’s just a mile or so south-west.”

Harah nodded slowly. “You’ll have to tell me about this *Guild* you’re a part of some day, ‘eh buddeh?”

Alex snickered.

Elijah stopped walking, clutching the right side of his face. He looked like he was in pain.

Alex was the first one to notice he stopped walking. “Yo Eli, you ok man?”

The others stopped walking. Lucia took a step in his direction.

It took him a while to respond, but when he did, he took his hands away from his eye. “Yeah I’m ok... I’m just... it’s kinda weird... like a headache I guess.”

“Hgn.” Lucia made a face, moving towards him, grabbing his hand. “Headache huh. Let’s go, you’re slow’n us down.” Her sarcasm wasn’t wasted. She poked her tongue out at him, and he did the same, quickening his pace.

The pain never really left, but Eli ignored it as best he could. With Lucia holding onto his hand, it wasn’t all that hard for him.

Two blocks from the hotel and Eli tripped over his own feet, nearly pulling Lucia down with him, but she didn’t budge, instead helping him to his feet on her sole arm strength alone.

“Thanks, sorry.” He muttered. She gave him a mysterious smirk. “Gotta catch up with them before we get left behi—”

Everybody froze. Time itself seemed to stand still.

Everyone besides Eli looked in a different direction, glowering.

Eventually, it passed.

“What was that just now?!” Eli whispered, excited.

Harah flat out frowned, which she rarely did. “You guys felt that, right?”

Alex grimaced. “Yeah. *A Major Player just arrived.*”

Lucia turned towards Eli. “Yo. Listen up. You need...”

Eli straightened. *What was that?* He was looking directly into her eyes. *Something’s different.*

“Whatever you do, don’t...”

Eli began to zone out.

“... and you can’t...”

His vision was spinning, blurring. His hearing was fading.

Something growled. Something from the deepest catacombs of his mind.

MUSICIAN.

Eli’s began feeling little pinpricks all over, as if his whole body just decided to fall asleep. He caught Lucia’s eyes... *and couldn’t look away.* It was as if a totally new person stood behind her mask. Someone dark. Someone *evil.* Someone... *powerful.* That nice girl facade was replaced by a fiery resolve that could never be defeated. Eli took an unsure step backward.

“*Musician...*” He whispered.

It was Lucia’s turn to be surprised, pausing mid-sentence. *He’s never called me Musician before...*

Elijah’s knowledge of Lower Town is limited to its existence. He doesn’t really know anything about it, or Players, or masters, or anything like that. She was careful not to say things that might stimulate premature memories, like “Skyking” or “Airmaster.” True, Harah and Alex called Lucia *Musician*, but the name never stuck when it came to Eli. It was as if he didn’t even hear the word, whenever it was spoken. So for him to say it now, of all the possible times he could have said it, really knocked her off balance.

Alex and Harah turned sharply, gazing at Eli.

The boy’s eyes were open wide in fear. His pupils the size of pinpricks.

“Eli...?” Lucia asked slowly, gently placing her hand on his shoulder. “Are you—”

He slapped her hand away.

“Ah!” He pressed his palm against his right eye, taking several steps backwards before falling on his backside. “Ahhhhh!” He screamed, placing his other palm against the same eye.

“Eli!” Lucia yelled, running towards him, holding her hand out. Hara and Alex were right on her heels.

“Eli what’s wrong?!”

Eli’s vision focused again. It focused on the girl standing in front of her. Her eyes. *Her eyes.* He gritted his teeth, trying to hold back his scream.

Her resolve.

His eye hurt. It hurt *so much*.

THE MUSICIAN!

Out of his left eye, he could see reality. He could see Lucia, kneeling down towards him. Hara and Alex hovering over him worriedly. The surrounding area. Other residents gave him with suspicious looks.

But out of his right eye, he saw a whole 'nother world. No matter how hard he pressed on his eye with his hands, it still showed him... *these images.*

AIRMASTER!

The air started swirling dangerously around Eli.

"Shit." Lucia growled. "His Landlord is acting up... *right in the middle of the fucking street!*"

"Calm him down!" Alex had to shout over the gathering force of the wind. People were beginning to stare — the high-tier players, anyway. The low-tier members of society were receding into the shadows.

Eli was dreaming again. Dreaming. The same guy from the other dream, the "Airmaster," was floating in the air. A woman who stood on the ground was shouting up at him.

The screen went blurry again.

"If you hurt yourself trying these little Air-stunts of yours, Mius, you know she'll be angry with you."

"Stop trying to ruin my fun, Aurora. I'm practicing onea my new moves."

A voice echoed from the deepest recesses of his mind. It was a dark, twisted entity that raked at the edges of his conciseness. Eli caught a few glimpses of it. *White... demon hair. Sharp Teeth. Red eyes.*

It started speaking to him, mouthing the phrase over and over again.

AIR—

"—Blade." Eli muttered calmly, as if he were reading a book aloud, looking towards the sky.

The air stopped whirling around him, and instead gathered right in front of his eyes.

Lucia jumped back, but she was too slow. She lost a few strands of hair.

A tremor ran through Eli's body, shaking him. A huge force of wind sped upwards, faster than anyone could see, slicing a streetlight clean in half before he even finished saying the attack's name. The lamp crashed to the floor, spraying glass everywhere.

People backed away, some pointing, others crying out in fear.

Eli's face was twisted in an expression of pain. Tears ran freely down his cheeks. His eye seemed to see right through Lucia, focused on some far off object, hands clamped tightly over the other.

THEY USED TO CALL YOU AIRMASTER!

"She won't stop talking to me!" He hissed. *"That voice. SHE WON'T STOP TALKING!"*

WHAT DID YOU DO WITH AIRMASTER?!

"The Skyking stirs in his sleep." Alex muttered, eyeing the damage, clearly impressed. "We have to get him out of here, *now*. We're attracting too much attention."

Hara was also staring at the sliced streetlamp. She looked up towards the clouds. There was a huge hole right in the middle of one of them. A crescent shaped hole. "The Skyking..." She whispered softly.

Lucia knelt down, embracing the boy. She put her mouth close to his ear, as to not be overheard.

I WON'T LET HIM HAVE HIS WAY. NOT WITH YOU, AIRMASTER. NOT WITH YOU.

Suddenly, Elijah's hands sprung to Lucia's throat. "YOU WILL NOT TAKE HIM FROM ME!" He shouted.

Lucia acted as if she didn't notice.

"Musician?" She whispered softly, soothingly. "No. I am Lucia. Lucia di Lammermoor. I have 14 years of age. You are Eli. Elijah Lammermoor. You have 12 years of age. We are nothing more. Nothing less. Got it?" No one would mistake that command as a question. Eli's eye widened slightly before returning to normal.

Harah grunted.

UNTIL NEXT TIME.

Slowly, Eli relaxed his grip, his eyes returning to normal. It was a moment before he spoke.

"Lucia..." He whispered slowly, as if it were a new word.

His eyes focused on her. He seemed to come back to life. To the same old Eli.

"Lucia!" he cried, hugging her.

She sighed. *Crisis averted*. Something did, however, strike her as peculiar. *Elijah was trembling*.

Cars were rare in Lower Town, and not particularly welcome. They weren't in any real danger of getting hit by a car or anything... but there were *other* things that roamed the streets of Lower Town...

Lucia held Eli until she noticed he was limp in her arms. "Crap. He's KOed. You there, in the coat, carry him." She pointed to Alex.

"I'm not your slave, jerk. *I have a name*." He complained, moving towards the two anyway.

"Chop chop." She clapped.

When the bystanders noticed that the show was over, they went about their business as if they had seen nothing. This was Lower Town. Crazy shit is normal here.

Alex picked the kid up smoothly, placing Eli on his back. His arms subconsciously wrapped around Alex's neck.

And so they walked, Alex and Eli at the head of their little line, with Hara and Lucia trailing further and further behind.

"How long can you keep suppressing these little outbursts with The Voice?" Hara asked, concerned.

The Voice is an authority only *very* powerful Soundmasters can acquire. When a Soundmaster speaks in *The Voice*, their target loses all free will. Whatever *The Voice* commands them to do, if it's within their power, they do it. No if ands or buts. Lucia had been using it to suppress Eli's Landlord for *years*. Only now — in the middle of Lower Town — has it begun to fail.

"We'll manage," she responded with a heavy sigh, "... *somehow*."

The sun was beginning to set.

Alex was increasing his speed exponentially, to the point of jogging. Hara and Lucia caught up with him.

"Why are we going so damn fast?!" Hara complained.

"Because," Alex said, "we absolutely *cannot* be caught out here in the darkness."

As the sun disappeared, Lower Town took on its true form. All sorts of things appeared in the shadows... and they slowly took over.

Watching... shifting... waiting for fresh food... *reaching out towards them*... towards the *fresh meat*.

And so they ran. The sun was below the horizon when they passed through the huge barred double-doors of the Guild's hotel.

Not to say they couldn't have walked briskly and taken their time, dealing harsh justice to whatever abomination got in their way... but in Lower Town, *power calls to power*. It's the fundamental fact of

reality. If Harah, Alex, Lucia, or even Eli were to use their powers, they'd flare up like huge beacons of light in the darkness, inviting anything from hyperactive demons to bored Major Players to tango... and with an unconscious Skyking in their midst, that wasn't a very smart option.

The doors automatically bolted themselves seconds after they entered, as magic-antimagic wards clicked into place.

It was only then that Alex exhaled, shoulders slumping, the tension visibly draining from his body.

Harah and Lucia were panting excitedly.

With Eli still on his back, Alex made his way to the front counter as if he owned the place. On the outside, the hotel looked like a Motel 6 from hell. Both Harah and Lucia had their doubts, but, to their surprise, the hotel was maintained with a military-like sense of cleanliness.

"Hello," the clerk greeted.

Instead of responding, Alex waited for several moments. The clerk gave him a weird look. After thirty or forty seconds, Alex bent over the counter and whispered something into the man's ear.

His eyes went wide with fear.

"Ri—right away, sir! I didn't recognize you si—si—sir!"

The terrified clerk scurried into the back office, returning a few seconds later with an untainted little white key.

"Thank you, sir! Have a nice day sir!"

Alex nodded his thanks, and swaggered back over to where Harah and Lucia waited.

"Here." Alex handed Hara the keys, but kept the kid on his back. "You two go to the room, get situated, and maybe take showers or something. I need to use the phone. Got any quarters?"

Harah rummaged around in her pockets for some spare change. "What was all that about?"

"I'll tell you later, I need that phone ASAP."

She handed him the required amount of change, mostly quarters.

"Thanks babe," he said, kissing her lightly on the lips. "The entrance is around the corner to the left, straight down the hall, and then two rights. It's the big black wooden door, you can't miss it. Look for *room three*." Without another word, Alex headed off in the opposite direction, towards the pay phones, leaving two dazed girls eating his dust.

Lucia folded her arms. "It's always '*I'll explain later*' with him. Hmph. Whatever. Let's go."

As he walked down the hall, there were scratching sounds coming from the windows. Every few seconds or so, one of the protective wards in place on the building would flare up, knocking back whatever had attempted to gain entry. Alex shook his head. *Weaklings*.

He reached the phones a few seconds later, dropped in the coins, and dialed a number.

Elijah stirred in his sleep, whimpering.

Alex held the phone to his head for a moment, listening to the voice on the other side, while flexing his shoulders to prevent Eli from falling off.

Then silence, the voice stopped talking. Alex responded. The voice resumed.

Eli shifted again, causing Alex to adjust his position once more. Unbeknownst to him, Eli had opened his eyes, slowly awakening.

The voice on the other side of the line ceased, and it was now Alex's turn to speak.

"Duh. Of course, don't be silly. I also have some news to report. Ten — onea Akito's guys. *He's dead*. Along with twelve others. Hopefully this'll serve as a warning; and in the future, *our virtuous*," he said '*our virtuous*' with extreme sarcasm, "Akito might listen to what I have to say."

They followed Alex's directions — turning the corner left, straight down the hall, right, right. The huge imposing black door was the only object in the whole hall. When they tried the key, it worked. Through the door spanned another hallway full of many other doors. On them were labels with symbols, or English words, or other things.

Lucia sighed. "The hell he want us to do now?"

"Find room Three." Harah reminded her.

They walked down the hall, reading the room labels. There was no room three. There were rooms from Number ten all the way down to Number five. Four, three, two, and one were missing.

"That idiot..." Lucia face palmed.

Harah looked around. It wasn't long before she spotted a door unlike the others, with a sign that read **To The Upper Floors**. It was a normal looking mahogany door.

"Aha! The stairs! Let's try the second floor."

"Whatever you say, mistress Harah."

They slowly descended the staircase, arriving at the top in a minute or so. When they got there, they froze.

Daylight poured in through the windows, the glass ceiling, and even the glass *floor*. They were surrounded by clouds in every direction, the sun a giant rolling disk on the horizon. It was like a skybox — literally.

“What the hell is this? No way this place goes *this* high...” Harah was easily amazed.

“Nexi Tech. The work of some serious Hackermasters. I’ve seen quite a few of these back in my day. The stairs act as a port and jump us to a different location. We’re pro’lly in whole `nother Lower Town,” Lucia looked down at the clouds under the glass at her feet, “and *thousands* of feet in the air.”

They looked at the names on the doors. Lucia read them off as she passed them. “King of I... King of II... King of III... King of IV...” She reached the end of the glass hallway and turned, facing Harah, who was still on the other side. “What number did he say look for? Five?”

“No,” Harah snickered; moving towards the door marked *King of III*, “I believe this is the one.”

Harah stuck the key into the door — one again: a perfect fit — and was in the process of stepping into the room — talking about Alex and Eli and where they were at the moment — but Lucia grabbed the back of her shirt.

“One second, Harah. I wanna see something.” Lucia brushed past Harah and stopped inside the door frame, an inch or two away from the room’s luxurious floor carpeting. Without stepping into the room, Lucia looked around. To Harah, everything seemed normal...

Ok, not really. There were *wolves* everywhere.

Not real live wolves, but wolf posters, wolf trinkets, a statue of a wolf in the corner, the discovery channel playing on the TV, and wolf... well... *everything*.

Harah smirked. “If it’s all the wolf crap lying around, don’t worry over it. You wouldn’t believe how much that *man* loves *wolves* of all things.” She nudged past Lucia and stepped on the carpet. “I’m more of a Lion girl myself, you know my Lan—”

“Aha!” Lucia shouted triumphantly, pointing towards a blank spot on the wall. Harah looked totally baffled... until the wall *exploded outward*.

Lucia smirked, walking towards the wreckage and inspecting the hole in the wall.

“Why’d you do that?” Harah asked, puzzled.

“Because,” she responded, “There was someone in here. Watching the door. Waiting for something. Annoying pest.”

"Whoever it was seems to have fled. Smart guy." Harah sighed, slumping down on the couch and changing the channel on the TV, kicking a smoldering brick away from her foot. The prospect of *being watched* didn't even faze her. "I wonder what's taking that idiot so long to get up here."

The door bust open. "King of II, sir! I have urgent information!"

"Calm down, Knight of III. You seem out of breath. Were you running from something?"

"Nah, sir. Everything's fine, sir. The room you assigned me to watch. The King it belongs to will not be in attendance. Instead, the King of III, Alex Freeman — codenamed: Shadowwolf — is downstairs at the payphones."

The man took that into consideration for a moment, nodding to himself. "And the location of my little apprentice, Austin?"

"Codenamed: Threadmaster Sergius — the King of IV, sir? Unknown, sir."

The man nodded to himself again. "Ah. Okay. So you say the King of III is downstairs, using the phone network?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hmph. Attempting to avoid my detection. Nice try. Let's see if we can't tap in to *their* little tête-à-tête." The man, this King of II, raised his hand, palm to the sky.

"Yep. I bet he's after me and my kid here... yeah, after what happened to his guys back at my place, I'm sure he'd be pretty mad." Alex listened to the voice on the other side of the phone line, nodding at certain intervals. "Ah, that's where you are? Why would you eat *there*?" Pause. "Alright, that's fine. Let's meet up at the usual spot. Yeah, on top of the—"

Out of the corner of his eye, Alex noticed a twinkle.

His eyes went wide.

"*Shit!*" he hissed, slamming the phone down on the hook. Temporarily forgetting about the child he was carrying on his back, Alex used both hands to grab at the air. At the last possible moment, where there had been nothing before, Alex caught hold of a single thread of wire.

"God damn *him*. He was listening in the whole time!" He turned his head swiftly, like a dog onto a new scent. "Sergius! He knows where Sergius is!"

Eli, in danger of slipping on Alex's back, tightened his grip, holding onto his neck for dear life. Alex moved his arms back under Eli, reestablishing the support, allowing him to loosen his chokehold.

Alex looked over his shoulder. "You awake back there, Eli? You okay?"

The kid nodded his affirmation. He looked really tired. Alex surveyed his surroundings carefully.

I can't leave him here. Too many... "Guild" people around...

"Hey, Eli," he whispered over his shoulder, "you're comin' with me, that okay?"

He nodded again before laying his head back down, dozing.

Alex once again walked out of the building as if he owned the place, timing his steps so he wouldn't seem hurried. Those few that paid any attention to him gave apprehensive looks.

They stepped outside.

Without delay, the cold air beat at their senses. The darkness beckoned. The unfriendly skies shined a menacing reddish light down upon the night-side of Lower Town.

The moon wasn't out.

A single drop of rain water splashed on the concrete ground — a prelude of what was to come.

Alex took off at a run, piggy-backing the anxious Elijah.

Lower Town as a whole is just a bunch of interconnected "Lower Towns" from all around the world. This allows some parts of Lower Town to shift into the night time — or "the night-side," as the creatures who dwell there like to call it — while other parts remain in the daylight. *It's a pretty interesting phenomenon.*

Sergius had agreed to meet him on top of the old power plant over in the day-side, which was about a fifteen minute sprint from the Guild's outpost hotel. They were rapidly approaching. Alex smirked. He made it so the speckles of rain would sizzle into utter nothingness whenever they got within a yard of the sprinting Magimaster.

The various night-side creatures were watching Alex very closely, determining if an attack would be worth the trouble before he reached the day-side.

Most of the creatures instantly recognized the little one on his back as prey, and moved in for a closer look.

With a small whimper, Eli huddled closer to Alex, hands gripping the fabric of his clothing with a strength borne of fear.

Alex slowed to a walk and looked back at Eli, who had his eyes screwed shut. He tracked the kid's would-be gaze to the group clustered in the shadows, *and smirked.*

“Ah. I see. Your first time on the night-side of Lower Town, huh, Eli.” Eli’s eyes snapped open, focusing on Alex. He nodded. Alex chuckled merrily. “Don’t worry kid. These bottom-feeders and low-tier trash are all just that. *Trash*.” He said that last one a little louder. “Not even worth our time.”

Two or three minutes away from the day-side rendezvous point.

Alex could see his goal, and began sprinting again — but stopped just as fast. A body was blocking his path, pointing a bony finger at him. “Did I just hear you say sommin’, old man? You talk’n down `bout my crew? *I don’t think you wanna throw down with us*. We’re the PKers... the Player Killers —and last I heard... *death* is hella fatal.”

Instead of addressing the figure, Alex turned his head back towards Eli once more. “Don’t be afraid. Not in Lower Town. Not you. *They don’t deserve your fear*.”

“HEY! OLD MAN! You listenin’ to me?!” He raised his hand like a rock star, making *shoo*-ing motions at his teammates. “Stand back guys. I’ll deal with this small fry on my own.”

Still facing Eli, Alex sighed. “I’m not even 35 yet, am I? Do I look old to you?” He made a funny face, causing Eli to snicker. “Aha! A smile! That’s better.” Alex smirked. “Now we can have some fun. I’ll deal with this loser in five seconds.” He held up his hand, fingers extended, representing the number. “I don’t want some *retard* followin’ me into some strict Guild business.”

The figure pulled out a big black object, which, when Alex saw it, was recognized as a *Submission Assault Rifle*.

“Laugh at this, old timer.” The figure growled, pulling the trigger. The resulting *pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop* startled Eli, but otherwise went generally unnoticed by the neighborhood as a whole. Gun violence outside at night in Lower Town? It’s like the sun rising and falling every day: everyone knows; nobody cares.

Alex yawned, sprinting through the spray of bullets as if they were no more than rain drops.

The figure became less and less sure of himself, backpedaling bit by bit. It was no use. Eventually, Alex came within arm’s reach of him.

The gun clicked on empty. “Crap!”

“Learn your place, *punk*.” Alex put extra emphasis on his last word — as if it held some kind of power all its own; flicking the gang leader on the head with his index finger as he passed by. Elijah poked his tongue out at him, making a face.

The guy went cross-eyed trying to follow the attack. He wouldn’t have seen it coming from a mile away. A few seconds after Alex and Eli sprinted past him, the guy was flung into the sky, as if shot up by a cannon. Eventually he went high enough that no one could hear him scream anymore.

“Cool!” Eli exclaimed, loosening his grip on Alex’s jacket. “That looks like fun! Can you do that to me some time?”

Alex continued sprinting as if nothing had happened. The remaining members of the gang retreated back into the shadows. The first rays of sunlight penetrated the darkness, shining in their eyes. Alex put his hand up to block the rays, letting their eyes adjust. “Heh. Maybe later, little buddeh.”

“Yay!”

When they arrived at the base of the building, Alex muttered a few words. Eli *eeeped* when they began levitating, and again when they landed on top of the roof. Alex chuckled.

After a quick look around the roof, Alex surmised that they were alone.

“Where is this guy?” Alex muttered crossly. “He was supposed to get here *first*.”

He didn’t show up after five minutes. Or ten. Or twenty.

Alex grew anxious.

Elijah, on the other hand, was sitting on the edge of the roof, staring out at the sky without a care in the world. He could see all of Lower Town from his skyward position, and even some parts of the Surface.

“Wow!”

Alex made his decision. “Hey, kid. I’m a run a really quick scan of our surroundings.”

Eli turned around and jumped off the ledge and onto the roof’s base. “Kay.”

Alex bit into his thumb, drawing blood. He marked off a section in some obscure corner of the roof, about the size of Elijah if he stood on two feet. “I’m a need you to stay in this perimeter, okay?”

Eli walked over into the blood circle and nodded.

“Do not break the line. Do not step out of the ring. Do nothing until I return, okay?”

He nodded again.

“I mean it. Just stay behind this barrier. I’m not sure who might show up here while I’m gone, and I need to move *fast*. *Really* fast. *He* may be in serious trouble and I’m a hav’ta save his ass. So don’t move.” Alex closed the circle. There was an audible *snap* as the power inside of the circle locked in place, isolated from the forces outside.

The spell Alex weaved made Eli invisible. Well... not “invisible” as in “un-seeable.” Anything within the circle would just go... “unnoticed” by anyone who happened to pass their eyes over him. A neat Magimaster trick.

Why didn’t he give Eli a heavy duty barrier? Simple. That would attract attention. The attention of someone who would *break* it. Sly and slick was the best plan for this one.

“Be right back kid.” Alex said reassuringly before muttering another set of words and leaping off the roof, smashing into the ground below.

It was several minutes after Alex left that Eli saw something.

A three pronged dagger, glowing purple and white in the sunlight, flew over the western edge of the building, opposite the edge Alex jumped off of. After a few seconds of motionlessness, the dagger began to slide backwards until it hit a sturdy spot on the rim of the wall. If one looked closely, they’d see a tiny thread of wire tied to the end loop of the dagger, swinging back and forth. A few moments later, a man in a black and white cloak just like Alex’s — and a mask to match — leapt over the edge of the building in a dramatic fashion. He pressed a button on his palm and the dagger retracted back into a machine on his wrist.

Eli gave him a once over. He did look like Alex, but there were subtle differences. He had a weird looking black belt thing, with different buttons and switches on it. On the sides of the belt hung around eight more of those dagger-looking things, all dangling by tiny threads. On both wrists he had heavy looking knife-shooter machines. Loaded within them were four other daggers, two on each side. The fourth dagger on the left wrist had just finished retracting back into its compartment — like a tape measure returning after being stretched out to its fullest.

The man looked like he was running from something. Eli held his breath. He didn’t understand what was happening at all, where Alex went, where Lucia and Harah were, or anything. He was utterly confused, and that gave him knots in his stomach. He was afraid.

Whoever the guy was, they locked eyes — if those black slits in the mask counted as eyes — seeing through Alex’s magic as if it were nothing. Eli gulped. The masked figure started walking towards him, hand held out like a blind man searching for his cane, grabbing randomly at spots in the air. The rain plastered his hair to his head, some of it spilling over the top of the mask.

He got closer.

It began raining furiously, the clouds blotting out the sky. It grew darker.

Eli chewed on his lower lip, huddling against the wall, as far away from the *masked grim reaper* as he possibly could. He continued holding his breath. It was surprisingly easy, as if the very *air itself* was obeying his command to be still.

He screwed his eyes shut, looking for inner comfort. *I’m ok I’m ok I’m ok...* Not even the white haired witch was talking to him. He’d have welcomed any voice, anything at all. He felt truly and unbelievably alone.

The masked guy was within a meter or so of Eli’s position.

Closer... *and closer still...*

The figure reached his hand out towards Eli's barrier... *and stopped a few inches short*. He stepped backwards and spun 180 degrees, facing the opposite direction. His coat spun with him, spectacularly. The rain water made him sparkle.

They came like spiders — taking the walls in huge leaps, flying over old cooling equipment, bolted boxes, gates, huge pipes, and all the other trashed parts that remained on the roof of the building after the plant was shut down. Eli finally took a huge breath, he couldn't help it. When he did, the cloaked figure standing before him did a double take, that expressionless mask sending shivers down the boy's spine.

On the back of his cloak, painted in white, were the roman numerals "IV."

"Four?" Eli mouthed slowly.

Instead of coming towards Eli again, the figure put his finger to the part of his mask that represented the mouth. A long red line. It was the *shhh* gesture most commonly used on the Surface world to mean *be quiet*. Eli complied, making nearly no noise.

The spidery figures, about seven or eight of them, surrounded the masked grim reaper — as Eli called him — in a crescent formation. They were all dressed *exactly* the same, and looked almost identical to the reaper and Alex in clothing and in form, except their masks all bore the number 2 in roman numerals over the right eye-hole.

Like the reaper, those *things* that surrounded them had retractable strings. At the end of their strings, however, rested tiny pointed spikes, like a flower petal before it bloomed. Instead of on their belts or wrists, those strange masked freaks had the bulbs retract into machines on their *fingers*. When fully retracted, the spikes resembled long, vicious looking nails. Ten per person.

For a moment no one spoke.

"Threadmaster Kiba." The reaper whispered just loud enough for a few of the other guys to hear. "I see you perfected your little robots. How'd that go, by the way? I hear Akito yanked your leash and stripped your funding."

"Threadmaster Sergius." They all responded together, as one person. "I thought I trained my pupil better than to leave a trail so easily followed." Their voices had no life to them. No emotions. "And your pathetic attempts at emotional control don't work on *machines*." They all tilted their heads at the same time, rain sliding down their pure white masks. "Join me. You and your squad may return to the Guild as the King of IV. Think about it, fool."

"Hmph." Threadmaster Sergius crouched down, grabbing a few knives from his belt and flipping them into his hands. Eli was impressed. It was a cool display. "I fight alongside the *Shadowwolf* now."

"Then you will die with him. Now."

The reaper dropped the knives he was holding — they retracted back into his belt — and swiveled to his right, dodging a flying claw. “Impressive” The machines voice together. “Now let’s have some *fun*.”

The masked grim reaper looked to his left, then his right. Then faced forward again, taking in his enemies.

The androids all released their claws, which fell to the floor, preparing to attack.

“Hmph.”

Sergius bent forward, like a bamboo tree swaying in the wind, spiky hair barely avoiding the first swipe of the razor-sharp wire. A few strands were actually cut clean off, falling to the floor.

That’s when the androids got *serious*.

The claws and wires arced across Sergius’s position like a spider’s web, bending and dancing in the air, slicing anything they came in contact with. The reaper dodged forward — a few more wires streaking over his coat — then bent backwards, one foot behind him, like the matrix — dodging even more flying claws and their deadly thread trails.

To Eli, the reaper’s motions looked as fluid as the rain falling all around him, as precise and professional as those action heroes he’d watch on TV. It was like he was dodging the very rain drops *themselves*, leaning and rocking back and forth like a martial artist, avoiding those sparkling satirical little threads.

He wouldn’t be able to dodge *them all*, and *everyone* knew it.

The reaper Sergius feinted a forward lean but instead swayed to his left, avoiding a claw that would have struck him in the throat. The androids expected this movement, however, and all launched a simultaneous attack in that direction.

Eli barely stifled a cry.

As the reaper turned, his coat flashing radically in the rain, his foot slipped on the slick blacktop. He almost lost his balance — only for a millisecond — but that was all the hesitation *they* needed.

The wires surrounded the reaper.

A few circled around his neck, others around his upper arms, three around his waist, four and four wrapped around each of his wrists and hands, two got caught on his thighs, and a few were tangled around his feet, two or three on for each boot.

A final thread wrapped itself twice around his head and mask.

The black razor wires looked *painful* as hell. Eli chewed on his lip again, anxious and scared.

“Shit!” The reaper uttered, as the wires encircled him.

This time, Eli couldn’t help but cry out.

The androids retracted their threads, each in a different path. The wires became taut in every which direction, stringing the reaper up like a doll, his coat tails flapping black and white in the wind.

THIS COULD BE TROUBLESOME...

Eli barely noticed his Landlord *speak* — her voice barely a whisper; he was too busy watching the reaper getting *torn apart*.

The wires resembled a spider's web for real this time, each one crossing over the others, heaving at Sergius's different appendages without mercy.

"Ahhrg!" The reaper shouted between ragged breaths. The wires were cutting through his suit and into his skin, blood traveling down the ropes, dripping along the floor. "Damn... you... Kiba...!"

The androids all laughed at the same time. It was a truly frightening effect, like a bunch of sand blasters running at the same time. Eli flinched.

One of the androids pulled at the wire surrounding his mask with extreme force, snapping his head backwards. Sergius pushed against the strain with all his might, moving his head in the opposite direction.

"Grrrr...!"

The white reaper mask cracked. And again. And again cracked under the strain of the wire. Soon fractures appeared all over the mask.

"Kiiibaaa!!!"

The mask shattered into a hundred pieces, flying across the ground. With the guy's back turned, Eli couldn't see his face. The wires shredded his trench coat, smearing the Roman numeral "IV" with blood.

The reaper was dying, strung up like Jesus on the cross, hands too far away to reach his belt, fingers too far away to operate the machines on his wrists.

Eli was even more bewildered than he was minutes before. *Who is this guy? Why did he tell me to 'sush'? Was he trying to save me?*

HE'S NOT AN ENEMY. YOU SHOULD ATTEMPT TO SAVE HIM. WHO KNOWS, I MIGHT EVEN HELP.

Eli noticed her voice this time. She seemed desperate... *strained*.

That was the first time his Landlord had ever spoken to him on even terms, asking him to do something. The white haired demon witch appeared in his vision again, his eye burning. He resisted the urge to press his palms over his eye, and instead watched the actions of the witch. She walked up to Sergius, strung up like a slab of meat, and made a slashing motion.

It took a moment for Eli to realize that *he* had made an identical slashing motion, in the same direction.

He took a step forward, accidentally breaking Alex's circle.

All the androids' glowing empty eye sockets focused on his position at the exact same time.

All the wires that bound the reaper snapped like twigs from the force of Eli's attack, sending the androids stumbling backwards. Some even fell over, totally off-balanced by the change in force.

Sergius's coat was shredded beyond any semblance of repair, so he discarded it. The pieces that remained blew away in the wind.

The Threadmaster wasted no time. He reached into his belt and grabbed four knives; he aimed and launched each one of them at his enemies with professional abandon, flinging the ones in his wrist compartments as well. The whole thing took about six seconds.

It was beautiful. The essence of eloquence. The threads attached to the knives glowed silver in the rain-light, giving Sergius a godly appearance, with seemingly hundreds of threads coming out of his body at the same time.

Each knife struck one of the androids, some going through their heads, others straight through their chests. Sergius flicked a switch on his belt, and an electric current ran through the wires, sparking whenever the raindrops would get too near, electrocuting the living fuck out of them. A few set on fire, while others exploded right then and there.

Three of the smarter androids snapped the wire with their bare hands before the electric charge reached them. They righted themselves instantaneously, now focused on the boy hiding in the corner. They bared their teeth, showing wickedly pointed fangs.

Eli flinched, pressing himself against the wall once more.

"Oh no you don't!" Sergius shouted, retracting his knives and re-launching them at the moving androids.

They evaded with inhuman speed, pointing at the boy and launching their remaining threads at him.

Eli found himself strung up much like Sergius was, except this time — *the androids weren't going to toy with him. They'd pull him apart in less than a second.* He screamed in pain and fear, the wires cutting into his flesh.

And then Sergius was there, knives in hand. The wires binding Eli were all severed. The androids' eyes glowed red behind their masks. Simultaneously, they emitted a sinister machine wail. Eli fell to his knees, back to the wall, tears in his eyes, covering his ears as best he could.

"YOU CAN NOT WIN. DO YOU REMEMBER? DO YOU REMEMBER, AUSTIN?!" The androids leaped at him, flying in the air with their arms extended like spiders. "DO YOU REMEMBER?!"

The remaining androids jumped him, and they rolled around on the rain-slick floor like a bunch of wrestling children.

Eventually they got Sergius pinned on the ground, with only a single hand free.

“YOU. WILL. REMEMBER.” Said one of the androids. “OR. YOU. WILL. DIE!” Said the other two, retracting their claws back into their hands, forming deadly weapons.

With his free hand, Sergius pressed and held three buttons on his belt. They lit up red.

Sergius’s face took on a pained expression. “People are not...” The knives on his belt quivered, each pointing in a different direction, attracted like magnets to the metal monsters. “... RULED BY THEIR MEMORIES!”

He released the buttons... *and the knives went flying in random directions*, as if rocket propelled. The androids screamed as the tri-pronged blades bored straight through their metal bodies. “Now die.” He muttered, flicking the switch on his belt that sent the electric current through the threads, exploding the remaining three enemies.

Their burnt husks fell to the floor, spattering oil and machine-parts all over the place.

Eli was still sitting in the corner, the blood perimeter broken, when the now-mask-less reaper got back on his feet. Acting on impulse, Eli jumped to his feet as well, running towards the edge of the building, not wanting to get caught by whoever the hell this person was. He made a mighty leap over the fence surrounding the roof’s borders, but got his foot *caught on something*. Instead of leaping off the rim, he fell on his face — only a few feet away from the gate and the edge.

When the shock from smacking his face full force against the ground ebbed away, he looked back at his foot. A thread was wrapped tightly around his ankle, although no knife accompanied it. With his eyes, Eli slowly followed the line back to its source.

“Hey! Let me go!” Eli shouted, desperate to escape. “Let me go!”

Instead, the reaper retracted the wire, dragging Eli across the wet ground, back towards him. The kid clawed at the ground the whole time, weeping.

The man held his arm out in front of him, parallel to the ground, perpendicular to his body.

When the thread was fully retracted, Eli was hanging upside down by one leg, tears running up his cheeks.

“You’re Wolf’s kid right? The one he was talking about?”

NO THANKS NECESSARY FOR SAVING HIS LIFE, HUH? HOW RUDE.

Eli didn’t respond. He was scared stiff.

The sky grew darker still.

“Hmph. I’d recognize Alex’s magic *anywhere*. That was a pretty deep invisibly shield, for it to have fooled Kiba...” The mask-less reaper locked eyes with Eli. “*Cut the howling you stupid brat.*” He snapped. Eli quit it right away, giving him a frightened look. “God damn, you’re whiney. Stop acting like such a child. This is *Lower Town, for fuck’s sake.*” He leisurely gave Eli the once over. “You must not be from around here, huh.” Sergius deduced. “You’re too wimpy to be a resident of Lower Town. Where’d Alex find you? You two look nothing alike, so I doubt you’re related.”

Eli didn’t respond. The sky grew even darker. Sergius surveyed his surroundings.

“Eh... the sun’s going down... and the *night-side* is coming. Great. Fucking great. Just what I fucking need... ... *fuck.*” This man liked to cuss just for the sake of cussing. He looked back towards Eli, any remaining semblance of patience in his voice gone. “Tell me where Alex went.”

Once again, Eli didn’t respond.

Sergius shook him a few times, dangling from the string. “Tell. Me. Where. He. Went.”

Eli started crying again.

“God damnit kid.” Sergius sighed, cutting the thread. Eli fell on his back. “This is why I *hate* children.”

Suddenly Sergius’s eyes widened. “Hey! *Quiet!*”

Eli did as he was told.

From the opposite side of the roof, more masked androids appeared. Instead of jumping over the gates that surrounded the perimeter of the building, they rushed right through them, wailing.

“Shit. *Time to go!*” Sergius hissed, grabbing Eli with one arm around the waist, as if he were a piece of luggage. With his open hand, he pressed a button on his belt. Three pellets detached from the back of his gear and fell to the floor. The onslaught of androids stopped in their tracks — unsure of this new development. The pellets detonated, shrouding the rooftop in mist.

There was a huge de-commissioned cell phone tower a few hundred yards away. Sergius pointed his free hand at it and — *bam! bam!* — released his dual-knives from their compartments on his wrist device. They flew like twinkling stars in the sky, latching onto or busting straight through the metal appendages at the top of the tower.

Without wasting any more time, Sergius retracted the threads, his body launching into the skies, Eli at his side. They swung like Spiderman — or perhaps more accurately, *Batman* — around the tower and onto the ground, *far* away from the building the androids currently occupied.

They were not followed.

Alex felt the exact moment the perimeter around Elijah was broken.

“Damnit! I don’t have time for this!!” He shouted, placing his palms on the soggy floor.

“YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE — KING OF III.” The androids wailed.

“FOZARE!!” Alex cried — hair and clothes soaked with rain. The ground splintered and cracked, sending Alex flying into the air. He whispered another word and, instead of falling, the tails on his coat stretched tight, like a glider.

“YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE!” The androids all pointed at the sky and launched their claw threads at him, but they were deflected by the huge semi-spherical shield Alex had placed beneath himself. “NO!”

“Fozare.” Alex muttered, smirking. He gave the androids a mock salute before blasting off at the speed of sound, leaving his enemies to eat his dust — literally. The boom cone left behind by Alex’s speed kicked up dust and debris all over the ground.

“Have fun in the night-side, you little freaks.” Alex muttered to himself. The rooftop he left Eli on, the one he was supposed to meet his friend and partner *Austin*, the King of IV — aka Threadmaster Sergius — was coming into sight.

It occurred to Alex how much Lower Town loved to give people titles. Despite himself, he smirked.

“Can I walk on my own?” Eli asked after about ten minutes. Sergius was still carrying him like a piece of luggage.

“Eh. Yeah.” He dropped the kid. Eli got up, brushing the water from his pants and continued walking.

“Mister Grim Reaper... where are we going?” Eli asked, still a bit confused about what exactly was going on.

Threadmaster Sergius gave the kid an odd look. “Grim Reaper ‘eh? I like it.” He faced forward again. They had just entered the night-side. “We’re headed back to the Guild outpost. That hotel you just came from. Kiba won’t expect us to show there, and the place is well maintained by my very own squadron, so that’s probably the safest place to be at right now. Besides, if Alex is anywhere, he’s there.”

Threadmaster Sergius was a well recognized figure in the night-side, and no one even bothered to screw with him — or anyone around him.

Eventually, the Guild hotel came into view. Eli smiled.

“Hey kid, how do you know Alex?”

Eli looked up at his un-masked 'grim reaper'. "I... well... he's my... *godfather*." Eli looked down at his feet. "My parents died when I was born... so all I have left is my almost-sister, Lucia... I heard they were from around here. From around '*Lower Town*,' so I've always wanted to visit..."

Sergius faced forward again. "Lower Town isn't a place for someone like you. You're *too nice* to be around here. Go home, kid. Don't get tangled up with Alex."

Eli said nothing.

They were about a block away from the Guild's outpost when someone stepped in their way. She was about Eli's size, but a little taller. The sun was rising on the night-side, so all they could see was her silhouette against the backlight.

"You there. *Player*." Lucia muttered. "*Step away from the boy... or Die. Trying*."

Alex landed on the rooftop with an audible *plop*. Amidst the corpses of destroyed androids, he found his barrier broken from the inside. *Eli ran out of it*. Images flashed through his mind. Horrible images, detailing all the different ways Eli could have died, or been captured... *or worse*.

He looked around, desperate for any kind of clue. Through the gentle caress of the rain, he spotted something reflecting the light. A *tread*, dangling from one of the run-down cell towers in this district. Behind the tower, Alex could see the night-side, rolling up fast, eating away at the daylight.

The sun was going down in this part of Lower Town, but rising in a few others.

"Austin..." Alex sighed, relieved. Austin was here, and chances are Eli was with him. Judging by the trajectory of their descent, they'd probably landed on one of the main roads, headed back towards the Guild hotel.

With a few more words, Alex was back in the air, gliding towards his final destination.

"Lucia!" Eli shouted, overcome with joy. It was Threadmaster Sergius that stepped in his line of sight, his arm at an angle to his side in a protective gesture.

"Who the hell're you?" He spoke menacingly. "And what business do you have with the child of the King of III?"

"Mister Reaper! That's my friend! Lucia!" He said, grabbing on his pants leg. He didn't hear Eli's soft voice.

“Who am I?” Lucia spoke just as menacingly, tilting her head to the side like an insane person. She didn’t hear Eli’s voice either. “I’m your *worst fucking nightmare*.”

Harah sighed, changing the channel. “They better not be off having any sort of *fun* without *me*.” She muttered, flicking the remote.

Outside the window, the clouds had turned grey. The sun had set.

It was still raining furiously. Eli had stopped trying to yell “STOP!” a while ago. They were too busy fighting each other to listen to him. He just sat there, on the muddy ground, pouting.

He didn’t notice one of the night-side creatures sneaking up on him — but Sergius and Lucia did.

Sergius was the first to react, shooting a knife at the creature. It flew right over Eli’s head and wrapped itself around the creature’s neck. Like a baseball player, Sergius swung the string around his body, using the screaming monster as a weapon to hit Lucia with. She slapped the creature away like an annoying fly.

The poor, terrified, screaming little monster — realizing it bit off far more than it could chew — exploded in a multi-chromatic fireworks display of flesh and blood.

None of the other creatures attempted to get any closer to them... *or* Eli.

“Not bad, girly.” He smirked.

“Not too bad there yourself, gangster.” She returned him look for look.

They continued fighting, attracting a crowd of followers. Eventually, there were “oohs” and “aahs” as each fighter released a technique or two.

When the battle finally climaxed, Lucia had a *sound dagger* pressed up against Sergius’s throat, and Sergius had one of his knives against hers.

But before they could go any further, a gigantic circle of light appeared right below them. They both eyed it warily, with varying degrees of surprise, before they both got slammed into the ground — weapons falling from their grasps.

“*What the hell is going on here?!*” Alex hissed, obviously pissed. He landed beside Eli. His trench coat had returned to its natural flapping state.

Eli looked up at him, reprieve written all over his face. "Alex!"

He looked down at Eli with a dopey grin.

As always, none of the rain ever got close enough to touch him.