



Vapour vented from his mask as he left out a surprised exhale at the glowing corpse before him. Its proportions were enormous and reminded him of a cracked-open shell of a powerful animal. To see such a giant split in two by a single spell was quite impressive.

It had once been known as the city of Serenity, but now it was a ruin strewn with corrupted and tainted survivors; he saw them crawl upon its corpse, battling for supremacy amongst themselves. Whatever war the Octland nation, and by extension the Church of the Eight Saint, might have been able to wage, it was now a bygone thing.

“Do you think you might find a fitting vessel there?” he asked the Spawn of Nharlla.

“**I HUNGER,**” moaned the ever-voracious child.

“I will. Find one. Amongst the survivors,” replied the shambling corpse housing the Shapeshifter’s spawn.

“Then let’s get a move on, I’m starving.”

Nwetrou’s spawn seemed the most excited by this, and Harmlig envied it slightly for the simple desires of its life. He was a man whose desires were harder to fulfil. Although the detour into Octland’s remnant nation had proven fruitful thus far. Within the vials he carried upon his person were two new strains of tainting bacteria he had never before seen, as well as an otherworldly parasite he had extracted from the shambling corpse.

As they began making their way towards the once-pristine Serenity, where a vast glowing scar bisected it down its central axis, he regarded his two peculiar companions.

“I think I’ll name you guys.”

“I already. Have. A name.”

“Pray tell.”

“My Progenitor. Named me. ‘Hark Nharlla’.”

A peculiar name, he thought to himself, but then it was perhaps unwise to try and apply logic to a being not defined by such primitive standards of mortal folk.

“And what about you, oh gluttonous one?”

“**I HUNGER.**”

“Guess I’ll call you ‘Feast’ then.”

“**FEAST?**”

“That’s right.”

The Spawn of Nwetrou paused for a moment, then nodded slightly.

“GOOD. FEAST.”

Harmlig sputtered a laugh at the response. To think that so dangerous a creature could act in such an adorable manner.

While Feast was off hunting for sport and pleasure, Hark accompanied the Pathogen Master as they searched the ruins of the city. He was no fool, so he steered well-clear of the glowing rend torn through the city. After all, he had seen very little life in that area of the ruined city, and those few creatures that now lived there were terrifying to behold.

“Do you reckon the Eight’s adherents have finally become Vice incarnate?” he wondered, as he took in a group of stained and putrid figures that fought amongst a ruined marketplace a few hundred metres away.

“They are. Tainted. By Jealous Spark.”

“Jealous Spark? What’s that?”

Hark pointed towards the enormous glowing scar with a finger stripped of skin. Even in the late evening, there was no part of the ruins that were not lit up by its intense vile-green luminescence.

“What do you think caused this Jealous Spark to infect the people here?”

“The Sovereign.”

“Truly?” he asked. Someone who wielded such power was certainly worthy of as lofty a title as ‘Sovereign’. For once in his strange journey to Helmsgarten, he was feeling quite excited about meeting this vaunted person, though he had to wonder what such a powerful mage might need from him.

“Hark,” he started. “Do you know what aid I’m to lend the Sovereign?”

The corpse regarded him without answering, before a commotion from some nearby rubble drew their attention away from the conversation.

From the wreckage of a small house came a lithe figure clawing its way out from below, shifting boulder-sized bits of wall and ceiling. The moment its head emerged from the ruins, two stubby and twisted horns drew Harmlig’s attention with their faintly-green luminescence.

He did not even have time to draw his corrupting rapier to defend himself before Hark had leapt for the skeletal-thin wraith-like human. With a screech and swipes of distended fingers, the survivor tried to fend off the corpse but was quickly overpowered.

Harmlig stared in horrified fascination as an obsidian-black beak emerged from the mouth of the corpse Hark inhabited. *Something* deep in its body began to wriggle itself out from the throat and stomach. With a wet slobbering sound and squelches of an unseen mass hidden in the bowels of the corpse, a large octopus tentacle liberated itself from the mouth, emerging out from behind the beak that it was connected to.

The corpse kept holding the screeching horned wraith pinned against the rubble, while the tentacles, which emerged one-by-one behind the exiting beak, began to add their adhesive suckers to the sides of the screeching survivor’s head.

It only took Harmlig a moment to realise what Hark was about to do, and, before he could blink, the mass of tentacles had escaped the corpse and begun forcefully shoving the beak into the screaming mouth of its victim.

While the screaming quickly became muffled and died down, the tentacles manoeuvred themselves in through the mouth, and he could only watch and listen as sounds of tearing muscle and meat came from inside Hark’s new ‘vessel’, along with joints popping and bones cracking.

Then the hateful and scared eyes of the wraith lost all their colour and its body began spasming, falling to the ground next to the discarded and hollowed-out skin of Hark Nharlla’s former body-suit.

With a couple last body-wrenching convulsions, the Spawn of the Disfigured One seemed to gain full control. The movements were unsettlingly-fluid as the horned wraith pulled itself upright and shook out its shoulders, head, and hands.

“This is a much. Better fit.”

“You could’ve warned me,” Harmlig joked darkly. “Also, who are you wearing? I’ve never seen a human *like that* before.”

“When I devoured. Her brain. I discovered that she. Was a pious adherent. She became a lesser Demon. With the fall of. Her Eight Saint.”

Harmlig looked at the fight nearby, and further beyond to where other similar figures were crawling all over the ruins. As he watched carefully in the sickening glow of the Jealous Scar, he noticed that all the figures had distended features, as well as horns that were growing in. Many were also covered in postulant sores and bulging tumours.

“If they were once a religion of Purity, they must now be the antithesis.”

“They are. Incarnate Corruption.”

“What a blessed time to be alive,” Harmlig remark, considering it quite fortuitous that he should be alive to witness the Fall of a Saint, especially one which now seemed perfectly aligned with his talents.

“Once I have my own laboratory again, I will have to attempt to summon one of these newly-birthed Demons.”

“We must seek. The Sovereign.”

“Yes, yes. In due time.”

“Now.”

Harmlig sighed. “We’ll head directly to Helmsgarten if you can fetch me some of the glowing fragments near the Jealous Scar.”

“Understood,” answered Hark, before leaping in the direction of the glow, performing an inhuman display of acrobatics to traverse the ruins.

No sooner had his companion left than dragging steps came from nearby and Harmlig turned away from the spectacle to lay eyes on one of the lesser Demons who had spotted him from afar.

He cautiously pulled out his rapier, while sidling away from the creature. However, his display of careful retreat did not seem to work, as it began striding towards him, its curled glowing horns drawing him in like a lure.

With a lunge belied by his unassuming physique, Harmlig lanced the lesser Demon in the face with his hollow rapier, the internal mechanism of the weapon firing its payload of flesh-devouring bacteria.

A pained grunt emerged from the brutish mouth of the lesser Demon, while black lines of rot quickly formed from the stab-wound Harmlig had gifted it. Before he could ascertain if his carefully-cultured bacteria worked on Corruption Demons, a black shadow appeared behind the figure, wrapping around it like an enormous blanket and swallowing it whole.

“DELICIOUS.”

Harmlig frowned at the missed opportunity, but could not avoid smiling at his companion’s sincere praise for the tastiness of its prey.

I still have to find something to eat... he realised as his stomach growled at him.

While Feast moved on to find other lesser Demons to eat, Harmlig did some hunting of his own to locate any food that might have survived the disastrous fall of Serenity.