

Something unordinary strode with purpose. Deep within the recesses of H5 was a being dressed in a coat of black feathers. The dilapidated streets were devoid of all life after the recent evacuations.

The figure whose eyes carried the cosmos blended with the shadows as she approached an abandoned perimeter located within the heart of an urban complex. It was the resting site of H5's Retrofitter, yet the security was nonexistent.

However, Galia knew this was far from the truth. The moment she stepped into the perimeter she smirked knowingly as she set her sights onto the concrete bunker. Her strides were long and elegant, each step as silent as herself.

She descended into the concrete tunnels, allowing the darkness to envelop her. Silence prevailed in this place, but her ears picked up a deep resonance further ahead. An unnatural choir caused a rush of haunted air to travel into the tunnel.

The ethereal strings were played on what sounded like a harp. Galia knew however that this was far from the truth. Her pace quickened as she dominated the cold air with her presence alone.

"You're quite something to play that miserable tune." Galia spoke into the darkness, her voice echoing within a vast chamber.

Sat at the base of the mound where the Retrofitter once resided was a figure dressed in only a black two-piece suit. Her long hair coiled behind her like a bundle of rope as exactly three swords impaled her on the spot.

"Ahh... For a Beholder to directly address me makes my blood gush so beautifully." *Enoch* began, lifting the blades one by one as blood gushed from her wounds. "A deity to call forth a human is a tale as old as time. Ahaha... I hope you understand that I had to make preparations."

"With that introduction you're hardly more human than I. You're aware of the reason why I've called you here, Enoch. It's to do with the gift I must leave for the Amalgam." Lights instantly dispelled the darkness. Stars filled the skies at the single click of Galia's fingers.

Enoch basked in the light as her wounds sealed before their very eyes. The blood beneath her crawled back into her body but not before leaving behind a perfect circle. Enoch's elated demeanor hid her arranged defenses in case Galia had come to slit her throat.

Even the lights Galia had erected were not a means for convenience. They were there as a warning to Enoch and threatened to descend by her will. As much as the two knew they were allies, they both could not help but to at least take appropriate precautions.

Although they knew that fighting was a foolish endeavor.

"Oh~ Am I being entrusted with its creation?" Enoch unexpectedly destroyed the ring of blood around her, suddenly trusting Galia as if they were close friends. "I take it as a yes. You chose the right Tempered Artificer for the job. Quick to business. I like that that. I guess the tales about the Colorless Incandescent can apply here too~"

“That impatient me would have already killed you where you stood.” Galia smiled smugly. “But neither of us can be called humans in the fullest extent. You and I have cast it away, snipping at the beloved leaves that we don’t dare to infect.”

“I am nothing but human~” Enoch boldly claimed, tilting her head to the side as she placed a finger on her cheek. “I’m just a little more tempered than the rest.”

Then, Enoch removed her suit revealing her white, buttoned shirt that revealed her bare, white flesh.

“Yet you know the tune of the Depths. Not a single blemish on your flesh. Can you really be called human when even Beholders –”

Galia exhaled through her nose, amused by the reveal as she too removed her coat and threw it aside. Underneath she wore another thick layer of clothes, covering every inch of her flesh. The apparel was colored darker than her hair, with the highlights as gold as the eyes of an Angel.

“– Will rot to the Curse of the Descent.”

When her undercoat too was taken off, all that remained was a sleeveless top. Her arms and body were wrapped in grimy bandages with black inscriptions. She began from the tips of her fingers, removing a glove to reveal her untouched dark skin.

But as she removed the bandages...

“No human can resist the infection. Only something beyond us can descend. If it’s not our bodies that break, then it will be our minds in that place where we fear to tread.”

... slits in her arms peeled open, revealing eyes and skin with the texture of burnt flesh. It was disgusting, and proof that Galia – despite her outer appearance – had lost a part of her humanity despite having no tech fused with her body.

“That’s why I’m curious, Enoch.” She rebandaged her arm as her thrown apparel magically hovered back to her. Her arms returned into their sleeves, the comfort of the feathers bringing peace to Galia.

“I knew that you hardly passed as a human from the moment I saw you. You’re more of a serpent than I am. But we both carry the same ideals. I will remind you – were I still the Colorless Incandescent, then I would have slain you were you stood.”

“You’re mistaken. I *am* human.” Enoch assured, bleeding herself again as if to prove it as her eyes widened into giant crazed spheres. “I’ve been tempered for so long that I’ve become resilient. Temper Aspirations. G-Z7 made me realize that being human is a silver lining~ Besides. I never descended to that same place. This tune comes from a friend of mine.”

“From a time not belonging to ours no doubt.” Galia’s eyes narrowed with suspicion.

Enoch happily laughed at Galia’s judgement.

“I don’t lie. I’ve learned that only the truth should be spoken. I’ve gushed enough to know it’s better like this. How did our business turn to this~”

“I had concerns, but they are mostly alleviated now.” Galia snuffed several lights above, leaving behind only the harmless ones. She had figured something out with Enoch and was satisfied with her conclusion. “That makes us both similar in that regard. That we are both invasive seeds.”

Enoch’s eyes returned to normal as she nodded in complete agreement.

“Your intuition is terrifying. I’m glad I didn’t have to die today~ But that just means I’m useful. Because you’re right. I’m the Artificer of Rupturing. I’m the creator of all the strongest Atelier Items. Let’s leave our differences aside and get down to business~!”

“That would be wise of us.” Galia held onto the same expression the entire time, as if she had only partially listened to Enoch’s words. In truth it all mattered little to her but conveyed the opposite.

Her specialty after all was manipulation. Her test here was to see how far she could get away with bending Enoch to her will. Unfortunately, Enoch was far harder to crack than she thought.

No... she expected this. The tune Enoch played paired with her uninfected body was enough to convince Galia that she was a valuable ally. Whether or not she had descended did not matter.

What truly mattered was that Enoch stubbornly held onto her own ideals and identity despite being in the presence of a Beholder.

This was invaluable to Galia.

“The Amalgam will be arriving shortly. She will explain her preferences to you. Truthfully, I was not required to be here.”

“Look. I’m clean.” Enoch showed both palms to Galia. “But that’s surprising. Do you think it’s necessary to be overprotective of the Amalgam?”

Galia turned her back to Enoch, leaving behind a blueprint of a Victorian-era firearm. The same smirk broadened as her visage disappeared into the darkness.

“Believe what you want. Beholders are moving again. The stagnation we faced... the chains and the vows we’ve taken to prevent ourselves from killing one another – it’s all gone. Therefore, this is the least I can do for the one that has freed us.”

Enoch collapsed when Galia’s presence finally disappeared. A long sigh of relief left her lips as she congratulated herself for surviving. Her eyes never left the opening of the chamber, and as the lights faded out one by one, she whispered:

“You say that, but don’t you mean the one that resolved the mistakes of your past? You may not know it, but those triplets are special to you. The same as their big brother. Really, the

Beholders don't know how to say thanks. But I should be grateful that I can walk by their sides~ Now then... How shall I create this gift for our benefactor?"