Machinations of war haunted Frost.

Aberrations of death and conflict appeared in the bloodied reflections. No matter where he looked in his crimson purgatory there was always someone silently screaming at him, bleeding tears, and pleading for their lives to be spared.

They should have been silent. Frost could hear them. The phantom wails of misery were more real than the nightmare he was trapped in.

They were the victims of the flames. Both in the past and present. The many discarded lives sought to guilt him as he kept his gaze levelled with the endless horizon. Looking down only showed the female version of himself, following like a spectre. That form he grown so comfortable in seemed so lost compared to him. Frost was too focused on finding a way out. A reason for this madness, whereas his reflection was more concerned about the bodies.

Frost didn't think much of it. Rather, he'd be lying if he said that out loud. It was as though his present self was aware of what she had done. The Frost now, wearing the skin of the old, still hadn't a clue of what his sins truly were.

*Aside from burning our city.*

"This is getting me nowhere. Shit… please just stop talking to me." Frost muttered, half expecting Nav to speak to him as he casted a glance to the left and right, hoping to catch a glimmer of golden eyes and strands of white hair.

The memory felt something like Ber's state of mind. A primordial part of Frost that caused him to feel more like a stranger in someone's world than his own. But he knew this was his. Later on, following an arbitrary direction for what felt like days on end, he found small monuments sticking out from the shallow sea.

Each step caused calm ripples to endlessly expand. Similar monuments were reflected in his female self's version of this damned world. They were wooden pillars. Some made from bricks. It was not until hours later when he realized that these monuments were the concrete foundations of buildings.

Steel rods protruded from them; half melted as the world became populated with ruins. He could see structures far ahead. At times he wondered if he was moving at all due to the immense stretch of this world. The silence was agonizing. It was torturous for someone like him, who took comfort in the presence of others.

"What is this place trying to show me? I know my hypocrisy. I know how many people I've inadvertently killed trying to get rid of Scarlet Logic. I know it can't be justified. I know I need to make amends." Frost self-reflected upon himself in both meanings of the word. "… I but don't know if there was any other way. I wonder if they've done it. Really. No. What the hell am I trying to say? I'm sure… everything's fine on their side."

Frost was always the kind of person who saw the light in the dark. Who would find a silver lining in his own darkest maelstroms. It was, in a way, his way to keep moving forward. He

slapped his face, pinched himself, but he never dared to smile as he set foot into the ruins of the city he once called home, wondering where it all went wrong.

No.

He knew exactly what went wrong. Frost had already seen it firsthand in Elysia. That violence was the only way to stop the atrocities. Flames lit the ruined buildings like candlewicks, melting them down as molten slop sunk into the blood.

The screams of terror and despair became stronger, and he wished he could just make it all stop. He was oddly calm. A part of himself knew that thrashing out would change nothing in this world devoid of things to fight. The truth was laid bare before him. To fight them would mean to lie to himself.

This was perhaps Frost's flaw. The guilt burned more than the heat of the flames, and it clung stronger than congealed blood that sept into his apparel. He looked down expectantly, as if his reflection would magically reflect a simpler version of himself.

"It's a monster!"

"Fire! Fire! Put me out!"

"Extinguishers won't work! Water just spreads it!"

"Everyone's on fire! Please let me in – no – don't go! Please bring us with you –!"

The voices only drove the blade of guilt deeper into Frost's chest. There wasn't a proper moment to ever lament the deaths of those he caused. He never believed himself to be accountable for the ones in this old world. Frost knew who he was. What occurred before mattered little.

The present mattered more.

"That reflection is the only me I care about. This past is just context… a fucked up context to use me as a scapegoat for whatever damned wish they have. I hate them. I hate the Impuritas… how much easier would things be if we didn't have to shed so much blood? I hope… I can change things for the better. So Elysia doesn't have to look like this." Frost made these promises, marching ever forward.

He stopped running at some point.

"Not even I can justify this. A part of me wants to. How much easier would it be for me if I could. I don't want to forget about my roots. Those roots… are exactly what brought us together… but…"

*At the same time, in this current world, how much longer will these bonds last in a world like Elysia? Ber was almost taken from us. I… fuck. Don't think about it. They're strong enough as is. I know they are…*

Bodies scattered these waters. Age. Race. Human. Machine. It did not matter who it was. All were slain. Finally, the horizon seemed to come to an end. The redness of the horizon was not due to the reflection of the waters. Neither was it due to the light.

The horizon was a wall of flesh. A mountain of corpses. Though they were dead, Frost's first instinct was to wince, hearing phantom voices come from every single one of them. Frost, however vague it was, knew that he was responsible for their deaths.

It became harder to walk. A part of him would have rather that he couldn't. The wall encompassed his field of view, stretching out further into the horizon. At the right angle, he almost mistook them for stars.

*"… In…"*

A static voice crackled, and with it was the accompanying ticking. It didn't come from his mind. He followed the static, moving over the body of a pale-haired woman, whose wings were shriveled down to the bone. They were like branches rather than wings.

It was an unspecified Angel. Judging from her skin color, it was thankfully not Ju…

*Not Elysia.*

*"… the aftermath…"*

More Angels were found along the way. He counted a total of five, each brutally murdered as he stopped by one who bared three tails. The static called for him from within her faceless skull.

He reached in, shoving aside senseless organs unbelonging to a human. He had seen and handled enough to know that an Angel's innards were unique, yet somehow ever familiar. In a way, those organs were like mock organs, containing nothing as if serving only to mimic the image of a human they took after.

Within was a biological radio shaped like a thyroid, protected by its cartilage, with the prominence – the Adam's Apple – oozing a thick, golden liquid through damaged cracks. Retrieving the object, Frost moved closer towards a felled black entity, pushing through debris as he scoured the world for Elysia's body.

*"… billions were lost. Dreams were followed. All were left unfulfilled."* This voice undoubtedly belonged to Elysia. *"… Our starless world shined so brightly. Was this the dream you wanted? You told me that stars used to populate the skies. That they were like the wishes of people in the world, hanging above us… like the toys that dangle above an infant's cradle."*

Frost assumed that it was a prerecorded message, left to share their tale with whoever uncovered it. Yet somehow, he could not help but to believe that it was recorded only for him to hear.

A spear could be seen embedded within the black, thousand-eyed entity. No. There was more than that. There were hundreds, riddling its body like the spines of the Righteousness.

*"… That the world's loss of it was a metaphor for their lack of aspiration. Our shattered dreams, fallen like stardust from the cosmos you so loved… Our dreams were never realized. It was all for naught… I don't blame you for judging them. I regret my lack of courage. I regret never taking a stand. I regret that I could not be your jury, for you lost your way and became a blinded judge and executioner."*

One stake protruded from the waters. It was the only one that did not strike the entity, and when Frost approached it, he vividly recalled the agony of having been skewered by Iscario. But there was something more to it. An inconsolable, underlaying sadness accompanied it.

*"The Pillar of the World reacted. Your woes took form. It ate you. I – Elysia, the Angel of Temperance and healing – indulged in my gluttonic vice. I killed him.*

*I killed Sinder to protect the world he tried to save!"*

The static abruptly cut, and the biological device exploded, sputtering blood across his body.

"… Sinder… was my name?" Frost wanted to laugh.

He wanted to cackle. But instead, he fell to his knees, staring down into a cavity of the entity where an organ of some kind used to reside.

"What a joke… what a sick… fucking joke. Sinder. Frost… my name is just the opposite. This isn't a game. This world isn't a story. My life… can't just be full of coincidence after coincidence. What – the fuck – AM IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!?"

Frost shouted till his voice became hoarse. Until the breath in his lungs were emptied. And even then, his existential cry dragged on as he tried to understand the nature of his existence.

Frost was a name he chose by chance. The mere fact that it was the polar opposite of what his previous name translated to cause a sudden burst of emotions to blow like a steaming kettle. 'Light'. 'Star'. 'Forbidden'. These roundabout names came to mind and Frost cried out once more, holding back tears.

None could console him, save for the sounds of the damned.

But eventually, Frost caught a glimpse of himself deep into the cavity where blood pooled. Within he saw his female reflection. The very same one from the forest of the Village of Virt with brown eyes.

A more innocent version of whatever he had become. Within the pool was a fake, diamond brooch made from hard plastic. An accessory belonging to the Archivist.

Somehow, even without her presence, the Archivist had managed to pull him out of a dangerous place.

"… my name… is Frost. Jury. Ignis. Cer. Ber. Res. Snap –" Frost recited every name, every person, and everything *she* had come across, ending with a groaned: "I know who I am. This… doesn't change anything. When I return… everything will be ok. The war will be over. All of this… all of it will be behind me. I can just focus on restoration. Yeah. With everyone…"

Frost's voice gradually became feminine. The clothes he wore became looser as his body reverted to its female form. However, her chest felt slightly heavier, her hair every slightly longer, and her body just marginally taller. She didn't know if it was a trick of her mind, or if she had actually changed. Whatever it was, Frost cared little as a bright light shone from within the cavity.

She smiled at the light, however pained it was, and realized that this nightmare…

… would be ending soon.