

“Hearts?” The Blood Angel shut her eyes for she was unfamiliar with the term. “Don’t be mistaken. You have a similar smell to us, and to *them*.”

“They are under my control.” The Missionary assured, jamming the Expositionist’s mouth with a finger again. “As you can see, they are my puppet. The ‘Head’ watches through them.”

“The Head. Another person that sought to claim the Nexus?”

“No. This person already has claimed it.”

The Blood Angel’s mouth curved into a smile as her wings disappeared into a red mist, causing more of the world to melt as a column of steel twisted directly beneath them. What they stood on was not a solid piece of ice, but in fact only the frozen surface of a subterranean sea.

“We really are in a new era. Book burnings of the past inspired many to rise to claim their own tale as the disease of pandemonium claimed countless. But flesh falters, and faith dwindles like candle flame. We understood the importance of the letters bestowed upon us from the great Library. The Fifty-Six. But *they*...” The Blood Angel escorted them forward as she gazed upon the mechanical hands. “... Understood the importance of forgoing the flesh. Contradictions bring birth to beautiful combinations. Before there were the liquid miracles, there were many that strove for the same thing.”

She took the role of the Expositionist as cracks broke through the ice like cracks of lightning. The Moons were infatuated with her to the point where they could not care less if the ground suddenly gave way beneath their feet. They trusted this being who was ignorant to the world, similarly to them.

The metal pipes underneath glowed suddenly as a surge of liquid ran through. The many colors were revealed by observation glasses that were installed along the colossal pipes. Soon, the snow from above became a steady trickle as a wave of heat washed over the world.

“There were many of us in our era of red mists and blackened skies. People of commonality were trampled in the path of those with strength. But there was one who took to the sides of the common, even though their methods were worse.”

The Blood Angel then stared back at the Expositionist with expectant eyes. She knew what the healer wanted. In her mind she wanted to refuse, but elsewhere in a place she could only call her heart – she complied with the soft demand, for she realized that her Heart was not what she believed it to be.

... Even though she was born from it...

“... What were sixteen became one.” The Expositionist’s eyes swirled with a faint glimpse of an unknown color. “And one became sixteen Chapters. They represented a Grapheme of an unknown alphabet.”

They entered the mouth of the industrial complex just moments before a great crash resounded from behind. The entire surface of the frozen sea shattered, revealing the crystal-clear waters underneath and the true extent of the pipework.

A total of two hundred and eighty-nine distinct pipework ran throughout the seabed, each twisting like the wheels of a crusher. Above them were the lights of natural crystals that illuminated their dark world like a second sun.

The castle followed the design of a great cathedral. Light shone through the many mosaic glasses, each depicting two hundred and eighty-nine unique icons.

“The sixteen Chapters made up the standard Serums. But beyond the sixteen were two hundred and seventy-three more magical elements that constituted the liquids which elevated the one who brought them all together into notoriety.”

More Blood Angels joined them.

Soon, they were surrounded by nearly sixteen Blood Angels. Their gas masks flicked with a unique color to differentiate them. It was clear that they were all once a part of a different Chapter but were brought together and put to rest after the War in Heaven.

The interior was decorated with black furniture, and had red carpets and banners to complement it. Other beings could be seen roaming within the castle, some shaking the frost from their bodies as they finally awakened. They were mostly mechanical constructs that were powered by an unknown source. The origin of their make was Geomancy – a magic that allowed inanimate objects to move as though they were living.

They were powered by a Serum called Serum Q – Qoph, a puppeteering Serum that streamlined Geomancy. It was restricted ever since the War in Heaven, for there was no limit to how many could be created. They had no mind of their own and followed only a strict commandment that was in the form of bloodied charms that dangled from their pale-red robes.

Within the core of each machine was a red vial containing said Serum. It was the heart of the machines, but not the hands which were the servants of the Blood Angels.

The larger ones, however, belonged to something greater.

They passed through corridor after corridor, walking in one straight line until they reached a place where the light could not reach. It was a much smaller chamber, and a raised platform was illuminated by a single spotlight. Surrounding it within the darkness were many hands and more mechanical entities, each dressed in ritualistic robes similar to that of the Blood Angels.

Instruments and entrances to what appeared to be an armory of sorts surrounded this sacred place. An altar resided in the far back of the room where the floor was raised the highest. There, exactly four tubes containing the most powerful Serums of Inflow Direct resided, the rime melting away with each passing second.

Suddenly, the ceiling opened like the petals of a flower, and an entity emerged. The bust of a man attached to a spinal cord riddled with steel bracings and decorated with innumerable blood-written scrolls scanned the room with its pair of crimson eyes.

“The last ten Serums were created strictly by Inflow Direct. It was a combination of nearly three hundred different magics. Two used by machines and the sickly. Four were used by their elite soldiers. And the final four...”

The Expositionist’s eyes fell onto the black pipes, knowing precisely what was stored within.

“... Were used by their strongest – the Obitutors.”

Once the bust of the hooded, half-machine, half human entity finished scanning the chamber, he stared at the group before him as the hands within the darkness shed their icy skin.