

l'ani flew above the land, his sun icon above devouring every monstrosity that touched its red-gold light in the lands below. Sucked in like a vortex, bursting into flames as they sunk into the fire. The icon growing bigger incrementally as l'ani slowly pulled off the seals on his power source. Not going any faster so it wouldn't evaporate everything in a 20-mile radius.

But below his eyes caught something, unnatural shadows on the ground moving away from him. Like they're running. l'ani expanded his senses and confirmed his suspicions. The Others were creating a shield of darkness from Spiritual energy, and running it through a Mental filter so it would turn into shade mana. Preventing his sun icon's light from reaching them.

l'ani summoned his Sword Icon, attaching it to his Spirit Avatar/ Diving to the ground and systematically cutting The Others apart. Banishing them to whatever realm they hailed from.

Expanding his senses further to catch more and more. Something hiding in the shade thinking he wouldn't catch them. He pushed even further and... and he felt the Purple Pipers' presence.

Wait no, the other one was here? The Blind Man should be truly manifested, he caught it messing with Relu's head. This is

l'ani launched off, letting The Others he was hunting go. At least two of the three Gatekeepers were here, if the Black Queen is here too then the Fire Witch could be summoned. He was the only Fianna awake and in the region, he'd have to do this himself.

The air around him boomed, sounding like a constant growl and screech in harmony, following him. But quickly being left behind as he stayed in front of the boom. The stadium in sight.

l'ani crashed onto the ancient wooden walkway, waves rippling out with the wake of air behind it. The doc itself unbothered. The Pipers' eyes widening at the sight of him.

l'ani sent mana into the doc below activating the runes, creating a molten silver barrier. Pushing away the Purple Piper, now standing above, on top of it. Completely unfazed, with an ear-to-ear grin across its face, containing too many teeth.

"Relu."

"Yes sir," they straighten their back

"Heal that Karu kid."

They nodded, placing their hand on the boy's head. Sending cohesion and life mana into Karu, after a moment Relu looked up to l'ani, "Hey, uh how'd you create a barrier that quickly. Is there some trick to it?"

"Oh, uh. I didn't. Holy sights always have some sort of barrier, especially ancient ones. I think this one was created near the beginning of the Voluspa era. If I'm remembering correctly."

"What's the Voluspa era, and why would this place need a barrier that strong?"

"It's a burial sight, well a resurrection-"

“Oh, hello l’ani!” The Purple Piper gleefully said, cutting him off, “Long time no see! Say how’s your sister doing?”

l’ani stopped talking, a beat of silence around him. *That bastard*, He felt as though molten lead coursed through his heart, the heat radiating from his chest. *That bastard*, Ringing in his ear growing louder and louder as each second passed. *That bastard*. His palms starting to hurt from the nails digging into them.

He bit the inside of his lip, tasting blood as he breathed in slowly. Then back out, doing one of those breathing exercises Relu taught him to calm down. T

The next moment he slid past the barrier. Pointing his Spirit Avatar at the abomination, the tailless ouroboros. Or whatever name it went by.

A burst of red gold energy flew past the Pipers' ear, barely dodging it. The beam punching a hole through the mountain behind it and going into the atmosphere, grazing the edge of a moon hanging in the sky.

l’ani sucked in through his teeth, *He was going to have to apologize to its god later.*

“You know you need an Icon to hurt me, or are you going senile now? Maybe you should’ve died with your sister?” it giggled

l’ani fired another blast, going right through its chest.

“A sun hasn’t risen in your presence yet, only fell. That boy's body isn’t a complete anchor yet. Have you forgotten that, or are you going senile? I heard dying is a good remedy.”

“Tsk, I was hoping you’d forgotten that.”

They stood on the barrier, circling each other. *That technique was expensive, so he couldn’t fire it whenever. Plus If he misses he could kill people en masse, not to mention the coffin beneath the lake.*

l’ani made up his mind, he lunged forward. Short sword in a reverse grip, stabbing forward at its head in a barrage. The Piper deflecting them with a baton and a more native style of short sword.

Then it caught his Leiomano on the shark's teeth with its sword covered in cohesion mana sticking them together. Striking out at his ribs with its baton. l’ani stepped to the side, extending the arm locking their weapons together.

l’ani grabbed hold of its extended forearm and twisted it. Weakening the grip and ripping the blade out of its hand. Separating the two swords. l’ani kned upward into its crotch, the body's identity still being a man at this stage of infection. Feeling its body buckle from the pain.

l'ani went in to take off its head, with a quick slash of the blade. But he felt something pierce his liver, making him falter. Looking down he saw the short sword he made it drop attached to its baton with a layer of cohesion mana, stabbing in his cut.

Taking advantage of the faltering, headbutting l'ani on the nose. Dazing him, forcing him to step back. l'ani sent out a pulse of Mana, preventing it from doing anything else to him.

And once again they were circling each other, l'ani wiping away blood from his nose. The Purple Piper unblinking as sweat trickled into its eyes.

l'ani lunged forward once again, miming to strike with his weapon. The Purple Piper readying to defend. But l'ani sent mana through his feet.

Sending instructions to the doc runes below. Teleporting it, instantaneously rotating it 180 degrees, panicking the Purple Piper as l'ani grabbed it by the neck. Forcing them both to fall in.

l'ani wasting no time propulsing himself forward underwater, a jet of flame rocketing him forward. Turning water to steam behind him as l'ani smashed it into the rocks at the edge of the lake. Grating the Purple Pipers vessel against the rock like cheese. Leaving Visera against the crumbling stone.

l'ani grinned, he would see this monster burned, shredded, ripped to bits. Slaughtered with rusty dull knives as it screamed- No. It didn't feel pain, not in the way humans did, it couldn't. But whatever small atom of consciousness the poor kid it inhabited had left, could.

He would banish it. l'ani stopped dragging it against the rocks, holding it up in the air. Starting to draw out an annoying, but painless Icon, closing his eyes to concentrate. Unlike nearly every other Icon, this one needed its due diligence. Then he felt a hand land on his shoulder, opening his eyes annoyed. He started talking, "I'll help you repair the moon lat-," Then he saw the Piper grinning at him. The grinded off half of its body emitting a purple haze imitating a body. A hand of smoke on his shoulder. "Made you look," it said in a childish voice.

Then he felt himself bisected by a shortsword, cleaving in between his eyes. His damned soul decided to stay on the side that wasn't holding onto the Piper. But as he fell it grabbed onto his left leg, well only leg for now.

And swung l'ani against the sandy beach over and over, l'ani ripped off a seal on his power. Ignoring the consequences, a burst of flame pushing away the Purple piper. Evaporating the nearby sand, turning the beach for a dozen or so feet into obsidian or glass. A hot blast of air flowing over the entire bowl of the two mountain shoot-offs this place was cradled in.

In the epicenter l'ani lay topless and only half a set of pants, body fully regenerated. He struggled onto his feet.

But before he could steady himself the Purple Piper grabbed him by the face with a clawed hand of smoke. Rocketing him towards the barrier his students were in. Smashing his skull onto it.

Brains splattering over the molten silver barrier. Then it stabbed its smoke hand into his heart right in front of his student. Making Relu and the others gasp. Pulsing poison into him

Then he felt his connection to his source of power cut. The pipeline shattered, trapping his soul in this body.
“Now allow me to tell you something little human, I'm going to enjoy killing you, even more than your sister. You have been such a thorn in my side for... whatever silly little calendar you use. But now, it's time to die.”
It ripped its hand out of l'ani heart, letting his pale body trying to repair itself with the minuscule amount of mana compared to what it previously had.

Now standing over the speechless six it started to monologue.
“I may be forever hungry children, but I am not a pig. I am refined,” The Purple Piper said, circling them overhead, “I have developed a rather fine pallet, but my sibling's taste are much... cruder.”
Ectoplasm started to form from thin air around it, turning into numerous misunderstandings of reality.
“Now since this idiot,” It gestured in the general direction of l'ani,” Never called for help,“ it kneeled down pressing its sickly lavender-tinted forehead onto the barrier, “Me and my sibling have much more time to revel in our feast.”
More and more distortion, nightmares, and monstrosities spawned as it started to giggle as it looked into the eyes of the six below. One by one.

Then it looked back, seeing l'ani deathly pale hand gripping onto its ankle. Golden chains bursting forth from the air, wrapping around the Purple Piper, a courtroom spawning around them. The Icon of the Scales blazing above them, and above that a sun devouring The Others.
“The charges have been evaluated,” l'ani rasped out, “and the sentence has been determined. Death.”
“NO, No, nO, NNNONnnoOOoooNOo!” it screamed out as static flickered across its purple form, releasing a kaleidoscopic rainbow of light as it was banished to where it came from.

OOO

Karu's eyes slowly opened, vision foggy. Being assaulted by a kaleidoscopic rainbow of colors flickering around like lightning. The being it originated from gripped by the ankle by the foreign

practitioner who tasked him with protecting his apprentice. A legion of monstrosities around him burning to ashes. The remnants blown away in the wind, dissolving into nothing.

Then all that was left was the Icons of a Scale and Sun blazing in the sky, dismissed with a flick of the hand. The sickly pale foreigner, *l'ani, that's his name*, sunk through the liquid silver barrier. Falling to the wood with a thunk, right in front of Karu.

"You feeling better kid?"

Karu tried to get to a bowing position, face burning, but his legs failed him.

"Hey, hey, hey, no need to stand. You got hit real hard in the noggin there."

"I offer my greatest apologies," Karu hung his head

l'ani furrowed his brow, "Why..?"

"Um, I failed the job you gave me. Even worse, I made you do it."

l'ani chuckled, "No need to worry, that vicious bastard nearly killed me. I thought you were going to deal with stuff like broken bridges and fire, my job was to deal with those. You're still getting payment if you're worried about that."

"How'd you survive getting your head blown off!" Xukali half yelled, disrupting the flow of conversation.

"Tis but a flesh wound for one such as I and my apprentice"

"No, he's just a freak of nature," The other foreigner said.

A thought popped into Karu's head.

"Now that's just rude."

"Then how did you survive?"

"I'm just an old practitioner."

"Then why are you so short-"

"I don't think it's the best idea to insult the person who saved us," the short red-headed girl said

"If you're that old then you should be a Leviathan in size, at least!" she carried on.

"Well if you want to know, we'll have to start with my birth. I was born at a very young age, newborn in fact-"

Karu interrupted, "Can I be your apprentice Elder-" he stopped himself, "l'ani, just l'ani."

"What!?" Xukali and Mei said in unison. One with shock, the other disgust.

"Nah."

"Thank- wait why!?"

"I don't want to have to unteach you all the bad habits and misinformation this place has."

"I've got the best training you can get on this side of the mountain, the whole coast!"

"It's a rather small coast kid."

Karu bit his tongue to prevent himself from saying something stupid, "I saw a boy die in my hands after being torn apart like mince meat... Please, I-I can't see something like that again,"

Karu looked l'ani directly in his eyes.

He sighed, "Fine-"

"No!" Xukali shrieked out. Karu stared daggers at her, *that insolent, stupid, filthy-blooded squid.*

"Can I finish, please? I'll let you be my apprentice if, and that's a big if. You pass my test."

Karu nodded his head, "... and uh, what is this test?"

"Help the people in need, those who lost their houses. Can't get food, clean water, or medical supplies."

“Uh, what is this meant to prove?”

“Well, I want to see your best. I’ve seen you fight, so I want to see what is your best. Is that satisfactory for you both?”

“Yes,” Xukali and Karu said, both disgruntled.