

Stage II

A Debt Repaid

Act 6

“ARE YOU FUCKING MAD?!” the sergeant called out amidst all of the explosions and weapons fire, yelling out right at Lord Providence.

Providence turned his eyes, barking back, “NO! THAT MAN DIES NOW!!”

Pop pop pop pop pop pop pop pop

It all continued, everyone watching in awe. Danielle’s reaction had subsided by that point, a look of dread crossing her- mouth hung, a quivering wrinkled face, her hands trembling. The twins to that point hadn’t really changed; though Almec now with one eye wide open stared with a look of shock all his own. Sylver’s gaze narrowed.

“CEASE FIRE RIGHT NOW GOD DAMMIT!” the sergeant yelled out.

“BELAY THAT!” Providence yelled following.

“Belay nothing! Either we got him or we’re wasting ammo shooting at nothing! HOLD FIRE!”

Grouping by grouping the soldiers ceased fire, the inferno blazing before him melting the paint of the walls. Almec lay there practically unaffected by the flames, despite the heat forcing others from the Federation to move away. Not a single expression had changed. All watched closely, either with shock or with dread.

For Danielle and Almec it was dread mixed with bewilderment. For Sylver and his unit it was mostly the latter. Providence and the sergeant stared and stared and stared into the flames... nothing stirring. The glow of the fire’s core began to dim, the growth of the flames slowing.

“... impossible-” one of the soldiers spoke, their arm scope up.

Providence looked over, his eyes drawn back, lip quivering. The sergeant stared ahead. A form of darkness had sprung up within the flames, and soon those flames would part. A figure of black strolled through the literal inferno, step by agonizing step.

The flames rolled off of the figure of black. A twisted figure of tendrils, vines, roots- whatever one will. All slithering and black along the surface of the body straight up and down. Moving like snakes these vines of darkness exuded a slight magenta mist.

The magenta glow surged around the torso, radiating through the vines. Wings jetted from the back of this figure, looking like branches of a dead tree with magenta flames arched between making up the flap. A tail of vines slithered and whipped through the air, lashing through the flames. Magenta talons arched into the ground, clawing as it walked.

The vines traversed straight up the legs and into the main body, the arms swaying with claws just the same as the talons. This magenta aura breathed out of the body, a breath like smoke escaping the mouth. Jagged fangs almost completely interlaced, the magenta glow flowing out like a smoker's smoke, rolling. Parts of these vines stuck out around the body just like branches, forth from the shoulders, along the arms and elbow, even jetting out of the back of the head looking like curved splintered horns.

A monstrous figure of darkness, solely darkness. What moved before them was truly a living shadow. Though this shadow moved untouched by the destructive power, flames were wafting off of its main form.

Providence threw his arm up, "FIRE!!!!!! FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE!!!" he howled losing his composure instantaneously.

The soldiers obliged, firing shots upon the walking shadow demon. The shots hit, the lasers struck, holes were placed clean through the body; though as said shots continued it was not yet impeded. Multiple shots to the right shoulder and with a grunt it did fall back slightly, the slithering mass of dark tendrils parting. Shots through the chest, the arms, the legs, even one clear through the head.

And all at once the shots ceased again. The slithering mass began to bind itself again, the holes closing up with the tendrils collecting together, the shoulder injury regenerating.

"W-why me," Providence whimpered.

"Clearly you remember me rather well, *Lord Providence*," came the voice of Alexander.

The beast stopped and stood in place, whilst behind it the figure of white emerged straight up from its own shadow on the ground. How it cast a shadow with all of the fire behind it was uncertain; though it certainly did not stop the Blackheart from emerging from it. He emerged with a smug grin and no longer holding his Dr. Pepper.

"Oh, my mistake, you thought this to be me didn't you? Heh heh well- I suppose in some sense it is," Alexander chuckled, "Marvelous, isn't it?"

“What manner of demon are you?” Sylver grumbled stumbling up off of the ground, brushing himself off with his free hand as his other still held the sword.

Alexander glanced over, shrugging, “I-unno. Bold of you to assume I’m a demon.”

“That man is an S-Class Criminal. Do NOT take him lightly Sylver!” Providence called out.

Sylver turned his attention back before returning it ahead, “Doesn’t matter what he is. If he’s in league with the demons, he’ll be purified in the name of the Lord.”

“Well that’s a new one,” Alexander chuckled, “Purified in the name of the Lord? Always some greater purpose with you religious types. Have you learned nothing from the Dusk Wars?”

Sylver raised his weapon, “We learned how to deal with your kind, heathen.”

“There you go again assuming that I’m a generic demon. Simply no imagination. Well no matter- I suppose if the boss hasn’t learned the subordinate really wouldn’t know any different,” Alex grumbled glancing up to Providence.

Providence quivered, grasping at his sides. The soldiers all around the room took steps back, each of them backing away- all the while Sylver and his allies were rising up and banding together yet again. Alex looked back to Sylver, smirking slightly as he did.

“Well then... I suppose we should get at it, shall we?” he questioned, the shadow creature right before him exhaling a breath with a slight growl.

Ruble shifted and tumbled. To his side rose Almec, stumbling ever so slightly still holding a hand to the wound in his abdomen. Alexander glanced to his side, observing.

“A-Almec!” Danielle called.

“How is he-” Sylver grumbled.

Almec huffed and stumbled, slamming his right arm against the wall. His hand pressed, steadying himself. Slowly he removed his hand from his wound, along with the hand from the wall. Arched over yet upright, the scowl ever present.

Alexander looked back ahead from beyond the defense of his shadow, “You sure you’re up for this old man?”

Almec spit at the ground, “Piss off. I got caught off guard, that’s it-” he spoke with his scowl.

Steam roared out of the wound, a dark red flesh beginning to crawl over the hole. In no time at all it would be covered up by a hard red scaly-body, and with it the butler man would stand

stern upright yet again. His knuckles crackled as he flexed his hands, the crunch as he forged them to fists. A red aura shunted from his shoulders and backs, encompassing him near immediately.

“I am not some ignorant pup, and I am not some doddering old nobody! I’ll be sure to teach these whelps a lesson they shall not soon forget!” Almec spat.

“Heh heh heh. That fire burns again like in the olden days my friend. Good to have you back,” Alexander concluded.

Almec spit at the ground, cracking his knuckles, “Beginning to think you let me get stabbed on purpose.”

“Could be,” Alexander then chuckled stepping to the left of his shadow in full view.

“AHEM-” came the interruption of Providence, catching the attention of both Nether Warriors, “Sorry to interrupt such a riveting commencement but in case you’ve failed to take heed, I have three hostages with which to hold you two back- and I am not afraid to kill them if it means proving a point.”

The twins, still muffled, found arm cannons pressed into the sides of their heads. For Danielle she was dropped to her knees with a cannon shoved into her back with another aimed at the side of her head. Providence stepped forward, the sergeant sticking close.

“Look- as fun and dramatic as this performance has been, I’m not looking to make a scene here Providence. You should know full well what I can do given the last time we met. Why not put your pride aside and think rationally for once? Let the kids go and I’ll spare all of your men,” Alexander spoke out, “I quite literally speed blitzed Virgil’s team earlier and it would be repetitive to have to do that again to make a point.”

Providence took a pace back, teeth grit. Sweat poured down his face from his forehead while his wild eyes went dancing around. The sergeant at his side looked to him and then right back over to Alexander. The magenta once more, the shadow demon at his side, the red spade pattern on his shoulder.

“... wait a minute- I know this man,” the sergeant murmured.

“Raikor Termonte, correct? The Taoreta?” Sylver questioned aloud, a question which caught the old man’s full attention as it did Alexander’s.

“... so you’ve heard of me,” Almec grumbled.

“I’ve put it in mind to learn lots of things about notable demons and heathens. Those who served as the elite unit of the biggest villain of them all- well, I know your story. What confuses me

is why a man like you would align with the Scarlet Spade over there when he's been hunting your former comrades?"

Almec glanced over to Alexander, he who remained stationary. A momentary pause, narrowing rage focused upon the white ghost with his living shadow beside him. Subtle shift back-

"What do you mean?"

"Come on, if you were of the Taoreta then you are most certainly not an idiot," Sylver continued, "Don't you find it odd? Alexander of all people showing up here and confronting your team? Perhaps even fending off Virgil for you? And now here he is. Have you not wondered what your old friend has been up to for all of these years since the Fall of the Home Lands?"

"..."

"He's been hunting!" Sylver called out.

"Hunting?"

"Yes, hunting! He's been on our radar for sacking bases of former Demonic Arms agents and killing survivors of the old order. Targets my master, Shepard Rookwood, has had his eyes on for years. He's been purging anything and everything having to do with his brother's uprising, and now he's come to both you and the girl. Why do you think that is?"

Almec's narrowed exchange became a glare of inferno. Across the way Danielle looked to Alexander. He remained stationary, unmoved as the holy knight continued to speak.

"Alexander?" Almec posed aloud.

"Well... his words do have their merit admittedly," Alex murmured with a subtle turn of the head and an exchanged look, "However if I wanted you and Danielle dead I could have let Vox and Virgil do that on their own, or simply left you to be cut down by the knight himself."

"Do you even know what he's been up to?!" Sylver called out, "The Scarlet Spade or the Crimson Spade, Alexander. During the Dusk Wars, he fought on the side of the ruling powers. He fought the revolutionaries to defend the corrupt powers still holding claim over this realm, no doubt killing former friends of yours as he did!"

Almec slowed his breathing, turning but a single pace to the left. Alexander remained unmoved, as was the case of his creature.

"... well?" Almec began.

"Well what?" Alex questioned, "Kind of hard for me to deny truth. Yes I fought for one of the royals. Yes I've been dealing with remnants of Zero's forces. And yes, it's why I'm here."

“You son of a bitch,” Almec growled.

“Never said I was here to kill you Raikor; but- I do need the girl. Danielle is the key to a great many things that my brother’s allies would love nothing more than to unlock. And though I would rather not do you people any harm when you are all doing your own thing... I think you understand doing what must be done, right?”

“I was right,” Almec began, “You Blackhearts are all one in the same. Deceitful, untrustworthy, and disloyal.”

“Now that actually stings, yet we both supported a future genocidal maniac, did we not?”

“Yeah- HRRRRRGH,” he grunted pulling his right arm back, “HYAAAAH!”

Throwing his right hand out a potent jet of blood red plasma shot forth straight at both Alexander and the shadow creature. Alexander turned a full turn just as the shot fired, the shadow creature remaining undisturbed.

KABAAAAAAAAAAAAAM!!!

The wall and ceiling collapsed, a jet of fire flew straight out slamming into two of the soldiers and clipping the shoulder of one of Sylver’s men. Many of the Fed Troops backed away in a great hurry as did Sylver’s own men; though not Sylver himself. Behind the line Providence grinned, turning right round. He began to move with the sergeant following just behind, the soldiers holding the trio of youths moving out all the same now gagging Danielle as well.

Almec turned about and threw his right arm out, a barrage of lightning purple in color flying straight out and nailing several of the soldiers. Their screams echoed out, the lot of them flying up and through the air tumbling. The electricity surged around the lot of them, a few accidentally discharging their weapons in a blistering collapse.

Sylver smirked, backing away and turning to leave at once with the rest of the main unit, several of the troopers remaining back with weapons up.

“FIRE!!”

The soldiers opened fire on Almec who turned a full. Smoke flew out of his mouth as the shots struck; though said strikes reflected off like rain drops on glass the moment they struck. He pressed forward through the fire as the hailstorm came buzzing in with the pewpewpewpew pop pop pop pop- then beside him the flames burst.

The shadow creature came flying out with an inhuman venom-like howl. Almec turned just as the figure crashed straight into him, both tumbling to the right and flying straight through the brick wall, more bricks and ceiling collapsing in that moment with dust going everywhere. The

cloud of flames where the beast launched from popped open again, this time with Alex himself strolling out. Troops that had been aiming at Almec now turned their attention to the Blackheart as he moved up upon them.

“I don’t have time for this,” he grumbled, snapping his fingers despite the gloves.

With the snap of his fingers something triggered. An echoing distortion of black rings appeared in the air just to his right, purple light radiating from the core which burst open into a full blown Dark Portal. Radiating darkness with purple light leaching out, then came the purply-black particle clouds. Clouds of particles mostly purple and black, some slight glow of red and yellow and orange hidden within- these clouds moving over to the fallen Federation Troopers.

Upon contact the bodies began to twitch, shake, tremble. Blackness leached out of the particles and grabbed hold of the bodies of armor by the arms and/or legs, by the torsos. The glass visors shattered as the particles became total shadowy liquid pouring and wrapping around the corpses, infusing into the bodies and armor. The bodies rolled over, their hands pressing down against the ground.

Knees bent, armor groaned, the bodies becoming cloaked in darkness with purple light emitting from the sludge now clinging to them. They moved and stood up tall, heads thrown back as the darkness moved inside of their broken visors and began to bind to the flesh within. The red and yellow lights seeped out of the broken helmets and then sunk within along with the black and purple. The bodies slumped forward, their distorted low pitch moans leaving them.

They stumbled, they fumbled, they stood with weapons raised. Glowing red eyes and deep dark purple crawling skin within, tendrils of the dark wrapped around the shoulders and legs. With their aim came their fire, firing straight into the lines of Federation Troopers. And as those troopers fell, more and more of the darkness spread around the room beginning to take the fresh bodies.

Soldiers closest these reanimated dark zombies fell fast, those near potential cover taking it immediately. The piercing dead red eyes, the visible teeth as the flesh decayed and sucked back.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY?!” one trooper screamed.

“OPEN FIRE!”

Pop pop pop pop pop pop pop pop pop pop. The sounds of gun fire filled the chambers. The dark zombies, when hit, did go down. They would die; but so too would the living troopers when hit- and once hit they too would become afflicted by the dark parasites so long as that portal spun open.

“ING POSSESSION!!” one trooper howled out.

“Ing?! Like from Aether?!” another called out.

“The Blackheart can command the Ing!”

The rapidly decaying possessed bodies stumbled forward, practically falling over as they did so. And through the lines moved the man in white undeterred by the activity going on around him. He moved with a stonewall face, any smile or smirk he once had now gone replaced only by a void expression. A blast roared behind, the wall flying apart, the scream of the shadow creature high pitched and resounding as it flew into the wall just across.

Almec emerged from the hole his impact had helped create. His sights turned, taking note of Alexander moving through the field of fire.

“BLACKHEART, WAIT!!”

His head turned back ahead, the shriek of the shadow as it came lunging back out. Almec grunted, pulling his right fist and swinging at its face as it leapt for him. His strike landed, the creature's face folding; though as the fist struck so too did its claws upon Almec's own shoulder. He screamed out as with a boom the tangled mess of darkness went flying back with a shriek, crashing through the same wall and blasting clear out of the building into an alleyway.

The butler dropped to his knees, right hand moved over to his shoulder wound. He huffed, the blood rushing out. **Grip.** And in no time at all a firm smoke wafted out.

He had taken hold and grunted in discomfort as sweltering heat smoldered his wound, cauterizing it. To his side the Federation Troopers continued their firefight with the Dark Troopers. He huffed looking over, then looked back ahead. The creature sat back up with a growl that came across as a devious purr- howling out as its eyes locked with Almec's own.

"SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAA!"

With the scream it shot at him again, mouth cracked wide open as it launched.