

*The boy looked at his parent, whose face was a mask of rage and disappointment. He had failed yet another of his father's many trials. It was nothing new, but somehow his father always acted this way, as though expecting the world from the boy, whose body bore no innate talent.*

*"You are weak! Worthless! Unbecoming of what I have to teach you!"*

*"But father, I try and I try and I cannot do any better!" he argued back.*

*"You will try again! You WILL get this right!"*

*Even after turning ten, the boy was still useless in the eyes of his father, despite having learnt everything that did not require him to cast spells or summon entities. His father was not impressed however and as punishment made him dissect his own pets or those few friends he had made in the villages they always moved around between.*

*Even when the boy tried to end his own suffering, his father brought him back with his talented hands and evil magic. He was destined by live out his divine punishment that some past life's transgressions must have earned him, but nonetheless the boy dreamt of a time when he could escape his torturous nightmare of an existence.*

*One day, when the boy was no older than fourteen, his father told him of a way to make him strong and to make him capable of wielding the magic that he had been unable to cast for all of his life. But the boy knew that it was yet another lesson in pain that would await him, though he could not disobey his parent and his wishes.*

*He felt the moment acutely, when his soul was drawn from his body and stuffed into a puppet of flesh that had been formed from the bodies of seven different demons. As he began to feel the sensations of his new body, his father took his old body and carved it up before him, before adding his face to that of the new form.*

*But though his new body was strong and allowed him to shrug off all the pain he experienced, he hated it. Even though it allowed him to cast and memorise all the spells given for him to learn, he hated it.*

*The way the other kids looked at him in horror mirrored perfectly how he himself felt after seeing his reflection in a surface of a lake. He was so mortified by the sight of his horrifying new body, with all its curling stitched-up patterns and mismatching colours, that he cast one of the spells that his father had not taught him, but which he had discovered by himself.*

*He bade the entity he invoked devour him whole, but when it manifested into the world it seemed incapable of feasting upon him. The backlash of its wrath of being slighted made the skin and flesh on his body fall from his reinforced inhuman bones, but no sooner had it fallen off that new fresh matter began to grow upon his skeletal frame.*

*He called upon the entity again, but the same thing happened and he was still alive, even as the ground below his feet became a massive pond of bottomless black water. When he attempted to call upon it a third time, no answering manifestation came, as though it had grown wise to his trickery.*

*Soon after his father found him and dragged him away.*

*Despite learning all his father had to teach him and mastering everything he was taught, as well as many things beyond the scope of his teachings, his father one day deemed him unfit to be more than a slave and began preparing to summon a child from beyond their world to become his successor.*

*Many of these children they called into their unforgiven world perished within their ritual chamber and his heart broke with each and every one of them.*

*But then the summoning bore fruit in the form of a bright-eyed boy no older than seven. He watched as the boy grew into adolescence, tackling everything thrown at him with cold-hearted determination and a will of unbreakable steel.*

*Heskel knew that he would one day give his life for this boy, because the Entities he prayed and spoke to told him as much. But it was okay, because he had always sought his end. However, when it finally came, he somehow felt reluctantly and remarked upon the fact that he now had the desire to live.*

*But alas, one cannot fight against one's fate.*

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Jakob shot upright. His head buzzing with foreign memories and dreams, and his whole body tingling with a restless desire to learn more and absorb from the world all the things it had to teach him.

The world around him was as it had always been, but, where the ritual site had been, the mud had turned to gleaming obsidian rock full of twinkling lights, as though a physical fragment of the void between stars. He crawled over to it on his hands and feet, remarking that his demon-spun clothes had fused with his body and become part of him, the souls of the demons that had inhabited it absorbed into his soul.

With an orange hand of strangely-spongey flesh that reformed according to his desires, he cut a piece from the obsidian ground and put it in a pocket that formed on the side of his torso that was now of the same matter as his hand.

He looked over to where Ciana lay. Unlike him, her body had not changed from their encounter with Nharlla. Jakob reached up to his mask, but it too had fused with his body and become a permanent part of him. But he did not feel any dread about it, for his body had no need to eat or drink anymore. It was enough for him to subsist on the knowledge he gleaned from the world around him.

Truly, he had become a Seeker of Knowledge. But beyond this desire to learn was the desire to fulfil a purpose he had been imbued with from his form-shifting Benefactor.

“Ciana, wake up.”

She began rousing from where she lay, while he went over to the cart that had brought them here. Mayhew and Wothram stood unflinchingly beside it, awaiting instructions. The construct mount came wandering over and with a single look at it, Jakob knew how its future would turn out, so he said, “Your name is Invincible, for you will live forever.”

The bone horse did not seem to consider the weight in his words, but over time its Birthed Sentience would become self-aware and be able to look back upon this moment and realise that through its name-giving it had been granted a certain unchangeable fate.

Though Jakob had been given a bottomless desire to learn as an answer to his wish, he had also been given quite a lot of knowledge that had been within the power of Nharlla to give, such as a perfect understanding of Chthonic, replete with so many invocations and spells that it would have made Grandfather giddy with excitement.

From the cart he lifted up the heavy Tungsten Scroll, seeing through his physical touch how it had been made by an Emissary of the Great Ones for this day to come to pass. He looked at its contents and read all the things he could never have understood before the Ritual.

The last esoteric toll, the one that had taken Hessel from him, was stated as: "*The Loss of a Loved One.*"

"Whom was it drawn from?" he wondered out loud. "Hessel or me?"

"You can read it?" Ciana asked him, suddenly appearing behind him.

"Yes. And so can you, though you have been able to read it ever since Hessel and I performed the ritual that gave you half of your Demon Progenitor's power."

"How did you know?"

Jakob looked her right in the eyes, putting the scroll back into the cart. He would not need to read it again, as he had already memorised its contents. Ciana flinched under the intensity of his gaze.

"Jakob... your eyes... they've changed."

"Changed?"

"They look just like *that* eye you sacrificed."

"Eyes that have Witnessed Divinity?" he considered. In a way it made sense, but Ciana's eyes remained unchanged.

Ciana nodded in confirmation.

"Why did you ask Nharlla to make you undefeatable?"

"Because it was my greatest wish," she replied frankly, not knowing that her true wish had been offered up as an esoteric toll. "I never more have to fear defeat. With the power in my body now I can defeat anyone who tries to hurt those I care about."

"Why didn't either of you tell me what the last toll was?" Jakob asked accusingly. Hessel's old memories still floated around in his head and his lungs hurt from all the pain that was interred within him, threatening to burst forth.

"It wouldn't have changed anything," she told him. "That's what Hessel told me, when I asked the same thing."

"We should have sacrificed you instead," Jakob said coldly.

An expression of incredible pain pinched Ciana's face, then she answered, "None of you loved me, so it would not have worked."

Jakob knew she spoke the truth, but he wondered if the sacrifice had not been greater than the reward, though he also knew that he could not have gained all the knowledge he now had, even if he had lived to the age of three-hundred.

"I'll learn how to bring him back," he told her resolutely.

She frowned, but said nothing.

"But first, there is something else I need to do."

"What's that?"

"It seems that I have been tasked with giving life to something known as the Sovereign."

She looked surprised and revealed, "I was told that I must help you create the Sovereign."

Jakob nodded. "Once this task is fulfilled, we must seek out Grandfather. He has something that I seek."