

*Moonboys*  
*Fae Gilyard*  
*Four*

Bone moves through Shadow with me in tow. We walk through an intricate web of gold shards within the depths of The Void. Hirou calls it “The Demon Highway”. I’ve seen a lot of realms, this is one of the most beautiful. There is no direction in the void. Distant stars of gold are everywhere. Gold glyphs hover and vibrate above and below, forward and behind. He stops me before we step through a large shard. Its glyph is larger than most of the ones I’ve seen.

“We’re about to do something illegal.” He looks over his shoulder for my consent. I’m already excited, “I’m with it.”

“Very well.” He leads us through the Shadow and we’re in a dark office. The office decor looks familiar in an annoying way. We’re at *The Aphricana*. I’m impressed. Nobody sneaks into *The Aphricana*, it’s an enchanted building built with red brick blessed and hexed for protection. Every choice made in creating this building was made with magick, intentional whether for protection or attack. The foundations are fortified with the most powerful stone of protection, Black Tourmaline. But their power play is the Fiery Wall of Protection Spell, which covers the entire building. It uses the fire of Archangel Michael’s sword of protection. It is so potent, Ori can see the red glow around the building, while some of us can smell its potency. This wasn’t easy.

“You’re impressed.” He smiles. His teeth brilliant and white.

“Not an easy thing to do.”

“Well, you ain’t seen shit yet! Follow me.”

“Wait. I have questions.”

“I know.” He moves into the hall and I do as instructed. We move through the hustle and bustle unseen. The Arcana never closes, nor does it sleep or rest. There are always Ori moving about. Our governing body must always stand watchful. It’s all bullshit. They have more power and corruption than any politician. I follow Bone down some side stairs, and we make our way to the basement, which means we’re going to the catacombs. I’ve always wanted to go, so I try not to run down the stairs. Ori pass us without looking in our direction.

“How are we doing this?”

“Shadows are everywhere, especially where *Carbon* are, gifted as Ori or not.”

“Fair point. Our nature *is* as above, so below.” I say.

“Our?” Bone stops and looks at me.

“What?”

“I’ve just never heard an Ori, especially not one as powerful as you, consider themselves Carbon.”

“I eat, sleep, bleed, and fuck just like every one else.”

He flashes that dazzling smile again and continues our journey.

“I’m not one of those elitists who believe they are better. I *know* better. I’ve seen a lot in this lifetime. Sometimes Shadow wins. Hell, it’s won with me a few times.” I confess.

“I know.” I look at him.

“We’re here.” He announces.

The Catacombs are breathtaking. It’s the original architecture, dated, stone and massive, and before it sits a man. He’s short and slim. His skin is rich soil black. His worn satin high hat makes him appear taller than he is, his silhouette haloed in thick cigar smoke.

“If you didn’t come with a proper offering, take yo ass back up them stairs.” He cracks up, his laugh loud and choppy. The weight of his voice reverbs through the quiet hall. I chuckle a bit, and if Bone does react, the gold skull is lifeless and intimidating and the brilliant smile from before is gone. He towers over me, and that’s not easy. The man rolls his eyes at him, turning his attention to me.

“Papa Guede.” He holds his hand out, his amber eyes raise to meet mine.

“Isam Badru.” I shake it.

Grinning, he asks, “What brings a Moon and Shadow Demon to my home?”

Bone remains quiet. I look at him and back to Papa.

“Well..” I begin, but Bone interrupts.

“Know that He is Papa Guede, a psychopomp.” Bone announces.

“*Thee* psychopomp!” Papa G is proud.

“Very well. He is divinely blessed to read other’s minds, and he knows everything that happens in this realm and The Realm Beyond.”

I look to Papa to respond.

Rolling his eyes again, “I’m *way* more glamorous than the Demon says. But yes, Isam, I know you are a Lover of *Mwezi* and a Warrior. Every battle scar you’ve ever received is known to me, even that big one you carry in your chest because of Fea—“

“Nope, that’s enough.”

Bone looks at me.

“I get it, you know things.” I say to Papa G. evading Bone’s look.

Papa Guede sizes me up before continuing, “Tsk! Boy please, ain’t nobody worried about your heartbreak. Light Killers is why you’ve come. I know your ancestors. Born of Aissa, beautiful but barren, and Kendi, a *Mwezi* man.”

I look at Bone who stares at Papa G.

“And Kendi’s father, Hondo, betrothed another *Mwezi* man, named Runihura. You are known to me. And, I simply adore *Madame Maati*, so please tell her I send my love.” Stepping aside, he reminds us to be quick, “The *Aphricana* isn’t a safe space anymore. Not for you two.” His grin, knowing.

We thank him, and Bone hands him an offering of a Geno Blac Rooster Cigar; spared no expense.

We step over the threshold, through the once solid stone wall that stood behind him. The Catacombs is a mashup of ancient ruins and a morgue. Bone passes the floor-to-ceiling stone walls adorned with a grid of glass drawers. We stop before another large rock wall.

“The room we need to access is beyond this door.”

Though I can’t see the door or room, I see the vibration of a protection spell.

“Ori are the only ones who can access it.”

“How’d you get in before?”

“An Ori.”

Of course. “Anything else I need to know?”

“You must offer your gift before you can enter.”

I should start charging for this. I call on Mwezi, and my eyes fill with the void of the Oniiverse; two full golden Moons for pupils. I ignite in her magic, and the stone fortification is no longer. I move forward through the protection spell, Bone in tow.

“What darkness in my allows you to move with me?”

“Fear.” No hesitation needed. “But you knew that.”

When I reach the glass sarcophagus I recognize the Ori within, and fall to my knees. It’s Fleckt, a *chanjman*, like Vu. Shapeshifters who are everyone and no one. I scan his body, sunken in and empty. The empty sockets where his stunning green eyes used to be have Light Killer billowing out of them, so do his mouth and ears. His old form is no longer, his new form a hollow husk. His albino skin now pitch black, and his hair the same. And I’m heartbroken for Vu. Was she in pain? Was she alone? My pain makes my armor grow brighter. The Light Killers attack the glass, but I don’t move. It’s a magnet to my light. I stretch out my hand and it stalks it against the glass. I look up at Bone.

“Where did you find his body?” The knot in my throat aches.

“I didn’t. He was found by a *Carbon* in The West Deck.” I stand up ready to go, and he gets the hint. We move back through the wall and he continues, “You know The *Arphricana* has people everywhere, so when they got the call, they picked him up and brought him here. *The Kids* told Malvolia about it, and she and I came to see if it was true.”

We pass Papa G again and he pulls on his new cigar, filling the hall with scents of vanilla and pepper before saying, “Isam Badru. Prepare yourself, there will be more.”

Bone and I look back at him and he waves us goodbye. Going back the way we came, we reach the office, but the light is on; someone is in there. We hold up by the door and I ask low, “What is The *Aphricana* doing about this?”

“A plan is being cultivated.”

“You believe that?”

“No. They’re *Carbon*, and I can move in and out of this building in my sleep. There's so much darkness here. It wasn’t like this before.”

The office light turns off, but nobody comes out. Bone holds my position with his hand and looks in; he signals me to follow as he enters. The office looks exactly as it did when we arrived. Nothing is out of place.

“See, I told you. This is the type of lurking, unseen Shadow that allows me to move so freely.”

“That can’t be good.” I sigh.

“It is not. And with that knowledge, I believe the plan is purposely being delayed, or they have no plan.”

“Do you think they are targeting *chanjman*.”

“Of that, I am not certain.”

“Which is even worse,” I add.

“Indeed.”

Realizing Hirou brought me back into yet another war, I need help that’s not bound to The Light.

“Can you take me to Shug’s?”

He looks shocked by my request, and with good reason.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Very well.” Both our tones are reluctant.