

## PROLOGUE

The sun flatlined along a seeping, bloody horizon. They advanced steadily, black billowing robes skimming churning, frothing waters. Icy spiderweb threads trailed their shadows caramelizing into larger fragments which fanned like lattice work in their wake. On the riverbank, insects and night creatures fell silent, feelers and antennae alert, a million assortments of eyes and protrusions observing the procession.

A school of luminous rayon-fish looped beneath each figure illuminating their journey across the Thyne-Occo, while further downstream, the mighty river tumbled past an islet at the very edge of the plateau where it cascaded into darkness.

From the centre of the rocky island a circular tower stretched to the domed sky, its base straddling the jutting terrain. With no visible windows or doors, it stood monochromatic against twilight.

As the rayon-fish approached, their neon radiance intensified. The tallest member of the procession lifted a hand, whispering faintly. In response the fish accelerated, each robed figure suspended in a halo of light as they disembarked.

After ascending a flight of stairs, the party vanished into the base of the Solfeggio Tower. Barely audible, as if illusory or perhaps misheard, so delicately carried by the breeze, so quiet, so ephemeral, the lyrics of a song danced within the mist:

*Doin' it right  
Everybody will be dancing and we'll be  
Feeling alright...*

\*

Revenant. Sage. Occultist. *Murderer*. Oh, he was known by all these names, these phonetic trinkets spewed from simple minds and foolish hearts. Indeed, words are pitiful currency. Ah, but energy! He was the veritable master of energy. Its wordless influence thrilled him. Nay, verily bewitched him. Words and sentiments are lawless, but, behold! Energy is sheer life force run by immutable law. All-invisible. All-encompassing. Omnipresent. *His*.

He cackled, cosmic secrets his alone to gorge upon; delicate morsels of blubber gleaned from freshly harvested limbs. And – who dare call him *cannibal!* Such maggoty mentality. The gods must have their sacrifices!

Bones, some charred, some virginal, fell from his calloused palm, scattering on soot-smearred hessian flecked by countless far-flung embers. Flames shot high, sulphur and boiled herbs, roasted innards, sweat, the stench of sorcery snapping and crackling; the fire that transfixed him an ever-burning portal. With gnarled fingers caging his eyes, the witch doctor rocked back and forth on fossilic haunches; back and forth he rocked, mewling like a kitten. Two digits parted abruptly, allowing a yellowed eye to witness a sudden apparition.

‘She comes,’ he whispered, voice childlike. ‘Too much light. Too much *music*.’

He heaved, regurgitating a sticky mass of sputum. It struck the centre of the fire, exploding. The cave filled with yellow smoke, an otherworldly fog, bitter and impermeable.

‘She must die.’

Back and forth he rocked.

Back and forth.

‘*Must*.’

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In a faraway city, perhaps in another world (or perhaps not), in a vast series of interlinking warehouses, a printing press laboured. It churned out thousands of large official notices. Buckets of paste and silver-handled brushes stood at the ready, and as each batch of posters was bundled it was passed from one jointed wooden soldier to the next forming a long file down the main central passage.

Hundreds of surveillance holocameras scanned the numerous chambers, sporadically zooming in toward specific soldiers. The air was filled with the steady beat of a curious song blaring through concealed speakers; the repetitive rhythm complementing the methodical work. With every *click-click* of the conveyor-belts, followed by *swish-swish* of paper against paper, a woman's voice echoed through the workhouses against a plethora of beats:

*You won't find no lady  
Who does it like I does it, yeah!  
From here on out I'll be your commander  
No fear, no doubt I'll provide the answer –  
Right now, I command you to dance!"*

When the last of the posters rolled off the press the soldiers mobilized, each bent at the waist to collect a bucket of glue and brush. Outside rows of armoured hovertrucks spluttered to life, headlights illuminating hazy exhaust emissions and myriad polished boots crisscrossing between the vehicles. The convoy idled patiently, waiting for the official order to deploy and begin its work.

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Excerpt from *Isobel Stellar & the Ubuntu Song*  
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