

JEFFREY ZEEVAART

Shadow and Royalty : An
awakening of the unnamed



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Prologue

Shadow and Royalty

A **millennium** has passed since the world was forged from the wreckage of a **divine war**. Today a sprawling civilization thrives under the cold ticking watch of the **Timekeepers** unaware that their golden streets are built upon a foundation of **celestial manipulation** and a **staggering lie**.

In the gutters of this society two orphans **Silarias** and **Nyx** struggle for a breath of life. To the world they are **nobodies** and freaks. To the **Cursed Gods** watching from the shadows they are the final pieces of a **Long Game** started by the **Bansaday** the Great Winged Lion who betrayed the heavens to create a world of his own.

Silarias is marked by a **primal Curse** his body sprouting **fangs** and **manes** that make the very air tremble with a power he does not understand. Nyx is bound by invisible agonizing **Seals** that choke a **Royalty aura** she was never meant to possess.

They know nothing of their **true nature** that they are the **living splinters** of a divine genesis. To survive a humanity that fears them and a **Tyrant God** who wants them erased these two orphans must go beyond **human limits**. They must hunt the **Cursed Gods** and face a destiny they never asked for discovering that the **monsters** they are becoming are the only things that can **save** the world they were never a part of.

Introduction

THE GENESIS OF THE LONG GAME

In the beginning the world was a void a stagnant empty canvas under the Tyrant's rule. The Tyrant demanded silence. He demanded a world without change a masterpiece of nothingness. But the Bansaday the Great Winged Lion was a traitor to that stagnation.

The Bansaday orchestrated a divine friction between the elemental and conceptual gods. He didn't just start a fight ,*HE ignited a Ragnarok*. He manipulated the gods into a war of total destruction not for victory but to harvest the debris of their battle. Those cosmic shards the broken bones of deities and the shattered essence of elements were forged into the First Island. A secret foundation. A laboratory for a revolution.

And as the years went by the Tyrant rewrote history. He turned the world against its creators branding the descendants of the spark as monsters and orphans while he ruled from the shadows of the void.

THE ARCHITECTS OF GENESIS: THE FOUR PRIMAL BEINGS

Before the gears of Estrella turned there were the four.

The Bansaday (The Primal Beast): The architect of the Long Game. He shattered the mystical World Branch to create life. Silarias carries his mana splinter manifesting as the fangs and mane of the Cursed.

The Vessel of Maya (The Primal Architect): The second half

of the original duality. She represents the Royalty and the architect of civilization. Nyx carries this pure essence currently suppressed by the 7 Divine Seals.

The Overarching Tyrant (The Tarnished Primal God): The original ruler of the void who demands a stagnant world. He views the Bansaday as a traitor and has turned the world into a prison.

Bakunawa (The Primal Dragon): The Great Brood mother The Serpent of the Eclipse. Once a peer to the Bansaday he was enslaved by the Tyrant. Now he is the Ensnared Enforcer forced to swallow the moons and maintain the Tyrant's iron grip on the tides of mana.

THE CURSED HOUNDS (Followers of the Tyrant)

The enforcers of the stagnation.

Amanikable: The Cursed Hunter of the Deep. A coral bodied horror who hates the Bansaday for stealing his essence to build the world.

Dumakulem: The Rotting Guardian of Mountains. A stone skinned giant who enforces the isolation of civilization.

Haliya: The Masked Moon Goddess. She manipulates the social divide whispering poison between the Royalty and the Beast humans.

THE NEUTRAL PILLARS (World Keepers)

The silent architects who keep the machine running.

Kan La-on (The God of Time): The silent architect behind the clockwork rhythm of the modern world.

Lakapati (The Weaver of Life): The only entity capable of re weaving a physical body to withstand the Bansaday's raw destructive mana.

Sidapa (The Keeper of Space): He marks the lifespan of all beings on the World Tree and maintains the physical borders

of the First Island.

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CHAPTER 1: THE SILT OF THE GODS

The sky above the Bastard's Ward was no longer a window to the universe. It had become a heavy, suffocating ceiling of rotting purple. The Iron Federation had stolen the sun, locking its radiance away within the massive furnaces of their floating cities. Below, the forgotten souls on the ground received nothing in return but an eternal rain of greasy, black ash. It was the industrial waste of a world fueled by spirits. This soot filled the lungs of the living and coated the eyes of the dead until everything dissolved into the same dull gray of hopelessness. In the Ward, color was a crime, and light was nothing more than a fading memory.

Behind the Broken Horn Tavern, a monolithic structure of twisted iron, rust, and blackened timber, time seemed to coagulate. The tavern served as a sanctuary for outcasts, those the world had chosen to erase. Inside, the heavy bass of a fractured jukebox pulsed like the heartbeat of a dying giant. But

out here, in the deepening shadows, the silence was absolute. The air was thick with the scent of ozone, iron, and stale blood.

Silarias sat perched on a stack of rotting crates. He was only twelve years old, but the way he occupied his oversized coat gave him the appearance of an old man waiting for the end of the world. His fingers, stained gray by soot and cracked by the biting cold, clutched a shattered holopad.

The small screen was webbed with cracks, yet the images remained clear enough to haunt him. A warrior from a forgotten epoch carved through an army of shadows. Silarias didn't focus on the victory. Instead, he studied the void between the sword strikes. He sought the silence within the chaos, because in that stillness, he recognized himself.

His own eyes were just as vacant. No fear. No hope. Just a hollow expanse where a childhood should have been. Beneath his left eye, the skin was pulled tight. There, embedded deep within his face, the Anting Anting gemstone pulsed like a glowing coal in a cold hearth. It was a heavy burden, the physical manifestation of a divine curse that had once fractured the heavens.

“Still staring at those fairy tales? You are no hero, Nobody. You're just the dirt beneath my boots.”

The voice was like shattered glass scraping over sandpaper. Nyx descended from a rusty drainpipe with unnatural, feline grace. As she dropped through the veil of ash, the pollution seemed to recoil from her presence. A faint, golden radiance pulsed softly around her, a royal energy that vaporized the black droplets before they could mar her tattered clothes. She was twelve years old, an orphan with the piercing gaze of an exiled queen. She wore her arrogance like a suit of armor, the only thing keeping the cruelty of the Ward at bay.

With a lazy flick of her fingers, she wove an almost invisible thread of energy. The holopad vanished from Silarias's hands before he could blink.

"Look at me when I speak to you," she commanded. Her expression was hardened, but deep within her silver pupils, a flicker of something else remained. She was terrified of the boy's deathly silence. They were both alone, but Silarias's loneliness felt like a predator coiled in the dark.

Nyx hadn't left their hideout to steal. She had followed a vibration, a call for help that resonated not through her ears, but through her very soul. The urge to intervene hadn't been a choice. It was an instinctual pull that momentarily shoved her ego aside.

A sharp, metallic crack shattered the tension between them.

Behind a mountain of scrap metal lay a creature that defied any mundane classification. It resembled a dog, but its proportions were too massive, too ancient. This was Toji. A fragment of primordial power, he was now pinned to the filth by white hot chains forged by the Iron Federation. The links were infused with energy blockers that bit deep into his flesh, leaving trails of charred fur and hissing blood. Every breath the beast took sounded like glass splintering inside a coffin.

Three members of the Hell Hounds, a local gang affiliated with the Federation, stood over him. Their leader brandished a glowing branding iron, a cruel smirk twisting his features.

"Look at this 'God dog' crawl," he sneered, pressing the searing metal against the creature's flank. "Even the strongest gods shriek if you turn the voltage high enough."

Nyx froze. Her golden light sharpened into a lethal, brilliant white in a fraction of a second. She was an orphan cast out by an empire she barely remembered, and the sight of another caged

being made something inside her snap.

Silarias stood up. He didn't move with the awkwardness of a child, but with the terrifying precision of a machine being activated. He didn't look at the men. He looked at the dog. The divine stone deep in his chest began to thrum rhythmically, a heavy, dull thud that seemed to warp the very space around him. The black rain abruptly stopped falling. The droplets began to hover, then drifted upward, held suspended by a gravity he was pulling toward himself.

"That dog," Silarias said. His voice was low and resonant, carrying an authority that belied his small frame. "It does not belong to you."

The leader of the Hell Hounds turned, a mocking grin on his scarred face. "And what are you going to do about it, Nobody? You're nothing."

Silarias took a single step. The mud beneath his foot detonated as if a grenade had been triggered. He wasn't a shadow; he was a kinetic impact. Before the leader could even register the movement, he was airborne. His jaw shattered with the sickening sound of breaking porcelain under the boy's small fist. The man slammed into the scrap pile and slumped there, a puppet with its strings severed.

The other two lunged, drawing their metal clubs, but Silarias was already upon them. He caught the iron bars with his bare hands. The metal groaned and buckled under his grip. The Anting Anting beneath his eye flared like a blood red star. A cold, predatory smile crept across the boy's face. It was the smile of the Cursed Liberator.

As Silarias dismantled the men with mechanical efficiency, Toji let out an icy, haunting cry of agony. The chains reacted to the surging anger in the alley, searing deeper into the dog's

hide.

Nyx saw it, and her mask of arrogance dissolved. Her light imploded, transforming into a dark, pulsing shadow. “Let go! Let him go!” she screamed. From her fingertips, black threads of pure obsidian rage lashed out. They were razor thin but vibrated with the lethal sharpness of a monomolecular blade. They coiled around the glowing chains.

In that instant, the fusion occurred. As Silarias hurled the final gang member into the mire, Nyx felt a white hot explosion of agony. As she severed the chains, she felt the heat of the metal in her own marrow. The Blood Bond was forged in the filth of the Ward. With one final, desperate surge of will, she tore the links apart. A loud metallic snap echoed through the alley. Toji collapsed as a faint silver light manifested briefly around his neck as a warning. Nyx fell to her knees, her lungs searing. Silarias walked toward her, his eyes returning to their dull state, the internal storm quelled for now.

In the distance, the Federation sirens began to wail. The hunt was on. But Silarias simply grabbed a wet cloth and began tending to Toji’s wounds. Every touch left a golden spark in its wake. The Nobody was no longer a spectator. He was the spark in the ash that would set the world on fire.

The silence that followed the struggle was not peaceful. It felt like a vacuum, pulling at their senses. Silarias stood among the wreckage of flesh and iron, his chest heaving. The black rain, which he had snatched from the sky like spears, began to fall once more, slow and rhythmic. The mud did not wash his hands. It mingled with the blood into a thick, tar like sludge that settled into the joints of his metal gauntlets.

He stared at his hands. They were trembling. Not from terror, but from the residual energy surging through his veins like an

electrical current that had lost its ground.

“Nobody...”

Nyx’s voice was barely a rasp. She remained on her knees in the dirt, her fingers still locked in the position used to weave her shadow threads. Her eyes, usually burning with royal pride, were vacant. The Blood Bond with the entity had drained her. A twelve year old was not meant to endure the agony of a fallen god, let alone carry it.

Silarias forced his legs to move. Every step felt as though he were wading through liquid lead. He reached for a sack of scrap felt he had scavenged earlier and began sliding the wounded Toji inside with an eerie, detached calmness. The dog remained motionless, but the heat radiating from its body was so intense the bag began to smolder.

Once the beast was secured, he turned to Nyx. Without a word, he extended his hand.

“I can walk perfectly fine,” she snapped, but her body betrayed her. The moment she attempted to stand, her legs buckled. Silarias caught her before she hit the muck. He didn’t wait for her protest. With a raw strength that far exceeded his stature, he hoisted her with his left arm and slung the smoking bag containing Toji over his right shoulder.

“We have to move,” he said grimly. “The Federation’s smoke is already in the streets.”

The trek back to the Broken Horn was grueling. They navigated the lightless veins of the Ward, avoiding the main thoroughfares where the searchlights of the Iron Federation sliced through the fog like the eyes of a hungry predator. Silarias moved through narrow corridors where rats grew as large as hounds and the inhabitants were merely shadows that retreated further into the gloom at his approach.

His heart thudded against his ribs like a trapped bird. It was the cadence of the Anting Anting, reacting to Toji's proximity. The stone beneath his eye felt like a white hot needle being driven slowly through his skull. He didn't feel the weight of the creature on his back as a burden, but as a destiny he had never requested.

Nyx had drifted into a feverish unconsciousness, her head resting against his shoulder. Her golden hair was matted with ash, a tarnished crown in a world of rust. Silarias watched her for a moment. She was an orphan, just like him. They possessed no names of fathers or mothers, only the titles the Ward had spat at them. The Princess and the Nobody. But tonight, for the first time, those titles felt like masks on the verge of shattering.

The rusted silhouette of the tavern loomed ahead. The jukebox within played a distorted bass that made the puddles shiver. Silarias knew that once he crossed that threshold, there was no turning back. He was no longer just a beggar watching warriors on a screen. He was the boy who had stolen a God from the Federation.

He felt the gaze of Master Juro through the walls before he even reached the handle. The scent of cloves and heavy smoke seeped through the iron seams. Silarias braced his muscles, put his shoulder to the door, and prepared for the heat within.

He had no idea he had just taken his first step into a war that would consume worlds. All he knew was that the bag on his back was heavy, the girl in his arms was cold, and for the first time in his life, he had something worth fighting for.

With one final effort, he kicked the door open.

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CHAPTER 2: SMOKE, RUST, AND RATS

THE SMOKE OF THE TAVERN

The heavy iron door of the Broken Horn Tavern let out a tortured shriek as Silarias shoved it open with his shoulder. The transition was a physical blow. The icy and corrosive ash rain of the Ward was instantly replaced by air that was thick and stagnant and warm. The atmosphere clung to his skin like a cocktail of stale ale and industrial machine oil and the sharp medicinal bite of clove drifting from the pipe of Juro.

Silarias breathed in ragged and burning hitches. The rags wrapped around his gauntlets which used to be a dull white were now saturated with a mixture of black soot and the luminous viscous ichor of the Hell Hounds. In his left arm he cradled Nyx. She was deathly pale and her golden radiance was extinguished and her breathing was reduced to a rhythmic and fragile whisper.

But it was the burden over his right shoulder that truly

anchored him. With every step the twelve year old took the floorboards groaned in protest. The heavy timber beams of the tavern creaked under a mass that defied logic as if he were carrying a piece of a fallen mountain.

At the far end of the bar nearly obscured by a veil of gray fog sat Grandmaster Juro. His monolithic metal pipe rested in the corner of his mouth looking less like a tool and more like an extension of his jaw. The etched symbols on the iron pulsed with a low orange glow that synced with his steady heartbeat. He did not look up from his glass where a dark liquid bubbled with a life of its own.

You are late Nobody Juro growled. The sound was tectonic like massive stones grinding together in the bowels of the earth. The ash of the Ward does not wait for children who linger too long in the rain.

From a darkened corner behind the bar the predatory eyes of Mistress Vespera ignited. She leaned forward and her silver hair shimmered like strands of refined spider silk in the amber glow of the jukebox.

Look at the girl she remarked and her voice was a smooth blade. Did you find her in a refuse pile boy? Even in her stupor she wears the arrogant look of someone waiting for a crown.

Silarias bit his lip, the raw tension coursing through his body like a live wire, until the metallic tang of blood flooded his mouth. He ignored the barb and began to drag himself toward the cellar door. Suddenly a subterranean growl vibrated from within the bag.

The sound was so primal it made the glassware on the bar chatter and caused the jukebox to skip a beat. For a heartbeat the air in the room grew heavy and saturated with the suppressed fury of the entity within.

It is just scrap Silarias rasped and his throat was raw from the ash. Replacement parts for Alchemist Bones. Let me through.

Juro took a slow and deliberate draw from his pipe. He exhaled a perfect ring of smoke that drifted lazily through the tavern and defied the drafts. The ring settled precisely over the bag and suddenly flared with a cold blue light. The snarl of Toji was cut short instantly as if an invisible hand had clamped shut around the throat of the beast.

Juro finally turned his gaze toward Silarias and his eyes cut through the haze like searchlights.

Scrap you say? Did you hear those metal parts snarling too Vesper? Or are the sewers of the Federation finally overflowing with monsters?

Perhaps it is just the rats Juro Vespera laughed and it was a short and sharp sound as she spun a needle between her fingers with blurring speed. Large and hungry rats who think they can play at smuggling.

Silarias did not stay for the interrogation. He hurried down the protesting stairs into the damp workshop of the cellar. He lowered Toji gently onto the stone floor and settled Nyx onto a heap of salvaged blankets. He turned to demand an explanation but the voice of Juro cascaded down the stairs before he could speak.

Nobody. See that she is cleaned. Vespera will not tolerate a single speck of mire on those clothes and neither will you.

Just as Silarias felt his strength failing a massive hand clamped onto his shoulder. The touch of Juro was searing and radiated a heat that suggested the smoke and ash lived inside his very marrow. Without a word the boy was hauled back up the stairs and propelled through the tavern doors and back into the freezing deluge of ash. Juro threw him into the

mud with effortless and brutal force.

One more time you senile baboon Silarias hissed as he scrambled to his feet and his jaw was tight as he adjusted his gauntlets. The divine stone in his chest began its frantic hammering once more.

Juro did not remove the pipe. The smoke he exhaled coiled around him and hardened into a translucent suit of armor.

You stand there waiting for the next blow. You believe enduring pain makes you a man. Juro took a single and measured step. The ambient noise of the city died away and was replaced by an unnatural and ringing silence. The world has no pity for your labor. If all you do is absorb hits then you are nothing but a punching bag with a burden too heavy to carry.

The heat radiating from the pipe was so intense that the rain on the cheeks of Silarias evaporated into wisps of steam.

I do not strike you to teach you how to stand. I strike you so you understand that every time you are hit you have failed. If an enemy lands a blow like mine then you are dead. Then the Princess is dead. Then that hound is dead.

The eyes of Silarias widened and his heart skipped a beat. Wait. The HOUND. How did you know?

Juro took a deep breath. The symbols on the pipe glowed white hot. Become stronger so that no one ever touches you again. The day I can no longer hit you is the day you can stop cleaning.

He turned and retreated into the tavern and left a wall of smoke so thick it stood like a physical barrier and left the boy isolated in the cold.

Limping and mapped in bruises Silarias eventually returned to the cellar. He found Nyx awake and perched on a workbench while she absentmindedly raked her fingers through her golden

hair.

He already knew Nyx Silarias panted and he leaned heavily against the damp wall. His smoke was all over me. He knows everything.

Nyx merely shrugged. Of course he knew Nobody. The smoke of Juro is his nervous system. He has the entire Ward under his thumb. Just look at your leg.

Silarias looked down. A small and persistent wisp of smoke was latched onto his trousers and pulsed rhythmically like a second heartbeat. Hey! Get lost! He began swatting and wiping at his leg and his face flushed with frustration. Get off me!

Upstairs in the tavern Juro took a long pull from his pipe and muttered to himself. The girl told him and I even paid her to keep her mouth shut.

Silarias cursed under his breath and headed for the small washroom in the rear of the cellar. But when he tried to exit the handle would not budge. The door was anchored as if welded shut.

What? Open up! Stupid door! Silarias kicked the wood but it felt like striking the base of a mountain.

In the main cellar Nyx did not even notice Silarias was gone. To her eyes he was still standing by the table with his back turned to her. But slowly the voice of the boy began to warp into a melody. The shadows in the corners of the room stretched and twisted.

Nyx froze and her instincts were screaming. No. An illusion. Vespera.

The figure rippled like a reflection in a disturbed pond and shifted back into the form of Mistress Vespera. She leaned casually against the workbench. So darling Vespera said and her eyes drifted toward the bag. Which dog were we discussing?