

[Exalted: The Descending Hierarchy redux]

>Previously on Triple King:

<https://archive.4plebs.org/tg/thread/94290540/#94294003>

>Final build: <https://archive.4plebs.org/tg/thread/94405860/#94410577>

We had defeated suffering.

Through long battle against all it's sources. Through the re-origination of Creation. Through constant cultivation and refinement of Virtue, through the condensation of Essence-patterns suitable for it's emulations through cosmic constructs. Through the retrieval of the Shining Answer, and the blessing of my father|God|Advaita Iraivan.

But even with death and resurrection overturned, there seemed to be one remaining iron law in this world: That nothing, for good or ill, lacked consequence. Suffering was defeated, but that which remained became a snarl in destiny that defiantly tried to secure it's own existence. And as we approached the final Shard, my relief that soon all would be saved curdled first to dread, then recognition, then bleak simmering hatred as I started to recognise what we faced.

The first signs appeared on my Primordial subjects|comrades|territories. Isidoros froze in an instant of hesitation-becoming a twisted boar who blackened the skies-before shaking himself free of the anomaly, uncharacteristically horrified. The Lawmaker Princess let out a scream, and forced herself to forget a Charm, insisting she never had a claim on death.

Adrian couldn't stop laughing.

Then we saw what had been erected around the final Shard. Blood-drenched gears of cinder and sooth, falling forever as if through syrup yet never wrenched apart from each other. Turbines that released flayed neverdreamt-spewing corpses. Conveyer belts slick with still-writhing gore.

"My, oh my" said Lilith. "Someone very clever seems to have reverse engineered the Eightfold Seal of Divinity for this world's necromancy"

INDEED. BRING OUT THE TRAITOR, I snarled.

1/6

The Primordials balked at the edge of the last Shard, (mostly) unsettled by a reminder of death's impending vastness. By contrast my Lilim children (and Adrian) surged forth with gleeful murder in their eyes, while my angelic brood turned sorrowful glances upon events that my wrath had made inevitable.

Light and flame pushed back the gore-strewn, calcifying Wyld between us as Lucianus, Ruvelia, the Magnus and Islinde dragged out a battered subsoul in chains of adamant. Sundered by his family for his betrayal, he looked up at me with what was not quite defiance but definitely not regret as he leaned on his flaking golden sword. A sort of sombre, resigned submission. The blueprints of an Exaltation glinted within his shattered ribcage.



SPEAK. IDENTIFY YOURSELF.

"I am the Regnant Prince, 15th soul of the Perfected Principle of Exaltation. I am the hammer of adversity that befalls all heroes to make them stronger. I am the necessary suffering that precedes greatness. And I am yours, not the Empyrean Chaos' nor any other principle you have incorporated"

HERESY.

"Then, my progenitor, you are a heresiarch"

YOUR PREVARICATIONS WILL NOT AVAIL YOU. "Where" I said, manifesting a humanform jouten right next to the wretched thing, "is the Incarna?". He met my eyes with empty sockets. "The Sixth Maiden continues to weave what you beseech her to-"

NO. THE SIXTH MAIDEN IS BUT A GOD OF THE FIFTH RANK. ONE OF EXCEPTIONAL POWER, BUT SHE IS NOT YOUR COLLUDER. ONLY ONE HAS THE ARROGANCE TO ATTEMPT A CONSPIRACY OF THIS MAGNITUDE. WHERE IS HE? /WHERE IS IGNIS?/

"Closer than you think"

The information is intuited immediately. The Pyrian Source encases Wormwood, my own vessel, in unbreakable crystal while Mabhaddoth unlocks it's unresisting form. My whimpering steed|pet|symbiont makes no protest, desperate to retain my approval, as the Unconquered Sun is dragged from my personal forge.

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Three of his hands clutched tight an artifact of unknown provenance-a crown resembling the one Theion bestowed on him. Yet instead of Theion-To consecrated metal, it was wrought of the Neutronium that my Incarna-aspect presided over. The fourth held out his shield, granting him a stay of execution against the outraged volleys of cosmic power from the other Primmordial, the vicious curses

and plagues my daughters unleash against their father's greatest rival, and my own baleful gaze.

"You do not have to do this" he called, and I said nothing because I knew he wasn't talking to me.

"Take it from me" said my wayward soul, "there is no other way we will understand"

WE HAVE NO NEED TO UNDERSTAND, I told my greatest rival and unfortunately, the being who understood me the most as I brought up my Incarna aspect "we need only to know" I cast an anguished glance at Lucianus and Ruvelia. "THEY were Incarnae once. I remember at this junction of my past. It was so! Look at how much you've cost me! DO you deny it?"

"...I am always in favour of a good dressing-down milord, but point of order: Being me is pretty great!" called my Green Sun.

"What my little brother said" chimed in Ruvelia.

"No. It is indeed by my hand, that what could have been was unmade. For the sake of arming you appropriately against the foe you are about to face" said the Sun steadily. He cast his gaze out at the outraged but concerned Primordials, at the angelic host, stared hard at my Lilim as they drooled at the sight of adversity who might actually put up a fight-and turned a soft glance at Merela, who hesitantly nodded. There was a time when I thought all three of us had reached an understanding. Obviously, that was before this particular treachery.

"By depriving me of my greatest hearts? If you think to lessen me before battle Ignis, others have tried"

"No" he said, "by gifting you new ones"

This wasn't like him. He was always straightforward even with boldfaced bluffs, and I quieted both the accusatory screams of titans and the jeers of Lilim as I stared him down. "Whatever game you are playing will fail here and now" I told him. "HENCEFORTH, I declare OURANOS as a fetich within my own hierarchy!" The signs of Ouranos, of Theion and of myself appeared in the sky, sigils forming definitive vistas of sacred geometry. I studied the methods of my own foes. I did to myself what Autochthon did to himself to form his Core, and I felt my titanic power surge.

THIS WAS A MISTAKE, I told Ignis.

"You misunderstand. Your victory is certain with or without Incarnae as fetiches, what concerns me is what you may do next. A heart that forges in magnanimity or a heart that rules mercilessly will not show the same restraint as a heart that defends Creation at all costs. And besides, I think such a heart would better suit your nature"

I HAVE BESTED YOU IN OTHER WORLDS. NOT MERELY IN COMBAT, I COMPLETED YOUR PURPOSE WHERE YOU FAILED.

"I cannot best you. That is known" he agreed.

THEN-

"So" he said, donning the crown at infinite speed as a Perfect effect, "I must simply join you"

Several things happen very quickly. My wretched soul unleashes a cast of Unconquered Self as a conceptual aerosol hidden in an abstract sanctum tied to his own death, and as I lash out at the Sun his artifact absorbs and internalises my Essence. Much as an Exaltation catalyses in the face of the Great Curse, the crown responds to a torrent of my wrath in the only way it can survive: By triggering a rite skin to Akumahood. As my Essence subsumes his, he meets my eyes with nothing but triumph.

When all subsides, my soul is dead and the Unconquered Sun stands as my second Incarna fetich.

As I let out a scream of outrage, Merela turns to Lilith and silently, they trade a thought to each other: That's hot.

4/6

Gears turn. Entire epochs are bloodied and mulched between them. Souls are fused into screaming amalgamates in tomb-engines. There is NO time to process this outrage. Whatever built this barrier designed it to be far easier to unlock by taking control of the Shards it has anchored itself around, and to gain strength from the act of doing so. And yet, even that is no safeguard against all my cosmic might tearing it aside, of my household pruning entire timelines.

No.

(The new fires of virtue ignited within me flicker with something that might be pride and I IGNORE THEM because this is MY decision)

No pruning.

>REMIND THEM OF THEIR PLACE

GENERAL. DO YOU FIND THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS AMUSING?

Merela stares me down and tries to think of something tactful and conciliatory to say, and then realises that's not her and I never expected her to. "Absolutely, yes"

THEN PERHAPS I SHOULD LAUGH ALONG. TAKE THE BEHEMOTHS WE HAVE SIREN,
THE SERVILE SPIRITS WE HAVE CREATE, AND THE WORLD WE BUILT TOGETHER. END
THIS REBELLION, NOW

She barely hesitates. "...you want me to kill the Exalted?"

I WANT YOU TO RESOLVE THE SITUATION WITH MINIMAL SUFFERING, AND TO SAVE THE SPIRAL. THAT IS ALL

"...good"

>SHOW THEM ALL

SCARLET DRAGON. TAKE YOUR COUNTERPARTS, AND THE SZORENY-DAYSTAR LENSING MAGITECH. DESIGN A WORLD TO THESE SPECIFICATIONS: ANGELIC HOST|TRIAT CELESTINE SPIRITS|MULTIDIMENSIONAL LAYERING. ONCE THE PRIMORDIALS ARE SUITABLY IMPRESSED, BUY THEM OFF WITH A WORLD TAILORED TO THEIR NEEDS.

"How delightfully deceptive. Even if I was not your kept creature, I would admire the audacity of this scheme" said the first version of the Scarlet Empress I had recruited "But are you certain a bargain construes conflict enough to bypass the lock? I wouldn't want you to be disappointed at using a lockpick where you should have brought a hammer instead"

OF COURSE! WE ARE TITANS! POETRY AND DECEPTION ARE WEAPONS AS SURELY AS BRUTE STRENGTH.

>RESTORING PROPER ORDER

IRIS. PLUTO. SIXTH. GAIA. LUNA-BOTH OF YOU. CATTELESTA. PHYRE. ABRAXUS. TAKE CONTROL OF YU-SHAN'S WORKINGS. TAKE ALL THE SHIPS YOU REQUIRE. ONLY, /ONLY/ ONCE YOU HAVE ADAPTED CREATION TO THE SPECIFICATIONS AGREED BY MYSELF AND MERALA IN THE TREATY OF CHAINS SHOULD YOU CONTACT MY IMPRISONED COMRADES.

AFTER THAT MY CONQUERED SUN WILL FREE THE YOZIS WITH HIS HORN, AND TASK THEM TO REPAIR THEMSELVES IN PURE CHAOS. BUT FIRST, SECURE THE EXALTATIONS BEFORE THEY HAVE TIME TO SPREAD.

"Yes father" chorused most of them.

YOUR GEAS IS REMOVED. IF MY COMRADES QUESTION YOU, INFORM THEM YOU ACT IN MY NAME. IPITHYMIA. EIGHT SUNS. BURY THE DEATHLORDS IN MOLTEN ORICHALCUM, LIBERATE MY FALLEN COMRADES FROM THEIR TOMBS, AND STAND READY FOR ANYTHING TO GO WRONG.

>LENDING AN EAR TO THE REBELLION

THIS LAST TASK, I AND THE COSMICS WILL COMPLETE.

5/6

Miracle after miracle happened, causing the rusted, hungry machine-necromancy to clatter and fall-apart. The final Shard did not draw nearer by any conventional metric. Only seven of the barriers erected physical and spiritual displacement; the last was a constant beckoning to Nirupadhika itself. Just as the Yozis could only escape Creation by making it spiritually congruent with Hell, the only way past these barriers was to bring the timelines they were wrought around fully under my control

The Empresses returned first, sniggering at how easily distracted their fellow Primordials could be by a good dance number. I returned last, having detailed at great length the consequences for conflict on both sides

My children thrashed and champed at the bit, begging and whining and demanding to be sent after the worlds-but I bade them wait as I told Lilith what would happen next. We had made clear from the beginning Creation was MY campaign and I would not break it to demand backup for what I was unwilling to do myself.

"I appreciate you going out of your way not to tax my military assets" said Lilith, languidly watching everyone rush around-Primordials readying for some kind of imminent threat, Yama Kings and Nephandi stoking the fires of Hell in anticipation for what had been described to them as the emergence of a damned amalgamation, Getimians randomly popping out of nowhere and asking for directions, and Lilim playfully fighting each other, "but you realise your children aren't just going to sit still while that bucket of bolts comes for your throat, yes?"

"I do. I will have to be quick"

"I'm trying to tell you that I don't mind" she said, shaking her head. "I've taken the measure of this world. My children have grown vast and terrible in the depths of Chaos and upon the Faraway, in the Beyond, in forsaken Zen-Mu and all the other liminal places. If you preferred, they could have come upon your enemies like an endless black tide"

I smiled at her, as the last lock broke. I JUST DON'T WANT ANY OF YOU-THEM, OR MY NEW SUBJECTS-TO GET HURT

And then with a dissonant noise like every machine in the world breaking at once, reality fractured in the shape of a buzzsaw as the Engine of Extinction lunged straight at me.



When I slew it in Autochthonia, it had resembled a great carrier made of fanged cogs, crawling on land, see and sky like a grotesque insect. When I slew it among the Jadeborn, it had resembled a great drilling worm with a boring maw. It had died twice, and as the barrier broke I saw that each time in it's desperation and spite the Dread Gear had anchored his greater self to the dreams of the Neverborn in this final Shard-arising again as their nightmare, more attuned to Oblivion each time, and worsening it's own nature. It was less machine, and more seething mass of Oblivion now, a great roiling tide of necrotic Essence from which pyreflame searchlights and cogs of bone occasionally jutted. Where it went, there was nothing but death.

And it shrieked in surprised as whereas every other Primordial recoiled in horror, I tackled it back into the Shard with the fury of a gamma ray burst. FALL, WEAKLING. COWARD. /CRIPPLE/, I screamed into it's mass, shoving it back through the tainted world it designed to trap me. YOU THINK YOU CAN BREAK MY PRIDE AS YOU KNOCK DOWN THE FOUNDATIONS OF MY THRONE? YOU THINK YOU CAN BREAK MY HEART AS YOU SLAY MY SUBJECTS? /I WOULD SOONER CONSIGN MYSELF TO CINDERS AND ASHES BEFORE YOU GOT THE CHANCE/

The Engine of Extinction howled promises to process me into Soulsteel, and I carved furrows of molten Adamant through it's machinery (Conviction demanded

nothing less). The Engine of Extinction showed me an artificial Maw of Oblivion within its jouten that would feed me to itself instead of Oblivion, and I filled its dark soul with light (Valor would not withstand this indignity). The Engine of Extinction screamed that we would both die, and I continued forcing the entire universe its rot encompassed back through its own work (Temperance would break before it bent). It was nothing but murderous, war machine purpose cast in Oblivion's shadow. Or at least, it was at the beginning of our fight. For as the supernova wrath of my eschaton jouten rent it from itself-multidimensional contours replaced with simple machinery and industrial waste-it began to remember something its living self was defined by.

Dread.

And so offended was my Compassion on behalf of every living being that had SUFFERED in its rampage, that taking only a moment to wink at She Who Lives In Her Name as she screamed out a warning not to do what I was about to do, I emulated her own sacrifice by shattering my fires against each other-burning away the rot and Oblivion and concepts that comprised the Engine of Extinction. Uran-drills contested my invincible flames. That was fine. A miasma of entropy honed in on my subsouls. Every single one of them withstood it so my comrades would not have to.

In short, having readied itself to fight an entire pantheon of what it perceived as arrogant megalomaniacs, the Engine of Extinction was ENTIRELY unprepared for selfless sacrifice alloyed with infinite power aspected to the Daystar itself.

Oh, it tried to get past me. Tendrils of flesh and soulsteel inched around my expanse, horrific spirits fled at the speed of darkness, a hundred Great Curses escaped the corona of my fury. And my children, bless their hungry hearts, beset it from all sides. Tearing it out of my Creations by the roots. Blasting it with flames of Gehenna, and wresting control of its own death.

And after them, it was the EXALTED brought under my banner that proved just as vital. The Dragonblooded in their numbers scoured away every death-spore it secreted. The Lunars burrowed into its scabbling limbs and the Sidereals bound them with chains of destiny. The Abyssals found and severed its connection to the Neverborn's nightmares, while the Solars rained down hails of golden light to cleave asunder its unnatural existence.

And the Primordials, once stricken with horror, still unwilling to commit to their king's sacrifice, rallied behind this resistance as I issued them one final command: STRIKE US BOTH, NOW.

Adrian's elemental torments. Isidoros' charge. The Lawmaker's space-warming sandstorms and the Pyrian Source's resonances, the corrosive blooms of Metagaos and the impossible breath of Oramus. Even the subtle talons of the Dragon's Shadow, unwilling to bear another mobile Neverborn claiming the crown he could have worn.

All of that, finally sent us both falling straight towards Oblivion in the next Shard.

Oh, how it begged as we both fell. That was the final irony in all this. Ignis was right. With himself and Ouranos was my hearts, I was more than a creator or a ruler-I purified, I released from desecration with my mere touch.

How it cried out for mercy, for respite, as even soaked in death I tore it apart, cauterised what withstood my blows, and slammed what was left on the walls of the Underworld hard enough to leave jagged holes where Creation's sunlight shone through.

Please, enough, it is enough, I am broken, it pleaded in it's shrieking, incoherent manner, as our inevitable destination as hapless, tortured Neverborn rushed up towards us like an immanent. Can't you see we're both suffering?

I SEE YOU REAPING WHAT YOU'VE SOWN, I told it as everything went black.