

Chapter 1 - "To Kill a Maelworm"

Striations of electric light leap from under his leather sleeve, lighting the stone street as they split the brisk air. The length of his black trench coat flares as he pivots. "Jed," he calls, "now!" Before the pin can hit the ground, a grenade is lobbed past the charging swordsman toward a long, pink tendril. "Athena!" It detonates as a gunshot sounds, the following fireball warding off the delegate limb. He slips under the blaze, sword drawn as he charges for the fallen tower that shrouds the twin tendrils' master. The smoke breaks. He attempts to lunge. His boots glide on the acid-glazed flagstone, and the pink whip cracks across his chest.

"Prophet!" Athena cries, dropping her rifle as her partner skips over the shattered street. Prophet tumbles into the crouching markswoman. Raking back his sweat-stained golden hair, he pulls himself to a kneel and plucks orange leaves from his sticky trench coat.

Three men round to guard their downed ally, swords at the ready. "I'll take the vanguard again in a minute, Clay," Prophet assures.

"Take a breather, Prop," Clay grunts, him and his men ducking as a tendril swipes, "George, Sap, and I have it for now." A leather-capped man and his bulky partner in a rawhide cloak confirm with a nod.

The three swat and stab at the knicked, bruised, and singed tendril tips looming over like starved cobras. As he pants, Prophet follows the relentless limbs' length down the apocalyptic street. They slither over the flagstone road webbed with cracks, polished with acid, and peppered with splintered branches. Board and brick buildings crumple into the sidewalks on either side, the rubble tide blocked by ornate stone planters of smashed oaks lining the thoroughfare. The furthest Prophet can trace the tendrils is to the fallen tower they drape over, a sliver of yellow is all the monster the ruined bastion fails to shroud. "Has anyone got a good look at the maelworm?" he asks.

"No," Clay says, "we got here first and the flak tower was already in the road. Evacuating civilians said the lightning blast knicked the streetward wall, and it toppled."

"Its lightning cut stone?" Prophet runs pale, glancing to crackling yellow between his fingers.

A tendril dives at George. He rolls. The tendril arcs, meeting Sap's obstructing swipe that adds another abrasion to the snake's complexion. "So agile," Sap complains, hoisting George to a stand, "how can it see us if we can't see it?"

A squawk and beating wings turn Prophet's attention behind. "Thanks for letting me borrow your gryphon," a cloak of basilisk scales and chimaera fur waves from the saddle. The pure white beast boasts a lion's body that sprouts feathers before a proud eagle head with matching talons for forelegs. Its two massive wings fold at its sides as it hits the flagstones with a gallop. The stampede of heavy footfalls and tapping nails slows to a stop at Prophet's chest.

"I hope Ivory treated you well," Prophet stands to pet the cooing gryphon nudging into him as her rider dismounts. "How's the evacuation effort going, Drake?"

"Well enough. My team's still aiding," Drake addresses the group, wasting no time assisting in the fight, "same goes for the rest of MantiCorp."

"What'd the other side of Plinth look like?" Athena calls as she reloads.

"Ground zero doesn't stretch far into town," he pants between attacks, "but there was some stray debris by the east gate."

Prophet pulls back. "The storefronts are there- is Lilly-?"

"I'm sure she's been evacuated with everyone else."

"Any word on Rhineforcements?" George adjusts his cap between warding swipes.

"Where's the rest of the Blitz Creed?" Sap echoes.

Drake shakes his head. "There is no 'rest.' Summer and Commander Rhine are unaccounted for, Armon, Greyson, and Maya are leading the evacuation, and it'll be morning by the time the Kingdom Guard can assemble any meaningful force. Defending Plinth comes down to us."

"Alone?" Clay runs pale.

"Seven Blitz to kill a maelworm?" Athena brushes chocolate locks from her eyes to better gape.

"If it'd be any seven, it'd be us," Prophet braces Athena's shoulder, his palm sliding on the high-cut jacket that challenges Jed's crimson coat for the most slime-slick leather.

"Prop, we kill a lot of monsters," Drake shakes his head, "but nobody's ever killed a maelworm."

"Screw that noise," Jed backs Prophet's resolve, "killing this bugger'll get me Type: Null rank for sure!" His camouflage backpack plops to the stone where Jed rummages to find two more grenades. Flicking the pins with his thumbs, he hurls them for the prodding arms. The first wriggling mass vanishes in a cloud of flame. The second arcs the explosive. Prophet fires a golden bolt, negating the maneuver as it blows prematurely.

Prophet's eyes dart forward. Lunging, he shoves Jed aside as the tendrils pierce the smoke. A fist leaping with lightning beats the attacker. It spasms under the voltage, stunned. Prophet grips the member with both hands, discharging, causing the pink tube to spasm with growing ferocity. The second comes to its aid, meeting the blender of the Blitz's blades combined. As the twitching hits a crescendo, Prophet's tendril reefs free.

The seven watch as the tendrils retreat through the nighted street. They slither back over shattered flagstone, around snapped trees, and through puddles of lung-biting acid spilling from whatever lies beyond the tower. The tower. As the tendrils recede over it, they stop. Then follow down the stone cylinder before burrowing underneath. The stone ruin creaks as the tendrils appear over top, rounding up from the other side. Bricks crack as the tendrils cinch. Dust billows as the tower rises, lifted from its shattered indentation as if weightless, then hurled at mind-shattering speed over the titan's head.

The Blitz watch in stunned horror as the tower, transformed by distance into a blot, flies into the empty night sky and then plummets to the merciless maelstrom far, far below.

The offender, the titan that accomplished such a feat with nothing but what Prophet now sees are mere whiskers, stares. The Blitz stare back. Stare down; down the stories-tall barrel of a cannon from hell.

The tendrils return, massive slithering feelers extending from either side of the megalithic worm. "It couldn't see us," Prophet gulps, "because it doesn't have a face..."

"The feelers must just sense our locations," Clay analyses, "it explains how it knew where to strike but not how to dodge."

The pink feelers pass inside the round, gaping maw that makes up the beast's hollow front. They dive behind the lip - a calloused tube that rounds the stories-tall circular opening. The lip pulses and an acid pond begins to form inside the mouth. Guttural cries echo, the sound of a dragon army roaring from the back of its seemingly endless cavernous form.

"What's the five-story garburator up to?" Jed ogles the countless rows of serrated teeth spiraling the hole that fades to black before the end. "Could it be charging another bolt of lightning?"

"The one it shot on arrival had a lot more buildup," Clay says, "this can't be that."

The tendrils strain and curl. The slack tightens as they lift. Fuming acid sloshes over the lip as the tendrils extract a condensed orb. The coiling tangle of pink, dripping as it rises, hoists the improvised warhead, steam billowing in the crisp autumn air.

Like the tower, the maelworm swings the putrid ball over its head. Then stops. With the same might as before, the tendrils swing. The orb - the boulder in a trebuchet - is hurled forward. The Blitz scatter. Clay, George, and Sap dive for cover behind an oak planter while Prophet, Ivory, Jed, and Athena clamor for distance.

"Caught!" Drake screams as his boot hooks a stray branch. He curls, plummeting behind it.

The viscous glob crashes into the stone where they once stood. George yanks Sap back as the ensuing tidal wave washes past. The glistening tide carries down the street, coating the flagstone and flowing into the many thousands of cracks theRhine.

Lung-crippling vapors pour from the battlefield as Athena halts. "They're coming back!"

The pair of tendrils fire like arrows. One dives behind the stone planter box, narrowly missing Clay. The other braves rifle fire. "Not her!" Prophet orders with a barrage of electricity. Bolts and bullets force the tendril to retreat.

"Thanks," Athena pants, coughing a few times on the omnipresent fumes.

He grips her shoulder to help her regain composure when a stifled squawk calls him. Ivory shields her master, the tendril coiling her neck in his place. Before Prophet can free her, the gryphon is flicked aside; cratering the stone wall of MantiCorp HQ. She slumps to the ground, dead or unconscious; he doesn't know.

"Caught!" Athena draws him back. A tendril lifts her by the chest, pinning her arms. Clay sprints toward her. "Cov-" he's tackled by the other that hits his ribs like a javelin. Sap shoves the staggered Prophet as he runs to finish the job Clay started. "I've got her," he insists. "You help Jed!"

Prophet, still processing the image of his childhood companion drilled into a wall, peels his eyes away to find Jed picked up by the shoulders - part of the tendril smothering his face. Jed's green camouflage bag drops to the stone in his struggle for breath. A leaping slash frees him.

"Sorry that took so long, I-"

"I'm not dead, man," Jed waves him off, clamoring for air, "you won't get a complaint out'a me."

"Drake's caught!" Athena sounds like an alarm again as she takes up his sword. Drake lies unconscious, pinned under the branch with the right of his body lying in an acid puddle. Prophet and Jed echo another 'covered' from down the street. George and Sap drag him out. Drake's skin bubbles as the acid burrows further, turning flesh into liquid.

Prophet leaves Drake to the others and lifts the sword from Athena. "Cover Drake!" Prophet readies Drake's sword, a massive crack creeping through the blade. Feeling the blade rattle, he swaps it to his off-hand and unsheathes his own with his right.

One blade at a time, Prophet challenges the tendrils with a fluid pattern. "Left, left, right, right," he grunts, swinging the blades accordingly. Prophet's sword, his trusted 'Unbecoming,' cuts with ease. Drake's sword, however, rattles and creaks worse with each use. Adapting, Prophet swaps to a single-handed style with which he can rely on Unbecoming alone. The beast throws both his way. He tempts fate by swinging Drake's sword again. The crack grows worse. "George! Sap!" Prophet glances over his shoulder. "I need backup!"

"One second!" Athena calls back to him, "we almost have the acid off, but it's all hands on deck right now!"

"You need three people for that?" Prophet responds as he parries.

"Don't tell me how to treat injuries! I don't tell you how to summon lightning from the sky. Though you probably wish I could, because Irene knows you still can't!"

"Dammit, Athena! We're doing this now of all times?"

Athena growls as she dabs the acid from Drake's cheek with a strip of clothing. "Sorry about that," Sap hands a new rag. "Relationships can be messy."

Hunching over to bandage the Blitz, Athena mutters, "What relationship?"

"You and- oh, did you two-?" Sap watches the woman's shoulders drop and composure soften. He hangs his head and returns to Drake's wounds, regretting having opened his mouth, to begin with.

Sword strikes slow as Prophet's stamina depletes. The tendrils keep up the pressure, pressing the Creed's weakened defenses. Pouncing from above, one tendril tastes steel before ducking aside. The other bares down from the left. With no time to bring Unbecoming around, he jets Drake's brittle sword in an attempt to stop it. It snaps. Half the blade remains lodged into the sticky, pink arm, leaving the rest behind. Before Prophet can warn, Athena is in its grip high above the ground. She squeals as the coiling snake buries the metal into her flesh.

"Not her! You put her down!" Prophet growls, abandoning his post with a flurry of golden bolts. The tendril gives - tossing the woman alongside Ivory. A resounding crack echos as Athena falls motionless.

Watching the bone-shattering impact sends Prophet into shock. Sparks jump as his jaw bares.

Jed wipes his eyes. He loots and reloads his partner's rifle, then reaches into his bag, flicking a grenade's pin and grasping firm the safety lever. "You're gonna pay for that, worm!" He pokes a few holes into a tendril before it collides with Prophet's blade, assuaging its wrath. Jed turns to be met with his typically hardened battle partner's melted stance and glazed eyes.

Sap calls out from behind, a tendril wrestling the bulky man's blade. "George, help! I'm caught!" George, securing his leather cap, abandons Drake and scrambles for his sword. Seeing it in a puddle of acid, he grabs the unconscious Clay's.

Coming to Sap's rescue, George wedges the sword in the tendril. It pulls, throwing both to the ground in a one-sided game of tug-of-war before rebounding straight at Sap for a finishing blow. No time to swing, Prophet grips it with both arms. It pulls him until his heels catch on a crack in the flagstone.

Jed fires at it to no avail. "Just cut it!" Prophet orders, the gooey, acidic surface slipping through his grip.

"Man alive, I'm trying!" He lays waste to the trigger.

Prophet grunts, leaning back and mashing his eyelids together.

Sap pulls his sword from the ground and plants the tip into the creeping arm. It thrashes. "Stay... still!" Prophet clenches his eyes harder and discharges a current through it. It falls limp. Freeing one arm, he tosses his previously pinned sword behind. "Jed, now! Cut it!"

Silent seconds pass. Nothing. All at once, life springs back into the tendril. It rips free and pulls Prophet back. He scrambles up, grabbing his sword from the ground. With a glance, he spots Sap, smoking and unconscious. "Did I-?" Prophet fingers the man's neck. Though relieved, Prophet still doubles over as his face crumples.

George snaps him out of it, unsheathing Clay's blade. "It's just you, me, and Jed now." George offers the shaking Prophet a hand. "Are you hurt?" George retracts his unanswered gesture and checks Sap's pulse. "He'll be fine, but we have to keep- Caught!" he shoots a finger down the street.

The word like lightning through his chest, Prophet tears off, locating Jed and adjusting his course on the run. George struggles to keep up as he watches Jed dangling above the road on a clear path back to the maelworm's massive maw. The remaining tendril swoops in for desperate attacks only to be swatted by the sparking swordsman's blade.

His sword flies while his legs dance over chunks of oak, stray tower debris, and potholes of acid. "Caught!" Prophet glances back. George fails to free his boot from a split in the road. It isn't long before

Prophet's pest swaps targets and scoops him up. "Keep going!" George reaches out as the tendril lifts. "I'll be-" it drives him into the stone with a cloud of dust.

Rifle fire clatters. Jed frees the gun from his side, snapping to reality the statue-still Prophet.

Prophet draws blood from his arm with a pinch before cranking his head around. He firms his rattling blade, turns his back to George, and soldiers on.

"Shoot it, man!" Jed's voice cries out, "I'm not touching the ground! It can't ground through me!" Prophet obeys. Bolt after bolt flashes from pale, unsteady hands.

His legs grow weak as road runs out. He stumbles to a stop. With a flourish, he twirls his sword into a backward grip. He takes an archer's stance - blade across his chest. The sharpened steel jumps and glows with electric striations. "Covered!" His shaking jaw releases a cry as he plunges the golden arrow whistling through the evening sky. It pierces the tendril with a gooey slosh and muffled zap. With a seized spasm, it drops.

Prophet arrives by the time it hits the ground. He grabs the wedged blade and pulls to no effect. Even stunned, the tendril maintains its grip on Jed. As he continues to tug, the arm twitches with life.

"That lightning blast-" Jed glances over to the gaping mouth, witnessing its countless teeth come alive with electricity. "Looks like the buildup Clay mentioned... Any chance you can absorb that?" he chuckles for a moment before Prophet's palpable desperation sobers him. "You grab Athena and the rest of 'em and go."

"No," Prophet grunts, yanking at the blade. "We're all getting out of here alive!"

"You're wasting your time with me. Better some survive than none," Jed comforts, his voice soft and reasonable as the crackling grows behind them.

"I'm not letting you die as worm food! That's not the firey death of glory you deserve!"

"Man, I don't plan on being food. The only thing it's gonna eat is this 'nade I'm cookin'." Prophet glances over to a grenade clenched in a restrained fist. "Once I'm in his belly, I'll let it loose. 'Might stop the attack; buy you more time."

Prophet heaves at the hilt, breaking only to scratch the water from his eyes.

"If I hold you up here, we both die," a tear escapes Jed as well. "Enough people have lost their lives tonight. Just go, man. Live to fight another day."

"Would you shut up?" Prophet spits as he cranks the sword free. Shaking arms thrust the blade down. It misses, crashing to the stone.

Prophet, stunned and confused, looks up as Jed yells. "Watch your ass, Prophet!"

The tendril that had pulled away just in time rebounds. With devastating force, it hurls Jed like a projectile, impacting with Prophet before he can react. They roll and tumble back down the road before skidding to a stop. Jed rubs his bleeding head and looks out across the sea of carnage. Prophet meets his gaze from behind a pile of tower rubble.

"When did you drop the-?" Prophet stares at his partner's empty hand. Jed looks down at the hand then darts his head rapidly around the area, eventually landing on the grenade as it rolls into a puddle of acid.

The puddle erupts in a fireball magnitudes larger and hotter than any bomb. The heat reaches far, stinging Prophet's skin even at his distance. Jed clamors up only to fall back down. When Prophet stands, Jed chuckles, gripping his ribs in pain. "Hell, man, sometimes I wish I was a thaum too." Prophet offers him a hand. Jed pushes it away. "I don't know why thaums complain about their powers," he rolls onto his back in resignation. "'Cus I'd kill for some of that superhuman durability right about now."

"And I'd love to hear more about it after we kill this thing." Prophet ignores his comments on account of them sounding like deathbed talk.

Jed lifts the hand from his chest to reveal a long, deep cut. "Guess your sword got me on impact. Funny how that works, huh? Of all the things, it's dumb luck that gets me."

"Yeah, nice going, wrecking ball." Prophet jokes in an attempt to breathe life into his friend's signature levity. Then he turns dire. "You gotta get up, buddy," he pleads. "We have a monster to kill." Jed shakes his head as it drops to the road. "Just think; you and me'll be the first to ever kill a maelworm. That's gotta' be Type: Null worthy, right? I can't think of many other things that would be. You get up

now, and I'll make sure you get the last jab. Type: Null rank will be all yours just like you've always wanted!"

"Man, run while you still can," Jed mutters. "That thing's not dying. We're fresh outa' manpower and never had a plan, to begin with."

"No." Prophet scans the battlefield. He turns his face away from the residual heat of the fireball. Then glances at the crackling maelworm and remembers the pumping lip. His eyelids peel wide. "I have something, just-"

"Man-"

"No! I'll get us close. Then- Your grenades! They'll ignite the-"

Jed closed his eyes a long time ago. While still awake and listening, Prophet accepts there's no getting through to him. "I'm down and out of this one, man." His hand slips from its place over the wound. Long, heavy blinks are all he musters as he gives the swordsman a hopeful smile. His fingers skitter on the stone, dragging Unbecoming inch by painstaking inch toward Prophet's boot. The last Blitz puts his hand down on the hilt - the struggle stops.

Prophet rakes himself off the road and turns to the legendary monster. His lips shake, and teeth shudder with a ferocity he hadn't felt since his days on the frozen streets of Gward. But this time, he doesn't have the temperature to blame. "I won't run again." With a gulp, he turns to the monster frothing with a building electrical storm. Two tendrils analyze their target. "I'll finish this."

Prophet unbuttons the black leather coat, dropping it to the stone. He scrapes back his golden hair tainted with sweat and dust. The midnight autumn air bites at his naked arms, his sleeveless shirt beating in the breeze. He parts his stance. Taking his blade one last time, he tears down the street.

"I'm taking you back to hell!" The tendrils act. They dive behind the lip and, in seconds, are lobbing sparkling orbs of acid through the night. He weaves through most. Not all. Dodging the brunt of one, he throws his arm into another.

He stumbles to a halt as the skin bubbles, the searing pain flooding his senses as he looks up. "Nice shot," he gripes. Above, one massive orb of acid plummets toward him. With no time to dodge, he

raises his blade sparking with life. "But so am I." In a flash of yellow, lightning leaps from the sword. The acid ignites. The night turns to day as the second sun burns.

Prophet emerges from the flames - guns blazing. Fireworks erupt along his final stretch to the callused lip as the two trade projectiles. As he grows too close, the acid rain lets up.

At last, he steps up to the lip. A quick jolt of electricity has no effect. "Insulated?" he scans the thick skin for a weak point, his voice drowned by the cacophony of thunderclaps directly above, "Nothing a little needle can't fix." A tendril dives. He slashes across his chest. It evades. From behind, it coils around his melting arm. He grips. Locating its deepest wound, he swings. The severed tendril falls. The last tendril looms overhead, unmoving.

Prophet stares at the acid duct - its rough skin contracting as it pumps. With a roar, he lifts both arms, flourishes his sword into a backward grip, and plunges it deep inside. Pressurized acid spews out from around his scalpel, forcing a step back. His arm lights with golden striations as he aims it at the lightning rod. And fires.

The final tendril dives to take the hit. Spasming from the voltage, it thrusts forward, ramming into Prophet's unsuspecting ribs and driving him back down the street.

He tumbles to a stop. Clutching his corroding arm, Prophet pulls his bloodied head up to the lightning-charged gun barrel bearing down on him. The grin of victory wipes from his face as he struggles to stand. Bolts of lightning leap from the maelworm's cannon with blinding flashes and ear-shattering claps. The monster wails from somewhere deep as it achieves critical mass.

Prophet, his failure setting in, punches the ground with a charged fist. He turns. Jed catches his eye first, watching with an understanding nod. Athena stares like a mother watching her child being torn apart by wolves. Ivory gapes without blinking, her talons wrenching at the stone in a futile attempt to crawl between her master and imminent death.

His face morphs to tempered steel. "No." His feet find their place firmly underneath him. The monster cries its final taunt as the bludgeoning thunder peaks in voracity. The air transmutes to a thick

web of static. Prophet whips back. "Not again..." Every volt of electricity prepares for discharge. Veins popping, Prophet throws his arms out as a lightning rod. "I won't let you!"

Crack. The town of Plinth ignites. The palpable flash of white light steals the vision of everyone within. The following shockwave strips everyone of their hearing, every window of its pane, and every stone structure of its integrity.

The maelworm - the towering yellow tube - adorns the street's end, stunned by its discharge. Further down, Jed and Athena rub their eyes. Through blurred lenses, they gawk at a common sight. The two lock on a cloud of black. Pitch black. Like a mutual hole in their vision. A hole that takes Prophet's place.

Prophet studies his tar-coated hands. The complete blackness surrounding them jumps and dances with cracks and pops. Lightning. Inky black striations emitting no light - absorbing all light - are only detectable via the blotted-out world behind. They coat his body like armor, an aura of void.

Inside is unmitigated rage. What takes him as a flame of anger stoked since time immemorial suddenly passed to him. Sharpening his eyes, the sight of the maelworm amplifies it. The emotion consumes. With a face of decided stone, he raises a hand out to Unbecoming, still lodged in the sputtering lip. "I won't let you take them from me," his cold voice echoes through the silent street. His outstretched arm gifts a cataclysmic bolt of black lightning to the hilt. The thunderclap shakes the ground. The maelworm erupts as every drop of acid in its seismic body is ignited simultaneously. The resulting blast challenges the first two, the fiery flash disabling sight once more.

Prophet collapses. The black crawls beneath his skin. Sore limbs, raked lungs, and tested power stores hold him in place.

Then a distinct gunshot finds his ear.

Chapter 2 - "The Face of Change"

The unmuffled crack turns his weary head from the blazing carcass. Across the sidewalk beyond a planter, his blurry eyes find their target. "The MantiCorp building," Prophet hoists his frail form from the flagstone as another gunshot sneaks through the HQ's bent door. His head pounds while ears screech like a haunting banshee. After a confirmational nod from Jed, he limps toward the front steps.

Dirty and dusty, the white gryphon coos as her master approaches. A grin widens as he clutches Ivory's mighty beak, rumbling with relief. "She's not bleeding," Athena stands, clutching her hip as she investigates the bird.

"Are you-?"

"I'm fine," she exaggerates, wingeing and aborting an attempt to walk. Another crack sends their eyes up to the dark MantiCorp entrance. "Only one thing makes a gunshot like that."

"Leave it to me," Prophet starts forward.

"But you're-"

"I'll make do," he assures. "The wounded-"

"I'll see to them," she nods.

Taking one last look at the bright, fire-lit night, Prophet cranks open the pummeled door. He uses reception desks as crutches to aid his trek. His left opens into a large cafeteria - no shortage of large tables fill it. The far end usually shows a hallway, but the lack of lighting swallows the room long before he can see it.

He creeps forward. A loud crash to his right, stifled by a thick oaken door. *Rhine's office*, he thinks to himself.

Leaving the desks, he drags his stiffening body to the door. *Locked*, he discovers. Voices chatter inside. Prophet's hands spark as he tests for anything left in the tank. Dim yellow lights the doorway. "Good enough," he mutters to the electricity. A heavy patter of falling books acts as his invitation. He charges what he can, then hits the door with a solid punch, shattering the lock and sending the door waving wide.

The oak desk lies broken, snapped in half with a man planted into it. The veteran points a sword at the woman leaning over him. His furrowed brow and shivering jaw accentuate his recently developed wrinkles.

"Step away from him," Prophet orders.

Golden-blond hair sweeps as the woman turns. "Behold your mighty Commander Rhine," she steps aside, "Now, what do you think you're capable of that he isn't?"

That voice... Prophet wonders.

"She's a monster! You need to leave-" Rhine is silenced as the woman propels him further into the rubble with a contactless jut of her palm. Prophet hesitates. The bookshelves that decorated the walls lay toppled, dented, and relieved of their contents. The framed pictures that punctuated them now join the broken shelves and desk scrap as they assist the large, ornate MantiCorp rug in covering the boarded floor.

Prophet responds as he would to any monster. He reaches above his shoulder and grabs his blade. Drawing it, he realizes a problem. A glance over his shoulder jolts his memory - he left it in the maelworm. Plan B; he lowers his stance and readies his arms.

"It's clear you're no normal thaum. What are you?" Prophet asks.

"No, dear, I wouldn't call myself a thaumaturge. 'Thaums' control any one of fire, water-"

"-Air or earth, I know." He glares at the woman, her cocky demeanor picking at his nerves.

"Mm-hmm," She cocks her head and gives a condescending clap. "Now tell me, as you saw my abilities, did that look like one of the four?" She parts her palms to dust off her form-fitting dress, an insidious black with unsettling amethyst eyes printed sporadically all over - each with three lashes above and beneath. The older woman gives the bruised and battered Prophet a theatrically inquisitive stare as she waits. "No. I'm no *thaum*." She turns her back, raising her hand to wave him goodbye.

"Technically," Prophet ignores the excusal. "But you have powers."

"Semantics." She glances over her shoulder.

Prophet shrugs. "Thaum or not. It doesn't matter."

"Good boy. Now-"

"Either way, I'm going to hurt you. Bad."

With a belabored exhale, she pinches the bridge of her nose. "You and what army?"

Yellow light blinds the room. The woman's diminutive attitude is flipped as she basks in the electric glow. Not threatened, but curious. "Those powers-? You're no ordinary thaum either."

"Semantics." His eyes are drawn behind the lady. He steps to the side.

With an unmuffled crack, a bullet tears through her chest. She shrieks as blood splatters into the doorway.

Rhine aims with both arms. "Atta'girl, Betty," he blows through the sword's split blade that acts as a barrel.

"Damn it, old man, you'll never learn to stay down, will you?" The blond demon whips around and throws Rhine against the wall, seemingly with her mind. She turns to Prophet. "Now for you," her eyes boil. Her face tightens, and her pointed nose projects as she cocks her arm. Prophet stands in place, his body refusing to move. That face - that angry, punishing face - he knows it all too well. All at once, all too soon, he realizes the woman's identity.

She thrusts. Another crack. A hole pierces her fist. Rhine stands, his ripped and tattered suit stained with blood and sweat standing in stark contrast to his shit-eating grin.

"Oh, you enjoy this?" She jets another hand out. Rhine braces. Prophet grips her wrist, knocking it off course. A painting inches to the Commander's side is pummeled into the wall.

She pries Prophet off. Sparks fly as they obey his will. The woman swings, Prophet beats her to it. Hatred in lightning form knocks her off balance. She rushes. Prophet steps aside, allowing her to topple into the rubble of the desk.

Prophet pulls Rhine toward the door. The woman flips, throwing a sloppy hand out at them. He shoves Rhine aside before flying back through the doorway into a reception desk.

Heels clack past him. An arm lifts him from the wreck. "She took off," the battered Commander says.

"Then we better follow," Prophet groans.

Following out the door, past a confused Athena, and down the disheveled street, they're joined by Clay.

"In the divine name," Rhine witnesses the maelworm as he traverses the fallen tower's rut. "Is that-?"

"I'll explain later," Prophet pulls him.

They jog around the smoldering beast to the docks. Looking down, Prophet no longer sees flagstones but wooden planks. Through the cracks, the eternal storm - the maelstrom - swirls and stirs countless miles below.

Landing pads once branching from the walkway are missing in the maelworm's wake, no trace of them but broken floorboards and railings leading out to nothing. Rhine gawks at the legendary beast dangling off the jagged island face like a cat hanging from a branch, the length of its yellow body stretching further down than he can stomach.

The woman reaches the end. The three Blitz stop short. Prophet squints. The woman stands, tapping on a handheld glass pane.

"Come any closer, and I'll shatter the supports!" She readies a hand, slipping the object into her pocket.

Rhine trains Betty, his sword, on the woman. "You're out of ground!" He calls out to her.

"Surrender now, and you may just see the outside of a cell again!"

"All bark. What happened to your bite?"

Rhine paces forward. "Surrender!"

The woman holds firm. "Do you have a death wish?"

"No," he glares. "A sense of duty."

The woman glances behind. "Cute. It's been fun, Rhine. I almost enjoyed myself." She thrusts.

Railings are torn up, and Prophet throws the Commander aside.

Low droning from below catches their ears. Quickly inbound. "A ship," Prophet grunts. The woman grins. A bullet from Rhine splits a pocket open. White rings rain out, and she clasps it shut.

"Unfortunately, I can't let you live." She aims to the floor before looking Prophet dead in the eye, a smirk smearing across her face. "Take solace," she sings, "I'll make this quick."

Prophet charges her. The woman only smiles. Arms crackling with what little he can dig up, he lunges. She evades, throwing herself over the safety rail. Prophet collides with the wood. Leaning over, he watches the assassin fall toward the maelstrom. *There's no fear in her eyes.* Her arm cocks back. Prophet freezes. They lock gaze. She winks.

One last thrust obliterates the dock's end. Prophet is cast up in a rain of woodchips. Rhine dives. Splinters batter the Commander as he plucks Prophet's arm from the downpour. Prophet dangles off the edge of the shattered walkway, his only claim to land being Rhine, who lays on his chest, gripping Prophet's wrist with both hands.

Prophet stares down at the eternal storm as a ship flies into view. The woman, transformed by distance into a mere spec, hits the top of the vessel as it continues onward beneath the rocky bottom of the hovering land.

The world fades as Clay helps the Commander hoist him up. Slipping into unconsciousness, his last haunting thought: the identity of the assassin.

Chapter 3 - "Null and Void"

He walks damp cobblestone streets. His arms emit a soft, yellow glow in the still air. The reliably docile striations he once commanded now dance over him with a mind of their own. He doesn't mind. They give light.

A drop taps his nose. He looks up at the sky to see an unending sheet of black clouds racing by at high speeds. No sound. His hand tests the air for wind. None. Prophet scans the landscape. Cobblestone

houses rest under cobblestone roofs, their windows black as if painted over. The streets mimic the aesthetic with cobblestone for road and sidewalk. The border is ever-present. A dome of inky black that moves with him so he's always at its center. The shroud allows him to see no more than a quick jog in any direction. "I'm not in Plinth anymore..."

Rain picks up. His boots fall on wet stone with reliable claps. The dark border follows, extending further out as he walks to reveal the world ahead while consuming everything behind.

Intuition washes over him. Nothing catches his eye. *Where are all the people?* he ponders. "Actually," he stops his pace, "there's something very wrong here." Prophet's thoughts start to come together like jolting into lucidity mid-dream. He listens. Dead silence. Even the rain fails to make a sound as it comes down in droves. The only sounds come from him.

Wandering street to street with a keen ear, a sound materializes from thin air. Footsteps. The same force and consistency as his. But slightly offbeat. They crackle in the puddles like the liquid-smothered sound of a sparking circuit.

Prophet doesn't halt. He doesn't look. For all intents and purposes, he hasn't noticed.

He turns the corner at a dim and flickering street light. Walking a length down the lane, he notices the flickering fixture behind now give a dimmer yellow. The footsteps round the corner and continue to pace. The corrupted yellow turns to black. Prophet reaches the end of the street and begins to turn once more before a realization stops him. The footsteps have stopped. He listens attentively, a primal, child-like fear taking hold.

All is silent.

Taking a deep breath, his heart beating and fists clenched, he whips back. His eyes rummage over the area behind him. Nothing but the dripping cobblestone houses sitting just inside the void border. The street lamp flickers further down; yellow again. A sigh of relief escapes as he closes his straining eyes and turns his head back.

His eyes open. His heart spikes. Lightning is called to his fist - he watches its familiar gold glow warp into a dulled and corrupted black. In front of him lies a figure. Humanoid, not human. Its face shares

all the characteristics of Prophet's yet remains distinct. Black, flickering hair shades it. An oily coating layers its skin, conducting small arcs of black lightning that jump off and dissipate into the air. Black veins invasively interweave through the features, seemingly branching from the glossy eyes of coal.

"Who... are you?" Prophet squeaks.

Its eyelids spasm; they beat once and hold a second before beating twice more.

Prophet makes the mistake of blinking. The being stands now inches away. With the world still mute, the silence is interrupted only by the buzzing of unbridled primal power.

Muscle memory takes control as Prophet throws a blackened fist toward the figure. Without batting an eye, the creature's cold, slimy fingers catch it.

"What the hell are you?" Prophet demands, his cool exterior melting as he struggles to tug his fist free. The figure tightens its grip. Its black energy - the black striations - flows from it into Prophet's arm. "That power," Prophet mumbles, "you were there when the maelworm-" He looks into the figure's glossy eyes. In the reflection, his own now spit black striations from the sockets. He leans into the tar mirror. The same dark veins of the monster begin to creep out from his discharging eyes.

Prophet stares, transfixed. Terror washes over him, yet he fights to remain as his facade begins to crumble.

Fear wins. Prophet thrusts back. Turning from the distorted beast, he rips down the street. His footfalls tear through puddles. Footsteps behind him. *It's running too. Faster.* Prophet's kick into overdrive as he charges at the now-stationary ink dome. The wall of blackness grows closer with every panicked step. For every step of his, the demon behind takes three. He hears it reaching his heels as he dives past the flickering lamp into the uncaring void.

"At long last, my words can reach you. We can begin."

He springs up. Lightning sparks to the ready as he illuminates the surrounding demons. Humanoid demons. Wide eyes and surrendering palms. "Prophet," one speaks, "you're okay." It sits on

the edge of his bed. Chocolate-brown hair drapes over her shoulders and one mossy-green eye. "It was just a nightmare," she strokes his shoulder, the arm of her thin, acid-chewed leather jacket dragging with her touch.

"Athena?" he pants. Jed and Rhine watch from a table on his other side. The striations settle as Prophet glances at the rows of beds housing countless injured. Medics roam the isles of the repurposed warehouse, tending to violent injuries.

He peels the thin blanket from his left arm, uneasy about what damage he might find. He lifts the hand and stretches its fingers. Completely ordinary fingers. *It... healed me?* he twists his arm showing no acid damage whatsoever. *What about scars?* he wonders and reaches to the corner of his mouth to follow a lightning bolt-shaped groove back across his right cheek. Pulling off a few wires feeding information to machines, he touches a distinct scar on the left of his chest. Confused, he turns back to Athena, who had apparently been talking to him.

"You were writhing in your sleep for a while. I couldn't wake you. It was like-"

"Something was keeping me there," Prophet finishes her thought with a low rumble. Acid and scars fade from mind as the streets, the void border, the flickering lamp, and the demon all flood back in vivid detail. *It was all in my head...* "A dream," he mutters.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Athena offers, straining her voice to be gentle with concern.

"No," he rubs his eyes. The corrupted face flashes in his mind. He pulls back. He locks eyes with the reflection in the bed's metal handrail. "It wasn't real."

"We're late," Jed opens the door, holding it for his partner.

Prophet commands the snow-white gryphon to lay beside the entrance. Forcing his eyes away from the gryphon-sized crater in the wall, he runs a hand over Ivory's braced ribs before following Jed up the steps. "And whose fault is that?" Prophet pats the chest of his friend's tuxedo. "Rhine said this was going to be a small ceremony. Your bandaging couldn't wait until after?"

"Man, you saw the cut; it's deep! It's also only been a week since I got it. Not that you'd understand, Mr. Superhuman, but we normals take longer to heal."

Prophet chuckles. "Fair point."

"Last thing I want is blood on this overpriced shirt."

"You call everything 'overpriced.'"

"'Cus everything is!"

The cafeteria shines and booms with life. Stepping in, Prophet notices a new reception desk - one lacking a hole roughly his size. "There's the man of the hour!" Clay jumps up and wraps an equally well-dressed arm around Prophet's neck before taking them to a big table near the room's end.

Prophet gawks at the chattering sea of people. Athena stands up and embraces him. "I know, right? So much for 'small ceremony,'" the woman flaunting a low-cut, royal blue, split dress whispers in his ear before pulling back with a coy smile. She drapes her hands on his shoulders to make sure he takes a good look. She does her best to accentuate her crimson lips and curled, shimmering chocolate hair strewn over one shoulder, then pops out her hip in an attempt to direct his gaze downward. At least a little.

Prophet doesn't fall for it. He glances directly down to the hip, causing Athena's lips to pout as he skips over the dress' deep neckline. "I'm glad to see the hip healed nicely."

"Perfectly. The doctor said not to move it too much, but," she leans in, "I'm willing to disobey if you ask nicely." Turning to the table, she lifts a glass. "I know how you do at social things, so," she forces the drink into his hand. "At the very least, it could wash that obnoxious grin off your face."

"Hey, Prop!" Clay calls from over the table. "You were supposed to leave your animals outside," he messes up Jed's greased chestnut hair. Jed bats him away and yanks his tie in retaliation.

The table of Blitz joke and drink as the night grows older.

Injuries are covered, scars are shown, and recovery details are shared. When Drake is mentioned, Armon and Greyson, tied up with the evacuation during the fight, clam up. Only they and Rhine have

seen the scarring left by the acid. Even Maya, his team's fourth member, hasn't seen it. In his honor, the Blitz share a silent moment.

Jed tells the story of the maelworm's slaying. While thoroughly enjoyed, Summer, the only Blitz out of town that night, is the first to demand the real story. Athena tells the truth after the table shuts down Jed's second flop. Summer gets stuck on the black lightning. Most others, untrusting after Jed's magical tales, don't buy it either. It takes Clay's confirmation to settle the debate.

Hours pass. As stories of past contracts and hunts dry up like the free drinks, clapping begins to louden. The Commander takes the stage.

Hands clasped on a podium bearing the MantiCorp emblem - a roaring lion's head with its mane forming the shape of a shield, a sword and staff crossed in front - he waits for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," his authoritative voice rings out, "thank you all for coming tonight.

"Many years and two Kings ago, Mantis Plinth tamed the first manticore. The people of Snapdragon said it couldn't be done. They mocked and ostracized him for claiming such a wicked beast could be reasoned with. But he set out and proved them wrong. He set out with nothing but a sword, a slab of meat, and his nerves of tempered steel and did just that - tamed a manticore. Little did anyone know this set in motion a new future for the Archipelago.

"For you see, when he strode back into town, the great man-eater dubbed 'Null' in tow, all stood with gaping jaws. He named his manticore after the number of things he believed mankind would never achieve. His neighbors understood this now. And all listened as he repeated what he had always preached; 'Man may lie anywhere on the food chain - but tonight we stand on top.'

"In time, Mantis had taught his methods to all in Snapdragon who would listen. They heralded him as a hero. And as the village of Snapdragon began to thrive, it was renamed after the great man who made it so. 'Snapdragon' was torn from the signs and replaced with the 'Plinth' that we all grew up knowing. The small town quickly grew in size and fame throughout the Kingdom until the King himself came to visit. He proposed to the city his newest venture. An ambitious idea that would combat the cryptid scourge that had always plagued the drifts- the floating isles forming our Archipelago- our sky-

surfing island homes. And who better to run it than the man who faced that scourge and made it bow before him?

"The King gathered the most capable fighters he could offer, and with Mantis' expertise, they formed the first legendary force against cryptids. They formed MantiCorp.

"The most elite of these fighters were later grandfathered into a higher system of Mantis' creation. He called it the 'Blitz Creed.'

"The Blitz Creed followed a 'three type' competence hierarchy that grew to the five types we still use today. But Mantis, being the eccentric man the stories portray, dreamed of a sixth rank. He believed that eventually, through enough work and experience, the fifth and most renowned rank would be crowded. 'With mastery comes complacency.' 'One doesn't hunt when they've had all there is to eat.' He wanted those at the top to strive further. He wanted an incentive to inspire even the greatest of our ranks to strive each and every day in search of - in turn, helping the people and furthering human dominance among the drifts. On his deathbed, with his family and loyal manticore, Null, by his side, he divulged this. His final breaths weaved the famous prophecy that we in the Blitz Creed know by heart. 'Any Blitz who should commit a noble feat far beyond reasonable measure should be named the highest of all; Type: Null.'

"News spread quickly. Within days, the hunt was ablaze. There were well-documented weeks where the cryptid situation started getting worse due to all the Blitz in the Archipelago hunting bigger game. But as the novelty wore, and shine turned to shimmer, the Blitz returned to their duties yielding from their hunts only the realization that this goal would not be one completed with haste.

"The search to obtain this infamous rank has been one spanning a great many years covering countless proposals put forward to a succession of MantiCorp Commanders before me.

"Now, as my speech draws to a close, I stand at the helm of this historic organization. Many outstanding accomplishments have come and gone during my many years in this position - none of which I ever quite felt fit the bill. And like the ones that came before them, today's Blitz thought the bestowal of

the first Type: Null rank would be an event beyond their lifetime. A view that holds true to this day. Or, shall I say, *held* true.

"Just over a week ago, my Blitz Creed faced a threat that no army in the Archipelago's history has come to meet. A maelworm jumped from the depths of the maelstrom onto the side of our drift. All were injured in the fight. But they did not simply stand as humanity's shield while citizens escaped! No! They stood behind and held the line. They pushed the line! They struck as humanity's sword! They toiled against the monster's arms, never wavering from what needed to be done!

"One man shined bright that night. One man was the lightning that split the storm. He gathered in himself nothing but a sword, his lightning, and his nerves of tempered steel. In true Blitz Creed spirit, he found weaknesses in his foe where none had looked before and slew the legendary beast! Dare I say, he committed 'a noble feat far beyond reasonable measure.'"

Rhine extends a hand to the seat holding Prophet. Hearts stop. A glance around his table reveals gaping jaws and unblinking awe. "On this historic evening," the Commander continues, "it would be my greatest honor to invite to the stage the Worm Slayer, the Sword of Plinth; Prophet Pawn."

As his name leaves the Commander's lips, he flatlines. All hands in the room collide. For him. The Blitz Creed, recovering from the impact of a ton of bricks, kick out their chairs and make a contest out of who can clap loudest. Their smiles pure, their pride palpable. While being the most important man in the room, Prophet is easily the last to leave his chair. Standing only fuels the applause. The blood drains from him as the implications of Rhine's speech sink in. The Blitz Creed surrounds him. Athena squeezes until he turns even whiter. Even the notoriously cold Summer cracks a smile.

If a stranger from the crowd offers a hand during his journey to the stage, he takes it. All the while, his heart races as if facing down the maelworm for a rematch.

Arriving at last, Rhine hoists him up behind the podium and, in proper Commander fashion, shakes Prophet's hand with nothing less than a vice grip. Rhine turns Prophet toward the crowd. The cheering maintains vitality as Rhine removes the black tuxedo jacket and ironed dress shirt from Prophet's

back. In their stead, Rhine lifts from the podium a sleek vest of golden-yellow diamond scales individually no bigger than a man's thumb, all linked in a flexible pattern.

Had he delivered that entire speech without notes? Prophet notices a lack of paper on the stand. Rhine fits Prophet into it. A grin widens from ear to ear as his eyes find the jumping and screaming table of boozed-up monster slayers chanting his name like a war cry.

Rhine takes position over Prophet's shoulder. "Maelworm hide has been long sought after for its impregnable properties. Passed from one legendary beast to another, may this hide serve you well," he grips Prophet's shoulders with enthusiasm.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the room simmers to a rumble. "Allow me to introduce Prophet Pawn, MantiCorp and the Blitz Creed's first-ever Type: Null!"

The room explodes with more ferocity than the maelworm. The table Prophet once attended is evacuated. The Blitz Creed storms the stage with compliments and pats on the back to last a lifetime.

Short hours later, Jed and Athena are all who remain with him. Then Rhine steps in. "You take your time here, Null. But if you could," the Commander offers dire eyes, "stop by my office before you clear out."

"So, what now?" Athena asks, hopping on her heels. "It's late, and I've had a lot to drink." She bites her lip. "I'm sure we could arrange-"

"A nap and a mint? I think that's a great idea," Prophet smirks, tossing a hand on her head and messing with her hair.

She puffs her lips and pries her eyes, making sure to bat them at regular intervals. "A nap does sound nice," her arm reaches for his chest only to be intercepted and escorted back to her side. She leans in. "Maybe you could tuck me in?"

"Alright, you drunk, no means no." Jed tugs her away, receiving in exchange a burning glare threatening violent and bloody retribution. Having seen worse from her, he continues to shove her out the

door. Prophet chuckles, shaking his head as he admires the empty room. Then his heart sinks at Jed's voice.

"Hey, man," Jed turns back. "We'll be back at the ship. We'll all set off for Harem and celebrate a little quieter. How's that sound?"

"Yeah," Prophet's hanging head nods. "Sounds great." Jed turns and struts for the door, his hands burrowing deep into his pockets. "Hey, buddy, I'm sorry," Prophet stops him, "I had no idea he was gonna-"

"Hell, man, if anyone was gonna beat my ass to Null rank, I'm glad it'd be you." He shoots a quick smile. Empty seconds pass before Jed turns back to the door and finally ambles through. With tight brows, Prophet watches him disappear into the darkness outside. With nothing left to do, he finds his way to Rhine's office.

"It took an army of diamond-tipped industrial saws to cut that hide," Rhine scribbles on a document as Prophet closes the new oak door behind him. Bookshelves, floorboards, desk; everything has been replaced. The iconic lion's mane shield crossed by saber and staff is sewn into a new rug. Only now, the company's slogan 'We Long to Set the World Straight' is stitched beneath in elaborate, golden-threaded cursive.

"Who made it?" Prophet asks. Rhine cocks his head. "The armor. The rug. Normally we get Lilly to do those things. But she didn't make these, did she?"

"I've made a few pieces of plate in my time," Rhine admires his work before turning his eyes to the man wearing it. "You know I know you."

"Nice palindrome," Prophet plops into a chair.

Rhine snorts. "That's a big word."

Prophet interlocks his fingers. "Thank Lilly."

Rhine bows his head. "Stuck on her, huh?" he drones, "we'll cover that at the end-"

"No. Now-" Prophet interrupts.

"And," Rhine counters, "as I know that won't sit well with you, I'll keep this meeting brief." Rhine places an amulet on the desk. A diamond shape the size of his hand. Flat, metal base. The red crystal, too dark and opaque for a ruby, projects up into a sharp pyramid. "This was pulled from the carcass."

"The maelworm's, right? Not a Bright Port jeweler's?"

"This too." Rhine pulls a warped and melted corpse of a sword.

"Unbecoming," Prophet slumps. "Replacing it won't be easy. Anything I buy'll be a downgrade," he laments. "It'd take divine intervention to find even a sideways move."

"Its enchantment was unique," Rhine says, "Amouranthe Apothecary might be able to help. They deal in oddities, so have them check the amulet while you're there."

Prophet takes the scrap metal from Rhine's desk. "We're headed to Harem after this anyway. I'll make a milk run."

"Get a detailed examination, Prophet. It's the only lead we have."

"Lead? You're making this sound like a contract."

"Consider it one." Rhine takes Prophet's eyes from the amulet. "Why did that assassin and maelworm show up at the same time?" Rhine leans in. "MantiCorp HQ is swarming with armed guards and a Blitz or two on the slowest of days. But then? Every Blitz was dealing with the worm, every guard was evacuating civilians."

"A perfect time to corner you. But why would she want to?"

Rhine shrugs. "Nothing specific comes to mind. That being said, I provide law and order. That doesn't make me popular in the criminal world."

"Not in a good way, anyway. Aside from that, you understand the implications of your theory, right? The assassin would have to know the maelworm was coming. That means communication with, or command over it. That's impossible."

Rhine motions to the amulet. "We thought killing one was, too."

"That's different."

"Prove me wrong," he slides the gem. "And take Summer with you. He requested, and given that the assassin is a thaum, I want both my thaums pitted against her. Speaking of which, we have to find her in case it was her powers that controlled it."

"The invisible force pushing?"

"She has other abilities. No clue how many. That's where Lilly comes in."

Prophet turns to stone. "Talk."

"We found her in the kitchen shortly after the attack. We've been keeping a close eye on-"

"The point, Rhine?"

"She was comatose with slime on her lips. The going theory is the assassin entered through the kitchen, ran into Lilly hiding from the chaos, then eliminated the witness with some sort of coma slime, which, in my theory, is a second power."

"Why not kill the witness?"

"I'd ask Lilly, but..."

"Where is she?" Prophet demands.

Rhine sighs. "Room seventeen."

Prophet races to the door. "Erin Pawn. That's your assassin." The oak slams behind him.

The door creaks open. Boots clomp to the middle of the room. Machines beep as light from the hallway frames the bed. The man's shadow is cast over the young girl, unconscious under the sheets.

"She's going to pay for this," his eyes boil over. "I'm gonna find the bitch that did this." Blood is drawn from his hand as he clutches the sharp, red gem. Words catch in his throat as his cheeks carry mourning streams to his quivering chin. "And I'm gonna kill her."

Chapters 1-3 of "Relic Lightning" written by Cypher F.